

WORD AND IMAGE:

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS'S *DISCOURSES ON ART*

WORD AND IMAGE:
AN ANALYSIS OF SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS'S
DISCOURSES ON ART

By
MARIANNE THERESIA ANDRES, B.A.

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts
McMaster University
March 1991

MASTER OF ARTS (1991)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Word and Image: An Analysis of Sir Joshua Reynolds's
Discourses on Art

AUTHOR: Marianne Theresia Andres, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Peter Walmsley

NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 88

ABSTRACT

Sir Joshua Reynolds's fifteen *Discourses on Art* seem to be the ultimate vindication of the English painter's right to autonomy — to the independence of a national tradition divorced from the tenets of literary criticism. However, this vindication is merely symbolic, for the fundamental paradox of writing about painting was exacerbated by the eighteenth-century insistence on associating painting with mechanism and naive mimeticism. By arguing for painting's inclusion in the liberal arts, Reynolds engendered an alternative form of iconoclasm; a distrust of images that failed to conform to the high-discursive art prescribed by the Academy. Although painting's affinity with the literary was evident in even the non-academic narrative cycles of William Hogarth, the official emphasis on poetic precedent signalled a difficult voyage on the road to interart equality. Modern scholarship has tended to forego in-depth discussions of the rivalry between word and image, focusing instead on the changing philosophical context in which Reynolds produced the *Discourses*.

This thesis will attempt to add another dimension to earlier analyses by looking at this underlying tension within the context of both the neoclassicism characteristic of the first half of the eighteenth century, and the emerging Romanticism of later years. The neoclassical discourse of the sister arts, with its emphasis on *ut pictura poesis*, prompted painters such as Jonathan Richardson to

view painting as a type of writing subject to the same principles as language proper. But, if Edmund Burke and G.E. Lessing promise to restore order by stressing the intrinsic differences between the arts, both theorists prefer the expressive potential of language, which remained privileged as a more advanced form of communication.

Ultimately, the *Discourses* support the aesthetic milieu from which Lessing's and Burke's prose evolved, and which heralded the final triumph of word over image.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the generous assistance of three persons: my supervisor, Dr. Peter Walmsley, for his suggestions and encouragement during the preparation of this thesis; C. Bertram Powell, for his continuing support (and wordprocessing); and, my mother, Verna Andres.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
1. Introduction	1
2. Two Painters: William Hogarth and Jonathan Richardson	23
3. Two Writers: Edmund Burke and G.E. Lessing	39
4. <i>Ut Pictura Poesis</i> : Word and Image in Reynolds's <i>Discourses on Art</i>	53
5. Conclusion	82
6. Works Cited	86

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

[Following page 85]

1. Reynolds, *Cupid as Link Boy*
2. Reynolds, *Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse*
3. Gainsborough, *Mrs. Siddons*
4. Reynolds, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire with her Daughter*
5. Reynolds, *Three Ladies Adorning a Term of Hymen*
6. Reynolds, *Lady Cockburn and her three Eldest Sons*
7. Reynolds, *Commodore Augustus Keppel*
8. Reynolds, *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Written between 1769 and 1790, Sir Joshua Reynolds's fifteen *Discourses on Art* established an unrivalled tradition of aesthetic criticism in England. Delivered annually, and later biannually, during the distribution of prizes at the Royal Academy, the *Discourses* were the first state-sanctioned philosophy of painting by a native practitioner. In his official capacity as the fledgling Academy's first president, Reynolds amended and expanded earlier theory, writing extensively on all realms of artistic practice, from the high-ranked art of the Italian Renaissance to the art he produced as the foremost portrait painter of his age.

Reynolds numbered Catherine the Great, stage celebrities, men of letters, and the cream of British aristocracy among his fashionable clientele. Yet, perhaps his greatest accolade came from his rival Thomas Gainsborough who, while admiring Reynolds's works, is said to have exclaimed, "Damn him! How various he is!" (qtd. in Leonard 143). He was championed by Horace Walpole who admired Reynolds's "wit" or the skill with which he incorporated the attitudes and gestures of others into his own works. This artistic borrowing revealed an intimate acquaintance with the

old masters and the great style,¹ yet the breadth of Reynolds's experimentation was limited by his necessary response to the commercial market for English portraiture.

In his history of English painting, William Gaunt maintains that the dissolution of the monasteries, and the subsequent disappearance of religious art paved the way for the secular insistence on portraiture, a genre of painting which was later conducive to sixteenth-century humanism with its emphasis on individual personality (15). In tune with the emerging spirit of capitalism, the English patron required merely a realistic likeness which, by connoting wealth and ownership, would publicly enhance his social position. Foreign painters, such as Hans Holbein, Anthony Van Dyck, and Peter Lely, were either recruited during periods especially propitious to the flourishing of the arts, or attracted by the prospect of more profitable employment.² Although these artists introduced subtle foreign influences into their paintings of successive regimes, they were nevertheless crucial to an indigenous art, establishing traditions that were to remain characteristic of English portraiture for generations.

In contrast, painters, such as Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini and Marco Ricci, who questioned the dominant idiom through the introduction of the Italian baroque, seem to have had a delayed following, appealing primarily to the gentleman-connoisseur, such as the Earl of Burlington and the Duke of Manchester (Gaunt,

¹ Although Reynolds never defines the great or grand style with any precision, we know that it reaches its zenith during the High Renaissance in Rome. The great style is characterized by exalted subject matter, clarity of style, and adherence to the principles of ideal nature (Wark, Introduction, *Discourses* xxviii).

² For further contextual information, see Gaunt, *English Painting* 16, 32, 34, 40.

English Painting 49). For men like Sir Godfrey Kneller and Sir James Thornhill, who had established "academies" that were the precursor of the Royal Academy, a formal attempt to define *English* art was the first step toward appreciating the talents unique to the *English* artist. Shunned by the connoisseur who sought the prestige associated with cultivating foreign art, the native artist remained outside the ideological and technical realms of the great style.

In both his art and his pedagogical writings, Reynolds attempted to correct this deficiency. Reynolds's career as a portrait painter did not prevent him from aspiring to more than mere "face-painting." In his portraits we see an experimentation with the stylistic and thematic elements of the Venetian and Bolognese modes, culminating in "the public style" of *Lady Sarah Bunbury Sacrificing to the Graces* (Waterhouse 12). Despite such innovation, Reynolds's attempts to produce portraiture in accordance with the great style were always constrained by the necessity of reproducing a satisfactory likeness. In large part, his writings were intended to liberate the painter from such constraint by supplying a method of study that would enable the aspiring English painter to adopt the grand style as his own.

Whether Reynolds's reputation rests primarily on his pen or his brush is uncertain. What is clear is that only with his pen did Reynolds "escape the bounds of his peculiar art," initiating an age in which the student would be exhorted to study "authentick [sic] models, [so] that [the] idea of excellence which is the result of the accumulated experience of past ages, may be at once acquired" (I,15). But if, in his prose, Reynolds sought refuge from the limitations of his vocation as

painter, the writings that were to elevate the status of British art proved a dubious source of freedom. Although the impact of the *Discourses* — attacked by William Blake, subjected to correction by the Romantic theorist William Hazlitt, and esteemed by the Victorian painter and theorist John Ruskin — is undeniable, they share the same paradox as all writing on painting. Despite his claim that the English Academy boasts the advantage of having had nothing to unlearn, Reynolds, like the president of the French academy, Charles LeBrun, faced the basic incompatibility of word and image. Although the act of seeing precedes language, the attempt to lend credence to painting as a liberal and literate discipline is undermined by the authority of the word. Ironically, a verbal defense of the image effects a privileging of word over image. If literary criticism maintains, at the very least, a linguistic link to its subject, painting suffers from its circumscription within a foreign medium and, by extension, an alien aesthetic.

Historically, word and image have been viewed in the context of competing ideologies, a territorial conquest in which the word, as the supreme arbiter of truth, generally emerged victorious. Religious icons, for example, have been subject to verbal prohibitions from the time of the Byzantine empire when the controversy surrounding their nature and use marked the citizen, in W.J.T. Mitchell's terms, as either "a conservative iconophile seeking to preserve traditional liturgical practices" or "a radical iconoclast" (7). Taking the example of religious ritual one step further, he cites the central political function of images in social movements, including such intangible matters as the "'idols of the mind' that Reformation thinkers sought to purge in themselves and others" (7). This fascination with the latent power of the

image, its potential mission to convey the *truth* to an illiterate laity, subjects it to a process of mystification which verges on iconoclasm, the ritual exclusion of unsanctioned forms of representation.

The regulation of artistic images — in themselves sacred relics — mystifies art by removing it from the common vernacular, while simultaneously offering the illusion that the values with which we imbue art are universal and unchanging. Rather than reflecting the norms of the ruling class of a particular culture, aesthetic assumptions about beauty, truth, and taste are assumed to be untainted by intimations of complicity with the central authority of the state. Theories of the image, particularly in their academic inception, blur the distinction between citizen and state, art and social responsibility.

On the artistic front — the cold war between pictorial and linguistic signs — the temporary ascendance of either word or image is achieved by inserting boundaries between the arts that testify to the intrinsic worth of the preferred faction, particularly as a locus of value in which a given culture has a vested interest. Words and images serve as convenient repositories for the binary oppositions — nature/culture, body/soul, male/female — engendered by a particular culture under a particular regime of power. Of course, such oppositions are incapable of proving the absolute or universal superiority of either medium.

If each art derives its unique identity from analogies with its "sister" or "other," the rhetoric supporting the *natural* hegemony of either is essentially reversible. That is, the same bias is capable of elevating either word or image to the status of truth. In the eighteenth century, for example, Addison's privileging of

sight in describing the pleasures of the imagination³ supported the view that painting as a visible representation was in closest proximity to the powers of the imagination, and, therefore, a superior instrument of pleasure. Or, rather than achieving transcendence as a natural sign, "Pictures" could be seen as the "Books of the Ignorant,"⁴ intended to convey inferior information and, therefore, only appreciated by those incapable of philosophic abstraction — primarily women and children. For others, the very unnaturalness of their medium was proof of its superiority. For Joshua Reynolds's great contemporary Edmund Burke, poetry's superiority lay in the fact that it affects by "sympathy" rather than "exact description" (172), a view echoed by Percy Bysshe Shelley more than sixty years later.⁵

A verbal defense of the image, by requiring that the visual object be annexed to the word in order to be legitimated, may be seen as inherently self-defeating, but the

³ Joseph Addison's pleasures of the imagination take as their premise the perfection of sight above the other senses. Divided into primary (the visible object before the eye) and secondary (the idea of a visible object), the three sources of pleasure are the great, the uncommon, and the beautiful. For further explanation, see Jackson 16.

⁴ Charles Lamotte, author of *Essay upon Poetry and Painting* (1742), preferred the psychological range of the verbal arts, referring to 'Pictures' as 'the Books of the Ignorant' (Jackson 47).

⁵ In *A Defense of Poetry*, composed in 1821 and published in 1840, Shelley maintains that language "is a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations, than colour, form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty of which it is the creation. For language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art, have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression" (113).

naturalization of vision is equally insidious. By raising visibility to the status of truth, the work of art becomes a self-contained totality, able to circumvent the normal critical dialogue by divinely apprehending a direct truth. Conversely, the "figural" component of an image, defined by Norman Bryson as "those features which belong to the image as a visual experience independent of language" (6), is subject to discursive⁶ appropriation because the image existing outside language is nevertheless mediated by and through it. Admittedly, this duality is reflected in the potential secondary role of the word as referencing an *a priori* image, but the imperialistic power of language, a ruling code from which lesser sub-codes evolve, attests to the primacy of the word. On the one hand, we can agree with Mitchell that "if we did not have some innate capacity, some 'natural starting point,' we could never acquire the skill of using *either* words or images" (88). On the other hand, we cannot ignore what he terms the "social ubiquity" of language which, as the first means of ordering our reality — what we can know and say — possesses a peculiar autonomy.

The problem with any linguistic evaluation of images is the inevitable intrusion of the discursive into a space from which it is supposedly excluded. The fundamental equation of image and word — "this painted image is that thing" — degenerates into "the worth of this painted image is dependent on its adherence to specific linguistic codes." In his introduction to the *Discourses*, Wark notes that it may be disconcerting to realize that Reynolds's criteria of beauty are phrased almost

⁶ I am adopting Norman Bryson's definition of the 'discursive' aspect of an image as "those features which show the influence over the image of language" (6).

entirely in terms of the moral and ethical properties of the image the artist has chosen to represent (xviii). Yet, this application of word to image signals the extent to which bureaucracy and text justify the inherent value of certain types of images by conspiring to surround painting with a verbal mystique (Bryson 34).

As the official champion of the image, Reynolds laments the inability of language to order the material arts. Despite this avowed insufficiency, his exclusive concern with the discursive aspect of art is tantamount to a heretical valorization of the word. The *Discourses*, by selectively attacking and retaining certain conventions, fix a canon of representation, providing a philosophical context for the emergence of a truly British art. At the same time, the distrust of language that invades the *Discourses* is displaced by a subversive iconoclastic rhetoric, undermining Reynolds's patriotic project, and the very art on which his career had been based.

