

= Sigismunda mourning over the Heart of Guiscardo =

Sigismunda mourning over the Heart of Guiscardo , fully titled Sigismunda mourning over the Heart of Guiscardo , her murder 'd Husband , is an oil painting by British artist William Hogarth . Finished in 1759 , it was the principal piece of the eight works he displayed in an exhibition in 1761 . It was the final and most ambitious of his attempts to secure for himself a reputation as a genre painter . It depicts a dramatic moment in one of the novelle in Boccaccio 's Decameron . While Hogarth had expected this work to be acclaimed as a masterpiece of dramatic painting , the work was met with criticism and ridicule . In the catalogue of the exhibition of Hogarth 's works at the Tate Gallery in 2007 , the criticism was described as " some of the most damning critical opprobrium the artist ever suffered " .

= = Analysis = =

Sigismunda mourning over the Heart of Guiscardo illustrates a scene from the first tale on Day 4 of The Decameron , a medieval collection of short stories ( novelle ) by Italian author and poet , Giovanni Boccaccio .

Seated at an ornate wooden table , wearing a pearl tiara and flowing silk , is Sigismunda ( called Ghismonda in Boccaccio 's original tale ) , the heroine of one of the novelle . It is probable that Hogarth modelled her on his wife , Jane . She clasps a golden goblet containing the heart of her murdered husband , Guiscardo .

Guiscardo was a servant and page in the court of Sigismunda 's father , Prince Tancred of Salerno . When Sigismunda 's father discovered that Guiscardo and Sigismunda had wed secretly , he angrily ordered his men to murder the low @-@ born Guiscardo , and had Guiscardo 's heart delivered to Sigismunda in a golden cup . Despite having committed to die without shedding a tear , she weeps as she realises her father has murdered her husband . She adds poison to the cup containing Guiscardo 's heart , and commits suicide by drinking it .

Hogarth claimed to have long been interested in the story of Sigismunda , which had appeared in England in several versions by the mid @-@ 18th century . It had become popular after being translated in John Dryden 's 1699 volume of Fables , Ancient and Modern , and adapted for the English stage by James Thomson in 1745 .

= = Commissioning = =

The painting was one of Hogarth 's last works , commissioned in 1758 by Sir Richard Grosvenor . James Caulfeild , 1st Earl of Charlemont had previously commissioned a painting from Hogarth , allowing Hogarth to select the subject and price .

For Lord Charlemont , Hogarth chose to paint the satirical Piquet , or Virtue in Danger ( also known as The Lady 's Last Stake , after a 1708 play by Colley Cibber ) , which , with echoes of Marriage à @-@ la @-@ Mode , shows an army officer offering an aristocratic lady a chance to recover the fortune she has just lost by gambling ( with the implication that if she loses again , she will have to take him as her lover ) . After Grosvenor saw this painting in Hogarth 's studio in 1758 , he asked Hogarth to paint a picture for him as well , under the same terms .

Hogarth chose a more serious topic for Grosvenor 's painting . He is said to have painted Sigismunda mourning over the Heart of Guiscardo with the aim of proving that he could equal works of the " Old Italian Masters " , and intending the painting to be one of his masterpieces . In the leg of the table in the painting , a turbaned , pug @-@ nosed figure is carved , emerging from the ornate decoration , which is reminiscent of Hogarth 's self @-@ portrait The Artist Painting the Comic Muse from around 1757 , and is perhaps Hogarth 's attempt to insert himself bodily into the picture , thereby making an overt connection between himself and the Old Masters . In 1758 , Sir Thomas Sebright , 5th Baronet had paid £ 405.5s in an Old Master auction for a painting of Sigismunda supposedly by Correggio . Hogarth doubted the attribution and was later proved correct : the painting is now considered to be by Francesco Furini . Nevertheless , Hogarth priced his

Sigismunda in line with what was paid for the " Correggio " version and commensurate with the time he had spent creating it ? at least two hundred days ( although it appears he was also working on finishing Piquet during this period ) ? and this may have contributed to Grosvenor 's eventual loss of interest . When Hogarth presented the piece to Grosvenor , he rejected it , ostensibly because it was " so striking and inimitable , that the constantly having it before one 's eyes would be too often occasioning melancholy ideas to arise in one 's mind " ; in disgust , Hogarth released him from their bargain .

= = Reception = =

Hogarth exhibited the painting at the Society of Artists in Spring Gardens in 1761 . Although press reports ? perhaps placed by Hogarth and his supporters ? were enthusiastic , Sigismunda mourning over the Heart of Guiscardo was attacked by critics who marked Hogarth 's attempt to emulate the drama depicted in older Italian paintings as foolhardy and ridiculous . Many critics were repulsed by the shocking contrast between the melancholy beauty of Sigismunda and the grotesquely bloody organ that she delicately touched . It was said that Hogarth placed an attendant next to the painting to note the remarks made by the viewers ; changes to the painting suggest that he may have responded to these criticisms by altering his work , although it is impossible to ascertain whether many of the changes were made before or after the painting was exhibited .

One of the fiercest critics of Hogarth 's work was the critic and writer Horace Walpole . Walpole , who had admired the " Correggio " , compared Hogarth 's portrayal of Sigismunda to that of a " maudlin fallen virago " , and saw in it :

None of the somber grief , no dignity of suppressed anguish , no involuntary tear , no settled meditation on the fate she meant to meet , no amorous warmth turned holy by despair

John Wilkes dismissed it as " not human " . More predictably , in his Epistle to William Hogarth , Charles Churchill sympathised with Sigismunda as the " helpless victim of a dauber 's hand " .

After ten days of the exhibition , Hogarth replaced the painting with another of his canvases , Chaining the Member , the fourth and last piece in his Humours of an Election series .

Hogarth was unable to sell the painting , but he considered selling engravings based on it . A subscription ticket for the engraving of Sigismunda depicting Time Smoking a Picture was made , and some subscriptions were sold before being recalled , but by March 1761 Hogarth had abandoned the project , having failed to find an engraver to produce the plates . Hogarth instructed his widow not to sell the canvas for less than £ 500 . On Jane Hogarth 's death in 1789 , the painting passed to her cousin , Mary Lewis . She sold it by auction at Greenwood 's in 1790 for 56 guineas to the publisher John Boydell , who exhibited it in his Shakespeare Gallery . Benjamin Smith made an engraving which was published in 1795 . The painting was sold for 400 guineas at Christie 's in 1807 , and had been acquired by J.H. Anderdon by 1814 . He bequeathed it to the Tate Gallery in 1879 .

= = Alterations = =

A number of alterations are visible to the naked eye as pentimenti . A piece of paper draped over the edge of the table is clearly visible in outline , despite having been painted over with detailing of the table itself . Sigismunda 's index finger which was bent towards and perhaps touching the heart has been straightened , but the outline of the tip is still visible on the surface of the heart . A looped cord in the top right @-@ hand corner is poorly concealed under the topmost layer of paint . It is also known that , to attempt to appease critics , Hogarth repainted the fingers of Sigismunda so that the blood that was previously there would no longer be visible .