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The Triumph of Men: Reassessing Gender in Fragonard's *Progress of Love*

James McCabe

University of Massachusetts Boston

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The Triumph of Men:
Reassessing Gender in Fragonard's *Progress of Love*

James McCabe

Art 492: Honors Project

Prof. David Areford

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Introduction

In 1771, Jean-Honoré Fragonard was commissioned by King Louis XV's mistress Madame du Barry to create a series of paintings for the Salon du Cul de Four in her pleasure pavilion at Louveciennes. However, after the artist completed the four paintings in 1771-72, they were rejected by du Barry and sent back to Fragonard. Although the reason for their rejection is unknown, art historians have offered many possible explanations, including the inappropriateness of the subject matter, a change in taste, or a clash of Fragonard's rococo style with the neoclassical architectural setting.¹ Whatever the reason, the paintings were hidden away in the artist's studio for almost twenty years. But in 1790, Fragonard repurposed the Louveciennes series, augmented with six new paintings, to decorate a villa owned by his cousin Alexandre Maubert in the town of Grasse.² This expanded series later became known by the title the *Progress of Love* and remained *in situ* until 1898 when Maubert's descendants sold the paintings to J.P. Morgan.³ After Morgan's death, the paintings were purchased by Henry Clay

¹ Four paintings (*The Pursuit, The Meeting, The Lover Crowned, and Love Letters*) were originally created for Madame du Barry's Louveciennes Pavilion, but she later rejected them after they were installed. For more theories of why the works were rejected see Colin Bailey, *Fragonard's Progress of Love at the Frick Collection* (New York: Frick Collection, 2011), pp. 87-102; Franklin M. Biebel, "Fragonard and Madame du Barry," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* Ser. 6, Vol. 56 (October 1960), pp. 207-21; Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Jean-Honoré Fragonard: Life and Work Complete Catalogue of the Oil Paintings*, trans. Anthony Zielonka and Kim-Mai Mooney (New York: Harry Abrams, 1988), pp. 152-4; Anne-Marie Dupuy-Vachey, *Fragonard*, trans. John Tittensor (Paris: Terrail, 2006), p. 115; Pierre Rosenberg, *Fragonard* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), pp. 320-5; and Jacques Thuillier, *Fragonard*, trans. Robert Allen (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), p. 103.

² Bernice Davidson, Edgar Munhall, and Nadia Tscherny, *Paintings from The Frick Collection* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), pp. 97-8. The paintings added to the original four were two large paintings (*Reverie* and *Love Triumphant*), and four overdoors (*Love Pursuing a Dove, Love the Sentinel, Love the Jester, and Love the Avenger*) Fragonard also painted four *Hollyhock* strips placed on the corners of the room.

³ There is no evidence that the Fragonard titled this series or the individual paintings; however, the first mention of the series comes from a 1772 inventory at Louveciennes that calls the four paintings *The Four Ages of Love*. Bailey, p. 69.

Frick.⁴ Today, they are beautifully installed in an ornate room in the Frick Collection in New York.

The *Progress of Love* is considered to be the culmination of Fragonard's career, and thus it has received much attention from art historians. These scholars have debated the meaning of its subjects, the specific order of its scenes, and especially, iconographic and thematic links between the images and the original, famous patron: Madame du Barry.⁵ Since Willibald Sauerländer's 1968 article on the series, the majority of the modern analysis on the *Progress of Love* has focused on the original four paintings at Louveciennes.⁶ As a result, art historians began clamoring to define the original Louveciennes progression of the series, arguing about how the panels were meant to be interpreted in the context of du Barry's pavilion. Sauerländer described the series as starting with *The Pursuit*, moving from *The Meeting* to *The Lover Crowned*, and ending with *Love Letters*. Working against Sauerländer's assumptions, Donald Posner in his 1972 article stated that du Barry would not end the series with friendship, but with marriage, as displayed in *The Lover Crowned*.⁷ He also argued that *The Meeting* should start the series, stating that this was the true progression based on descriptions of the paintings' sequence by visitors to Grasse. Marianne Roland-Michel reevaluated these previous orderings of the paintings, stating that the narrative should begin with *The Meeting*, move to *Love Letters* and *The*

⁴ Davidson, Munhall, and Tscherny, p. 97; Cuzin, p. 320; and Bailey, p. 150.

⁵ Some of the earliest writings on these subjects come from 19th century art critics visiting the Villa Maubert. For information on their description of the narrative and iconography of the paintings, see Leon Lagrange, "Notes de voyage," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* Ser. 1, Vol. 23 (August 1867), pp. 188-92; E.F.S. Pattison, "Fragonard and His Decorative Paintings at Grass," *The Academy* Vol. 14 (10 August 1878), p. 149; and Baron Roger Portalis, "Les Peintures decoratives de Fragonard et les panneaux de Grasse," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* Ser. 2, Vol. 32 (December 1885), pp. 486-492.

⁶ Willibald Sauerländer, "Über die ursprüngliche Reihenfolge von Fragonards' 'Amours des Bergers,'" *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* Vol. 19 (1968), pp. 127-155.

⁷ Donald Posner, "The True Path of Fragonard's *Progress of Love*," *The Burlington Magazine* Vol. 114, No. 833 (August 1972), pp. 526-534.

Pursuit, and end with *The Lover Crowned*.⁸ Notably, in 1990, Mary Sheriff took a very different approach in her book *Fragonard: Art and Eroticism*, rejecting the assumptions that the *Progress of Love* is a mere set of episodes to be read in a particular order.⁹ In his 1999 thesis and subsequent publications on Fragonard's later artworks, Andrei Molotiu discussed the completed series at Grasse, tying the paintings from the Louveciennes pavilion with most of the 1790 additions.¹⁰ (Although he analyzed most of the images, his examination ignored two of the overdoors, *Love the Jester* and *Love the Sentinel*). More recently, in his 2011 publication *Fragonard's Progress of Love at the Frick Collection*, Colin Bailey has taken Sauerländer's approach to the series.¹¹

In this paper, rather than focus solely on the original four du Barry paintings or theories of progression and positioning, my reappraisal will look deeply at Fragonard's series as a whole and how it depicts gender roles and power. Scholars have fixated on Madame du Barry's role in the creation of this installation, but I feel it is critical to shift the focus away from the first failed series to analyze the paintings' adaptation for the middle-class male patron Alexandre Maubert. By overlooking the Grasse setting and installation, art historians have ignored the radical change in the ideals of love and gender roles that took place in France from the start of the original series

⁸ Marianne Roland-Michel "Eighteenth-Century Decorative Painting: Some False Assumptions," *The British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* Vol. 2 No. 1 (March 1979), pp. 35-36.

⁹ Mary Sheriff, *Fragonard: Art and Eroticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), pp. 58-94.

¹⁰ See Andrei Molotiu, "Allegories of Love in the Late Work of Jean-Honoré Fragonard" (PhD diss., New York University, 1999), pp. 203-48; Molotiu, "The Progress of Love and the Magic Garden: Jean-Honoré Fragonard's Decorative Ensemble for the Villa Maubert in Grasse," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* Ser. 6, Vol. 137 (February 2001), pp. 91-114; Molotiu, *Fragonard's Allegories of Love* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), pp. 102-5. For more detailed information for Molotiu's choice to overlook *Love the Jester* and *Love the Sentinel* in his writings, see Molotiu, "The Progress of Love and the Magic Garden," p. 105.

¹¹ Bailey, pp. 71-85.

to its completion twenty years later. In contrast, I will investigate how these changes impacted the paintings' meaning.

To begin my discussion, I will examine the four large Louveciennes paintings in terms of the art historical literature which describes the scenes as female-centric with the male figures on the periphery. Next, I will examine the two large panels of *Reverie* and *Love Triumphant* added to the series in Grasse. In this section, I will delve into past readings of these works and reexamine assumptions concerning the figures depicted. I will then discuss the marginalized overdoor paintings, with an emphasis on reevaluating *Love Pursuing a Dove* and *Love the Avenger* in order to show the transformation of the series from the female dominated paintings in Louveciennes to their reinstallation in Grasse. Finally, I will interpret these works in light of the Grasse patron, Alexandre Maubert, and how the adjustment from a female to male dominated series reflects 18th century male bourgeoisie taste especially in regard to themes of love and gender espoused by Enlightenment thinkers in revolutionary France.

The Lovers (and Statues) in the Garden

The original paintings commissioned by Madame du Barry are traditionally referred to as *The Pursuit* (Figure 1), *The Meeting* (Figure 2), *The Lover Crowned* (Figure 3), and *Love Letters* (Figure 4).¹² In these four paintings (each around 124 inches x 95 inches),¹³ Fragonard depicts scenes of young lovers in various stages of a relationship.¹⁴ These scenes have been considered by some scholars to be the tale of one couple's blossoming romance throughout the four panels. The generally accepted series title, the *Progress of Love*, has caused the original paintings to be viewed as a single narrative, yet the identities of the characters shift from scene to scene, showing that they in fact represent separate couples.¹⁵

Due mainly to Sauerländer's article with its emphasis on the patronage of Madame du Barry and the four original paintings, the art historical assessment of the paintings has centered

¹² The specific paintings of the *Progress of Love* have been labelled differently since the paintings were recorded at Grasse; however, to create a consistent naming system, I will use the titles given to the paintings by Colin Bailey in his book *Fragonard's Progress of Love at the Frick Collection* from 2011.

¹³ Note that this measurement applies to *The Meeting* and *The Lover Crowned*. *The Pursuit* and *Love Letters* are roughly the same height as the other two paintings, but only 84 inches in width. This variation comes from the original Salon du Cul de Four placement, in which the wider paintings hung on a larger, curved surface. See Bailey, pp. 66-7.

¹⁴ Bailey describes the figures as adolescent figures, noting that they are on "the threshold of life" an age group Fragonard preferred to paint. See Bailey, p. 69.

