

Reynolds

DELPHI  CLASSICS

Masters of Art

Joshua Reynolds

(1723-1792)



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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joshua Reynolds". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, decorative initial 'J'.

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Version 1

Masters of Art Series

Joshua Reynolds



By Delphi Classics, 2023

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Masters of Art - Joshua Reynolds

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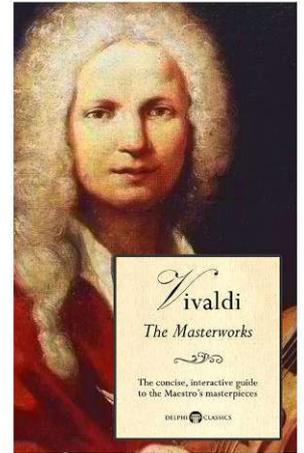
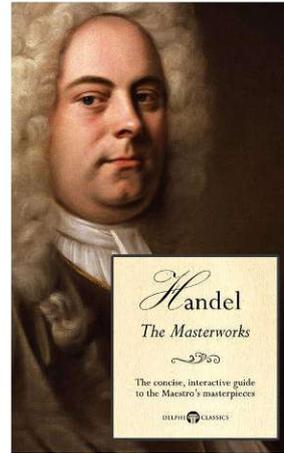
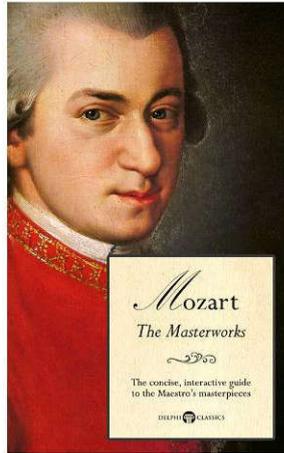
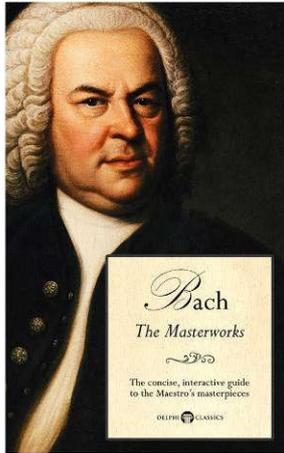
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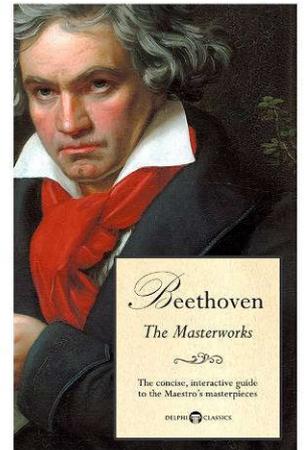
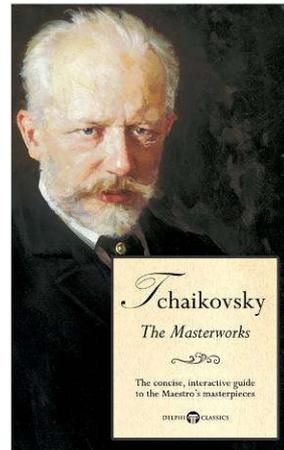
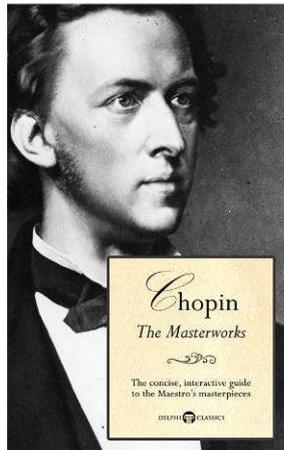
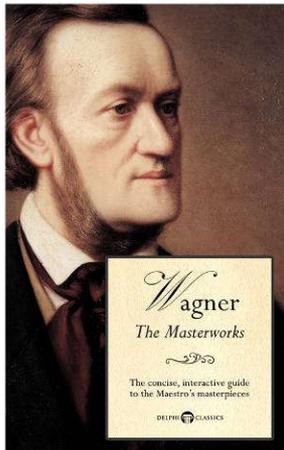
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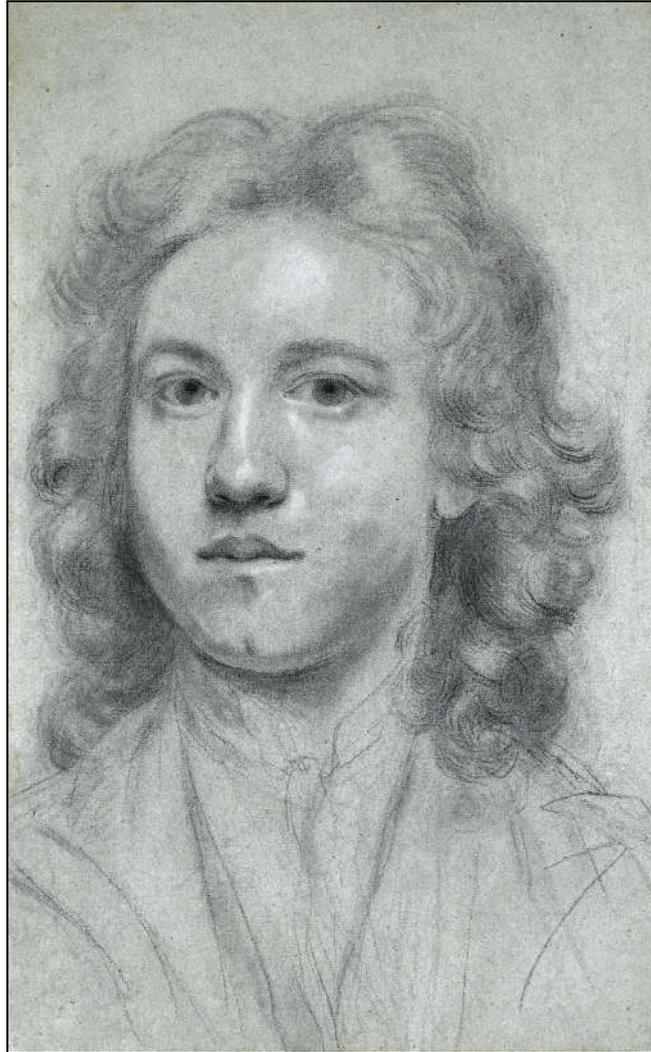


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The Highlights



Plympton, a suburb of the city of Plymouth, Devon — Joshua Reynolds was born in Plympton on 16 July 1723.



