

The Bird-Catcher Tuning His Guitar and Three Other Paintings in an Italian Costume by Jean-Baptiste Greuze. A Forgotten Attempt at Libertine *Peinture d'Histoire*

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ABSTRACT

After his resounding success at the 1755 Salon in Paris, Jean-Baptiste Greuze went to Italy, where he stayed for two years. During his sojourn, he was interested in the local folklore as much as in the ancient, Renaissance and Baroque art of Italy. The most important fruit of that journey were the 'four paintings in an Italian costume' – *Broken Eggs*, *The Neapolitan Gesture*, *Indolence* and *The Bird-Catcher Tuning His Guitar after the Return from a Hunt*, which he exhibited at the 1757 Salon. They were admired and immediately purchased by collectors, but later fell into oblivion for a long time. They were restored to art history by Willibald Sauerländer (1965) and written about by the painter's biographers Anita Brookner (1972) and Edgar Munhall (1976). Andrzej Pieńkos devoted a separate study to them (1987). Yet in publications on Greuze or, more broadly, on eighteenth-century French art, they are usually omitted or discussed only briefly, as a transitional episode before the famous multi-figure family scenes Greuze painted after 1760. Thanks to the publications of Antoine Chatelain (especially the diary of Louis Gougenot, *Voyage dans différentes contrées de France et d'Italie* [Paris, 2023], which he edited), more details about Greuze's travels in Italy with his patron, Abbé Gougenot, came to light. In this article, the author reports on the state of research and views on the four paintings, their fortunes and their popularity, expressed, among others, by print reproductions made by the famous engraver Pierre-Étienne Moitte. This series was most often treated as a continuation of Greuze's Dutch-style genre painting from the period of his debut in 1755, only with the figures dressed in Italian costumes, as well as a harbinger of his more important later works. However, looking at Greuze's concept of creating a narrative in two pairs of pendants, as well as his use of a coherent mixture of different artistic patterns, the author suggests that the 'four paintings in an Italian costume', and to the greatest extent *The Bird-Catcher* from the National Museum in Warsaw, were a well-thought-out experiment in modern *peinture d'histoire*. The 'pathos formula' achieved by means of clear references to famous ancient sculptures, to a fresco by Michelangelo, and perhaps also to paintings by Caravaggio, gave an ordinary libertine tale an elevated quality expected by the Academy milieu. The contemporary Italian costume, in turn, combined with the scenery and staging of genre scenes referring to the then popular patterns of seventeenth-century Dutch art, met the tastes of the collectors with whom Greuze associated from the very beginning of his career.

KEYWORDS

Diderot, expression, eroticism, Hollandism, libertinism, history painting, Italian fashion, Italian journey, genre character, ancient sculpture, the Academy Salon

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Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *The Bird-Catcher Tuning His Guitar after the Return from a Hunt* (fig. 1), exhibited in Paris in 1757, is one of the most famous and most frequently reproduced works of European painting in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw,¹ where it is catalogued under the title *The Guitar Player*.² It appears in the museum's advertising brochures and on admission tickets; its reproduction even adorned the cover of an encyclopaedia of music published by PWN in 2001. In 1967, the Polish Post Office dedicated a postage stamp to it, and in 2005 it reappeared on a French stamp commemorating the two-hundredth anniversary of the painter's death. However, the painting itself has seldom been a subject of research. It has been mentioned in biographies and various academic works concerning the painter, and has been exhibited in his only retrospective exhibition to date,³ but it has not been properly incorporated into reflections on eighteenth-century French art at large.

My first study of this painting was published in 1987. It was written as a result of an iconographic study of Greuze's art which I conducted, under the supervision of Professor Jan Białostocki, as part of my Master's thesis at the Institute of Art History at the University of Warsaw. It also constituted a part of my monograph on the painter, which was never published.⁴ Afterwards, I occasionally returned to *The Bird-Catcher*,⁵ most recently mentioning it in the introduction to a book on the relationship



fig. 1 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Guitar Player* (*The Bird-Catcher Tuning His Guitar after the Return from a Hunt*), 1757, The National Museum in Warsaw
photo Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie

between the visual and musical arts.⁶ The reason for the reference was not sentimental in nature, however, as Greuze's *Guitar Player* is, after all, one of the model examples of the presence of music in painting. And it is undoubtedly an outstanding painting. In addition, it contributes to an interesting narrative and dramaturgical experiment when placed alongside other Greuze paintings from the same time – its pendant *Indolence (La Paresseuse italienne)* (fig. 2) and two multi-figure scenes, *Broken Eggs (Les Œufs cassés)* and *The Neapolitan Gesture (Le Geste napolitain)* (figs 3–4). It was therefore a thoroughly considered undertaking, of much significance to the thirty-year-old artist who was already being hailed as 'the Molière of painters'.⁷ These 'four paintings in an Italian costume'⁸ should not be regarded solely as evidence of Italian fashion's presence in the

iconography of the time, or as harbingers of Greuze's ingenuity with serial solutions (i.e., creating stories in pairs or cycles). In my opinion, we are dealing here with one of the most interesting visual and narrative experiments in European painting of the mid-eighteenth century.

When in September 1755, in the company of his patron, Abbé Louis Gougenot, Greuze crossed the Alps to Italy, where he was to work on the aforementioned paintings, he was already a mature artist. A few months earlier, he had been accepted into the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture as an *agrée* (candidate) and had a successful first presentation of five paintings at the Academy's Salon. Among them was a multi-figure family scene, *The Bible Reading (Un Père de famille qui lit la Bible à ses enfants)* (fig. 5), which opened an ensuing sequence of genre paintings that would become

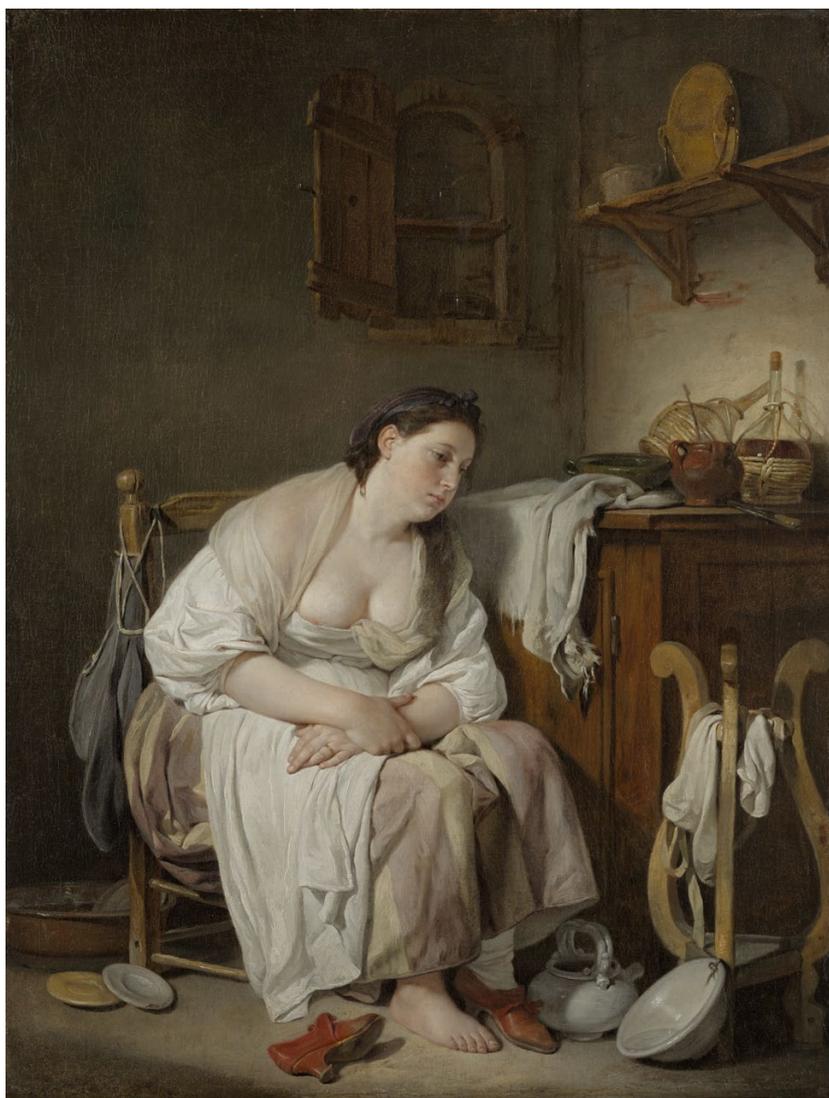


fig. 2 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Indolence (La Paresseuse italienne)*, 1756, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford photo Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford

fig. 3 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Broken Eggs*, 1756, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York photo public domain



fig. 4 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Neapolitan Gesture*, 1757, Worcester Art Museum photo public domain





fig. 5 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Bible Reading*, 1755, Musée du Louvre, Paris
photo © Musée du Louvre / Tony Querrec

the best known in Greuze's oeuvre, as well as a painting of a similar nature: *The Blind Man Deceived* (*L'Aveugle trompé*, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow) and one of Greuze's masterpieces, a demonstration of his utter technical mastery, *A Schoolboy Asleep on His Book* (*Un Enfant qui s'est endormi sur son livre*) (fig. 6).⁹ With this, Greuze gained considerable fame, receiving several very favourable reviews and selling three of the paintings immediately.

The trip to Italy was funded by Abbé Gougenot, as Greuze was not eligible for the Prix de Rome scholarship, an award for young students of the Academy. The route of their journey, the painter's attitude and his interests are known to us from the priest's diary.¹⁰ Greuze intended some of the sketches and study drawings he had made along the way to serve as illustrations for his benefactor's manuscript (figs 7–8).¹¹ This journey was unique compared to similar ones of the era; the powerful patron, art expert and collector reported that Greuze, in addition to

providing him with fascinating conversation, gave him advice regarding his diary entries.¹² Abbé Gougenot's notes reveal what the travellers saw during their journey, which was filled with attractions as they wended their way through most of the famous regions and cities in Italy, all the way to Naples. It is known, for instance, that Greuze visited Herculaneum and admired the Roman paintings there.¹³ The artist's stay in Italy ultimately turned out to be longer than planned, since he remained in Rome after his patron's departure, intending to study the Renaissance masters. This may seem surprising for a painter of *bambochades*, or insignificant genre scenes modelled on northern paintings, which was the reputation with which Greuze had left France. The malicious, and influential, Pierre-Jean Mariette went as far as to suggest that a stay in Italy was completely unnecessary for such a painter. Nevertheless, Greuze's efforts were appreciated in Paris and the minister Marquis de Marigny even allowed him, as an exception, to use an apartment in the



fig. 6 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *A Schoolboy Asleep on His Book*, 1755, Musée Fabre, Montpellier
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Palazzo Mancini, where the Roman branch of the Academy was located.¹⁴

When, in 1987, I proposed an iconographic analysis of *The Bird-Catcher* and three related Italian paintings, I based my work on the state of research summarized ten years earlier by Edgar Munhall in his fundamental catalogue for the monographic exhibition of Greuze's oeuvre. Has our knowledge of these works increased since then? This analysis remains the only study of the four Italian paintings; also, it went almost completely unnoticed, not only because it was published behind the Iron Curtain, but also because of the *a priori* assumption among members the scholarly community that these works played a marginal role in the art of the period and that Greuze's almost two-year stay in Italy had a merely 'auxiliary' dimension. Even relatively recently, Philippe Bordes, a prominent expert on French art of that period, stated in passing that during this period, Greuze was 'attracted primarily by the picturesqueness of everyday life there'.¹⁵ It is, therefore, important

to note the surprising absence of the works in question from the latest art history, possibly caused by the dispersion of the set, but also by their early dating, that is, before Greuze's great successes and the praise of his work by Denis Diderot, who began to regularly discuss the Paris Salons in 1759. Inevitably, these early paintings by Greuze, unlike his works from the 1760s and later, were not included in research and exhibitions focussing on Diderot and the art of his time. Generating the most interest were his characteristic images of girls (the so-called 'Greuze girl' type),¹⁶ as well as his ambitions to become a painter of historical scenes, which resulted in the famously catastrophic presentation of the painting *Septimius Severus and Caracalla* (Musée du Louvre, Paris) at the 1769 Salon.¹⁷ The painter's desire to maximize the 'narrative character' of his paintings was noted, and appreciated, in individual scenes and 'dip-tychs' from the 1760s and 1770s which formed a moralizing 'series' that was highly acclaimed at the time.¹⁸ Influential books by Robert Rosenblum and Thomas E. Crow¹⁹ cemented Greuze as, first and foremost, a painter of moralizing family scenes. Meanwhile, an artist's merit as a modern creator was presumed to lie mainly in their imitating or building on William Hogarth's concept of art,²⁰ a concept in line with Diderot's tenets. Thus, treated as early works, the four paintings discussed here fell out of circulation. Greuze went to Italy to study, after all, and he was deemed to have used the skills acquired there in his 'mature' work; for this reason, the consequences of his stay were analysed with a focus on his later period. Incidentally, let it be noted that this focus of research likewise excluded Greuze's work from the last decades of his life, even though it makes him an important representative of Neoclassicism.

In fact, there still exists a long, and long outdated, tradition of perceiving Greuze as a painter who 'debuted' in 1761 with the great success that was *The Village Bride* (*L'Accordée de village*),²¹ even though he was already thirty-six at the time and had participated in three Salons. It seems, therefore, that Greuze still functions in art history almost exclusively as a painter of the 'Diderot era', and if his early works are taken into account, it is only those that 'heralded' his later achievements.²² *The*



fig. 7 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Bolognese Peasant Girl with a Distaff*, 1755, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
photo public domain



fig. 8 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Florentine Woman Wearing a Butterfly Cap and Holding a Hand Warmer*, 1755, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
photo public domain

Bird-Catcher (The Guitar Player) seemed to herald even less than the other Italian paintings, and for this reason it remained the least commented-upon of the works exhibited by Greuze in the period spanning 1755–1759; its location in a Warsaw museum is also likely to have contributed to that neglect.

In her book, which is otherwise excellent and one of the few existing monographs on the artist, Emma Barker omits this painting. She discusses Greuze's major influences and his reliance on seventeenth-century Northern art, the 'Flemish genre',²³ which is particularly evident in his early work. She focuses on several peasant scenes, assessing the painter's interests as deriving from his Burgundian, and therefore provincial, origins. *The Bird Catcher* is not included in her analysis, even as an exception that proves the rule. Greuze's knowledge of seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish artists is, of course, well documented

and this influence was recognized still in his lifetime.²⁴ It is worth recalling here that Greuze came to know their works not only through print reproductions; he was close to several Parisian engravers who specialized in promoting this type of painting, in particular Jacques-Philippe Lebas and Pierre-Étienne Moitte. He was also closely acquainted with Johann Georg Wille, an engraver, as well as an art dealer and influential promoter of 'northern taste' in France, whose portrait he painted (although their acquaintance is confirmed by sources only from 1759 onwards). In addition, he could easily have had access to original paintings, as he moved in the circles of several well-known collectors of this type of art. At the beginning of his education, before arriving in Paris, he had the opportunity to view such paintings in Lyon. I shall return to the question of the Dutch influence on Greuze later in this article.

