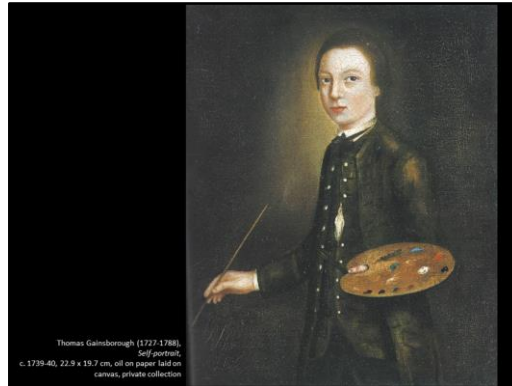


Thomas Gainsborough (christened 14 May 1727, died 2 August 1788)

- We follow on from last week as Gainsborough was a pupil at Hogarth's academy in St. Martin's Lane.
- Gainsborough was one of the greatest artists England has produced. David Garrick said of Gainsborough his cranium **"is so overcharged with genius of every kind that it is in danger of bursting upon you, like a steam-engine overcharged."**
- Gainsborough lived through a period of extraordinary transformation in British art. When he became a student in 1740 very little painting was on public display and from the first exhibition of the Society of Artists in 1760 and the formation of the Royal Academy in 1768 public awareness was transformed, art criticism blossomed in the press, aesthetic debates raged and artistic rivalries became intense. Society was changing rapidly as agricultural and technological change provided new structures for reducing costs, reducing prices, improving productivity and increasing profits.
- The painting styles at the beginning of the period was all very similar but by the 1780s Reynolds, West, De Louthembourg, Stubbs and Gainsborough painted in remarkably different ways.

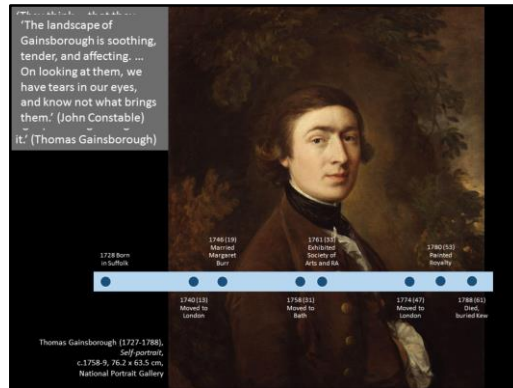
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- Hugh Belsey, *Thomas Gainsborough: A Country Life*
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Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), *Self-portrait*, c. 1739-40, 22.9 x 19.7 cm, oil on paper laid on canvas, private collection

- **Thomas Gainsborough** was an English portrait and landscape painter who was born in Sudbury, Suffolk, only 16 miles from John Constable's birthplace at East Bergholt.
- He was painting heads and small landscapes by the age of 10. He was so precocious that his father sent him to London to study art in **1740**, when he was 13. He studied with Francis Hayman and William Hogarth. His father was a wool merchant and Gainsborough was the youngest of nine children. His uncle bequeathed him £30 which assisted him in travelling to London where he studied engraving under a silversmith but switched to St. Martin's Lane Academy. This was started by Sir James Thornhill in 1711 and was revitalised in 1735 by William Hogarth, then the most influential artist in London.
- This painting was first **discovered in 1983**. It was at first argued that Gainsborough was 11 but it is now **assumed he was 13** as he had just arrived in London and would be inclined to demonstrate his skills. Even at 13 it is not possible to find a self-portrait of this skill from another artist in this period.



Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), *Self-portrait*, c.1758-9 (aged 31), 76.2 x 63.5 cm, National Portrait Gallery

- Gainsborough was a **mercurial character** with a clear understanding of his own abilities and a **stubbornness** inherited from his East Anglian nonconformist roots. His artistic training (he was mostly **self-taught**) exaggerated his **temperamental opposition to the studio system** operated by so many of his rivals and **posed a problem** which he was able to address by adopting a **speedy technique**. He did not suffer fools gladly and hated humbug. He had some musical ability and a lively wit. His dislike of portraiture is indicated by this letter he wrote,
 - 'They think ... that they reward your merit by their Company ... but I ... know that they have but one part worth looking at, and that is their Purse; their Hearts are seldom near enough the right place to get a sight of it.'
- But he loved landscape. John Constable, in a lecture at the British Institution in 1836 said,
 - 'The landscape of Gainsborough is soothing, tender, and affecting. ... On looking at them, we have tears in our eyes, and know not what brings them.'
- In 1740** (aged 13), he moved to London as a student.
- In 1746** (aged 19), **he married** Margaret Burr (1728-1797) the illegitimate daughter of the Duke of Beaufort who settled a £200 annuity on her. They remained married for 42 years, until his death, and had two daughters.
- In 1758** (aged 31), Gainsborough and his family **moved to Bath**. There, he studied portraits by van Dyck and was eventually able to attract a fashionable clientele. At this point he felt able to charge five guineas for a portrait. He underwent a remarkable change in style in Bath. Before he moved he produced doll-like figures in fresh East-Anglian landscapes but he changed to painting figures which were the acme of elegance. By 1760 he had moved to the newly built No. 11 Royal Circus

and was charging 20 guineas for a portrait (80 guineas for a full length).

- **In 1761** (aged 33), he began to send work to display publically at the **Society of Arts exhibition** in London (now the **Royal Society of Arts**, of which he was one of the earliest members). In 1763 he became so ill the *Bath Journal* reported his death. From 1769 he submitted works to the Royal Academy's annual exhibitions. He selected portraits of well-known or notorious clients in order to attract attention. The exhibitions helped him acquire a national reputation, and he was invited to become a founding member of the Royal Academy in 1769. His relationship with the academy was not an easy one and he **stopped exhibiting** his paintings in **1773**.
- **In 1774** (aged 47), Gainsborough and his family moved to London to live in Schomberg House, Pall Mall and in 1777 he again began exhibiting at the Royal Academy for the next six years.
- **In 1780** (aged 53), he painted the portraits of George III and his queen and afterwards received many royal commissions. In 1784 the royal painter, Allan Ramsay died but the king was obliged to give the job to his rival Joshua Reynolds although Gainsborough remained the royal favourite.
- **In 1788** (aged 61), he died of cancer in Richmond and was buried along his friend Joshua Kirby in St. Anne's Church, Kew.





Thomas Gainsborough, *Gainsborough's Forest or Cornard Wood*, near Sudbury, Suffolk, 1748, 122 x 155 cm, National Gallery
Also known as Gainsborough's Wood

- Gainsborough made money by painting portraits but his love was painting landscapes.
- Today, the National Gallery's *Cornard Wood* is regarded as one of the most important landscapes by an English artist. It was also highly regarded in Gainsborough's lifetime.
- Some art historians have suggested a deep religious symbolism in his landscapes. There were strong business and religious links between East Anglia (Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire) and Holland and the art of Dutch painters such as Jacob van Ruisdael (c. 1629-1682) was influential on Gainsborough. The sunlit church spire in the background could be St Mary's at Henny. The central tree has been seen as a failure of composition but it may be a representation of an actual scene close to his home in Sudbury or it may be a device to separate two worlds, the path to spiritual enlightenment on the left and the dark, formless, ungodly world of swamps, mire and no clear path out on the right. The winding path that leads towards the church spire is populated by a hard-working woodsman preparing for the winter, a young man who has stopped work to look at a young woman with a dog, a traveller passing two donkeys on the path and further along the path a man on horseback.
- Gainsborough wrote in a letter,
 - 'It is in some respects a little in the Schoolboy stile – but I do not reflect on this without gratification; for – as an early instance how strong my inclination stood for LANDSKIP, **this picture was actually painted at Sudbury in the year 1748; it was begun before I left school; - and was the means of my Father's sending me to London.**' [Letter published in the *Morning Herald* reproduced in facsimile in 'The British School', Judy

Egerton, (National Gallery Catalogues, 1998), p.74]

- This is confusing as he left school in 1740 ('in his 13th year') and went to London. Historians argue that the painting could not be that early but Gainsborough only says it was begun then. It is possible he painted sketches of this scene or began the painting and then finished it after he returned from London in 1748. What appears to be an earlier version has recently been found. It is a less mature style, there are fewer figures and the woman was two workmen.
- Philip Mould writes,
 - "The view seen in both versions of 'Cornard Wood' would have been taken from the hill at Abbas Hall, looking South West, over the River Stour, towards Great Henny. The church of St Mary's at Henny, with its distinctive spire, can be seen in the background of the National Gallery's 'Cornard Wood', and, more simply drawn, in the present picture. It has often been remarked that the National Gallery picture is a flawed composition – evidence of Gainsborough's youthful naivety; with the tree in the centre presenting the viewer with an awkward foreground. True, Gainsborough himself wrote that 'there is very little idea of composition in the picture' ['The British School', Judy Egerton, National Gallery Catalogues, 1998, p.74], but Gainsborough's other early landscape works, such as 'Wooded Landscape with Peasant Resting' [c.1746-7, Tate Gallery], are often masterpieces of composition, with the viewer's eye guided effortlessly through the picture, that we should not necessarily regard the National's 'Cornard Wood' as a momentary lapse.
 - Instead, Gainsborough is simply presenting us with Cornard Wood as he saw it. The discovery of the present picture evidently shows that the subject and composition were formed in his mind from an early date. The intense level of detail in the National's 'Cornard Wood' bears all the hallmarks of an initial concept being repeatedly improved, and must be further proof that he was building on earlier versions of the same scene. It is the busiest of all Gainsborough's landscapes. It includes a cow, two donkeys, three dogs, flying ducks, five people and, in the distance, a sharply lit village, each detail a further exploration of Gainsborough's skill, until the whole canvas bursts with activity. One commentator has even suggested that 'Cornard Wood' 'can be read as a reminder of the path to Salvation' [*Gainsborough's Vision*, Asfour & Williamson (Liverpool, 1999) p.29]. The more prosaic reality, as this newly discovered work now shows, is that Gainsborough was simply making a true to life study of a favoured rural spot not far from his boyhood home. We must therefore place a greater emphasis on his remark that the National Gallery's 'Cornard Wood' relies at its heart on its 'closeness to nature'"
- The painting is one of two halves. On the right is the dark uninhabited wood of

mystery and on the left the wood is bustling with local activity. Is this a comment on the contrasts of life, work versus rest, social interaction versus silent contemplation? This would make the painting an allegory of life. The workers and travellers are dressed as locals and the painting emphasises the close knit social grouping in an English village, particularly prior to enclosure when the rural worker was independent and could grow their own food on common land and graze their cattle in the woods.