Reynolds' self portrait, aged 17, 1740

The Highlights



In this section, a sample of Reynolds' most celebrated works is provided, with concise introductions, special 'detail' reproductions and additional biographical images.

Self Portrait (1748)



Sir Joshua Reynolds, the celebrated portrait painter and aesthete that dominated English artistic life in the middle and late eighteenth century, was born in Plympton, Devon, on 16 July 1723, the third son of the Reverend Samuel Reynolds, master of the local Free Grammar School. The family held a place on the fringe of the lesser gentry, where all the men entered the Church. His father was a good-natured schoolmaster, whose enquiring mind was easily distracted by new interests, lacking a steady application to a single pursuit. The Reynolds household was scholarly, pious and always short of funds. From an early age young Joshua benefited from the many books scattered around his home, inspiring his passion for the arts and developing an elevated idea of the possible status of a painter. The narrow means of his upbringing had a lasting impact on the painter, who became miserly to a fault. His sister and later his niece always found it difficult to extract the necessary housekeeping money from him and his professional assistants were treated in an almost measly fashion.

Although his father, who had been a Fellow of Balliol, could not afford to send Reynolds to university, he taught him a certain amount of Latin. Always, he was keen to improve his knowledge by reading and by the conversation of erudite friends, most notably Dr. Johnson. Through hard work and constant reading of the best writers of the day, he taught himself to write with distinction. Indeed, in the latter stages of his career, Reynolds prized his reputation as a writer at least as highly as he did that as a painter.

Displaying an interest in becoming an artist from an early age, Reynolds was apprenticed to the local portrait painter Thomas Hudson (1701-1779), who was an avid collector of old-master drawings and of engravings. Reynolds failed to learn from Hudson the skill of drawing from the model, which he would regret for the whole career. Nevertheless, he did learn how important it was for a portrait artist to own a large collection of old master drawings, prints and paintings, from which he could regularly refer. Many of Hudson's portraits were actually partly executed on the surface by the professional drapery painter, Joseph van Aken, who also performed this work for Ramsay, Highmore, Knapp and several other prominent artists. This was a practise that Reynolds would learn to rely on, though one that his great rival Gainsborough would never agree to. By frequenting van Aken's studio, Reynolds was able to view the work of other notable artists and further develop his artistic style. Eventually, a final break between Reynolds and Hudson came in 1743, due to Reynolds' reluctance to take a portrait out to van Aken's studio one especially wet and gloomy evening.

Only a few canvases can be ascribed to Reynolds from the years before he sailed for Italy in 1749. They reveal a fond interest in the old masters, from whom he aspired to establish a new British tradition of face painting. His early portrait of the Hon. John Hamilton (c. 1746) is modelled on a Titian painting, while *Boy Reading* (1747) is evidently borrowed from one of Rembrandt's portraits of his son Titus.

The greatest portrait painter of London at the time of Reynolds' apprenticeship was William Hogarth (1697-1764). The celebrated portrait of *Captain Coram* (1740) was widely available for any aspiring painter to view in the offices of the Foundling Hospital and Reynolds' own keen interest in studying Hogarth's works is clearly

documented. In time, he would model his own ideas of the interpretation of character through Hogarth's work.

An early masterpiece of his oeuvre, numbering one of the numerous self portraits he would complete during his long career, the following plate was painted just before Reynolds left for his study trip to Italy. At one time the canvas had been vertical in format, but it was reduced at top and bottom during the nineteenth century. It is the only self portrait to present him engaged in his trade. The originality of the composition and its technical assurance had previously suggested a later dating, before the art historians Leslie and Taylor identified that the artist's mouth displayed signs of an accident he had sustained in 1749. The unabashed inclusion of the artist's tools and accessories reveal Reynolds' confidence in promoting his image as an established and independent master. It is an engaging image due to his enigmatic gesture, as he shades his eyes with his hand, looking out of the canvas directly at the viewer. We can see him full on and yet his eyes are noticeably obscured by the shade of his hand, adding to the mystique of the artist's persona. Is it the viewer that is judging the artist, or the reverse, we might ask? Truly, it is a self portrait that would have won the approval of Rembrandt for its equivocal and interactive qualities.





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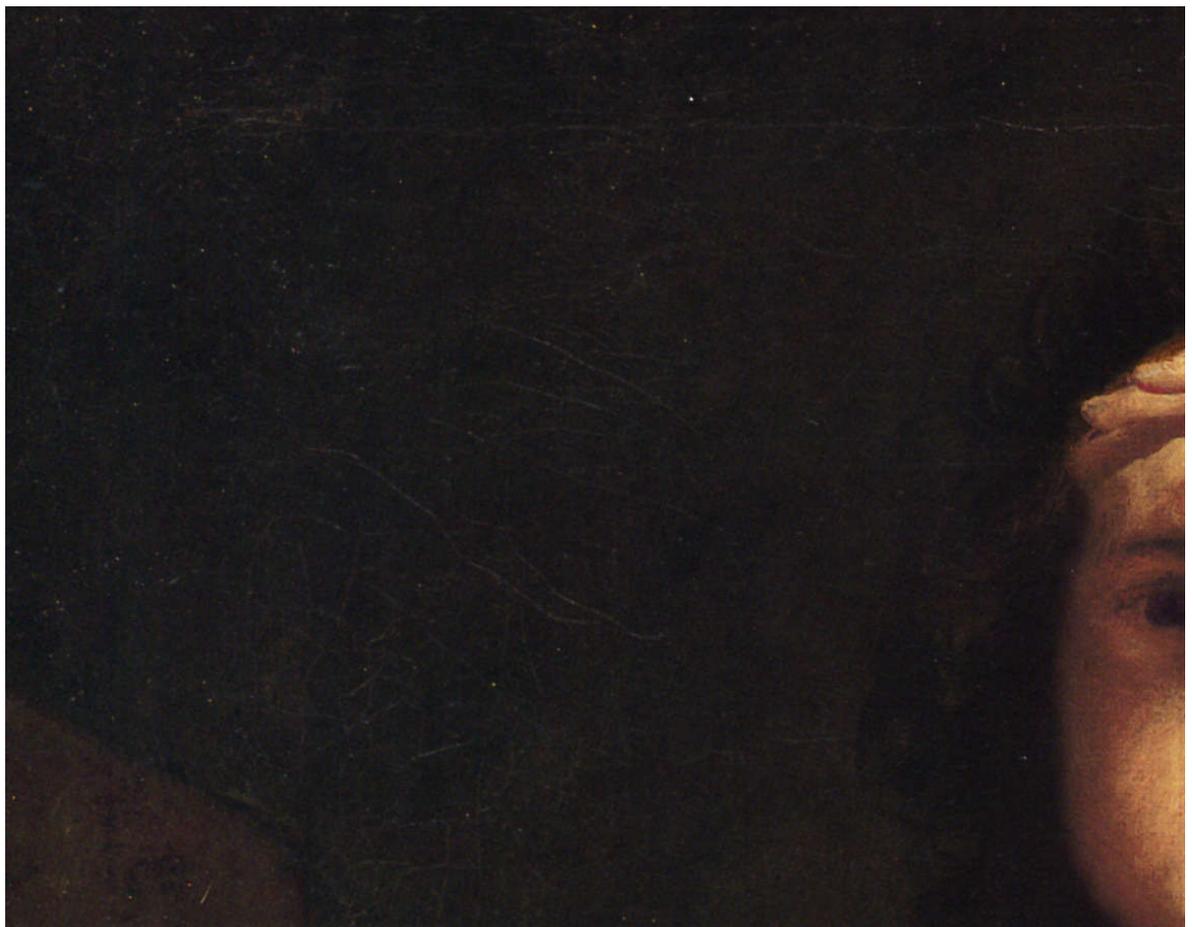
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George Frideric Handel by Thomas Hudson, Reynolds' first master, painted in 1749