Upon his return from Italy, Greuze hastily prepared a set of works to be shown at the 1757 Salon, including portraits of his benefactor Abbé Gougenot (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon)²⁵ and the renowned sculptor Jean-Baptiste Pigalle (lost), from whom he received assistance before his departure. Apart from those, the catalogue (*livret*) for the exhibition announced 'quatre tableaux dans le Costume Italien, dont deux de 2 pieds 3 pouces sur 2 pieds 11 pouces de large, & les deux autres de 1 pied 11 pouces de haut sur un pied & demi de large'.²⁶ These two larger paintings were *Broken Eggs* (*Les Œufs cassés*)²⁷ and *The Neapolitan Gesture* (*Le Geste napolitain*).²⁸ Greuze gave these paintings to Gougenot as a gift. From the priest's diary, it transpires that the eponymous gesture – which has erotic connotations, as it signifies a refusal of sexual contact – was witnessed by the two men in Naples and then inspired the painting.²⁹

In art history, both of these works have been discussed rather briefly.³⁰ A more detailed analysis by Bernadette Fort, like most others,

leans towards a moralizing interpretation, despite the ambiguity: the first painting (as presented by the artist at the Salon), *Broken Eggs*, is generally presumed to be a warning to the girl depicted in the second painting, *The Neapolitan Gesture*. The breaking of the eggs is to have been caused by the amorous frolicking of the two young people, who are being severely reprimanded by the girl's mother. Despite the apparent lightness of the anecdotal content, the effect that the painter achieved in the poses of his figures was so noble that they were deemed worthy of 'adorning a history painting', as noted by Abbé Barthélemy, one of the chief observers of the artistic life of the era.³¹ As to the playful child in the first scene, in turn, James Thompson argues that the little boy is not merely a pleasant genre-style ornament. Contradicting earlier interpretations that saw the boy as an embodiment of childish naivety and innocent ignorance (in relation to the erotic subtext), Thompson forcefully draws attention to the figure potentially being an allusion to the cunning

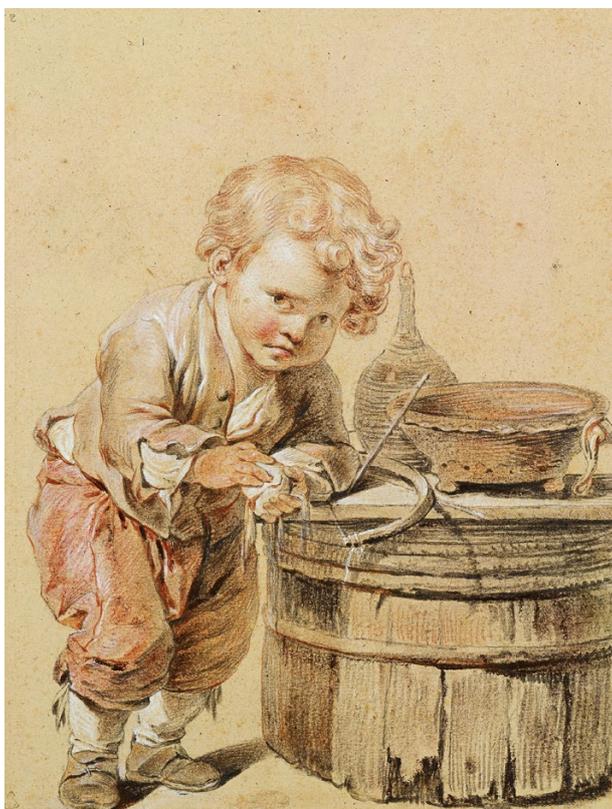


fig. 9 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, A Study for the Figure of the Boy in 'Broken Eggs', c.1756, Albertina, Vienna photo public domain

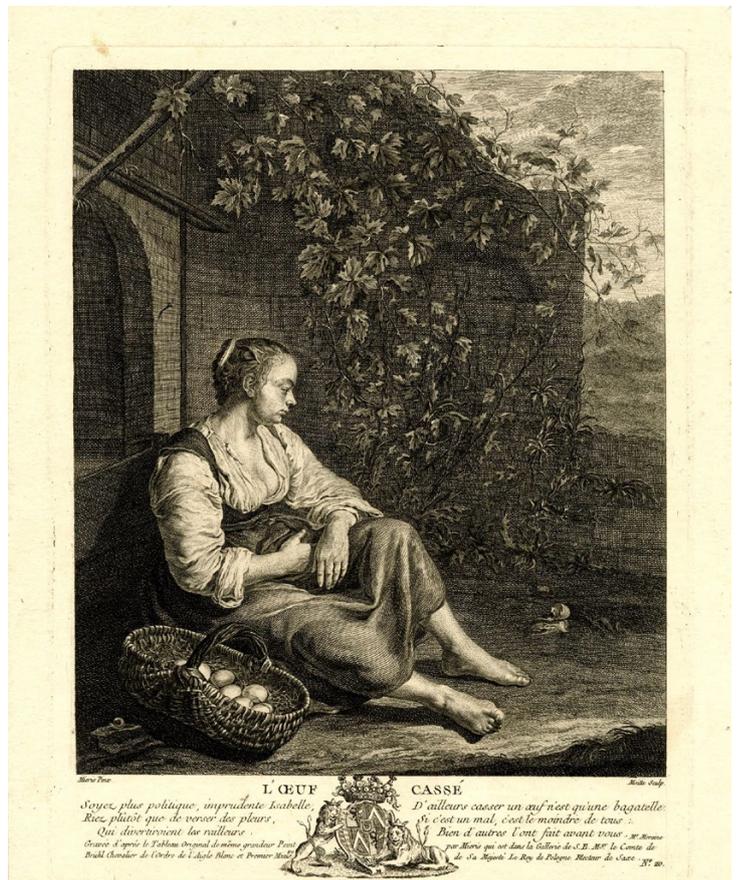


fig. 10 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, A Study for the Figure of the Old Woman in 'The Neapolitan Gesture', 1756, Getty Center, Los Angeles photo public domain

fig. 11 Pierre-Étienne Moitte after Frans van Mieris the Elder, *The Broken Egg*, British Museum, London
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and mischievous Cupid (fig. 9).³² The toy bow and arrow lying beside the boy, as well as his wonderfully rendered face with a crafty expression certainly leave little room for doubt. It seems that the opinions need not clash, however; after all, it is not only in this motif and not only in this painting that Greuze played a sophisticated game of meanings, making use of a variety of attributes (often ones that the iconographic tradition held to be unambiguous), costumes, poses, gestures, facial expressions, connections and colour contrasts. The boy can therefore be at once a cunning Cupid, a little peasant playing Cupid, and an innocent child who does not yet understand the intrigue.

