CHARLES LE BRUN: EXCERPTS FROM *THE EXPRESSION OF THE PASSIONS*

*Gentlemen,*

In the last Assembly you approved my project to speak to you today on Expression. It is necessary, then, in the first place, to know in what this consists.

Expression, in my opinion, is a simple and natural image of the thing we wish to represent; it is a necessary ingredient of all the parts of painting, and without it no picture can be perfect; it is this which indicates the true character of each object; it is by this means that the different natures of bodies are distinguished, that figures seem to have movement, and everything which is imitated appears to be real.

It is present just as much in colour as in drawing; it ought also to be observed in the representation of landscapes, and the composition of figure groups.

That, Gentlemen, is what I have tried to point out in earlier lectures. Today I shall try to demonstrate that expression is also that which reflects the movements of the heart, and which makes visible the effects of the passions.

There are so many wise men who have written on the passions that it is hardly possible to say anything that has not been said before on the subject; I should not trouble to repeat their opinions, did I not believe it would help you to understand that which concerns our art. I think I must say a few words about this for the benefit of the young students of paintings; I shall try to be as brief as possible.

First, a passion is a movement of the sensitive part of the soul, which is designed to pursue that which the soul thinks to be for its good, or to avoid that which it believes to be hurtful to itself. Ordinarily, anything which causes a passion in the soul produces some action in the body.

Since most of the passions of the soul produce bodily actions, we ought to know what the actions of the body are which express the passions, and what an action is.

An action is nothing else but the movement of some part, and this movement can be effected only by an alteration in the muscles, while the muscles are moved only by the intervention of the nerves, which bind the parts of the body and pass through them. The nerves work only by the spirits which are contained in the cavities of the brain, and the brain receives the spirits only from the blood which passes continuously through the heart, which heats it and rarifies it in such a way that it produces a thin air or spirit, which rises to the brain and fills its cavities.

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The ancient philosophers having given two appetites to the sensitive part of the soul, place the simple passions in the concupiscible appetite, and the wilder and mixed passions in the irascible. For they maintain that Love, Hatred, Desire, Joy, and Sorrow are contained in the former, and that Fear, Courage, Hope, Despair, Anger, and Fright belong to the latter. Others add to them Wonder, which they place first, followed by Love, Hatred, Desire, Joy, and Sorrow, and from these they derive the others which are mixed, such as Fear, Courage, and Hope.

The Simple Passions

It will not be out of place to say something of the nature of these passions, so as the better to understand them before we speak of their external movements. We shall begin with Wonder.

WONDER is a surprise which causes the soul to consider attentively objects which seem to it rare and extraordinary, and this surprise is sometimes so powerful that it pushes the spirits towards the place whence the impression of the object is received, and they are so much occupied in considering this impression that there are none left to pass thence into the muscles; the body therefore remains motionless as a statue. This excess of Wonder leads to Astonishment, and this Astonishment may happen before we know whether the object is good for us or not.
Thus it seems that Wonder is the first of all the passions, for Esteem and Scorn are linked to Wonder according to the grandeur or meanness of the object, and Esteem leads to Veneration, and simple Scorn to Disdain.

But when a thing is represented to us as good for us, that makes us conceive Love for it, and when it is represented to us as bad or harmful, this stirs us to Hatred.

LOVE, then, is an emotion of the soul caused by the movements which impel it to join itself voluntarily to objects which appear agreeable to it.

HATE is an emotion caused by the spirits which incite the soul to wish to be separated from such objects as appear harmful to it.

DESIRE is an agitation of the soul caused by the spirits which dispose it to wish for those things which seem agreeable to it, thus we desire not only the presence of an absent good, but also the preservation of a good which is present.

JOY is an agreeable emotion of the soul which consists in the enjoyment of a good which the impressions of the brain represent as its own.

SORROW is a disagreeable languor of the soul which consists in the discomfort which the soul receives from the ill or defect which the impressions of the brain convey to it.

The Mixed Passions

FEAR is the apprehension of a future evil, which anticipates the ills with which we are threatened. Extreme Hope becomes Assurance, and, on the other hand, extreme Fear becomes Despair.

DESPAIR is the expectation of not being able to obtain what we desire, and it makes us lose even that which we have.

COURAGE is a movement of the appetite whereby the soul raises itself against evil to resist it.

ANGER is a turbulent agitation which pain and courage excite in the appetite, which causes the soul to retire into itself so as to withdraw from an injury which it has received, and at the same time to rouse itself against the cause of the injury in order to take vengeance.

There are several others which I shall not discuss here, but will content myself with showing you some drawings of them.