Beyond a general consideration of the text-image debate, and the canonical issues arising from national standards of evaluation, the modern reader must be oriented to concerns peculiar to the eighteenth century. Chief among these is the incestuous alliance between the sister arts, poetry and painting. The rivalry of word and image, forever competing for the control of such precepts as genius, taste, beauty, and truth, was complicated by the resurrection of Horace's *ut pictura poesis* ("as a painting, so a poem") which, as Jean Hagstrum observes, attained the status of critical proverb by the eighteenth century (3). But, if *ut pictura poesis* achieved a dogmatism inconsistent with its origin, as a model in which painting figured as

the dominant paradigm for the arts, it served chiefly as a useful metaphor.⁷ Invoked as a test for poetry, a reaffirmation of its connection with the immediacy of a visual reality, *ut pictura poesis* nevertheless remained a theory centred on poetry. The verbal evocation of a particularly graphic image provided singular evidence of poetry's ability to be a speaking picture; it did not, however, imply that painting could transcend its inferior status as mute poetry — mute suggesting a dependence on the literary voice to determine the propriety of the visible "poem." Lawrence Lipking, in his comprehensive study, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England*, notes that "during most of the time when painting was acknowledged to be the pattern of the arts, its advocates fought for its prestige as something more than grammar or illustration" (117). Rather than liberating painting from enforced subservience, *ut pictura poesis* cemented a precarious sisterhood, reinforcing the existing inequality by demanding that painters prove their claim to membership in a literate profession. And, by fostering a dependence on literature for subject matter, *ut pictura poesis* provided proponents of poetry such as the German philosopher G.E. Lessing with evidence of painting's inherent mechanism. Comparisons with the sister art, which Reynolds claimed "has had the advantage of better criticism," (XV, 267) deflected attention away from the

⁷ According to Mitchell, the discourse of the sister arts with its "emphasis on the witty comparative mode" conceals "from us the figurative basis of our own canons of judgment. We tend to think, in other words, that to compare poetry with painting is to make a metaphor, while to differentiate poetry from painting is to state a literal truth"(49). He argues that there is no inherent, and unchanging difference between painting and poetry, only a culturally determined ensemble of 'antithetical values'; the *paragone* is thus, not a conflict "between two kinds of signs, but a struggle between body and soul, world and mind, nature and culture" (49).

fundamental differences between art criticism and literary criticism in the eighteenth century:

All writers on painting in Britain were obliged to address an issue which literary criticism was not obliged to address, and which made the particularly civic nature of the value-language of criticism, which might elsewhere have remained implicit, unambiguously apparent. This issue was whether painting, which, in common with the mechanical arts, was employed in converting the materials of nature into material artefacts, was truly a liberal art, and worth the attention of the gentleman-citizen whose attention it must solicit if its higher branches, at least, were to survive. (Barrell 12)

Reynolds's obsession with this very issue permeates the *Discourses*, yet he suggests that artists are, by definition, less qualified to comment on the higher ideals of art than their literary counterparts to whom they owe automatic deference. On several occasions, Reynolds, referring to the example set in antiquity, eloquently defends his role as critic. Yet, in *Discourse VI*, he admits that the rules by which men of genius work are transcribed with difficulty, "especially as artists are not very frequently skilful in that mode of communicating ideas" (VI,98). In his final address to the Academy, Reynolds maintains that a short essay written by a practicing painter will do more to advance the theory of painting than a thousand volumes penned by the uninitiated. However, his perceived inability to express adequately his ideas is tantamount to an admission of failure.

The primacy of the word in Western culture is especially evident in Reynolds's *Journey to Flanders and Holland* which, intended for publication at some future date, chronicles his trip from July 24 to September 16, 1781. Although Reynolds viewed his learned observations as a guide to the student's own journey, they exerted a monopolistic control over the paintings they described by effecting a

fusion of word and image. The distant paintings are (re)constituted in their absence. Sprinkling his prose liberally with judgmental adjectives, Reynolds describes entire paintings in vivid detail, from location, inscription, expression, colouring, and line to specific improprieties, such as the rationalization for Rubens's inclusion of the dog gnawing a bone in the *Last Supper* at Mechlin. He deems this last circumstance not only unworthy, but also puzzling to the spectator who "does not see how the dog came by his bone, nothing of that kind being on the table" (*Works* 153).

Rather than offering a straightforward account of various paintings, the journal reiterates his obsession with interart comparisons. Writing about the poor quality of Christ's head in the same composition, Reynolds suggests that "it is here as in poetry; a perfect character makes but an insipid figure; the genius is cramped and confined, and cannot indulge itself in those liberties which give spirit to the character, and of course interest the spectator" (*Works* 152). The works of the Dutch and Flemish painters, simulated in prose, are recreated, though not without the complicity of the reader/spectator, whose interpretation of the paintings will inevitably be influenced by Reynolds's didacticism. The illusion of subjectivity ceases to exist as does the original image which, subject to correction and appropriation by its verbal counterpart, seduces the "viewer" with the promise of the perfect image; the representation that, quite literally, eclipses the reality. The fact that Reynolds intended to publish his commentaries on the Dutch and Flemish paintings is particularly interesting given that the notes, although penned by a critic of art, are, as Hilles observes, those of an avid student of literature (79). Despite

the brevity of his observations, Reynolds manages to compare paintings to the works of Shakespeare and Donne, even quoting "Milton when discussing Rubens's picture of the fallen angels" (Hilles 79).

On a more personal level, then, Reynolds's role as first president of the Royal Academy and his increasing fame as writer and painter were not uncontaminated by his divided allegiance to the separate worlds of literature and art. Though he is ostensibly a champion of the image, Reynolds's literary aspirations implicate him in an aesthetic that posited painting as an inferior art.

The necessity for painters to defend their art in words is partly responsible for both this desire to excel in the written and visual arts, and the subsequent division of artistic loyalties. After all, since the Renaissance, it was the artist, not the poet, to whom all branches of knowledge were assigned. Artists such as Leonardo DaVinci were forced to differentiate themselves from mere writers by courting public recognition of their dual proficiency. Decrying the ignorance of scribes, who have no knowledge of the science or philosophy of painting, DaVinci's famous fifteenth-century defense of an art "which does not display her accomplishment in words" (DaVinci 139) served as the prototype for the British defenses that were to emerge some two hundred years later.

As the reign of George II ushered in a new era of independence for the English artist, Jonathan Richardson's assertion of a complementary relationship between the arts in his *Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715) set the stage for Reynolds's later ambitions. Although Richardson is often viewed as a comparatively minor painter, his attempt to cultivate an appreciation of painting by revealing its

"true uses" inspired Reynolds, who proved to be a man of similarly unprecedented dedication to his art. As his heir apparent, Reynolds readily accepted Richardson's challenge of "attempting and hoping only to equal the greatest masters of whatsoever age or nation" (123). Declaring that "he would rather be an apothecary than an *ordinary painter*" (qtd. in Waterhouse 3), Reynolds learned early the necessity of studious application. With Richardson's *Essay* as his primary influence, the young Reynolds supplemented his limited formal education with forays into his father's library, where the catholicity of taste encouraged his predilection for philosophy (Hilles 4).

But if his well-documented library suggests a broad base of study, Reynolds, like his predecessor, continued to subject painting to the same interpretive codes as the poetry he venerated. For Richardson, "painting is another sort of writing, and is subservient to the same ends" (250). Beyond the necessary intrusion of the discursive into the figural, this mode of criticism, inspired by comparisons initiated by Horace and Aristotle, relied heavily on a borrowed aesthetic. In his seminal study *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting*, Rensselaer Lee suggests that, for critics, the fundamental assumption that both painting and poetry were *ideal* imitations of human action justified the importation of ancient literary theory:

They found their *raison d'être* for a humanistic theory of painting not only in the prescriptions of ancient authors for a humanistic literature, but in Italian art itself which, from Cimabue and Giotto to Raphael, Michelangelo, and Titian, had been concerned at its best with truth, which is in the highest sense representative of human action and emotion. And, in any case, a direct or implied comparison of painting with poetry was natural enough when the painters, like their ancient forebears, drew so largely . . . on the great poetry of the past and present. (vii)

It is, therefore, in the light of Richardson's and Reynolds's dual careers — as both painters and writers — that the subversive privileging of word over image is most visible.

As artists who lived more fully in the literary milieu they often celebrated on canvas rather than in their professions as portrait painters, Reynolds and Richardson reveal divided loyalties. Both men harboured strong literary ambitions, and one suspects that their cultivation of friendships with men of letters was more than simply a strategic move to firmly establish their careers in criticism. If not distinguished, Richardson was a published poet,⁸ often appearing in the company of Pope⁹: "I have from my Infancy Lov'd and Practic'd Painting and Poetry," he once remarked: "One I Possess'd as a Wife, the Other I Kept Privately" (qtd. in Wendorf, *Biographer* 540). And, in addition to his *Essay* (which was followed in quick succession by *The Whole Art of Criticism in Relation to Painting* [1719], *The Science of a Connoisseur* [1719], and *An Account of Some of the Statues, Bas-reliefs, Drawings and Pictures in Italy* [1722]), Richardson and his son collaborated on an explanation of *Paradise Lost*, complete with bibliography (Wendorf, *Biographer* 540).

⁸ *Poems on Several Occasions* appeared in 1745, the year of his death (Wendorf, *Biographer* 540).

⁹ Richardson painted a "series of portraits of Pope, at least nine of which show Pope laureated and many of which portray him in ancient dress" (Wendorf, *Biographer* 551). In a more daring experiment, he combined the features of Milton and Pope "to create a visual *idea* of the poet, an image that stands as only an extreme example of the kind of improvement he suggests in *The Science of a Connoisseur*" (551). Wendorf notes that Richardson's intense awareness of the relationship between the two arts is seen not only in his view that painting is a type of writing, but also in his insistence on the usefulness of inscriptions to document *both* portraiture and allegorical paintings (542).

Reynolds's days in the coffee houses at Rome were succeeded in 1753-4 by his entrance into the society of London's greatest intellectuals (Hudson 55), and, in 1764, by the Club,¹⁰ which he founded with the avowed intention of "giv[ing] Johnson unlimited opportunities of talking" (Waterhouse 15). His first published works appeared in Johnson's *Idler*, and, if Reynolds never tried his hand at poetry, he proved his versatility in minor literary criticism and written portraits of his intimate acquaintances.¹¹

These biographical fragments highlight the tension between word and image because only in the sketches — the written counterparts of portraiture — is the union of idea *and* image made explicit. Although portrait painting aspired to an honest representation of the sitter's character, portraiture remained associated with mechanical reproduction, as well as the unspoken necessity to flatter the subject who paid the painter a stipulated fee in return for a commemorative image. In contrast, the written sketch could mitigate the harshness of deficient physical and moral characteristics by interspersing them with an account of the subject's larger triumphs. Richard Wendorf's analysis of Richardson's earlier biographical

¹⁰ The Club boasted such diverse luminaries as Charles Burney, author of *History of Music*; Oliver Goldsmith and Samuel Johnson, two of Reynolds's closest friends (the latter usually considered his literary mentor) and renowned 'men of letters'; Edmund Malone, the editor of Shakespeare; Edmund Burke, politician and philosopher; Adam Smith, economist; and, David Garrick, distinguished actor and theater manager.

¹¹ Hilles writes that Reynolds "is said to have left at his death at least two thousand manuscript pages — essays for periodicals, criticism on art for his *Discourses*, notes on Shakespeare . . . a sort of *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* occasioned by his quarrel with the Academy, fragmentary thoughts on the French Revolution, and biographical sketches of some of his friends" (xv).

attempts proves helpful. Wendorf asserts that "like his portrait paintings, Richardson's life of Milton initially appears to belie his advocacy of ideal form" (*Biographer* 542). But, as in the case of Reynolds, who cautioned the reader to remember that he was "giving a portrait, not a panegyric, of Dr. Johnson" (*Portraits* 72), accidental character blemishes are subordinated to the subject's genius; the general idea that constitutes the truth the painter is attempting to preserve. If Reynolds's assessment of Johnson's character appears unduly harsh, his insistence on the necessity of a *true* depiction of Johnson's rudeness is mediated by the recognition that "an account of all the peculiarities or absurdities of a man would leave on the reader's mind an impression of an absurd character" (*Portraits* 78). The idealized verbal portrait, removed from painting's association with the purely mechanical and assured of its status as a liberal art, differs from its concrete counterpart in its ability to effect a clear concept without the intervention of a determinate visual image. If all communication is necessarily incomplete (the sender and receiver do not share identical codes), the word remains privileged for its *natural* ability to affect the imagination, and so produce an image in the mind's eye. In this schema, the painting, as a pre-existing material sign, is exclusively associated with mimetic identification: "I recognize this person." The value of the depiction — the recognition of character — is dependent, for example, on institutionalized ways of "reading" facial expression, props, and costume. Meaning is independent of likeness, only to the extent that the ability to read a work of art issues from the public acceptance of a genre and its attendant conventions. All art is the product of the mind, but painting is successful only if it can claim

membership in the ill-defined realm of the poetical.

Like Richardson, Reynolds desired praise for his judgment and excellence in philosophy and literature; unlike his predecessor, he was rewarded with the highest esteem of the greatest men of letters of his age.¹² But, Reynolds's initiation into Literature's inner sanctum involved an acceptance of the current discourse¹³ of the sister arts and, implicitly, the devaluation of painting as merely a convenient point of reference. The extent of his assimilation of the literary doctrine *ut pictura poesis*, for example, is evident in his commendation of Shakespeare's descriptions as pictures: "I would only observe that by considering nature as a poet, he involuntarily considered it as a painter" (*Portraits* 116). The man Reynolds considered England's greatest poet is lauded for his ability to evoke a vivid image through description. Yet, as we shall see in the *Discourses*, the painter's image answers the true end of art, and affects the imagination, only if it is the product of a truly poetical mind.¹⁴

¹² The honours bestowed upon Reynolds by his literary peers include the dedications of Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, and Sheridan's *School for Scandal*. And, if Johnson considered his revered friend "one of his literary school" (Boswell qtd. in Hilles 93), he merely echoed the good opinion of Burke, Goldsmith, Sheridan, and Beattie (*Dissertation on Imagination*), who sought his opinion before their works went to publication.

¹³ Barrell notes the following features of "discourse": "it 'defines the subjects it will treat in distinctive ways, formulating and giving prominence to particular problems and effectively excluding others from consideration'; and that, in doing so, it 'develops a characteristic vocabulary,' and 'establishes a particular order of priorities in its discussion and implies particular ideological valuations of the subjects it has defined'" (8-9).

¹⁴ Gainsborough, Reynolds suggests, never realized his potential because he "did not look at nature with a poet's eye" (XIV,253).

Reynolds's intellectual stimulation was derived from the literary world which he chose as his natural habitat. If his respect for the literary led to an insidious privileging of word over image in his own productions, this conflict of interest was nowhere more apparent than in his monumental defense of the visual, the *Discourses*, which are the primary focus of this thesis.