Erotic allusions are obvious in both paintings and are linked either to the old iconographic tradition (broken eggs) or to observed local customs (the aforementioned Italian gesture of refusal). The intrigue is spread across two paintings and expressed in the theatrical poses and facial expressions of all the characters. The templates that Greuze may have used, as pointed out by scholars, are numerous; some of them may raise doubts, but it indeed does seem that the painter preferred not to waste time during his sojourn in Italy and sought solutions that would allow him to condense his works' expressiveness. The Farnese Hercules has been pointed out as the prototype for the young man in the scene with the broken eggs, while the son of Niobe in the statue from the Uffizi in Florence has been suggested as the inspiration for the fleeing man in the second painting. In the same painting, the elderly woman in despair or anger (fig. 10) was said to have been inspired by the figure of Mary from Caravaggio's famous *Deposition* in the Vatican.³³ At the same time, the earlier remark about Greuze imitating Brouwer and Teniers can also be applied to these paintings, accurately identifying yet another circle in the young painter's range of inspirations (although, of course, alongside Flemish artists, there were also seventeenth-century Dutch masters). In addition to general references to genre works of



the northern minor masters, there is a clear influence of Moitte's engraving after a painting by Frans van Mieris the Elder from the then collection of Count Brühl, an engraving that was part of a series of reproductions of masterpieces from that famous collection: Greuze modelled the figure of the girl in the first scene on a female figure by the Dutch painter (figs 11–13).³⁴

The second pair of 'paintings in an Italian costume' consisted of *Indolence* or *La Paresseuse italienne*³⁵ and our *Bird-Catcher*. Sauerländer claimed that Greuze modelled the figure of the lazy servant on Caravaggio's *Penitent Magdalene* (Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome), which the painter could have seen during his time in Italy, and perhaps also on Giuseppe Maria Crespi's *Woman Looking for Fleas*, versions of which were found in Florentine collections.³⁶ In addition, the arrangement of the scene brings to mind interiors from Dutch kitchen scenes, including those by Nicolaes Maes.³⁷ As noted by Colin Bailey, the figure of the maid, as well as her surroundings, including certain attributes, resemble several other, slightly later depictions of women by Greuze.³⁸ The scattered dishes,

fig. 12 Pierre-Étienne Moitte
after Jean-Baptiste
Greuze, *Broken Eggs*,
1769, Slovenská národná
galéria, Bratislava
photo public domain



fig. 13 Pierre-Étienne Moitte
after Jean-Baptiste
Greuze, *The Neapolitan
Gesture*, 1763,
Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York
photo public domain





fig. 14 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Guitar Player* (*The Bird-Catcher Tuning His Guitar after the Return from a Hunt*), detail

wine bottles and, above all, the shoe knocked off her foot further explain to the viewer the situation depicted in the painting, in which the woman is objectified; she becomes a victim of both her own passive attitude and the attack of her partner and tormentor – the musician returning from a bird-hunt in the second painting.

The uniqueness of *The Bird-Catcher* was noticed by Polish scholars as early as 1955, before the commencement of modern research on Greuze's oeuvre and his sojourn in Italy. The painting was pronounced to be 'a work [...] outstanding in its realism and surprising by its lack of sentimentality so characteristic of the artist's later works'.³⁹ In Greuze's times, the figure of the bird-catcher, or fowler, as well as the symbolism of dead birds, was unambiguously interpreted to signify erotic conquest; in fact, the motif returned in Greuze's later works, as he took up the theme of a girl mourning a bird several times, including in the famous painting

commented on by Diderot in his *Salon 1765*.⁴⁰ As noted by Fort,⁴¹ the bird-catcher boldly (provocatively?) looks at the viewer, drawing them into the tale, the continuation of which can be observed in the pendant. Various details with more or less unambiguous erotic connotations only reinforce the interpretation of the actions (already accomplished, but perhaps also planned) of the bird-hunting musician (the cage, empty wine bottles, objects of phallic shapes) (fig. 14). In this painting, like in the entire Italian series, these 'accessories of Desire', to borrow the words of Fort,⁴² are presented overtly and would not be overlooked by an educated viewer. The association of music-making with courtship was in no way unusual, either.⁴³ Viewers of the painting were certainly familiar with various depictions of group or solo performances of this kind, which appeared both in seventeenth-century Dutch painting (in the circle of the Caravagisti, in the works of Jan Steen, Judith Leyster

fig. 15 Jean-Baptiste Greuze,
The Bird-Catcher,
Bibliothèque nationale
de France, Paris
photo Bibliothèque nationale
de France, Paris



and Jan Miense Molenaer) and in the works of Antoine Watteau and his circle. The established relationship between the contorted, tense figure of the pursuer (fig. 15) and Michelangelo's *Ignudi*, the male nudes from the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, where Greuze is known to have worked, is yet another example of the fusion of classical 'high' inspirations with the northern tradition.⁴⁴ We are presented with an allegory of debauchery (spread over two paintings), personifications of two different temperaments, and an erotic tale in a style typical of the era.

When and under what circumstances the replica of the painting, apparently by the author himself, currently housed in the Musée d'Arts in Nantes as a deposit from the Louvre (fig. 16), was created remains a mystery. It may be evidence of this painting being particularly highly admired in its time,⁴⁵ since nothing is known about any painted repetitions of the other three Italian scenes.

It must be emphasized that references or veiled allusions (often clear to contemporary audiences) to ancient models, the Italian Renaissance and Baroque, and Dutch patterns did not create an eclectic effect. The paintings in this series are stylistically consistent and, as has repeatedly been pointed out (even in Greuze's own time), some accessories seem to move from painting to painting; in addition, Greuze used the same models, so it can be assumed that he did not try to hide the unity of situation and contents of the entire series. In all the paintings in the series, he used similar 'amassing' techniques: he used patterns from both ancient and classical Italian art to enhance the expression and blended them with a theatrical (conventionally Italian) costumes; also, all of these paintings contain an accumulation of objects having clear erotic connotations.⁴⁶ While seemingly remaining in the position of a genre painter, which had been officially granted to him, and taking care

to include Dutch/Flemish 'references' in his scenes, Greuze created a wholly mature model of a new *peinture d'histoire*, one set in contemporary scenery and costumes. Its modern character lay in the presentation of moral issues in an undisguised manner, without a pastoral or mythological filter. It seems that in the group of paintings discussed here, we are dealing with a reflection on the cycle of life, in which virtue becomes the subject of ambiguous allusions.

This 'invention' of Greuze's has, of course, long been analysed in academic literature. Here, I am merely attempting to shift the emphasis, or rather its dating: it did not first appear in 1761 in *The Village Bride* or in 1763 in his equally famous *The Paralytic*.⁴⁷ All that happened then was that thanks to these large, multi-figure scenes, Greuze became noticed and famous, acquiring the status of one of the most desirable French painters. However, it seems that in those large family scenes (and subsequent ones of the same type), the tension Greuze had achieved in the 'Italian paintings' was toned down, as was

the condensed 'pathos formula'. The size of those canvases, the number of *dramatis personae* and the complexity of the staging would become the weapons with which the painter would fight for his inter-genre invention to be recognized as a new formula of *peinture d'histoire* and for his position as a representative of the highest class of painting. Despite being popularized in the 1760s by Moitte's excellent engravings, the 'four paintings in an Italian costume' remained in the shadow of these more famous works – and remain there to this day.

Are they still deprived of the opportunity to establish a real relationship with the viewer who tries to see and interpret them? After all, the viewer stands in front of each of them separately in American museums and in the Warsaw museum (as well as in Nantes). Even though Worcester and New York are less than 300 km and a few hours' drive apart (with Hartford conveniently on the way), there is no way to reconstruct the dialogue between these paintings, not to mention *The Bird-Catcher*. The four paintings,



fig. 16 Jean-Baptiste Greuze (?),
*The Bird-Catcher Tuning His Guitar
after the Return from a Hunt*,
1757 (?), Musée du Louvre, Paris,
deposit at Musée d'Arts, Nantes
photo © Musée du Louvre / Gérard Blot

linked by concept, general theme and Italian costume, were separated as a quartet immediately after their presentation at the 1757 Salon, but the most closely connected pairs remained together for a long time. It was in this Italian set that Greuze made the first attempt in his career to 'network' paintings,⁴⁸ that is to spread their meanings over several mutually complementary works.

