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FIGURE POSE AND MOVEMENT IN  
EARLY FRENCH ROCOCO PAINTING

By

Michael Hollowell Duffy

A THESIS

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Art

1984

## ABSTRACT

### FIGURE POSE AND MOVEMENT IN EARLY FRENCH ROCOCO PAINTING

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This study examines how early French rococo painters applied the contemporary eighteenth-century theoretical interest in figural expression to their design of the figure pose. It first defines this theoretical interest in representing the passions of the soul and then looks for evidence of early rococo painted figures who are momentarily preoccupied with strong ascending passions that appear to trap the individual between two emotional and physical states. To demonstrate that this interest in mixed passions and the preoccupied figure was particularly tied to the early rococo style of French court paintings, I contrast a sample of classical baroque paintings by Jean Jouvenet to a corresponding number of rococo works by Charles de La Fosse, Antoine Coypel, Noel Coypel and Francois de Troy. The early rococo emphasis upon intrigue and irresolution was continued through the art of Francois Boucher to the end of the rococo literary and artistic period.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee for the interest that they took in this study and for the time and effort that they spent in reading the thesis and in preparing for my defense. I would like to personally thank Dr. Webster Smith and Dr. Molly Smith for the continued interest that they showed in the thesis topic and for the encouragement that they gave me in the final months of preparation. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Eldon Van Liere, whose seminar brought about my initial interest in some of the issues that I explore in the thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Van Liere for the interest that he showed in my investigations and for his many insights, helpful suggestions and the considerable time that he spent in reading and commenting upon the thesis drafts.



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## INTRODUCTION

This paper will look at a sample of the earliest paintings produced in the French rococo style and demonstrate how they departed from the classical style of Charles LeBrun's school in their sympathetic rendering of the principal figure's pose. I shall focus on the tendency of these paintings to portray centralized figures who appear to be caught between successive stages of a single action. Principal figures are often actively involved in a weight shift that leaves their balance in doubt or up to the conjecture of the spectator. Accessory figures frequently express surprise, intrigue and sympathy to indicate for the spectator how a recent turn of events has cost the main figure considerable emotional and physical effort.

After the middle of the eighteenth century, French art critics looked unfavorably upon the continued rococo practice of combining different stages of action in a single figure pose and of suggesting an indecisive pause in the action of the main figure. Denis Diderot, Friedrich Grimm, Jean-Pierre Mariette, the Comte de Caylus and other men of letters of the mid-eighteenth century often characterized rococo figures as pretentious, artificial and confusing.<sup>1</sup> Yet, these writers called upon painters to depict mixed passions and a sense of deep reflection in their principal figures: interests which had their origin in rococo art theory and practice.

There has been a recent trend to accept the art criticism of Diderot, Grimm and other writers hostile to the rococo as an adequate

evaluation of rococo art and to incorrectly give these writers credit for producing the first widespread literary and artistic interest in mixed passions and the self-engrossed figure. Michael Fried and John Wilson support this opinion and have largely credited Jean-Baptiste Greuze, Joseph-Marie Vien, Jacques-Louis David and other middle and later eighteenth-century painters with the first practical illustration of these interests.<sup>2</sup> Vladyslav Folkierski and John Wilson have recognized that during the first half of the eighteenth century the rococo aestheticians Anthony Cooper and Jean-Baptiste DuBos as well as the Academy conférenciers Louis Tocqué and the Comte de Caylus were somewhat interested in the spontaneity and unfolding drama of mixed passions.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, there is no art-historical literature to date which specifically attempts to draw a connection between rococo art theory and practice during the early eighteenth century.

This study will try to show that early rococo painters did attempt to apply contemporary eighteenth-century theoretical interest in figural expression to their design of the figure pose. It will set out to prove that the earliest painters in the rococo style and two generations of their followers actually promoted and kept alive the artistic interests in mixed passions and the self-engrossed figure. I will largely focus on individual paintings of Charles de La Fosse, Noel Coypel, Antoine Coypel and Nicholas Bertin and attempt to relate the rococo theoretical interests in continuous figural movement and intrigue to the practice of the painter.

The first chapter will show that this new interest in mixed passions and figure movement conformed to the climate of opinion of the time among theorists of art regarding the subject of figural expression. The French Academy of Painting and Sculpture in the last quarter of the seventeenth century urged that young painters combine LeBrun's facial characterizations of the passions with the official Academy notion that the painter had to inform and edify the spectator with character types that were drawn from the ancient poets and the Scriptures. During the 1670's, André Félibien and Roger de Piles deviated from official Academy doctrine when they extended their discussion of the passions to include convincing physical evidence of the passions' emotional cost to the principal figure of the painting. They discussed how the figure could display many unintentional physical marks and gestures when it passed through different passions. This inadvertent display of anxiety and the figure's dramatic response to a recognizable source of affliction would sympathetically touch the spectator and move him or her to tears.

At the turn of the century, de Piles and Antoine Coypel placed new emphasis upon the expressive quality of hands, head and eyes to most effectively communicate the feelings of the figure to the spectator. They reintroduced the humanist theory of imitation as it had been explained earlier by Leon Battista Alberti, Leonardo da Vinci and Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo. An accurate and imaginative copy from nature of the physical effects of a passion of the soul would, according to this theory, secretly move the spectator's own

soul with the same passions as if the painted event were actually taking place. De Piles and Coypel counselled the painter to follow actors and orators, who know how to express a feeling in order to excite it in the audience.

The second chapter would demonstrate how certain paintings by La Fosse and Antoine Coypel are rococo in feeling when they place the central figure close to the spectator and impart a sense of intimacy, intrigue and tenderness that is lacking in more sober and majestic works by Jean Jouvenet on the same subject. Jouvenet's classical baroque style contains a successful synthesis of the art of Poussin and DeBrun. It exemplifies the kind of court art that was particularly popular before the rococo style was favorably received in France. To specifically illustrate how the pose and movement of early rococo painted figures differed from those figures produced by Jouvenet, I have chosen to contrast Jouvenet's Sacrifice of Iphigenia, Esther before Asahuerus and Apollo and Thetis to La Fosse's Sacrifice of Iphigenia and Antoine Coypel's Esther before Asahuerus and Zephyr and Flora. The mythological and religious paintings of Jouvenet incorporate Poussin's planar arrangement of figures and his interest in sharp modelling, arrested action and carefully balanced movements. Jouvenet's works also utilize LeBrun's strong diagonal arrangement of figures, foreshortened objects in space, chiaroscuro, lively contrapposto and exaggerated expressions demonstrating the great consequences of the central event. The early rococo paintings have softer contours and have modified the baroque diagonal with a circular arrangement of figures. They also substitute mixed gestures

and a certain imbalance in the figure poses for the arrested actions and balanced poses found in Jouvenet's art.

The third chapter shows how the early rococo paintings of the Coypels, La Fosse and Bertin display principal figures who may actively move from a position of rest in the form of an extended and graceful turn toward an object of great interest. Other paintings portray contrapposto movements that bend the torso away from the legs and the head away from the alignment of the shoulders in order to denote indecision on the part of the figure. Early eighteenth-century art theorists as de Piles, Cooper and DuBos felt that the graceful turn or twisting torso suggests a figure's internal struggle between conflicting passions and their anticipated outcomes. The early rococo emphasis upon intrigue and irresolution was carried on in the paintings of Antoine Watteau, Jean-François de Troy and François Boucher.

I shall also discuss briefly the role that the late seventeenth-century French aristocratic code of honnête behavior had upon the creation of the lively rococo figure pose. In early rococo paintings, main figures are frequently charmed into a state of uncertain pleasure by a galant partner who, through a process of courteous self-effacement, flattery and easy accommodation, insinuates his or her way into the heart of the other person. The magnetic charm of the honnête male or précieux female is unforeseen and only gradually reveals its beautiful traits as it attracts the attention of an admirer. Antoine Coypel in the 1700's as well as Antoine Pater and François de Troy, a generation later, emphatically represented



this je ne sais quoi, or inexpressive something, as a surprise that accompanied expressions of fear or shame. By the 1740's and 1750's, Francois Boucher downplayed the element of surprise for the notion of delicatesse, which emphasized the innocent pleasures that were subject to the law of reason. The quiet savoring of these pleasures in the intimate presence of a mutual friend was a necessary prelude to a successful love affair.

The French rococo style of painting first appeared on a regular basis in the late 1690's amid the new building program inaugurated under Jules Hardouin-Mansart as Surintendant des Batiments. This program began with the remodelling of the small chateaux de plaisance at Trianon and at the Menagerie stables at Versailles in 1698. The subsequent interior decorations for the royal mansions at Meudon, Versailles, Marly and Trianon from 1699 until 1702 began to promote to a considerable extent the linear, playful and airy wall designs of the current Dessinateur des Bati-ments, Pierre Lepautre, whose style soon came to be associated with the "rocaille" decorative style of the Regency and the reign of Louis XV.<sup>4</sup> To the tall mirrors, raised cornices and curvilinear scrollwork that ambiguously flowed in three-dimensional space were added the exquisite arabesques of Jean Berain with their emphasis upon shells, tendrils and sprays.<sup>5</sup>

Just as this new rococo feeling for playful and minute forms was being preferred at court over the earlier geometric, grand and corporeal scheme of Charles LeBrun and Pierre Lassurance, so then the royal commissions for paintings in these newly remodelled apartments

were largely going to young artists who worked in the graceful, delicate and curvilinear late style of La Fosse, Noel Coypel and Louis de Boullogne the Younger. The very ordered, austere and extended composition of Charles LeBrun and his pupils was now more narrowly appreciated at court for its noble presentation of religious subjects.<sup>6</sup> The majority of secular history paintings made for the royal residences at Trianon, Meudon, Paris and in the Versailles countryside from 1698 until 1710 depicted youthful figures who were engaged in either delicate and amorous encounters or distracted by musical performances. These paintings frequently portrayed the intimacy of few figures who closely interacted with one another in the vicinity of the picture plane. The intricacy of delicate and subtle hand and facial gestures and of body posture further created a sense of intrigue and complexity that was similar to the sensation produced in the spectator by the fanciful, delicate and busy arabesques that formed wall moldings and panel decorations within the same room.

This sense of intrigue and ingenuity was in part a reflection of the contemporary aristocratic code of honnête behavior which stressed the ability of minute, delicate and circuitous actions to bring inexpressible pleasure and charm to a polite audience of spectators. Pleasure and captivation were the expected product of honnête behavior when practiced by persons of quality and honor. Through the practice of easy self-control, urbanity and eloquent accommodation, the honnête homme could expect to move freely within upper-class circles and bring honor to one's family name. Honnêteté acquired a

refined galant style after Rene Le Pays, Antoine Méré, the Chevalier Saint-Evremond and other littérateurs in the third quarter of the seventeenth century formulated a new "galant" code of amatory behavior that replaced the previous "tender" system of courtly love. The playful air, savoir-faire and lightness of the galant gentleman and his précieux female counterpart largely modified the prowess, discretion and devotional practices of feudal courtly love.<sup>7</sup> Near the end of the century, the air galant was extended to the behavior of polite society at large. Méré, La Bruyere and other writers emphasized in the galant approach to honnêteté the ability of the cultivated person to totally win over others by enchanting and captivating them. The process of winning over by attracting sympathy when humbly accommodating oneself to another was often described as seduction.<sup>8</sup> By the force of his presence and wit, the honnête homme could "besiege", "manage", "take hold" or "silently penetrate" the heart of the spectator or addressee by the least imposing but most alluring movements of the body.<sup>9</sup> Georges de Scudery wrote that some of his contemporaries viewed the art of pleasing, or honnêteté, as sorcery, deception or magic.<sup>10</sup> The galant style of honnêteté made use of subtle, delicate and exquisite manners,<sup>11</sup> which were disengaging<sup>12</sup> and appeared to cost little to produce.<sup>13</sup>

The terms insinuation and inclination described the noteworthy effects that honnêteté had upon the addressee. The honnête homme drew the inclination of another toward himself by way of pleasing and indirect insinuations which ". . . wind their way into the heart of the captivated individual."<sup>14</sup> The resulting pleasures experienced

were tentative and ambiguous. These pleasures ". . . would confound the highest wisdom."<sup>15</sup>

It was believed that a single object or effect of pleasure could not hold the soul since it would quickly cause boredom.<sup>16</sup> For the mind to be preoccupied, it had to perceive a complexity of sensations.<sup>17</sup> As with Méré and other promoters of honnêteté, the painter Antoine Coypel believed that excitement was generated by a thing which had a mixed complexion. Part of the painter's difficulty lay in depicting this confused state, especially where the passions were concerned. To satisfactorily represent love, for example, the artist had to display the avidity of pleasures and the aggressiveness of desires together with traits of sadness or fear, which produced inquietude and introspection.<sup>18</sup> Coypel wrote that the heart frequently lapsed into self-abandonment when the passion of love had conquered an enchanted person and allowed that person to be given into the impetuous desires caused by the object of esteem:

In effect, nothing could appear comparable in nature to the object which enchants us. The heart, always ingenious to be mistaken, finds false pretexts to weaken itself and refuses to understand the troublesome voice of reason, in order to abandon itself to the impetuous desires that the adored object often causes, even in the heart of the wisest. . . .<sup>19</sup>

Coypel lamented that the ability of one to rationalize about current amatory sensations was often reduced by the deceptively swift growth of the passion of love.<sup>20</sup>

From the time of its inception in the late style of Charles de La Fosse, rococo painting very often displayed an interest in depicting impassioned principal figures who struggle to understand or take

control of the irresponsible impulses of their passions by turning them inward. Painters depicted the cost to the figure of this introspection. The ambiguous and mixed nature of the figure's feelings was displayed by open and closed arm gestures as well as by contrapposto movements of legs, torso and head. The second chapter explores how this interest in gentle and ambiguous reflection upon the sensations developed with the early rococo style of La Fosse, the Coypels and Louis de Boullogne. The third chapter shows how lively body movement often mirrored the conflict between a figure's initial impulses and its interiorization and reflection upon these sensations.

## INTRODUCTION: NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See John M. Wilson, The Painting of the Passions in Theory, Practice and Criticism in Later Eighteenth Century France, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981), pp. 66-7, 71, 118; Michael Fried, Absorption and Theatricality. Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 35-41, 82-90; Philippe de Chennevieres and Anatole de Montaiglon, Abecedario de P. J. Mariette, IV, Archives de l'art francais—document, (Paris: J. B. Dumoulin, 1853-1854), pp. 31-6.

<sup>2</sup>Both John Wilson and Michael Fried believe that rococo facial expressions and attitudes fail to make the central action of a painting intelligible and compelling to the spectator. Diderot found rococo figures to be too pretentious in their poses and too independent of the principal event in the painting. Michael Levey also noted that, internationally, rococo painted figures are very often too languorous or contrived in their attitudes to form a well-integrated event. Wilson, The Painting of the Passions, pp. 66-7; Fried, Absorption and Theatricality, pp. 35, 79, 83; Michael Levey, Rococo to Revolution. Eighteenth-Century Painting, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966), pp. 25, 31-2, 37.

<sup>3</sup>Vladyslav Folkierski, Entre le Classicisme et le Romantisme. Etude sur l'esthétique et les esthéticiens du XVIIIe Siècle, (Paris: Edouard Champion, 1925), pp. 172-3; Wilson, The Painting of the Passions, pp. 34, 39.

<sup>4</sup>Sidney Fiske Kimball, The Creation of the Rococo, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1943), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 62, 66-7.

<sup>6</sup>See Louis Hourticq, De Poussin à Watteau, (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1921), pp. 240-44; and Antoine Schnapper, Tableaux pour le Trianon de marbre, 1688-1714, (Paris: Moutin, 1967), p. 38.