Notes

- National Gallery website: The title is from a print of 1790. Cornard Wood, the name by which the picture is generally known, was first apparently used in 1828, but there is no good evidence that the church tower in the background is that of Great Cornard, near Sudbury. The picture is influenced by Dutch painting, particularly by the landscapes of Wynants and Ruisdael. It is probably a very early work, painted in 1748.



Thomas Gainsborough, *A Grand Landscape*, early 1760s, 146.1 x 157.5 cm, Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts

Jacob Isaakszoon van Ruisdael (1628/1629–1682), *Road through an Oak Forest*, 1646/47, 65 x 85 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst

- This is likely to have been painted shortly after he arrived in Bath and is the 'largest and grandest' of the landscapes of the period.
- In the foreground of open wooded countryside is a dell with a brook where a rider is watering his horse below a small waterfall. A figure is crossing the stream above by a small rustic wooden bridge. At the right a flock of sheep is descending a steep path emerging from the woods and a radiograph reveals a cart drawn by two oxen behind the sheep.
- Gainsborough was influenced by the Dutch artist Jakob Ruisdael.

References

European Paintings in the Collection of the Worcester Art Museum



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *Sunset: Carthorses Drinking at a Stream*, c.1760, 143.5 x 153.7 cm, Tate Britain

Notes

- Tate website: The theme of *Sunset: Carthorses Drinking at a Stream* is peasants going to or from market. In this painting a family is resting on the way home to allow the horse to drink. The golden light from the sunset adds a romantic element to an everyday event.
 - As mentioned, Gainsborough's move from Suffolk to the fashionable spa town of Bath in 1759 coincided with a change of style in his painting. Whereas the influence of the Dutch manner is apparent in his earlier landscapes, with their close observation of nature and ordered compositions, those painted in Bath, and subsequently in London, became more pastoral and poetic.
 - *Sunset: Carthorses Drinking at a Stream* is typical of Gainsborough's Bath period landscapes with its schematic, less representational composition. The Dutch influence has been replaced by the freer, more dramatic and imaginative style of Sir **Peter Paul Rubens** (1577-1640), apparent in a broader handling of paint and richer colouring. In addition to the more Flemish approach to landscape, Gainsborough has also borrowed something of the structure and poetry of **Claude Lorraine** (1600-82), at the time regarded as one of the greatest Old Masters of landscape painting.
 - The artifice or contrived nature of the composition is most apparent in its curving, almost **circular design**, created by the sweeping arch of the pollarded tree on the right and the downward movement of the wagon and horses towards the stream. This pronounced circular structure gives a 'peephole' effect to the composition, which offers the viewer an intimate glimpse of an enclosed and idyllic world.
 - Gainsborough's change in style, following his move to Bath, was probably a

response to the sophisticated tastes of his new patrons there. It was also possibly aided by his seeing works by Claude and Rubens and other Old Masters in some of the nearby art collections, such as those at Wilton and Stourhead. His tendency, once in Bath, to produce nostalgic rural idylls may also have been an escape from the demands of urban life and from his flourishing but wearisome portrait practice.

- During this period of Gainsborough's career, he remained fascinated by landscape and made frequent sketching excursions into the surrounding countryside. However, there is something of a duality in Gainsborough's practice as a landscape painter. Although he was an avid sketcher from nature, it is reported that around this time he built model landscapes in his studio, consisting of coal, clay or sand with pieces of mirror for lakes and sprigs of broccoli to represent trees, in order to help him construct his compositions. These artificial models, created by the dim light of a candle, were used as a basis for his finished paintings - entirely imaginary landscape compositions, such as this.
- The addition of people and animals was a traditional pastoral convention that can be traced back to Vergil's *Georgics*. Eighteenth-century convention was that the workers were shown resting and idyll rather than engaged in physical activity which was thought to be unseemly.



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *The Harvest Wagon*, 1767, 120.3 × 144.5 cm, Barber Institute of Fine Arts

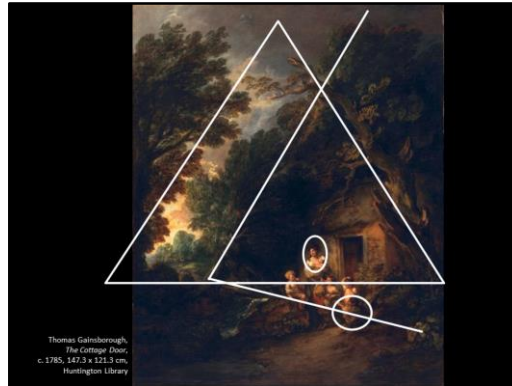
Thomas Gainsborough, *The Harvest Wagon*, 1784, Art Gallery of Ontario

Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), *The Descent from the Cross*, c. 1612-14, triptych, middle panel, 420.5 × 320 cm, Cathedral of Our Lady (Antwerp)

- Gainsborough often painted variations of the same subject. There are two versions of *The Harvest Wagon* one painted in 1767 and the other 17 years later in 1784. The later one is perhaps the best known.
- The **first work could not find a buyer**, perhaps because it was considered too vulgar for contemporary tastes, and was given to Gainsborough's friend Wiltshire, a mover who transported Gainsborough's paintings from Bath to exhibitions in London. Wiltshire's horses had also served as the model of the animals in the picture. The painting remained in Wiltshire's family until his grandson sold it in 1867. The earlier painting is also far more intimate to the artist as the women in the wagon are portraits of Gainsborough's own daughters, Mary and Margaret.
- The second painting, done at the height of Gainsborough's fame, was sold to the Prince of Wales, later to become King George IV. It was unfortunately damaged in 1959 when thieves tried to cut it out of the frame.
- The **later painting** is more sedate, the figures are less excited and they are often described as more unified. **The way in which the woman is being pulled into the wagon is reminiscent of Rubens' *The Descent from the Cross*.** The woman being pulled up in a motion opposite to Christ's.
- Christina Payne has observed some of the symbolism in the 1784 work, noting that the broken pitcher placed in front of the pregnant passenger may be linked to a pitcher then being a symbol of virginity.



Thomas Gainsborough, *Cottage Door with Girl and Pigs*, c. 1786, 98 x 124 cm, Colchester and Ipswich Museums



Thomas Gainsborough, *The Cottage Door*, c. 1785, 147.3 x 121.3 cm, Huntington Library

- **This is among Gainsborough's most famous paintings.** It was first exhibited in 1780 at the Royal Academy and he repeated the subject twice more over the next ten years.
- These paintings were the first in Britain to take cottage life as their subject. They show idealised rural peasants who embody the 18th-century notion of 'sensibility'. This is similar to the modern idea of sympathy, an intense awareness of another's feelings and an ability to share them and the eighteenth century notion of sensibility was based on the notion that mankind is inherently good. This meant that poor and uncultured people were less corrupted by civilization and thus more capable of feeling sympathy. People who lived modestly and close to nature became both an example of the 'noble savage' and an objects of sympathy.
- Gainsborough's cottage door compositions show young, elegant-looking women and cherubic children clustered at the door of a cottage, which is embedded in its landscape setting. The artwork's overall emotive power is enhanced by Gainsborough's use of heightened colour and theatrical treatment of light.

Notes

- A Huntington curator wrote, "Gainsborough's paintings of cottage dwellers embody sensibility's idealized and nostalgic view of human nature by emphasizing the innocence and vulnerability of the rural poor and the unspoiled beauty of the cottage landscape ... His cottage-door paintings are meant to tug at our heartstrings; they are full of visual stimuli meant to touch us and move us in new ways."
- Huntington library website:
 - Like many eighteenth-century British artists who earned their livings through fashionable portraiture, Gainsborough would have preferred to

devote himself to a different mode of art. **Weary of the business of 'face-painting'**, he occasionally expressed a desire to "**walk off to some sweet Village where I can paint Landskips and enjoy the fag End of Life in quietness and ease.**" He never carried out this fantasy, but periodic visits to the countryside provided rich impressions that he later reformulated in landscape paintings and rustic genre scenes. The young Uvedale Price who accompanied him on his rural expeditions recalled that Gainsborough could be "severe and sarcastic: but when we came to cottage or village scenes, to groups of children, or to any objects of that kind which struck his fancy, I have often remarked in his countenance an expression of particular gentleness and complacency."