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the various titles Fragonard's series has had, see Bailey, pp. 69, 71, and 109. Some scholars view the characters to be repeated couples throughout the four panels due to Madame du Barry commissioning Joseph-Marie Vien to create replacements for the Salon du Cul de Four entitled *Progress of Love in the Hearts of Young Girls* in which the same figures were depicted in all four of the paintings; see Bailey, p. 71 and 91. The series has been given multiple titles throughout its history with no source stating Fragonard's intended title. When the paintings were repurposed for Grasse, 19th century art historians such as E.F.S. Pattison called the series *Fragonard's Decorative Paintings at Grasse*; see Pattison, p. 149. Sauerländer in his article referred to the series as *Les Amours des Bergers (The Loves of the Shepherds)*, see Sauerländer, p. 127. Lynne Kirby in her article calls the series *The Pursuit of Love*; see Lynne Kirby, "Fragonard's *The Pursuit of Love*." *Rutgers Art Review* Vol. 3 (January 1982), pp. 58-60.

on the women in the scenes.¹⁶ Some art historians have even claimed that the female figures resemble du Barry.¹⁷ These young women are centered, well-lit, and dressed in clothes that make them stand out from the shrubbery and garden plants. Jean-Pierre Cuzin, in his 1988 catalogue raisonné of Fragonard's oeuvre, notes that the paintings of *The Pursuit* and *The Meeting* tell the story of "a very young heroine, who is a very young girl, dressed in white... she runs away from her admirer and then, half-consenting, has a meeting with him right at the back of the garden."¹⁸ Such a description of the paintings is typical of other art historians, who focus their interpretation of the series on the young girls, with the male suitors mentioned only when it pertains to action of the girls.

Giving a different explanation for why the women in the series are the most visually dominant figures, Lynne Kirby, in her 1982 article, states that the upper classes placed erotic emphasis on "feet, hands, necks, breasts, and buttocks, and on such clothing as the corset, shoes, and stockings, as quasi-autonomous objects of desire."¹⁹ By highlighting these specific female body parts and clothing, Kirby sees these images as meant to accentuate these feminine characteristics for the enjoyment of the (presumed) male viewer's sexual desires.²⁰ Therefore, these women are meant to be seen as exhibitionist coquettes who act "as a flirtatious diversion" for the male suitor and viewer (most likely a nobleman) to enjoy.²¹ As a result of such

¹⁶ In most of the literature I have reviewed, art historians have written sections about the *Progress of Love*, but only focus on the Louveciennes paintings. See Bailey, pp. 71-85; Kirby, pp. 58-79; Ashton, pp. 142-52; Sheriff, pp. 58-94; and Stephen D. Borys, "Fragonard and the Garden Setting: The *Progress of Love* at Louveciennes" (PhD diss. McGill University, 1994), pp. 111-37; in contrast to the other art historians mentioned above both Posner, "The True Path," pp. 526-534 and Biebel, pp. 207-226, refer briefly to the painting of *Reverie* as a continuation of the series.

¹⁷ Bailey, p. 78 and Biebel, p. 212.

¹⁸ Cuzin, p. 152.

¹⁹ Kirby, p. 66.

²⁰ Kirby, p. 68.

²¹ Kirby, pp. 70-1.

interpretations, the men in these artworks have typically been seen as secondary and characterized as aggressive, passive, effeminate, and unimportant by various art historians commenting on the series.²²

The Pursuit depicts a chaotic scene in which a young male has entered from behind a pedestal to offer the young girl a rose (Figure 5). The young man's intrusion has startled the group of girls, who try to flee. At the corner of the canvas is a still life of nuts and apples, which according to peasant folklore were the objects young men searched for in the pockets of their lovers during their annual courtship rituals like the one the figures act out in this scene.²³ The most striking figure in this scene is the central female in the cream-colored dress with her emphatic outstretched arms. Her pose has been noted as very ballet-like and relates to pantomime of the stage.²⁴ In comparing this image with an 18th century drawing of the play *Acis et Galathée* (Figure 6), one sees that both women display a similar pose. As Dore Ashton has argued, Fragonard's girl imitates an actress's pose, which refers to the playful nature of the two lovers, who act out love rituals rather than actually show the sincerity and emotions of true

²² For discussion of the masculine lovers in the work, see Posner, "The True Path," p. 534, which discusses how the male lover is aggressive and forceful in his attempts to fulfill his desires, while the final two panels show a gentler and tempered male due to the girl accepting his advances. See Kirby, pp. 58-79, for her assertions that the male is meant to frame the pictorial details as well as act in *The Lover Crowned* as competing voyeurs who seek pleasure from viewing the women. Additionally, see Barbara Robinson, "Games of Idealized Courtship and Seduction in the Paintings of Antoine Watteau and Jean-Honoré Fragonard and in Laclos' Novel, *Dangerous Liaisons*" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2009), p. 67, in which the author views the male in *The Meeting* as dressed to blend in with the surrounding garden, while the female is meant to be the focus of the painting.

²³ Bailey, p. 72.

²⁴ Dore Ashton, *Fragonard in the Universe of Painting* (Washington: Smithsonian University Press, 1988), p. 144. See Ashton for her discussion of the theatrical qualities of the series. She reinterprets the scenes as episodes based on the theme of the stages of love rather than a progress movement. The figures are also meant to be seen like actors on stage in which the viewer looks at the figures from the orchestra adding another element of theatre to the work.

lovers.²⁵ Ashton notes that like young girls today who imitate movie stars, 18th century French girls would have “adopted the gestures, attitudes, and gaits of the belles of the theater in Paris.”²⁶ This comparison shows that the 18th century viewer would have seen the girl’s stiff stance as her mimicking the contemporary dance moves of contemporary ballet stars.

Additionally, Ashley Lowery discusses that the characters have expressions of pleasure on their faces that may relate to the aristocratic idea of “love as an endless game.”²⁷ In light of this assessment, one can see that they do not take love seriously; rather they play a game of cat and mouse in which the male endlessly pursues the woman, whose goal is to forever lead him on.²⁸ Yet, it is not just the female who leads the boy on, but also his inner desires as referenced by the statue in the background. As Donald Posner has argued, the statue presents two putti who ride a dolphin, which symbolizes “the impatient surge of love” that has overcome the man.²⁹ Additionally, the hat in his hand may relate to the man’s sexual arousal, while the rose may refer to the traditional symbol of the lover offering his beloved a rose to win her affection.³⁰

²⁵ Ashton, p. 151.

²⁶ Ashton, p. 151.

²⁷ Ashley D. Lowery, “What’s Love Got to Do with It: Reevaluating Rococo and Rousseauian Love in the Work of Jean-Honoré Fragonard” (Masters diss., University of Florida, 2012), p. 23. During the 18th century, it was known that aristocracy would dress as shepherds and shepherdesses and reenact scenes from popular plays for entertainment, see Lowery, p. 25.

²⁸ Kirby, p. 71.

²⁹ Donald Posner, “The Swinging Women of Watteau and Fragonard” *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 64, No. 1 (March 1982), p. 84. In art, a putto is nude, chubby babies with wings that were used in Renaissance and Baroque art. These figures were derived from the earlier figures of Cupid/Eros from Greek and Roman mythology. See Charles Dempsey, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 4.

³⁰ See Posner, “The Swinging Women,” p. 85 and Jennifer Milam, “Playful Constructions and Fragonard’s Swinging Scenes.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* Vol. 33, No. 4 (Summer 2000), pp.549, for a description of 18th century puns of the men without their hats on their heads symbolizing erections and Richard Campbell, “The Sacrifice of the Rose by Jean-Honoré Fragonard: A Late Eighteenth-Century Inflection of a Traditional Erotic Symbol” *The Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin* Vol. 66 (December 1983), p. 27 for rose symbolism in 18th century France.

Though the young man displays aggressive sexual behavior, he shows a playful bravado through his actions. He does not violently barge into the garden, but gracefully leaps towards the group of girls while holding out the flower of his affections. Looking at the boy's face, one notices that he has very rosy cheeks and accentuated red lips that form a kiss. These features make the boy look both hostile and playful, which may be due to his adolescent appearance – not fully masculine, but in-between. It is as if the male lover is meant to be a young boy acting like an older male suitor, reinforcing the idea of the image portraying love as a game.³¹

In his oil sketch for *The Pursuit* (Figure 7), Fragonard originally planned to place the figures farther apart and included a blue flower instead of a rose.³² This shows that there was a change from a less energetic male to a more dynamic male figure that both takes up more space and asserts himself more fully.³³ The male figure in the final painting also has a cream colored shirt that helps to differentiate him from the shrubbery, as opposed to the sketch, where his earthen colored coat blends in with the nearby foliage. However, both boys have rosy cheeks that give them a sense of heated love. But it is not just the boy who has changed appearance, but also the central girl. Comparing these two images, Lowery points out that the girl's cheeks in the final version are far less rosy than they are in the sketch, as if the woman is not prominently displaying her emotions (a level of restraint expected of a noble woman in the 1770s).³⁴

In *The Meeting*, another young man is shown in pursuit of another young woman. This scene depicts a young girl who sits waiting on the ground, while her suitor climbs a ladder over the garden wall to see his beloved. According to Sauerländer and Posner, the young man is the

³¹ Ashton, p. 144.

³² Bailey, p. 74 and Edgar Munhall, "Fragonard's Studies for the Progress of Love," *Apollo* Vol. 93 (May 1971), p. 404.

³³ Bailey, p. 76.

³⁴ Ashley Lowery, p. 24.

equivalent of a young knight storming the citadel.³⁵ However, more recent scholarship has deemed this painting a planned meeting by both people; the surprised faces are meant to suggest the surprise of someone entering the garden and interrupting the couple.³⁶ The latter explanation is a better description, for the girl looks like she is giving the male suitor “a gesture of silent warning.”³⁷ The time is not right for their meeting, as indicated by the statue of Venus withholding Cupid’s arrows and thus inhibiting him from doing his work.³⁸ Yet, the statue of Cupid still tries to reach for its arrows in an impatient, childish way.

This statue of Cupid relates to the putti in *The Pursuit*, all showing a wave of excitement and anticipation on their faces. Yet in both panels, they can only observe the couples’ failed attempts at courtship. The Cupid statue in *The Meeting*, like the suitor on the ladder, cannot complete his task. Both can only watch and wait for the action to unfold. The man’s eyes look off past the girl as if he sees something in the distance. His movements seem to have stopped, as noted by the tight grip he has on the ladder, showing that he waits in anticipation of what is to come. In past writings on this painting, some art historians have described this pose an aggressive lunge over the wall to his beloved.³⁹ But in looking closely at the work, one can see that the man appears to hesitate in his posture.

Past analysis of the male suitor in *The Meeting* has posited that the color of his outfit causes him to blend in with the garden setting.⁴⁰ Yet his reddish pink shirt pops against the darker green foliage that surrounds him, making him a more prominent figure in the work. One

³⁵ For these kinds of interpretations, see Sauerländer, pp. 136-7 and Posner, “The True Path,” p. 529.