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…Now I shall explain which are the parts of the body which express the passions outwardly. The soul being linked, as I have told you, to the whole body, every part of the body can serve to express the passions: Fear, for example, may be expressed by a man running or fleeing away, Anger by one who clenches his fists, and seems to strike another.

But if it is true that there is one interior part where the soul exercises its functions most immediately, and that this part is in the brain, then we may also say that the face is the part where it makes its feelings most apparent.

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Wonder (Fig. 160)

As we have said that Wonder is the first and most temperate of all the passions, in which the heart feels the least disturbance, so the face also undergoes very little change in any part. If there is any change, it is only in the raising of the eyebrow, but the two ends of it will remain level; the eye will be a little more open than usual, and the pupil will be situated equidistant from the two eyelids, and immobile, fixed on the object which causes the wonder. The mouth will also be slightly open, but it will appear otherwise unchanged, as will the rest of the face. This passion produces a suspension of
movement only to give time to the soul to deliberate on what it should do, and to consider the object before it attentively, for if it be rare and extraordinary, out of this first simple movement will come Esteem.


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162. Charles Le Brun, D, E: *Le mepris et La haine*, Paris, Musee du Louvre

**Scorn** (Fig. 162)

And Scorn is expressed by the eyebrow frowning, with the inner end drawn down towards the nose and the other very much raised, the eyes wide open, the pupils in the middle, the nostrils drawn upwards, the mouth shut, with the corners slightly lowered, and the under lip thrust out beyond the upper.

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**Terror** (Fig. 164)
Those affected by extreme Terror have the eyebrow raised high in the middle, and the muscles which produce this movement very prominent and swollen, pressing against each other and drawn down over the nose; both the nose and the nostrils must appear drawn up. The eyes must appear wide open, the upper lid hidden below the eyebrow, the white of the eye surrounded with red, the pupil in an unsettled movement, but nearer the lower part of the eye than the upper, the lower eyelid swollen and livid; the muscles of the nose will be swollen, and also the nostrils. The muscles of the cheeks will be extremely prominent, forming a fold on either side of the nostrils, the mouth wide open with the corners drawn back, and all the veins and tendons very prominent. Everything will be strongly marked, as much on the forehead as around the eyes; the muscles and veins of the neck must be very taut and prominent; the hair will stand on end, and the complexion be pale, while the extremities of the features, such as the end of the nose, the lips, the ears, and the parts around the eyes, will be somewhat livid.

If the eyes appear wide open in this passion, it is because the soul makes use of them to discover the nature of the object which causes this Terror. Raised at one end and lowered at the other, the eyebrow seems to show by the raised end that it wishes to rise to the brain to protect it from the danger which the soul apprehends, while the other end appears drawn down and swollen due to the spirits which flow in quantity from the brain, as if to cover the soul and defend it from the evil which it fears. The widely open mouth marks the spasm of the heart which is oppressed by the blood which withdraws towards it, obliging whoever is subject to this passion, if he would breathe, to make such an effort that the mouth opens very wide, and the air passing through the vocal organs produces an inarticulate sound. If the muscles and the veins appear swollen, this is only because of the spirits which the brain sends into those parts.

If all the preceding passions can be aroused in us by those objects for which we feel either Esteem or Aversion, so may Love also, if, as we have said, the thing represented as good is seen as being so in relation to ourselves, that is, as being suited to us; in this case we feel Love towards it.

**Simple Love** (Fig. 165)

The external movements of this passion, when it is alone, are very gentle and simple: the forehead will be smooth, the eyebrows slightly raised on the side to which the eyes are turned, and the head inclined towards the object which causes our Love; the eyes may be moderately open, the white very lively and shining, and the pupil, gently turned towards the object, will appear very sparkling and
elevated. The nose remains unchanged, as do all the other parts of the face, which is merely filled with spirits which warm and animate it, giving a livelier and pinker colouring, particularly in the cheeks and lips; the mouth will be just open, the corners slightly raised, and the lips moistened by the vapours which rise from the heart.