<sup>7</sup>Jean-Michel Pelous, Amour précieux, amour galant (1654-1675), (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, 1980), pp. 195-224.

<sup>8</sup>Pelous, Amour précieux, pp. 208, 211; Domna C. Stanton, The Aristocrat as Art. A Study of the Honnête Homme and the Dandy in Seventeenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Literature, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 64.

<sup>9</sup>Stanton, The Aristocrat as Art, pp. 64, 65, 235.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 120-1, 246-7.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 121, 124.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>15</sup>"Il me semble que dans le dessein de se rendre honnête homme et d'en acquérir la reputation le plus important consiste à connaître en toutes les choses les meilleurs moyens de plaire et de les savoir pratiquer." "L'un avait toute sorte d'agréments . . . et il semblait avoir dans son naturel, de quoi plaire à tous les hommes. L'autre avait tant de belles qualités qu'il pouvait s'assurer d'avoir de l'approbation dans tous les lieux où l'on fait quelque cas de la vertu. Le premier . . . ne manquait jamais de s'attirer les inclinations. Le second avait quelque fierté, mais on ne pouvait pas lui refuser son estime. Pour achever cette différence, on se rendait avec plaisir aux insinuations de celui-là, et on avait quelquefois du chagrin de ne pouvoir résister à l'impression du mérite de celui-ci. C'est un enchantement secret qui confondrait la plus haute sagesse."

It seems to me that in the scheme of becoming an honnête homme and in acquiring a reputation by it, the most important fact consists in knowing in all things the best means of pleasing and how to practice it. The first has all kinds of agreements . . . and he could appear to have in his person that pleasure which is in all men. The other has such beautiful qualities that he could be assured of finding approval in all the places where one displays virtue. The first . . . never fails to draw toward himself inclinations. The second has some aggression, but one could not refuse him esteem. To accomplish that difference, one gives into the insinuations of the former, and one sometimes has trouble in not being able to resist the temptations of the latter. This is a secret enchantment that could confuse the highest wisdom. This passage from Antoine Méré's Lettres is quoted in Stanton, The Aristocrat as Art, p. 246.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 247, footnote 31.

<sup>17</sup>See Montesquieu's article on taste written for Diderot's Encyclopedia in 1753. Encyclopedia Selections. Diderot, D'Alembert, and a Society of Men of Letters, trans. Nelly Hoyt and Thomas Cassirer, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), pp. 350-2; and Robert Mauzi, L'idée du bonheur au XVIIIe siècle, (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1960), p. 396.

<sup>18</sup>Henri Jouin, Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, (Paris: Quantin, 1883), p. 356.

<sup>19</sup>"En effet, rien ne paraît comparable dans la nature à l'objet qui nous enchante. Le coeur, toujours ingénieux à se tromper, trouve de faux prétextes pour s'affaiblir lui-même, et refuse d'entendre la voix importune de la raison, pour s'abandonner aux désirs impetueux que l'objet aimé fait naître souvent, même dans le coeur des plus sages. . . ." Jouin, Conférences, p. 355.

<sup>20</sup>"La première blessure que l'amour fait naître dans une âme est presque incroyable; l'on se flatte quelquesfois que la raison pourra la combattre, et c'est dans ce même instant qu'il sait vaincre et triompher sans même qu'on s'en aperçoive. . . ." Jouin, Conférences, p. 355.

"The first wound that love causes to be born in a soul is nearly incredible; one flatters himself that reason will combat it, and it is in this same instant that it can conquer and triumph without one even perceiving it. . . ." Jouin, Conférences, p. 355.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### Introduction

Seventeenth-century French writers of art theory acquired from Italian Renaissance theorists their belief that lively figure movement and gesture were an important means of communication between painting and spectator. Leon Battista Alberti's fifteenth-century treatise on painting attempted to promote the ancient Roman precepts that painting ought to morally instruct the spectator and that the spectator can be made to feel as the painted figures do toward the main event. Leonardo da Vinci, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, extended Alberti's discussion of body movement into the area of how figures can most effectively and naturally express their intent as they interact with other objects or figures. In the 1580's, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo closely followed Leonardo in his assertion that the painter ought to observe how passions are formed and expressed in their true and natural environment. He further promoted the idea that the imagination and invention of the painter were essential in creating passions that will move spectators to the same passion: an idea that would have a great effect on Roger de Piles and rococo theorists as Antoine Coypel and Jean-Baptiste DuBos.

French connoisseurs, artists and academicians of the middle seventeenth century revived Alberti's idea that the painter must edify spectators with a learned narrative and found figural expressions most important in narrating the stories of poets and Scriptural authorities. They thought that the placement, attitudes and expressions of subsidiary figures could most effectively demonstrate how the spectator ought to react to illustrious heroes who experienced diversity in the great events of history.

Charles LeBrun wrote a handbook on the physical facial features of the eleven general passions of the soul outlined by the French Rationalist philosopher, René Descartes. LeBrun's manual emphasized that complex passions as love and hate were naturally built up from simpler responses of attraction or repulsion that an individual might have for a person or object. Influenced by LeBrun's work, André Félibien wrote that a single figure could display past and present passions when aroused by a single object. During the late 1670's, Félibien and de Piles thought that mixed passions, portrayed in one figure, could indicate the emotional cost to the figure and the figure's proximity to the cause of its affliction. After 1700, de Piles and Antoine Coypel carried further this empathic quality of figural expression. They recalled Horace's remarks on the true imitation of nature as well as the comments of Quintilian and Leonardo on the rhetoric of gestures and posturing.

### Early Background

Mid-seventeenth-century French writers of art theory acquired from Italian Renaissance theorists their belief that lively figure movement and gestures were an important means of communication between painting and spectator. In his Della pittura, Alberti wrote that all the figures of the dramatic and monumental istoria ought to move, gesture and express feelings according to what is ordered in the painting. All movements of the body should be directed toward describing the event as narrated by the ancient poets and then toward moving the spectator by the painter's ingenious depiction of the passions of the figures represented. "Thus whatever the painted persons do among themselves or with the beholder," wrote Alberti, "all is pointed toward ornamenting or teaching the istoria."<sup>2</sup> Horace, the Roman poet of the first century B.C. and one of Alberti's important sources for expression in painting, counselled poet and painter alike to follow the ancient poets, like Homer, in their depiction of characters. The artist should generally follow the promoters of great legends who have appropriately developed through time the heroes and victims who could serve to illustrate the good and bad in human attributes.<sup>3</sup>

Alberti believed that the painter's interpretation of the great event should be displayed with all the force necessary to attract and move the spectator. Gestures and facial expressions ought to display how figures are "disturbed souls," stirred by the action. The istoria would, in turn, move the soul of the spectator ". . . when each man painted there clearly shows the movement of his

own soul."<sup>4</sup> "We weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing and grieve with the grieving."<sup>5</sup> The movements of the soul that could make the viewer participate in the emotions of the acting figures were best displayed through movements of the body. All the motions of the body should be closely observed from nature so that the painter could capture the feeling of the person who was to look in and share the participant's grief or pleasure, Leonardo wrote about hand and arm motions that express the intent of a figure that is conversing with others. According to Leonardo, the painter ought to follow the practices of good orators in the tribunal who amplify for others the force of their feelings by ornamenting their speech with hand and arm gestures.<sup>11</sup> The painter should eavesdrop on actual conversations in order to determine what causes people to make certain gestures with the hands.<sup>12</sup> Leonardo repeated the advice given much earlier by Quintilian on the delivery of the orator, when he encouraged painters to visit deaf persons who have learned how to amplify and precisely communicate their thoughts and desires.<sup>13</sup>

In the second book of his Trattato dell'arte della pittura of 1584, Lomazzo also called upon the painter to learn the physical traits of particular human emotions from real life situations. The painter was to closely observe the different ways that a particular figure might express a certain feeling, such as dejection, courage or desire.<sup>14</sup> He could depict what the figure was thinking, but, like the poet, needed a certain natural genius that had to be combined with the desire to succeed and a direct inspiration for his art. The expressive traits that were created first-hand would best affect the

spectator.<sup>15</sup> The painter should study what physical motions are caused by each passion that interests him and apply this knowledge to the most sympathetic characterization of the illustrious hero and his or her special attributes in order to move the spectator toward an emotional involvement with the people depicted:

If one knew the complete story of Christ, he shall gather up the true idea and method of how he ought to represent the motions of Christ, the Apostles, the Jews, and all the rest . . . so sufficiently that the mind of the spectator be moved to pity, tears and sorrow at the sight of the picture, than men are usually, at the reading of the story.<sup>16</sup>

From the natural behavior of the living, the painter would best learn how to reach the heart of his spectators.

Paul Fréart de Chambray, Nicholas Poussin and André Félibien, who were early spokespersons for the French classical spirit that prevailed in the conferences and teaching of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris, emphasized the ability of expressions to narrate the great stories of the poets and of Scripture, and to illustrate their teachings. In his Idée de la Perfection de la Peinture, published first in 1662, Fréart de Chambray reserved an important place for figural expression as the great communicator of the painter's knowledge and the force of his feelings about his subject. It was from the painter's application of judgment and circumspection in the depiction of passions that spectators could judge his worth and abilities. As Leonardo before him, Fréart wrote that expressions gave to figures the ability to speak and to reason with the spectator. "Expression not only discovers what every figure

does and speaks, but even what it thinks also, a thing almost incredible."<sup>17</sup>

When discussing an engraving of Raphael's Judgment of Paris, Fréart praised the painter for characterizing the passions of the figures in a manner most appropriate to their roles that the ancient poets had ascribed to them. In Raphael's Judgment of Paris (Figure 1), the figure of Minerva showed disdain, while that of Venus gracefully revealed a certain secret and bashful complacency that was appropriate to beauty. "As for Juno," wrote Fréart, "she is sufficiently conspicuous, according to the poets' description of her, full of anger, revenge and arrogance."<sup>18</sup> Mercury's posture and his intent to speak and move forward simultaneously suited his guileless and diligent character and how well he was chosen for his task here.<sup>19</sup> In the engraving of Raphael's Descent from the Cross, Fréart similarly remarked how it would be impossible to better imagine the devotion in Joseph of Arimathea, love in Saint John, grief in the Virgin and melancholy in the landscape. Fréart promoted Alberti's idea that figural expression was important in narrating the great stories of the past and in moving the spectator, himself, to identify with the virtues that were revealed in such times of adversity.

When Poussin wrote to Fréart de Chambray's brother, Paul Chantelou, regarding the artist's Israelites Gathering Manna, he also emphasized, above all else, the role of expression to teach the story as told by the ancient authorities. Poussin wanted Chantelou, his longtime friend and receiver of the painting, to be able to distinguish the various emotions that could narrate the events leading up



Figure 1. Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael. Judgment of Paris. Engraving, c. 1510.

to and including the Israelites' deliverance, as narrated in the Book of Moses. Poussin wrote that the first seven figures on the left side would tell all that was written there, and he counselled his friend to ". . . study the story and the picture in order to see whether each thing is appropriate to the subject."<sup>20</sup>

The connoisseur André Félibien promoted and publicized the classical theories of Poussin, Fréart and LeBrun in his published account of the seven conference discourses that were read to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1667, four years after the academy rules and procedures were instituted under the direction of Jean-Baptiste Colbert as Finance Minister.<sup>21</sup> In his preface to the published account of the first seven Academy discourses of 1667, Félibien wrote that the painter should begin with a perfect knowledge in his mind of the action he wished to represent as well as the compositional parts appropriate to his understanding of the subject. As with Poussin, he noted that history and fable were best suited to the grand manner of painting and that an art well-conceived should surpass the actual imitation of the thing in order to instruct and satisfy.<sup>22</sup>

To better instruct the viewer, the figures and all the ordinance had to be placed in such a manner ". . . that one could even judge that which has preceded the action."<sup>23</sup> Individual expressions that were well-suited to the imaginary figures were necessary to suggest to the spectator a prior state of affairs as well as the consequences that the action had produced on the principal character. Félibien restated the official classical formula of the Academy which



emphasized that supporting figures had to have expressions that helped to explain the reasons for the main figure's expression in its complexity. The painter should always choose to depict only one among several possible actions. At this early date, Félibien has not yet suggested that the figure display a dramatic relationship with the cause of its emotion.

As Premier Peintre du Roi and Chancelier of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture during the 1660's, Charles LeBrun popularized the idea that Academy discourses could supply a definite code of rules for young artists on the topics of invention, expression, design and color.<sup>24</sup> LeBrun followed the scheme of ancient philosophers as well as that of Lomazzo and Descartes when he divided the eleven principal passions of the soul into the gentle "concupiscent" and the violent "irascible" passions. LeBrun adhered closely to Descartes's Traité des passions when defining admiration as the first passion and when grouping the passions into simple and composite. LeBrun adopted the Cartesian premise that in every potential encounter that a person has with an object, the several psychological states of emotion that could be experienced were naturally connected with one another. The soul first affected the brain and the face when a passion was being aroused. Eyebrows, pupils, mouth, nose and cheeks were those areas of the head through which LeBrun traced the birth and progress of the different passions. LeBrun emphasized that each passion used features from the previous emotional state. For nearly a century after its inception in 1671, LeBrun's Traité de l'expression des passions influenced Henri Testelin, Antoine Coypel and Claude Henri Watelet,

among others, who wrote at considerable length about LeBrun's facial and head characterizations of the passions.

Henri Testelin's Sentiments recueillis en tables de préceptes, or summary book of the rules and precepts for young painters, first published in 1680, effectively combined LeBrun's facial and head characterizations of the passions with the fundamental Academy notion that expression gave intelligence to and edified the painted subject. At first, the painter had to collect his expressions from recorded accounts of the heroes of the story. It was necessary to research the subject to determine how to most effectively express the image and the idea. As with other academicians sympathetic to Poussin and the grand manner of painting, Testelin believed that all the parts of the painting had to concur to form an exact idea of the subject so that it could inspire spectators with emotions suitable to that idea.<sup>25</sup> Academy discourses of the early eighteenth century followed Testelin's synthesis of choice and demonstration of the passions with regard to the topic of history painting.

During the late 1670's, Félibien and de Piles extended their discussion of the passions to include convincing physical evidence of the passions' emotional cost to the principal figure of the painting. They wanted the painter to know how to sympathetically touch the spectator by displaying the many unintentional physical marks that anxiety caused on the principal figure's body and by revealing the figure's dramatic response to a recognizable source of affliction.

In the fifth part of his Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des peintres, Félibien acknowledged that there were certain

principles and rules to follow which would suitably characterize the disposition of the figure affected by passions of the soul. Yet, the painter had to personally know the exact passion that he wished to represent by knowing exactly what feelings brought it about. Félibien went beyond LeBrun's characterizations for the head and face to include a discussion of how the passion would affect the body as a whole. He also wanted to dramatize how the passion would take hold of the principal figure and dispose that figure toward the source of the passion:

But I will tell you that the knowledge of the various movements by which the mind of a lover is agitated while her passion lasts requires a very exact study. It impresses on the body different marks, according to the different transports in which it finds itself. Sometimes joy bursts onto the face, and sometimes that same face appears pale and dying when joy gives way to sadness. . . . Sometimes those lovers appear completely on fire, and at other times, they are as ice. Sometimes they make complaints and are immodest, afterwards they are mute and insensible. . . .

Those different changes . . . happen as the soul finds itself agitated between fear and hope, and it is this which causes them to display marks of joy or distress.<sup>26</sup>

Félibien was here writing about the psychological states of languor and ravishment that could be observed in those persons who strongly experienced love when they enjoyed the presence of a person that they desired. Félibien recalled the state of a lover who appeared more present in the object that he loved and whose soul seemed to abandon a body that had become immobile and lifeless. The author cited Annibale Carracci's Jupiter and Juno (Figure 2) from the Palazzo Farnese in Rome as an example of a figure that was afflicted with such desire and inclination toward the source of its passion:



Figure 2. Annibale Carracci. Jupiter and Juno. Fresco, c. 1601-8.