Throughout the *Discourses*, Reynolds reminds his audience that he is establishing the rules of art from the perspective of a practicing artist. In large part, the *Discourses* were intended to correct the errors of writers whose treatises on art were founded on mistaken assumptions. Artists who wished to transcend their allotted roles as mute witnesses had to contend with the popular belief that the painter's chief merit lay in his ability to produce a *trompe l'oeil* effect. Even in classical antiquity, painters' attempts to rival nature through literal mimeticism were judged on their ability to deceive the spectator by effecting a complete identification between nature and the work of art. Pliny's popular anecdote of the rivalry between Zeuxis and Parrhasius is a prime example. Although birds peck at the grapes in Zeuxis's picture, a testimony to his powers of illusion, the painter surrenders the prize to Parrhasius when he is deceived by the painting of a linen curtain (Hagstrum 24).

Removed from the intellectual universe of the writer whose works issued from the mind, not the hand, Reynolds faced a chauvinism that reached its zenith in "Shaftesbury, who hired painters as 'hands' to execute his ideas" (Lipking 110). Reynolds emphasizes that painting, by conveying ideas abstracted from particular nature, is an ennobling form of communication. The imitation Reynolds

recommends is not the duplication of a pre-existing reality, a throwback to art in its infancy, but rather the ideal synthesis effected by Zeuxis in his famous painting of Helen of Troy. In order to achieve an ideal beauty, Zeuxis derived the central form from a close comparison of five beautiful virgins from whom he selected the component parts of perfect beauty, and so corrected the accidental deformities of each individual (Hagstrum 14).

Reynolds is often uncomfortable with his dual roles as writer and painter, especially his ability to convey in words an idea applicable only to the image. He goes as far as to suggest that the apparent descent of painting "from her visionary station in the clouds" (VII,119) is a function of criticism which, in order to render art intelligible, must resort to the inconvenience of mere words. If writing on art is, to some degree, a diminishment of the image, it would be a mistake to conclude that such criticism is automatically self-defeating. The fact that Reynolds established a canon of taste by forging a national tradition is proof that his efforts to advance painting in prose met with practical success.

Lawrence Lipking suggests that "in an age that valued history-writing as much as the later eighteenth century did, no lover of painting could be satisfied until his art too had acquired a history" (192). The absence of a history of painting was closely linked to its exclusion from membership in the liberal arts. Paying undue homage to poetry, which had long since established its birthright as a liberal art, seemed to be the easiest means of accessing the coveted order. By adhering to an aesthetic that posited poetry as the proper model for emulation, the man of genius could distinguish *his* excellence from that of the mere technician.

Reynolds consistently reinforces the power of text over image by according authority to literary precedent and to the positions enforced by the great poets and critics of antiquity. Throughout the *Discourses*, Reynolds refers to Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Horace — the greatest names of antiquity and the authors of works of undisputed genius. His theory of imitation relied heavily on the belief "that all the arts receive their perfection from an ideal beauty, superior to what is to be found in individual nature" (III,42). He accepted, without question, the maxim that choosing proper models for imitation and eliminating the accidental would result in a profound truth, unattainable from the contemplation of common nature.

His strategy to elevate painting, however, degenerates into an iconoclastic rhetoric in which the impermanence of the image derived from vulgar (read non-poetical) imitation testifies to its essential falsity. The enlightened, who participate in what John Barrell has termed the "community of taste" (70), recognize the innate dignity of the *true* image, which embodies "what never existed but in the imagination" (XIII,244). Reynolds illustrates this position by explaining that, in forming Jupiter, Phidias "contemplated only that image which 'he had conceived in his mind from Homer's description'" (III,42).

The association of eighteenth-century art with a rule-bound neoclassicism has tended to foster the illusion of critical stability in the years immediately preceding the French Revolution. Nothing could be further from the truth. The eighteenth century witnessed a period of hitherto unprecedented aesthetic speculation. William Hogarth's aversion to the extremes of neoclassical formalism in both his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753) and his opposition to a state academy provide a singular instance

of resistance to rigid orthodoxy. And writers, both in England and on the Continent, increasingly dissatisfied with the interart analogies arising from a literal interpretation of Horace's *ut pictura poesis*, sought either to undo the mimetic identification of painting and poetry, or to insert appropriate boundaries between the arts.

The young Irishman Edmund Burke, in his revolutionary *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), denied the imitative nature of poetry which, unlike the visual medium of painting, affects by imaginative sympathy rather than "exact description." In Germany, G.E. Lessing's *Laocoon* (1766) purported to distinguish between the predominantly spatial and temporal arts of painting and poetry respectively. Over the twenty-one year period in which the *Discourses* were written, the imagination was increasingly validated as the test of artistic truth, and Richardson's ideals of coherence, legibility, and completion were displaced by Burke's and Lessing's celebration of the expressive potential of the unfinished and the obscure.

I have chosen to refer to the works of four men — Hogarth, Richardson, Lessing, and Burke — which reflected the divergence of aesthetic theory and practice in the eighteenth century, to provide a historical context within which we can examine Reynolds's own struggles with the uneasy relationship between word and image. If, as Mitchell argues, both Lessing and Burke treat the image as fetish, "the site of a special power that must either be contained or exploited" (151), Richardson's and Reynolds's attempts to elevate their art reveal a similar idolatry. Reynolds is a direct descendent of Richardson, who based national appreciation of

the arts on the acquisition of proper knowledge. Certainly both men faced resistance from a literary community unaccustomed to artists writing about the art they produce. Hogarth faced this same prejudice, yet his declaration of independence from the continental tradition resulted in an aesthetic premised on practical application, and removed from a poetical tradition that disseminated the tastes of a particular social class. If the lines of beauty and grace are the primary tenets of his aesthetic, the seventeen chapters of his *Analysis* (complete with thirty-one plates) are chiefly an empirical examination of the mechanism of painting. His adoption of the literary constructs of the newly emerging novel (a lower form than poetry) in his own works results in a series of images that, however different from the Renaissance ideal, prove equally discursive. The final chapter will focus on Reynolds's interart comparisons, particularly the subversive aspects of choosing to align painting with her elder, more powerful, sister. These analogies, although initiated to defend painting, share, albeit unwittingly, much with those of Lessing and Burke — two of the eighteenth century's greatest exponents of the word.

CHAPTER TWO

TWO PAINTERS: WILLIAM HOGARTH AND JONATHAN RICHARDSON

The theories of William Hogarth and Jonathan Richardson, two renowned British painters whose aesthetic writings predate the *Discourses*, provide a useful foundation for examining the context out of which Reynolds's *Discourses* emerge.

As previously mentioned, Jonathan Richardson is Reynolds's most obvious predecessor. Although he was not the first native painter to recognize the unwarranted authority of the foreign artist in England, he is acknowledged as one of the most ambitious propagators of chauvinistic doctrine. The *Essay* (1715), his attempt to reform public opinion and redeem British painting from the shadow of ill-informed connoisseurship, proved painting's entitlement to the status of liberal art by positing knowledge as the foundation of proper aesthetic appreciation. The extent to which he succeeded is confirmed by the somewhat patronising esteem of the great Samuel Johnson, who admitted that he "did not think it possible to say so much upon the art" (qtd. in Lipking 120). His first work became a prototype for the critical approach that was to receive official sanction in Reynolds's *Discourses* some sixty years later.

In the interim, William Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* (1753), though appreciated by Burke who acknowledged "the opinion of the very ingenious Mr. Hogarth" (115) in his *Enquiry*, failed to gain other than a dubious notoriety among

its intended audience.¹⁵ If Hogarth shared with Richardson the love of art and an intolerance for the caprice of fashion, he premised his theory on the promotion of an alternative form of public virtue. Although Reynolds chastised Hogarth for failing to conform to the dictates of the grand style, Hogarth found merit in exploring the economic and social exploitation of the lower classes, and in celebrating the talents of native artists.

Hogarth equated the favouring of foreign arts with the diminishment of the capacities and commercial interests of Englishmen. Although he reconstituted Kneller's (1711) and Thornhill's (1716) academies in 1734, he was later distinguished for his opposition to the Royal Academy and what he perceived as a slavish subservience to the dictates of foreign art. His much-parodied self-portrait of 1745, conspicuously displaying the volumes of Shakespeare, Milton, and Swift, contains the first hint — the curving *line of beauty* inscribed to the side of the palette — of an aesthetic that owed more to the strength of personal conviction than to his famous hatred of connoisseurs. An almost heretical espousal of the variety of particular nature evidenced in the wavy and serpentine lines of beauty and grace, the *Analysis*, which made use of illustrations to support theoretic claims,

¹⁵ Although the *Analysis* was ridiculed by artists and connoisseurs alike, it was approved by many "men of letters," including Burke. Gaunt notes that Hogarth's treatise "made impression enough to be attacked by Diderot in France and praised by Lessing in Germany" (*Hogarth* 105). In true Swiftian fashion, Reynolds's letter published in the *Idler* No. 76 effectively ridicules Hogarth's theory in its espousal by an affected connoisseur who, having completed the requisite tour of Italy, is prepared to disseminate "foreign" critical practice: "What nobleness, what dignity there is in that figure of St. Paul! and yet what an addition to that nobleness could Raffaele have given, had the art of Contrast been known in his time; but above all, the flowing line, which constitutes Grace and Beauty!" (*Works* 125).

stood in direct opposition to neoclassicism's great style.

Hogarth begins the *Analysis* by asking the reader to consider objects as hollow shells, composed of lines or threads corresponding in both inner and outer surfaces (7). By placing the eye within the empty interior, the imagination allows us to understand form and outline, "to retain the idea of the whole, and make us masters of the meaning of every view of the object" (8). Straight and circular lines, in various combinations, circumscribe all visible objects, but the wavy line, composed of two contrasting curves, produces the greatest beauty. In contrast to the straight line which varies in length only, the wavy line or *line of beauty* is associated with the pleasure derived from ornamental forms such as flowers. The serpentine line or *line of grace*, which is more evident in the human frame than any other part of nature, adds grace to beauty by waving and winding at the same time, and so leading the eye in a pleasurable chase.

Hogarth opposed the blind veneration paid to antiquity, yet he admitted his indebtedness to ancient statues, attributing their taste of elegance to the perfect facility with which the ancients employed the precise serpentine line (92). Unlike Reynolds, who referred to painting as a dying art, Hogarth championed the advances of the contemporary English artist. He favoured the simplicity of modern architecture, "particularly in England; where plain good sense hath prefer'd these more necessary parts of beauty, which everybody can understand, to that richness of taste which is so much to be seen in other countries" (46). This type of patriotism was incomprehensible to Reynolds who believed that the creation of a national republic of taste occurred only within the broader framework of a

universal republic of art. The country in which a particular branch of knowledge had its source was of little consequence to Reynolds since, in the end, "the *gusto grande* of the Italians, the *beau ideal* of the French, and the *great style, genius, and taste* among the English, are but different appellations of the same thing" (III,43). Reynolds's annotations to his friend William Mason's translation of Alphonse Dufresnoy's *De arte graphica* in 1783 are a natural extension of his belief that national partisanship need not imply theoretical insularity. Unlike Reynolds, Hogarth looked to both Michelangelo and the example of the serpentine symbols accompanying Greek and Roman deities primarily to confirm his own observations on beauty and grace. Rather than serving as absolute models of perfection, the ancients became a convenient corroboration of his aesthetic.

Despite obvious theoretical differences, it is important to note that, for both Hogarth and Reynolds, art was primarily an appeal to the mind or the imagination rather than the eye. Both men make similar observations concerning incompatible excesses, variety, simplicity, uniformity and custom. Reynolds's detailed distinctions between real and apparent nature echo Hogarth's assertion that "custom and fashion will, in length of time, reconcile almost every absurdity whatever, to the eye, or make it overlooked" (31). Further, each believed that the union of incompatible beauties would result in the ridiculous. If Reynolds advocated but one great style of painting in line with one mode of beauty, Hogarth believed there was but one precise line which comprised the line of beauty.

The overriding difference between the two theorists is Hogarth's refusal to subscribe to an ideal nature which requires the aid of "nature-menders [who] put

one in mind of Gulliver's tailor at Laputa, who, having taken measure of him for a suit of clothes, with a rule, quadrant and compasses . . . brought them home ill made" (77). The bulk of his *Analysis* is a very specific technical discussion of the painter's media, particularly light, shade, colour, and proportion. Subject matter, which is crucial to the grand style, is touched on only peripherally by Hogarth who, although an admirer of heroic painting, finds merit in a variety of artistic approaches. Rather than focusing on the academicism of French art, Hogarth criticizes the academic preference for chaste colouring, asserting that "France hath not produced one remarkably good colourist" (121).

Hogarth's minute discriminations concerning the mechanism of painting are apparent in his description of the ability to distinguish gender based upon the size of facial features relative to the constant size of the eye. His consistent adherence to his central theory and his zealous attention to particulars are evident in both the entire chapter he devotes to the colouring of flesh tones, and his discussion of aging which is said to break up the roundness of the face by removing the serpentine lines (134). Like Reynolds, Hogarth considered clarity to be one of the chief attributes of a work of art, yet he acknowledged the limits of legibility without apparent regret: "Deportment, words, and actions, must speak the good, the wise, the witty, the humane, the generous, the merciful, and the brave" (131). His references to the literary — Socrates, Shakespeare, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* — are fleeting, and are clearly not intended as a defense of his own artistic practice. If the discourse of the sister arts is conspicuously absent, Hogarth's celebration of a particular legible nature still awards a certain precedence to discursive art.

While Reynolds was espousing the necessity for elevated subject matter based on some hallowed historical text, Hogarth painted the common people, investing their lives with the significance academic art reserved for the classical hero. Hogarth's urban poor stand in stark contrast to Reynolds's composite portrait of the link boy as Cupid. Not content to paint a simple likeness, Reynolds transforms the child into the allegorical figure of Cupid who lights the way through the darkened streets of love with his phallic torch. It is little wonder that Hogarth found his most able defenders in the Romantics who praised his democratic vision. What Reynolds viewed as the expression of "the various shades of passion, as they are exhibited by vulgar minds" (III,51) was, for William Hazlitt, neither a contradiction of the ideal nor the historical:

Is there any one who can possibly doubt that Hogarth's pictures are perfectly and essentially *historical*? — or that they convey a story perfectly intelligibly, with faces and expressions which every one must recognize? They have evidently a common or general character, but that general character is defined and modified by individual peculiarities, which certainly do not take away from the illusion or the effect any more than they would in nature. (Hazlitt qtd. in Appendix II, *Discourses* 333)

Although he spent almost two years painting pictures on biblical themes — *The Pool of Bethesda* and *The Good Samaritan* — Hogarth saw great value in his earlier moral satire: "In these compositions those subjects which will both entertain and improve the mind bid fair to be of the greatest utility and must therefore be entitled to rank in the highest class" (qtd. in Leonard 11). However, the great popularity of Hogarth's prints tends to belie his belief that British painting could be raised to loftier heights: "If [Hogarth] referred contemptuously to what 'puffers

in books call the *great style* he returned time and again with a characteristic obstinacy to the quest for its secret" (Gaunt, *Hogarth* 88).