In conclusion, *The Bird-Catcher* does not herald that *grand livre de corruption*;⁴⁹ it wholly belongs to the same ambitious pictorial treatise packed with a conscious ambivalence of demoralization which Greuze would pursue, in various ways, in many of his later works. At the same time, it is already a fulfilled attempt – and in terms of painterly *qualité*, one of the best attempts – to combine a lowbrow 'genre' theme with the assumptions of *peinture d'histoire*.⁵⁰ This concept of the painting distinguishes *The Bird-Catcher* and its pendant, even among the 'quatre tableaux dans le Costume Italien', and seems also to set the hunter apart from his indolent companion,⁵¹ because in this work, the 'high' (*grande*) idea is not contained in a classical *storia*, but in an image of a single figure dressed in a contemporary costume.⁵²

If, following Michael Fried, we agree that one of the main ideas realized in Greuze's mature work (i.e., after 1761) was to create a feeling of the figures' 'absorption',⁵³ then the Italian series seems to have been an attempt to move in a different direction. Here, the viewer would not be able to enter the reality of any of these scenes by means of the method formulated at the time by Denis Diderot in his critical writings. Instead, in reading these scenes the viewer may follow the suggestions of Norman Bryson and Mark Ledbury, among others, who describe Greuze's often humorous way of depicting ambiguity.

There remains the problem of the Italian costume and scenery, since in these paintings, Greuze departed from the world of the French province (or perhaps his own, Burgundian one), which he showed in the genre scenes exhibited at the 1755 Salon – a world to which he would, in fact, return a few years later in his famous

family scenes. Were the reasons for that trivial: the fashion of the day and his own momentary fascination with Italy (confirmed by sources) during his sojourn there, or a desire to appeal to buyers? Greuze showed an interest in local costumes and customs during his travels, but in that he was, of course, by no means original.⁵⁴ Did he decide, out of caution, to place his bold, libertine story in a safe 'frame', to cover it with Italian picturesqueness, as if from an Italian comedy, and thus distance it from associations with the real world which he used to depict at the start of his career? The 'four paintings in an Italian costume' were, after all, his first works with erotic overtones. Soon, however, he would take up this theme without the costume: his girls with broken mirrors or jugs, or mourning dead birds, whom he painted repeatedly, especially in the 1760s – thus creating the most serious treatise on the moral and other circumstances of sexual initiation to exist in eighteenth-century European art – could be born Parisiennes.

It is certain that after the success of 1755, confirmed by an invitation to Italy from a powerful patron, Greuze – who was known for his ambition, often described as excessive by his contemporaries – decided to develop his career with two audiences in mind: the Royal Academy and its wider circle (including, among others, the minister Marquis de Marigny and the French ambassador to Italy, Duke de Choiseul), and the aristocratic and bourgeois milieu of wealthy art lovers. These worlds were intertwined, but the former preferred (at least in terms of official theory) classical tradition, Antiquity, the Renaissance, Nicolas Poussin and Charles Le Brun; the latter increasingly valued 'lower' subjects, risqué themes, art modelled on the ever more highly regarded 'little masters' of the seventeenth century, such as David Teniers the Younger or Frans van Mieris, and finally, picturesqueness, whether in their style or coloured by a fascination with Italian washerwomen, bandits, charlatans, and the often false gallantry of local lotharios.

Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz

NOTES

- ¹ The painting has for a long time been included in Polish studies on the most important works of foreign painting to be found in our collections. See, e.g., Jan Białostocki, Michał Walicki, *Malarstwo europejskie w zbiorach polskich 1300–1800* (Warsaw, 1955), pp. 548–549; Dorota Folga-Januszewska, *111 arcydzieł Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie* (Warsaw, 2000), p. 129; 'Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Gitarzysta (Ptasznik strojący gitarę po powrocie z polowania)*', in *Le siècle français. Francuskie malarstwo i rysunek XVIII wieku ze zbiorów polskich*, eds Iwona Danielewicz, Justyna Guze, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw (Warsaw, 2009), pp. 230–231 (Iwona Danielewicz). In connection with this exhibition *Gazeta Wyborcza* issued a special supplement (28 Feb. 2009), which was advertised by a full-page reproduction of Greuze's painting. See also Agnieszka Morawińska, *Director's Choice. Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie* (London, 2016), pp. 30–31, where a description of this painting is found among the *chefs-d'œuvre* selected by the then director of the National Museum in Warsaw (an English-language version was also published). For the most recent scholarly treatment of the painting, see Iwona Danielewicz, *French Painting from the 16th to 20th Century in the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw*, ed. Antoni Ziemia (Warsaw, 2019), pp. 103–106, cat. no. 75. In European and American literature, see Anita Brookner, *Greuze: The Rise and Fall of an 18th Century Phenomenon* (London, 1972); Heather McPherson, 'Jean-Baptiste Greuze's Italian Sojourn 1755–57', *Studies in 18th Century Culture*, vol. 14 (1985), pp. 93–107; *Greuze the Draftsman*, ed. Edgar Munhall, exh. cat., Frick Collection, New York, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (London, 2002); *Meisterwerke der französischen Genremalerei im Zeitalter von Watteau, Chardin und Fragonard*, eds Colin B. Bailey, Philip Conisbee, Thomas W. Gaehtgens, exh. cat., National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Berlin, 2004) (also available in English); Bernadette Fort, 'The Greuze Girl. The Invention of a Pictorial Paradigm', in *French Genre Painting in the 18th Century*, ed. Philip Conisbee (Washington, 2007), pp. 129–151. However, the painting has yet to enter circulation in worldwide literature. The catalogue of Greuze's exhibition that took place in the Petit Palais in Paris in the autumn of 2025 is not cited here since the text was submitted for publication before the exhibition opened.
- ² The original title from the time of the painting's exposition at the Salon in Paris in 1757 was *Un Oiseleur qui, au retour de la chasse, accorde sa Guitarre*; later, especially in texts of a popular-science character, the title was shortened to simply *The Guitarist*. Although historically incorrect, this title has caught on and is used in the literature. Jean Martin's *Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné de Jean Baptiste Greuze* (Paris, 1908), p. 10, mentions one other version of the title: *L'Accordeur de guitare ou le Donneur de sérénade*. This version was derived directly from an undated engraving after the painting, made by Pierre-Étienne Moitte, and therefore functioned already in the era. In an essay discussing transformations in French painting written in advance of the work's presentation to Polish audiences, Emmanuel Starcky referred to the Warsaw painting by means of the title *Neapolitan Guitarist* [sic], most probably arising from conflation with another work by Greuze. See Emmanuel Starcky, 'Dzień i noc niczym symfonia', in *Cienie i światła. Cztery wieki malarstwa francuskiego*, eds Daniela Galas, Monika Myszor-Cieciela, exh. cat., The Royal Castle in Warsaw (Warsaw, 2009), pp. 48–49.
- ³ *Jean-Baptiste Greuze 1725–1805*, ed. Edgar Munhall, exh. cat., Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, California Palace of Legion of Honor, San Francisco, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon (Hartford, 1976). The exhibition and the publication caused a widespread response in the scholarly milieu; they were reviewed by many luminaries of art history, such as Rüdiger Klessmann, Michael Levey, Robert Rosenblum and Antoine Schnapper. Munhall's

catalogue is still the fullest study of Greuze's life and work to have been published to date.