³⁶ See Mary Sheriff, *Fragonard*, pp. 68-71, and Bailey, pp. 72-81.

³⁷ Biebel, p. 210.

³⁸ Posner, “The True Path,” p. 528.

³⁹ See Sauerländer, pp. 136-7, Posner, “The True Path,” p. 526-7 and Kirby, p. 60.

⁴⁰ Robinson, p. 67.

can easily argue that Fragonard gave this figure more distinction, based on comparison with his earlier sketch of the scene (Figure 8). In the sketch, only the man's head peers from behind the ladder. This change in the man's prominence adds a greater sense of anticipation to the painting. In the final version, the man has moved closer to his beloved; however, he must stop his advances due to the intrusion of an unseen guest entering the garden.⁴¹ All of these factors heighten the tension of whether this couple will be able consummate their desires. Like his counterpart in *The Pursuit*, the male in *The Meeting* has the same rosy cheeks showing he too is flushed with sexual expectancy. Yet, this suitor's sexual longings are not stopped by his lover as in *The Pursuit*; rather they are interrupted due to an unexpected visitor.

In *The Lover Crowned*, the episode depicts a couple surrounded by ripened orange trees and bursting flowers as they pose for an artist to record their love. Beside the couple are sheet music and musical instruments, which Bailey suggests the couple had been playing earlier.⁴² The male figures in this scene have similar red colored outfits, appropriately warm in color to match their eager (and amorous) emotions. This similarity in appearance has been noted by Kirby as a reference to the men fighting for the affection of the woman.⁴³ In relation to the men, she sits in the center and higher up, making clear that she is the most important figure in the scene. Kirby describes the dynamic here as voyeuristic; furthermore the men become stand-ins for an implied male viewer, who can enter the scene and join the men at the girl's feet.⁴⁴ While both men look in the direction of the female figure, the male lover appears to be specifically staring at the crown

⁴¹ Posner, "The True Path," p. 528.

⁴² Bailey, p. 81.

⁴³ Kirby, p. 71.

⁴⁴ Kirby, p. 71.

of roses that the woman holds in her hand.⁴⁵ In contrast to the first two scenes, here the couple has reached the point where they are finally together. No longer waiting, the young man clutches the woman's hand and flower garland. His desires are about to be consummated, at least in the form of a crown soon to be placed on his head.

Behind these three main figures, the statue of Cupid sleeps, as if his work has been accomplished. Yet this does not seem like the right time for Cupid to rest, since the girl has yet to place the crown on the man's head. Like in the other panels, the statues seem to be either waiting patiently for the right time or unarmed. This resting Cupid with his empty quiver continues the cycle of incapable statues that watch the lovers and are unable to act. This relationship is even more obvious in the final painting, *Love Letters*.

In *Love Letters*, a woman sits on a pedestal in the middle of the garden reading letters, while her suitor holds her in a loving embrace. A spaniel sits at their feet acting like the couple's watchman. Behind the figures, the trees form a heart shape symbolizing the lovers' fidelity and friendship.⁴⁶ However, while the man is happy and contented, the woman seems to ignore him, focusing on the letters in her hand (Figure 9). The lack of connection between the woman and the man reveals that there is a show of power, in which the female is the support – figuratively and literally – that the man leans on. Like the other women in the series, she does not show any signs of affection or give any attention to the man in the panel, which Lowery relates to the notion of coquetterie in which the woman's goal is to feign indifference.⁴⁷ Bailey notes that the nearby statue, depicting Cupid and the female personification of Friendship, parallels the couple's

⁴⁵ See Campbell, p. 24 where he discusses the symbol of the rose crown as the sexual union between two lovers.

⁴⁶ Bailey, p. 83.

⁴⁷ Lowery, p. 24

emotional disconnect.⁴⁸ The figure of Friendship holds her heart out of Cupid's reach; and the young letter-reading woman does the same, withholding her affections from her male suitor. She is in control of her emotions, in contrast to the man and the little Cupid who both expressively try their best to fully attain the heart of the woman.

In all four of these paintings, both the male suitors and the infant statues are unsuccessful in achieving their goals, due to the women concealing their love and the female statues hindering the actions of Cupid. The Cupids in these scenes are unable to interact or participate as main characters, but instead only act as subordinates. In this way, they are like the male suitors who are subject to the whims of the women, but still adamant to consummate their desires.⁴⁹ This dynamic between dominant females and weaker males survives as a reflection of the first patron, Madame du Barry, and the original aristocratic context of the Louveciennes pleasure pavilion. Yet when Fragonard repurposed the paintings, his new patron (and changing ideas about love and femininity) dictated a new emphasis and message that altered the perception of the men in the entire series.

⁴⁸ Bailey, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Kirby, p. 70-4.

Reverie and Love Triumphant

After Madame du Barry's rejection of the original series, Fragonard kept the four paintings in his workshop until 1790 when he visited his cousin, Alexandre Maubert in Grasse on the French Riviera.⁵⁰ In decorating the Central Salon of his cousin's villa, Fragonard installed *The Meeting* and *The Pursuit* on the east wall (Figure 10) and *Love Letters* and *The Lover Crowned* on the west wall (Figure 11).⁵¹ In addition, he created two new large canvases for the north and south walls (Figures 12 and 13). These two paintings, *Reverie* (Figure 14) and *Love Triumphant* (Figure 15), are almost the same dimensions as the original series, but their palette is more autumnal and their brushwork is looser and sketchier in execution.⁵²

Of these two paintings, *Reverie* is the most discussed by art historians due to its focus on a lone girl, instead of a frolicking couple. The girl lounges next to a column which is topped by a sculpture of a winged infant on a sundial. The girl's eyes glance up toward the sky but do not appear to look at anything in particular. Above her, the infant points outwards and casts a shadow to signal the time of noon.⁵³ This singular woman has been characterized by most art historians as "abandoned" by her lover.⁵⁴ More recently, scholars such as Molotiu and Bailey have argued for an explicitly erotic interpretation, comparing the scene to Pierre-Antoine Baudouin's 1778 pornographic engraving *Le Midi* (Figure 16), which shows a woman in a

⁵⁰ Bailey, p. 102.

⁵¹ The images of the walls of Maubert's Central Salon show 19th century reproductions that were made before the sale of the works in 1898 to J.P. Morgan. When one visits Grasse today, these paintings hang in the same locations as the Fragonard originals. See Bailey, pp. 119-20 for information about the sale.

⁵² See Bailey, pp. 31-2.

⁵³ Bailey, p. 32 and Molotiu, "Allegories in the Late Works of Jean-Honoré Fragonard," p. 227.

⁵⁴ See Jean Montague Massengale, *Jean-Honoré Fragonard: Life and Work: Complete Catalogue of Oil Paintings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993), p. 126; Anne L. Schroder, "Fragonard's Later Career: The *Contes et Nouvelles* and the Progress of Love Revisited" *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 93, No. 2 (June 2011), p. 169-70; Cuzin, p. 233; and Dupuy-Vachey, p. 239. *Reverie* has been known as *Forsaken* or *Abandoned* in earlier writings on the painting.

similar pose.⁵⁵ Relating this woman to the one displayed in *Reverie* (Figure 17), they reason that the hour of noontime was known in France to be the “hour of the shepherds,” defined by Bailey as the time of day “when amorous swains take their pleasure with willing shepherdesses.”⁵⁶ The poses as well are noted as being much the same, with both women reclining in a garden with their hands in their laps, suggesting a more pornographic meaning to the scene.⁵⁷ Bailey notes, however, that unlike the woman in the Baudouin print, the Fragonard girl does not have a book, which limits “the pornographic potential” of the image.⁵⁸ Mary Sheriff describes that in 18th century pornography of the time, engravings such as *Le Midi* depicted young women in boudoirs and gardens reading erotic novels that had caused them to “succumb to [their erotic] imaginings.”⁵⁹ Without a book to signify that the young girl has been fantasizing about sex, Molotiu concedes that *Reverie* instead shows the girl’s awakened sexual desire without being “pinned down by any obvious iconographic signs.”⁶⁰ This interpretation gives a different and more consistent explanation of the figure, one that relates to some of the other erotic undertones in the series (such as the overdoors *Love the Avenger* and *Love the Sentinel*, to be discussed in Section IV).

In Molotiu’s explorations of *Reverie*’s iconography, he states that above the girl sits a statue of a “Cupid who points out.”⁶¹ However, as Jean Montague Massengale claims, if one looks closely at the infant (Figure 18), one sees not the feathery wings of Cupid but butterfly

⁵⁵ Bailey, p. 32-3 and Molotiu, “Allegories of Love in the Late Work of Jean-Honoré Fragonard,” p. 230.

⁵⁶ Bailey, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Bailey, p. 33.

⁵⁸ Molotiu, “Allegories of Love in the Late Work of Jean-Honoré Fragonard,” p. 231. For a discussion of iconography of women reading erotica, see Mary Sheriff, *Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 100-39, in which Sheriff describes the 18th century prints of women masturbating while reading erotic novels.

⁵⁹ Mary Sheriff, *Inspired Artists and Deviant Women*, p. 104.

⁶⁰ Molotiu, “Allegories of Love in the Late Work of Jean-Honoré Fragonard,” p. 231.

⁶¹ Molotiu, “Allegories of Love in the Late Work of Jean-Honoré Fragonard,” p. 231.

wings typical of another mythological character: Psyche.⁶² Indeed these same wings are found in Antonio Canova's 1789-94 painting *Cupid and Psyche* (Figure 19). Given Fragonard's use of Cupid figures in some of the original paintings, it is not surprising that the initial assumption would be that the statue in *Reverie* was a Cupid as well. But Fragonard is not referencing Cupid, but his lover, Psyche, a character from mythology who overtime came to symbolize the soul.⁶³

Thus, instead of viewing this work as simply about erotic pleasure, one can view the young woman and the infant in relation to the tale of Psyche. As described in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, Psyche is abandoned by her lover, Cupid, when she discovers his identity. To reunite with her lover, Psyche must pass a series of tests assisted by the gods, which results in her eventual marriage to the god of love.⁶⁴ Indeed, the theme of Psyche Abandoned was a popular one in the late 18th and early 19th centuries,⁶⁵ as evidenced by depictions of *Psyche Abandoned* such as Augustin Pajou's famous sculpture from the 1785 Salon (Figure 20) and Pietro Tenerani's sculpture from 1816-17 (Figure 21).⁶⁶ A comparison between Pajou's Psyche and Fragonard's girl reveals similarities such as their tousled hair, distraught expressions, and sorrowful frowns. Both young women are unkempt and outward-looking, suggesting that they are alone and yearning for their lovers to return. Looking at the Tenerani *Psyche*, one can see

⁶² Massengale, p. 126.