Despite later praise, in the eyes of the eighteenth-century painter and man of taste, Hogarth violated the prevailing definition of taste, and was condemned as an inferior painter. His painting and aesthetic were often a subject of ridicule for Reynolds who, in a letter to James Beattie, wrote:

All lines are either curved or straight, and that which partakes equally of each is the medium or average of all lines and therefore more beautiful than any other line; notwithstanding this, an artist would act preposterously that should take every opportunity to introduce this line in his works as Hogarth himself did, who appears to have taken an aversion to a straight line. (LXI, *Letters* 92)

Reynolds's and Hogarth's theory and practice were often in direct conflict. But if Hogarth never (at least in Reynolds's opinion) mastered the great style and history painting, his works were equally subject to discursive appropriation.

Hogarth is thought to have derived the inspiration for his moral series from theater such as John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. However, there seems to have been a reciprocal relationship between Hogarth and Henry Fielding, who saw the painter as an "endless source of inspiration," particularly in his novels *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* (Gaunt, *Hogarth* 75). Hogarth's influence can also be found in the works of Tobias Smollett, who makes occasional references to the "inimitable Hogarth."¹⁶ His images, particularly in the progressive series, such as the famous *Marriage à la Mode*, are most often compared to narrative texts. Using up every

¹⁶ For further information concerning the relationship between Hogarth and the writer, see Gaunt, *Hogarth* 75-78.

inch of available canvas, each detail of Hogarth's transient scenes mark him as a consummate storyteller and dramatist. Rather than painting idealized archetypes, Hogarth depicted his characters with such exaggerated detail of expression that they literally "speak volumes" as they turn their "legible" faces toward the spectator.

Hogarth's engravings are often captioned. Beyond the verbal inscriptions within the visual text, the external "inscription guarantees closure: the image must not be allowed to extend into independent life" (Bryson 4). Although such closure seems to be interrupted by the movement from picture to picture, Ronald Paulson notes that the pairing of the pictures in one of Hogarth's most popular engravings, *Industry and Idleness*, adds another dimension to what Bryson sees as the intended message. According to Paulson, "there is no way to hang [the twelve prints] without breaking up the paired contrasts (2-3,4-5,6-7,8-9)." The pairing "is at odds with, runs counter to, and perhaps undermines the formal-moral contrasts within the series" (65).

In a similar inversion, quotations from Proverbs appear to authorize and reinforce the moral message already detected in the visual depictions of the industrious hero and the idle apprentice. Bryson, offering a particularly strong reading, provides greater insight into the usual interpretation of the series as an explicit tale of virtue rewarded:

A systematic contrast of the fates of the 'good' and 'bad' apprentices generates such a powerful semantic field that, in fact, no one believes in it. The device of antithesis, in itself one of the most powerful mechanisms for the production of meaning, is so overweening that the viewer becomes sceptical, reluctant to accept the glaring official text (of the rewards of industry, of the terrible punishment that awaits vice), and he begins to look instead for the traces of an inversion of the official

text, where industry is criticised (as mercenary, hypocritical, obsequious) and vice admired (as vivacious, tragic, human). The fascination of the series lies in Hogarth's play between 'official' and 'unofficial' readings — he is the great master of shifting textual levels. (148)

The unofficial ironic reading exerts a peculiar fascination because it is, as Bryson suggests, "more in keeping with the literary context Hogarth found himself working in — more 'Hogarthian'" (150).¹⁷ Subject to the alternating authority of two textual levels — the patent official reading and the unofficial morality — Hogarth's "disposable" image is depleted of content (Bryson 150).

Beyond the literary link, and the subservience of image to text, all three painter-theorists — Richardson, Hogarth, and Reynolds — share a disdain for the critic who, not conversant in the art, is "pleas'd with a Work where nothing's just or fit."¹⁸ Rather than completely dismissing connoisseurs, Richardson clings to the naive belief that a lucid explanation will promote the estimation of his art. "Connoissance," a term coined by his friend Matthew Prior (Lipking 116), will compensate for the deficiency of a public literate in the pictorial as well as the verbal sign by providing a science of art as the prerequisite to *true* connoisseurship. All three men insist on cultivating an aesthetic on native soil. But, unlike Hogarth,

¹⁷ Hogarth's ironic explorations of modern morality, although less brutal than those of Jonathon Swift, nevertheless share the famous writer's delight in outlandish paradox — what Gaunt has termed "the reversal of accepted proportions" (55).

¹⁸ Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism," *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, (line 291) 153.

Richardson and Reynolds see no contradiction in their attempts to remove British painting from the blight of parochialism and subsume it under the aegis of classical European (particularly Italian) tradition.

If Hogarth's practice provides an alternative context for the emergence of a highly discursive art, it is to Jonathan Richardson that we must look for evidence of direct influence. As the successor to a long tradition of subservience, Richardson would have been acutely aware of the intrinsic dominion of state over art, and in the case of questions concerning truth, beauty, justice, and virtue, the necessity of deference to the literary representatives of the ruling class. As a gentleman-painter, Richardson vindicates personal investment in the commerce of art by expounding a bourgeois art palatable to those men who are gentlemen without necessarily being men of leisure (Barrell 17). The *Essay*, his aesthetic handbook for literary men, is able to address a wider public by extending "the definition of the gentleman to include some, at least, of those who, in their daily lives, found more use for the private than for the public virtues, and for practical piety in particular" (Barrell 23).

Like Reynolds after him, Richardson strove to "do justice to [his] profession as a liberal art" (14). His first priority lay in subjugating inferior beauties, which are the product of rudimentary mechanical skills possessed by ordinary workers. In the seventeenth-century French academic tradition of imitating *la belle nature*, Richardson preached against the vulgar equation of painting and naive transcription. Following the precedent established by Leon Battista Alberti's fifteenth-century *Treatise*, he invoked the doctrine of the learned painter,

encouraging the artist to know the poets and historians to whom he must appeal for subjects of universal interest (Lee 44). Invested with stature in the *Cinquecento*, the doctrine became an important component of *ut pictura poesis* (Lee 41). The learned painter was central to Leonardo's famous *paragone* — the imaginary contest between painting and poetry — as well as Richardson's *Essay*, in which the educated imagination reaffirmed the opposition between the literate gentleman and the vulgar mechanic, a distinction not fully realized until the advent of the *Discourses*. But if learning differentiates the slave from the citizen in both painter and poet, it is the painter, whose knowledge must implicitly supersede that of the gentleman connoisseur, who is unjustly penalized for his powers of execution, or, as Richardson claims, "for excelling in all the qualities of a man as distinguished from a brute" (15).

Reacting to allegations that painting's low rank is a function of its relative utility, Richardson unabashedly subjugates sensual delight in the purely visual to the fundamental act of communication in which painting is equivalent to "another language." The painted image is "a sort of writing, it ought to be easily legible" (40). Richardson is prepared to acknowledge the imperfection of language — there exists, for example, "an infinity of other ideas which have no certain words universally agreed upon as denoting them" (2). Yet, his attempts to use language as a model from which he can derive the principles of painting admit no parallel deficiency. Rather, the immediacy of painting, which "pours ideas into our minds" (2), confers apparent advantage upon the image which is *seen* to communicate in a universal tongue, naturally, and without ambiguity:

Language is very imperfect . . . whereas the painter can

convey his ideas of these things clearly, and without ambiguity; and what he says everyone understands in the sense he intends it. (2)

The paradox inherent in extolling the universal and direct appeal of the visual is also particularly obvious in the works of writers such as Joseph Addison, who maintained that "our Sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our Senses" (*Spectator* No. 411, 535). Both Addison and Richardson suggest that the sight of a beautiful painting or other material object will engender an automatic, effortless pleasure. In the *Spectator* No. 411, Addison writes that "it is but opening the Eye, and the Scene enters. The Colours paint themselves on the Fancy, with very little Attention of Thought or Application of Mind in the Beholder" (538). However, despite his apparent agreement with Richardson's "painting as language" analogy, Addison favours words because they are capable of giving greater pleasure than that found merely in viewing concrete objects.

Richardson's primary concerns are echoed throughout the *Discourses*, but Reynolds, always the astute politician, discourages any concept of his art that implies universal access. Richardson is determined to establish painting as both a didactic and economic commodity, arguing for the validity of the painter's professional status, including his right to fair remuneration. Although Reynolds was tremendously successful both as a portraitist and a collector, he was wise enough to dissociate art from the realm of commerce. Art is inherently elitist, and if, as John Barrell argues, Reynolds's mission was the creation and confirmation of a "republic of taste" (70), Reynolds created his public by distinguishing between those who were and those who were not capable of abstracting from particulars.

Unlike Richardson, Reynolds avoids reference to the inherent mechanism of his art, using it only to distinguish stages in the artist's successive development:

A Student is not always advancing because he is employed; he must apply his strength to that part of the art where the *real difficulties* lie; to that part which distinguishes it as a *liberal art*; and not by *mistaken industry lose his time in that which is merely ornamental* (I,19, emphasis mine)

This "useless industry" captivates the untutored mind, relegating its practitioners — who, as in Plato's allegory of the cave, "have taken the shadow for the substance" (I,18) — to the worship of sensible appearance. In contrast to the mental effort evident in "the quietness and chastity of the Bolognese pencil" (IV,64), which addresses our highest faculties, the tumult of a Venetian picture is likened to "a mere struggle without effect, *a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing*" (IV,64). Excessive indulgence in style bodes a promiscuous preoccupation with the purely mechanical which, in its perversion of the end of art, is tantamount to sexual decadence: "there is scarce an instance of return to scrupulous labour, after the mind has been debauched and deceived by this fallacious mastery" (I,18). The painting that asserts a narcissistic fascination with its own materiality by failing to "efface the traces of its own production" (Bryson 27) commits a double transgression:

Tintoret, Paul Veronese, and others of the Venetian school, seem to have painted with no other purpose than to be admired for their skill and expertness in the *mechanism of painting*, and to make a parade of that art, which as I before observed, the *higher stile requires its followers to conceal* (IV,63,emphasis mine)

First, this "seduction," by dissipating the attention of the spectator from the principal subject, ignores propriety and its correlation with the depiction of dignity in the higher genres. Beyond being inimical to the tenets on which the Academy was established, the principal effect of engagement with such minor excellencies is a negation of the power of text over image. The unregulated "heathen" image defies circumscription under academic rule, resisting linguistic penetration in the potent assertion of difference — space, colour, line, light, shadow. Ultimately, the official word relegates the particularized, deviant image to the realm of contingency.

Reynolds would probably have concurred with Richardson that painting's "great business" is the *legible* relation of a history or fable. In his fascinating study of French painting of the *ancien régime*, Norman Bryson maintains that Anglo-Saxon art has never been as discursive as its French equivalent, and that, for Reynolds and the Royal Academy, history painting remained an importation (239).¹⁹ Yet, beyond serving as a narrative text capable of initiating its own critical commentary and providing subject matter worthy of communicating noble ideas, history painting represented a political alliance. Denied what little protection was afforded by the institution of the Royal Academy under George III, and the measure of security and authority Reynolds later enjoyed as first president, Richardson advocated a more direct equation of painting and writing. If "history is a fusion of event with writing," painting becomes simply the instrument to re-record an action that has already occurred as writing (Bryson 39-40). Referring to the practice of

¹⁹ History painting maintained a hallowed place in the Academy, and was valorized by painters as diverse as Hogarth and Van Dyck.

painters who created literal speaking figures with words coming out of their mouths, Richardson defends his supremely discursive art by concluding that even Raphael chose to write rather than leave ambiguity in a completed work (61). On the one hand, Richardson maintains that no words issuing from the poet or historian are sufficient to convey the idea of greatness inspired by Raphael's apostle (52). On the other hand, he suggests that before any preliminary drawings, the painter write the story, giving "it all the beauty of description, with an account of what is said, and whatever else he would relate, *were he only to make a written history*" (37, emphasis mine).

Reynolds refuses to allow his prose to degenerate into polemic. But, he sees no contradiction in praising the genius of Veronese's *Marriage at Cana* or Rubens's *The Altar of St Augustine at Antwerp*, although "neither of those pictures have any interesting story to support them" (XI,201). In contrast to history painting in which the one-to-one correspondence between image and idea results in unified meaning, the lower-ranked genre painting releases a profusion of possible messages. Reynolds defames descriptive painting as merely incompatible with the great style, but clearly the chief sin being committed is the omission of a promised narrative in line with painting's didactic function. In a letter to Edmund Burke, Reynolds demarcates this split between visual/descriptive and textual/interpretive cultures in his negative assessment of "Dutch pictures [as] a representation of nature, just as it is seen in a *camera obscura*" (LVIII, *Letters* 84). Despite their admirable qualities, the paintings are disparaged chiefly because "*they would have no effect in writing*" (*Letters* 84, emphasis mine).

Richardson and Reynolds share many of the same ideals for the artist's proper initiation into painting's sacred preserve. Both men, by subscribing to a hierarchy of artistic genres in which history painting occupies first place, implicitly sanction a style in which the control of word over image is most pronounced. Yet, Reynolds's *Discourses* temper the extremes of Richardson's aesthetic. While Richardson insists that the painter be knowledgeable in all realms of intellectual life, Reynolds recommends only such breadth of reading as will not "disqualify [the artist] for the practical part of his profession," urging the conversation of learned men as the best possible substitute for years of study (VII,118). However, Richardson's overwhelming reliance on the literary leads to the notion of painting as a complement to literature. Painting is distinguished primarily by its ability to complete the act of communication initiated by its elder sister.