I am going to consider a tableau where Jupiter is represented with Juno, in which one sees the marks of a very violent passion, whether one regards the action and countenance of this god, or whether one considers the emotion of his face and his languishing eyes. . . . One could very well make the same observation in a tableau where Titian has painted Venus and Adonis.<sup>27</sup>

In Carracci's figure of Jupiter, Félibien found a figure that displays considerable feeling through lively body movement. Jupiter's expansive tilt toward the body of Juno is highlighted by the considerably raised right leg and the torso of Jupiter, which twists around from a frontal to a side position as it leans into Juno. In Titian's Venus and Adonis that was mentioned by Félibien, the figure of Venus twists around from a frontal to a rear position in order to embrace the departing figure of Adonis (Figure 3).

Giovanni Bellori's account of Carracci's Jupiter and Juno, which was probably known by Félibien through the auspices of the French Academy in Rome and through the publication of the Vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti moderni in 1672, differed considerably from Félibien's account. Bellori's description downplays Jupiter's excitement and draws more upon Ovid's legend of the marriage of the two gods. Although Bellori described the extended hands and warm embrace of Jupiter as well as the warm but diffident response of Juno, he did not see the languor and ravishment in Jupiter that Félibien did. "Thus, Jupiter," wrote Bellori, "turning amorously to her (Juno), breathes the most benign influences, and that brow which makes the heavens clear is bright."<sup>28</sup> Titian's figure of Venus is even further removed from the "warm" and "majestic" countenance of Jupiter, to denote a despairing individual who displays her suffering



Figure 3. Tiziano Vecelli. Venus and Adonis.  
Oil on canvas, 1554.

through the great lateral torsion of her body. In the case of Jupiter and Venus, the head leans back and the eyes are turned up to signify exertion: a fact that is noticed and hinted at by Felibien. Unlike his earlier writings, Félibien's Entretiens mentions figures whose varied body movements strongly suggest different stages of action in a single motion that visually opposes a restful and an active state of mind in the same figure.

In the course of his discussion on the emotional states of figures, Félibien considered how passions such as distress were mixed with varying degrees of hope and fear. This imprint of hope or fear would, in turn, give momentary vigor or languor to the face and body of figures.<sup>29</sup> The expression of liveliness or abandon would be further reinforced by showing the figure's physical closeness to or distance from the object of desire or repulsion.<sup>30</sup>

Félibien cited the example of Raphael's Massacre of the Innocents (Figure 4) where ". . . those who hold their children that are still alive, attempt to flee and save themselves; and those who see them massacred, will abandon themselves in distress, or only have strength to reveal the effects of their despair."<sup>31</sup> In Raimondi's engraving of Raphael's work, we can see in the two female figures in the foreground, instances of recent vigor that makes the lunging torso and tilted head outstrip the lower part of the body. Félibien believed that the spectator would sympathize with a figure that physically begins to show signs of languor, abandon, fear or any other distressful or anxious state. "Recent distress, which is tender and which has not had time to make an impression beyond the



Figure 4. Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael. Massacre of the Innocents. Engraving, c. 1510.



head to the body," wrote Félibien, "renders a figure beautiful and touching."<sup>32</sup> When the spectator could be led to imagine a comparable degree of suffering in himself, he would be led to tears:

When it (distress) is a little less strong, we pour out our tears, we cast outside of us . . . a part of our affliction; and in exhausting by this means the humor that oppresses us, we discharge from ourselves, little by little, the burden that we have written.<sup>33</sup>

The spectator could undergo this process of catharsis, or the cleansing of the soul if the supporting figures in the narrative signalled a degree of compassion and misery that was appropriate to the situation. Such subsidiary expressions tell the spectator that he or she is to pity the person who is unjustly afflicted. "We expect it (misfortune) to happen in order to take part in the figure's affliction."<sup>34</sup> We will be touched with compassion when we see the figure effectively in pain at its own realization of suffering.<sup>35</sup> Charles LeBrun, Noel Coypel and the young Jean Jouvenet painted mythological and religious dramas during the 1670's with clear cathartic intent. The early rococo painters inherited this interest in subsidiary figures who show appropriate expressions of pity and confusion.

Félibien devoted several pages to the expression of pudeur, which the author defined as a combination of prudent shame and genteel character. This pudeur is experienced at the moment of an improper encounter with a second figure. "This shame appears on the face of a Susanna, or of a Lucretia, because of the injury they will have received."<sup>36</sup> Félibien discovered an expression of pudeur in Raphael's painting of the Holy Family. When the aggressive behavior of Joseph's mistress causes him shame and fear, Joseph expresses this compound

passion with his open mouth, troubled look, lively motion of arms and hands and the effort he makes to flee and save himself.<sup>37</sup> Félibien noted that pudeur was very becoming to young gens, who regarded the red color spread across the face as the vermilion of virtue.<sup>38</sup> Pudeur was prized for the great burst it produced on the face and for the respect it brought to the person who induced the red color.<sup>39</sup> As with the other passions of the soul, pudeur was to move the spectator to compassion as a result of the figure's recognition of its own innocence and the injustice dealt to it.

In his Conversations sur la connaissance de la peinture, published in 1678, Roger de Piles similarly extended the discussion of passions of the soul to include their unsettling effects on the body. De Piles directed his attention to gentle passions, which although tranquil on the face, frequently disguise a very agitated interior:

But for the gentle expressions, whether they appear as an effect of the soul's tranquility, or because they are of those sorts of passions which cause little change on the face, they do not permit one to see that the interior is very strongly agitated.<sup>40</sup>

De Piles looked at Rubens's Judgment of Paris, Descent from the Cross and Saint George and pointed to passions of astonishment, sadness and fear, which are overcoming the figures of Paris, Mary and the three confidants of the king's daughter in Saint George. He write that Rubens's figure of Paris (Figure 5) displays a certain negligence of body and attentiveness of head that results when the interior is strongly preoccupied with a decision:

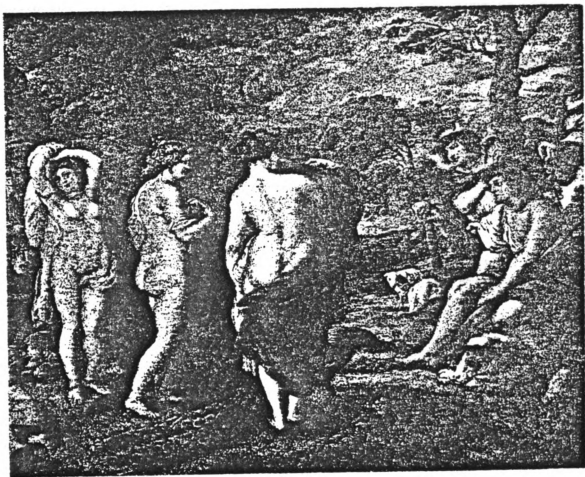


Figure 5. Peter Paul Rubens. Judgment of Paris. Oil on wood, c. 1632-5.

Paris is at the other side seated on a mound of turf in the habit of a berger; one of his legs is placed on the ground, and the other is negligently extended. His dreamy look and entire attitude allow one to sufficiently see that he is strongly occupied within by the judgment that he is going to make.<sup>41</sup>

De Piles suggested that the spectator fix his attention on the painting and think about the main figure's possible actions by the subtle and at times confusing gestures of the head, hands and legs.

In Rubens's Descent from the Cross (Figure 6), Mary approaches the body of Christ with an expression of distress in her face and head, which advances forward and within reach of that of Christ. Mary's newly emerging expression of sadness is highlighted by her open mouth, inflated nostrils and even eyebrows. Mary's attentive expression of heightened grief touches the spectator:

In the Descent from the Cross, the air of the Virgin, which reveals an abatement of distress, is represented in a fashion so touching and particular that it could suit no other mother in like occasion than the Mother of God. . . . The Virgin . . . advancing to receive the body of her son, regards Christ with a look of distress which penetrates the viewer when one sees that figure with some attention.<sup>42</sup>

Rubens's Saint George (Figure 7) similarly displays figures who are strongly preoccupied by passions stirred up by objects that are close by. The three women behind the princess hold onto each other in mixed gestures of advance and retreat, signalling that their very recent admiration and joy is not without traces of apprehension on their bodies. De Piles and Félibien were both interested in the bursting forth of passions upon figures in dramatic settings. Both authors frequently point to bodily attitudes and facial expressions that show an unsettling physical state that could easily be read and



Figure 6. Peter Paul Rubens. Descent from the Cross.  
Oil on canvas, c. 1615.

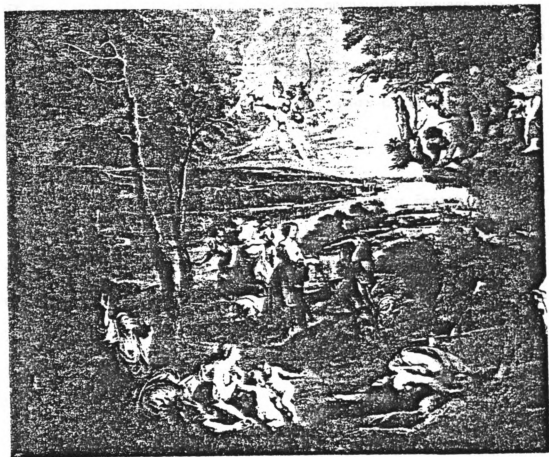


Figure 7. Peter Paul Rubens. Saint George. Oil on canvas, 1629.

felt by a sympathetic spectator who is aware of the danger that is present in the narrative scene. From the time that he wrote his preface to the Academy conferences of 1667 until the publication of his first Entretiens in 1671-2, Félibien came to emphasize drawing more as a creative process and less as a mechanical process subordinate to other parts of the composition.<sup>43</sup> As with de Piles, the act of drawing included not only learning and study but also the inexpressible je ne sais quoi, which spectators could directly experience.

#### Eighteenth-Century Interest in Spectator Empathy

After 1700, writers on art theory and practice placed even more emphasis upon the sympathetic rendering of the passions and the physical effect of the passions on the body. In his Cours de principes de peinture, first published in 1708, de Piles wrote that traits of the face usually required the accompaniment of principal body parts in order to touch the viewer and keep his interest. De Piles brought new attention to the expressive power of hands, head and eyes to directly communicate the sentiments of a principal character's soul. Each expression requires a different combination of actions from the face and body. The author repeated Quintilian's remark that the motions of the head make visibly known our supplications, threatenings, gentleness, haughtiness, love and humility. Our hands, as servants of the head, strengthen the action signified by the head. With our hands, we hope, desire, promise, summon, reject, question and approve.<sup>44</sup>

De Piles was also insistent that the painter imagine the passion as best he could. The painter had to interpret the passions in his own way from nature as well as antique sculpture. The young artist should choose those means of expressing passions which are most suited to touching the gens d'esprit, or aristocratic and non-professional persons of taste:

It is sufficient that he (painter) know that the passions are movements of our soul which allow certain sentiments to flare up when it is in the presence of some object, without waiting for order and the judgment of reason. The painter ought to envisage that object with attention, representing it present as well as absent, and ask himself what he would naturally do if he were surprised by the same passion. It is necessary to do more. He must take the place of the person impassioned, arouse his own imagination. . . . But it is not enough that the painter feel the passion of the soul, he must make it felt by others; and that among several characters by which a passion could be expressed, he choose those that he will believe the most suited to touch especially the gens d'esprit. . . . When one has once caught the taste of a spectator,<sup>45</sup> nothing interests him more in favor of the painting.

The painter's imagination and the inexpressible notion of "genius" were important in conjuring up an imitation that would surprise and preoccupy the spectator. De Piles restated the theory of imitation, promoted by Horace and repeated by Leonardo and Lomazzo, that the best and most imaginative copy from nature will move an audience of spectators. Although painting and poetry surprise by an imitation that seems true to life, painting has the ability to move our passions ". . . as if the thing were effectively happening."<sup>46</sup> Sight is the most direct route to the soul of spectators. The soul is secretly moved when the person appears to observe the very thing that is represented by the artist.



De Piles believed that raisonnemens would help the spectator to take note of the effects that the painting has produced on his soul and the painter's reason for such a depiction. Raisonnemens will explain to the spectator the cause of his sympathy and surprise ". . . by the action of the understanding which knows one thing by another, and which draws from it consequences."<sup>47</sup> The painter's raisonnemens could be induced from the attitudes, expressions and movements caused by the passions. "There are compositions," wrote de Piles, "which represent for us conversations and dialogues, where we know the very sentiments of figures that appear to converse."<sup>48</sup> Raisonnemens is also expressed in a figure's transition from one physical state to another. De Piles cited Rubens's Birth of Louis XIII, in the Luxembourg Gallery at Paris, as a good example of the dramatic shift of the main character, the Queen Mother, from a distressing state of childbirth to one of joy and fondness for the newborn child.

Antoine Coypel adopted de Piles's notion of painting and poetry as sister arts which imitate nature and animate virtue in the savant as well as the ignorant person. Painting moves the most secret provinces of the soul in its lively imagination, grand ideas and correct imitation which renders it "mistress of the heart and soul."<sup>49</sup> The painting causes the spectator to feel as if he were always in company with the main figures. The mute conversation and lively language of the eyes ". . . causes one to converse with the painted figure even in the absence of friends, parents and of all those whom we hold most dear. . . ."<sup>50</sup>

Coypel wrote that the movements of the body, or gestures, give soul to the figures, and even prevent the best compositions from becoming cold, languishing and inanimate.<sup>51</sup> He recalled Cicero's comment that action is the eloquence of the body.<sup>52</sup> Gestures should always be coordinated with the head, eyes and face. As with other early eighteenth-century writers on art, Coypel noted that gestures had to suit the moral character of the figure, particularly expressions of sincerity, nobility, affectation, audacity and haughtiness that characterize persons of different social status and sex.<sup>53</sup>

Coypel followed Quintilian and Leonardo in his assertion that the hands are the principal instrument of our wishes. The hands allow figures to speak in a universal language.<sup>54</sup> Coypel counselled the young painter to observe the speaking hands of the pantomime as well as the animate gestures of the deaf. Since the goal of painting is to move the spectator to tears or joy, the painter should take note of Boileau's passionate actor who had to experience a feeling in order to excite it in the audience.<sup>55</sup>

In his expose of the different passions of the soul in the Epistles à mon fils, Coypel followed LeBrun in his typology of the general passions and Félibien in his discussion of passions such as love, desire and joy that are naturally mixed in a single expression. It is significant that Coypel did not write about distress, fear or anger, which greatly concerned LeBrun and Felibien, particularly where grand history paintings were to offer serious moral instruction to the spectator. "The simplest expressions are the most difficult,"

wrote Coypel, "and meanwhile the most agreeable."<sup>56</sup> The painter should never cause his figures to stir with too much violence, and must strive for that which is naive, noble and simple.<sup>57</sup>

Coypel devoted over half his discussion of the passions to the expressions of love and joy. Love was the great deceiver of hearts and the most dangerous passion, which, after having enchanted the heart of its victims, ". . . troubles its empire by all the passions which follow and surround it."<sup>58</sup> Love and desire were complex passions which involved traits from most of the other passions and that were difficult to resolve and tame. The passion of joy, which became lively and strong in the presence of the thing it finds good, was the most charming and agreeable momentary state that the painter could find.<sup>59</sup>

Coypel believed that pretentious, ambitious and proud individuals would encounter more adverse effects from these passions than the homme d'esprit, who has a worthy opinion of himself and who searches to admire good things, to instruct himself and to acquire knowledge of things that surprise him.<sup>60</sup> The want to please often diminished the deleterious effects of love by polishing the most clumsy individual, by causing one's intelligence to shine, and by elevating one's courage and sense of honor.<sup>61</sup> The injuries of insult and the afflictions of jealousy are most commonly felt by ambitious persons. Weak-minded, lax and envious men easily abandon themselves to hatred.<sup>62</sup> Coypel promotes the sentiments of generosity, courage and honor which, in themselves, can restore tranquility to the soul and regularize one's rapport and demeanor.<sup>63</sup> Unlike LeBrun, Félibien and Testelin,

Coytel's discussion had a strong ethical tone and promoted the honnête aristocratic values of the man of taste and of the courtier. As with de Piles and other writers of the early eighteenth century, Coytel promoted gentle passions that came to be associated with the delicate taste of the rococo style in art and architecture. These delicate passions were to be displayed so naturally in all their complexity that they could create in the pleased spectator the same passions. Coytel and de Piles wrote that the goal of painting was to please and instruct the spectator. LeBrun, Félibien and other seventeenth-century writers on art placed greater emphasis on the painting's ability to instruct and to satisfy and did not raise the problem of creating naive and simple expressions that could amuse, and occupy the spectator and communicate directly with him as well.