⁶³ Massengale, p. 44.

⁶⁴ See Sonia Cavicchioli, *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche*, Trans. Susan Scott (New York : George Braziller, 2002), pp. 9-38, in which recounts the tale of Cupid and Psyche, their love affair, the obstacles Psyche faced in order to reunite with her lover Cupid, and the final marriage of Cupid and Psyche and the bestowal of immortality on her.

⁶⁵ Fragonard may have been influenced by the trend in the late 18th century to create an image like Psyche. See Schroder, p. 170, in which the author discusses some of Fragonard's later work as reminiscent of other works of solemn women alone such as *Motionless upon a Rock, Olimpia Stares at the Sea*.

⁶⁶ Massengale, p. 44-5.

that this statue's butterfly wings are similar to those of Fragonard's infant. Thus, both the girl and the infant reference the story of Psyche.

In addition to these Neoclassical sculptures, Jean-Baptiste Greuze's 1786 painting of *Psyche* (Figure 22) shares similarities to *Reverie*'s female figure. In Greuze's *Psyche*, the girl's eyes appear to roll back into her head as she looks up and off into the distance just like Fragonard's girl. Her lips too are slightly open and form a frown. According to a 1857 sales catalog description of the Greuze painting, the girl is a "victim... [who] sadly inclines her head... with all the signs of silent sorrow."⁶⁷ Like the Greuze *Psyche*, the young girl in *Reverie* seems to long for something that she has lost. She appears to be hopelessly awaiting her lover, just as Psyche yearned to reunite with her beloved Cupid after he abandoned her. Yet, the butterfly-winged infant above the girl gives her some hope, for the infant symbolically represents Psyche's divine soul, pointing across the room toward an image of victorious love.

Directly across from *Reverie*, above a fireplace, Fragonard positioned another large allegorical painting, *Love Triumphant* (Figure 15), which depicts Cupid, who holds torches and ascends over a garden, similar to the one in *Reverie* but set on fire and obscured by billowing smoke.⁶⁸ Flanking him are two other winged figures, one holding a crown of roses and the other a tambourine. Beneath Cupid's feet, two more infants engage in a delightful, midair kiss. While Cupid victoriously floats near the top of the canvas, another figure is hidden in the flames below. Unlike the other winged infants in the series (usually identified as Cupids or putti), this figure is clearly a demon, as indicated by its darker appearance, bat wings, and pointed tail. Instead of torches, flowers, or musical instruments, this winged demon brandishes a dagger and a snake.

⁶⁷ Stephen Duffy and Jo Hedley, *The Wallace Collection's Pictures: A Complete Catalogue* (London: Unicorn Press, 2011), p. 176.

⁶⁸ Bailey, p. 31.

Most scholars have failed to comment on this strange figure, although Molotiu has argued that it should be interpreted as a representation of Envy, as seen in Fragonard's *Psyche and her Sisters* painting from 1753 (Figure 23).⁶⁹ Like the demon in *Love Triumphant*, the flying figure of Envy in *Psyche and her Sisters* is painted in brownish tones and holds snakes in her fists. However, unlike the figure of Envy, *Love Triumphant*'s demon is positioned below the other figures and looks more startled. Also, the figure is changed from an old, ugly withered Medusa to an infant reminiscent of the other winged figures in Fragonard's series.

In his analysis of the little demon, Molotiu consistently refers to the naked figure as male; yet a close inspection reveals that the figure is actually female (Figure 24).⁷⁰ Thus Fragonard has created an interesting juxtaposition of masculinity and femininity, with the fully realized male Cupid asserting his triumph, while the barely visible female demon burns in the flames below. Instead of a woman in control of the scene, which is the case in the Louveciennes paintings, *Love Triumphant* dramatically focuses attention on the male as the central figure, with the female figure lower and hidden from the viewer. The male in this painting stands out, while the female fades into the background, reversing the compositional logic of the other five paintings where the women are the most prominent figures.⁷¹ With his very deliberate choice of gender for the victorious figure and the fallen figure, Fragonard is reworking the power dynamics of the series, from the female-centric world of his original patron to the male-dominated reality of his new patron.

⁶⁹ See Molotiu, "Allegories of Love in the Late Work of Jean-Honoré Fragonard," p. 235.

⁷⁰ Molotiu, "Allegories of Love in the Late Work of Jean-Honoré Fragonard," p. 234 and Molotiu, *Fragonard's Allegories of Love*, p. 105. In the latter book, Molotiu refers to the demon as a putto, which as discussed earlier denotes a male sex.

⁷¹ Kirby, p. 71 and Robinson p. 67.

Considering *Reverie* and *Love Triumphant* together, both paintings share a similar garden setting with red poppies, peonies, and dead branches in the lower corners of the scenes. The figures are sketchily drawn with simple contour lines delineating the figures' body parts. Yet, unlike *Love Triumphant*, *Reverie* is more similar in design to the Louveciennes paintings for it depicts a scene of a lover in a garden, rather than an allegory of love. Like the other pastoral characters and settings of the original series, the girl's pose in *Reverie* is reminiscent of past pastoral paintings like Boucher's 1761 *Shepherd and Shepherdess Reposing* (Figure 25) which depicts a shepherdess leaning on her male lover who is higher in the composition. Both women look up in the same direction and have a longing stare, yet Boucher's shepherdess looks at the man and smiles, while Fragonard's girl looks at nothing and frowns. Viewing these works together, one imagines that there is a loss that Fragonard's girl feels, for she does not have a man to lean on, only a column. These images seem to parallel each other in that they depict the woman's need for a man to keep her composed. This helpless figure contrasts the imagery in *Love Letters* where the girl is shown supporting herself and her lover. She sits straight and crosses her legs as if she is in control of herself and her body. The man next to her holds her tightly and leans on her, as if she is like the pedestal capable of holding his weight. *Reverie* not only appears on the opposite end of the room from *Love Letters*, but also depicts a completely different scene, that is, a woman who has lost control of herself and has no one to help her.

Added to the original four paintings, *Reverie* and *Love Triumphant* suggest a shift in meaning that recasts the women as abandoned or fallen, while asserting a more powerful and victorious male figure in the form of Cupid. By choosing to recall imagery of Psyche, who needed men to save her from isolation, and Boucher's pastoral where the male is the physical support that the girl needs, Fragonard shows women who are reliant on men for happiness and

fulfillment. This change makes sense for both the time period and the patron, for Enlightenment thinkers, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, began to rebuke the female-dominant relationships of the monarchy, characterizing them as unnatural in comparison to the prized patriarchal relationships of the middle class.⁷² Thus, Fragonard's additions are meant to rework the series to appeal to a new bourgeoisie ideal of love. This meaning is reinforced by the remaining paintings – the overdoors – which create a framing commentary that alters the interpretation of the gender dynamics in the original series.

⁷² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau on Women, Love and Family*, ed. Christopher Kelly (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2009), pp. 72-3.

The Winged Figures Above

Between the six large canvases of his series (Figure 26), Fragonard situated four much smaller overdoor paintings of winged infants representing allegories of love: *Love Pursuing a Dove* (in between *The Pursuit* and *The Meeting*) on the east wall (Figure 27), *Love the Avenger* (in between *The Lover Crowned* and *Love Letters*) on the west wall (Figure 28), *Love the Jester* and *Love the Sentinel* (on either side of *Reverie*) on the north wall (Figure 29). Although most scholars have devoted little attention to these figures, I believe that they serve as a crucial interpretive framework for the entire series. Indeed, like the depicted sculptures that I have already discussed, these figures are meant to color our understanding of the lovers and their actions in the scenes below.

These four winged figures ostensibly represent different manifestations of love. Whether identified as Cupids or putti, Molotiu and Bailey describe each as distinctly male, which is a logical conclusion based on the definition of a putto or Cupid.⁷³ Yet the sex of these figures is far from clear and consistent. The problem arises specifically with the overdoor painting of *Love Pursuing a Dove* (Figure 30) which Molotiu has described as depicting a male infant and the same putto as the one shown in *Love the Avenger*.⁷⁴ However, upon close inspection of *Love Pursuing a Dove*, the figure is revealed to be unambiguously female (like the demon in *Love Triumphant*). With fluttering wings and fabric, she seems to chase a dove flying in front of her.

⁷³ See Molotiu, "Allegories of Love in the Late Work of Jean-Honoré Fragonard," p. 210 and Molotiu, "The Progress of Love and the Magic Garden," p. 105, and Bailey, p. 31. While Molotiu goes into detail about the symbols of some of the winged figures, Bailey does not touch on the subjects of the overdoors and instead describes how Fragonard tries to unify visually and aesthetically these overdoors with the rest of the larger panels. See Dempsey, p. 4, for a definition of putto.

⁷⁴ See Molotiu, "The Progress of Love and the Magic Garden," p. 105, in which the author states that the two overdoors are meant to show Cupid chasing a dove and then stabbing it on the other side.

In contrast, *Love the Avenger* (Figure 31) is clearly male and holds down a dove on a cloud altar with one hand, while the other wields a threatening dagger. These two works create an antithesis, similar to the theatrical masks of comedy and tragedy, with the smiling female face compared with the frowning male face. By placing these figures on opposite walls across from each other, Fragonard has created another contrast of femininity and masculinity, with narrow expressions of binary gender roles exemplified in the opposition of receptive and active behaviors. The male figure shows a violent intensity that contrasts with the relaxed abandon of the female figure.

Considering the gendered differentiation of these winged figures, one can appreciate how these subjects work with the larger scenes below to add new layers of meaning to the actions of the lovers. On either side of *Love Pursuing a Dove*, *The Meeting* and *The Pursuit* depict lovers meeting and chasing each other. Viewing these three paintings together, one notices that the overdoor depicts a female hurrying toward the dove, unlike the two panels below, in which the men are the ones who are following the women. In the two Louveciennes paintings, the gendered role of the male is the pursuer, while the female is the coquette who leads the boy on and feigns indifference. However, the overdoor suggests the inner wishes of the girls below, for like the winged infant, they want to be united with the men. Especially in the case of *The Meeting*, the young girl does not dash away, but awaits her suitor's arrival. Therefore, *Love Pursuing a Dove*, with its figure ready to accept and receive, turns the teasing women below in *The Meeting* and *The Pursuit*, who play a game that only they control, into willing and enthusiastic lovers.