The first objective of both Richardson and Reynolds remained the elevation of painting to the status of liberal art and *true* sister of poetry. The promotion of "high-discursive art" prevented either man from fully achieving his goal. Reynolds was more successful, not only because he enjoyed the obvious practical advantages mentioned earlier, but largely because his was a "quiet revolution." If Richardson's indignation with painting's inferior status engendered a paranoid defensiveness that threatened to overwhelm his message, Reynolds was careful to ensure that the *status quo* was not perceived to be under direct attack. Unfortunately, such diplomacy levied a steep toll on the success of Reynolds's mission. He was able to foster the illusion of objective neutrality by drawing on accepted aesthetic doctrine only at the expense of an equally dangerous dependence on the literary.

CHAPTER THREE

TWO WRITERS: EDMUND BURKE AND G.E. LESSING

The Irish politician and writer, Edmund Burke — Reynolds's close companion, as well as a founding member of the "Club" — was no stranger to painting. In 1744, Burke entered Trinity College in Dublin, where he was soon distinguished by the breadth of his intellectual curiosity, a passion no doubt sparked by his religion and an early acquaintance with Longinus. At the age of fifteen, and armed with an insatiable interest in the analysis of human nature, Burke was already writing about beauty and displaying a precocious interest in the aesthetic ideas which would receive a definitive treatment in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Motivated by his continuing interest in painting, Burke later served as patron for two fellow Irishmen: George Barret, an inferior landscape painter for whom he commissioned a lucrative post as master painter to Chelsea Hospital, and, Reynolds's foe, James Barry (Boulton, Introduction, *Enquiry* cix). The *Enquiry* made an indelible impression on the young Barry for, despite his eventual belief in painting's superiority, traces of Burke's influence are reflected in Barry's work as a painter (Boulton, Introduction, *Enquiry* cxi).

In the interim, Burke entered the Middle Temple. While literature may have held a greater fascination than the law, Burke soon embarked on an active political

career, during which time he served as MP for Wendover, Bristol, and Malton, championing such causes as the emancipation of Ireland and the American colonies. The bulk of Burke's treatises and speeches, including *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), were the product of his political life, but it is perhaps in the *Enquiry* that Burke, following the course of his youthful passion for systematic investigation, is most original.

The first four parts of the *Enquiry* constitute an in-depth and reasoned discussion of taste, beauty, and the union of the sublime and beautiful. Throughout, Burke relies on both personal experience and that of friends to validate his central belief in the universality of response to sensory stimuli among men. In Burke's schema, language affects through sympathy and is the proper medium for the sublime, while painting passively reproduces the beautiful in accordance with the external world. In his aesthetic, predicated on an epistemology of sexual difference, beauty appears to be a tepid social quality, inspiring "tenderness and affection" (43), rather than the violent terror of the masculine sublime.

While Burke remained thoroughly rooted in his empiricist age, the psychological bent of the *Enquiry*, with its unique sensationism and shift of emphasis from the aesthetic object to the experience of the beholder, heralds Coleridge's assertion that "every human feeling is greater and larger than the exciting cause" (495). James Boulton maintains that Burke's anti-pictorialist stance — a radical departure from contemporary thought — was later reflected in Coleridge's opposition to producing poetry so minute in detail "that the reader

naturally asks why words, and not painting are used" (Coleridge qtd. in Boulton, Introduction *Enquiry* lviii). Although the *Enquiry* was but "a poor thing" in Coleridge's estimation, he agreed that poetry affects the imagination, not through description, but by using a single word to produce a livelier image (Coleridge qtd. in Boulton, Introduction, *Enquiry* cii). Burke begins the fifth and final part of his treatise by dispelling the prevalent myth that words, both in ordinary conversation and in poetry, raise stereotypical images.

Burke divides words into three classifications: the *aggregate* word such as man, horse, tree, castle; the *simple aggregate* word depicting, for example, colours and shapes; and, finally, the *compounded abstract* word, an arbitrary union of members from the first two groups. Burke cites honour, virtue, persuasion, and magistrate (presumably an amalgam of justice and man) as examples in this category. The ability of the word to excite human passion is not dependent on simplistically substituting mental images for corresponding words. Rather, the power of language lies in the sound, the picture or image signified by the sound, and the resulting affection of the soul produced by either the sound or image alone, or the union of sound and image. Burke stresses that the production of the image is secondary, even unnecessary, for in the description of the most awe-inspiring scenery, the mind is not able simultaneously to comprehend both the sound of the word and the image it represents.

Burke uses the instance of the blind poet Thomas Blacklock (1721-91) to prove that a man may skilfully manipulate language, and, in so doing, affect the passions of his audience without ever having "real ideas of the things described"

(169). Rather than automatically producing images during conversation, the mind must voluntarily exert a conscious act of will. Referring to the example of Nicholas Saunderson (1682-1739), the Cambridge professor of mathematics who had early lost his sight through small-pox, Burke concludes that words are capable of ordering reality without producing images. According to Burke, Saunderson was able to lecture on light and colour because "it was as easy for him to reason upon the words as if he had been fully master of the ideas" (169). Poetry, in particular, would lose its power to excite the imagination if it functioned merely by raising a series of arbitrary pictures.

For Burke, poetry is not an imitative art in the true sense of the word. Rather than referring to the expressive potential of the poetic image, which arises from avoiding minute particulars, Burke explains that words bear no physical resemblance to the ideas for which they stand. In the final section, Burke adds that human beings are intensely emotive and words are the only means of communicating this common sympathy. Words which represent the intangible, or ideas for which men can have had no concrete experience such as hell, God, famine and war, nevertheless have a powerful impact on the mind. Painting may furnish a clearer idea of the common conception, for example, of an angel as a winged young man, but ultimately words affect the mind more than the sensible image. Burke illustrates his point with reference to Milton's depiction of the travels of the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost*. The addition of a single word may be so central to the sublimity of the verse, that the passage would lose the greater part of its effect if the word were absent. The impact of the "rocks, caves, lakes, dens, bogs, fens and

shades" (Milton qtd. in Burke 174), which comprise the fallen angels' habitation, would be extremely diminished were the following evocative line — "a universe of death" — to be removed.

Implicit in Burke's assertion that words are able to affect us much more strongly than the objects they represent is his belief that the pleasure accompanying the sight of a painting arises from its mimetic fidelity. He associates the beautiful in painting with a transcription of the accidental deficiencies occurring in nature. Reynolds, on the other hand, maintains that both poetry and painting are conducive to the sublime. Although Burke allows that both arts work by sympathy (44), he believes that the type of legibility prescribed by Reynolds in the *Discourses* "helps but little towards affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms whatsoever" (60). Clarity, far from being the ultimate goal of poetry, is inconsistent with poetic rhetoric's crowning glory, the ability to affect the passions through indistinct imagery. For Burke, even if painting operates by sympathy as well as description, a drawing of an object can affect the viewer no more than the sight of the original:

The most lively and spirited verbal description I can give, raises a very obscure and imperfect *idea* of such objects; but then it is in my power to raise a stronger *emotion* by the description than I could do by the best painting. (60)

Although Reynolds insists on the legibility of a finished painting, he seems to be in league with Burke in his celebration of the expressive potential of the painter's preliminary sketches. In contrast to a history painting in which the image functions as a narrative substitute, the sketch, with its profusion of possible

meanings, occupies the unsanctioned realm of the illegible. Although Reynolds would never adhere to the Burkean notion of painting's reduplicative mission under the tyranny of realism, he nevertheless exploits the painter's potential to effect the obscurity so central to Burke's definition of the sublime:

From a slight undetermined drawing, where the ideas of the composition and character are, as I may say, only just touched upon, the imagination supplies more than the painter himself, probably, could produce; and we accordingly often find that the finished work disappoints the expectation that was raised from the sketch; and this power of the imagination is one of the causes of the great pleasure we have in viewing a collection of drawings by great painters. These *general ideas*, which are expressed in *sketches*, correspond very well to the art often used in *Poetry*. A great part of the beauty of the celebrated description of Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, consists in using only general indistinct expressions, every reader making out the detail according to his own particular imagination, — his own idea of beauty, grace, expression, or loveliness. (VIII,163-4,emphasis mine)

Reynolds's praise for Milton's depiction of Eve is a direct echo of Burke's reference to Homer's description of Helen. Priam's summation of Helen's charms avoids conjuring up any precise image, yet stimulates the imagination to such a degree that "we are much more touched by this manner of mentioning her than by these long and laboured descriptions" (172). The freedom of interpretation Reynolds grants his spectator is limited only to the preliminary image, ostensibly because the value of a painter's sketch resides in the intuition of a greater whole. On a deeper level, however, Reynolds seems to concede that in poetry alone the imagination is unburdened by the materiality of distinct corporeal forms. By removing the mind from the sensible objects found in the external world, poetry comes closer to fulfilling Reynolds's criterion that "the great end of the art is to

strike the imagination" (IV,59).

Significantly, almost a decade after the appearance of the *Enquiry*, the German critic and playwright Gotthold Ephraim Lessing cited Homer's description of Helen as proof that "everything that in the poet raises the gods above god-like men utterly vanishes" in the hands of the painter (81). Although Burke's aesthetic treatise received mixed reviews in England, the *Enquiry* made an immediate impact on the Continent, particularly in France and Germany where, "with Lessing and Kant, Burke's challenge was readily acknowledged and accepted."²⁰ As early as January 1758, Lessing had begun to translate the *Enquiry*, though Burke receives no mention in his famous distinction between the arts, *Laocoon* (Boulton, Introduction, *Enquiry* cxxi-cxxii). While Lessing would presumably have agreed with Burke's fundamental assumptions, particularly those underlying the separation of affective poetry and descriptive painting, his approach to the two arts is fundamentally different. Rather than distinguishing painting from poetry on the basis of imitation, Lessing maintains that both arts reproduce an absent reality, and that this illusion is one of the chief sources of aesthetic pleasure. Lessing attempts to correct the modern tendency to literalize artistic metaphors by premising his distinctions between the arts on space and time, which are associated with the natural and arbitrary signs of painting and poetry respectively.

Lessing claims that he is not devising an absolute system for comparing the arts, but merely warning critics of the tendency to lay blame for perceived

²⁰ Boulton, Introduction, *Enquiry* lxxxii. For a further evaluation of Lessing and Burke, see cxx - cxxv.

deficiencies in a poem or painting according to the individual's preference or taste for either art (Preface 5). Reacting to the entrenchment of Simonides's maxim that painting is mute poetry, and poetry a speaking picture, Lessing asks the would-be critic to consider the limitations and intention of each work of art. He believes that the popular praise of allegory in painting is a reflection of an ingrained resistance to considering, for example, to what extent a painting "could express general ideas, without alienating itself from its destiny, and degenerating into an arbitrary method of writing" (Preface 5). In the case of the stoical suffering of Philoctetes, Hercules and Laocoon, Lessing suggests that, although the expression of passion is not incompatible with greatness, the artist has valid reasons for refusing to depict a cry of bodily pain.

But, if Lessing's defense of painting appears to contradict mainstream criticism by allowing painting greater freedoms, he still pits the artist against his "rival, the poet" (11). In his suggestion that painting and poetry co-exist as two friendly neighbours, Lessing seems to be an impartial commentator. But, as W.J.T. Mitchell points out, rather than creating separate but equal states, the arts are segregated "in what [Lessing] regards as their natural inequality" (107). Lessing writes,

But if the less cannot contain the greater, the less can be comprised in the greater. I mean, although each trait of which the descriptive poet avails himself need not necessarily have as good effect upon the other surface, or in marble, yet could not every detail of which the artist avails himself be just as effective in the work of the poet? (44)

This implicit anti-visual stance begins with Lessing's introductory explanation of the role of the state in the practice of ancient art. According to Lessing, the Greeks confined imitation to the depiction of the beautiful and took severe measures to ensure the proper exercise of imitation:

Too many indifferent portraits were not allowed to find a place among the productions of art; for although a portrait admits of the ideal, this last must be subordinate to the likeness; it is the ideal of an individual man, and not the ideal of man in the abstract. (13)

Lessing implies that imitation in the plastic arts is confined to the beautiful simply because beauty is both the greatest source of pleasure, and the highest ideal attainable in the physical universe. The poet, on the other hand, can abandon the ordinary dimensions of the visible world by expanding the imaginative sphere beyond the empirical boundaries of experience. Although Lessing maintains that he is simply establishing beauty as the first rule of art, his concern with the potential effect of images on the national character reveals an unconscious fear of the power of the plastic arts, which require "the closest inspection of the law" (14). In fact, "Lessing rationalizes a fear of imagery that can be found in every major philosopher from Bacon to Kant to Wittgenstein" (Mitchell 113).

In the third chapter, Lessing explains the constraints that accompany the limitation of visual art to a single moment in time. Because "this single moment receives through art an unchangeable duration" (20), the artist should not limit the expressive potential of his work by depicting the transitory. Lessing praises Timomachus because "he did not paint Medea at the instant when she was actually murdering her children, but a few moments before, whilst her motherly love was

still struggling with her jealousy" (21). The depiction of the subject of a painting or sculpture in a moment of extreme passion inhibits the imagination by focusing its powers on a single unrepresentative subject:

If Laocoon sighs, the imagination can hear him shriek; but if he shrieks, it can neither rise a step higher above nor descend a step below this representation, without seeing him in a condition which, as it will be more endurable, becomes less interesting. It either hears him merely moaning, or sees him already dead. (20)

The limitations prescribed to painting are rarely applicable to poetry, and, by the fourth chapter of the *Laocoon*, Lessing's sympathetic alignment with poetry is already firmly established.

Lessing notes that the similarity between Virgil's description and the sculpture of the Laocoon leads to the assumption that the artist deferred to the poet's powers of invention and originality in following his example. Invention, which requires greater mental effort than expression, is the poet's chief merit. Conversely, because artistic expression is perceived to be far more difficult than expression involving the arbitrary signs of language, the painter is assumed to be naturally indifferent to invention, preferring "that lower kind which Horace recommends to his tragic poet!" (76) According to Lessing, the lack of invention, which would be shameful in a poet, is acceptable in the painter who remains confined to a narrow circle of subjects (76). Recognizing that the painter is often depicted as a hack, for whom the repetition, or even "ownership," of subject matter is of little consequence, Reynolds defensively maintains that an artist who borrows from earlier works is merely imitating the poets who "practise this kind of borrowing, without reserve" (VI,107).

