9 : DC Connections

1. Class title 1 (Chase: *A Friendly Visit*, 1895)

The picture, by American painter **William Merritt Chase** (1849–1916), is called *A Friendly Visit*. It's there for thematic reasons: it contains a couple of figures and a lot of art, it belongs to the Nineteenth Century (1895), and it is in the **National Gallery of Art in Washington**. I have been sick in bed for most of the past week, and unable to put together one of my usual classes developing a theme with many different media and cute graphics. So I thought the simplest thing was just to select some comparisons of paired portraits and have you discuss them. To focus further, I have taken them all from the National Gallery and all from the Romantic era, about 1780 to 1880. This may even be better in the end; I have found that discussion of comparisons often leads to deeper insights than I could have formed on my own. The second hour will pick up on **Beethoven** and **Emily Dickinson** from last week with a couple of videos

English Girls

2. The two pictures below
3. Reynolds: *Lady Caroline Howard*, 1778
4. Romney: *Miss Juliana Willoughby*, 1781–83

We'll start, however, in Britain, with its eighteenth-century tradition of portraits of the heriditary aristocracy. What makes these two so appealing is that both are children: *Lady Caroline Howard* (of Castle Howard), painted by **Sir Joshua Reynolds** (1723–92) in 1778, and *Miss Juliana Willoughby,* painted by **George Romney** (1734–1802) between 1881 and 1883. What is each artist's view of childhood? Is there anything about them that would have been different if they had not been aristocrats, or were boys rather than girls? What is the function of the landscape? What is different about the composition and color of the two pictures?

Ladies of Means

5. Portraits of women by Raeburn, Stuart, Ingres, and Sargent

Here are four portraits of ladies from three different countries, spanning 90 years between them. Our focus is now not only upon the techniques of the various artists (Raeburn, Stuart, Ingres, and Sargent) but also on the sitters themselves. What kind of woman gets her portrait painted as the century moves forward, and what characteristics may the artist appropriately bring out. Is there anything that strikes you looking at the four together? Which might you nominate as the odd-one-out?

6. The two pictures below
7. Raeburn: *Miss Eleanor Urquhart*, 1793
8. Stuart: *Catherine Brass Yates*, 1793

Since two of the portraits come from exactly the same date, they make an obvious comparison**. Sir Henry Raeburn** (1726–1823) was British, like Reynolds and Romney and Gainsborough, but he was Scottish and based in Edinburgh; he had already established his own distinct style. **Gilbert Stuart** (1755–1828) was American, but he worked in Britain for many years. This portrait, however, was done in 1793, the year he returned to America for good. So the questions: what are the ages social standing of the two sitters? What qualities does the artist seek to bring out in each? What is the outstanding technical accomplishment of each portrait? Do they in any way reflect their different nations? I don't have the details, but I imagine **Eleanor Urquhart** was the marriagable daughter of a landed family; the intent is to create an image of naturalness and simplicity, and Raeburn achieves this by painting it all *au premier coup*, not going back to change a thing. **Catherine Brass Yates** was the wife of a New York merchant; she had no claims to aristocratic birth and no desire to be idealized. Her portait shows her as she no doubt was. Despite its no-fuss simplicity, though, Stuart has gone to considerable lengths in painting the textures of both flesh and fabric, closely observing the many different colors that make them up.

9. Ingres: *Madame Moitessier* (Washington NGA, 1851)
10. — detail of the above

Jump forward by half a century and over to France. What do we make of **Madame Moitessier**, painted by **Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres** (1780–1867) in 1851? How does she compare to the two women on her left? She is no *ingenue*; in fact, she was 30 at the time of the portrait. She has the same confrontational quality as Catherine Yates, but she is no merchant's wife. He husband was a banker, twice her age, and she herself was the daughter of a government official. Is she beautiful? I used to laugh at this, thinking it was some kind of caricature. But it is clear that Ingres has worked long and hard over its detail. Ideals of beauty have changed, and Ingres, who was a classicist, had a special admiration for women who carried themselves like a Roman statue. His friend, the writer **Théophile Gautier**, who attended some of the sessions, wrote: "Never did beauty more regal, more magnificent, more stately, and of a more Junoesque type, offer its proud lines to the tremulous pencil of an artist."

11. Ingres: *Madame Moitessier* compared with Sargent: *Mrs Adrian Iselin* (1888)
12. — the Sargent, with John Walker's description

What adjectives would you use to describe the attitude of the sitter in the Ingres painting, and in this work by **John Singer Sargent** (1856–1925) from 1888? Gautier calls Madame Moitessier "proud," but he means it as a compliment. John Walker, the former Director of the Washington National Gallery, calls her contemptuous and disdainful. Here is the relevant passage from his book; do you think it rings true? The problem I have with with Walker's explanation is that the Iselins must still have accepted the picture. They must have seen something characteristic and true in her depiction; any hint that the painter was contemptuous of *her,* and they wouldn't have paid.