## CHAPTER ONE: NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting, trans. John R. Spencer (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>The Complete Works of Horace, Edited by Ernest Rhys, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1911), p. 137, lines 145-60.

<sup>4</sup>Alberti, On Painting, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Leonardo da Vinci, Treatise on Painting, trans. A. Philip McMahon, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 151.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Quintilian encouraged the orator to attend the tribunal and learn how the advocates increase their power of expression through precise gestures and posturing. For the influence of Quintilian on humanist art theory, see Rensselaer W. Lee, Ut Pictura Poesis. The Humanist Theory of Painting, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967).

<sup>14</sup>See The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian, 4 vols., trans. H. E. Butler (New York: Putnam, 1921-1931), 3:iii, 157.

<sup>15</sup>Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, A Tracte Containing the Artes of Curious Paintings, Carvings and Buildings Written First in Italian, trans. Richard Haydocke (Oxford: Printed for R. H. . . by Joseph Barnes, 1598), 2:3.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 2:5.

<sup>17</sup>Paul Fréart de Chambray, An Idea of the Perfection of Painting, trans. John Evelyn (London: Printed for Henry Herringman, 1668), p. 32.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, A Documentary History of Art, 2 vols., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 2:147.

<sup>21</sup>See Nicholas Pevsner, Academies of Art, Past and Present, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 87-8.

<sup>22</sup>André Félibien, Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages plus excellens peintres anciens et modernes; avec la vie des architectes, (Westmead, England: Gregg Press, Ltd., 1967), 5:309-12.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 5:313.

<sup>24</sup>Pevsner, Academies, pp. 94-5; and Henri Jouin, Charles LeBrun et les arts sous Louis XIV, (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1889), pp. 371-90.

<sup>25</sup>Jouin, Conférences, p. 153.

<sup>26</sup>"Mais je vous dirai que ce qui demande une étude très-exacte, est la connaissance des divers mouvemens dont l'esprit d'un Amant est agité pendant que sa passion dure. Car elle imprime sur son corps des marques différentes, selon les différens transports où il se trouve. Tantôt la joy éclat sur son visage, et tantôt ce même visage paraît pâle et mourant quand la joye fait place à la tristesse . . . Quelquesfois ces mêmes Amans paraissent tout de feu, et d'autres fois ils sont tout de glace. Tantôt ils font des plaintes, et incontinent apres ils sont muets et insensibles." "Ces différens changemens . . . arrivent selon que l'âme se trouve agitée entre la crainte et l'esperance, et c'est ce qui fait qu'elle donne des marques de joye ou de douleur." Félibien, Entretiens, 3:201.

<sup>27</sup>"Je fis considerer à Pymandre un tableau, où Jupiter est represente avec Junon, dans lequel soit que l'on regarde l'action et la contenance de ce Dieu, soit que l'on considere l'émotion de son visage et de ses yeux languissans, l'on voit les marques d'une passion très-violente." Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Giovanni Bellori, The Lives of Annibale and Agostino Carracci, trans. Catherine Enggass (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), p. 40.

<sup>29</sup>Félibien, Entretiens, 3:216.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 3:204, 209.

<sup>31</sup>"Celles qui tiennent leurs enfants encore vivans, tâchent de fuir et de se sauver; et celles qui les voyent massacrez, s'abandonnent à la douleur, ou n'ont de force que pour montrer des effets de leur desespoir, en s'arrachant les cheveux, et se jettant sur les corps de ces pauvres Innocens." Ibid., 3:216.

<sup>32</sup>"Quand elle est un peu moins forte, nous versons des larmes, nous jettons au dehors, pour ainsi dire, une partie de notre affliction; et en epuisant par ce moyen l'humeur qui nous oppresse, nous nous dechargeons peu à peu du fardeau que nous avons au dedans." Ibid., 3:214-15.

<sup>33</sup>"Et puis une personne peut encore etre quoiqu'elle soit affligés; car il faut que la douleur ne doit mise sur son visage, que comme un voile au travers duquel on appercoive sa beauté, lors principalement que la douleur est toute récente, et qu'elle n'a pas encore eu le tems de faire impression sur le corps, comme dans les premiers momens que la Magdelaine se convertit." Ibid., 3:217-18.

<sup>34</sup>"Nous attendous qu'il soit arrivé pour prendre part à son affliction." Ibid., 3:214-15.

<sup>35</sup>". . . d'ordinaire nous ne sommes touchez de compassion que quand nous voyons une personne être effectivement dans la peine et dans le malheur." Ibid., 3:214.

<sup>36</sup>"La honte paraît sur le visage d'une Susanne, ou d'une Lucrece, à cause de l'injure qu'elles auront recûes." Ibid., 3:230.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 3:233.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 3:234.

<sup>40</sup>"Mais pour les expressions douces, soit qu'elles paraissent comme un effet de la tranquillité de l'âme, ou qu'elles soient de ces sortes de passions qui causant peu de changement sur le visage, ne laissent pas de faire voir que le dedans est fort agité. . . ." Roger de Piles, Conversations sur la connaissance de la peinture et sur le jugement qu'on doit faire des tableaux, (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), p. 269.

<sup>41</sup>"Paris est de l'autre costé assis sur une motte de gazon en habit de berger l'une de ses jambes pose a terre, et l'autre est negligement estendue. Sa mine rêveuse et toute son attitude font voir assez qu'est au deduns tort occupe au jugement qu'il va rendre." Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>42</sup>"Dans la descente de Croix, l'air de la Vierge qui fait voir un abatement de douleur, est represente d'une facon si touchante et si particuliere, qu'il ne peut convenir à aucune mere en semblable occasion qu'a la Mere de Dieu . . . la Vierge . . . s'avance pour recevoir le corps de son fils, qu'elle regarde avec une douleur dont on est soi-même penetré, quand on voit cette figure avec quelque attention." Ibid., pp. 134, 269.

<sup>43</sup>Claire Pace, "'Dessein' and 'Coloris': the Growth of Félibien's Entretiens," Journal of European Studies 10 (March 1980), p. 53.

<sup>44</sup>Roger de Piles, Cours de peinture par principes, (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), p. 172.

<sup>45</sup>"Il suffit qu'ils sachent que les passions font des mouvemens de notre âme qui se laisse emporter à certains sentimens à la vûe de quelque objet, sans attendre l'ordre, et le jugement de la raison. Le Peintre doit envisager cet objet avec attention, le représenter present quoiqu'absent, et se demander à soi-même ce qu'il feront naturellement s'il étoit surpris de la même passion. Il faut même faire davantage: il faut prendre la place de la personne passionnée, s'echausser l'imagination. . . Mais ce n'est point assez que le Peintre sente les passions de l'âme, il faut qu'il les fasse sentir aux autres; et qu'entre plusieurs caracteres dont une passion peut s'exprimer, il choisisse ceux qu'il croira les plus propres à toucher surtout les gens d'esprit, ce qui ne se peut faire à mon avis, que par un sens exquis, et par un jugement solide. Quand on a une fois attrape le goût du spectateur, rien ne l'interesse davantage en faveur du Peintre." Ibid., pp. 165-66.

<sup>46</sup>"J'ai souvent jetté les yeux sur un tableau qui represente ce spectacle digne de pitié, et je ne les ai jamais retirés sans larmes, tant la Peinture a scu représenter la chose comme si elle se passait effectivement." Ibid., pp. 442-3.

<sup>47</sup>"On entend par le mot de Raisonnement, ou la cause et la raison par laquelle l'Ouvrage fait un bon effet, ou l'action de l'entendement qui connait une cho par une autre, et qui en tire des consequences." Ibid., p. 462.

<sup>48</sup>"Il y a des tableaux qui nous representent des Conversations et des Dialogues, où nous connaissons jusqu'au sentiment des figures qui paraissent s'entretenir." Ibid., p. 463.

<sup>49</sup>Roger de Piles helped to revive the Horacian idea of ut pictura poesis, "as is painting so is poetry," which combined painting and poetry as sister arts and often viewed the painter as an accomplished poet. From Aristotle's Poetics, Renaissance and Baroque critics of art took up the idea that human nature in action is the true source of the painter's imitation of nature. From the writings



of Leonardo da Vinci through those of Roger de Piles and Antoine Coypel, painting was compared to poetry and even deemed superior in that it directly appealed to our sight, which was a direct path to the soul of the spectator. For a discussion of the humanist doctrine of ut pictura poesis and its influence on seventeenth-century French writers on art, see Lee, Ut Pictura Poesis, pp. 5-8, 24-8.

<sup>50</sup>"Il est vrai que cette conversation est muette; mais le langage des yeux n'est pas toujours le moins vif . . . La peinture nous fait, pour ainsi dire, converser dans l'absence même avec nos amis, nos parents et tout ce que nous avons de plus cher; et non seulement avec ceux avec qui nous vivons, mais encore avec ceux qui vivoient dans les temps les plus reculés. . . ." Jouin, Conférences, p. 221.

<sup>51</sup>". . . Je dois parler de l'expression des passions, qui se fait par les mouvements du corps ou par les gestes qui doivent donner de l'âme aux figures, et sans lesquels les tableaux les mieux composés, les mieux dessinés, peints et coloriés, seroient froids, languissants et inanimés comme le remarque Cicéron l'action est l'éloquence du corps." Ibid., p. 339.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 347-8.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>56</sup>"Les expressions les plus simples sont les plus difficiles, et cependant les plus agréables; ce sont des beautés naturelles qui ont leur grâces avec elles et qui n'ont pas besoin d'être fardées." Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>58</sup>"Il faut encore ajouter que si l'amour dans sa naissance paraît n'avoir rien que d'aimable, à mesure qu'il croît et qu'il s'agrandit, il abuse de ses forces . . . Son aveuglement furieux le porte même jusqu'à troubler son empire par toutes les passions qui le suivent et qui l'environnent." Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 354.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., pp. 353, 358.

## CHAPTER TWO

### INTIMACY AND UNCERTAINTY IN EARLY ROCOCO DEPICTIONS OF DRAMA

#### Introduction

During the 1680's and 1690's, Charles de La Fosse and Antoine Coypel produced compositions on subjects from contemporary drama which display the early Rococo interest in intensely preoccupied central figures and actively involved surrounding figures that are responsive to the principal's anxiety. The contemporary taste for intense drama of the tragic moment in classical and biblical subjects was formed in the grand compositions of LeBrun and outstanding pupils of his style, such as Jean Jouvenet. While Jouvenet's expressive treatment of the biblical subject of Esther before Asahuerus and the Homeric story of Iphigenia in Aulis show the Academy's interest in forcefully depicting the psychological and physical state of figures consumed by fear, anguish and surprise, La Fosse and Antoine Coypel deal with the same subject in a more intimate and sympathetic manner.

#### The Fainting of Esther

Jouvenet's Fainting of Esther before Asahuerus (Figure 8) appears to have been inspired by Poussin's Esther before Asahuerus (Figure 9), painted twenty years earlier. Jouvenet may have either

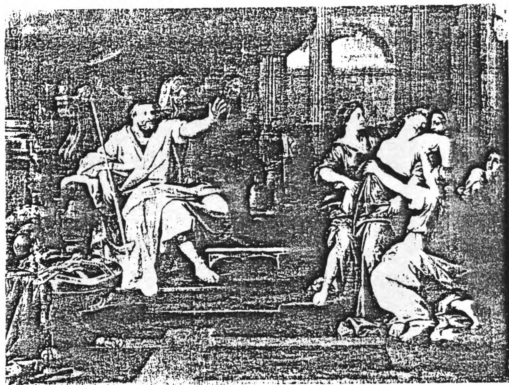


Figure 8. Jean Jouvenet. Fainting of Esther before Asahuerus.  
Oil on canvas, 1674.

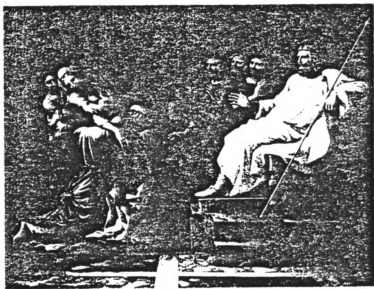


Figure 9. Nicholas Poussin. Esther before  
Asahuerus. Oil on canvas, c. 1655.

seen the painting which was in the French collection of Colbert de Seignelay or the engraving of Poussin's work by Jean Pesne.<sup>1</sup> Jouvenet and Poussin treated the moment that Esther intrudes upon King Asahuerus in his throne room, under the possible pain of death and in order to request that the Jewish people be spared the decree initiated by Aman, the king's evil advisor. The story of Esther became popular in the seventeenth century as retold by Pierre Matthieu, Montchrestien, Du Ryer and Desmaret.<sup>2</sup> Seventeenth and eighteenth-century painters chose the moment where virtuous Esther faints when in the presence of the surprised king, an incident not actually recorded in the Book of Esther. Poussin's composition is evenly balanced by two groups of statuesque figures. To the right, Asahuerus and his three assistants are gently aroused to a warm expression of concern. The cheek muscles are raised, the brows slightly knitted and the mouth is partly open in the faces of the three assistants, and in the figures attending the collapsed Esther. Jouvenet has retained the separate and recognizable groups that are found with Poussin in order to emphasize the forbidding presence of Asaheurus. Yet, Jouvenet has exaggerated the expressions, put more movement into the gestures and portrayed the scene off-center and to the left along a diagonal axis that recedes from right to left deeply into the background. Poussin's figure of Asahuerus remains restrained with one hand gently raised and the other completely at rest. Jouvenet's Asahuerus, on the other hand, is ready to rise from his throne with his left arm fully extended and his left leg poised to support a figure that will rise to its feet. The assistants of Esther no longer wind around Esther as in the

graceful curve created by Poussin. In the fashion of LeBrun, Jouvenet presents studied individual poses of Esther's attendants, who are less graceful but more dramatic than those of Poussin. The pose of Esther is also well-researched to show how the head of a figure that has fainted realistically and unflatteringly collapses onto a limp shoulder that has been propped up from behind.

Jouvenet's facial expressions are more animated to suit poses that display emotion as a grand and heroic event. Asahuerus's assistants have deeply sagging brows and heads that widely tilt in opposite directions to express deep gloom and a sense of tragedy at the dire state and possibly fatal consequences of the principal action. Asahuerus has widely open eyes and inflated nostrils and is given an expression of determination. The attendants of Esther have an expression of astonishment tinged with anguish. Their mouths are gaping, their nostrils inflated and their brows significantly raised in the center. In Jouvenet's painting, the anxiety of the moment is created by the forbidding and forceful king and the lively anguish of Esther's attendants. We fear that Asahuerus, in the moment of recognition, may fail to shield the queen with his gold sceptor and thereby allow the palace guard to kill her as they would any unannounced visitor. While the king's left arm and hand reach out to signal his own dissatisfaction, Asahuerus's right hand toys with the possibility of raising the sceptor to save Esther.