- Other painters routinely toured rural England on sketching trips, but Gainsborough seems to have **gone in search of spiritual sustenance as well as artistic material**. His conception of the countryside as a place where life could be enjoyed "in quietness and ease" reflects the **romantic sensibilities** of his time-- particularly the ideal of rural retirement that colours much contemporary poetry. This poetic concept fed a burgeoning **national nostalgia for the idyllic rusticity of a mythical "olde England,"** and also informed the **genteel fantasy of cottage life** as an existence of wholesome **simplicity and robust health, rather than of poverty and hard labour**. The artificiality of Gainsborough's concept of rural cottage life is suggested by the fact that although he began to record scenes of peasant families gathered outside their woodland cottages in the late 1760s, it was only after his 1774 move from Bath to London (when his distance from the countryside was greatest and the demands of his portrait practice most taxing) that he became deeply engaged in the theme as a vehicle for expressing the pleasurable sensations he associated with rural domesticity.
- The present painting, known since the mid nineteenth century as *The Cottage Door*, has long been considered the consummate expression of Gainsborough's **wistful, imaginative ideal of a simpler way of life**. When shown along with five of his other landscapes at the Royal Academy in 1780, it reminded a writer for *The Morning Chronicle* of the Garden of Eden. "This beautiful scene," he wrote, "where serenity and pleasure dwell in every spot, and the lovely figures composed in the finest rural style, their situation worthy of them, forms **a scene of happiness that may truly be called Adam's paradise.**" Three decades later, **J.M.W. Turner** described *The Cottage Door* in more concrete terms, as an image of **'pure and artless innocence'**, worthy of esteem because of its "truth of forms, expression, full-toned depth of colour; and expertness of touch carrying with it the character of vigorous and decaying foliage." Turner was not alone in asserting the 'truth' of *The Cottage Door*, but other early commentators drew attention to its artificiality, both as a landscape painting and as a

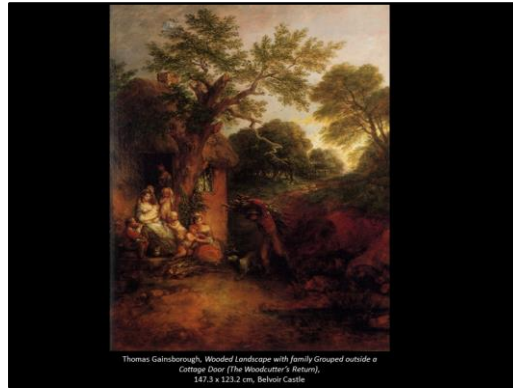
- vision of rural society.
- In a description of **1819**, **William Carey** noted that the painting evoked ‘those ideas of **innocent delight and happiness**, which we have been taught, in our early days, to associate with the lowliest condition, in the retirement of the country’, but he acknowledged that **this concept was a fantasy**, adding, ‘Why is it that moralists and preceptors have, in all ages, formed this delusive opinion?’ Others attributed the appeal of Gainsborough's painting to his **sanitized treatment of rural poverty**. After closely studying *The Cottage Door* during the summer of 1812, the watercolourist Thomas Hearne observed that Gainsborough's ‘representations of simple life are given with such taste as to delight and **never offend. He is never coarse; His Peasant in rags has no filth; no idea of dirt** & wretchedness is excited.’
 - Today, art historians continue to tease out the disparities between Gainsborough's rustic ideal and the actual circumstances of life in late eighteenth-century rural England. Although undoubtedly informed by Gainsborough's actual experiences in the English countryside, the ultimate source of the imagery of *The Cottage Door* is **seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish landscapes** and rustic genre scenes. The growing British market for such paintings provided Gainsborough and his colleagues with strong incentive for treating native subject matter in a similar mode. The rich palette of *The Cottage Door*, together with its dramatic effects of light and shade, and the lush, vigorous handling of the foliage, all reflect Gainsborough's emulation of the Flemish painter **Peter Paul Rubens** (1577-1640). However, in order to evoke the warm atmosphere of a summer evening, Gainsborough very likely relied on his own increasingly sophisticated experiments in artificial lighting. Since the 1760s he had been in the habit of painting by candlelight. His continuing fascination with luminous effects inspired him, around 1781, to experiment with transparent paintings on glass plates, lit from behind by candles. Analogous effects are seen here in the glowing sunset and flickering lights that relieve the deep shadows.
 - *The Cottage Door* is generally recognized as the most majestic and effectively composed of Gainsborough's numerous renditions of this theme. **X-radiographs** and recent technical analysis have shown that the design of the painting was not entirely premeditated, but **evolved gradually** as the artist painted. Gainsborough initiated the painting on a **smaller, horizontal canvas in which the figure group dominated** the landscape setting. After the painting was fairly well advanced, he expanded the composition to a vertical format by **adding canvas sections at the top and bottom**. The upper extension was far greater than the lower, resulting in an enhanced sense of upward lift and expansiveness. Physical elevation

- of the canvas also elevated the painting's tone, fundamentally altering the impression it makes on a viewer. In this way, Gainsborough transformed what was once an anecdotal scene of a mother surrounded by several voracious children into a more stately and dignified scene possessing something of the grandeur and **generality of history painting**.
- We now view the figures with distance and detachment, as generic types of rustic simplicity. Gainsborough's incremental development of the painting in the direction of more dignified and impressive effects confirms John Hayes's observation that **around 1780 the artist embarked on a deliberate strategy** to convince the public of the **merit of his landscapes**, which had failed to achieve the commercial success of his portraits. In *The Cottage Door* we see him spontaneously inventing a personal mode of grand-manner landscape painting, modelled not on the prestigious classical ideal of Italianate scenery, but on more modest prototypes of Dutch and Flemish landscapes and low-life genre scenes.
 - In formulating *The Cottage Door*, Gainsborough also built on his own previous landscape paintings, particularly *The Woodcutter's Return* of 1772-73. Here, he has retained the woodland setting and vertical format, but the cattle, shepherdess, and woodcutter in the earlier painting are replaced in the Huntington canvas by the dramatically spotlighted cottage and figures, nestled among overhanging trees. Both pictures are framed at right by a gnarled tree tilting toward the centre, and at left by an echoing tree, beneath which we glimpse a distant landscape prospect. Gainsborough tightened this structure in *The Cottage Door* by moving the two framing trees closer together so that they form a triangular structure. The apex of the triangle actually occurs on the canvas extension, so that one important effect of enlarging the composition was the **explicit articulation of this geometric structure**, which had originally been incomplete and implicit. Similar considerations probably led Gainsborough to add the **angular figure of a seated boy** at the far right of the cottage door, where he demarcates the lower right corner of the pyramidal figure group. X-radiographs reveal the figure as **an afterthought**, introduced in order to reinforce the geometrical underpinnings of the composition. Yet another triangle is created by the diagonal line of foliage running from the upper right corner down to the left edge of the canvas, where it joins another implied diagonal connecting the rustic bridge and figure group with the burdock plant in the lower right foreground. The geometric rigor of this composition is unusual for Gainsborough and (together with the extension of the canvas itself) attests to the special pains he took in developing this exhibition piece as an expression of his ambitious conception of rustic landscape painting.

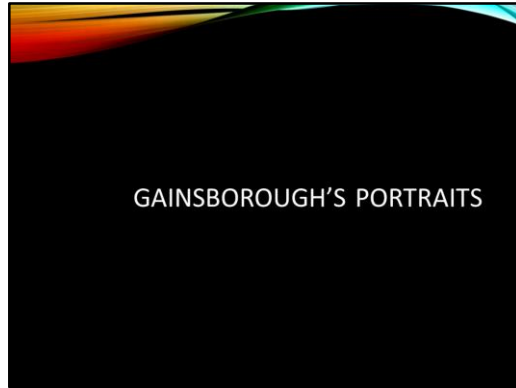
- Yet another important change carried out during the execution of *The Cottage Door* was the modification of the **hairstyle of the standing woman**. X-radiographs reveal the compact arrangement that Gainsborough painted originally, prior to substituting the higher and more elaborate style seen in the finished painting. Whereas the original coiffure would have been consistent with the simple style that Gainsborough generally adopted in depictions of peasant women, the altered arrangement approximates the shape and height that were then fashionable among the artist's **upper-class female portrait** subjects. Like the physical elevation of the canvas, Gainsborough intended the woman's heightened hairstyle to inflect the painting with an **air of dignity and refinement**.
- However, more than any other element of this rural fantasy, it was Gainsborough's elegant characterization of **the cottage-woman** that **threatened the suspension of disbelief** among early viewers of *The Cottage Door*. A sympathetic critic writing for the Literary Gazette observed in 1818, "The beauty of the female figure is too delightful to be questioned, though perhaps the artist **has gone as far in giving it grace and elegance as his subject would permit**.... It is said that the Duchess of Devonshire sat for this lovely cottager." The association of the Duchess of Devonshire with *The Cottage Door* is surely spurious, but the existence of such a legend speaks to the incongruous impression that the elegant female cottager produced on early viewers of the painting, who felt obliged to account for her surprising appearance.
- Through numerous nineteenth-century exhibitions and reproductions, *The Cottage Door* has become established as one of the icons of Gainsborough's art, yet he evidently **found it no easier to sell** than the vast majority of his landscape paintings. **For six years** after its exhibition, the painting **remained in the artist's studio**, before finally selling to his friend and patron Thomas Harvey. Undeterred, Gainsborough continued to develop the theme and composition of *The Cottage Door* in new works of art. Indeed, the last large landscape that he produced, within months of his death, was essentially a reworking of the present painting. In that final work, Gainsborough repeated *The Cottage Door's* vertical format, the gnarled tree trunk at right gesturing toward an open landscape at left, and the dramatically spotlighted, pyramidal group of hungry children with their attractive mother, gathered outside a rustic cottage. The persistence with which Gainsborough revisited the pictorial and thematic ideas of *The Cottage Door* indicates the significance that he attached to the work. As both a public statement and a private meditation, the painting crystallizes the complexity of Gainsborough's approach to depicting the English countryside, epitomizing the heightened ambition and imaginative sensibility that he brought to the landscapes of his late career.