⁴ Andrzej Pieńkos, 'L'Oiseleur et les trois autres « tableaux dans le costume italien ». Quelques remarques sur l'œuvre de jeunesse de J.-B. Greuze', *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie*, vol. 28, no. 1–2 (1987), pp. 1–13.

⁵ 'Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Gitarzysta (Ptasznik strojący gitarę po powrocie z polowania)*', in *Sztuka cenniejsza niż złoto. Obrazy, rysunki i ryciny dawnych mistrzów europejskich ze zbiorów polskich*, eds Anna Kozak, Antoni Ziemba, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw (Warsaw, 1999), p. 216 (Andrzej Pieńkos); Andrzej Pieńkos, '„Malarstwo na ciemniejszej porcelanie”? Powikłana kariera sentymentalizmu Greuze'a', in *Le siècle français...*, p. 116; id., 'Nieznane arcydzieło. Przewrotny Papageno', *Art and Business*, no. 6 (2012), pp. 100–102.

⁶ Andrzej Pieńkos, *Odważył się namalować głos. O odwiecznej albo tylko nowoczesnej analogii* (Warsaw, 2024), pp. 9–11.

⁷ In a favourable review from the 1755 Salon by Abbé Joseph de La Porte, *Sentimens sur plusieurs des Tableaux exposés cette année dans le grand Sallon du Louvre* ([s.l.], 1755).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ He did not, however, exhibit the technically equally outstanding *Portrait of Joseph*, depicting a model from the Royal Academy, dated to 1755 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). This portrait has repeatedly been compared with the work of Rembrandt, and when acquired for the collection of the Comte de Vence, it was placed next to a youthful *Self-Portrait* by the Dutch master.

¹⁰ The diary of the well-travelled abbé, until recently remaining in manuscript form and held in a private collection, has lately been beautifully published, with a scholarly commentary and illustrations: Louis Gougenot, *Voyage dans différentes contrées de France et d'Italie*, ed. Antoine Chatelain (Paris, 2023). On this art connoisseur, see Hélène Guicharnaud, 'Un Collectionneur parisien, ami de Greuze et de Pigalle, l'abbé Louis Gougenot (1724–1767)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, vol. 6, July–August, no. 134 (1999), pp. 46–53. An interesting narrative linked with Greuze's sojourn in Rome, only

seemingly anecdotal in nature, is cited by Konrad Niemira in his monograph on Jean-Pierre Norblin de la Gourdain: *Bazgracz. Trzy eseje o Norblinie* (Gdańsk, 2022), pp. 24–27.

¹¹ Later, those studies of Italian costumes were supplemented with several others and served as the basis for a graphic series of 25 plates made in 1768 by Pierre-Étienne Moitte with the help of his son, his daughter and the painter Jean-Baptiste Lallemand (who added landscape backgrounds), entitled *Divers habillements suivant le costume d'Italie dessinés d'après nature par J.B. Greuze peintre du roi*. See *Greuze the Draftsman*, pp. 44–49; Antoine Chatelain, 'Jean-Baptiste Greuze à Rome (1755–1757). Quelques remarques sur son activité de dessinateur', *Les cahiers d'histoire de l'art*, no. 20 (2022), pp. 53–63. Among Greuze's travel sketches there is also an unusual 'reportage' drawing from the travelling party's way over the Mont-Cenis pass in Savoy.

¹² Gougenot, *Voyage...*, vol. 1, p. 6.

¹³ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 323.

¹⁴ These facts are related by Heather McPherson, 'Jean-Baptiste Greuze's Italian...', pp. 93–95. See also Chatelain, 'Jean-Baptiste Greuze...', pp. 54–55. In describing Greuze's Italian sojourn, Chatelain mentions, i.a., his study drawings of a fresco by Domenichino and a sculpture by Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini, but above all, he accentuates Greuze's interest in the picturesqueness of Italy, which those studies reflect. It is worth adding that Greuze's interest in the oeuvre of Bernini, still unobvious at the time, would shortly thereafter manifest itself in an interesting scene titled *Silence!* (or *Rest*, 1759, Royal Collection, London), where the pose of the woman echoes the personification of Caritas from the tomb of Pope Urban VIII in St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

¹⁵ Philippe Bordes, 'Préface', in Yuriko Jackall, *Les têtes d'expression du peintre Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805). La fortune d'un genre* (Paris, 2022), p. 9.

¹⁶ See esp. Fort, 'The Greuze Girl...', pp. 129–151; Jennifer Milam, 'Greuze Girls and the Painterly Embodiment of Sexual Pleasure', in *Making Waves. Crosscurrents in the Study of Nineteenth-Century Art*, eds Laurinda

Dixon, Gabriel P. Weisberg (Turnhout, 2019), pp. 95–100. In the broader context of seeing Greuze as a representative of the *sensibilité* tendency, see Britta Hochkirchen, *Bildkritik im Zeitalter der Aufklärung. Jean-Baptiste Greuzes Darstellungen der verlorenen Unschuld* (Göttingen, 2018); Jackall, *Les têtes d'expression...* During the last few decades, this was the area of Greuze's output to be the most extensively researched and to undergo re-evaluation.

- ¹⁷ See, e.g., Daniel Arasse, *Le Détail* (Paris, 1996), pp. 50–53; Thomas Kirchner, '« Observons le monde ». La réalité sociale dans la peinture française du XVIII^e siècle', in *L'art et les normes sociales au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Thomas W. Gaehtgens et al. (Paris, 2001), pp. 373–376; Mark Ledbury, 'Heroes and Villains: History Painting and the Critical Sphere', in *Penser l'art dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle*, eds Christian Michel, Carl Magnusson (Paris, 2013), pp. 30–31. The work itself, and Greuze's submission of a 'classical' painting as his *morceau de réception*, which was to pave his way to full membership in the Academy with the status of a history painter, was the subject of a separate exhibition and catalogue: *Greuze et l'affaire du « Septime Severe »*, ed. Annick Lemoine, exh. cat., Musée Greuze, Tournus (Paris, 2005). The catalogue includes a detailed discussion of the circumstances in which Greuze made this surprising decision, the scandal that followed the Academy's decision (since it accepted Greuze only in the 'lowly' category of a genre painter) and the later career of the artist, who, deeply offended, from then on renounced exhibiting his works at the Salons. The well-known course of events was this: the painting was exhibited at the 1769 Salon; members of the Academy accepted its new member with enthusiasm and full honours; however, towards the end of the ceremony its director turned to Greuze, allegedly telling him: 'Monsieur, l'Académie vous a reçu, mais c'est comme peintre de genre; elle a eu égard à vos anciennes Productions, qui sont Excellentes, et elle a fermé les yeux sur celle-ci, qui n'est digne ni d'elle ni de vous' ('Monsieur, the Academy accepts you, but only as a genre painter; the Academy has full respect for

your earlier works, which are excellent, but has closed its eyes to this one here, which is unworthy of both it and yourself'). After a heated argument with his Academy colleagues, the infuriated Greuze stopped exhibiting at its salons until 1804, when the revolution opened the doors of the Academy to everyone.