Reynolds would condemn Lessing's conception of the painter who, preoccupied with acquiring mere mechanical dexterity, is practising art in its most primitive guise. Lessing's discussion of the painter's all-consuming difficulty in acquiring mechanical skill stands in direct opposition to Reynolds's assertion that the value of his art is dependent on "the mental labour employed in it, or the mental pleasure produced by it" (IV,57). Reynolds suggests that, rather than merely seducing the eye, the painter uses visual concepts to give rise to imaginative speculation.

When Lessing considers the two arts together, he concludes that, while a poet may personify abstractions, the artist is compelled to resort to the use of arbitrary emblems to make his figures legible. Lessing claims that the poet has the advantage in being able to manifest beauty and frightfulness simultaneously. The horns and chaplet, which impede the artist's depiction of Bacchus, enhance the poet's work by providing him "with neat allusions to the actions and character of the god" (60). Because the painter is limited to a static moment, he must take care that his representation of a god does not contradict the figure's essential character. The rendering of an angry or vengeful Venus, for example, is the option only of the poet who, "if he paints her as inflamed with indignation and fury" (61-2), is fully justified since injured love is the source of her passion. Poets, whose works encompass a more extensive vision than painting, should not degrade their art by succumbing to the popular love of pictorialism in poetry. Although imaginative restrictions are inherent in the painter's medium, poets need "not convert the necessities of painting into a part of their own wealth" (70). Examples of Lessing's

and Reynolds's theoretical disagreements are numerous and diverse, but it is their convergence which proves most revealing and, ultimately, most damaging to Reynolds's mission.

Lessing's attempts to dispel confusion between the spatial and temporal arts bear some similarities to Reynolds's demarcation of critical boundaries between painting and poetry. Despite Lessing's unpopular invocation of the traditional alliance of painting and mechanism, Reynolds agrees with Lessing's assertion that the poet's medium allows greater latitude for the violation of traditional principles of decorum:

[What] would cost the artist a separate work, costs the poet but a single trait; and should this trait, if viewed by itself, offend the imagination of the hearer, either such preparation has been made for it by what has preceded, or it will be so softened and compensated by what follows that its solitary impression is lost, and the combination produces the best possible effect.
(Lessing 23)

Lurking beneath Reynolds's insistence on the spectator's ability to interpret the single moment reproduced in the painting is the necessity to conform to a narrative structure. By choosing to depict a "pregnant moment" from a biblical, historical, or classical source, the artist may lend the spatial art of painting a temporality usually reserved for poetry. Rather than focusing his imaginative powers on a single cataclysmic instant, the spectator unfolds a narrative by allowing his mind to range over the sequence of events immediately preceding and following the single moment depicted.

Reynolds's theory, then, approaches dangerous proximity to Lessing's in his insistence on the paramount importance of legibility in the plastic arts. Although

Reynolds would surely resent Lessing's assessment of the painter's role as "nothing more than express[ing] the words of the poet in form and colour" (75), he acknowledges the loss of legibility when a painter mistakenly attempts to surpass the limitations of his art by depicting a "mixed passion" (V,78). Far from contradicting the desired aesthetic effect, the union of disparate qualities in a poem enhances the process of abstraction which is the fountainhead of imaginative activity. In Reynolds's aesthetic, a painting affects the imagination by communicating mental states abstracted from particular nature, yet the resulting general image is, nevertheless, limited by its worldliness. In other words, the painter's figures must conform to the logical expectations of the phenomena experienced in the visible world.

Lessing's dismissal of the popular praise of pictorialism in poetry and allegory in painting held out the elusive possibility of an unbiased theoretical framework, which would stress the intrinsic differences between the arts. Instead, the desire for a democratic vision of the arts was shattered by a similar privileging of poetry, this time premised on the equally artificial boundaries of space and time. If Lessing abandons the neoclassical concept of *ut pictura poesis*, explaining that imposing the limitations of the painter on the poet would be a violation of his imaginative freedom, painting remains subject to the precedents set by successful (namely Homeric) poetry. Even when painting depicts beauty with a "fulness [sic] of manner which is so difficult to express in words" (VIII,160), this beauty is consigned to an inferior station as merely the greatest effect attainable in the plastic arts.

Of course, both arts possess the capacity to transcend their *natural* sphere. Painters, for example, are often forced to resort to the use of arbitrary emblems to render allegorical figures intelligible. The implication, however, is that artists use conventional signs merely to escape the restrictions inherent in the natural signs of painting. Poetry is superior because the arbitrary signs of language, by imitating the unfolding of an action over time, approach the natural in a truer sense. Painting is caught in a double-bind. The poet can simultaneously use natural and arbitrary signs — he is praised for both the sublimity of his indistinct imagery, and the clarity of vision (or immediacy) arising from his adherence to the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*. But, because painting has only one moment to engage the viewer's attention, the possibility of communicating an unintended or false message must always be taken into consideration.

CHAPTER FOUR

UT PICTURA POESIS: WORD AND IMAGE IN REYNOLDS'S DISCOURSES ON ART

From the time of the Renaissance, writers who sought to elaborate on the relationship of literature to its favoured sister turned to certain famous passages in Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars Poetica* for illustration. Painters who wished to attain for their art the status awarded poetry often relied on the extension of these fundamental parallels to prove the intrinsic nobility of their chosen profession. Others, such as Leonardo DaVinci, compared the two arts to demonstrate the superiority of painting which "does not display her accomplishments in words" (139). He argued that "as the scribes have had no knowledge of the science of painting, they could not assign to it its rightful place or share" (139). Painting, like poetry, has its origins in the mind of the creator yet, in the hands of the scribes, the art is translated into mechanism, and the painter alone is condemned for the power to execute his conceptions. Rather than focusing purely on the literary tradition, Leonardo's impassioned defense of his art looked abroad to the other speculative or philosophical sciences, which could not have existed without an equal measure of manual labour.

More often, however, painters reverted to a discussion of the sister arts'

common ability to evoke visual images to make painting sufficiently humanistic — to lend painting the universally human values of classical antiquity as exemplified by the literature of the Greek and Latin poets, rhetoricians and philosophers. Humanistic painting would, therefore, appeal not only to man's sensibility, but also to his noblest pursuit, the cultivation of the intellect.

Although DaVinci explored the contradictions apparent in unilaterally privileging the word in his *Treatise on Painting*, the fundamental assumption of poetry's superiority continued to haunt future generations of painters. Nearly three hundred years after the appearance of DaVinci's *Treatise*, Sir Joshua Reynolds struggled to provide new answers to these age-old questions — to re-articulate the dichotomy between the construction of the pictorial and the verbal sign.

His determination to lay the rules of art upon a more firm and lasting foundation was, to some extent, an attempt to endow painting with the permanence accorded language. Rather than creating images that reflected the accidental deviations of a particular culture or historical age, Reynolds advocated a style of painting that would transcend all local and temporary customs and prejudices. Although Reynolds conceded that men of genius already have an intuitive understanding of the rules of art, he recognized that, without some type of linguistic prescription, painting would remain a secondary and derivative form of communication. And, if Reynolds followed DaVinci's example in criticizing the mistaken authority of ignorant writers and false connoisseurs, he was nevertheless afraid that artists, by definition, lacked the verbal and linguistic skills necessary to defend their art. The importation of a well-developed literary theory provided an

opportunity simultaneously to redefine British art and to determine a canon of approved images.

In *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting*, Renssalaer Lee traces the evolution of a humanistic theory of painting from its inception in the fifteenth century to its realization in the mid-eighteenth century — the period immediately preceding the formation of the Royal Academy in England. He suggests that an early interest in a scientific treatment of the art was, by the end of the sixteenth century, displaced by the desire to codify the existing body of knowledge for the benefit of young painters (6). Although Reynolds's fifteen addresses to the Academy antedate the height of the *ut pictura poesis* reign, he exploited the primary tenets of the doctrine to satisfy his ultimate objective — the elevation of the status of the painter to that of the man of letters. His analogies concerning content, invention, and power of expression were not fully developed until *Discourse XIII*, when he asserted that the fundamental equality of the sister arts is based on their shared appeal to two faculties of the mind, the imagination and the sensibility. However, Reynolds was not averse to establishing and maintaining throughout the lectures a set of purely formal correspondences between the arts.

Discourse I, delivered at the opening of the Academy in January 1769, fixed Reynolds's role as teacher, recounting the advantages to be incurred by establishing a national institution at a time when the level of wealth, artistic excellence and political inclination conspired to produce a climate favourable to the advancement of the arts in England. Reynolds claimed that, by supplying the student with proper models of past excellence and thus sparing him the painful investigation of

his pioneering predecessors, the Academy would offer a less circuitous route to the painter's attainment of ideal beauty. Drawing extended comparisons between the "language" of painting and that of poetry, Reynolds suggests that the process of learning the language of the graphic arts is similar to the process of acquiring a facility with words. The young student, like the young child, must learn the "grammar" — drawing, modelling, and using colours — of his chosen language before attempting to "snatch a grace beyond the reach of art" (Pope qtd. in I,17). In the same vein, style in painting and in poetry is simply "a power over materials, whether words or colours, by which conceptions or sentiments are conveyed" (II,32). Reynolds cautions the student against trusting his own ill-defined and inexperienced notions of beauty, and encourages the young artist to copy with fidelity the living model before him.

In the second discourse, he warns that the painter who believes he can obtain excellence through "the frigid contemplation of a few single models" is as absurd as the poet who "imagine[s] that by translating a tragedy he can acquire to himself sufficient knowledge of the appearances of nature, the operations of the passions, and the incidents of life" (29). In other words, the poet must, in the true Aristotelian sense, comprehend the formative elements of both tragic plot and character, as well as the conditions on which the tragic effect depends, before he can acquire the imitative skills necessary to create a work that inspires pity or fear in the spectator. By analogy, the painter who is content to develop his powers of imitation by transcribing the works of a few recommended artists will never attain the simplicity of invention associated with the poetic sensibility of the acknowledged

masters. Defending his departure from standard academic practice, Reynolds suggests that imitation without selection, while a delusive industry for the advanced student, is an essential prerequisite to future depictions of those ideas that exist only in the imagination. Again, in accordance with a humanistic theory of art, the painting Reynolds advocates is not the mere transcription of an external reality, but a depiction of the educated painter's imagination — a landscape bounded only by the limits of the art.

The parallels between the correct method of learning the rudiments of the two arts laid the foundation for an interrelationship unrivalled before the eighteenth century. In the notes that accompanied William Mason's translation of Dufresnoy's *De arte graphica* (1783), Reynolds claims that

the poet and the painter must unite to the warmth that accompanies a poetical imagination patience and perseverance: the one in counting syllables and toiling for a rhyme, and the other in labouring the minute parts, and finishing the detail of his works. (Note L, *Works* 345)

This academic and purely artificial equivalence proved to be standard rhetoric in an age that was, for the first time, priding itself on its knowledge of the epic works of both literature and art. Never before had poets developed such a widespread knowledge of painters, or felt more compelled to comment on the relationship between the arts. Although pictorialism was present long before the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Reynolds was synthesizing his theory of painting at a time when pictorialism had come to represent immediate and universal comprehension. Of course, for writers who indulged in a comparative analysis of the arts, *ut pictura poesis* was essentially a literary theory, and pictorialism was primarily a quality

capable of elevating literature.

Jean Hagstrum notes that "during its long history [literary pictorialism] has sometimes seemed to thrive quite independently of the visual arts" (xvi). Far from an automatic privileging of the visual, poetry's ability to translate description into a clear image was a celebration of the seemingly infinite capacity of language. Words were capable of assuming a different shape — of transforming the temporality of language into the guise of spatial image — but painting remained confined to a single, albeit monumental, instant. The arts had become so closely allied that the boundaries of painting and literature blurred, and painting suffered the equivalent of an "identity crisis." Dwarfed by the accomplishments of her elder sister, painting could obtain a reflected glory only by adopting the humanistic tenets of ancient literary theory. Seen in this light, Reynolds's early insistence on the necessity for the same conduct in art as in language was merely the first of many parallels that aspired to raise painting's rank to that of literature, particularly the finest epic poetry of Homer and Milton.

The desire to produce an essentially literary and allusive art found precedent in Alberti's claim that the painting of a history is the chief business of a serious painter (Lee 7). In the *ut pictura poesis* tradition, the painter need not invent the subject which is divined from the poet or historian. Invoking the example of ideal imitation "embodied in the greatest Italian painting from Cimabue to Michelangelo" (Lee 8), Reynolds suggests that in pursuing the grandeur of his design, a representation of strict historical truth is necessarily subordinate to expressive possibility. In Reynolds's view "history" painting is a misnomer: "In conformity to

custom, I call this part of the art History Painting; it ought to be called Poetical, as in reality it is" (IV,60). Alberti's philosophy of imitation as the rendering of a history or significant human action may be a cornerstone of humanistic theory, but Reynolds nevertheless rejects the term "history" as inadequate to convey the impact of painting on the imagination of the spectator. Instead, Reynolds implicitly accepts Aristotle's division between the specificity of history, which describes an actual event or general truth, and verse, which gives particular facts to tell what could or might happen (*Poetics* 35). Following the precedent established by the *Poetics*, Reynolds suggests that universality renders poetry and, by extension, poetical painting more philosophic and, therefore, more important than history.

