PORTRAIT OF A LADY WITH A DOG BY FRAGONARD

Jean Honoré Fragonard's Portrait of a Lady with a Dog (illustrated on the cover) which comes to the Museum from the collection of Mme Burat of Paris, is shown this month in the Room of Recent Acquisitions. During the eighteenth century France produced three painters of genius, Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard, and of these Fragonard has not hitherto been represented in the Museum's collection of paintings. The acquisition of this portrait therefore fills a recognized gap with a work of exceptional brilliance.

As Fragonard, or Frago, as he is often called, is a new member of the Museum's family of artists, it seems appropriate to pass in review the principal events in his active and, in the main, happy life. He was born in 1732, the son of a merchant of Grasse. At the age of fifteen he was taken to Paris by his father and, after a brief interlude during which he studied law, began his apprenticeship as a painter, first with Chardin and subsequently with Boucher, whose assistant he became. In 1752, at the age of twenty, he won the Prix de Rome, but he did not go to Italy until 1756. The intervening years he spent, as a member of the École des élèves protégés, under the tutelage of Carle Van Loo. After almost five years of travel and study in Italy, which broadened his knowledge and influenced the development of his style, he returned to Paris in 1761 and set to work painting in the grand manner—newly restored to fashion in reaction against the frivolous style of Boucher. To satisfy this taste he exhibited at the Salon of the Académie royale in 1765 the great machine, Corésus and Callirhoé, now in the Louvre, which was purchased by the king and used as a design for tapestry.

Subsequently abandoning the grand manner, he began to paint sprightly little easel pictures based on themes of love, to which his talents were eminently suited and which are still considered his most typical paintings. This about-face evoked the censure of art critics such as Buchaumont, who, in 1769, wrote disparagingly: "M. Fragonard... qui aî dénoté... les plus grandes espérances pour le genre de l'histoire... il se contente de briller aujourd'hui dans les boudoirs & dans les garderobes." But in this field, in which his southern nature revealed, he soon gained a reputation and was patronized by many of the celebrities of his day, including Mme du Barry and the dancer Mlle Guimard. He appears to have led a gay bachelor's life until 1769, when he suddenly married his pupil, Marie Anne Gérard. About this time his art seems to have entered into another phase, owing perhaps to the settling effect of his marriage, perhaps to the general change in taste expressed in contemporary literary works like Diderot's and Rousseau's; for while his earlier works, such as The Swing in the Wallace Collection, are charmingly naughty, his later works, for example The Happy Family in the collection of Mrs. William R. Timken in New York, frequently depict the charms of domestic happiness.

Fragonard's popularity continued undiminished until the Revolution in 1789. With the Revolution came the end of his accustomed manner of living, but though he lost his wealthy patrons he managed to keep his own head. Shunted about from Paris to Grasse and back—from his old residence in the artists' quarters in the Louvre to humble private lodgings—Fraco, still cheerful in adversity, lived on a drastically reduced scale for the remaining years of his life. When he died, on August 22, 1806, at the age of seventy-four, he was almost forgot-

1 Acc. no. 37.118. Fletcher Fund. Oil on canvas. H. 32 in., w. 25 3/4 in. The history of this picture is uncertain before 1907, when it was in the Burat collection. According to A. Dayot and L. Vaillat, L'Oeuvre de J.-B.-S. Chardin et de J.-H. Fragonard (Paris, 1907), p. xi, no. 77, it came from the collection of M. Féral, who obtained it from either the de Cambis or the des Isnards family. Efforts to verify this have been so far unsuccessful. The following exhibition catalogues mention the de Cambis and des Isnards collections but do not mention the Féral collection: Exposition d'oeuvres de J.-H. Fragonard (Musée des arts décoratifs) (Paris, 1921), no. 31; Commemorative Catalogue of the Exhibition of French Art, 1200-1900, Royal Academy of Arts, London, January-March, 1932 (London, 1933), no. 164.

2 F. le C. de Buchaumont, Lettres sur les peintures, sculptures, et gravures de mrs. de l'Académie royale, ... depuis MDCCCLXVII jusqu'en MDCCCLXXIX (London, 1780), pp. 38 f.
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BY JEAN HONORÉ FRAGONARD
ten. The style of painting in which he had won his great success had gone out of fashion and had been replaced by the frigid classicism of David. The *Journal de l'Empire*, which reported the important events of the day, did not even record his death, and the only notice is the usual one in the parish register.

Fragonard had the happy faculty of absorbing influences as a sponge absorbs water, and he changed masters, subjects, procedures, and styles with equal ease. Early in his career he was naturally subjected to the influences of his masters: Chardin, Boucher, and Van Loo; and later, when he was in Italy, he found much profit in studying the works of Barocci, Pietro da Cortona, Solimena, and especially Tiepolo. He had, however, only a feeling of awe for the Italian Old Masters. Of Raphael and Michelangelo he said: “L'énergie de Michel-Ange m'effrayait;... en voyant les beautés de Raphaël, j'étais ému jusqu'aux larmes, et le crayon me tombait des mains.”3 It was during this visit to Italy that Fragonard's interest in landscape painting began. His delicate views owe part of their captivating charm to the influence of Hubert Robert, with whom many happy hours were passed in sketching and painting when in 1760 they were both guests of their enthusiastic patron, the abbé de Saint-Non, in the Villa d'Este at Tivoli.

The works of the seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish painters were another source from which Fragonard drew much inspiration. Rubens and Rembrandt, whose paintings he knew and copied, attracted him especially, and their influence is very marked in some of his paintings. The similarity of the brushwork in certain of Fragonard's canvases to that of Frans Hals is due perhaps to a temperament of kinship rather than to direct borrowing. Another and final influence seen in Fragonard's post-Revolutionary works is that of David, the principal exponent of the classical revival, to which, however, Frago's artistic bent was opposed.