- ¹⁸ 'This narrative character is noticeable in all of Greuze's output', writes Emmanuelle Brugerolles, 'Essai. Jean-Baptiste Greuze', introduction to Antoine Chatelain, *Greuze, l'enfance et la famille*, exh. cat., Galerie Eric Coatalem (Paris, 2024), p. 16. Even very recently, an author who analyses this phenomenon overlooks the 'four paintings in an Italian costume' completely, quickly passing from *The Bible Reading* from 1755 to *The Village Bride* from 1761 and later scenes.
- ¹⁹ See Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late 18th Century Art* (Princeton, 1967 and later edition); Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in 18th-Century Paris* (New Haven, 1985).
- ²⁰ This affinity was highlighted already by the de Goncourt brothers. See, e.g., Norman Bryson, *Word and Image. French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 147–149 (although the author fails to take the Italian paintings under consideration); Werner Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild* (Munich, 1993), p. 49; James Thompson, 'Jean-Baptiste Greuze', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (1989–1990, Winter), pp. 39–40; Emma Barker, *Greuze and the Painting of Sentiment* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 85.
- ²¹ Correct title: *Un Mariage, et l'instant où le père de l'Accordée délivre la dot à son gendre*; currently in the Louvre in Paris.
- ²² Mainly the already mentioned scene of the father reading the Bible to his children (*Un Père de famille qui lit la Bible à ses enfants*) from 1755.
- ²³ Barker, *Greuze and the Painting...*, p. 22 ff.
- ²⁴ Greuze was described as a 'young imitator of Brouwer and Teniers' by Guillaume Baillet de Saint-Jullien in a review from the 1755 Salon: *Caractères des peintres français actuellement vivans* (Paris, 1759), p. 6.
- ²⁵ Pierre Quarré, 'Acquisitions pour le musée: Portrait de l'abbé Gougenot par Greuze',

- Bulletin de la Société des Amis du Musée de Dijon* (1970–1972), pp. 17–24.
- ²⁶ Quoted after Greuze *the Draftsman*, p. 20.
- ²⁷ In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, signed 'Greuze f. Roma 1756'. The description at the Salon was long indeed: *Une Mère grondant un jeune Homme pour avoir renversé un Panier d'Œufs que sa Servante apportoit du Marché. Un Enfant tente de raccomoder un œuf cassé.*
- ²⁸ In the Worcester Art Museum, signed 'Greuze Roma 1757'. Full title: *Une Jeune italienne congédiant (avec le geste napolitain) un cavalier portugais travesti, et reconnu par sa suivante: deux enfants ornent ce sujet, l'un retient un chien qui abboye.*
- ²⁹ Gougenot, *Voyage...*, vol. 2, p. 251. The characteristic gesture of the girl's hand curved at her neck allegedly signified a refusal of the man's advances. In the situation shown in the painting, the girl's attitude may be more complicated, as it is her mother that seems to be unmasking the peddler (in reality, a gentleman in disguise, as evidenced by his garments under the cloak), so the refusal might not have been voluntary. Both works remained in the abbé's possession until his death in 1767, after which they went to his brother Georges Gougenot de Croissy.
- ³⁰ *Jean-Baptiste Greuze 1725–1805*, pp. 40–41, 48–50; Thompson, *Jean-Baptiste Greuze...*, pp. 13–17; Mark Ledbury, 'Sedaine, Greuze and the Boundaries of Genre', *Studies on Voltaire and the 18th Century*, no. 380 (2000), pp. 135–138; *Meisterwerke der französischen Genremalerei...*, pp. 266–267; Mark Ledbury, 'Greuze in Limbo. Being "Betwixt and Between"', *Studies in the History of Art*, no. 72 (2007), pp. 187–188; Fort, 'The Greuze Girl...', pp. 131–133; *L'empire des sens: de Boucher à Greuze*, ed. Annick Lemoine, exh. cat., Musée Cognacq-Jay, Paris (Paris, 2020), p. 136.
- ³¹ In a letter addressed to another luminary of the art world, the Comte de Caylus, written from Italy after seeing the painting in person, 12 May 1756. Quoted after Jean-Jacques Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie de M. l'abbé Barthélemy de l'Académie française de celle des inscriptions et belles-lettres...* (Paris, 1801), no. 22.
- ³² James Thompson, 'A Study by Greuze for Broken Eggs', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal*, no. 17 (1984), pp. 47–48. The polemic pertains to the old monograph by Louis Hautecœur, *Greuze* (Paris, 1913), p. 22, and the catalogue by Edgar Munhall, *Jean-Baptiste Greuze 1725–1805*, p. 40. In this context, Thompson points to Greuze's drawing (Vienna, Albertina) which is a study for the figure of the boy in this painting. See also Chatelain, *Greuze...*, pp. 48–50.
- ³³ McPherson, 'Jean-Baptiste Greuze's...', pp. 104–105.
- ³⁴ Anita Brookner, *Greuze* (London, 1972), pp. 97–98. The painting by van Mieris is in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. In fact, the caption under Moitte's engraving does not leave any doubts as to the erotic interpretation of its message. Moitte cooperated with Greuze for a long time; apart from the costume series, he made graphic interpretations of the paintings *The Neapolitan Gesture* (1763), *The Bird-Catcher (Le Donneur de Serenade, 1765)*, *Indolence* and *Broken Eggs* (1769). For more on the northern inspirations and kinships in Greuze's oeuvre, see, among others, Brookner, *Greuze*, pp. 38–44; *Au temps de Watteau, Fragonard et Chardin. Les Pays-Bas et les peintres français du XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Hervé Oursel, exh. cat., Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille (Lille, 1985), pp. 103–107; Andrzej Pieńkos, 'Holandyzm w malarstwie francuskim XVIII wieku. W oczekiwaniu na synteze', *Ikonothea*, no. 7 (1994), pp. 80–83; Agnieszka Rosales Rodríguez, *In the Footsteps of the Old Masters. The Myth of Golden Age Holland in 19th Century Art and Art Criticism* (Frankfurt am Main, 2016), esp. p. 85, note 245, where the paintings *Indolence* and *The Bird-Catcher* are cited as model examples of Dutch influence in Greuze's work.
- ³⁵ In Wadsworth Atheneum Art Museum, Hartford CT. The painting was sold in 1790 from the Boyer de Fonscolombe collection at Hôtel Grimaldi-Régusse in Aix-en-Provence and went from owner to owner until 1862, when it was bought by Konstanty Branicki for his collection held in Paris; after 1882, it passed through the Radziwiłł and Branicki family collections in Rome, Paris and Warsaw;