William Hogarth's 'Self Portrait with his Pug, Trump', Tate Britain, London, 1745



Hogarth's 'Portrait of Captain Thomas Coram', 1740

Captain the Honourable Augustus Keppel (1753)



Following his father's death in late 1745, Reynolds shared a house in Plymouth Dock with his sisters. Four years later, he met Commodore Augustus Keppel, a Royal Navy officer that had seen action in command of various ships during the War of the Austrian Succession. Keppel invited the artist to join HMS Centurion on a voyage to the Mediterranean. It was an opportunity that Reynolds was quick to seize. Lord Edgcumbe, who had known Reynolds as a boy and introduced him to Keppel, suggested he should study with Pompeo Batoni, the leading painter in Rome, but Reynolds swiftly replied that he had nothing to learn from him. He had developed an early belief that the art of portraiture, then deemed by English patrons as only slightly above the level of dressmaking, could be elevated to a greater status. Reynolds dreamed of producing portraits that were treated as a branch of historical painting, imbuing an essence of originality, while receiving lucrative commissions from the English gentry. Therefore, the aspiring portraitist needed to broaden his horizons and go to Italy, where he could study the old masters directly to see what he could observe and synthesise in his own artworks.

Reynolds travelled with Keppel as far as Minorca, where he painted the first of his six portraits of the Commodore, along with others of the British garrison officers stationed there. Keppel concluded an agreement with the Dey of Algiers which protected British commerce. After negotiating treaties at Tripoli and Tunis, Keppel returned to England in July 1751. From Minorca Reynolds travelled to Livorno in Italy and then on to Rome, where he would spend two years, studying the masterpieces of the Renaissance and Baroque eras, acquiring a taste for the "Grand Style". Life in Rome was not without its hardships. He suffered a severe cold, which left him partially deaf, and, as a result, he began to carry with him the small ear trumpet, with which he is often pictured.

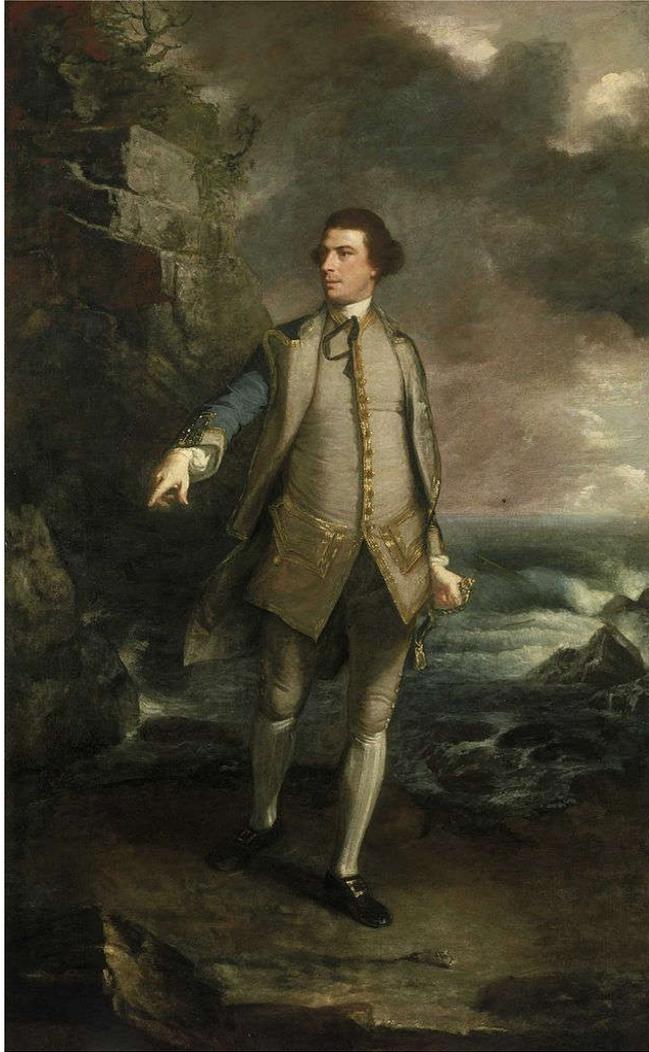
During his two years in Rome, Reynolds devoted his researches to understanding how the work of the old masters had such a powerful hold on the imaginations of connoisseurs. During the voyage home, he spent three weeks in Venice and made extensive notes, including an important analysis on the technical mastery of the Venetians in their control of light and shade. He soon discovered that the Venetians were of greater importance to him than any other school. Though his studies in Italy had been long and rigorous, he had achieved the knowledge he had sought and it would serve him for the rest of his career. In fact, he would never contemplate returning to Italy to see the many works of art he recommended, year after year at the Academy — he felt he had mastered their secret and so he kept his knowledge of them fresh by amassing his own remarkable collection of old master paintings and prints.

