STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF JEAN JACQUES LAGRENET WORKS AND HIS INTERPRETATION OF OVID "METAMORPHOSES"

Darya V. Konkova, Juliana G. Emanova, Rada I. Salakhova
Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Tatarstan street 2. (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)
Russia@prescopus.com

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the works of Jean-Jacques Lagrenet Junior (September 8, 1739, Paris - 13th of February, 1821., Paris), who along with his brother Jean-Louis François is considered as a special master of the second half of XVIIIth century. In his work the aesthetic principles of the era were reflected - the reign period of two kings of France - Louis XV and Louis XVI. This is the period of art evolution from rococo to neoclassicism. This era gave rise to such a specific kind of art as a decorative painting. The samples of this type have mainly a decorative function, being mainly not an object of isolated contemplation, but an active element interior. The works of "Ovid Series" painted by Lagrenet Junior bear the characteristic features of the era: they illustrate one of the most popular works of Roman literature, organized accordance with the compositional principles of style, depict not personalities but ornamental types. The creativity of Lagrenet Junior cannot be included in a string of outstanding XVIIIth century painters in France, beginning from A. Vatto and ending with L. David. However, it belongs to the "artistic layer", to those artists whose art is an integral part of the era style. The article may be of interest to specialists studying the art of XVIIIth century held in the collection of Russia. It introduces into the science a quite remarkable series of Lagrenet Junior paintings. The comparative analysis of Lagrenet Junior works with the works of the Russian artist A.P. Losenko, XVIIIth century (1737-1773), i.e. with his work "The Death of Adonis" (1764). In a study conducted A historical and stylistic analysis of four paintings written by Lagrenet Junior, located in a large collection of fine arts, belonging to Mr. A.G. Semin is performed in a study. The authors hope to continue the study of Lagrenet brothers creativity with the Russian art of that time.

Key words: painting, decorative painting, "Metamorphoses of Ovid", Rococo, Neo-Classicism, ancient stories, the French art of the XVIIIth century

1. INTRODUCTION

The XVIII century until the French Revolution is the century of decorativism. It is the age of successive styles. It is the century of form dominance over content. A lot of attention was paid to form and decoration. So much attention was given to ornamentation and decoration, that at times, the painting, losing its artistic content, was transformed into a decorative component of the palace furniture. The pictures were painted for a specific hall, room or gallery. They were decorated with gilded, ornate, carved frames and became an integral part of the interior. Four paintings of Jean Jacques Lagrenet were painted for these purposes.

This series was acquired by Alexey Semin for his private collection of fine arts in France at Tajan auction on December 13, 2010. We do not have information about the specific origin of paintings. However, it is obvious that they belong to the interior of a chateau or a hotel. Jean Jacques Lagrenet Junior belongs to the French school of painting of the XVIIIth century and is a remarkable master of his age [1].

2. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jean-Jacques Lagrenet Junior (Fr. Lagrenée Jean Jeacque, le Jeune) is a French painter of XVIIIth-XIXth century, belonging to the dynasty of Lagrenet artists. He was born on September 8, 1739 in Paris and died there on 13th February 1821 and worked in historical, mythological and religious genre like his brother. He painted still lives with flowers. He worked with pastels. He was a draftsman. He worked in Russia together with his elder brother, but left a year early in 1762 [2]. In 1775 he returned to France and was admitted to the Academy. His painting "Winter" still decorates the ceiling of Apollo gallery in the Louvre, where the XVIIIth century Academy was located. Later, the artist regularly exhibited his works at the Salon from 1771 to 1814. Having painted a significant amount of historical and genre paintings, the painter in the middle of his artistic career, became interested in a special kind of decorative art - incrustation in marble, wood and glass. At the end of his life Lagrenet worked at Sevres porcelain manufactory, making drawings for models [3].

Jean-Jacques Lagrenet Junior lived in dramatic times for France. Starting his creative activity in an exquisite time of Louis XV, developed as an artist with him and his successor. He finished his career in the era of the Restoration. His fate as the fate of his brother painter, Lagrene Jean-Francois Louis Senior (Fr. Louis Jean François Lagrenée, l'Ainé), is similar to the fate of many European artists of that time. Both of them studied in Italy, and then became interested in Russian patron visiting, worked in Russia and in St. Petersburg. They witnessed here the development of Russian art and the development of the Russian Academy of Arts. [4]

3. SUBJECT DESCRIPTION

Since the Renaissance ancient stories became an integral part of European culture. In the XVIIIth century they acquired the features of sermon and allegory, and sometimes a secret story about the world of the senses. For this series, the artist chose the remarkable and touching stories of "Metamorphoses" written by the Roman poet Ovid (43 BC - 17/18 AD), which tell about the love of gods and heroes to mere mortals. When the paintings were added to collection, the plot
structure of two of them, determined by French experts, with question marks, required a further study. Therefore, plot stories received a different interpretation. The plot of one of the paintings was interpreted as "Sylvia and Aminta" - a story about love of the nymph Sylvia to shepherd Aminta. The author of the story was Torkvatto Taso (1544-1595) [5]. This plot was proposed for ballet with the same name with Leo Delibes (1836-1891) music. The painting does not say anything about this story, according to which the nymph, who was shooting at the statue of Eros, accidentally killed Amynta. According to the plot, the painting should have a statue of Eros or his herma, while the defeated hero should have the attributes of a shepherd - a stick and a cloak. Instead of these things, there is a well-known Perseus attribute at the feet of characters - the shield with the head of Medusa Gorgon. It has warrior armor and sandals donated by Mercury, and there is a golden chariot on the background, in the clouds. All these details help quite definitely to draw the conclusion that it is Perseus and Andromeda saved by him.