Approximately a decade before Reynolds began the *Discourses*, he had used Samuel Johnson's *Idler* as a forum to voice similar sentiments. In his second letter to the *Idler* (No. 79), published in October of 1759, Reynolds compared the necessity for an accurate depiction of events in history painting with the Dutch predilection for high finishing and laborious detail. In the fourth discourse, Reynolds adds that "the circumstances that enter into a picture of this kind, are so far from giving a general view of human life, that they exhibit all the minute particularities of a nation differing in several respects from the rest of mankind" (69). The kinship of painting and poetry, on the other hand, is based on the exclusion of mundane truths that engage the spectator in a consideration of common nature. In *Discourse IV*, Raphael is praised for the poetical manner in which he endows the apostles, particularly St. Paul, with a dignity contrary to scriptural truth. Bernini is chastised for deviating from the general in his sculpture of David who, in the

moment of suspended energy before releasing the stone, is depicted biting his under-lip. Reynolds urges the painter to transform the language of representation, with its implied appeal to the senses, into a gratification of the mind. Rather than scrupulously following a chosen text, the painter is encouraged to take poetical licence and imaginatively adapt the possibilities of the verse to the traditional language of his art.

The translation of a written narrative into a visual form may depend on previous knowledge of the poetry or literature that serves as the subject. Without an understanding, for example, of the events occurring prior to the single moment represented in the painting, the image may be unintelligible. It is surely for this reason that Reynolds advocates the representation of fable, history, or Scripture, "which early education, and the usual course of reading, have made familiar and interesting to all Europe without being degraded by the vulgarity of ordinary life in any country" (IV,58). However, the debate concerning the propriety of borrowing the subjects of painting from poetry was of little interest to Reynolds, who argued that such borrowing enhances rather than diminishes the painter's powers of invention.

In a somewhat derivative fashion, the ideal image imitates not only the subject matter of a suitable text, but the effect that its words had originally produced in the painter's mind. According to Reynolds, "whenever a story is related, every man forms a picture in his mind of the action and expression of the persons employed. The power of representing this mental picture on canvass [sic] is what we call Invention in a Painter" (IV,58). Reynolds seems, at first, to be

forging a particularly unfortunate alliance with Richardson, who claimed that an artist ought to have a detailed knowledge of his chosen narrative before he translates the text onto canvas. The priority both painters seem to accord the word which, in effect, stimulates the creation of the image, highlights Burke's insistence that words precede ideas. Reynolds is charting, if not new theoretical territory, an acceptable middle ground: even if the power of words to affect the passions is not derived "from any representation raised in the mind of the things for which they stand" (Burke 164), Reynolds maintains that word and image are equally capable of appealing to the intellect.

In order to attain the generality of a mental picture, which is already free from the minute particularities of fashion and custom, the painter must ensure that his images "shall strike the spectator no more than they did himself in his first conception of the story" (IV,58). The structure of communicating a mental state on canvas is aligned to the process of abstracting from nature which, in popular criticism, had been the exclusive domain of poetry. Counteracting the belief that execution was the painter's chief difficulty, Reynolds suggests that invention, or the mental effort expended in producing the art, is the distinguishing feature of works of genius produced in either medium. Reynolds's own highly literate art, as well as his practice of employing studio assistants to complete the minor details of his paintings, attests to his conviction that the painter should imitate the "conceptions," rather than the "touches" of the great masters. Expanding on earlier metaphors that, for example, compared colours to words, Reynolds translates the primary attribute of poetry — mental abstraction — into the

language of painting.

Although the formal parallels between painting and poetry were established to ensure painting's membership in the liberal arts, the *ut pictura poesis* doctrine, which implicitly sanctioned poetry's superiority, undermined Reynolds's project. The proponents of painting may attempt to assume for their art the guise of poetry's creative powers but, in the end, painting's natural attributes are also viewed as limitations. Measured against the impossible standard of language proper, the painting is rendered mute — limited to depicting figures and actions that can convey sentiment through external signs. Already in *Discourse IV*, Reynolds is urging the painter to "compensate the natural deficiencies of his art. [The artist] has but one sentence to utter, but one moment to exhibit" (60). Limited to the expression of visible dignity, Reynolds suggests that the painter is less suited than either the poet or historian to convey veneration for the hero or saint he represents. Careful study of the circumstances that are associated with dignity will enable the painter to achieve the maximum possible effect — to make his hero, at least, look like a great man, if he cannot make him talk like one (IV,60).

In his annotations to William Mason's translation of *De arte graphica*, Reynolds elaborated on the artist's choice of subject, with particular reference to the limitations imposed by the medium. Literature and verse can encompass the spectrum of topics that suggest grace and majesty, "but as the Painter *speaks* to the eye, a *story* in which fine feeling and curious sentiment is predominant, rather than palpable situation, gross interest, and distinct passion is not suited to her purpose"

(Note X, *Works* 305, emphasis mine).

In yet another linguistic analogy, Reynolds maintains that an overriding concern with the technical mastery of the art, or what is known as the language of the painters, indicates "but poor eloquence" — the orator is expected not merely to talk, but to move the passions. Reynolds wryly observes that when ignorant spectators are drawn to a consideration of petty excellencies, they "often part from such pictures with wonder in their mouths, and indifference in their hearts" (IV,59). If mechanism necessarily precedes theory, the painter's ability to manipulate light, colour and shadow "should be employed as the means, not as the end: language is the instrument, conviction is the work" (IV,64). Although Reynolds allows that the Venetian painters deserve praise for accomplishing perfectly what they intended, their misguided interest in form over substance is incompatible with the great style and, more important, destroys utterly painting's claim to be a literate and liberal art. Excessive indulgence in style bodes a promiscuous preoccupation with the purely mechanical which, in its perversion of the end of art, is tantamount to sexual decadence. Far from producing the steadiness required by heroic subjects, the colouring and manner of the Venetian painters "debauch the young and unexperienced" (IV,67), and divert the attention of connoisseurs, patrons, and painters alike from the higher excellencies. Citing a chance remark attributed to Michelangelo, Reynolds concludes that even the "Homer of painting" believed that Venetian painters studied colours to the neglect of the ideal (IV,66). Reynolds contrasts their preference for displaying extraordinary mechanical power in scenes depicting marriages, feasts, and processions with the superior judgement of

Annibale Carracci who understood that an excess of figures detracted from the effect of a whole (IV,65).

This "effect of a whole" is the cornerstone of Reynolds's concept of the sublime, which "impresses the mind at once with one great idea; it is a single blow" (IV,65). Originally associated with distinction of language, the sublime was nevertheless an essential element of Reynolds's defense of his art. As a locus of aesthetic value, the sublime complemented Reynolds's attempt to locate the source of artistic excellence in the profundity of the painter's imagination. In other words, the sublime allowed the painter, once and for all, to abandon technical servitude and, ultimately, to invade poetry's last stronghold by proving itself capable of inspiring the intellectual awe that had previously been the province of poetry alone.

The eighteenth-century interest in the sublime can be traced back to the anonymous Greek work attributed to Longinus. However, it was not until Boileau's French translation of 1674 that the Longinian sublime began to gain credence as an aesthetic norm. Burke's discussion of the terror aroused by vast objects in the natural world owed much to Longinus's description of the grandeur and immensity of nature — the seeming infinity of the ocean, the mystery of volcanoes, and the majesty of mountains.

Writing less than one hundred years after the appearance of Boileau's famous translation, Reynolds was part of an eighteenth-century milieu that safely assumed a fundamental acquaintance with the concept of sublimity on the part of its audience. Addison, Shaftesbury, Dennis, Hume, and Burke are but a sampling of the writers who devoted their efforts to an analysis of this current of thought.

The sublime, although never clearly articulated in the *Discourses*, so informs Reynolds's aesthetic that Raphael (who is favoured as possessing more excellencies) is subordinated to Michelangelo. Of the two foremost practitioners of the great style, Michelangelo conforms more closely to the ruling aesthetic standard: his ideas are vast, he has more *Genius* and *Imagination*, and he is capable of possessing the whole mind of the spectator with his poetical inspiration.

Rather than merely depicting a pleasing beauty, Reynolds joins Burke in preferring the overpowering effect of the sublime, which "is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (Burke 39). Burke reasons that words alone, because they create indistinct images, are naturally conducive to the terror, grandeur, and obscurity of the sublime. Reynolds, on the other hand, asserts that "the sublime in Painting, as in Poetry, so overpowers, and takes such a possession of the whole mind, that no room is left for attention to minute criticism" (XV,276). Although the sublime was developed by and for writers, in the mid-eighteenth century theorists turned their attention to objects other than literature, paving the way for Reynolds's insistence that the sublime is as much the province of painting as literature. The *Discourses* are strewn with references to Homer and Milton, who were acknowledged to be the two greatest poets of the sublime. In Reynolds's aesthetic, the painter is not the poet's handmaiden, existing merely to illustrate instances of sublimity in his text, but a rival capable of provoking similar passion:

The effect of the capital works of Michael Angelo perfectly corresponds to what Bouchardon said he felt from reading Homer; his whole frame appeared to himself to be enlarged, and all nature which surrounded him, diminished to atoms. (V,83)

Reynolds's insistence on immediacy as the chief criterion of sublimity is distinct from Dubos's and Addison's praise for the instantaneous visibility of the physical details of a painting. The example of the Venetian painters is proof that a painting is not sublime because it dazzles us, or because it brings the elements of the physical world into sharp focus. The sublimity of the painting will vary in direct proportion to the mental effort expended by the painter. The painting may be cleverly allusive, as is the case in Reynolds's *Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, but the mind unites the various references to classicism and the theatre in the ultimate, and by this time well-known, compliment to Mrs. Siddons as the reigning queen of the English stage.

Reynolds implies that the sublime marks the threshold at which representation becomes expression and description becomes "poetry." He negates the traditional restrictive alliances — of painting with the senses and language with the intellect — by encouraging the student to aspire to the realm of mental representation. Admittedly, in the true Burkean sense, poetry operates by using the conventional signs of language, which bear no relation to the objects they represent, while painting conveys its content through natural signs. But Reynolds maintains that

imitation is the means, and not the end, of art;
it is employed by the sculptor as the language by which
his ideas are presented to the mind of the spectator.
Poetry and elocution of every sort make use of signs, but
those signs are arbitrary and conventional. (X,177)

Ideally, however, both the arbitrary linguistic sign and the natural visual sign should not be experienced purely at the level of the signifier. The language of

poetry may be distinguished from prose by its beauty, but the reader's attention is not captured by the words, but by their primary effect — the duplication of an absent reality. In several instances, Reynolds implies that the Venetian talent for excelling in inferior beauties results in semiotic operations that interfere with the intuitive apprehension of the aesthetic object. Instead of merely describing an heroic event through natural signs, the painting Reynolds advocates moves the passions by communicating mental states that transcend the traditional boundaries of time and space.

The highly literary and allusive portrait of *Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse* illustrates how painting can combine the advantages that are seen to be unique to each art. According to Richard Wendorf, the background and foreground of the painting "reveal an intentional suppression of any distinct spatial design that would divert attention from the central figure" (*Portrait-Painting* 17). If Reynolds is unable to depict the successive events of poetry, Wendorf suggests that he can abolish, or infinitely extend, time (*Portrait-Painting* 17). Reynolds captures his subject in the context of the dramatic activity by which she was defined, while at the same time "portraying her 'out of herself', having relinquished her own individuality as she takes on a more ambitious role" (Wendorf, *Portrait-Painting* 17).

In his fourth discourse, Reynolds laments that the portrait painter paints "a particular man, and consequently a defective model" (70). In the case of Mrs. Siddons, however, he practises what he preaches and improves the lower style "by borrowing from the grand" (IV,72). Rather than depicting a superficial likeness, Reynolds chose to remove his sitter from the ordinary circumstances of life, and

enthroned her in the archetypal timelessness of the tragic muse, complete with the shadowy figures of Pity and Fear. Underlying the compliment to Mrs. Siddons is Reynolds's reinforcement of his own artistic genius; he may practise in the lower walks of art, but he still has the power to immortalize his sitter (and himself) on canvas. His witty remark regarding the placement of his signature — "I have resolved to go down to posterity upon the hem of *your* Garment" — affirms the importance of both Reynolds and his celebrity sitter by alluding to the practice of yet greater artists, such as Raphael (qtd. in Wendorf, *Portrait-Painting* 246). Ultimately, the painter who desired to kiss the hem of Michelangelo's garment²¹ — that is, to receive his poetical inspiration — sees his own vanity gratified on the garment of the actress he has poetically transformed into myth.

Gainsborough's equally famous portrait of Mrs. Siddons (1783-5), on the other hand, reveals the importance that Reynolds's chief rival attached to producing an adequate likeness. Portrayed in profile and gazing away from the spectator, the seated Mrs. Siddons is at once serious and relaxed; although Gainsborough's famous model may have adopted a formal posture, she is depicted without reference to her vocation. Instead, painted in the perfection of Gainsborough's later style, Mrs. Siddons, as the society lady, gave the famous portraitist an opportunity to exhibit his trademark skill in reproducing the silks, plumes and ribbons of the

²¹ Much of Reynolds's final address is devoted to praise of Michelangelo who, as the founding father of art, brought painting to a maturity unequalled in modern times. In his closing remarks, Reynolds claims that, given a second chance, he would "tread in the steps of that great master: to kiss the hem of his garment, to catch the slightest of his perfections, would be glory and distinction enough for an ambitious man" (XV,282).

would-be upper-class female sitter.

The rich texture of these fabrics is the result of Gainsborough's peculiar habit of producing "all those odd scratches and marks," which are observable upon close examination (XIV,257-8). Although Reynolds was usually averse to such idiosyncratic displays, he was the first to admit "that this hatching manner of Gainsborough did very much contribute to the lightness of effect which is so eminent a beauty in his pictures" (XIV,258-9). Reynolds concedes that Gainsborough's unfinished manner contributes more to the likeness of the portrait than any detailed attention to particular features. Despite this praise for "the language in which he expressed his ideas" (XIV,257), Reynolds, who devoted his fourteenth discourse to an educational evaluation of the practice of his late rival, disagreed with writers who cast Gainsborough in the role of untutored genius or nature's poet. Central to Reynolds's argument is the implication arising from his acknowledgement of the "one evil attending this mode" (XIV,259) of painting:

If the portrait were seen, previous to any knowledge of the original, different persons would form different ideas, and all would be disappointed at not finding the original correspond with their own conceptions; under the great latitude which indistinctness gives to the imagination, to assume almost what character or form it pleases. (XIV,259)²²

²² Reynolds's concern with the legibility of countenance in Gainsborough's portraits contradicts his earlier assertion that "the excellence of Portrait-Painting, and we may add even the likeness, the character, and countenance, as I have observed in another place, depend more upon the general effect produced by the painter, than on the exact expression of the peculiarities, or minute discrimination of the parts" (XI,200).