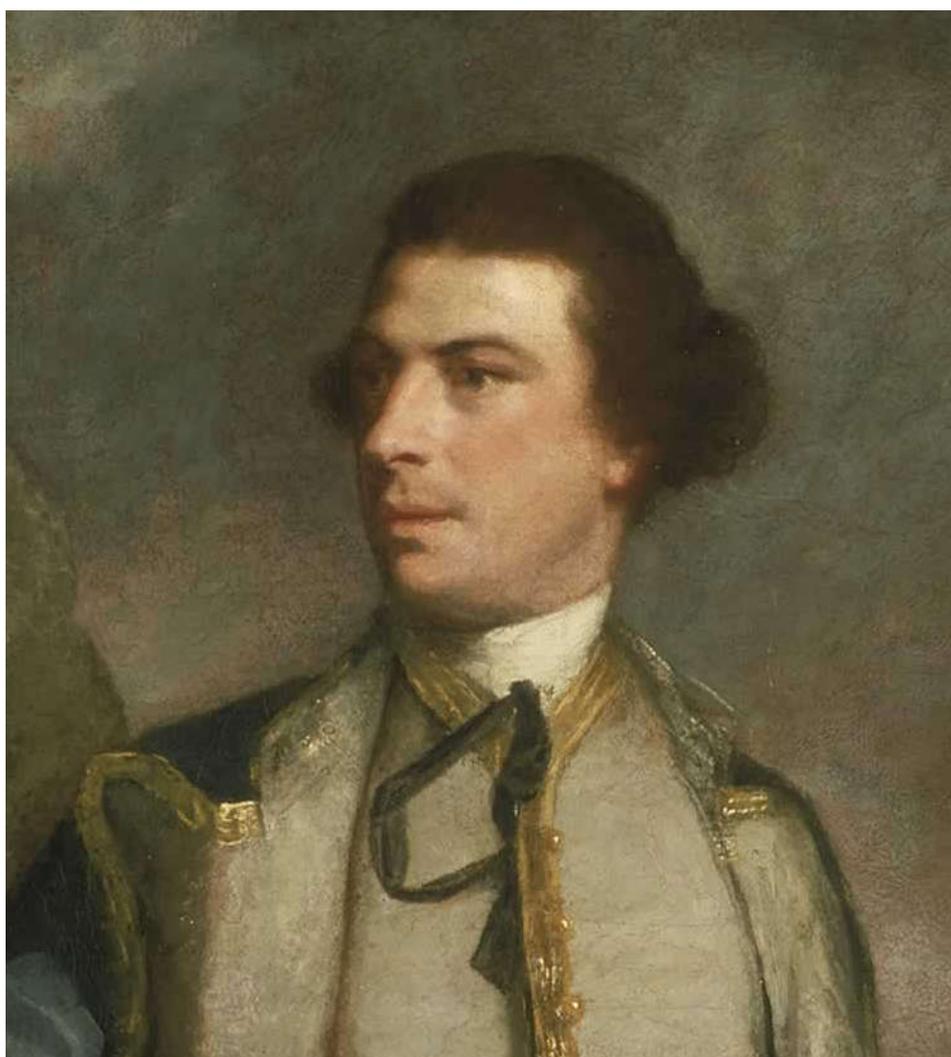
Following Reynolds' arrival in England in October 1752, he spent three months in Devon, before establishing himself in London and remaining there for the rest of his life. He took rooms in Saint Martin's Lane, before moving to Great Newport Street; his sister Frances acted as his housekeeper. He achieved success rapidly and was prolific in his work. One of his most celebrated early portraits, representing Keppel in the pose of the Apollo Belvedere, was completed in 1753 and hangs today in Greenwich's National Maritime Museum.

It is a full-length portrait, portraying the sitter in a captain's undress uniform, with grey breeches, waistcoat and facings, double lacing on the waistcoat pockets and striped stockings. Keppel strides dramatically across a storm-swept beach, pointing with his right hand. There is a rocky cliff on the left, while the foaming sea on the right is punctuated with thin strokes of brown paint, representing debris from a recent shipwreck — a reference to an event from Keppel's career, the wreck of his ship the 'Maidstone' on the Brittany coast on 27 June 1747. This implies that the canvas depicts Keppel as taking command in the aftermath of the disaster, lionising the sitter's status. Yet, the artist has anachronistically portrayed Keppel in a naval uniform that was not introduced until nine months after the wreck of the 'Maidstone'. The breeches and waistcoat are coloured silver-grey, rather than the regulation white, likely for artistic reasons, complementing the scene's stormy palette, as recommended by the tradition of sixteenth-century Venetian painting.

Reynolds and Keppel formed a close friendship during their voyage together and this portrait was intended as a tribute to his naval friend and patron, thanking him for his support. The painting was also used by Reynolds to promote his talent, as he set about establishing his new London studio. It is believed that he displayed the portrait in his showroom to impress potential clients. According to contemporary reviewers, the portrait 'was so much admired, that it completely established the reputation of the Artist'. Keppel's dynamic pose and the sense of action in the portrait were seen at the time as highly innovative. The figure is often associated with the classical statue of the Apollo Belvedere, held in the Vatican. From the mid-eighteenth century it was regarded by ardent Neoclassicists as the greatest ancient sculpture and for centuries it epitomised the ideals of aesthetic perfection. The iconic pose was used by numerous artists to instil an air of classical gravitas in contemporary sitters, including a notable example by Allan Ramsay in his *Portrait of Norman, 22nd Chief of MacLeod* (1747-8).

However, Reynolds' canvas is clearly set apart from the other portraits that borrowed the Belvedere pose. His image suggests a greater sense of movement and narrative. An X-ray investigation conducted on the portrait has revealed that Keppel was originally standing in front of a classical column, a traditional backdrop for portraiture at this period. Reynolds changed his mind and painted over this architectural setting with the stormy and romantically brooding scene that we see today. By illustrating Keppel as a man of action, Reynolds adds an element of history painting to his portraiture, signalling his ambition of elevating the genre. In the eighteenth century history painting was regarded as the most prestigious form of artistic production and now Reynolds could claim that his own works were a part of that tradition. The portrait was a significant moment in the history of British art, inaugurating a new style of portraiture that took inspiration from the grand manner, breaking away from the early eighteenth-century style of theatrical displays of polite comportment.