References

- Huntington Library website, quotation from Ann Bermingham, curator of the Huntington's Gainsborough exhibition of *The Country Door*.
- Historical Portraits website



Thomas Gainsborough, *Wooded Landscape with family Grouped outside a Cottage Door (The Woodcutter's Return)*, 147.3 x 123.2 cm, Belvoir Castle



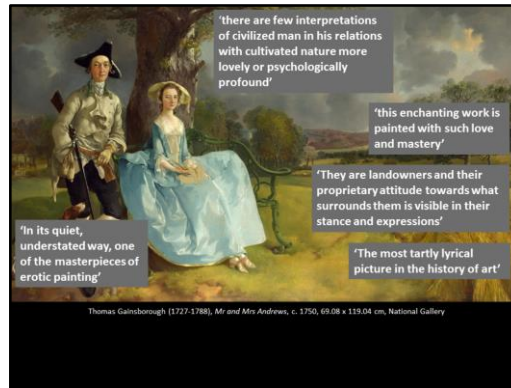


Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *Lady Lloyd and Her Son, Richard Savage Lloyd, of Hintlesham Hall, Suffolk*, 1745-46, 63.5 x 76.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art

- **This is a very early portrait and within a few years his style had improved enormously.**
- This was painted after he had moved to London but he frequently travelled to and from his home in Suffolk.
- **Lady Lloyd and Her Son**, Richard Savage Lloyd, of Hintlesham Hall, Suffolk – at the time, his clientele included mainly local merchants and squires.
- He found it difficult to sell his landscapes and switched to portraits of local merchants but had to borrow against his wife's annuity.
- The father, Sir Richard Lloyd (?1697-1761) was an early patron of Gainsborough and this is the earliest portrait he painted of the family. The father was knighted in 1745 following a loyal address he gave after the Jacobite uprising. Also, in 1745 the 90-year old dowager Countess of Winchelsea died inexplicably leaving him her entire estate. This supported him in Parliament and enabled him to buy Hintlesham Hall, near Ipswich in 1747.

References

- Oxford Dictionary of National Biography



Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), *Mr and Mrs Andrews*, c. 1750, 69.08 x 119.04 cm, National Gallery

- Another early and well known painting that combines his portrait work with his landscape work.
- This portrait is the masterpiece of Gainsborough's early years. It was painted after his return home from London to Suffolk in 1748, soon after the marriage of Robert Andrews of the Auberies and Frances Carter of Ballingdon House, near Sudbury, in November of that year. The estate was two miles from Gainsborough's home and the unusual composition that combines a portrait with a landscape suggests the couple may have had a role in specifying it. The **lighting, the colour balance, the cloud formations and the sweep of the landscape revealing All Saints**, Sudbury where they married creates a perfect composition. He has a gun under his arm, while his wife sits on an elaborate Rococo-style wooden bench. Their costumes were most likely painted from dressed-up artist's mannequins, which may account for their doll-like appearance, and the landscape would have been studied separately.
- The painting of **Mrs Andrews's lap is unfinished** as there is a mysterious unpainted area in her lap. It has been suggested that it was reserved for a later addition. A brown brushstroke suggests that a cock pheasant was to be placed there, despite the painting probably (from the state of the corn) being set before the legal start of the pheasant season on September 1st. Perhaps more likely is a work bag for embroidery, 'tattooing or knotting', as is often seen in portraits, a book, a fan, a lapdog, or even a baby yet to be born—their first child was a daughter born in 1751.
- The painting follows the fashionable convention of the conversation piece, a (usually) small-scale portrait showing two or more people, often out of doors. The emphasis on the landscape here allows Gainsborough to display his skills as a painter of convincingly changing weather and naturalistic scenery, still a novelty at

this time.

- The reaction of critics and art historians tells us more about the nature of art criticism than the painting.
 - Sir John Rothenstein in 1947 wrote **‘there are few interpretations of civilized man in his relations with cultivated nature more lovely or psychologically profound’**, and other writers have developed the analysis of themes of fertility, abundance and interest in nature in the work.
 - Kenneth Clark in *Landscape into Art* (1949) wrote **‘this enchanting work is painted with such love and mastery ...’**,
 - but Marxist art critic John Berger in his *Ways of Seeing* (1972) said Mr and Mrs Andrews are ‘not a couple in nature as Rousseau imagined nature. **They are landowners and their proprietary attitude towards what surrounds them is visible in their stance and expressions.**’ This has been picked up by others and it is now seen as an important example of the capitalist property relations of the eighteenth century with no farm-workers in sight, the sweep of the owned countryside and the impassive, aristocratic sneer of property ownership. Mr Andrews is showing his possessions, his dog, his gun, his wife and his country estate.
 - In contrast, Andrew Graham-Dixon finds the painting **‘in its quiet, understated way, one of the masterpieces of erotic painting’**; Robert’s ‘clothes are almost falling off him, they are so loose and floppy’ while Frances ‘has a **melted, langourous** [‘dreamy or ‘sensual’] **look about her’**’.
 - For Erica Langmuir it is “Out of these conventional ingredients Gainsborough has composed **the most tartly lyrical** [‘sharply emotional’] **picture in the history of art**. Mr Andrews’s satisfaction in his well-kept farmlands is as nothing to the intensity of the **painter’s feeling** for the gold and green of fields and copses, the **supple curves of fertile land** meeting the stately clouds. The figures **stand out brittle against that glorious yet ordered bounty**. But how marvellously the **acid blue hooped skirt** is deployed, almost, but not quite, rhyming with the curved bench back, the **pointy silk shoes in sly communion with the bench feet**, while Mr Andrews’s substantial shoes converse with tree roots. More rhymes and assonances link the lines of gun, thighs, dog, calf, coat; a coat tail answers the hanging ribbon of a sun hat; something jaunty in the husband’s tricorne catches the corner of his wife’s eye. Deep affection and naive artifice combine to create the earliest successful depiction of a truly English idyll.’

References

- Web Gallery of Art

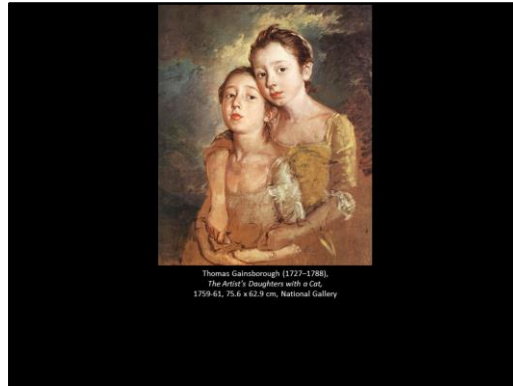


Thomas Gainsborough, *The Painter's Daughters chasing a Butterfly*, c. 1756, National Gallery

- This painting, in terms of its sensitivity and rapid technique has been described one of the most remarkable paintings of the eighteenth century.
- This is perhaps Gainsborough's earliest portrait of his two daughters Mary and Margaret; some six others are known. Mary was baptised on 3 February 1750 (taking the same name as a daughter who died two years earlier) and Margaret was baptised on 22 August 1751. The portrait was probably painted in Ipswich in the mid-1750s and left unfinished.
- It demonstrates what was understood by the term 'sensitivity' in the late eighteenth century. Laurence Sterns wrote in 1768 'Dear Sensibility! ... unexhausted of all that's precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows'. Unlike Hogarth, who had no children, Gainsborough took full advantage of the fact that he had lovely, paintable daughters. **Mary, the elder, on the right was cool, poised, wise and restrained** while **Margaret was impulsive and heedless of danger**. As they emerge from a dark wood the elder Mary looks wary as she constrains the impetuous Margaret who is trying to leap forward to grasp the fragile symbol of a the beauty and joy of life.

References

- Hugh Belsey, 'Thomas Gainsborough', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *The Artist's Daughters with a Cat*, 1759-61, 75.6 x 62.9 cm, National Gallery

- Gainsborough's daughters Mary and Margaret were baptised in February 1750 and August 1751. Mary appears to be about nine or ten years old, and Margaret about eight or nine.
- Gainsborough had moved with his family from Ipswich to Bath in the autumn of 1759 and this work may therefore have been painted in Bath rather than in Ipswich. The painting is unfinished, but the outlines of a cat whose tail is being pulled can be seen on the lap of the elder girl.



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *Portrait of Artist's Daughters*, early 1760s, Worcester Art Museum

- *Portrait of the Artist's Daughters*. While it was fashionable for young women to learn drawing and watercolour as hobbies, Gainsborough trained his **daughters** to be **professional artists**, in case they should “miss getting husbands”. This notion was revolutionary for the 18th century.
- Concerned for their future, Gainsborough took care to ensure that they were well educated, sending them to an **exclusive boarding school** in Chelsea and **tutoring them in drawing and landscape painting**. A few years after this portrait was made, **Mary entered into a disastrous marriage** with the celebrated oboist, Johann Christian Fischer, an associate of her father. In later life she lived with her younger sister Margaret, although by then she suffered from **severe mental illness**.