On the opposite wall, *Love the Avenger* seems to contradict the idea, espoused in the paintings below, of the woman in charge. Instead, rather violently, the little figure overpowers and subdues the woman in the form of the dove, making clear that the control is really in the

hands of the man. According to Molotiu, this image is meant as an allegory of the sexual consummation only hinted at in *The Lover Crowned* and *Love Letters* below.⁷⁵ Certainly, the winged male infant's actions exhibit aggressive masculine behavior that mixes violence with sexual domination. For unlike the Cupid statues in *The Lover Crowned* and *Love Letters* (one is asleep and the other cannot reach the heart of Friendship), *Love the Avenger* aggressively takes control, using violence to assert his will.

Indeed, his stance is reminiscent of rape scenes such as Felice Ficherelli's 17th century painting, *The Rape of Lucretia* (Figure 32), which shows a helpless Lucretia, a girl from ancient Rome, being forced down on her bed as her captor, Sextus Tarquinius, threatens her with a dagger.⁷⁶ Both Lucretia and the dove in *Love the Avenger* lay helpless as the male figures attack them, anticipating the penetration of their bodies. While both Lucretia and the dove try their best to stop their captors (or in the dove's case flee) both men forcefully and violently restrain them from escaping. Additionally, the choice of Cupid stabbing a dove reverses the power dynamic in the statue of Venus and Cupid in *The Meeting* on the opposite wall. Doves are associated with Venus, the goddess of love.⁷⁷ Thus Cupid overpowers the dove (Venus) and overthrows the female control of his mother to assert his own virility and supremacy.

As with *Love Pursuing a Dove*, the overdoor of *Love the Avenger* changes the ways one can interpret the paintings below. While the men of *Love Letters* and *The Lover Crowned* appear clearly under the control of the women, the overdoor painting allows these seemingly passive men more agency. The man in *Love Letters* wraps his arms around his beloved's body,

⁷⁵ Molotiu, "The Progress of Love and the Magic Garden," p. 103.

⁷⁶ Duffy and Hedley, p. 144.

⁷⁷ Christine Kondoleon and Phoebe C. Segal, eds., *Aphrodite and the Gods of Love* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2011), pp. 191-3 and 197-8. Doves were considered symbols of Venus because of their kind nature and their tendency for lovemaking.

referencing his ownership of the girl who accepts her lover's advances with her hand tenderly hanging over his shoulder. The male suitor in *The Lover Crowned* also shows possession of the girl for he holds her hand and tightly grasps the flower garland around her body. This grasp shows the man has ownership of and control over the woman's body. While not directly looking at her lover, the girl shows an acceptance of his advances and a willingness to allow him to consummate his desires, for she is about to place the marital crown on his head.⁷⁸

This new interpretation of the male and female figures from the Louveciennes paintings relates to the changing ideals of the time, for as mentioned above, Rousseau formulated new concepts of masculinity and femininity, stressing that "woman is made especially to please man. If man must please her in turn, it arises from a less direct necessity. His merit is in his power; he pleases solely by being strong."⁷⁹ Unlike in the Louveciennes setting, where the female patron, Madame du Barry, desired images of strong females teasing their admirers, the new male patron preferred paintings that showed scenes of women who pleased or accepted the advances of their virile lovers who display their masculine capabilities. Therefore, the infants of *Love Pursuing a Dove* and *Love the Avenger* help the viewer to associate these new standards of gender with the Louveciennes paintings.

The other two overdoor paintings, *Love the Jester* (Figure 33) and *Love the Sentinel* (Figure 34), have typically been dismissed by scholars as simply examples of the artist recycling old themes. Molotiu has noted that these images were "so popular that Fragonard had painted

⁷⁸ The garland with its pink flowers may reference roses, which were references to female genitalia and breasts as well as the cult of Venus in which crowns of roses adorned the heads of participants in marriage ceremonies. See Campbell, pp. 26-30.

⁷⁹ Rousseau, p. 66.

them a total of twelve times each.”⁸⁰ Thus, these works have barely been considered in past interpretations of the *Progress of Love*. Yet, I believe these themes have been carefully selected by the artist and should be examined as part of the programmatic arrangement at Grasse.

Interestingly, the sex of these infants is at first glance ambiguous, at least in the case of *Love the Jester*. This overdoor shows a lighthearted scene in which a winged infant with a jester staff jubilantly flies above a rose garden. The infant is surrounded by doves that fly in the air while others pair off into couples on the ground. In other versions of this theme, usually titled *Love as Folly*, Fragonard was less ambiguous about the figure’s sex, explicitly asserting a gender identity, sometimes male (Figure 35) and sometimes female (Figure 36). But here, due to the figure’s pose with its left leg blocking its genitalia, the artist does not assign a clear gender.⁸¹ Thus the joyful little figure suggests that the madness of love affects both men and women equally. However, this reading does not connect the overdoor with the rest of the paintings that surround it, specifically the large painting *Reverie* whose young girl looks directly at the overdoor. The girl’s gaze creates a link between the two works that relates to the story of Cupid’s abandonment of Psyche. Thus, the joyful infant in *Love the Jester* can be understood as Cupid, while the gloomy girl in *Reverie* is the forsaken Psyche. In *The Golden Ass*, Psyche disobeys Cupid’s orders not to look upon him when he visits her at night. Her prying causes Cupid to chastise her for breaking her promise and to fly away.⁸² After Cupid flutters away, Apuleius states that Psyche “lay motionless on the ground, following him with her eyes and moaning

⁸⁰ Andrei Molotiu, “The Progress of Love and the Magic Garden,” p. 105.

⁸¹ See Anne-Sophie Hoareau-Castillo and Marie-Christine Grasse, *Jean-Honoré Fragonard: Peintre de Grasse* (Paris: Somogy, 2006), pp. 84-5, in which Janinet’s engravings of Fragonard’s *Love as Folly* depict labia, denoting these specific figures as females and Andrea Zanella, *Trois peintres grassois : Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Marguerite Gérard, Jean-Baptiste Mallet* (Grasse: Musée Fragonard, 2010), pp. 40-1, where an image of *Love as Folly* is described as male.

⁸² Cavicchioli, pp. 27-8.

bitterly,” aware that her curiosity had driven away her beloved.⁸³ Psyche’s foolishness is embodied in the young girl in *Reverie*, who looks in despair as the Cupid floats away from her showing the madness of love (represented by Cupid in the guise of *Love the Jester*) has caused her to lose her lover.

The final overdoor painting, *Love the Sentinel*, hangs above the door at the head of the staircase.⁸⁴ Since it hangs above an entrance, it serves as a kind of watchman for the lovers in the garden below. Its eyes are specifically focused on the couple in the scene of *The Meeting*. Between these lovers, a statue depicts Cupid being denied the use of his arrows by his mother Venus. In contrast, Love the Sentinel – clearly identifiable as Cupid – holds one arrow at the ready. As in *The Meeting*, the overdoor painting also includes a couple in the form of two doves. Cupid appears to be signaling to the viewer to remain quiet so that he can hit his target.⁸⁵ Further, the position of his arrow – aimed toward the curving form of the bush – adds a sexually suggestive visual pun to the scene. In this case, despite his hidden genitalia, this figure asserts his masculinity through his phallic arrow and his intimate physical relationship to the flowering shrub. Compared to the frustrated dynamics of the game of love in *The Meeting* below, the specifically male goals of sexual conquest and control are clearly asserted by the mischievous Cupid standing guard above the door. Unlike in *The Meeting* where Venus and an unexpected visitor halt Cupid’s and the man’s objectives, the Cupid in *Love the Sentinel* is alone and uninhibited and thus capable of dictating his will on the other figures (the doves) in the scene.

Like *Love the Avenger*, the infant in *Love the Sentinel* blatantly displays his male sex and supremacy through his weapon. Yet despite this similarity, *Love the Sentinel*’s expression is

⁸³ Cavicchioli, p. 28.

⁸⁴ Bailey, p. 113.

⁸⁵ Zanella, p. 41.

more playful than *Love the Avenger*'s forceful exhibition of power. The placement of these images diagonally across from each other creates a duality of masculinity: the macho and passionate suitor of *Love the Avenger* against the mischievous prankster of *Love the Sentinel*, displaying a multifaceted visualization of male lovers. This duality of masculinity is also relevant to the larger paintings of the east and west walls. Like *Love the Sentinel*, the male figures in the panels of *The Pursuit* and *The Meeting* on the east wall show the youthful spirit of a boy: either surprising a group of girls or climbing over a garden wall to meet a sweetheart. In contrast, *Love Letters* and *The Lover Crowned* on the west wall like (*Love the Avenger*) depict the maturity of men who have fulfilled their sexual wishes.

As with my earlier interpretations of *Reverie* and *Love Triumphant*, the overdoor paintings reframe the Louveciennes paintings in light of changes in the politics and culture of France. By 1790, France had undergone a political revolution that transformed the ideology of male and female relationships. Gone was the aristocratic concept of love as a game, replaced by Enlightenment ideas of a more “natural” sexual dichotomy where women became subservient to men. This change in gender dynamics is consistent with placating the male patronage of his cousin Alexandre Maubert who would not want *ancien régime* imagery in his house. Instead, he would have preferred paintings that displayed sentimental scenes of romantic love.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Bailey, pp. 23-4.

Conclusion: Enlightened Love and Male Patronage

In creating the *Progress of Love*, Fragonard had to re-conceptualize the original Louveciennes paintings created for Madame du Barry and expand the series to satisfy the requirements of a new patron Alexandre Maubert. The artist also had to reframe the scenes of aristocratic lovers in order to meet the ideas of middle class society. As explored above, Fragonard created six new paintings when combined with the Louveciennes paintings, communicates a new bourgeoisie sensibility that was espoused during the Enlightenment by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Dennis Diderot. Such philosophical and political notions are appropriate for a male patron who was a middle class perfumer with a family to support.⁸⁷ Unlike Madame du Barry, Maubert would not approve of a series that championed coquettish females and emasculated males. Maubert was apparently a staunch republican who was dedicated to the French Revolution's cause. According to Bailey, while at the Villa Maubert, Alexandre's father, Honoré Maubert, commissioned Fragonard and his son Alexandre-Évariste to paint frescoes of "revolutionary symbols and figures in grisaille" on the staircase and in the hall of the two-story house.⁸⁸ Thus the Mauberts were aligned with the principles of the Revolution, rather than those of the monarchy.