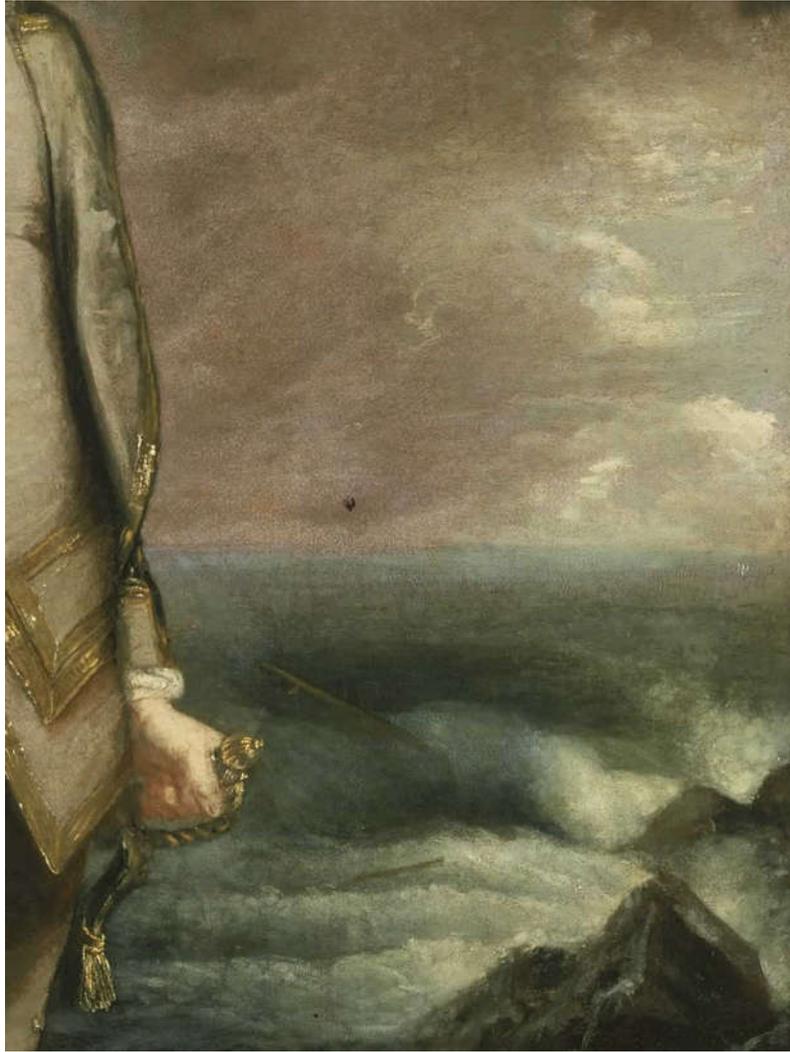
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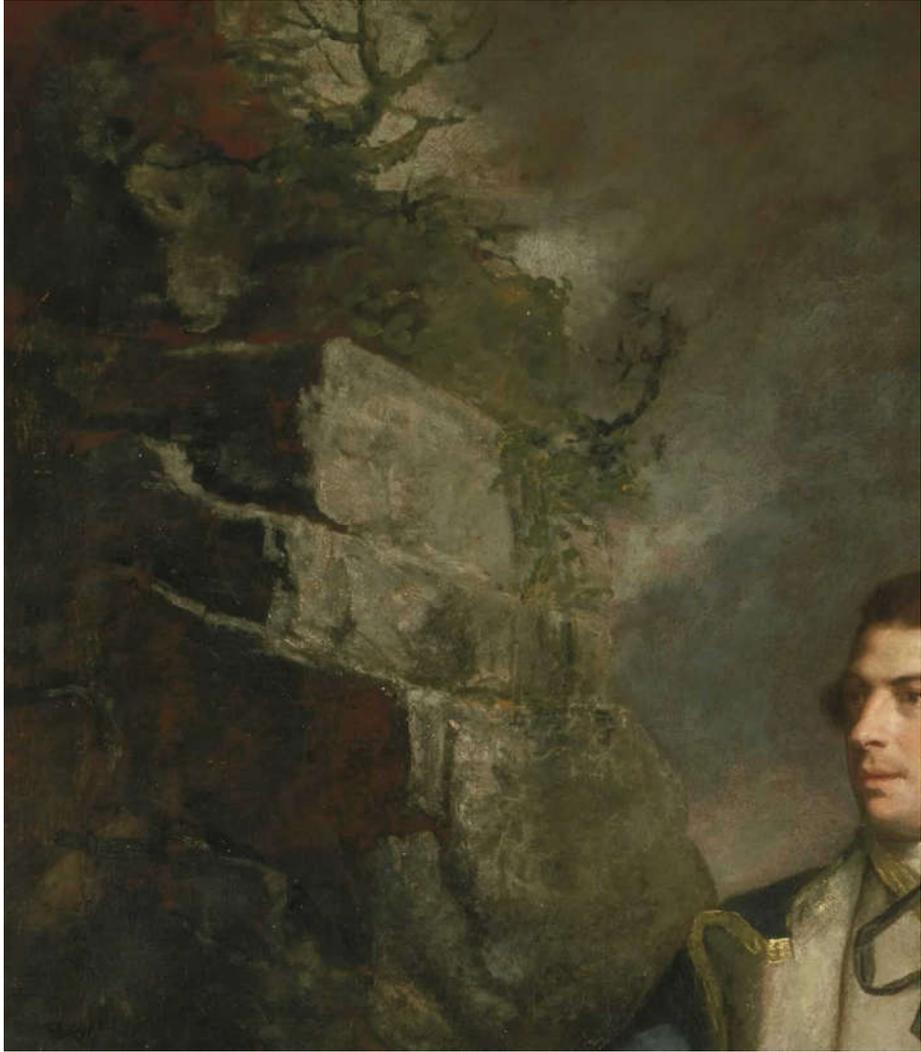
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The Apollo Belvedere, a celebrated marble sculpture, now thought to be an original Roman creation of Hadrianic date, Vatican Museums, Vatican City, c. 130 AD



Reynolds' first portrait of Keppel, produced on Minorca, 1749

Robert Orme (1756)



Promoting his grand manner approach, Reynolds soon became a leading society portrait painter and a highly influential figure of the artistic establishment. The two years he had spent in Rome had enabled him to form several important connections and friendships, paving the way for a flurry of commissions once he was securely established in his London studio. In time, he eclipsed the status of Pompeo Batoni, until then the most successful face painter for the Englishman on the grand tour. Since the end of the sixteenth century, the British landowning classes had developed a fondness for full-length life-sized portraits, which had been elevated to its highest achievements through the elegant work of van Dyck, as well as Hogarth's celebrated *Captain Coram*. Due to Hogarth's somewhat antagonistic and brash personality, he was not commissioned to paint any similar portraits. The one true rival standing in Reynolds' way was the Scottish artist Allan Ramsay (1713-1784), who was now advertising himself as a master of full-length portraits. Throughout the 1750's both artists watched each other's work closely and were at times influenced by each other. Although they were never close friends, they at least dined together once and shared a number of mutual and influential friends. Reynolds is reported to have called Ramsay "the most sensible among all those painting in his time". Even though their relationship was lukewarm, no other painter ever enjoyed Reynolds' hospitality.

