



## ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

### S56. The Reception of the Arts in Georgian Britain

Friday 1 September: 9.30-11.30am

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Recent work on the reception of art exhibitions, of Italian opera, of the landscape garden in Georgian Britain has shown how stimulating the study of the responses of an emerging public in the Georgian age can be. They may be found in a variety of texts, both public and private, ranging from the press, essays, guide-books, poems and satires, to private letters, memoirs and autobiographies in English and other languages. This seminar will explore the relationship between these texts and the aesthetic theories of the age, according to the perspectives of cultural history as well as reception theory.

### The Role of Reception in George Cruikshank's Early Career (1811-1825)

Françoise Baillet - (IUFM Academy, Versailles)

Often described as 'the Hogarth of the nineteenth century', George Cruikshank provided, through his innumerable etchings and wood-engravings, a faithful and lively record of his times. Born into a family of graphic artists at a time when the Napoleonic wars strengthened the print trade, Cruikshank first emulated his immediate predecessors – Gillray in particular – offering the Regency public a biting pictorial comment on contemporary events. The 1820s, however, witnessed a radical change in the career of the artist who, within a few years, shifted from broadsheet caricature to book illustration.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of reception in this change of direction. Eager as Cruikshank may have been in seeking new outlets for his talent, he still depended on a public whose preferences - recorded by contemporary sources like the specialized press but also private correspondence and memoirs - seem to have largely influenced his choices. At a time when graphic artists were more acknowledged by their customers than by the art establishment, the unprecedented success of Cruikshank's first illustration venture – Pierce Egan's *Tom and Jerry*, soon followed by other publications, among which Grimm's *Fairy Tales* or Scott's novels - may well have paved the way towards the artist's enduring fame as a children's book illustrator.

### The Reception of "English Gardens" in the Eighteenth Century: Outline of a Research Project

Laurent Châtel (University of Paris 4, Sorbonne)

This presentation will confine itself to a brief outline of a research project in the making: how can the idea of reception help counter-balance the fame and myth of the English garden? The study is based on the assumption that the history of English gardens has over-exaggerated the degree of success and enthusiasm with which English gardens were met throughout the period and that there is a need to place English garden creativity to the test of contemporary perception, taste and assessment. Fresh light can be shed on English gardens when one brings into consideration the perceptive tools of garden visitors as well as the satirical and critical production to which they gave rise.

### **Reviews of the Handel Commemoration of 1784: Discourse and Reception**

Pierre Dubois (University of Paris 4, Sorbonne)

The Great Handel Commemoration that was organised at Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon in 1784 played a pivotal role in the institutionalization of a certain idea of “national” music in Great-Britain. It was “the most important single event in the history of English music,” according to E.D. Mackerness (*A Social History of English Music*, London, 1964). Charles Burney was commissioned to write an *Account of the musical Performances in Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon (May 26th, 27th, 29th; and June the 3rd, and 5th, 1784) in Commemoration of Handel* which was duly published in 1785. How are we however to read his appraisal of the event? We know that Burney wrote under the control of the King (George III) himself. His text has therefore a strong ideological, patriotic bias. It may be interesting consequently to study other accounts of the same event written by various contemporaries. Confronting various sources (diaries, letters, etc.), we shall attempt to show that the reception of this particular musical event was in no way neutral, but on the contrary that the various accounts all more or less reproduced the same stereotyped discourse, suggesting that the “official” account penned by Burney was used as a kind of matrix for these other writers to be able to make sense of the Commemoration. From this particular example, we may be able to suggest that the fashioning of musical taste and the reception of music in a given society at a given time are not independent from the prevailing conceptual categories and the discourse that organises these.