Thomas Gainsborough, *Ann Ford (Later Mrs Philip Thicknesse)*, 1760, 196.9 x 134.6, Cincinnati Art Museum

William Hogarth (1697–1764), *The Lady's Last Stake*, c. 1759, 91.44 × 105.41 cm, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, New York State

- In October 1758 Gainsborough moved to Bath and by this stage he felt confident enough to charge five guineas for a portrait. In 1760 he rented a large house in Abbey Street with a studio and a showroom. It is believed that he painted this portrait of the well-known musician Ann Ford to display in his 'Shew' room as an advertisement of his outstanding abilities. He painted one of the **great portraits of the eighteenth century**.
- Anne or Ann Ford was an 18th-century English musician and singer, famous in her time for a **scandal** that attended her struggle to perform in public. The scandal surrounded her affair with the Earl of Jersey and her unladylike musical performances.
- Ann Ford had gained more education than most as she had a **knowledge of five foreign languages and played several fretted string instruments**, including the lute-like English guitar and the viola da gamba. This gave her a chance to perform with others giving Sunday concerts at her house. Her father, Thomas Ford, **refused to allow her** to perform publicly. She also was a singer with a beautiful voice by her early twenties, but her earliest attempts to appear in public venues were unsuccessful; her father went so far as to have her **arrested twice** to prevent her escaping his control. Eventually she made a successful escape, and held her first public subscription concert on 18 March 1760. She performed a series of subsequent concerts, including daily performances from 24 Oct. through 30 Oct. of that year, though her playing on the '**masculine**' **viol da gamba**, comparable to a modern cello, was somehow considered a point of controversy.
- Ford's accomplishments risked to be complicated by an **infatuated lover, the Earl of Jersey**, who offered her **£800 a year to be to his mistress**. When she refused,

Lord Jersey **tried to sabotage** her initial public concert, but **she earned a large sum, £1,500** from it nonetheless. In 1761 she published a pamphlet, "A Letter from Miss F—d to a Person of Distinction", defending her position. This in turn provoked a pamphlet from the Earl, "A Letter to Miss F—d". The brief pamphlet war between them differed in subject and tone from others conducted in that era. Gainsborough wrote that her bravado made her "partly admired and partly laugh'd at at every Tea Table." Gainsborough invoked some of the scandal by her expression, showing her with a masculine viol de gamba and **showing her with her legs crossed**, a "masculine freedom" according to a contemporary conduct book. Gainsborough displayed it in his showroom and it attracted attention but he never exhibited it.

- On 27 September 1762, **she became the third wife of Philip Thicknesse**, therefore establishing greater social standing and respect. She and her husband were travelling to Italy in 1792 when Thicknesse died suddenly in Boulogne and his wife was **imprisoned during the Reign of Terror** in the French Revolution. After the execution of Maximillian Robespierre in July 1794, she was released under a general pardon for all prisoners who could **prove that they could earn their living**; her profession stood her in good stead.
- Roubiliac's famous statue of Handel at Vauxhall Gardens and the pose of the woman in Hogarth's *The Ladies Last Stake* (158-9) when a woman contemplates whether to surrender her virtue to pay her gambling debts.



Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), *Marchesa Brigida Spinola Doria*, 1606, 152.5 × 99 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington

- This three-quarter length painting is often regarded as an early precursor of the full length portraits of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The sheen of the clothes adds to the Marchese's splendour and the background adds classical authority and hints at an outside location as we see in many portraits by Gainsborough.
- It is the portrait of *Marchesa Brigida Spinola-Doria* of 1606 (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC). It was commissioned by Marquess Giacomo Massimiliano Doria, of Genoa, and shows his wife (and cousin) shortly after their wedding in 1605; she came from the equally prominent Spinola family. He died in 1613 and she remarried another Doria. It has been cut several times on each side, removing the garden shown in the background and the lower part of the figure.



Thomas Gainsborough, *Mary, Countess Howe*, c. 1763-4, 224 x 152.4 cm, English Heritage, Kenwood House

- A typical full length portrait of the aristocracy that he painted in Bath. In 1760 he moved to a new house in the Royal Circus and was charging 80 guineas for a full length portrait.
- **Mary, Countess Howe**, was born Mary Hartopp in 1732 and she married into aristocracy in 1758. That was the year her husband, Richard Howe, inherited his family's viscountcy when his older brother died. Richard was described by Horace Walpole as 'undaunted as a rock and as silent,' and a marble monument in Richard's honour stands at St. Paul's Cathedral. He had a long, successful military career and became Commissioner of the Admiralty at the end of the Seven Years War in 1763. Later in that same year he and Mary **met the up-and-coming artist Thomas Gainsborough** during a vacation in the fashionable retreat city of **Bath**, England.
- Gainsborough was **trying to establish himself** as a fashionable painter of the aristocracy and offered to paint the Howes. This life-size portrait of Countess Howe—at nearly eight feet high— is a **masterpiece of Gainsborough's career and established him among other portrait painters of the time**, such as Sir Joshua Reynolds. The painting's aristocratic air and breath-taking background portray Gainsborough's talent—the countess is actually standing in the artist's studio, passing time while her husband goes for spa treatments to try to cure a case of the gout.

References

- The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston



Thomas Gainsborough , *Ignatius Sancho*, 1768, 73.7 x 62.2 cm, National Gallery of Canada

- **Ignatius Sancho** (1729-1780) was a musician and man of letters who possessed an impressive breadth of learning. His musical compositions and correspondence have been published. Born aboard a slave ship en route from the coast of Guinea to the Caribbean, Sancho was brought to England at the age of two. He spent many years in the **service of the Duke of Montagu**, during which time he cultivated an interest in the arts.
- Gainsborough painted this portrait at **Bath in 1768**, and according to tradition, it took him only an hour and forty minutes to complete.



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *The Blue Boy, Portrait of Jonathan Buttall*, c. 1770, 178 × 122 cm, Huntington Library, California

- Perhaps Gainsborough's best known painting. Thought to be Jonathan Buttall but this has never been proven. Jonathan Buttall's father had made a fortune as a hardware merchant and wanted Gainsborough to immortalize his son. Gainsborough dressed Jonathan in clothes that were **fashionable a hundred years** previously perhaps as a **tribute to Anthony Van Dyck**. His father eventually went bankrupt and had to sell the painting in 1796.
- It is possible this painting was a **challenge to Reynolds** who had painted a boy in a brown costume and had claimed that it would be **impossible to make a great painting using blue as the dominant colour**.
 - 'Let this conduct be reversed; let the light be cold, and the surrounding colour warm, as we often see in the works of the Roman and Florentine painters, and it will be out of the power of art, even in the hands of Rubens and Titian, to make a picture splendid and harmonious.' [Joshua Reynolds]
- Reynolds was a classical painter but Gainsborough exhibits many of the attributes that would later be associated with **Romanticism, a love of nature and a personal viewpoint**.
- It caused a scandal in 1921 when the Duke of Westminster sold it to an American railroad pioneer for a then record sum of \$728,800 (£182,200). Before being exported to California it was seen by 90,000 people in the National Gallery.
- This was painted while he was still in Bath. He moved back to London in 1774.



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), Elizabeth and Mary Linley (The Linley Sisters), c.1772, retouched 1785, 199 x 153.5 cm, Dulwich Picture Gallery

- This double portrait of Elizabeth and Mary Linley, is the only known painting depicting both sisters together, each other's closest companions. Gainsborough moved to Bath in 1759 and became good friends with the Linley family; he did a series of portraits of the Linley family from the late 1760s until 1789. Elizabeth the eldest wears a pale blue underdress and overdress and gazes into the distance, with her hands resting on a guitar. Mary wears a golden brown under and overdress and engages with viewer with a score sheet on her lap.
- The Linley family were a famous musical family known as '**The Nest of the Nightingales**'. Elizabeth was known for her **voice and beauty**, appearing first as a singer in 1767 in **Covent Garden** and she soon escalated to being one of the most highly sought after singer of oratorios. Mary made her public debut as an **actress at Theatre Royal**, Covent Garden in 1769 and then followed in her sister's footsteps as a singer of oratorios in 1771. Both sisters were **forbidden to sing in public once married**, and therefore Elizabeth retired at eighteen and Mary at twenty-two, depriving the music world of their beautiful voices.
- Elizabeth's dramatic love life was the **talk of society**, she broke off her engagement to Walter Long in 1771, reputedly because of an **affair with Captain Thomas Mathews**, a married friend of the family, but by 1772 it is believed that **she fled to France with Richard Brinsley Sheridan** acting as her escort, to distance herself from Mathews and to **enter a convent in Lille**. Prior to the second (and legal) marriage of Elizabeth and Sheridan in London on the 13th April 1773, Mathews and Sheridan **fought two duels** for her hand. Mathew had written an article defaming the character of Elizabeth. In the event Mathew lost his sword and had to beg for his life and sign a retraction of the article. Because the apology was made public Mathew challenged Sheridan to another duel. This time was much more aggressive and both men broke their swords and both were wounded. Sheridan

had part of Mathew's sword sticking through his ear, his whole body was covered in wounds and his face beaten to jelly yet eight days later he was out of danger.

- Gainsborough carried out this painting between early 1771 and March 1772. In 1785 upon the request of the Linley family, he **re-touched the painting** to depict the sitters in the fashion of the 1780s. It appears that **Mary had not been satisfied with the likeness**, however when it returned to the Linley household on the 2nd November 1785, Mary wrote to Elizabeth 'I found our picture come home from **Gainsbro's very much improved** and freshened up. My father and mother are **quite in raptures** with it; indeed it is in *my* opinion, the best and handsomest of you that I have ever seen.' What we currently see today is combination of Gainsborough's own hand 1771-2 and 1785.