Eager to build on his burgeoning reputation, in 1756 Reynolds executed a heroic military portrait of Captain Orme (1725-90), a soldier of no special consequence, who certainly never paid for the canvas. It would remain a cherished ornament of Reynolds' studio for many years, winning the admiration of anyone visiting, serving as the most effective advertisement of Reynolds' skill as a painter of full-length portraits. The prospective patrons must have realised immediately that a new artistic power had arisen, equipped to record a new age.

The canvas depicts the captain at the age of thirty-one, in action in the war against the French for supremacy in the North American colonies. Orme was serving as aide-de-camp to General Edward Braddock, commander-in-chief of the British forces in America, and he was also friends with the young George Washington. On 9 July 1755, General Braddock and his forces were ambushed and defeated by the French and Native American riflemen near Fort Du Quesne on the Ohio River. In the portrait, Orme is about to leap upon his horse and ride off to join the battle. The dispatch he holds firmly in his white-gloved hand is not legible, but it is believed to bear news of the captain's friend Braddock's death, hence the grim and melancholic expression on his face. Behind, there is a stormy sky and through the trees we can glimpse the red jackets of the British, referring to Orme's part in the British defeat at Monongahela. The postures of Orme and his horse are derived from a fresco by Jacopo Ligozzi in the church of Ognissanti in Florence, which Reynolds recorded in his Italian sketchbook four years before.

Reynolds has divided Orme's face into light and dark halves, offering insight into the harrowing effect of the battle and the sitter's loss of comrades. Critics have suggested that the light half of the face conveys the image of a resolute and commanding army officer, while the dark half connotes the turmoil of the inner man, who only a short time ago witnessed his comrades cut to pieces, as it was described in

contemporary newspapers. What sets this full-length portrait apart from those that came before it in British art, is its innovative approach to the established conventions of the format, which usually presented an aristocrat sitter, born to his position and not necessarily merited to it. In the Orme portrait we can detect a new interest in the sensibility expected of a gentleman in the eighteenth century, illustrating a man that has achieved his position through ability alone. This theme must have been important to the artist, who also was not from an aristocratic background, and had sought to raise his reputation through his own industry. Therefore, Orme — an almost unknown personage at the time — is symbolic of a changing and Enlightened England, where merit could matter more than worldly connections, both in war and art.

Reynolds did not sell the canvas until over twenty years later, when it was acquired by the 5th Earl of Inchquin. It passed by descent to the 5th Earl of Orkney, before it was bought by Sir Charles Eastlake at Christie's in 1862 for the National Gallery. It represents an important stage in the artist's career, when he toiled to establish his name and build his list of wealthy patrons. Now that his reputation as an accomplished portraitist was secure, all that remained was to win the attention of the peerage.