Along with the Mauberts, Fragonard's family members supported the revolutionary cause. Cuzin writes that a few months before their departure to Grasse, Fragonard's wife, Marie-Anne Fragonard and sister-in-law, Marguerite Gerard, were members of a delegation of artists'

⁸⁷ Bailey, pp. 22, 31, 105-7 and Hoareau-Castillo and Grasse pp. 18-23. While these texts do not give information on how many children Maubert had, they highlight Alexandre Maubert's 1817 will which left his house to four of his heirs, two of which were his granddaughters.

⁸⁸ Bailey, p. 23-4.

wives who gave their jewelry to the new French government to pay off the national debt.⁸⁹ Even before the Revolution, Fragonard seems to have disdained the French aristocracy. Bailey states that the artist failed to finish all of “his decorative commissions for the Crown and fell out with nearly all his most prominent private patrons” after Madame du Barry’s rejection of the *Progress of Love*.⁹⁰ Therefore, both the patron and the artist were dedicated to the cause of the Revolutionary regime that overthrew the monarchy.⁹¹ By 1791, when Fragonard completed the new installation of the *Progress of Love*, the French monarchy’s reputation and power had waned. Indeed, in 1775 after Louis XV’s death, Madame du Barry was forced out of her Louveciennes pleasure pavilion and exiled from the French court.⁹² As a result, the former royal mistress had lost her power and influence in the French government well before the French Revolution swept the nation.

The Revolution opened up a new discourse about gender roles and relationships. The treatises of Enlightenment thinkers became the basis for new models of male-dominated marriages and middle class romantic love.⁹³ Such thinkers as Rousseau and Diderot stressed new standards of love, family, and gender roles in reaction to what they considered the immoral lifestyle of the French monarchy. They deemed the past aristocratic love affairs counter to true

⁸⁹ Cuzin, p. 233.

⁹⁰ Bailey, p. 102.

⁹¹ Multiple art historians have assessed Fragonard’s career to have ended after this series, usually mentioning that he and his family left Grasse to weather the harshest years of the Revolution in Paris. However, this does not seem to be the case since Jacques-Louis David, a staunch Republican artist, gave Fragonard a post at the Louvre in 1792. His son, Alexandre-Évariste, was also a pupil at David’s studio, which suggests that the two artists must have been on friendly terms for David to both help Fragonard earn an important curatorial job and educate his son. For more information on this topic see Bailey, p.102, Cuzin, p. 236-42, and Dupuy-Vachey, pp. 244-5.

⁹² Oliver Bernier, *Louis the Beloved: The Life of Louis XV* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984), pp. 246-9.

⁹³ Carol Duncan, “Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in French Art,” *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 55 No. 4 (Dec. 1973), p. 577.

love and derided how the men were controlled by calculating women who were only interested in the physical aspects of love.⁹⁴ These qualities of aristocratic love were considered libertine, unnatural, and incapable of providing a moral basis for the continuation of society.⁹⁵ Rousseau denounced these female-controlled relationships, for he believed men and women should “each cooperate equally in the common object, but not in the same manner.”⁹⁶ In his 1762 novel *Emile*, he argued that there is a natural inequality between men and women because men only need women because of their desires, whereas women are more dependent on men “because of their desires, *and* their needs.”⁹⁷ This assumption about the interdependence of the sexes changes a woman’s position in the relationship from a dominant lover to a submissive and needy companion.

In forming Enlightenment standards for love and relationships, Rousseau and Diderot both condemned the gallant and libertine images of the monarchy which they described as games of love that were morally wrong and too feminine.⁹⁸ Paintings similar to those of the original Louveciennes series were derided by Diderot as “devilishly feeble work” and “pitiful things” unworthy of Fragonard’s talents.⁹⁹ Lowery argues that the 18th century thinkers would also have

⁹⁴ Lowery, p. 21-6.

⁹⁵ Duncan, pp. 574-7.

⁹⁶ Rousseau, p. 66.

⁹⁷ Rousseau, p. 73.

⁹⁸ Lowery, p. 62. Lowery in her dissertation states that Rousseau and Diderot were known to disparage the rococo (which for them meant feminine and aristocratic love scenes) paintings as immoral and were meant for vapid collectors rather than enlightened men. Diderot compared artists based on the moral character of their works in his reviews of the Salon exhibitions, noting not only technique but the quality of the subject matter on the minds of the viewers. Lowery writes that Diderot usually pitted the rococo and frivolous paintings of Francois Boucher and Antoine Baudouin against the dignified and sentimental paintings of Jean-Baptiste Greuze.

⁹⁹ Dennis Diderot, *Diderot on Art, Volume Two: Salon of 1767*, trans. John Goodman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 256. Diderot derided Fragonard’s paintings shown at the Salon of 1767 as mediocre compared with his earlier history painting of *Coresus and Callirhoë* which Diderot felt invoked as a great achievement for French art.

despised how the love depicted in the paintings was “predetermined by the players in the game and devoid of love’s spontaneous nature.”¹⁰⁰ The prearranged coupling of the figures in the *Progress of Love* went against the belief of the essential impulsiveness of true love. Such images could not fit into the Revolutionary context of the Villa Maubert for they represented the past ideals of love in which women were in control of men and staged love as an endless game rather than as passionate and romantic.

In order to remove these connotations of frivolous aristocratic love, Fragonard was required to subvert the meanings of the original paintings. To do this, he supplemented the series with paintings of *Reverie* and *Love Triumphant* and the four overdoor winged figures, especially *Love Pursuing a Dove* and *Love the Avenger*. With these additions, Fragonard allowed a new interpretation of the Louveciennes scenes that positioned the male lovers as less emasculated and placed the women as more dependent on the men in the paintings.

In *Love Pursuing a Dove*, Fragonard presents the female winged figure as a willing lover instead of a coquette like the women below her. This winged figure changes the meaning of the paintings below by reversing the power between the women and men, for the winged girl – like the ideal Rousseauian woman – “is made to please and be subjugated, she must make herself agreeable to man instead of provoking him.”¹⁰¹ This winged infant, instead of inciting the dove to chase her, flies towards it as if she is an enthusiastic lover. With this figure, the women of *The Pursuit* and *The Meeting* are recast as wholehearted lovers who want to be captured by the men, rather than flirtatious coquettes who feign indifference towards their suitors. With *Love the Avenger* flying above the west wall, the male figures below can be perceived as taking charge of

¹⁰⁰ Lowery, p. 40-2.

¹⁰¹ Rousseau, p. 66.

the relationships. *Love the Sentinel*, like *Love the Avenger*, shows off a more active male figure who wields his arrow to assert his sexual prowess and masculinity, rather than waiting for the female figure to initiate the action.¹⁰²

While the small overdoor infants – their actions, poses, and sex – transform the interpretation of the scenes below, it is the two large paintings of *Reverie* and *Love Triumphant* that ensure we don't miss the point. The painting of *Reverie* displays a woman who is not powerful or independent like the girls on the east and west walls; instead, she is a vulnerable girl who, like Psyche and Rousseau's ideal woman, is lost without a man.¹⁰³ The girl does not hide her emotions like a teasing royal, but displays them for all to see. Before this time, other artists such as Greuze created similar images of despairing young girls. One comparable pastel by Greuze is titled *Madame Greuze* from the Salon of 1765 (Figure 37).¹⁰⁴ Diderot described this figure as having “lips, half-parted in a sigh of yearning... The woman's swimming eyes, looking up and outward, gaze beyond the painting into an undefined space inhabited by her own visions.”¹⁰⁵ Diderot continues to remark how such a female figure with her “voluptuous fusion of pleasure and pain” would cause “all respectable women [to] lower their eyes and blush in its vicinity” which suggests that such an image is designed just for a male audience.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² See Posner, “The Swinging Women,” p. 85.

¹⁰³ Cavicchioli, pp. 9-38 and Rousseau, p. 72. In the story of Psyche, she is constantly helped by Cupid and the other gods and mythological figures in order to be reunited with her lover. Rousseau believes in his book *Emile* that women both need and desire men which symbolizes that they cannot live without them.

¹⁰⁴ I have searched for the exact image that Diderot discusses, but was unable to find the pastel; however, there is an engraving of the painting titled *La Philosophie Endormie* which closely (though not fully) resembles the description of the work.

¹⁰⁵ Bernadette Fort, “Accessories of Desire: On Indecency in a Few Paintings by Jean-Baptiste Greuze,” *Yale French Studies* No. 94, *Libertinage and Modernity* (1988), p. 151.

¹⁰⁶ Denis Diderot, *Diderot on Art, Volume One: Salon of 1765*, trans. John Goodman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 102. This duality is also referenced by Rousseau who states that women must

Across from the young girl of *Reverie*, *Love Triumphant* depicts a powerful male in the form of Cupid rising above all of the other figures in the canvas, including a weaker female demon who fades into the shadows. The sketchy, almost nonexistent quality of the demon makes it appear as if the figure is disappearing into the darkness, as if a woman's role in love is diminished and placed lower than the man's which is emphatically stressed to show that the man holds the power in the relationship. In this painting, it is the male, not the female, who brings the light into the world, while the surrounding winged figures revel in Cupid's triumph. In addition to his triumphant pose and glowing torches, Cupid is the only figure in the whole series that actually looks directly at the viewer (Figure 38). His gaze shows a hospitable smile as if to welcome the viewer to the room's garden setting.¹⁰⁷

In 1867, Léon Lagrange described the Cupid in *Love Triumphant* as "Love-Hymen."¹⁰⁸ Hymen was the god of marriage in ancient mythology who is commonly depicted wielding a bridal torch and holding a garland of flowers. This god was known to the ancient Greeks as the god of wedding ceremonies who would lead the singing and dancing.¹⁰⁹ Carol Duncan describes that in the late 18th and early 19th centuries Hymen was a popular character in French painting.¹¹⁰ Indeed, in Joseph-Marie Vien's replacement series for Madame du Barry's pavilion at

be vulnerable and beautiful. See Rousseau, pp. 73-4. What is interesting about Diderot's description of Madame Greuze is that in the end he relates the figure of Madame Greuze to the Marie de' Medici by Rubens in which Marie showed "both her pleasure at having brought a son into the world and the traces of her preceding pain" which gives the connotation of pleasure and pain of childbirth, something that he and Rousseau wished to promote, women as mothers.

¹⁰⁷ See Massengale, p. 45, in which the author discusses the Cupid figure in relation to Raphael's *The Transfiguration of Christ* and *Disputa* where Jesus's poses and the poses of Cupid both appear to be similar which Massengale equates with the power of love triumphing and a more religious connotation of love being transfigured into a sacred love espoused by Rousseau.