References

- Dudley Picture Gallery



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *Portrait of Mrs Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (1754-1792), c. 1785-1786, 220 × 154 cm, National Gallery of Art

Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), *Elizabeth Linley, Mrs Richard Brinsley Sheridan as Saint Cecilia* (1754-1792), 1775, Waddesdon Manor

- **As just mentioned Elizabeth Ann Linley was a singer** who enjoyed success in Bath and London before marrying Richard Sheridan in 1773. She **died of tuberculosis aged 38** seven years after this portrait. Both her parents were musicians and she started singing in public when she was nine and made her debut at Covent Garden when she was 13. She was betrothed to a wealthy suitor but the engagement was broken and she received £3,000 in compensation. She was described as **‘infinitely superior to all other English singers’**. Gainsborough was a friend of the family and she was the model for **Joshua Reynolds St Cecilia** which he described as **‘the best picture I ever painted’**.
- Gainsborough combines his love of landscape with portraiture in a work with a strong Romantic component. Her calm and precisely delineated face is the centre of a swirling world of long, delicate, free flowing brushstrokes. She is an isolated and lonely figure in a windswept landscape with elements, such as her hair reflecting the leaves and the pink of her dress the sunset, that merge the figure with the landscape.

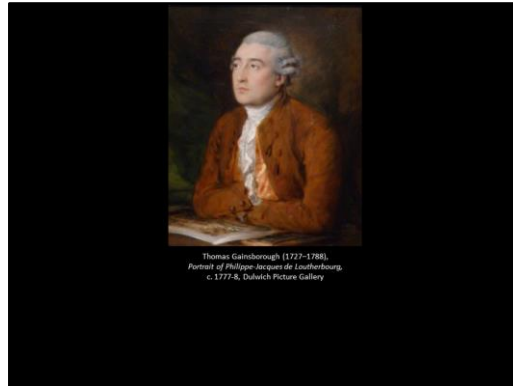
Notes

- There is another painting by Joshua Reynolds of Mrs Sheridan as St Cecilia which was recently deaccessioned by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) for \$650,000. LACMA sold the painting and a Cranach in order to purchase other works. There is a voluntary codes of ethics in the museum world that say it is unacceptable to deaccession (‘sell’) works from a collection unless the money is used to buy other works. This ensures the value of works in the public domain does not diminish.



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *Portrait of Anne, Countess of Chesterfield*, 1777 – 1778, 219.7 × 156.2 cm, Getty Center

- He moved to Bath in 1759 and lived at 17 The Circus where he was patronised by fashionable society and he began exhibiting in London. In 1769, he became a founding member of the Royal Academy, but his relationship with the organization was thorny and he sometimes withdrew his work from exhibition. **Gainsborough moved to London in 1774**, and painted portraits of the king and queen, but the king was obliged to name as royal painter Gainsborough's rival Joshua Reynolds.
- In his last years, Gainsborough painted relatively simple landscapes and is credited (with Richard Wilson) as the originator of the 18th century British landscape school. Gainsborough died of cancer in 1788 and was buried at St. Anne's Church, Kew.



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *Portrait of Philippe-Jacques de Louthembourg*, c. 1777-8, Dulwich Picture Gallery



Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), *Giovanna Baccelli*, exhibited 1782, 226.7 x 148.6 cm, purchased 1975, Tate Britain

- Tate website:
- 'The Italian dancer **Giovanna** Francesca Antonio Giuseppe Zanerini was born in Venice and took her mother's name, **Baccelli**, as her stage name. She was a **principal ballerina** in London at the King's Theatre, Haymarket, where she first appeared in 1774. She reached the peak of her acclaimed career during the **1780-1 season** when she appeared with Gaetan Vestris and his son Auguste in several important ballets devised by Noverre. As one reviewer (quoted in Whitley, p.188) noted, she appears in this portrait in the costume, make-up and pose from a ballet she danced that season, *Les Amans Surpris*: 'the artist was not only obliged to vivify and embellish; but, if he would be thought to copy the original, to lay on his colouring thickly. In this he has succeeded, for the face of this admirable dancer is evidently paint-painted'. Baccelli also danced with great success in Venice in 1783-4, and at the Paris Opéra as late as 1788. Gainsborough was well-acquainted with many theatre people, including Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the famous dramatist and part-owner of the King's Theatre.
- Baccelli was equally known as the last and most enduring **mistress of John Frederick Sackville, 3rd Duke of Dorset** (1745-99). When Baccelli's portrait was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1782, **Gainsborough's portrait of the Duke** (collection Lord Sackville) **was withdrawn**, presumably for reasons of decorum. The Duke patronised Gainsborough's great rival Joshua Reynolds, who painted Baccelli in 1783 (collection Lord Sackville). The Duke, a handsome, extravagant man with a string of famous mistresses, had set up **Baccelli in a suite of rooms at Knole** by October 1779. Baccelli accompanied him to Paris in 1783 when he was appointed Ambassador to France. They entertained lavishly, patronising the Paris Opéra, and were admitted to the friendship of Queen Marie-Antoinette. Horace Walpole records that when the Duke was awarded the Order of the Garter in 1788,

Bacelli danced at the Opéra wearing the blue Garter ribbon around her head. As the events of the French Revolution unfolded, the pair returned to Knole, where Bacelli remained until their amicable parting in 1789. She left a son behind. She subsequently developed close friendships with Henry Herbert, 10th Earl of Pembroke, and Mr James Carey, with whom she remained until her death in 1801.

- This lively portrait, which was at Knole until 1890, is an excellent example of Gainsborough's mature style, which is distinguished by small, quick, light brushstrokes. Most striking is the artist's successful rendering of movement. Bacelli was by accounts more charming than beautiful, and Gainsborough's portrait captures this aspect of her character perfectly. A contemporary newspaper critic said the portrait was 'as the Original, light airy and elegant' (quoted in Einberg, p.14). A receipt from Gainsborough is still preserved at Knole: 'Recd. of His Grace the Duke of Dorset one hundred guineas in full for the two 3/4 Portraits of his Grace, one full length of Madlle Bacelli, two Landskips and one sketch of *Begger Boy and Girl* 63105. June 15 1784/ Tho. Gainsborough'.
- A small finished oil sketch for this painting is at Russborough. It has no tambourine in the lower left corner and there are other slight compositional variations. Bacelli was also painted by Ozias Humphrey (exhibited 1780, untraced), John Graham (exhibited 1784, untraced), and Gainsborough Dupont (c.1795, Royal Collection); a nude sculpture by Locatelli is at Knole.

Notes

- See *Thomas Gainsborough and the Modern Woman*, an exhibition in Cincinnati, the 'demirep' was a less-than-respectable woman who rejected the accepted notions of femininity, made their own money, gambled, left their husbands and wore French fashions. This painting makes it clear they also managed their image like any modern pop star.



Thomas Gainsborough, *Portrait of Margaret Gainsborough*, c. 1779, The Courtauld Gallery

Gainsborough's Wife

- This is not, as many think, a portrait of the artist's mother but of his wife.
- This portrait was one of the first paintings to be acquired by Samuel Courtauld, who bought it in 1921, along with a work he believed to be a self-portrait by Thomas Gainsborough painted as a pendant to this portrait of his wife; the portrait of the artist is now thought to be either a copy, or at least to have been completed by his nephew and studio assistant, Gainsborough Dupont.
- **Margaret Burr** (born in 1728) married Gainsborough when she was only eighteen and he a year older, and it has been suggested that this portrait was painted to **mark her fiftieth birthday**. Since their marriage, Gainsborough had become one of England's leading portraitists, and in the tradition of his wife's family, the artist would paint a new portrait of Margaret on their wedding anniversary each year.
- This portrait is **striking for its suggestion of intimacy** between painter and sitter; Mrs Gainsborough is shown with her body and face pointing straight towards the viewer, **her eyes meeting our gaze directly**, her lips slightly curved into **what may be a smile**, but which also suggests resignation. Equally striking is the mantle edged with black lace which she has draped over her head and shoulders; this is formed from a **powerful swirl of energetic brush-strokes** around her head, which, continued by the position of her hands, suggests a subtle, personalised version of the painted architectural ovals within which, many more formal eighteenth century portraits were framed.
- Towards the latter part of his career, Gainsborough's handling of paint became increasingly rhythmic and flowing. Working with thinned paints he experimented with ever-bolder effects of transparency and light. In fact, it may be possible to see in the strong back-lighting that illuminates the sitter's left side – throwing the delicately patterned black lace into silhouette – a reflection of Gainsborough's

experiments with the newly fashionable art of painting transparent images on glass. Such images, when lit from behind by flickering candlelight, could produce a startling effect of glowing and moving light.

- During the mid-1770s Gainsborough painted a number of **landscape images on glass** to be viewed through a magnifying lens in a specially constructed 'peep-show' box (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum), and it is possible that his interest in such lighting effects spilled over into his portraiture.

References

- Courtauld Gallery website



Thomas Gainsborough (1727-88), *Queen Charlotte* (1744-1818), September 1782, 59.4 x 44.1 cm, Royal Collection

Gainsborough's Royal Commission

- This portrait of Queen Charlotte forms part of the series of fifteen portraits probably commissioned by Queen Charlotte of the royal family.
- They were painted at Windsor in September and October 1782.
- On 30 October the *Morning Herald* reported that Gainsborough 'has just completed his **painting of the whole Royal Family**, at Windsor... all of which are spoken of as highly-finished characteristic portraits of the illustrious personages who sat to him'.
- All the portraits were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1783. The hanging of the whole sequence of portraits at the Royal Academy in 1783 concerned Gainsborough considerably. On the eve of the exhibition he sent a letter to the Hanging Committee insisting that the portraits should **not be hung 'above the line along with full-lengths'** and said if this happened 'he never more, whilst he breathes, will send another Picture to the Exhibition'.
- Queen Charlotte hung the portraits in her apartments in Buckingham House, but by 1838 they had been **moved to Windsor**. At the exhibition of the King's Pictures at the Royal Academy in 1946, they were arranged according to Gainsborough's original design. After the exhibition they were similarly displayed in the Grand Corridor at Windsor in frames of an eighteenth-century design.