Desire (Fig. 166)

If one wishes to represent Desire, this can be done by showing the eyebrows pressed forward over the eyes, which are more than usually open; the pupil will be situated in the middle of the eye, and full of fire, and the nostrils more pinched than usual and slightly drawn up towards the eyes; the mouth is also more open than in the preceding action, the corners drawn further back, and the tongue may appear on the edge of the lips; the complexion is more enflamed than in Love. All these movements show the agitation of the soul, caused by the spirits which dispose it to want what is represented as beneficial to itself.
Jealousy (Fig. 169)

Jealousy is expressed by the wrinkled brow, the eyebrow drawn down and frowning, the eye sparkling, the pupil hidden under the eyebrow and turning towards the object which causes the passion, looking at it out of the corner of the eye while the head is turned away; the pupil must appear in ceaseless movement, and full of fire, as also are the whites of the eye and the eyelids; the nostrils are pale, open, and more apparent than usual, and drawn back, which makes folds appear in the cheeks. The mouth may be shut, and showing that the teeth are clenched; the lower lip is thrust out beyond the upper, and the corners of the mouth are pulled back and downwards; the muscles of the jaw appear hollow.

One part of the face will be enflamed, and another yellowish, the extremities livid; and the area around the eyes, and even the whites of the eyes, will be of a fiery colour; the cheeks will be yellow, the lips pale or livid.

Anger (Figs. 175, 176)

When Anger fills the soul, he who feels this passion has red and enflamed eyes, the pupils restless and shining, the eyebrows now lowered, now raised, and contracted against each other. The forehead will appear deeply furrowed, forming wrinkles between the eyes; the nostrils will be open and enlarged, the lips full and turned out and pressed against one another with the under lip raised over the upper, leaving the corners of the mouth slightly open to form a cruel and disdainful grin.

He will appear to grind his teeth, and to foam at the mouth. His face will be pale in some places and enflamed in others; the veins of the forehead, temples, and neck will be swollen and taut, and his hair standing upright. He who feels this passion gasps rather than breathes, the heart being oppressed by the abundance of blood which flows to its aid.

Rage and Despair sometimes follow Anger.
There, Gentlemen, are some of the external movements I have observed in the face.

But as we have said at the beginning of this discourse that the other parts of the body may help to express the passions, it should be as well to say something of this in passing.

If Wonder brings little change to the face, it produces scarcely any alteration in the other parts of the body, and this first movement can be represented by a person standing upright, both his hands open, the arms fairly near the body, and standing with his feet still and close together.

But in Esteem the body will be a little more bowed, the shoulders very slightly raised, the arms bent close to the body, the hands open and near together, the knees bent.

In Veneration the body will be yet more bowed than in Esteem, the arms and hands almost joined, the knees on the ground, and the whole body manifesting a profound respect.
But in the action which characterises Faith the body may be bowed right to the ground, the arms folded against the body, the hands crossed one over the other, and the whole action will manifest a profound humility.

Rapture, or Ecstasy, can be shown by the whole body bent backwards, the arms raised, and the hands open; the whole action will display a transport of joy.

In Scorn or Aversion the body can be drawn back, with the arms in a gesture of repulsing the object for which one feels Aversion; they can also draw back, with the legs and feet doing the same.

But in Horror the movements must be much more violent than in Aversion, for the body will appear drawn violently back from the object which causes the Horror, the hands wide open and the fingers spread, the arms drawn tight against the body, and the legs in the act of fleeing.

Terror has something of these movements, but they will appear more exaggerated and wilder, for the arms will be stretched stiffly forwards, the legs in the act of fleeing with all their might, and the whole body in disorder.

All the other passions can produce actions in the body according to their nature, but some, such as Love, Hope, and Joy are scarcely visible, for these passions produce no great movements in the body.

Sorrow produces only a dejection of the body, similar to that in all the features of the face.

Fear may also have some movements similar to those of Terror, when it is caused only by the apprehension of losing something, or of some ill occurring. This passion may produce bodily movements characterised by the shoulders pressed together, the arms and hands drawn close against the body, and the other limbs drawn together and bent, as if to express their trembling.

Desire can be represented by the arms stretched towards the object one desires; the whole body can be bent towards it, and all the limbs in an uncertain and restless movement. But in Anger all the movements of the body are large and extremely violent, and all the limbs are agitated; the muscles should be very prominent, larger and more swollen than normal, and the veins and nerves taut.

In Despair all the limbs are in almost the same state as in Anger, but they should appear in greater disorder, for one can draw a man who tears his hair, bites his arms, or tears his flesh, who runs and flings himself down.

There would be other things to observe if we wished to express all the passions in detail, and in their minuter circumstances. But, Gentlemen, I hope you will accept this little outline I have sketched out of deference to the wishes of our Protector, and that you will receive it as a work proportionate to the state of my health, and to the time which my other occupations have permitted me. I know that there are a great number of passions which I have not even touched upon here, for fear of boring you and abusing your patience. But when it is my turn to talk to you again in this Assembly I shall endeavour to speak to you on Physiognomics, and the different effects which the passions produce according to the diversity of those who are subject to them.