¹⁰⁸ Lagrange, p. 190.

¹⁰⁹ Jennifer R. March, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (Havertown: Oxbow Books, 2014), p. 255 and Lagrange, p. 190.

¹¹⁰ Duncan, p. 579.

Louveciennes, the final painting is entitled *The Temple of Hymen* (Figure 39) and depicts a couple getting married while Hymen (in the guise of a winged infant wielding a torch) leads the girl to her lover at the marriage altar. Due to the rejection of Fragonard's original series and the installation of Vien's Neoclassical works at Louveciennes, Fragonard may have added the dynamic *Love Triumphant* painting specifically to outdo Vien's stylistically rigid work.

Fragonard had also used Hymen in his 1775-80 series of *The Sacrifice of the Rose* in which the god, in his adolescent form, lights a young girl's rose on fire (Figure 40). This series illustrates the allegorical loss of a girl's virginity to the god Hymen, who lights her rose on fire with his phallic torch. This imagery is meant to symbolize the consummation of matrimony, in which the virginal girl offers herself willingly to the god of marriage.¹¹¹ While the setting of *The Sacrifice of the Rose* is at night during the full moon compared to the noontime of *Reverie*, the imagery of the ecstatic, yearning girl and the torch-wielding Hymen is still present in the series of the *Progress of Love*.¹¹² In light of *The Sacrifice of the Rose* representation, *Love Triumphant* and *Reverie* – opposite each other in the room – figuratively play out the same scene: the girl offers her “rose” to Hymen in a dream, in which the light from his torches (literally coming from the fireplace below and the sunlight through the flanking windows) shines on the girl's white dress, allowing her to experience the ecstasy of marital bliss. This interpretation would suit a middle class male patron, for the imagery shows a girl who gives herself fully to the man in marriage. Thus the winged boy and young girl are changed from symbols of erotic love into

¹¹¹ See Campbell, pp. 19-20 & 24 and Molotiu, “Allegories of Love in the Late Work of Fragonard,” pp. 136-143. The scenes of the sacrifice are meant to be symbols of the loss of virginity with the young girl in each of the scenes offering her rose to Hymen who lights it on fire with his torch. The rose is meant to symbolize both female genitalia and virginity. Also, *The Sacrifice of the Rose* from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts depicts a similar column to the one in *Reverie* although the girl in *Sacrifice* does not lean against it.

¹¹² Campbell, p. 19.

images of conjugal harmony (where the man helps the woman fulfill her desires and needs).¹¹³ Such an explanation is appropriate for the changing ideals of Revolutionary France. By the completion of these paintings, marriage had triumphed over the immoral and stagnant love games of the past nobility.¹¹⁴

Fragonard's *Progress of Love* creates a world in which couples and allegorical figures frolic freely in a luxurious garden of love. Instead of interpreting the four original paintings in relation to Madame du Barry, they must be seen as part of an ensemble made for a later time, place, and patron. The original series – with its strong, controlling women and the weak, submissive men – did not meet the current ideals at the time of the series' completion. Thus, Fragonard reframed and subverted the original paintings in order to counter the focus on frivolous aristocratic love. With his additions of *Reverie* and *Love Triumphant* and the four overdoor winged figures, the artist created a thoroughly integrated programmatic ensemble that offered both a critique of and an alternative to the tainted love promoted by Madame du Barry and her kind. By examining these works in their totality, as a complete series designed for Maubert's villa, we are now able to appreciate the artist's intentions. And in the context of the philosophical and political climate of Revolutionary France, we can better assess the true aim of the *Progress of Love*.

¹¹³ Rousseau, p. 73.

¹¹⁴ Duncan, p. 579-82. During this time period in France, Duncan describes how families and marriages were looked forward to unlike previous generations and that families started to reflect "the new concept of conjugal love and familial harmony," see Duncan, p. 579.

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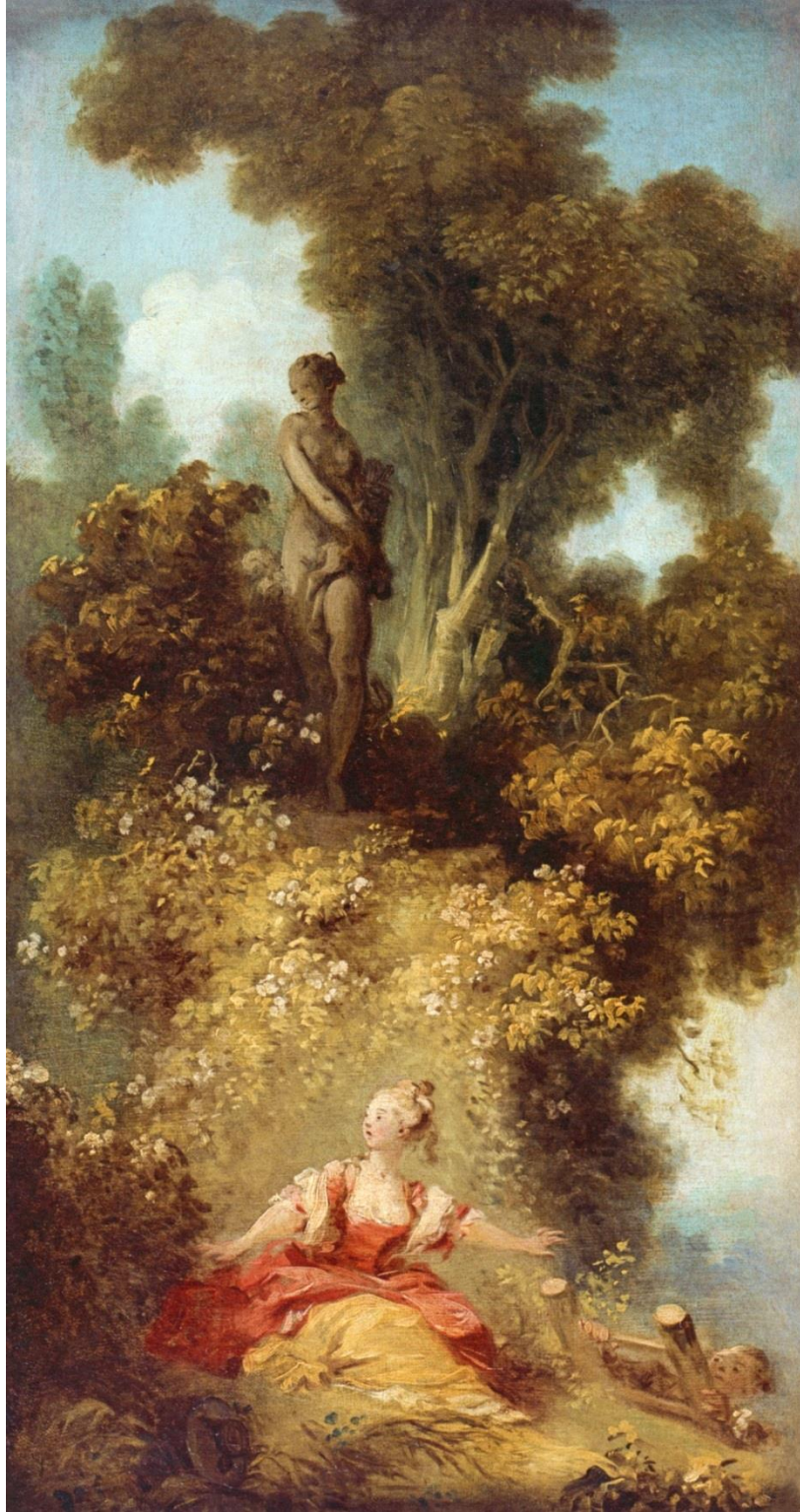


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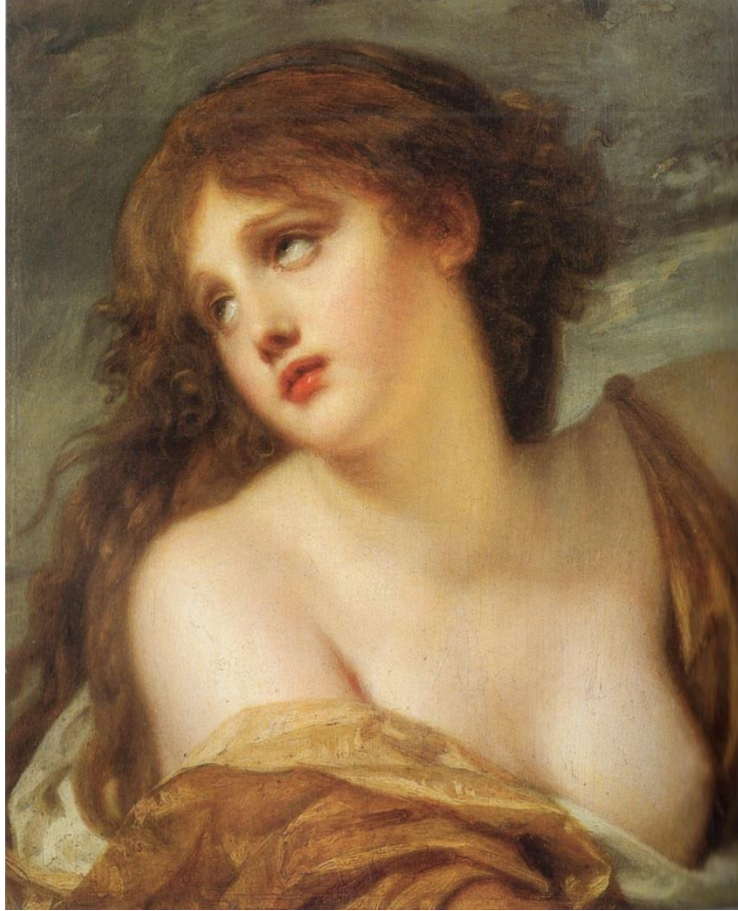