Notes

- Left to right, top to bottom:
 1. George III (1738-1820)
 2. Queen Charlotte (1744-1818)
 3. Prince of Wales, George IV (1762-1830)
 4. Prince William, later Duke of Clarence (1765-1837)

5. Charlotte, Princess Royal (1766-1828)
6. Prince Edward, later Duke of Kent (1767-1820)
7. Princess Augusta (1768-1840)
8. Princess Elizabeth (1770-1840)
9. Prince Ernest, later Duke of Cumberland (1771-1851)
10. Prince Augustus, later Duke of Sussex (1773-1843)
11. Prince Adolphus, later Duke of Cambridge (1774-1850)
12. Princess Mary (1776-1857)
13. Princess Sophia (1777-1848)
14. Prince Octavius (1779-1783)
15. Prince Alfred (1780-1782)

References

- Royal Collection website

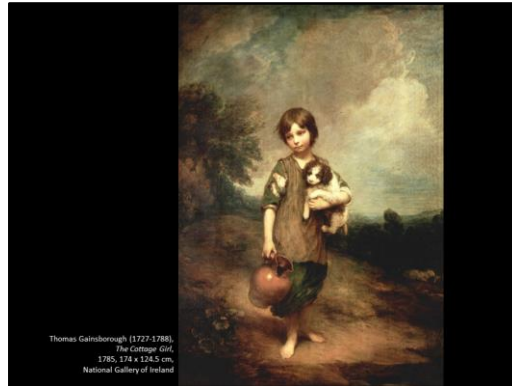


Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *Mr and Mrs William Hallett ('The Morning Walk')*, 1785, 236 x 179 cm, National Gallery

- The Halletts are shown in their finest clothes taking a stroll through a woodland landscape with their dog. **This format and style of painting was a fashionable status symbol.** The couple, William Hallett and Elizabeth Stephen, were both 21 and due to be married that summer, shortly after the painting was completed.
- William is wearing a black, silk velvet frock-suit and his apparent carelessness is a studied pose. The undone jacket and with **one hand tucked** into it is a stance seen in many **fashionable** 18th-century informal portraits (known as conversation pieces). Elizabeth is in a dress of ivory silk - perhaps her wedding dress - caught at the waist with a black silk band. A frilled muslin kerchief covers her breast, with a knot of grape-green ribbon under it.
- The light, feathery brushstrokes used to describe the landscape are **typical of Gainsborough's late style.** William's hair and Elizabeth's gauzy shawl almost blend into the landscape they walk through.

References

- The National Gallery



Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), *The Cottage Girl*, 1785, 174 x 124.5 cm, National Gallery of Ireland

- The ragged child standing forlornly by a stream with a broken pitcher is one of **Gainsborough's most celebrated 'fancy pictures'**. His landscapes, even for portrait backdrops, had long been **idealised rural idylls** conjured from the imagination and, during the 1780s, he painted a group of country subjects with touching sentiment.
- These were the artist's own genuine response to the activities and **predicaments of children** in a natural setting, and they struck a deep chord at the time. Unlike some of his contemporaries, **Gainsborough makes no moral point** in these pictures. **A fashion for the picturesque**, the poetry of Wordsworth and scenes of **beggars by Murillo** were all contributory factors.
- A sense of Arcadia is accentuated by the indefinite location. The model here is actually **thought to be a boy, Jack Hill, encountered by the artist while walking near Richmond Hill**, although from the earliest references the subject is **referred to as a girl**.
- The picturesque is an **aesthetic ideal** introduced into English cultural debate in 1782 by William Gilpin in *Observations on the River Wye* a practical book which instructed England's leisured travellers to examine 'the face of a country by the rules of picturesque beauty'. The picturesque was a part of the emerging Romantic sensibility of the 18th century. The picturesque merged ideas of beauty and the sublime described in 1757 by Edmund Burke in *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Burke argued that beauty was related to soft gentle curves which were associated with male sexual desire and the horrors of the sublime appealed to our desires for self-preservation. The picturesque arose as a middle path between these opposed ideals.
- Gainsborough died of cancer in 1788 (aged 61) in Richmond and was buried

alongside his friend Joshua Kirby in St. Anne's Church, Kew.



GAINSBOROUGH'S RIVALS



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), *Portrait of Mrs. Sarah Siddons (1755–1831)*, 1785, 126 cm x 99.5 cm, National Gallery

Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), *Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, 1789, 239.7 x 147.6 cm, Dulwich Picture Gallery, exhibition history Royal Academy summer exhibition, Somerset House, 1784. The original painting of 1783 is now in the Huntington Library and this is an autograph replica.

- Let us start with a painting by Gainsborough that we can compare with Joshua Reynolds painting of the same actress, **Mrs Sarah Siddons**. Gainsborough's sitters were easily recognizable and shown in a flattering way. Gainsborough shows her on a delicate French chair, dressed in the latest fashion, gazing off into space, with what might be a stage curtain behind her.
- Sarah Siddons (born Kemble, 1755–1831) was a **Welsh-born English actress, the best-known tragedienne of the 18th century**. She was most famous for her portrayal of the Shakespearean character, **Lady Macbeth**, a character she made her own, and for **famously fainting at the sight of the Elgin Marbles** in London. She married the actor William Siddons and they had seven children of whom two survived but their marriage became strained and they separated. She acted alongside David Garrick and played privately for royalty.

Joshua Reynolds

- Reynolds often painted his sitters in a historic style with the sitters' faces sometimes altered. In this case he paints **Siddons as the 'Tragic Muse'**, on a throne-like chair, clad in classical draperies. She floats in the clouds, like a goddess, and to emphasize the point two dramatic figures stand behind her, on the left is **Terror holding a dagger** and on the right is **Pity, holding a poisoned chalice**.
- **The conflict between Reynolds and Gainsborough can be seen as the conflict that continued for the next hundred years between Neoclassicism and Romanticism.**
 - Neoclassical art was generally morally uplifting, drawn with lines, calm,

- rational, and often of classical or biblical subjects.
- Romantic art was dramatic, emotional and imaginative and used rich, unrestrained colours and visible brushstrokes. Subjects were often set in the medieval and Baroque periods and the Middle and Far East and included legends, exotica and violence.

Notes

- Melpoméne is a character from Greek and Roman mythology, one of nine muses of the arts. She was originally the Muse of Song but then became the Muse of Tragedy. She was the daughter of Zeus and her eight other sisters were the muses: Calliope, muse of epic poetry; Clio, muse of history; Euterpe, muse of flute playing; Terpsichore, muse of dancing; Erato, muse of erotic poetry; Thalia muse of comedy; Polyhymnia, muse of hymns; and Urania, muse of astronomy.
- The Huntington website: 'Of the nearly 400 portraits of the legendary actress Sarah Siddons that have been recorded, this one is considered her defining image. It is also renowned as **one of Reynolds's greatest paintings**. Siddons had recently taken London by storm with her performance in a string of heart-breaking tragic roles when she posed for Reynolds. Siddons appears as an austere icon of Tragedy, seemingly enthroned for all eternity. Conscious that he was painting a theatrical star, Reynolds dressed Siddons in the way audiences were accustomed to seeing her on stage. She wears a sumptuous gold dress with scalloped sleeves – a fanciful variation on 17th-century style – a diadem, and a twisted strand of pearls. Two figures behind her allude to Aristotle's statement that the value of tragedy lies in the emotional catharsis it engenders through the experience of fear and pity. **On the right**, holding a poisoned chalice, is the **figure of Pity**, whose grimacing face was modelled on **Reynolds's own features** studied in a mirror. **To the left**, clutching a dagger, is the figure of **Terror**. Reynolds's muted colour scheme enhances the drama, while the spotlight on the star allows the supporting players to fade into the shadows.'



Sir Joshua Reynolds (English, 1723–1792), *The Ladies Waldegrave*, 1780–81, 143 x 168.3 cm, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh

Joshua Reynolds

- This portrait of the three Waldegrave sisters was painted for their great uncle, **Horace Walpole**, to hang in his celebrated house in **Strawberry Hill**. The sisters, all of whom were to **marry in the following years, were single** when the painting was commissioned. Their portrait, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1781, would have **advertised their eligibility and desirability**. Individually and collectively, the Waldegrave sisters embody contemporary ideals of feminine accomplishment, style, and beauty.
- Reynolds was particularly skilled at choosing poses and actions which suggested a sitter's character and which also created a strong composition. Here, three sisters, the daughters of the 2nd Earl Waldegrave, are shown collaboratively working on a piece of needlework. The joint activity links the girls together. On the left, the eldest, Lady Charlotte, holds a skein of silk, which the middle sister, Lady Elizabeth, winds onto a card. On the right, the youngest, Lady Anna, works a tambour frame, using a hook to make lace on a taut net.
- Reynolds's cultivation of a network of aristocratic patrons was an important aspect of his success as a portrait painter. His portraits played a vital role in endorsing both the dynastic and political ambitions of the nation's powerful elite. During a career spanning fifty years he often painted several generations of the same family, strengthening the power of particular dynasties through grand family portraits as well as more intimate studies of women and children.
- Reynolds's celebration of the allure of the aristocracy reached a peak in a series of spectacular full-length portraits of titled women, exhibited at the Royal Academy during the 1770s. In these he again managed to blend tradition and innovation, using the Madonna and child theme from old master paintings to celebrate the

modern attitude towards motherhood adopted by aristocratic women such as the Duchess of Devonshire.

- By his death, Reynolds's achievement in courting the aristocracy was unparalleled. His arch rival **Thomas Gainsborough was buried modestly in a quiet churchyard; when Reynolds was buried in St Paul's Cathedral** his pall-bearers included three dukes, two marquesses, three earls, a viscount and a baron.