Also the interpretation "Mercury and Venus" painting story seemed an unconvincing for us. We did not identify the storylines in ancient mythology, clearly linking these representatives of Olympus and the picture enhancements together. It is much more convincing to assume that it is Venus on the picture mourning Adonis.

Here is the storyline for all four paintings.

**Aurora and Cephalus** (Reproduction 1). The artist pictures the moment when Aavrora, the goddess of dawn, saw a beautiful young man, an Athenian prince Cephalus. Aurora loved Kefal and then took away a sleeping hunter to heavenly palaces in a chariot. But awaken Cephalus did not fall in love for Aurora, the goddess that brought a lot of suffering. The situation was saved by Cupid who pierced the young man with his arrow that made Cephalus to love the goddess [6].

![Reproduction 1](image1)

**Pygmalion and Galatea** (Reproduction 2). Once a mythical king of Cyprus Pygmalion managed to create a statue of a very beautiful young woman. The more Pygmalion admired his creation, the more merits he found. He began to feel that no one of mortal women can match the beauty and nobility of his creation. He prays to Venus that he had a wife as beautiful as the image created by him. And the goddess, heeding the pleas of Pygmalion bring the image created by him into life. The king named his beloved Galatea [6].

![Reproduction 2](image2)
Perseus and Andromeda (Reproduction 3). Persey is the hero of ancient Greek mythology. He is demigod and half a man. The son of Danae and Jupiter. His heroic acts included the victory over Gorgon and the rescue of beautiful Andromeda from a sea monster. The painting depicts the scene when rescued Andromeda, hugs resting Perseus, dressed in military armor. A shield with the head of Medusa lies at his feet. The cupids are flying around the lovers with the attributes of the goddess Venus love: a rose, an arrow, and pigeons [6].

Venus and Adonis (Reproduction 4). Ovid wrote the story about Venus who found her first lover among mortals. It was a great hunter Adonis. Goddess often warned his chosen one about all kinds of dangers. But Adonis did not listen to her advice. One concern of the Goddess came true - He was killed by a wild boar during hunting [6].

The fine arts of the XVIIIth century is characterized by the creation of not just a single painting, or even a series of paintings, developing a plot, but the cycle of works which keeps a hidden content [7]. The works of Lagrenet Jr. is an example of this. Besides to setting out of ancient plots in a courtly manner a generalized artistic image in its various states is revealed here. All paintings have the "creator" of the situation and the "image" created by them: Aurora, who noticed the sleeping Cephalus; Pigmaleon the sculptor who created Galatea; Andromeda, thanking his savior; and Venus, mourning his lover. Thus, a spectator sees four stages of "Image" state: from sleeping Cephalus to Galatea coming to life, from Perseus taking part in the joy of existence to the dying Adonis.

4. STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

It is interesting to dwell on the problem of authorship and the time of Lagrene Junior painting creation. Three paintings of the series are signed and dated: «JBlnvLPinx.1774». The belonging of the fourth work to this series ("Perseus and Andromeda") is undoubted.

In terms of style, the manner of painting, such as an image of a face type and in accordance with the principles of form modeling all four paintings belong to the French school of painting of the second half of XVIIIth century. All four works are decorative pictures that, as mentioned earlier, is typical for the art of that time. Stylistically, they are the product of XVIIIth century 60-ies aesthetics - the time of the transition from Rococo to the style of Louis XVI - neoclassicism or Tranzisen which corresponds to compositional and plastic principles that came into art with the creation of Antoine Watteau [8] and developed
Francois Boucher (Reproduction 5). Rocaille painting is characterized by a diagonal composition, a simpler one compared to the baroque, a more graceful dynamics, the absence of massive forms, like Rubens, but they are subject to a complex, intricate rhythms. The compositions have a complex pattern of lines, providing a good emotional state of characters. The author is not interested by the individuality of last ones. Not only the characters, but their poses are typified at maximum. The figures on the pictures are similar and they have faces with peculiar large eyes and a prominent upturned nose. The characters are depicted often in the same perspective, or its mirror reflection. The coloring of works also corresponds to the aesthetics of the late Louis XV period. The works are dominated by rather similar than contrasting color combinations. Associatively the compositions of pictures are similar to the music of France of that time, particularly to the works of Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764).