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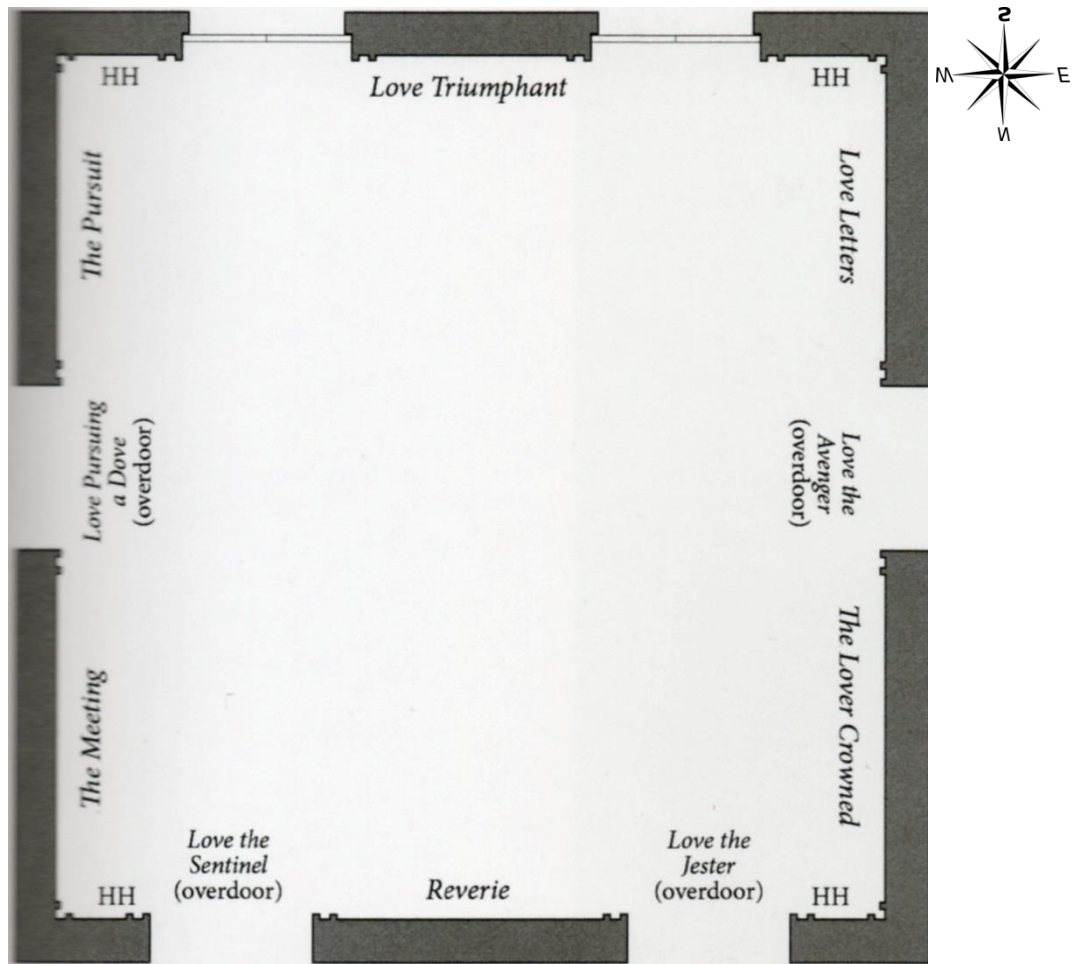


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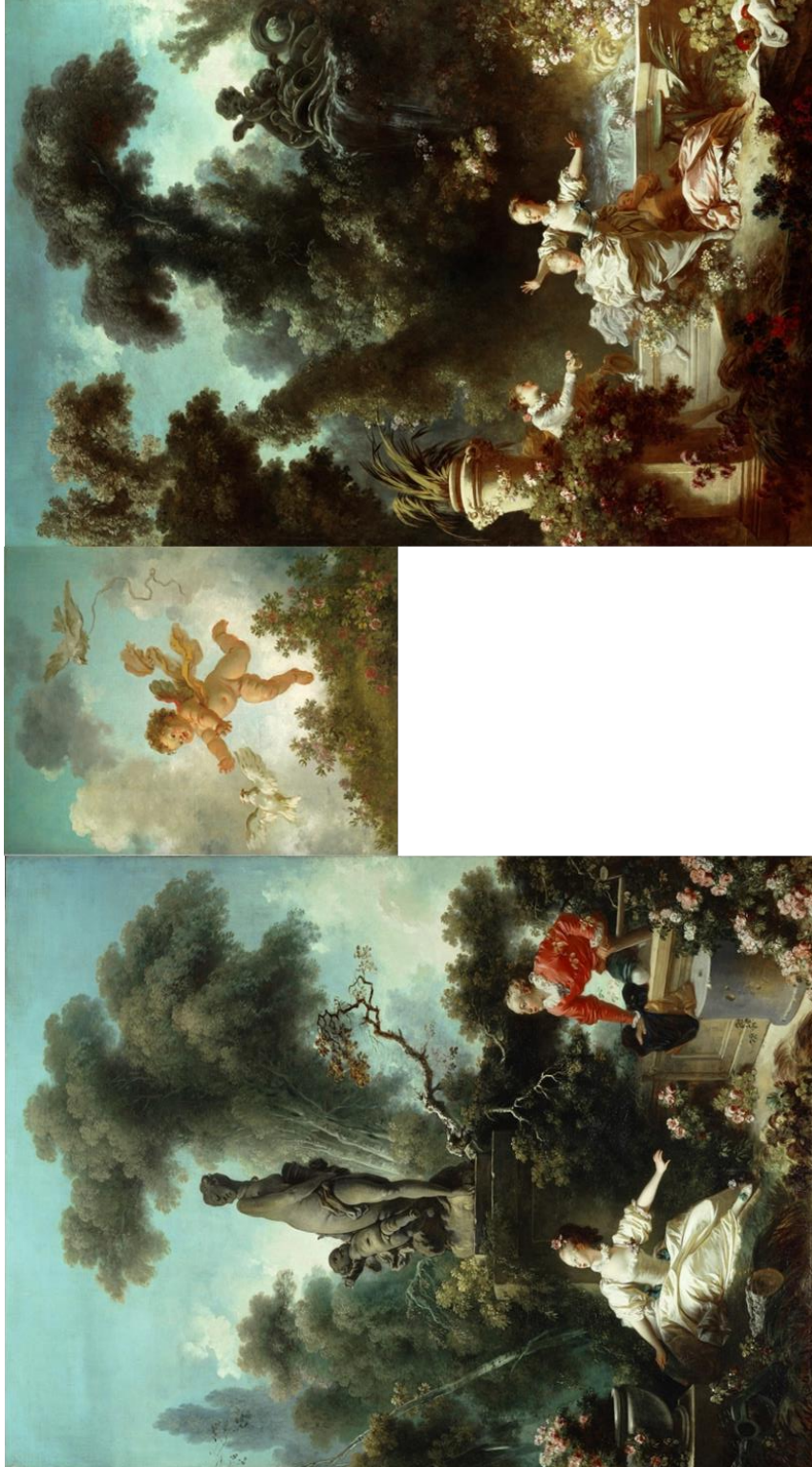


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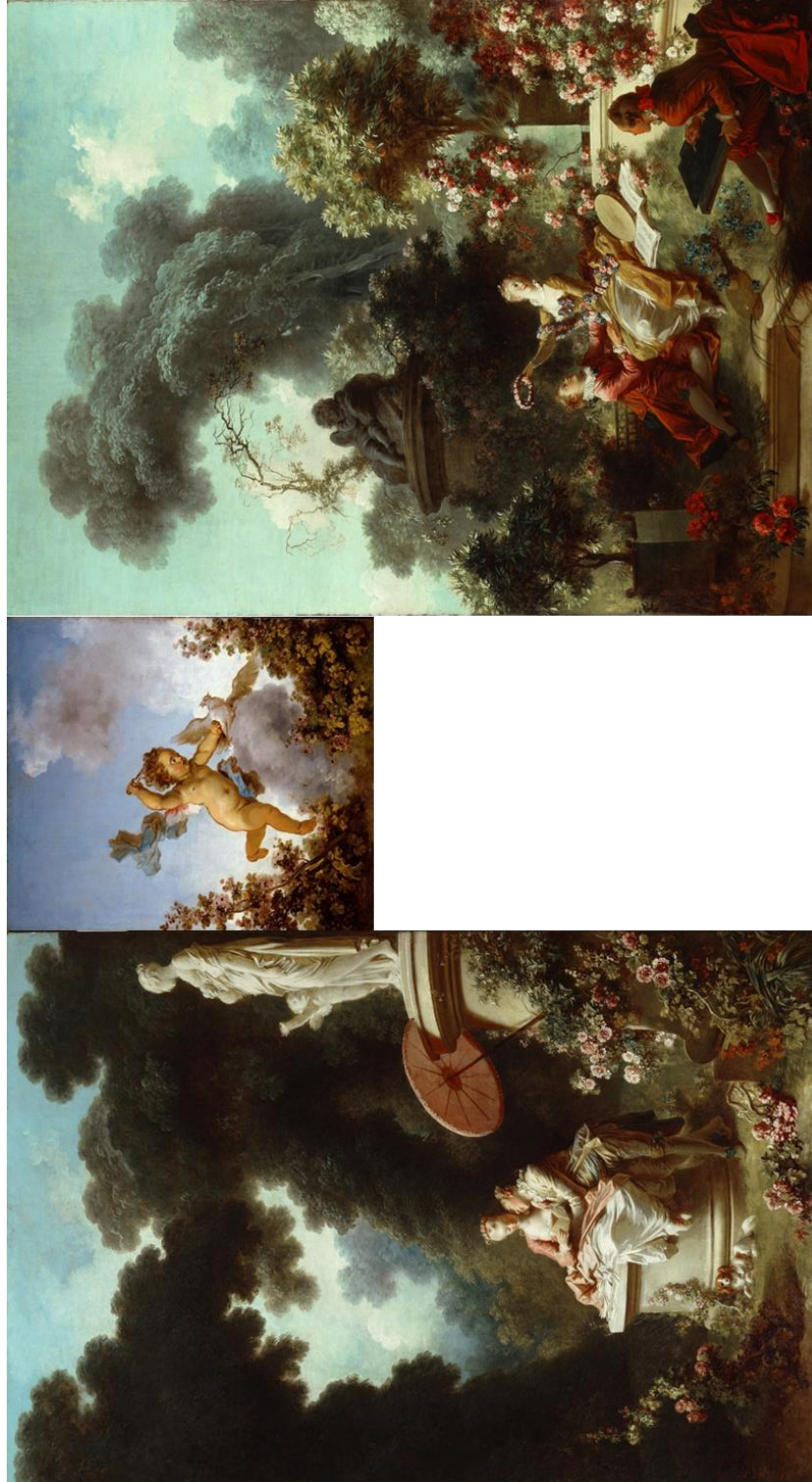


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