### **Constable's Art and its Visual Reception**

S'everine Letalleur (University of Paris 1)

In the 18th and 19th centuries, *varnishing days* were meant for artists to make the most of the exhibition venue, so that their work would perfectly adjust to their new environment. Painters vied with each other to catch the spectators' attention. Constable's art was partly driven by such a visual contest (and so was Turner's). Hence his skill at restoring the soft flickering light of the sun bathing luxuriant landscapes. Luring the eye on the canvas was achieved together with a rising awareness of the painting as a cultural artefact. The very artificiality of what prompted the viewer's delightful sensations was made apparent. Through painting, the immaterial could be made visually tangible, *impasto* skies had become a faint three-dimensional reference to the aesthetic object as a whole, while the odd aerial texture of water and foliage turned into a summer snow. This talk will focus on the modernity of Constable's pictorial technique in terms of visual reception and perception theories.

## **Defining a Properly Protestant Judgment: Country House Chapel Decorative Schemes and the Elite's Engagement with Catholic Art in England, c.1660-c.1830**

Annabelle Soulard (University of Paris 7 and Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge)

As Clare Haynes has recently demonstrated in her breakthrough PhD Thesis *Pictures and Popery: Art and Anti-Catholicism in England, 1660-1760*, the continuing identity of religious art as potentially Popish can be said to have been a matter of considerable anxiety among the English religious and political elite of the XVIIIth century. Debates such as the Moulton and Whitechapel Cases over the nature of a properly Protestant engagement with the religious image meant that a simultaneous dialogue with Catholic culture, on the grounds of idolatry, had to be maintained in the texts and practices of the spectatorship of European art. Responses to the decorative schemes of country house chapels, in particular, revealed the need for negotiating the problem of judgment in a way that would refocus the post-Reformation Popish Catholic art through a distinctly Protestant lens. Through a discussion of the complex politics of religious imagery in the XVIIIth-century Church, this paper will tackle the issue of country house chapel decorative schemes, both in these particular cases and more generally, showing how the elite's response to Catholic art is a useful focus for generating understanding of the problems of judgment in XVIIIth-century England.

## **Sermons and the Reviewers in the Mid-Eighteenth Century**

Carol Stewart (Dhofar University, Oman)

This paper will consider reactions to sermons as texts in mid-eighteenth century periodicals such as the *History of the Works of the Learned* and the *Monthly and Critical Reviews*. With the proliferation of printed material, and the emergence of literary reviewing, sermons became another item in the literary market-place by the mid-century. This marks a change from the generally deferential approach of an earlier period, when the *Spectator* praised Tillotson's sermons. The mid-century periodicals also demonstrate a slightly more relaxed attitude to religious diversity and religious scepticism, in keeping with increasing tolerance of dissent in British society. The reviewers themselves took on the role of moral arbiter and assumed a position of critical superiority. Sermons began to be judged on aesthetic rather than religious grounds, though the views expressed could still reflect the bias of such contributors as the non-conformist Ralph Griffith and the Tory Tobias Smollett. A degree of cynicism about the value of sermons also reflects a tendency by the middle classes to begin to place more reliance on literature as a medium of instruction, with the *Monthly*, for example, judging that even the Bible would be more effective if rewritten as a compact and sequential narrative.

## **"Elite" Subscribers to Italian Opera in Early Georgian London**

Carole Taylor

Early Georgian London was noted for its patronage of the Italian opera at Covent Garden and the King's Theatre, Haymarket. Financing of the opera was to a considerable extent underwritten by subscription from wealthy 'subscribers', many of whom were drawn from the titled aristocracy and other components of Britain's elites. The social background of these subscribers has been studied by a number of historians, including

myself, and is often seen as evidence of the homogeneity of a part of the Georgian elite. However, a larger group of subscribers whose patronage was more ephemeral in nature has not previously been researched in depth, and this omission may well distort our impression of the nature of both opera patronage and Britain's elites at that time.

This paper examines the social backgrounds of this larger group of approximately 325 more ephemeral subscribers, as well as comparing them to the 100 or so largely aristocratic ones which have been previously studied in some depth. This under-group, while it also contains many aristocrats, consists as well of men and women from outside the aristocracy, providing evidence of a possibly wider clientele for Italian opera, drawn from the gentry and professional elites in which women were increasingly prominent. The paper also analyses networks among the subscribers, linking opera patronage to other modes of cultural expression.