Antoine Coyppel's Esther before Asahuerus (Figure 10), painted in 1704, was presented to Louis XIV as one piece in an Old Testament series for the Gobelin Tapestries. His work differs from that of

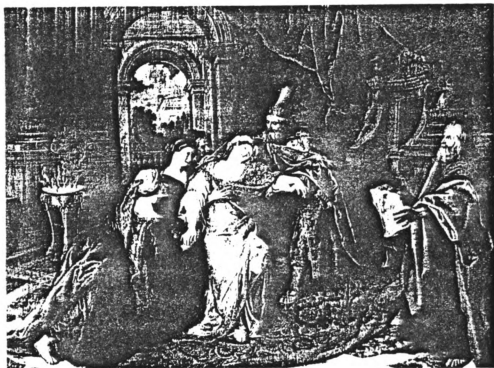


Figure 10. Antoine Coypel. Esther before Asahuerus. Oil on canvas, 1704.

Jouvenet and Poussin in its setting and principal action. The airy marble palace has become a cozy drawing room with a brazier to the left rear and an elegant Persian rug that covers much of the floor. The viewer is brought into the parlor and becomes a bystander to the left of Aman, who presumably holds the decree that he wrote which called for the death of all the king's Jewish subjects.<sup>3</sup> The principal action has changed from Esther's collapse at the moment of her bold entrance into the throne room to that of Asahuerus's intervention on the queen's behalf. Much in keeping with Racine's Esther, which was performed several times at Court prior to Coypel's painting, the action reveals a gentle and good husband who hastens to console his frightened queen. Now, the figure of Esther faces us in the center of the composition. Esther's body does not simply fall as in the other two compositions. Rather, it is languorously poised in the arms of the attendants and the king. Esther's left extended arm, left leg, hanging head and flexing wrist and fingers reveal a body that is carefully poised as if to suggest a state of suffering and anxiety. The formality of Poussin and Jouvenet is lost in the absence of heroic body gestures and expressions of astonishment and anguish. The only vigorous expression in the canvas is the anger of the diabolic figure of the eaves-dropping Aman. Esther has a distressed expression that is closer to LeBrun's Academy drawing of languor than that of ravishment. The three figures surrounding Esther are physically very close to her. One is reminded of Poussin's figures which affectionately hug the falling queen, except for the fact that Coypel shows their faces, which tenderly lean toward Esther. The figure to



the left of Esther sets the stage for a tender group interaction with her eyebrows sharply raised in the center, the partly open mouth and her open outstretched hand which gently clasps the chest of the queen. Her pose nearly mimics the languorous posture of the queen.

Racine's depiction of the difficult moment following Esther's intrusion upon Asahuerus similarly explores the theme of tenderness and innocence. The playwright spotlights Esther's innocence and the power of her virtuous action to tame the austere and cruel king.

Asahuerus speaks in response to Esther's faintness and fear:

Powerful gods! What strange paleness of her tint all of  
a sudden erases her color.

Esther, what are you afraid of?

Am I not your brother?

Oh Sun! Oh Flame of eternal light!

I am myself disturbed; and without shuddering

I can not see her pain and seizure.

Calm yourself queen, calm the fright that  
presses down upon you.

From the heart of Asahuerus, reigning mistress,

Experience only its ardent friendship. . . .

I only find in you an undefinable grace,

Which always charms me and never leaves me.

From the amiable virtue such soft and powerful attractiveness!

Esther breathes only innocence and peace.

From the darkest trouble, she lights the shadow. . . .

And believe that your forehead leads to my diadem

A burst that renders it even respectable to the gods. . . .

What interest, what care agitates you, presses upon you?

I see that in hearing me, your eyes address themselves to  
the heavens.<sup>4</sup>

Like Racine's depiction, Coypel's scene is one displaying clemency and tenderness: attributes that characterize the mood of early rococo expression.

In Jean-François de Troy's Fainting of Esther (Figure 11), exhibited in the Salon of 1737, the composition is arranged along a diagonal that likewise places the viewer off-center and to the right of the principal action. The diagonal that is created by this off-center position is grander in its figure count and in its interior recession. De Troy saw Coypel's earlier painting and nearly duplicated the pose of the compassionate king and the distressed Esther. The great purple drape also hangs from behind the king, but is withdrawn to reveal a magnificent throne room that is faced with very large Roman columns.

The collapse of Esther is more complicated here than elsewhere. Esther's distress is accentuated by her clasping right hand and the open gesture of her extended left hand. Her falling movement is swept up in the pyramid whose base is defined by the swirling drapery on the floor and the bent postures of the two attendants. The distress of Esther is almost dwarfed by the great anxiety of the large group around her. The straightforward grouping of Jouvenet and the cautious bending poses of Coypel's group figures has become a series of sweeping diagonals that cut across the diagonal line that recedes into the picture space.

As with other French rococo paintings of the 1720's and 1730's, de Troy has produced a feeling of keen interest and delicate astonishment in accessory figures by depicting group members with forward leaning heads and shoulders and eloquent gestures of one of their hands. The general effect of this group commotion is to create a feeling of uneasiness and continual surprise. In his article on taste

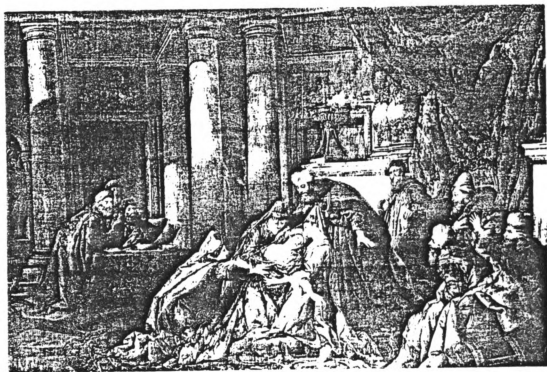


Figure 11. Jean-Francois de Troy. Fainting of Esther. Oil on canvas, 1737.

written for Diderot's Encyclopédie in 1753, Montesquieu wrote that keen pleasure is derived when the viewer is continually surprised by new and unexpected occurrences:

Many painters have the fault of indiscriminately placing contrasts everywhere, so that when we see a figure we are immediately led to anticipate the arrangement of the figure next to it. The continual diversity results in a kind of similarity. . . . Nature is more varied, it places some bodies in repose and gives to others movements of different kinds. . . . The soul can not support the same situation for any length of time, because it is bound to a body that can not endure this. . . . Since the soul is always disposed to seeking new objects, it enjoys all the pleasures that surprise can procure. Surprise is a feeling that is agreeable to the soul because its effect is rapid and attracts our attention. . . . For this reason too we delight in seeing plays; they develop gradually, conceal events until they happen, continually prepare new surprises for us, and often stimulate us by revealing these surprises as something we should have foreseen. . . . Surprise can be produced by an object itself or by the manner in which it is perceived, for the object may appear to our eyes to be larger or smaller or different from what it really is. We may also see the object itself, but accompanied by an accessory idea that surprises us.<sup>5</sup>

De Troy's painting appears to mirror Montesquieu's statement on the rococo esthetics of surprise and uneasiness, which was derived from the psychological theory of Jean-Baptiste DuBos, thirty years earlier. As we travel around the group of onlookers in de Troy's scene, we see a contrasting and unsettling mixture of poses and expressions. The unexpected nature of the central drama is further heightened by accessories such as the expansive drapery that takes on a life of its own. The surprised figures who are distant from the central action add drama and increase the sense of intrigue where the larger story is concerned.

Coytel and de Troy have replaced the emphasis of Poussin and Jouvenet on the austerity and grandeur of the palace with a more close-knit scene in the foreground where figures generally relate to one another more intimately and tenderly. Poussin and Jouvenet have contrasted the austere and stolid presence of Asahuerus and his ministers to the dramatically extended and fearful figures of Esther's group, which is not far removed from the circumstances of the actual biblical story. Coytel and Jouvenet have stripped the awesome or irreproachable sense of the grand event by having Asahuerus approach Esther just as the spectator approaches her. In this way, the spectator can imagine how the sensations of fear and distress have been turned inward to create a sense of crushing self-abandonment. De Troy, as with Antoine Pater and other painters of this second generation of rococo arts, gave a stronger sense of immediacy to the scene by suggesting that the passions have advanced considerably before being reflected upon by the figure.

### The Sacrifice of Iphigenia

As early as 1682, Charles de La Fosse's Sacrifice of Iphigenia (Figure 12) moved away from the strong emotions portrayed by LeBrun and Jouvenet to embrace an early rococo feeling for intimacy, anxiety and tenderness. Jouvenet painted a version of the same subject for the mantelpiece in the Hotel de Saint-Pouange in Paris (Figure 13) at about the same time La Fosse produced his canvas for the Salon de Diane at Versailles. Both paintings depict the dramatic moment before Iphigenia, Agamemnon's daughter, was to be sacrificed at the altar of



Figure 12. Charles de La Fosse. Sacrifice of Iphigenia. Oil on canvas, c. 1682.



Figure 13. Jean Jouvenet. Sacrifice of Iphigenia. Oil on canvas, c. 1675-85.

Diana. As the Greek armies were gathered under Agamemnon to launch an attack on Troy, the Olympian gods decreed at the altar at Aulis that favorable winds would be restored if Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia were sacrificed. In both paintings, the robed figure of the elderly priest, Calchas, pronounced the oracle from above, stating that Diana will spare Iphigenia at the last moment. Beside the priest is the innocent figure of Iphigenia who voluntarily resigns herself to the executioner's knife, in the name of purity and loyalty to her father. Both paintings appear to follow Euripides's version of the story, which tells how Diana replaced Iphigenia with a sacrificial doe and then transported the virtuous virgin daughter away to Taurus where she would be safe. Although both paintings display the sacrificial doe and the innocence of Iphigenia in keeping with Jean Routrou's 1640 play Iphigenia, they seem to be directly inspired by Racine's tragedy, first performed in 1674 but ceremoniously performed at court in 1680. The 1680 performance was given upon the arrival of the Bavarian princess Marie-Anne as the future Dauphine of France.<sup>6</sup> This was the same year that La Fosse painted the virtuous Iphigenia at the court palace.

According to Racine, Achilles, the fiance of Iphigenia, surrounded the altar of Diana with his soldiers. Iphigenia's father, Agamemnon, who brought his daughter to be sacrificed, turned his face away from the altar with great remorse. The priest Calchas suspended the sacrifice to pronounce Diana's wish that another daughter of Helen, named Eriphilia, would be sacrificed instead. Jouvenet shows the older Agamemnon beside the altar, turning his eyes away from the



tragic scene. La Fosse, on the other hand, does not show the aged king, but a young grieving soldier instead. Faithful to Racine's play, he shows the distant Achilles who at the last moment summons his troops to gather around the altar.

Jouvenet and La Fosse both depict the moment that the sacrificial exercise has been suspended. In each composition, a submissive Iphigenia is seated against the altar. Her torso and head are turned away from hips and legs which are firmly planted in the direction of the priest and his assistants. Supporting figures of the priest, the assistants, Agamemnon, Diana and the deer all surround the central figure, while each responds differently to the suspension of the sacrifice. Jouvenet's supporting figures are more isolated from each other and from Iphigenia. The figures of La Fosse's composition all gather close to Iphigenia and respond directly to her and to a deity that is actually within arm's reach of Calchas and Iphigenia. They nervously anticipate the impending doom of Iphigenia. Our eye moves quickly around the circular arrangement of figures, who are either turned toward or away from the central action.

La Fosse's crowding figures give an immediacy to the scene that is lacking in Jouvenet's work. Jouvenet's figures gesture grandiosely while almost ignoring Iphigenia to look up at Diana on a grand machine, at a distance. La Fosse's Iphigenia remains in an anxious state. Her hands are tensely extended and her head is tilted up with a nervous expression of surprise and hope depicted on her face. Jouvenet's Iphigenia has a more inert expression of solicitation accompanied by a languid gesture of the hand. Diana looks down

at Calchas from her cloud with an interested but grave expression. Only the female figure in front of Iphigenia, perhaps Euriphilia, looks up at the goddess in suspense and astonishment. La Fosse's youthful servant kneels in astonishment before the altar, while a soldier to his right covers his head in extreme grief. A departing Diana sympathetically looks back to Calchas with her arm gently extended toward the doe. La Fosse has depicted the moment of Clemency when the lowered hand of Calchas has humbly dropped the knife, as if to pay homage to the innocence of Iphigenia. Jouvenet does not convey this feeling of Clemency since his executioner still fearfully holds his hand tightly gripped on the knife. Racine described Calchas as distracted or troubled (éperdu) at the moment when Diana explains her intentions to the priest. The playwright also has Esther say to her attendants at the moment before she faints: "My girls, hold your distracted (éperdu) queen, I am dying."<sup>7</sup> Both Coypel and La Fosse have chosen to represent the moment of distraction with Esther and Calchas as an anxious state of irresolution that will keep the viewer intrigued. This element of confusion will characterize rococo expression and pose in the two generations that follow La Fosse and Coypel.

### Conclusion

This chapter has shown how early rococo paintings by Antoine Coypel and La Fosse shared with classical baroque works of approximately the same time period a contemporary taste for intense drama of the tragic moment in classical and biblical subjects. Coypel and

La Fosse removed some of the austerity and distance that Jouvenet and LeBrun customarily gave to the grand event and brought the spectator and accessory figures closer to the principal figure to privately share in its anxiety. The figural expressions that Jouvenet has given to Esther and Iphigenia placed them accurately beyond the point of anxiety. The spectator may be awed and even feel compassion for their suffering, which is proportionate to the grandness of the event. On the other hand, Coypel and La Fosse forced the spectator to consider the delicate and yet different gestures of the arms and hands of Iphigenia who reflects upon mixed sensations of hope, fear and distress that the great event has produced on the heroine. The various expressions of the accessory figures reinforce this preoccupation with the unexpected and unsettling emotional states of Esther and Iphigenia. Unlike the carefully balanced figures of Jouvenet's painting, Coypel's figures of Esther and Asahuerus are precariously off-balanced. The spectator is led to anticipate the next movement or shifting balance of Coypel's figures, which will also break the sense of confusion and imbalance together in the body expression of the figure in order to make the figure's anxiety all the more convincing.

## CHAPTER II: NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Antoine Schnapper, Au temps du roi soleil, les peintres de Louis XIV, 1660-1715 (Lille: Palais des beaux-arts, 1968), p. 32; Anthony Blunt, The Paintings of Nicholas Poussin 2 vols. (London: Phaidon, 1966), 2, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Turnell, Jean Racine Dramatist (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972), p. 280.

<sup>3</sup>The cozy and intimate interior setting for this and many other royal commissions of this time was in part due to the modest taste of the King and Madame Maintenon. With the arrival of Francoise d' Aubigne, the Marquise de Maintenon, at the French Court as the King's favorite in 1682 and her subsequent marriage to Louis in 1684, the King spent more time away from the formal court etiquette of Versailles to enjoy the pleasures and privacy of his country residences. The new manner of creating innocent dramas at Court in the mid-1680's and their later performance in the apartments of Maintenon during the winter of 1702 at Versailles by members of the royal family, magnificently dressed in stage costumes, set the tone for such familiar and intimate dramas in the future. Plays were increasingly performed in private residences in Paris and depicted in art during the Regency of the Duc d' Orleans. Gilette Ziegler, The Court of Versailles in the Reign of Louis XIV, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (London: George Allen & Urwin, Ltd., 1966), pp. 202, 248-50, 256. Saint-Simon, Louis de Rouvroy, Memoirs of the Duc de Saint-Simon on the Times of Louis XIV and the Regency, trans. Katharine Prescott Wormeley, (Boston: Hardy, Pratt & Co., 1902), I, p. 241.