International Man of Mystery

13. Prud'hon: *David Johnston,* in frame, untitled

Suppose you found this in a junk dealer's bin, what would you think? A professional art historian would immediately try to place the style, assign a date, and conjecture an artist. But more ordinary folks might wonder about the young man being portrayed: what sort of a man was he? Why it he dressed like that, coiffed like that, lit and painted like that?

14. — the same, larger, titled

See it in the gallery, and the art-historical work has been done for you. The painting is dated 1808 and signed: **Pierre-Paul Prud'hon** (1758–1823), an established but not-quite-top-tier French artist known for a portrait of the Empress Josephine, among others. The sitter has been identified too, but the name is a surprise: **David Johnston**. Who is this young man with a Scots-Irish name (same as my best friend in Northern Ireland as a child), and what is he doing in France? The furthest my research will take me is that David was the 19-year-old son of a Scottish-Irish-French-Swiss family of minor industrialists active in Bordeaux. Beyond that, nothing. How could they attract the Empress' own portraitist? And why was the son depicted as a **Regency dandy** or **Byronic hero**—because he too was at least partly British? The mystery remains.

Family Matters

15. The three pictures below
16. Cézanne: *The Artist's Father Reading "L'Évenement"*, 1866
17. Morisot: *The Artist's Mother and Sister*, 1869
18. Degas: *Madame René de Gas*, 1872

One thing we learn from that, I hope, is that there are some things we can guess for ourselves, some we can only learn from the gallery label, and that the two may not always coincide. Let's look now at three works by French painters—**Paul Cézanne** (1839–1906), **Berthe Morisot** (1841–95), and **Edgar Degas** (1834–1917)—in the decade before the first of the Impressionst Exhibitions in which, to one degree or another, they would all take part. I will tell you now that the subjects are all family members. To get them all on one slide, I have kept the Cézanne intact, but included only details of the other two in the same proportions. Just from these details alone, and putting aside anything you might happen to know, what do think of the figures in these three paintings? What is their social class and role in life? Which painting is the simplest? While two of the figures are reading, two of the women are sitting and thinking; what might they be thinking?

Given the heavy impasto and thick brushwork of the **Cézanne**, which his quite unlike the thin paint of his mature style, you might think that his father was lower-middle or even working class. But in fact he was the son of a successful milliner who opened a bank that prospered rapidly, leaving a substantial fortune

for the artist to inherit. Berthe **Morisot** came from a well-to-do upper-middle-class family, as the furnishings in her portrait might indicate. And **Degas** was also the son of a banker, from an aristocratic family; his relatives called themselves De Gas, though he himself as a natural democrat combined the two words into one.

Let's look again at the two pensive women; what *are* they thinking? **Berthe Morisot's** sister **Edma Pontillon** had trained with her as an artist, and they had spent days together at the Louvre, copying the Old Masters. She had hoped to continue after she married, but found it impossible to do so. At the time of this picture, she was pregnant with her first child. Working at the Louvre, Berthe had become friends with **Édouard Manet** (1832–83). Dissatisfied with this picture, she asked him for his advice. With only hours to go before the van took it away for exhibition, he siezed a brush, and began painting out most of the mother's dress, leaving a picture that is effectively an amalgam of two different style. Morisot was horrified, but she respected the older master, and when the painting was enthusiastically received at the *Salon,* she had to admit he was right. She eventually married Manet's brother.

Degas painted his picture in **New Orleans**, where his family had established themselves as cotton brokers. He found "the tenderness of the Eighteenth Century" in the life his brothers lived in New Orleans; this comes over, I think, in the simplicity of his painting, which has almost no incidental detail. But there is one thing about the sitter that I wonder if you can guess—don't say if you actually know. **Estelle de Gas** had gone almost completely blind.

Women in White

19. Whistler: *The White Girl* (1862), with Monet: *Bazille and Camille* (1866)

My last grouping is less a comparison than a journey of exploration that starts in Washington but will take us to London, Paris, and Saint Petersburg; I call it "Women in White." On the left, *The White Girl* (1862) by American expatriate **James Abbott McNeill Whistler** (1834–1903), featuring his model and lover **Joanna Hiffernan**. On the right, a sketch by **Claude Monet** (1840–1926), showing *his* lover (and future wife) **Camille Doncieux**, together with his friend, the painter **Frédéric Bazille**. So both show identifiable figures—but is either one a portrait?