References

- Tate Britain, 'Joshua Reynolds: The Creattion [sic] of Celebrity'
- Scottish National Gallery



Allan Ramsay (1713–1784), *King George III in coronation robes*, c.1765?, 236.2 mm x 158.7 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia

Allan Ramsay (1713–1784), *The Artist's Wife: Margaret Lindsay of Evelick*, (c. 1726–1782), 1758, 74.3 x 61.9 cm, Scottish National Gallery

Allan Ramsay

- Ramsay was a prominent Scottish painter who worked in London from the age of 20. He studied at St Martin's Academy before travelling to Rome and Naples where he worked for three years. He returned to Edinburgh where he became established as a portrait painter. His full length portrait of the Duke of Argyll was later used on Royal Bank of Scotland banknotes.
- He moved to London where his pleasant manner and culture made him a popular choice as portrait painter. He married his first wife Anne Bayne but all three children died and she died giving birth. **One of his pupils was Margaret Lindsay who he later eloped with** and married in Edinburgh. Her father never forgave him and Ramsay struggled to maintain her in the comfort to which she was accustomed. They had three children who survived their long and happy marriage. Ramsay and his new wife went to Rome, Florence, Naples and Tivoli, researching and painting. **On his return he was appointed Principal Painter to George III beating his arch rival Thomas Hudson.** The king commissioned so many portraits as gifts that Ramsay had to use many assistants. He gave up painting in 1770 to pursue literary pursuits. He suffered from an accidental dislocation of his right arm and his **wife died in 1782**. He completed a likeness of the king and then **left for Italy** leaving his assistant to complete 50 royal portraits. He lingered in Italy but died in Dover in 1784.
- Unlike this stiff portrait of George III his earlier portraits, such as this one of his second wife, were full of softness, delicacy, grace and individuality.



George Romney (1734-1802), *The Death of General Wolfe at Quebec* (study), 1762-3, 36.8 x 46.4 cm, Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kirkland, Kendal

George Romney

- This study was made for a painting Romney exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1763 when he was trying to **establish a reputation as a history painter**. The **finished picture, now lost**, was at first awarded a prize, but later Romney was **criticized for treating the subject as a contemporary event**, rather than in the more conventional way as an allegory.
- Romney was a **fashionable portrait painter**. He **avoided delving into the sitters personality** and could be **relied upon to provide a flattering image**.
- His history painting ***The Death of General Wolfe*** won him an award from the Society of Arts; nonetheless he turned almost immediately to portrait painting. In 1764 he paid his first visit to Paris, where he was befriended by Joseph Vernet. Romney especially admired the work of Nicolas Le Sueur, whose use of the antique strongly appealed to him. In 1773 he went to Italy for two years, where he studied Raphael's Stanze frescoes in Rome, Titian's paintings in Venice, and Correggio's at Parma. Travel abroad matured his art, and a new gracefulness appears in portraits such as *Mrs. Carwardine and Son* (1775) and the conscious elegance of the large full-length *Sir Christopher and Lady Sykes* (1786).
- Romney was by nature **sensitive and introspective**. He held himself **aloof from the Royal Academy** and his fellow artists, making his friends in **philosophical and literary circles**. About 1781–82 he **met Emma Hart (later Lady Hamilton)**, who fascinated him. For Romney she became a means of escape into an imaginary, ideal world. He painted his **"divine Emma" more than 50 times**, in guises ranging from a bacchante to Joan of Arc.

Notes

- Benjamin West's (1738-1820) *Death of General Wolfe* was painted in 1770. The

painting became one of the most frequently reproduced images of the period. West was known in England as the 'American Raphael' and he was President of the Royal Academy from 1792-1805 and 1805-1820. West painted in a new style with expressive figures, colours and compositional devices to enable the viewer to identify with the scene. West called this 'epic representation'.



George Romney, *Portrait of Mrs Anne Carwardine and Her Eldest Son, Thomas*, 1775, 75 x 62 cm, private collection

- This portrait is said to have been the first picture that Romney completed after his return from Italy. In Italy Romney was seduced by Italy's classical heritage, in particular the work of Raphael.
- The sitter of this portrait, Mrs. Anne Carwardine (1752-1817) was the wife of Thomas Carwardine, a close friend of Romney. She is shown half-length, seated, wearing a black dress and a white lace shawl with a white bonnet, holding her eldest son Thomas (1772-1822) in her arms. The portrait acknowledges a debt to Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia*.



George Romney, *Emma Hart, later Lady Hamilton, a Straw Hat*, c. 1782-84, Huntington Library, California

- Emma, Lady Hamilton (1765–1815) is best remembered as the mistress of Lord Nelson and as the muse of George Romney.
- She was born **Amy Lyon** in Cheshire, the daughter of a blacksmith who died shortly after she was born and she received no formal education.
- She worked as a maid in several households and when she was 15 she met Sir **Harry Fetherstonhaugh** (pronounced ‘Fanshaw’), who hired her for several months as hostess and entertainer at a lengthy stag party at Fetherstonhaugh's Uppark estate in the South Downs. She is said to have **danced nude on the dining room table**.
- Fetherstonhaugh took Emma there as a mistress, but frequently ignored her in favour of drinking and hunting with his friends and Emma formed a friendship with one of the guests, the dull but sincere Honourable Charles **Francis Greville** (1749–1809), MP and second son of the first Earl of Warwick. In late June-early July 1781 **she conceived a child by Fetherstonhaugh** who was furious and moved her to London. She left Fetherstonhaugh for Greville and her daughter Emma Carew was removed and brought up separately and later became a governess.
- Greville insisted she change her name to **Emma Hart** and asked his friend George Romney to paint her. Romney became obsessed with her for the rest of his life sketching her nude and painting 50 portraits in various guises and classical costumes. She was witty, intelligent, a quick learner, elegant and, as paintings show, extremely beautiful and she became well known in society.
- In 1783 **Greville needed a rich wife** to replenish his finances but she (Henrietta Middleton) would not marry him unless he **broke off from Emma**. Without telling Emma Greville arranged for his uncle, **Sir William Hamilton, British Envoy to Naples, to take her as his mistress**. Sir William agreed in order to relieve him of a poor nephew. Emma was sent to Naples, allegedly for a short holiday and arrived

at the prestigious and well known home of Sir William. Sir William's wife had died the previous year.

- **Emma developed** what she called **her 'Attitudes'** or Mimoplastic Art, which combined Romney's **classical costumes** and poses with dance and acting. This developed into a **form of charades** where the audience had to guess the classical character portrayed. It was a sensation with visitors from across Europe and Emma charmed artists such as Élisabeth-Louise **Vigée-Le Brun**, writers including Johann Wolfgang **von Goethe** and kings and queens and it created a new dance trend across Europe and a fashion for wearing draped Grecian dress. Emma was also a talented singer who was even offered a role at the Royal Opera in Madrid.
- In 1791 **she married Sir William** in Middlesex and **became Lady Hamilton**, she was 26 and he was 60. Lady Hamilton became a **close friend of Queen Maria Carolina**, the sister of Marie Antoinette, and the wife of Ferdinand I of Naples. As wife of the British Envoy, **Emma welcomed Nelson in 1793**, when he came to gather reinforcements against the French. **Nelson returned five years later, a living legend** but a prematurely aged man who had lost his arm and most of his teeth. Lady Hamilton was so overcome with admiration **she fainted against him**. She took him home and **nursed him** and laid on a party with 1,800 guests to celebrate his 40th birthday. **They fell in love and this was tolerated by Sir William**. Emma Hamilton and Horatio Nelson were by now the **two most famous Britons in the world**. They were not only in love with each other, but admired each other to the point of adulation. Following a revolution in Naples the three of them travelled slowly back across Europe (hearing the 'Nelson Mass' by Joseph Haydn in Vienna in 1800. The three lived together openly in London creating a public scandal and causing the Admiralty to send Nelson back to sea. **Nelson was still married to Fanny, Lady Nelson**.
- **Emma gave birth to a daughter, Horatia in 1801**. Nelson bought **Merton Place** outside Wimbledon and lived openly with Emma, Sir William and Emma's mother. **The newspapers reported her every move and she set the fashion** in dress and home decoration. Sir William died in 1803 and Nelson returned to sea to fight the Napoleonic Wars and Emma became pregnant again but the girl died a few weeks after being born. In 1805 Nelson's fleet defeated a Franco-Spanish fleet at the **battle of Trafalgar** and **Nelson died**. Nelson had willed his estate to his brother but asked Parliament **to look after Emma** and Horatia but this **wish was ignored**. Emma spent a year in debtors prison with Horatia before moving to France to try to escape from her creditors. She turned to drink and died in poverty in Calais in 1815, aged 49, of amoebic dysentery. **Horatia married and had ten children** and lived to 1881 but **never acknowledged she was the daughter of Emma Hamilton**.
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Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), *Sarah Barrett Moulton (Pinkie)*, 1794, Huntington Library, California

Thomas Lawrence

- *Pinkie* is the traditional title for a portrait made in 1794 by Thomas Lawrence in the permanent collection of the Huntington Library at San Marino, California where it hangs opposite *The Blue Boy* by Thomas Gainsborough. The title now given it by the museum is *Sarah Barrett Moulton: Pinkie*. These two works are the centerpieces of the institute's art collection, which specialises in 18th-century English portraiture. The painting is an elegant depiction of Sarah Barrett Moulton, who was about **eleven years old** when painted. Her direct gaze and the **loose, energetic brushwork** give the portrait a lively immediacy.