<sup>4</sup>"Dieux puissants! quelle etrange paleur De son teint tout à coup efface la couleur? Esther, que craignez-vous? suis-je pas votre frère? . . . O soleil! o flambeau de lumiere immortelle! Je me trouble moi-même, et sans fremissement Je ne puis voir sa peine et son saississement. Calmez, reine, calmez la frayeur qui vous presse. Du coeur d' Assuerus souveraine maîtresse, Eprouvez seulement son ardente amitié. . . . Je ne trouve qu'en vous je ne sais quelle grâce Oui me charme toujours et jamais ne me lasse. D l'aimable vertu doux et puissants attrait! Tout respire en Esther l'innocence et la paix. Du chagrin le plus noir elle ecarte les ombres. . . . Et crois que votre front prête a mon diadème Un eclat qui le rend respectable aux dieux même. . . . Quel intérêt, quels soins vous agitent, vous present? Je vois qu'en m'ecoutant vos yeux au ciel s'adressent. Racine, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962), p. 274.

<sup>5</sup>Encyclopedia Selections, pp. 351-2.

<sup>6</sup>Turnell, p. 218.

<sup>7</sup>"Mes filles, soutenez votre reine éperdue; je me meurs."  
Racine, p. 274.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FIGURE MOVEMENT AND POSE

#### The Figure in Transition

La Fosse and the younger painters who worked with him at Versailles and Trianon during the 1690's developed a new rococo feeling which anticipated the full development of the rococo in succeeding generations of French artists from Watteau, de Troy through Fragonard. They emphasized the sympathetic depiction of figures who appear preoccupied with thoughts of love, pleasure and fear. This feeling is partially communicated by having the principal figure gracefully turn toward the object of attention. In many court paintings of the 1690's and 1700's, the legs of turning figures usually bend in the direction of the movement, while the torso may twist either toward or away from the turn. The head could move in either direction, depending on the nature of the figure's commitment to action. This largely circular or serpentine figure movement, which had been earlier popularized by Michelangelo and the Mannerists, often implies considerable deliberation on the part of the figure and assumes that the figure, in the course of time, has travelled through several moments of action that lead toward a central climax.

Rococo artists and aestheticians used such circular figure movement to show how a figure has responded in time to a certain

occurrence within a composition that must obey the unities of time, and action, as taught by the Royal Academy in Paris. Anthony Cooper and Jean-François Du Bos could write about the classical unities of time, place and action and yet discuss individual works that show successive stages of a figure's emotions, as they arrive at a climax and anticipate a resolution.

At the end of the seventeenth century, de Piles and Antoine Coypel wrote about the graceful turn of the figure as a beautiful effect that was given to a dignified action. In his discussion on the distribution of objects in a painting, de Piles gave attention to the movement of bodily parts of figures either in a circular arrangement or in opposite directions. Besides exposing the beautiful parts as much as the action demanded, ". . . it is additionally necessary that it (attitude) have a turn, which without abandoning either verisimilitude or the character of the person, throws agreement into the action."<sup>1</sup> The gracious turn further characterized things in an elegant manner, choosing to place them beyond what nature and painters ordinarily have prescribed. Elegance displayed a politesse in the action ". . . by giving a turn to the thing, which strikes persons of a delicate mind."<sup>2</sup> Although elegance was customarily found in works of antiquity and the painted figures of Raphael, de Piles now wanted to call attention to Correggio, whose drawing may have been inexact but whose elegance ". . . caused one to admire even the taste of the design, in the turn that this painter gives to actions; in a word, Coreggio rarely deviated from elegance."<sup>3</sup> De Piles went further to say that reason, which revealed to the spectator the cause of a

painting's good effects, was also to be found ". . . embellished with an elegance and an agreeable turn. . . ." <sup>4</sup> Such elegance together with the sublime furnished reason with a sense of harmony and a guaranty of being favorably received.

Coypel wrote that the gracious turn of a figure was indispensable for an art that sought, above all, to please its patrons. He followed de Piles in asserting that the grand taste for drawing need not imply precision in detail. This taste gave value to the large parts of the composition by producing large masses and by avoiding that which was dry, contrasted, unyielding and interrupted. The undulating form and that which resembled the flame animated the contours, producing qualities of greatness, elegance and truth. <sup>5</sup> Coypel referred to this undulating and flamelike form as the spirit of the contour, which he found most often displayed in Correggio and which could also be found in Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael and the Carracci. <sup>6</sup> The turn was an aspect of grace, which was an embellishment of beauty that won the heart more promptly than a beauty of the mind and of reason. <sup>7</sup> Coypel also found it appropriate to express the graceful turn in the movement of drapery <sup>8</sup> and in the arrangement of a group of figures. <sup>9</sup>

The paintings commissioned for Louis XIV's pleasure house at Trianon between 1688 and 1706 seem to reflect a new interest on the part of the Coypels, Louis de Boullogne, Michelle Corneille and Nicholas Bertin in continuous lateral figure movement in the principal persons represented. In the bedroom of the east wing of the Trianon palace, one may compare two paintings of Apollo Crowned by Victory by



Noel Coypel, the father of Antoine and the veteran painter at the palace. The theme of Apollo was an important part of the Ovidian iconography of the palace houses at Trianon, Meudon and the Menagerie at Versailles. In the Salon de Repos at Trianon, for example, there are nine canvases about the youthful Apollo where the warrior god is being crowned by Victory or attended by Mercury. Apollo is also depicted in the presence of his lovers Thetis, Hyacinth, Sybil and Iris. In the bedroom, one finds Apollo and Thetis or Clytia, as signs of the setting sun. The Apollo and Thetis story, according to Charles Perrault, architect and designer for the Court, could symbolize Louis XIV "reposing himself at Versailles after working for the good of the whole world."<sup>10</sup>

In Noel Coypel's earlier Apollo Crowned by Victory (Figure 14), we see seated a youth whose right shoulder leans slightly forward to balance an upright lyre with his extended arm. The defeated python lies in the distance, while a mischievous Cupid observes Apollo from the left. Coypel's painting could be an introduction to Ovid's story of Apollo and Daphne. "Delian Apollo, while still exulting over his conquest of the serpent," writes Ovid, had seen him (Cupid) bending his bow with tight-drawn string, and had said: "What hast thou to do with the arms of men, thou wanton boy? That weapon befits my shoulders. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

In Noel Coypel's second version of Apollo Crowned by Victory (Figure 15), painted ten years later, a centrally seated Apollo has completed a 90 degree turn to face the spectator. Apollo's torso leans against a rock while his right hand clutches a great bow that



Figure 14. Noel Coypel. Apollo Crowned by Victory. Oil on canvas, c. 1696.



Figure 15. Noel Coypel. Apollo Crowned by Victory. Oil on canvas, c. 1704.

is to his right. The legs are considerably bent and spaced apart to emphasize the lively lateral movement while the left arm falls in the direction of the rotation. Only the head violates this left-to-right movement by boldly leaning away from the turn. As with the earlier canvas, a victory places a wreath on Apollo's head. The later canvas shows nyads and young maidens who are visibly charmed by the figure of Apollo. The earlier image of the stately peacemaker is now replaced by Apollo the hunter, who is armed with quiver and bow. Apollo's playful and daring smile, golden locks and sturdy physical demeanor bring him closer to the Olympian Apollo. He has also become more of a courtier and less of an arbiter and civilizer, here surrounded by a household of admirers. Coypel's later Apollo figure has the same large eyes and long blond curly hair as Poussin's Olympian Apollo who is assembled with the gods. Coypel's figure, however, is much more animated in his pose and facial expression than that of Poussin.

Apollo's difficult turn appears to merge into a restful pose. His left arm boldly crosses his torso to flaunt his shoulder in a culminating action that attracts the spectator. As with other early rococo paintings of the same period, lively figure movement is contradicted by a thoughtfulness that leaves the action incomplete. The two nymphs below also reflect upon their heart-felt sentiments for Apollo and keep the spectator in suspense.

Noel Coypel has replaced the sharp and accurate contours, strong chiaroscuro and crisp drapery of his earlier painting with a soft surface of flesh and drapery, fluid line and a gentle modelling

in light. This soft and playful quality of Coypel's drawing in the 1704 version of Apollo Crowned by Victory accentuates the flat, curvilinear and voluminous quality of the figural forms found in many paintings of Antoine Coypel produced for the gallery of the Palais-Royal in Paris after 1703.

Antoine Coypel largely attributed this new style to the paintings of Correggio. Correggio's soft brushwork was preferred to that of others in the depiction of gentle passions and gracious objects. Correggio's brush was directly opposed to the bold and overdrawn traits that Coypel disliked. Correggio's "tender and suave" brush appeared to flow from a lively and pure source. Correggio and Rembrandt had the desirable quality of fullness and suavity in their painted forms, although Rembrandt's brush was a little too brusque. Noel Coypel's later figure of Apollo generally conforms to what Antoine Coypel has called in his own style "the light and spiritual brush." The spiritual touch removed insipid neatness and cold uniformity from shapes while providing a "fire" that animated the bodies one chose to represent through drawing and color.<sup>12</sup>

Antoine Coypel thought that the grand goût of his own generation after 1700 was present everywhere in Correggio's paintings. The grand goût diminished angles and created undulating and flame-like forms.<sup>13</sup> Correggio's gracious, lively and uninhibited figural movements were those most likely to pique the spectator.<sup>14</sup> De Piles also wrote in his Cours des principes of 1707 that Correggio was the best example to follow when producing an elegant turn of action that ". . . struck persons of a delicate mind."<sup>15</sup>

It is very likely that Noel Coypel's Apollo figure was influenced by Correggio's youthful, caped figures in the cupola of the Cathedral at Parma. Antoine, himself, spent a year in Parma, where he copied the entire Assumption of the Virgin (Figure 16) painted on the dome.<sup>16</sup> Correggio's caped youths and the bolder figures of Saint James and Saint Thomas (Figure 17) display intense and awesome feelings through bold and difficult poses. Coypel's Apollo is less violent in his movement and more approachable to the spectator.

The circular movement in Coypel's Apollo figure, which is found in other post-1700 paintings at Trianon, the Menagerie and Versailles, was markedly different from that depicted by Jean Jouvenet and René-Antoine Houasse at about the same time. In contrasting Jouvenet's Apollo and Thetys (Figure 18) to Antoine Coypel's Zephyr and Flora (Figure 19), which were both placed in the country palace at Trianon, we can discover the essential differences between the French classical style of Poussin and the early rococo style of the Coypels. Jouvenet's figure has retained the strong sense of balance found in Poussin's mature style. As with many painted figures of Poussin, Jouvenet has caused the actions of Apollo's legs to occur along distinct planes with the figure's head reinforcing this uniform movement either to the front or to the side: a movement that is illustrated in the figures of the three nymphs.<sup>17</sup> The movements of the three figures appear to be frozen in time as the figures come to rest in perfect balance on their limbs.



Figure 16. Antonio Allegri da Correggio. Assumption of the Virgin. Fresco, c. 1526-30.



Figure 17. Antonio Allegri da Correggio. Ascension of Christ. Fresco, c. 1520-24.





Figure 18. Jean Jouvenet. Apollo and Thetys. Oil on canvas, c. 1700.



Figure 19. Antoine Coyne. Zephyr and Flora. Oil on canvas, c. 1702.

In Jouvenet's painting, the contours are carefully outlined and the flesh has been given a plasticity that clearly defines the three-dimensional forms and their relationship to each other and the space around them.

In Antoine Coypel's Zephyr and Flora, on the contrary, the two figures are in the process of shifting their balance. The legs and arms of Flora are moving away from one another as her body accomplishes a spiral and serpentine movement toward the descending figure of Zephyr. The planar arrangement of the figures is largely absent. The leaning gestures of the heads of Flora and Zephyr further release the figures from a fixed and easily determined intention. As with Noel Coypel's second Apollo figure, the contours and surfaces are smooth, soft and voluminous. Nevertheless, the forms of Apollo, Flora and Zephyr are flat and do not give the spectator a clear sense of the space they occupy or the distance between figures that is discernible in Jouvenet's work. The possible Flemish derivatives of Antoine Coypel's Zephyr and Flora, as well as Louis de Boullogne's Apollo and Sybil and La Fosse's Venus Asking Arms from Vulcan, all from around 1700, have the same sense of shifting balance as their later imitations in a graceful circular movement that suggests to the spectator a continuous and unresolved action.

Noel Coypel's later Apollo figure became a symbol for unremitting enthusiasm, where continuous figure movement is left unresolved by the upward glance of the eyes in such figures as Michel Corneille's Apollo, from his painting of the Judgment of Midas (Figure 20) of 1705-6 for the country palace at Trianon. Corneille has depicted



Figure 20. Michel Corneille. Judgment of Midas.  
Oil on canvas, c. 1701-06.

Apollo, the musician, playing his lyre. Apollo is twisted around 90 degrees from an audience of listeners to face his lyre on the left side of the oval painting.

As with Coypel's later Apollo figure, the arms of Corneille's Apollo move with the torso in order to heighten the opposing positions of the upper and lower body parts. Both Apollo figures turn their heads away from the torso and in the direction of the legs.

According to Ovid's popular account of the judgment of Midas, King Midas, after having washed away his greed for the golden touch, took to inhabiting woodlands and worshipping Pan. On one occasion, Pan compared his own music to that of Apollo in the presence of nymphs. He thereby caused a musical competition to be staged between himself and Apollo, which the sun god won:

Then Pan made music on his rustic pipes, and with his rude notes quite charmed King Midas, for he chanced to hear the strains. After Pan was done, venerable Tmolus turned his face toward Phoebus (Apollo); and his forest turned with his face. Phoebus's golden head was wreathed with laurel from Parnassus, and his mantle dipped in Tyrian dye, swept the ground. His lyre, inlaid with gems and Indian ivory, he held in his left hand, while his right hand held the plectrum. His very pose was that of an artist. Then with trained thumb he plucked the strings and, charmed by those sweet strains, Tmolus ordered Pan to lower his reeds before the lyre.<sup>18</sup>

In Corneille's painting, the inspired Apollo is playing his lyre much to the amazement of a nymph and to the consternation of Pan, who bites on his pipes. Corneille describes the scene much as Ovid did, particularly with regard to the description and pose of Apollo. The canvas was placed in the same room as Venus and Adonis, Venus and Hymen, Venus and Mercury, Art, Nature and Mars.<sup>19</sup>

In the Menagerie at Versailles, depictions of the musical inspiration of Arion and Orpheus were likewise associated with games, amusements and friendship. Louis de Sylvestre's Arion on the Dolphin (Figure 21) takes the theme of music from Ovid's Metamorphosis and like the paintings of Coypel and Corneille shows the torso of Arion actively turned to the right away from legs that are bent and actively pointed in the direction of the turn. Sylvestre's figure has arms that are similarly turned with boldness in the direction of the torso and a head that leans back over the shoulder, away from the turn. Arion was a famous musician who lived at the court of Periander, king of Corinth. After Arion had sung a last song before being thrown into the sea by mutineering seamen who wanted his lyre, sea nymphs and dolphins were struck by Arion's beautiful music and saved him from drowning. Sylvestre depicts Arion riding a great dolphin that, along with nymphs, marvels at the music. Arion has moved around considerably to our right while his head leans back in the opposite direction and with great effort as if the figure were deeply moved.