Portraits do not have to be commissioned, like those with which this class started; none of the three family pictures we have just seen were, though portraits they undoubtedly are. But they do have to be exhibited under their sitter's name, and neither of these was, so my answer is **No**.

20. Whistler: *The White Girl* (1862) and *The Little White Girl* (1864, London Tate)

Whistler's painting is life-size, and it certainly makes a statement—but I would say it is a statement that works better if the sitter is anonymous. What statement does it make for you? Is it the same as you get from this companion piece of the same model he made in 1864, *The Little White Girl*? Whistler would later group these with a third painting of women in white, under the title *Symphony in White 1, 2, and 3.*

21. The Manet and Monet *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* paintings

The Whistler and Monet paintings are connected in a surprising way. *The White Girl* baffled critics in London in 1862, but Whistler sent it to the Paris *Salon* in 1863. It was rejected, but so were many other paintings that Emperor Napoléon III announced the now-famous ***Salon des Refusés*** where the public could assess the rejects for themselves. **Whistler's** painting was the *succès d'estime* of that exhibition; **Manet's** *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* was the *succès de scandale.* Which in turn inspired **Monet** to paint his own *Déjeuner,* but this time making the picnic real: a group of friends in a woodland clearing, lit by the dappled light falling through the leaves. The Washington painting was a study for that.

22. Monet: *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (central recovered portion, 1866–78, Orsay)

In the end, Monet could not finish the painting and left the canvas with a landlord in security for unpaid rent. When he recovered it twelve years later, it had been largely destroyed by damp. But he was able to restore the central section, which showed his beloved Camille, not as a semi-anonymous figure on the fringe, but as the radiant hostess of the picnic, seated in full light in the center. But alas, Camille was consumptive and already quite ill. A year later, he painted her on her deathbed—a portrait, indeed, but an astonishingly private one.

23. Monet: *Camille on her Deathbed* (1879, Orsay)

Emily

24. Cynthia Nixon as Emily Dickinson in *A Quiet Passion*

I'll round off the class with substantial clips from two films that fill out two of the subjects of last week's class: **Emily Dickinson** (1830–86) and **Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770–1827). I showed a scene from *A Quiet Passion,* Terence Davies' 2016 film about Dickinson, in which Emily (Cynthia Nixon) forms an attachment to the kind Reverend Wadsworth then flies into a passion with her sister when she hears he is to leave town. The two scenes I shall play now come just before and shortly after that sequence. In the first, she is joined at night by her sister-in-law, confidante, and next-door neighbor Susan (Jhodi May), who it appears is also drawn to the eloquent minister. *A Quiet Passion* does not go as far as the other film I showed, *Wild Nights with Emily,* in suggesting a lesbian relationship between the two, but in all other respects it makes it clear that they are indeed soulmates. The second clip traces stages of her turning into a recluse: watching her father's funeral from an upstairs window, arguing with an interfering editor from the top of the stairs, and refusing to see an admirer because he is too handsome.

25. Excerpts from *A Quiet Passion* (Terence Davies, 2016)

Eroica

26. Ian Hart as Beethoven in *Eroica*

Eroica, the 2003 film about **Beethoven's** Third Symphony, is an unusual undertaking. It dramatizes the private rehearsal of the symphony at the palace of Beethoven's patron **Prince Lobkowitz** on June 9, 1804. The entire symphony is played (by the *Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique* conducted by **Sir John Eliot Gardiner**). Around it, the screenplay by **Nick Dear** shows the reactions of the aristocratic patrons, their servants and musicians, and some of Beethoven's professional colleagues, brilliantly combining historical commentary and musical analysis. There are too many figures to name individually, but look especially for the conservative views of **Count Dietrichstein** (**Tim Pigott-Smith**) contrasted with the openness of **Lobkowitz** (**Jack Davenport**). Also, among the musicians, Beethoven's pupil **Ferdinand Reis** (**Leo Bill**) and, at the end, Beethoven's former teacher, the aged **Haydn** (**Frank Finlay**). Beethoven is played by **Ian Hart**. It is important to know that the symphony was originally called ***Buonaparte***.

I will play the opening of the rehearsal, a couple of moments of discussion that occur between movements, and then the final movement complete. It is interesting to note that Beethoven begins this movement with an almost skeletal bass line, then gives us a couple of variatons on it, before introducing the main theme, so the whole thing grows in scale from a child's music box to an existential drama.

27. Scenes from *Eroica* (Simon Clellan Jones, 2003)
28. Final title