The heritage of Lagrenet Junior has the work "Boreas abducting Orifiya" (was sold at the auction Christie’s on 24.10.2012, NY) [9]. It was also painted in 1774. The proximity between them is clearly felt at its comparison with the considered paintings. This is expressed in dynamic diagonal compositions, in characteristic figures with round heads and thick coarse proportions. (In general, a certain naturalism is peculiar for Lagrenet Jr., which is especially evident in his portrayal of Galatea, which acquired a human flesh on the canvas, while its lower part still remains a marble one. This marble part is in sharp contrast by its rough masculine proportions to the very idea of a female body nice picture). The works are similar in color, built on the combinations of bright colors, accented with bright spots of pink-purple, turquoise and ochry and golden colors. The draperies are also similar. It is sufficient to compare Venus robe, particularly the folds of a sleeve on her right arm, with the folds of Orifiya cloak. The picture demonstrates the clouds, which are also written in a similar manner. Finally, the overall sounding of works makes an impression not only of an unfolding real action but of a spectacular theatrical performance of a courtly character.

The iconography of the painting "Pygmalion and Galatea" is noteworthy. This story was popular in the XVIIIth century. It is very indicative for its era. At the heart of the myth there is the belief in the possibility of a man's creation reviving - the idea of living things victory over dead things is the triumph of creativity. It is no coincidence that Angelo Bronzino, Peshé Laurent (XVIII century), Louis Gauffer and the sculptor Petro Stadzhi referred to this plot. The composition of Francois Boucher (Reproduction 5) is widely known [11]. The expert of Eric Turquin study at the end of the auction suggested that Lagrenet Junior composition was inspired by Francois Boucher painting and the Noelyale Mire engravings "Pigmaleon and Galatea" ("Trezel" collection) [10]. However, the comparison of paintings suggests that if there was Bushe impact, then it was an indirect and apparently insignificant one. Both works almost do not have similar parts or compositional peculiarities. There is no intimacy between the painting and the engraving under consideration, where the story of Pygmalion and Galatea is further developed - it is the frivolity of the revived heroine. The common grounds may be found with the works of other authors. In particular, the pictures with the same name of his older brother ("Pygmalion and Galatea", 1781. Museum of Art, Detroit; "Pygmalion and Galatea", 1777, State Art Museum, Finland) (Reproduction 6) are the closest ones. But, obviously, they are both painted later than the studied works of Lagrenet Jr. [12]. In other words, there is the younger brother impact on the older one, and not vice versa. This is indicated by the similarity of perspectives in the image of the sculptor on all three paintings, the setting of Galatea figure, making a step forward, her hair style, the overall ambiance of the scene, the proximity of plans and the similarity of compositions. The images of women heads on the paintings of brothers are very close stylistically and the example of it is may be a maid's head on the background in the painting "The Education of the Virgin Mary" (1772, Private collection) painted by Lagrenet Senior.


Even more interesting connection is found in the works of Jean-Jacques Lagrenet with Russian art in general, and with the work of Anton Pavlovich Losenko (1737-1773), in particular. We have already mentioned that both brothers worked in Russia from 1760 to 1762/63. One of Russian classical painting founders A.P. Losenko began his career before the foundation of the Academy of Arts (1757) in the workshop of Ivan Petrovich Argunov (1729-1802). Later, A.P. Losenko was enrolled in it and was among its first graduates. It is unlikely that in the year of arrival to Russia Lagrenet brothers could meet with Anton Losenko who was sent to the pensioner’s trip to Paris along with the future famous architect Vasily Bazhenov (1738-1799) to develop knowledge and improve skills in September of 1760 [13]. The status of invited French master brothers Lagrene and a recent student of the Academy was too varied. Their meeting is probably occurred later in Paris. The fact that the meeting took place says that Lagrenet Junior, creating the series in 1774, explicitly uses the elements of the picture, created by Losenko in Paris in 1764 (Reproduction 7).

Reproduction 7. A.P. Losenko. Death of Adonis. Russia, 1764
National Art Museum of Belarus, Minsk.

The fact that Losenko’s work not just impressed Jean-Jacques, but served as a source for the painting of Ovid characters, is explained by the similarity of both artists images. The typological similarity is noticeable when the head of Adonis head painted by Losenko with Cephalus heads and Adonis painted by Lagrenet [14]. It is significant that the angle of heroes hands picturing is similar here and there. This similarity is a direct or a mirror one. Losenko mastered the principles of classical art perfectly which is evidenced by his pyramidal composition. Although the similarity of pyramid composition from both authors can not be considered a product of one author influence on the other. Their proximity suggests an artistic and ideological thinking similarity among artists. The fact that the work of a 27 year old Russian artist was influenced by Jean-Jacques Lagrenet, who started to create his series at the age of 35 as a recognized author already is a remarkable one. This happened 10 years after the work was painted by Losenko, who could not see the analyzed works of Lagrenet Junior, as he died the year before their creation [13].

5. CONCLUSION

A series of paintings depicting the scenes of Ovid characterizes Lagrenet Junior from an unexpected aspect. He was an artist, who did not imitate neither his brother, nor Francois Boucher, and created their own original compositions. They, in their turn, had an impact on his elder brother recognized by contemporaries. He is also interesting as a painter, who was among the first ones who drew the attention to the images of the Russian artist and widely used them in his works.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The author confirms that the presented data do not contain any conflict of interest.

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