Sylvestre's painting is very close to a contemporary composition by Antoine Coypel on the same subject, which was lost in the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup> François Boucher also took up the theme of Arion and the Dolphin. Boucher's Arion Carried on a Dolphin (Figure 22) displays the same figural pose in Arion, whose legs, torso, and head are opposed to adjacent body areas as is the case in the compositions of Corneille, Sylvestre and Noel Coypel. Fragonard's Venus Binding Cupid's Wing similarly shows body movement along three planes that shift away from one another. As with Correggio's figure of



Figure 21. Louis de Sylvestre.  
Arion on the Dolphin.  
Oil on canvas, c. 1702.



Figure 22. François Boucher. Arion Carried on a Dolphin. Oil on canvas, 1749.



Saint Thomas, which is located in the cupola of Saint John the Evangelist in Parma, the rococo figures of Corneille, Sylvestre, Boucher and Fragonard have a dreamy pose that indicates the characters' total preoccupation with something that seems abstract to the spectator. In the figures of Noel Coypel, Sylvestre and Boucher, the fixed expression of the face and head is strangely inconsistent with the liveliness displayed in torso and legs. The spectator must pause before the figure and share in the figure's enthusiasm, which occurs at a climactic moment in the figure's movement from one position or pose to another.

One may see considerable figure movement in the oil sketch for Antoine Coypel's ceiling vault in the Aeneas Gallery at the Palais-Royal, Versailles. The central plan represents Venus asking Jupiter to provide arms for her son, Aeneas (Figure 23). On the opposite side, an animated and regal Bacchus sits up high on the right side of a rocky ledge. In the legs and torso, he is very similar to Annibale Carracci's figure of Paris receiving the golden apple that is located in the Farnese Gallery. On the opposite side of the ledge, Diana and Apollo are seated near one another. The figure of Apollo recalls Sylvestre's Arion and suggests some details from Michelangelo's figure of Jonah on the ceiling vault of the Sistine Chapel. The poses of Apollo and Diana are similar to those of the two figures that frame Annibale Carracci's Venus and Anchises in the Farnese Gallery. The figure of Jupiter bears similarity to Correggio's St. Peter in the Church of St. John the Evangelist, in the chest, raised arm, bearded face and leg, although the two works



Figure 23. Antoine Coypel. Assembly of the Gods. Oil on canvas, c. 1702.

are seen from different points of view. The general theme of Ovid's Olympian gods and their lovers was promoted in France when Errard, the director of the École de France at Rome, had students at the school copy the ceiling of the Farnese Gallery. Many of these designs were transferred to the ceiling of the Gallery of Ambassadors in the Luxembourg palace in Paris. Nicholas Loir painted many scenes at the Luxembourg and the Tuileries that depicted the female lovers of the Olympian gods. Le Sueur and Vouet also painted subjects from the Metamorphosis, which made the Ovidian themes and many of their sources in the Farnese Palace popular, especially when the Coypels lived in Rome during the middle 1670's.<sup>21</sup>

### The Action of Uncertainty

From the turn of the century, Antoine Coypel, Nicholas Bertin and others introduced into the figure movement of their principal characters a sense of ambiguity, as when bending torso may move in opposition to head and legs. The artists wished to show in the figure's movement and expression traces of the past moments and anticipation of the future action. Piles, Shaftsbury, DuBos and other theorists write about "mixed passions," which frequently imply inner conflict and anxiety on the part of the figure that displays seemingly contradictory body movements.

De Piles, as with the early promoters of galant honnêteté, wrote that depicting the art of conversation had to include a certain insinuation and persuasion on the part of the main figures.<sup>22</sup> Since insinuation implied an indirect and circuitous approach to another's

heart, the addressee could display contrary movements of attraction and repulsion to reflect the devious and sinewy approach of a potentially dangerous performer. The serpentine body movement that is seen in addressees through the duration of rococo painting is indicative of the great cost to the character of its preoccupation, suffering or indecision. As with the circular figure movement popular in the first decade of the eighteenth century, the contrary and sinewy movement of legs, torso and head was accompanied by an incomplete shift in balance that lent a degree of mystery and uncertainty to an action left incomplete.

De Piles believed that contrasts in the movements and in the placing of body parts gives energy to a figure's expression and adds life to objects while drawing attention to them:

It (contrast) includes not only the different movements of the figures, but also the different situations of members, and all the other objects that are found together, in kind that it appears without affectation and only to give more energy to the expression of the subject. . . . This opposition well conceived gives life to objects, draws attention to them and increases grace.<sup>23</sup>

As with de Piles, Antoine Coypel counselled the young painter to contrast the pose of figures that are positioned next to one another. Yet, the painter must also strive to produce a final sense of unity in the overall arrangement of figures within the composition. He should display the spiritual turn expressed by a group of figures that our sensibility causes us to experience, and for which the painter could scarcely furnish rules.<sup>24</sup> Anthony Cooper also wrote that the turn and balance shift indicates an opposition of intentions

in the central figure. "It should appear by the very turn or position of the body alone that the young hero (Hercules) had not wholly quitted the balancing or pondering part."<sup>25</sup>

In his article written for d'Alembert's Encyclopedia in 1752, Montesquieu wrote that contrasts were very important for artists and viewers since the soul loves to experience variety within symmetry:

While nature requires painters and sculptors to introduce symmetry into the various parts of their figures, it demands on the other hand that they introduce contrasts into the attitudes of these figures. A foot placed in the same position as another, a limb that moves like another, these are unbearable. . . . Moreover nature has not given us such a posture; she gave us movement and did not fix our actions and our behavior as if we were figurines. . . . Therefore, figures must be presented in contrasting attitudes, especially in sculpture, which is by nature cold; sculpture can only express the fire of life through strong contrasts and a striking position.<sup>26</sup>

Piles also believes that the study of sculpture, particularly of antique models, could provide a natural and ready source of grace, elegance, expression as well as the natural contrasts and ponderation that one finds in attitudes:

Since it is constant that the antique figures include not only all that which is most beautiful in proportion; but that they are yet the source of grace, elegance and the expressions. . . . It is then here where one ought to place the study of the Model to which it is necessary to join that of Contrast and of Ponderation which two together make up the Attitudes. . . . It is necessary when posing a Model to look for natural contrasts in an attitude and cause one to see the beautiful parts.<sup>27</sup>

Anthony Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftsbury, wrote that it was important to document the resolution of conflict by showing opposing actions and feelings in the principal figure of a painting.

Shaftsbury's instructions to the Neapolitan painter, Paolo de Matteis, on the painting of a Judgment of Hercules specify that the painter must represent one instant in time when Hercules, overcome by the goddesses of Virtue and Pleasure, is about to make a decision as to which way of life he will follow. Shaftsbury wrote that the artist may choose to represent an advanced stage in Hercules's decision process:

According to the first Notion, Hercules must of necessity seem surprised on the first appearance of such miraculous forms; he admires, he contemplates, but is not yet engaged or interested. According to the second Notion, he is interested, divided and in doubt. According to the third, he is wrought, agitated and torn by contrary passions. 'Tis the last Effort of the vicious one, striving for possession over him. He agonizes, and with all his strength of Reason, endeavors to overcome himself.<sup>28</sup>

The author felt that the last possibility could best represent the actual resolution of Hercules. Shaftsbury says that it is desirable to anticipate a fourth state when Hercules is completely won over by Virtue, but still shows signs of the difficulty of his decision. His answer is very similar to that of Félibien, Bellori and de Piles and calls for mixed passions, where the artist may recall the past and anticipate the future:

To this we answer, that notwithstanding the Ascendency or Reign of the principal and immediate Passion, the artist has power to still leave in his Subject the Tracks or Footsteps of its Predecessor: so as to let us behold not only a rising Passion together with a declining one, but, what is more, a strong and determinate passion, with its contrary already discharged and banished. . . . Again by the same means which are employed to call to mind the past, we may anticipate the future. . . . For in this momentary turn or gesture, Hercules remaining still in a situation expressive of suspense and doubt, would discover nevertheless that the strength of this inward conflict was over.<sup>29</sup>

As with Félibien, Shaftsbury suggested that the head could leave the "heavier" body behind for a period of readjustment. He also wrote that the figure should not leave its original state of balance at this point when an accompanying shift is anticipated by the figure turn.

Five years later in 1719, DuBos, in his Reflexions critiques, was intrigued by mixed passions. He held up ancient sculptors and painters, who, as much as French painters in the École at Rome, excelled in expression. In Ausonius's account of Timomachus's Medea, for example, the inner conflict of Medea is beheld by the viewer:

It is on this account that Ausonius extols the Medea of Timomachus, where Medea was drawn in the attitude of lifting up her dagger to stab her children. We behold, says Ausonius, rage and compassion mixed together on her countenance, and amidst the fury which transports her to commit so detestable a murder, we may still decry the remains of a maternal tenderness.<sup>30</sup>

DuBos believed that contrary passions or movements in the figure signify conflict at a dramatic moment of struggle, and a moment that anticipates the future. The Hellenistic Dying Gaul from Pergamon, for instance, represents a male figure whose bending legs and turned torso indicate that he is lapsing into unconsciousness. DuBos mentioned the grinning face and straining arm, which supply valiant resistance to the approach of death. He then anticipates a slow resolution to this climactic moment:

It is the picture of a dying gladiator, attentive to preserve his composure although difficult to him. Sitting on the ground, he still has enough strength to support himself on his right arm. . . . He is not afraid of dying, he only apprehends expiring with a wry visage. We gaze upon him a long time, expecting every moment to see him expire.<sup>31</sup>

The feeling of inquietude and suspense is also revealed in a sculpture depicting Papirius and his mother. The mother of young Papirius looks worriedly at her son, with one hand caressing him while the other appears contracted. "This a motion very natural," writes DuBos, "to those who strive to suppress the signs of their inquietude just ready to break loose." DuBos is also intrigued by the behavior of the son, who intends to mislead his mother. Although the youth's attitude is open, solicitous and innocent, there is a feeling of insincerity or contradiction in a half-formed smile and the inadvertant actions of hands and face. "Four or five touches which the painter has artfully drawn on his face and something particularly observable in the actions of his hands," writes DuBos, "bely the openness and sincerity, which otherwise appear in his gesture and countenance."<sup>32</sup> DuBos frequently discovered in the passions attempting to gain dominance, a resolution that is morally correct. For example, one sees in the countenance of a mother sculpted by the Hellenistic Theban, Aristides, "the liveliest sentiment and the most eager solicitude of maternal tenderness" for her child that attempts to win out over a look of dejection that anticipates the approach of death.<sup>33</sup>

At mid-century, discerning art critics as La Font de Saint-Yenne still recognized the importance of mixed passions and the role of the spectator to read the action with excitement and anticipation at a climax, well-conceived. In his Reflections on Some Causes of the Present State of Painting in France of 1747, La Font remarks that a single event could produce different passions in the heart of persons animated by diverse interests, and that the same passion



"which has several degrees, can modify itself by an infinity of manners. . . ." The assemblage of different passions in the same face distinguishes the artist with genius. La Font recalls Piles's example from the Luxembourg Gallery of Rubens's Birth of Louis XIII, where Marie de Medici's "maternal tenderness and sweet joy, pierces across the despondency caused by the difficulty of childbirth."<sup>35</sup> La Font further wrote that the depiction of an action must continue and an expectation be sustained for the spectator to remain interested in a painting. He preferred Le Sueur to Restout in the depiction of Alexander the Great taking tainted medicine from his unsuspecting son, Philip:

In Restout the bad is accomplished. Alexander has perished by his (artist's) timeliness, and my tenderness can do nothing to save him, and becomes importune for me, and vanishes. Le Sueur's moment is more beautiful. I forget myself to take a role in the action: I could tear the vase from the lips of Alexander; I am agitated and share all the passions of those who were present there. In the Tragedy, I also prefer the moment that Orosman, with knife raised, runs over to Zaire. I fear the blow will not go away. . . . Fear has an action more powerful on our souls than even happiness which it proclaims.<sup>36</sup>

The sense of struggle that many early rococo paintings convey through the principal figure's contrapposto also suggests to the spectator a time of indecision. The figure's suffering or dilemma results from its being caught between two worlds, or choices. In Noel Coypel's Hercules, Dejanira and the Wounded Centaur Nessus (Figure 24), a composition in the Hercules cycle placed between 1697-99 in the Summer Room at the Trianon palace,<sup>37</sup> Dejanira's legs are positioned near the dying Centaur while her torso leans dramatically back toward Hercules. Dejanira's head is similarly pulled back

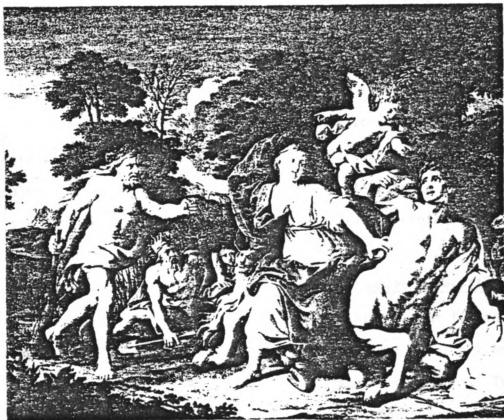


Figure 24. Noel Coypel. Hercules, Dejanira and the Wounded Centaur, Nessus. Oil on canvas, c. 1700.

as if she were about to flee from the tragic event. Yet, her head leans slightly to the side, while her somewhat open mouth and arching eyebrows indicate surprise mixed with sadness. Dejanira's hip is positioned near Nessus, while her torso leans away, only to be contradicted by her head, which gestures toward Nessus, as if in pity. Ovid tells the story of how the Centaur Nessus offered to carry Hercules's bride, Dejanira, across the swollen river Evenus. Hercules then shot the creature through the chest when it attempted to abduct Dejanira.<sup>38</sup> Ovid did not describe Dejanira's abduction, but only Hercules's response. The artist takes poetic license in observing the act with fear as well as pity for the imploring centaur, who does not appear as a violent animal.

In Antoine Coypel's Hector Bidding Andromache Farewell (Figure 25), dated 1707-8, we see the same tension in the figure of Andromache, who leans toward her mistresses and then hangs her head back in the opposite direction, toward her departing husband. The surprise and yearning of her expression is restated in the heads of her mistresses, which are bent forward in astonishment. According to the sixth book of Homer's Iliad, Andromache pleads with Hector to stay. In a lengthy scene, she comes to confront her departing husband at the Skaian city gate of Troy:

She (Andromache) came to him there, and beside her went an attendant carrying the boy in the fold of her bosom, a little child, only a baby, Hector's son. . . . Andromache, stood close beside him (Hector), letting her tears fall . . . and spoke to him: 'Dearest, your own great strength will be your death, and you have no pity on your little son or on me. . . . Please take pity upon me then, stay here on the rampart, that you may not leave your child an orphan, your wife a widow. . . .'<sup>39</sup>



Figure 25. Antoine Coypel. Hector Bidding Andromache Farewell. Oil on canvas, c. 1708.

Hector replies that he must fight for his own glory and would fight to his death before he would see Andromache put in chains:

So speaking he gloriously held out his arms to his baby, who shrank back to his fair-girdled nurse's bosom. . . . Then his beloved father laughed out. . . . Then taking up his dear son he tossed him about in his arms. . . . He set his child again in the arms of his beloved wife, who took him back again to her fragrant bosom smiling in her tears.<sup>40</sup>

We have encountered the moment that Andromache pleads with Hector to stay with her and their son. She has moved from Hector toward her baby to outwardly symbolize her attachment to her family just as Dejanira withdrew toward her honorable husband. Andromache's head leans back toward Hector to depict her desire that Hector stay, and her resulting conflict between family and honor. Dejanira's conflict is between honor and the tender feelings toward an affectionate being who desired her.