- in 1927 it was bought by the firm Wildenstein & Co. and finally sold to Wadsworth Atheneum in 1934. In the light of recent research, however, this route does not seem entirely certain; see Tomasz F. de Rosset, 'Habent sua fata picturae. Count Konstanty Branicki's cabinet of paintings in Paris', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 32 (2025) [in print]; see also an early analysis of the painting: Glenway Wescott, 'Poor Greuze', *Wadsworth Atheneum Bulletin*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1935), p. 7.
- ³⁶ Willibald Sauerländer, 'Pathosfiguren im Oeuvre des J.B. Greuze', in *Walter Friedlaender zum 90. Geburtstag*, eds Georg Kauffmann, Willibald Sauerländer (Berlin, 1965), pp. 146–150; this text was a breakthrough in the recognition of genre characteristics in Greuze's oeuvre; see Thomas W. Gaehtgens, 'Greuze – Fragonard – Houdon – David: das Kunstwerk in der französischen Aufklärung', in *Willibald Sauerländer und die Kunstgeschichte*, eds Ulrich Pfisterer, Franz Hefele (Munich, 2022), pp. 107–128. See also the discussion of the painting in: *Meisterwerke der französischen Genremalerei...*, p. 270. In the context of Greuze's later output: Mary D. Sheriff, *Moved by Love. Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in 18th Century France* (Chicago, 2004), pp. 115–118.
- ³⁷ I cite various closer and more distant Dutch analogies in: Pieńkos, 'L'Oiseleur...', pp. 4–7.
- ³⁸ Colin B. Bailey, *Jean-Baptiste Greuze: The Laundress* (Los Angeles, 2000), p. 2733. See also Richard Rand et al., *Intimate Encounters: Love and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century France*, exh. cat., Hood Museum of Art, Hanover (Princeton, 1997), pp. 147–149.
- ³⁹ Białostocki, Walicki, *Malarstwo europejskie...*, p. 548. The painting, as well as its pendant, was already annotated at the 1757 Salon: 'Ce Tableau appartient à M. Boyer de Fonscolombe, & est tiré de son Cabinet à Aix en Provence'. This local Provencal luminary was a well-known collector of paintings of northern schools. In the middle of the 19th century the work joined Ksawery Branicki's collection in Paris; later, it was kept in Róża Branicka's palace in Warsaw, after that, in Wilanów. In 1926, it was inherited by Jadwiga Rey, née Branicka, who had it transferred to Przecław. In the National Museum in Warsaw since 1954. See de Rosset, 'Habent sua fata picturae...'.
⁴⁰ Denis Diderot, *Salon 1765 roku*, tr. Jerzy Stadnicki, selected and edited by Andrzej Pieńkos (Warsaw, 2009), pp. 62–64. The first version of this motif seems to have been produced by Greuze as early as 1757: *Une Jeune fille qui pleure la mort de son oiseau*, canvas, 71 × 61 cm (private collection). This painting, which is probably the same one that was exhibited at the 1759 Salon, was long considered lost. It was exhibited in Paris in 2024: Chatelain, *Greuze...*, p. 144.
- ⁴¹ Fort, 'The Greuze Girl...', p. 134.
- ⁴² Bernadette Fort, 'Accessories of Desire. On Indecency in a Few Paintings by Jean-Baptiste Greuze', *Yale French Studies*, vol. 94 (1998), pp. 146–162.
- ⁴³ Interestingly, in roughly the same period Greuze produced two portraits with sitters playing music: that of Marquise Anne-Marie de Bezons playing the guitar (Baltimore Museum of Art) and that of Ange-Laurent de Lalive de Jully playing the harp (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC); he exhibited both at the 1759 Salon. Lalive de Jully was a renowned collector; it was he who bought three of the paintings that Greuze exhibited in 1755. Is it not possible that he also suggested the musical theme for *The Bird-Catcher*?
⁴⁴ Sauerländer, 'Pathosfiguren...', p. 148. Less direct analogies link the bird-catcher's pose with another identified model: Caravaggio's *St John the Baptist* (Musei Capitolini, Rome); *Jean-Baptiste Greuze 1725–1805*, p. 47–48; McPherson, 'Jean-Baptiste Greuze's...', p. 100. According to Anita Brookner (*Greuze...*, p. 97), Greuze may have been inspired by Orazio Gentileschi's painting *The Lute Player*, in the Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome. However, the work that Brookner had in mind was most probably *The Lute Player* by the same painter in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Looking for connections (rather than influences) between Greuze and Italian Baroque art, it is worthwhile to note the output of one of his peers in age, Gaspare Traversi; we do not know, however, whether Greuze could have met him in Italy or seen his works.

- ⁴⁵ See *Éloge de la sensibilité, Peintures françaises du XVIII^e siècle dans les collections de Bretagne: Nantes*, eds Guillaume Kazerouni, Adeline Collange-Perugi, exh. cat., Musée d'Arts de Nantes (Nantes, 2019), pp. 266–268. The differences are minimal, but in the Nantes painting, the man's pose appears even more tense. A third version of *The Bird-Catcher*, from the former Wildenstein collection, is now considered a later copy. See the auction at Christie's in 2005, where it was described as a work by a 'follower of Greuze', <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-4531867>. A drawing for this painting, large in format (55 × 48 cm), shaded with gouache and signed 'Greuze' may have been a preparatory study, but it may also have been painted after the scene was ready, as a work to be sold, a collector's drawing (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris). See Jean Vallery-Radot, 'Le dessin préparatoire de Greuze pour l'Oiseleur accordant sa guitare', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, vol. 54 (1959) (October), pp. 215–218. Similarly, a drawing of an old woman, considered to be a study for the *Neapolitan Gesture* (McCrinkle Collection, New York), is meticulously signed 'Greuze. f. Romae an. 1756', which may suggest its intended function as a collector's piece and indicate that the painter's Roman output achieved immediate popularity.
- ⁴⁶ Concurrently, it cannot be ruled out that the exquisitely rendered details of this still life may have played an additional role: they may have been Greuze's attempt to demonstrate his skills in this area and to reference Chardin's success.
- ⁴⁷ The original title: *Le Paralytique servi par ses enfants* (Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg).
- ⁴⁸ The term *narration* « *réticulaire* » was used by Brugerolles, although in a broader context of her discussion of Greuze's narrative and dramatic conceptions, in which she recognizes a variety of literary references, even reaching Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine* (Brugerolles, *Essai...*, p. 34).
- ⁴⁹ 'Au milieu de ce grand livre de corruption, les *Liaisons dangereuses*, il est une page inattendue, et qui fait contraste avec tout ce qui la précède, tout ce qui la suit, tout ce qui l'entoure. C'est la scène où Valmont va, dans un village, sauver de la saisie du collecteur les meubles d'une pauvre famille qui ne peut payer la taille. Le collecteur compte ses cinquante-six livres. Échappée à la paille, toute la famille, cinq personnes pleurent de joie et de reconnaissance; les larmes coulent, des larmes heureuses et qui éclairent de bonheur la figure de patriarche du plus vieux. Autour du groupe, le village bourdonne, ses bénédictions murmurent; et voici qu'un jeune paysan, amenant par la main une femme et deux enfants, entoure Valmont de l'adoration des siens, et les agenouille à ses pieds comme aux pieds d'une Providence humaine et de l'image de Dieu. Cette page dans le livre de Laclos, c'est Greuze dans le XVIII^e siècle' – Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *L'Art du XVIII^e siècle*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1882), p. 3. The interpretation of Greuze's libertine moralization as presented by the Goncourt brothers continued to be very attractive even in 20th-century art history.
- ⁵⁰ In keeping with the dominant view, which hails from Diderot, Greuze would make such attempts only in his multi-figure scenes, from 1761 onward. See, e.g., Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild...*, p. 240.
- ⁵¹ And when a few years later Greuze would again use a similar pose in a single-figure scene, that is, in *The Laundress* (1761, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles), the painting would not be imbued with such tension. There, the narrative seems simpler, more banal, to a greater degree consisting in the sensual image of the female protagonist.
- ⁵² At this point, it is worthwhile to note Greuze's later invention ('pictorial paradigm'), namely his famous, or infamous, depictions of girls, which Bernadette Fort defined as follows: 'The identifying marks of the Greuze girl – the blending in one image of the antithetical signs of innocence and sensuality, virtue and sexual knowledge [...] – Fort, 'The Greuze Girl...', p. 130.
- ⁵³ Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley, 1980), esp. pp. 55–60. In reference to several female figures painted at the time, Fried writes of their erotic 'self-abandonment'.
- ⁵⁴ On this topic, see, e.g., Maria Teresa Caracciolo, 'Le costume italien dans la peinture française du XVIII^e siècle: Nicolas Vleughels (1668–1737), Jean-Baptiste-Marie

Pierre (1714–1789), Jean Barbault (1718–1762), Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805)', *Les cahiers d'histoire de l'art*, vol. 11 (2013), pp. 40–47. At the 1757 Salon, in addition to the

already mentioned works, Greuze exhibited the drawing *The Game of Morra* (Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow).

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