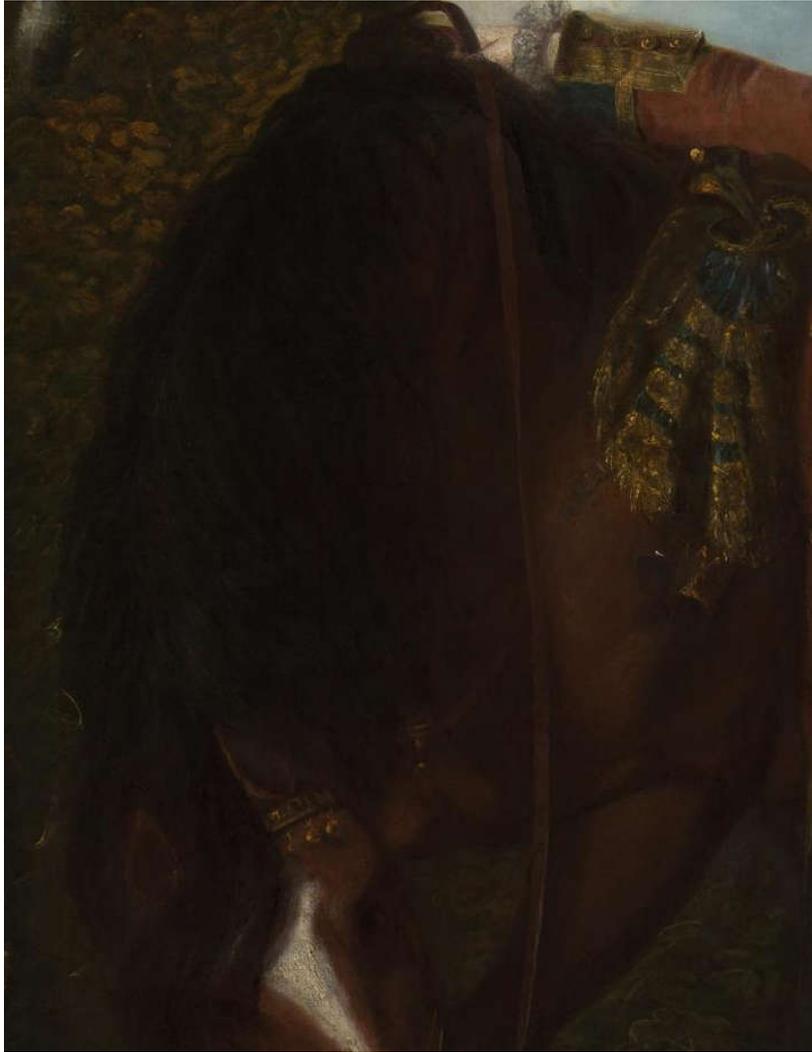




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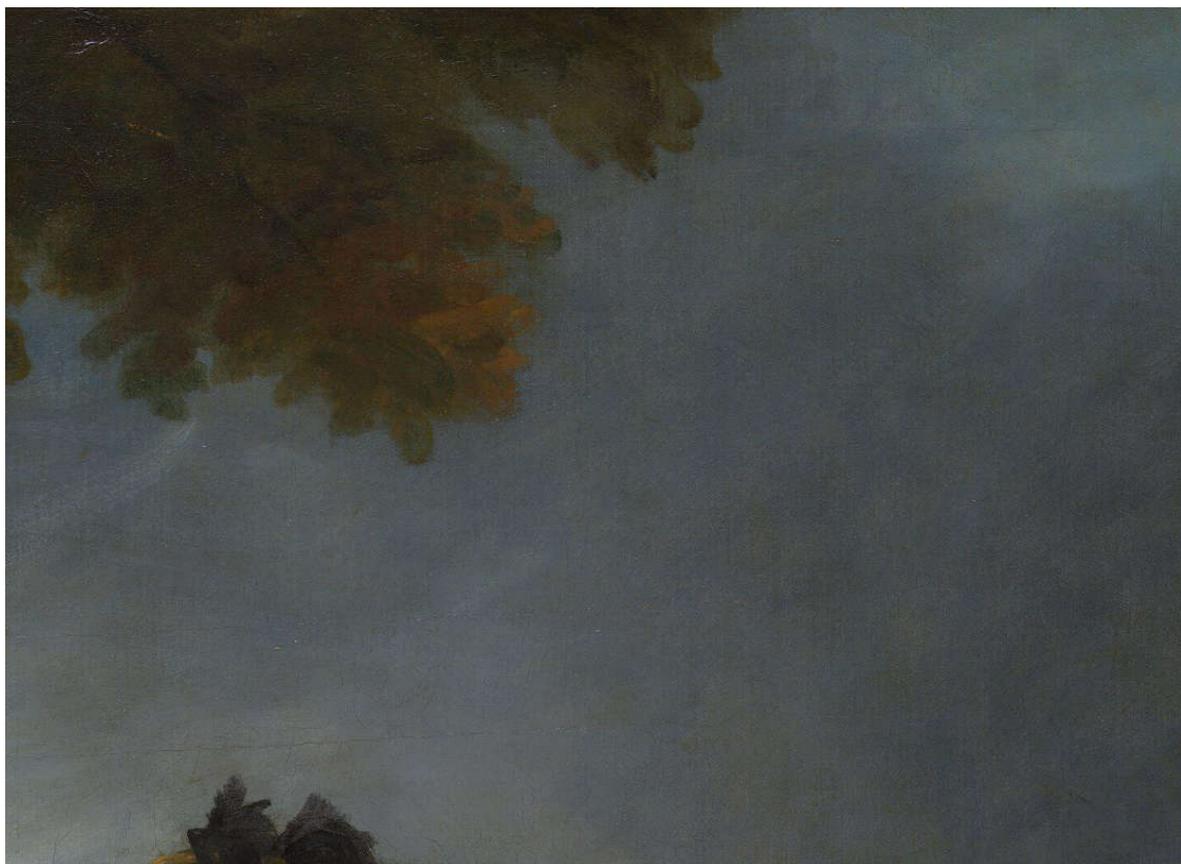
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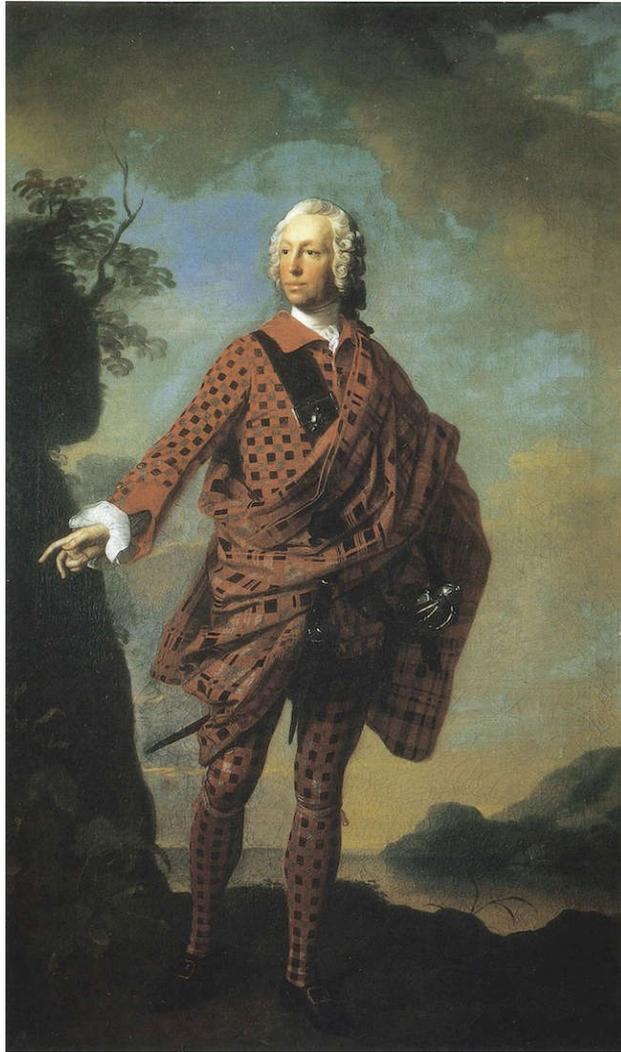
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Reynolds' early rival, Allan Ramsay's self portrait, National Portrait Gallery, London, c. 1737



Norman MacLeod, chief of Clan MacLeod by Allan Ramsay, c. 1747

David Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy (1761)



During the 1750's Reynolds lost no opportunity in bringing his art to public notice. He toiled hard all day at his canvases from nine in the morning until his dinner hour at four p.m., usually working solely on his feet. He was too devoted to the work at hand and too deaf to have a chatty 'bedside manner' with his sitters. In the evenings, he liked to enjoy convivial company with like-minded friends. He became a member of a group of literary and cultural men, who would help promulgate his name and prowess all over London. He first met Dr. Johnson, the philosopher Edmund Burke and the actor David Garrick in 1756, and a few years later he was intimate with the playwright Oliver Goldsmith and the famous diarist James Boswell.

In 1760 he purchased the lease of a grand house in Leicester Fields (later to be called Leicester Square), where he remained for the rest of his life, settling down to a regular routine. He spent more than £3,000 on the lease and on improvements for a studio at the back — a considerable sum for an artist to spend. Over the next ten years he concentrated on building a fortune and advertising his work by any means in his power. He also purchased an impressive coach in which he forced his naturally unassuming sister to go out and drive in as often as possible. For Reynolds, reputation as a great artist was everything and it certainly worked, as commissions continued to pour in from the rich and famous.

David Garrick was perhaps the greatest master of advertising of his age, so much so we are still familiar with his name, though we can never witness at first hand his ability. Indeed, most actors of that time have been largely forgotten. He was the first to realise the advertising power of well-executed paintings of stage scenes and actors performing in character parts, which could be exhibited to the public in enduring engravings. At nearly every public exhibition in the 1760's, a picture or statue of the actor was on display for all to see. The most memorable example was a canvas completed by his friend Reynolds and shown at the Society of Artists in 1762.

Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy was a modern retelling of the age-old subject of 'The Choice of Hercules', familiar to intellectuals like the artist's group of friends. According to the ancient Greek parable attributed to Prodicus, it concerns the young Heracles, who is offered a choice between Vice and Virtue — a life of pleasure or one of hardship and honour. In the early modern period it became a popular motif in Western art. Reynolds' painting transposes Heracles for the actor, who is caught between the Muses of Tragedy (Melpomene) and Comedy (Thalia). Appearing in a burlesque manner, Garrick stands in the centre of the painting wearing an Anthony van Dyck costume, against a rural landscape of a field and woodland. The Muse of Tragedy, raising her dagger, exhorts Garrick to follow her exalted vocation, but Comedy, bearing her mask, drags him away with a seductive grin. The actor yields, trying to excuse himself, pleading to Tragedy that he is being forced, though the viewer is under no illusion which path he would rather choose. The critic Horace Walpole recorded that George Montagu-Dunk, 2nd Earl of Halifax, bought the painting for £300.

The differences between the Muses are both formal and iconographic. Comedy is represented in the light and convivial rococo style, reminiscent of the work of Antonio da Correggio, while Tragedy is depicted in the precise and serious neoclassical style,

after Guido Reni. There are elements of Augustan imagery, such as in the treatment of clothing, light and shadow. Comedy has slightly tousled fair hair, similar to a bacchante drawn by Rubens, while Tragedy wears a deep blue dress, with her head and arms covered, as though in mourning. Comedy smiles at the viewer, while Tragedy gazes sternly at Garrick. Comedy is portrayed in dappled light, while Tragedy is strongly lit from above, with a dark background. The side of Garrick's face that looks towards Comedy is smiling and illuminated, while the other side is cast in shadow, as he looks back at unrelenting Tragedy.

Though Reynolds is parodying the Hercules tale, where the hero ultimately chooses the more modestly dressed Virtue, Garrick succumbs to the immodestly dressed Comedy. The didactic tale is inverted for comic purposes, giving it a distinctly modern approach. Also, the painting can be viewed as an allegory of the artist himself, who contemplates his own personal crossroads. Should he move away from strict portraiture and his grand hopes of history painting, symbolised by Tragedy, to a more humorous iconography and popular means of expression, connoted by Comedy, disseminating images of celebrities to the masses through engravings?

The painting had a mixed reception on its first unveiling, with some commenting on Reynolds' painting skills, while others viewed it as a lowering of his artistic standards. Edward Fisher created a mezzotint for the painting in 1762, before the canvas was exhibited in May 1762 at the Society of Artists. Fisher published the mezzotint in November of that year, with the inscription "Reddere personae scit convenientia cuique" (he knows how to give to each what is appropriate). In 1764, Reynolds requested copies of the print to give to his admirers. The print was popular with the public and it was widely copied and pirated, resulting in at least fourteen different mezzotints. In time, the painting would become one of the artist's most studied and well-known works, serving not only as an advertisement of Garrick's versatility, but as an iconic advertisement of Reynolds' own talents. Clearly, the artist had learnt a valuable lesson from his actor friend.





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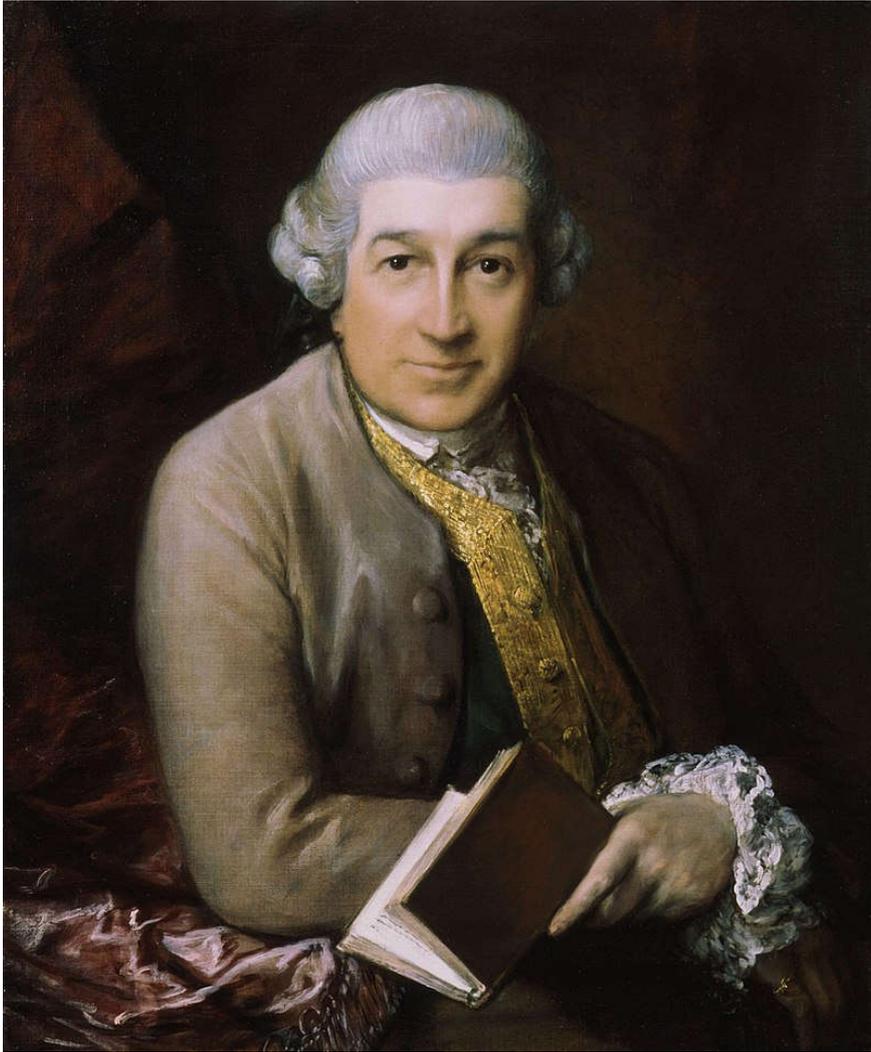
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Portrait of Garrick by Thomas Gainsborough, 1770



'A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds'; or, The Club' by James William Edmund Doyle, 1851. The Club, a London literary dining club, was founded in February 1764 by Reynolds and his friend the essayist Samuel Johnson, along with Edmund Burke, the Anglo-Irish philosopher-politician.



Now a Chinese supermarket, this was once the Turk's Head Tavern on Gerrard Street, Soho. Initially, the Club would meet one evening per week at seven, at the Turk's Head Inn. Later, meetings were reduced to once per fortnight whilst Parliament was in session, and were held at rooms in St James' Street.

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