Nicholas Bertin's Vertumnus and Pomona (Figure 26), commissioned for Trianon during the same years, displays a similar dialogue of attraction and rejection that is displayed by bending torso and tilted head. The artist dramatically resolves the conflict between a desirous lover and his unresponsive love. According to Ovid's story, Vertumnus, a young male deity associated with the changing seasons, paid a visit to Pomona, a wood nymph who devoted all her attention and love to her garden and fruit trees to the exclusion of all male suitors. Vertumnus, disguised as an elderly woman, was admitted into Pomona's garden one day. He implored her to accept into her heart an honest, devoted and compatible lover named Vertumnus. He also told the story of how the proud and hard-hearted princess



Figure 26. Nicholas Bertin. Vertumnus and Pomona.  
Oil on canvas, c. 1706.

Anaxeteres was punished for ignoring the young Iphis, her suitor, and for driving him to commit suicide. Finding that neither the fear of Venus's wrath nor the devotion of Vertumnus and Iphis could move her, the deity changed back into his own appearance. "Vertumnus was ready to force her will," wrote Ovid, "but the nymph, smitten by the beauty of the god, felt an answering passion."<sup>41</sup>

Bertin has chosen to show the moment that Vertumnus advances upon Pomona. The spectator is left to wonder if Pomona has begun to see the youthful appearance of the deity. The appearance of a charmed Pomona seems to dramatically follow the nymph's initial rejection of the lover. Although her feet are positioned near those of Vertumnus, Pomona's legs lean away from the suitor. Pomona's torso is further twisted to the side in order to avoid a direct encounter that Vertumnus's advancing body seems to anticipate. The wood nymph's head leans back toward her left shoulder in continuation of the retreating movement as yet as a possible sign of endearment. Pomona's hand is raised in a gesture of surprise, while the wood nymph's half-opened mouth and evenly raised brows signify intrigue and possibly enchantment. Vertumnus is turned toward Pomona with an extended, open hand in a gesture of persuasion. His mouth and eyes are wide open as he confidently speaks and leans toward Pomona, perhaps as the process of change begins. The subtle insinuations of Vertumnus as an honnête lover are reflected in the gently twisted torso and tilting head of Pomona, who appears to hesitate at this time.

In Watteau's Vertumnus and Pomona (Figure 27) of 1715, the standing disguised suitor, Vertumnus, leans aggressively toward



Figure 27. Antoine Watteau. Vertumnus and Pomona. Oil on canvas, c. 1714.



Pomona, in a graceful winding bend which implies coercion or insinuation. The pensive Pomona, with head resting against forearm, looks down toward the foreground as if frozen in thought. Her raised eyebrows, inflated nostrils and heavy eyelids signal that she has experienced the first effects of admiration and desire and is trying to come to grips with her feelings. She has the same expression as the enchanted woman in Watteau's earlier Rendez-vous. Pomona's slumping shoulders and downcast eyes, however, indicate that she is still unresolved as to what action to take.

Boucher engraved Watteau's painting and produced three versions of the story of Vertumnus and Pomona in 1749, 1758 and 1763 (Figures 28, 29, 30). Watteau and Boucher have preferred to depict the quiet drama of Pomona's gradual enchantment, where the nymph never actually looks directly at Vertumnus. In all three versions by Boucher, the tension is eased by the closeness of the two figures and the relaxed pose of Pomona. The nymph reclines on the ground against a partially seated Vertumnus, who leans forward in a somewhat tense pose.

In Boucher's earlier two paintings, Pomona's torso is twisted in toward the body of Vertumnus in order to create a sense of involvement and intrigue. Pomona's head is tilted to the side, away from Vertumnus. Pomona's eyes are thoughtfully cast to the side. In all three paintings, Pomona holds a strap or flower in her delicately raised hand that manages to come between the heads of the two figures. The gentle horizontal twisting and then vertical bending of the torso and the tilting head of Pomona in Boucher's compositions shows a



Figure 28. François Boucher. Vertumnus and Pomona.  
Oil on canvas, c. 1749.

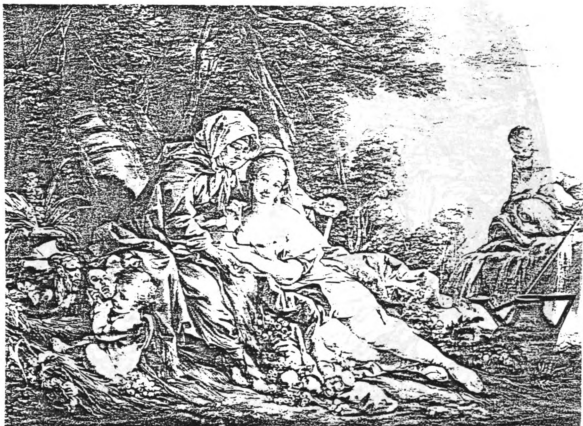


Figure 29. François Boucher. Vertumnus and Pomona. Oil on canvas, 1758.



Figure 30. François Boucher. Vertumnus and Pomona.  
Oil on canvas, 1763.

double torsion of torso and head. This double movement toward and then away from the other figure is generally the opposite order of body movement revealed in the earliest rococo paintings of the Coypels and Bertin, as well as the later works of de Troy and Watteau.

Boucher's female figures do not show the deep and troubling reflections that were attractive to early rococo painters. Boucher always showed more of the male suitor and emphasized less the power of deception that made the other figure's intentions ambiguous.

Prevost, Marivaux and other novelists of the 1710's and 1720's wrote about the irrational, mysterious and dangerous nature of love, which tended to alienate persons from themselves and to subject them to the torture of irresponsible feelings. Since the passion of love could not be foreseen by the conscience, it was always discovered as a surprise.<sup>42</sup>

Writers at mid-century emphasized the refined delicatesse of early innocent pleasures that gave birth to love and which were known to the conscience. They stressed the excellence of the desired object, the union of the souls of lovers, and a certain prolonged savoring of the sensual pleasures that accompanied love.<sup>43</sup> New emphasis was placed upon the bond of love and friendship, which was indispensable for happiness.

Friendship tamed love in its early stages by forcing an impassioned lover to come out of his or her abandonment.<sup>44</sup> Madame Lambert wrote that ". . . a woman who likes the solid friendship of a man puts all the vivacity of love in this agreeable commerce."<sup>45</sup> As a sublimated image of ourselves, friendship is an ideal state of

protection against the condition of fear and inquietude.<sup>46</sup> The country environment was ideally suited to provide the soul with a sense of peace and plenitude. It produced contentment at the least price while restoring unity to the soul.<sup>47</sup>

Friendship preceded love as a period of endearment when a woman is persuaded to yield to love.<sup>48</sup> The crowning or triumph of love followed this period of sweetness and friendly avowals. In Boucher's 1749 oil sketch of Vertumnus and Pomona, trust and confidence have been earned. The fact that Pomona's heart is confidently ready to sustain love for Vertumnus is established by visual symbols of Venus's crown and Cupid's arrow. Denis Diderot believed that the depiction of the first offering of love was the most difficult task for the painter, since one must show that lovers were preparing themselves to proceed beyond their innocent feelings. The sinewy posture of Pomona indicates that the figure has made considerable effort in coming to terms with Vertumnus in order to accept his offer of love. It continues the early rococo interest in the lively and intricate figure pose which could display to the spectator the emotional cost to the figure of the principal.

### CHAPTER III: NOTES

<sup>1</sup>" . . . il faut qu'elle fasse voir de belles parties autant que qui sans la nature du sujet peut le souffrir. Il faut de plus, qu'elle ait une tour, qui sans sourtir de la vraisemblance, ni du caractère de la personne, jette de l'agrément dans l'action." Roger de Piles, Cours, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>"L'Elegance en general est une maniere de dire ou de faire les choses avec politesse, avec agrément; avec choix en se mettant au dessus de ce que la Nature et les Peintres font ordinairement; avec politesse, en donnent un tour à la chose, lequel frappe les gens d'un esprit délicat. . . ." Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>3</sup>"Elle se fait souvent sentir dans des ouvrages peu chaties et négligés d'ailleurs, comme dans le Corregge, où malgré les fautes contre la justesse au dessein, l'elegance se fait admirer dans le goût du dessein même, dans le tour que ce peintre donne aux actions, en un mot, le Corregge sort rarement de l'elegance." Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 468.

<sup>5</sup>"Ce grand caractère du dessein, qui est dans le génie du peintre, n'est pas aisé à déterminer. Il consiste, cependant, à faire valoir les grandes parties par de grandes masses, à éviter tout ce qui est sec, tranché, dur et coupé. . . . La forme ondoyante, et celle qui ressemble à la flamme, anime les contours, y jette du grand, de l'élégance et de la vérité." Jouin, Conférences, p. 283.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 285, 290.

<sup>10</sup>William H. Lewis, The Splendid Century: Life in the France of Louis XIV (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), p. 273.

<sup>11</sup>Publius Ovidius Naso, The Metamorphoses of Ovid, trans. Frank J. Miller (New York: Putnam, 1921), I:35.

<sup>12</sup>Jouin, Conférences, pp. 261-2.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>15</sup>de Piles, pp. 159-60.

<sup>16</sup>Louis Dimier, "Antoine Coypel, 1661 à 1722," in Les peintres français du XVIIIe siècle. Histoire des vies et catalogue des oeuvres, 2 vols., edited by Louis Dimier (Paris: Les Éditions G. Van Oest, 1928), I:98.

<sup>17</sup>Anthony Blunt, Art and Architecture in France, 1500 to 1700 (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), pp. 161-3.

<sup>18</sup>Ovid, Metamorphoses, 2:131.

<sup>19</sup>Schnapper, Tableaux, pp. 124-5.

<sup>20</sup>Gerard Mabilie, "Les tableaux de la Ménagerie de Versailles," Bulletin de la Société de Histoire de l'art français (March 1974), p. 99.

<sup>21</sup>Henri Bardon, "Ovid et le grand roi," Les Études Classiques 25 (October 1957), pp. 410-11.

<sup>22</sup>"Les patétiques (passions) commandent, les moraux (passions) persuadent; les uns portent le trouble et remuent puissamment les coeurs, les autres insinuent le calme dans l'esprit." de Piles, Cours, p. 166.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>24</sup>"... ainsi, par un contraste aimable et cependant convenable au caractère du sujet, on peut jeter une variété dans l'ouvrage qui en augmente les agréments sans en détruire l'unité; comme, par exemple, on peut opposer aux plus aimables nymphes des faunes et des satyres qui sont assez laids pour faire du contraste mais dont la laideur enjouée ne laisse pas d'avoir pour ainsi dire une sorte de grâce... il faut songer qu'il est dans la forme des groupes une espèce d'élégance de tour spirituel et gracieux que le goût fait sentir, et dont l'on ne peut presque donner de règles." Ibid., pp. 102-3.

<sup>25</sup>Holt, Documentary History, 2:249.

<sup>26</sup>Encyclopedia Selections, p. 350.

<sup>27</sup>de Piles, Cours, pp. 405-7.

<sup>28</sup>Holt, Documentary History, 2:245.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 2:248.

<sup>30</sup>Jean-Baptiste DuBos, Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting and Music, 3 vols., trans. Thomas Nugent (London: J. Nourse, 1748), 1:305.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 1:309.



<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 1:310.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 1:311.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 1:304.

<sup>35</sup>"Avec les parties du dessein, du coloris, et de l'entente de la lumière on est un grand imitateur de la nature, et rien de plus, quant on ignore au'un même événement peut produire des passions différentes dans le cœur des hommes animés par des intérêts divers; et que la même passion qui a plusieurs degrés, peut se modifier d'une infinité de manières . . . c'est l'assemblage de plusieurs passions sur le même visage, qui ne peut être rendu que par un homme de génie." La Font de Saint-Yenne, Reflexions sur quelques causes de l'état presnet de peinturs a France (Geneva: Slatkine, 1970), p. 67.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-8.

<sup>37</sup>"Dans celui-ci le mal est fait Alexandre périt par sa témérité, et mon attendrissement qui ne peut rien pour le sauver, me devient importun, et s'évanouit. Le moment que a pris LeSueur est bien plus beau: j'oublie mon personnage pour faire un rôle dans l'action: je puis arracher le vase des lèvres de ce Prince; je m'agite et partage toutes les passions de ceux qui y furent présents. Il en est de même dans la tragédie. Le moment où Orosmanne, le poignard levé, court sur Zaire, est le plus vif: je crains que le coup ne parte . . . mon intérêt pour Zaire cesse." LaFont, Reflexions, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup>Schnapper, Tableaux, pp. 91-2.

<sup>39</sup>Ovid, Metamorphoses, 2:235-6.

<sup>40</sup>The Iliad of Homer, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 164-5.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>42</sup>Ovid, Metamorphoses, 2:355.

<sup>43</sup>Robert Mauzi, L'idée du bonheur, p. 466.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 476-8.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 472.

<sup>46</sup>Pierre Desfontaines, Observations sur les écrits modernes, 1735-1743, 4 vols., (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1967), 2:331.  
". . . une femme, qui l'amitié solide d'un homme, met dans cet agréable commerce toute la vivacité de l'amour. . . . La véritable amitié est occupée à sentir les choses présentes, et à imaginer agréablement pour l'avenir; elle se fait un devoir d'être toujours fidèle, et d'exercer une noble et généreuse confiance."

<sup>47</sup>Mauzi, L'idée du bonheur, p. 359.

<sup>48</sup>See Donald Posner, "The True Path of Fragonard's 'Progress of Love'", Burlington Magazine, 114 (August 1972), pp. 526-34.

## CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to show how the earliest paintings produced in the French rococo style departed from the classical style of Jean Jouvenet. I have tied the theoretical interest of late seventeenth-century French writers on art in mixed passions and the preoccupied figure to the actual sympathetic rendering of principal figures in early rococo paintings of Antoine Coypel, Noel Coypel, Charles de La Fosse and Nicholas Bertin. At the turn of the century, painters and theorists alike displayed an interest in lively and graceful body movement which could indicate a figure's great enthusiasm or anxiety toward a visible, dramatic cause. Roger de Piles and Antoine Coypel emphasized the expressive quality of body language to move the spectator to a passion comparable to that of the main figure. They advocated expressions that were simple and yet captivating to the ordinary polite spectator. The French aristocratic code of the honnête homme gave additional meaning to the sympathetic and empathic power of the main figure by emphasizing the subtlety and insinuation of delicate body movement and the reaction of surprise or confusion that it could evoke in supporting figures.

The earliest rococo paintings present to the spectator an art of intrigue, where the principal action and diverse figure movements appear strangely indecisive. The spectator is drawn into the scene by the closeness of the figures to one another and to the spectator. A

sense of excitement or restlessness is also offered to the spectator by way of the flowing, soft contours and the shifting balance of the figures. The principal figures have shifted their balance from a restful pose to one of uncertainty and anticipation in order to bring the spectator back to the anticipated outcome of the encounter. Just as the main figure reflects on the implications of its unforeseen feelings, so then the spectator is left to guess what the figure may do according to the subtle and conflicting gestures and marks of expression. In the mid-century art of Boucher, figures do not express surprise at their predicament, but gently contemplate their feelings of love and duty. Most of Boucher's galant encounters serve as a test for more serious activity and commitments to love. Nevertheless, they maintain the early rococo interest in intrigue and uncertainty. The figures continue to show insinuation and mystery in their contrapposto movement which often places head and legs in opposition to the torso. As with the literature of the period, rococo art was devised as a diversion for the aristocratic and courtly gens d'esprit and the polite and worldly gens du monde. This paper has attempted to discover a central intention in rococo artists which could justify their early experiments in body pose and movement.

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