Fragonard was not a professional portrait painter. The painstaking task of getting a likeness was not congenial to his impetuous temperament, and serious portraits by him are rare. A large number of his so-called portraits are, in reality, only unidentified decorative studies quickly dashed off for pleasure or by way of exercise. The Museum's Portrait of a Lady with a Dog is one of these quick studies, sketched from life and painted at one sitting with all the fire and vehemence of his nature. The identity of the model, whose distinctive features are here so strikingly recorded, is unknown, but Fragonard knew and painted many people of the theater and it is possible that the sitter was a singer or an actress.4 Her anachronistic, “Spanish” dress, with its ruff, its puffed and slashed sleeves, and the ropes of huge pearls, support this possibility.

The mode of painting figures *vêtus à l'espagnole*, sponsored by no less a person than Mme de Pompadour, was a reaction from the grand manner of painting, for which the only proper subjects were historical or mythological scenes. Mme de Pompadour's boredom with the academic fashion and her efforts in 1755 to encourage a new type of subject matter are recounted by a contemporary commentator in these words: “Weary of seeing only Alexanders, Caesars, Scipios, Greek and Roman Heroes she [Mme de Pompadour] suggested to the artists... to attempt some subject in European dress which would be effective. Vainly they objected that most of our short garments do not arrange at all well, do not lend themselves to the picturesque... She herself removed the difficulty by inducing M. Van Loo to use the Spanish subject.”5

Fragonard, always open to influences, painted several canvases in this “Spanish” vein, to which he had probably first been introduced while he was a student of Van Loo *d'Espagne.*6 The subjects of these pictures are mostly allegorical with figures in fantastic dress. The costumes are certainly not those of contemporary Spain but go back rather to the early seventeenth cen-

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4 The portrait has been erroneously identified as Fragonard's sister and as his aunt. The features do not resemble other known portraits of the artist's aunt, and he apparently had no sister.


6 Bachaumont, *op. cit.*, p. 16, uses this epithet.
tury for their inspiration—to the period of Van Dyck and Rubens. One of the most characteristic is his Portrait de M. l'abbé de Saint-Non vêtu à l'espagnole, which was exhibited in Paris last summer. The companion portraits of the duc de Beuvron and the duc d'Harcourt in theatrical costume in the possession of Mme la duchesse d'Harcourt are also in this genre. But the most famous examples are the series of four paintings in the La Caze collection in the Louvre: L'Inspiration, L'Étude, La Musique (also sometimes called Portrait de M. de la Bretèche), and Portrait de Fantaisie (called Portrait de M. l'abbé de Saint-Non).

To these seven paintings and, to a lesser extent, to the Portrait of Diderot in the André Pastré collection in Paris, our painting shows a marked likeness. This likeness depends as much on technical similarities of brushwork—on little tricks such as the use of the handle of the brush to scratch accents in the wet paint—as on the choice of subject matter and the stylistic influences.

In the Museum's Portrait of a Lady with a Dog and in the other examples of the Spanish mode, the artist has displayed the same virtuosity of brushwork and economy of means. His quick hand has darted over the canvas, painting very thinly except in the face, which is carefully built up and modeled. The rapidity with which Fragonard worked is shown also in the handling of the drapery, which is painted with bold strokes hastily but surely applied. Almost every stroke of the brush can be seen, and his method of working can be reconstructed. For example, in the sleeve it is apparent that the painter first laid on the local colors of red and yellow, next, with a well-laden brush, added accents of stronger value for shadows and, in the following step, mixed these pigments with white to give the lights. Finally, as a finishing touch, he added two rapid strokes of pure white for the high lights, and the sleeve was done. One can well believe that this picture, like La Musique and the Portrait de Fantaisie, was, as contemporary inscriptions on the back of these canvases record, “peint par Fragonard ... en une heure de temps.”

While our portrait is Gallic in interpretation, influences coming from outside Fragonard's native land are obvious, and of these influences that of Rubens is predominant. It is found in the composition, in the robust figure, in the form of the head, in the modeling of the face, the drawing of the eyes, and especially in the use of reddish reflected lights in the shadows in the flesh. Subsidiary influences deriving from Boucher, Tiepolo, and Van Loo are but dimly seen in comparison.

The similarity of the Museum's Portrait of a Lady with a Dog to Fragonard's other paintings à l'espagnole is so striking that it seems highly probable it was executed at about the same time. Except for the Portrait de Fantaisie and La Musique, which are inscribed 1769, none of these paintings is dated, but general opinion places them between 1765 and 1771. To be more exact one might say, at least tentatively, that our picture was probably painted between 1767 and 1770.

"L'aimable Frago" was an artistic hedonist with no serious mission, no exacting conscience. He was, as his friend Marguerite Gérard said, "a veritable nursling of caprice" and painted largely for the joy he derived from the process—a joy shared by the beholder. The Portrait of a Lady with a Dog, with all its freshness of color, its playfulness of mood, its wit, gives concrete expression to the spirit of the age of rococo.

Hermann W. Williams, Jr.

RECENT CHANGES IN THE AMERICAN WING

For more than a year changes have been taking place in the third floor galleries of The American Wing, to permit the installation of two authentic rooms and two staircases of prime importance. The galleries in which they were installed were opened on December 28, 1937.

These new rooms replace the reproductions of domestic architecture of the seventeenth century—the parlor, kitchen, and

7 Chefs-d'oeuvre de l'art français (Palais national des arts) (Paris, 1937), no. 158, pl. lix.