Although Gainsborough's works stimulate the imagination to create a whole — one effect of the sublime — Reynolds unconsciously undermines his art by implying that painting alone must be universally legible. Reynolds's criticism of Gainsborough's indeterminate manner suggests that it is the fate of painting as a natural sign to bear a real resemblance to an original. Although he claims that the sublime is a property of both poetry and painting, in this case he clearly echoes Burke's belief that pictorial signs necessarily describe things as they are, while words convey things as they are felt. While obscurity is a source of the sublime in poetry, Reynolds suggests that painting must look to other avenues.

Many of Reynolds's portraits aspire to sublimity by using a form of parody to intellectualize the genre — to force cultivated spectators, such as Horace Walpole, to recognize and admire the immediate force of his "quotations." While this talent for incorporating the touches of earlier artists and present-day rivals into his own works may have earned Reynolds the reputation of being a plagiarist, he remained firm in his conviction that "he who resolves never to ransack any mind but his own, will be soon reduced, from mere barrenness, to the poorest of all imitations" (VI,99). In the short essay on Shakespeare, which was included in his collection of written "portraits," Reynolds intimated that the principles of art are subject to the vagaries of the human mind:

Man is both a consistent and an inconsistent being, a lover of art when it imitates nature and of nature when it imitates art, of uniformity and of variety, a creature of habit that loves novelty. (*Portraits* 118-9)

Reynolds, therefore, appeals to man's dual nature, to his simultaneous desire for entertainment and enlightenment.

On the one hand, Reynolds often chooses the conventional language of portraiture to engage his audience. Reynolds's family portraits, including those of his nieces, Theophila and Mary Palmer, reveal his mastery of this distinctly English idiom. Paintings, such as the mother-daughter portrait, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire with her Daughter*, provide further evidence of his talent for producing intimate domestic scenes. On the other hand, if the primarily commemorative function of portraiture is in direct conflict with Reynolds's attempts to approximate the complexity of a verbal portrait, even the most straightforward of Reynolds's public representations seem to be tinged with classical or symbolic reference.

At first glance, paintings such as *Lady Sarah Bunbury Sacrificing to the Graces* or *Three Ladies Adorning a Term of Hymen* have little in common with the picture entitled *Lady Cockburn and her three Eldest Sons*, which Reynolds exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1774. But, even if Lady Cockburn is not cast in a mythological role, the painting of a mother surrounded by her three naked, cherub-like sons is reminiscent of a fifteenth-century madonna painted in the popular circular form. The drapery, and the classical pillar in the upper right hand corner of the portrait, provide both a stark contrast to the trinity of flesh, and a formal framing device for a classical representation of the charity or madonna motifs.

Writers such as David Mannings have related the style of Reynolds's prose to both his portraits and conversation pieces. He divides these "deep underlying continuities" into two components: "[Reynolds's] natural gift for placing his figures satisfactorily within the shape of the canvas" and the self-conscious use of the same formal devices used in his writings (357). Mannings finds the latter in the case of

the painting of Lady Cockburn and her children:

what might have been a busy and agitated group is calmed by the classicizing (i.e. *Cinquecento*) pictorial structure, and the spectator is led to think about the literary allusions which hover around the group just as the *Discourses* hint now and then at Milton, Livy or Virgil. (357)

Mannings goes so far as to suggest that the whole-length portrait of Captain Robert Orme makes use of pictorial alliteration:

Just as in his writing Reynolds contrasts 'a smooth period' with 'a sound precept' (XV,269), so in his painting he uses the long dark descending curve of the horse's neck to echo the line of Orme's left arm. Is it possible to see the way these different yet related shapes bounce back and forth across the canvas as, in some sense, comparable to the way Reynolds's verbal contrasts work in the rhythm of his sentences? (357)

However, rather than striving for mere likeness — even a likeness as remarkable as the portrait of the young Augustus Keppel, with its implicit reference to the pose of the Apollo Belvedere — Reynolds seems to prefer a more obtrusive blend of composite portraiture.

This style of portraiture resembles his writing at its most diffuse in that the reader/spectator is denied a coherent subject position. Reynolds's dignified and stately prose, which defines theoretical terms through a series of analogies and oppositions, places the onus on the reader to fix an area of meaning.

Throughout the *Discourses*, Reynolds — in a direct echo of John Locke — laments the insufficiency of words "to express the more nice discriminations which a deep investigation discovers" (VII,121). Yet, at the root of Reynolds's suspicion that art has been trapped in incomprehensible, mystifying language is the paradoxical

notion that men of genius acquire the rules of art through a type of divine cognition: the rules "by which men of extraordinary parts" work "are either such as they discover by their own peculiar observations, or of such a nice texture as not easily to admit being expressed in words" (VI,98).

As well, the inherent logic of Reynolds's prose, with its systematic links between ideas, proffers the illusion of critical exactness, while forcing the reader to seek the definitions of key words by considering the relationship between at least two (often contrary) terms. No writer in the eighteenth century, for example, could escape the increasing scope and complexity of the neoclassical concept of nature, which followed Pope's maxim "whatever is, is right." Beyond the definition of nature in its broadest application, Reynolds conjoins nature with the human mind, imagination, beauty, truth and reason. The aim of art shifts from pleasure to the more didactic unfolding of useful truths (at times, one and the same). In either case, the individual must deny his vanity and submit to the pleasure or truth "derived from the uniformity of sentiments among mankind" (VII,141).

Similarly, upon viewing Reynolds's *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, the spectator's mind will automatically desire "to double, to entertain two objects at one time" (*Portraits* 119). The parodic adoption of the Rubens and Caracci *Choice of Hercules* functions on several levels, yet beyond these layers of meaning is the unarticulated relationship between word and image. Although the story of "Hercules at the Crossroads" is now virtually forgotten, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it "was a kind of archetypal icon," a synonym for difficult moral choice (Hagstrum 190). As a boy on the threshold of manhood, Hercules is

approached by two women of great stature. Virtue, the first woman, is fair, tall and sober. Her counterpart, conscious of her bodily charms and promising Hercules the joys of the flesh, tells him that she is called Happiness by her friends and Vice by her enemies. Implicit, however, in the well-documented accomplishments of Hercules is his choice of the high and noble road of virtue.²³

Reynolds elevates his painting by adopting second-hand a tale that had already enjoyed a long and varied history, both as legend and in pictorial form. Annibale Carracci, one of the followers of the great style, had painted a version of the Hercules theme that proved to be "one of the most famous paintings of the epoch" (Hagstrum 191). Although Hercules stands equidistant between the two women who are capable of determining his fate, he appears to favour Virtue. In Rubens's interpretation, however, the difficulty of choosing between sensuality and duty is highlighted, and Hercules seems inclined toward a nearly naked Voluptas.²⁴ When Reynolds portrays David Garrick, the great eighteenth-century actor, hesitating between the figures of Comedy and Tragedy, he self-consciously borrows the works of earlier painters (and poets) to add yet another dimension to the complexity of his work.

Lessing would argue that painters who appropriate the work of writers serve merely to reinforce painting's dependent role — its lack of true invention. Although it is impossible to argue that Reynolds does not glorify the literary in both his

²³ See Hagstrum 190-196 for a detailed description of the history and fortunes of the legend.

²⁴ The foregoing account of the Hercules motif in Carracci and Rubens is a condensed version of Jean Hagstrum's description (192).

Discourses and his portraits, his use of allusion creates an entirely original set of potential meanings.

Richard Wendorf suggests that the use of borrowed attitudes encourages this process of expansion or doubling:

The implicit relationship between Garrick and Hercules, however, turns the tables on us as viewers. The tensions and conflicts that we previously detected in the visual text have now been extended to the process of interpretation; as viewers, we are necessarily implicated in the complexities of representation. (*Portrait-Painting* 248)

On the surface, Reynolds's painting of Garrick is nothing more than a classicized portrait of an artist caught between the two dramatic forms — comedy and tragedy. Ellis Waterhouse has pointed out that Comedy is painted in the style of Correggio and Tragedy in that of Guido Reni (qtd. in Wendorf, *Portrait-Painting* 241), a decision that hints at the universality, or even necessity, of artistic choice. However, at a deeper level, Garrick's implied choice seems to be a comment on a somewhat frivolous moral character. Reynolds was an ardent theatregoer and, we can safely assume, an admirer of Garrick's dramatic personae on the public stage. In private life, however, Reynolds suggested that Garrick's vanity and his unending passion for fame led him directly into the fawning arms of vice: "When this passion [for fame] is carried to excess, like every other excess it becomes a vice, either ridiculous or odious, or sometimes criminal" (*Portraits* 87). As well, Reynolds may be making a witty comment on the relative "heroism" of the actor's choice — after all, the two dramatic masks in the right-hand corner of Carracci's canvas are part of Vice's

seductive apparatus.²⁵

Reynolds's artistic practice provides a useful context for examining the underlying tensions between word and image in his writings, primarily because it highlights the sublime as the chief criterion of merit in a work of art. Again and again, Reynolds claims that the chief end of art is to move the passions, or to strike the imagination. Earlier writers such as Jonathan Richardson had suggested that painting effects this emotive communication by simultaneously presenting a number of ideas, hence the oft quoted: "Painting pours ideas into our minds. Words only drop them" (2). Upon first reading, it may appear that Reynolds, who claims that the sublime strikes in a single blow, also subscribes to the belief that immediacy guarantees some degree of accessibility: "A picture should please at first sight, and appear to invite the spectator's attention" (VII,126). On closer examination, however, it is clear that the sublime painting controls the reception of the artist's message in much the same way that poetry controls the events it relates by depicting them in a certain sequence. The sublime painting may not be able to achieve the temporal effect of poetry. But, by exhibiting only the general ideas of nature, the painter is able to focus the viewer's attention on one central idea.

In contrast, the Venetian preference for sensuality — the concern with colour and figure to the neglect of ideal form — leaves the spectator with total freedom to attend to the circumstances of the painting as he pleases. Choosing to dazzle

²⁵ Mrs. Siddons was not the only famous sitter that Gainsborough and Reynolds had in common. According to Jonathan Leonard, Gainsborough painted his theatrical friend at least five times. Gainsborough's portrait of Garrick casually leaning against a bust of Shakespeare "captured the essence of this vain, but immensely talented man" and is said to have been Mrs. Garrick's favourite. (142)

rather than instruct, these painters depict events that often relay a profusion of conflicting messages. Because the Venetian artists fail to subordinate the language of the art to the primacy of mental communication, their paintings cannot effect the sublime, which appeals to a cultivated audience alone: "the totally ignorant beholder, like the ignorant artist, cannot comprehend a whole, nor even what it means" (XI,202). In other words the sublime painting requires a degree of artificial preparation, or what is known as taste, in the painter and spectator alike. The minute elegancies of the Venetian style will naturally appeal to the ignorant who, though satisfied with a faithful reproduction, remain unimpressed by the poetic genius of Michelangelo. Reynolds later concedes that many ambitious students of the art do not, at first, recognize the sublimity of Michelangelo, but must be encouraged to study prescribed works until they acquire a due relish for the old masters — it is absurd "to suppose that we are born with this taste, though we are with the seeds of it" (XV,277).²⁶

In the opening remarks of *Discourse V*, Reynolds maintains that "if you mean to preserve the most perfect beauty *in its most perfect state*, you cannot express the passions, all of which produce distortion and deformity, more or less, in the most beautiful faces" (78). For instance, although Reynolds freely admits his indebtedness to Pliny, he criticizes Pliny's assessment of an image of Euphranor's

²⁶ "See Reynolds, *Works*, 2nd ed. (London 1798), I, xiv,xvi: 'I remember very well my own disappointment, when I first visited the Vatican . . . Notwithstanding my disappointment, I proceeded to copy some of those excellent works . . . In a short time a new taste and new perceptions began to dawn upon me; and I was convinced that I had originally formed a false opinion of the perfection of art'" (qtd. in Wark, *Discourses* 32).

Paris because "a statue in which you endeavour to unite stately dignity, youthful elegance, and stern valour, must surely possess none of these to any eminent degree" (V,79).

This insistence on perfect beauty is reminiscent of Lessing's belief that beauty is the highest ideal that the "lesser" art is capable of achieving. Reynolds is not, however, making a value judgment on the relative efficacy of the two arts: "we need not be mortified or discouraged at not being able to execute the conceptions of a romantick [sic] imagination" (V,79). Far from reducing the potential range of expression, the painter who avoids uniting contrary qualities maintains the legibility and clarity of his work. Although painting cannot successfully depict the passions or complex emotional states, Reynolds claims that "all arts have means within them of applying themselves with success both to the intellectual and sensitive part of our natures" (VII,129). The would-be critic must, however, be acutely aware of the various hazards involved in transferring the principles of one art to another. Painting, which is limited to a single pregnant moment, cannot describe "an intermixture which, though in poetry, with its proper preparations and accompaniments," might be "managed with effect" (XIV,256). Reynolds defends his position by suggesting that it would have been impossible for the sculptor of the Laocoon to heighten interest by depicting the father absorbed in the suffering of his two children — "such refined expression is scarce within the province of this Art; and in attempting it, the Artist will run great risk of enfeebling expression, and making it less intelligible to the spectator" (X,180). By the same token, the accusation of tediousness levelled against allegorical poetry does not apply "to

painting, where the interest is of a different kind" (VII,129). Reynolds's ability to speak knowledgeably on either art effectively negates his vested interest as president of the Royal Academy, and fosters the illusion that he is an unbiased critic, seeking only to place the rules of art on a permanent foundation.

However, Reynolds's apparently straightforward ordering of the arts is undermined by his own anxiety about the instability of images relative to language. Although both arts are registered by the senses, language is the vehicle through which all sense experience is rendered meaningful. Ultimately, Reynolds adopts Lessing's position that poetry alone, unhindered by the material signs of painting, is capable of attaining the true end of art — the intuitive apprehension of an absent "reality." If Reynolds partially resists Lessing's belief that the artist necessarily limits the free reign of the imagination, even "stepping beyond the limits of painting" (Lessing 83) in attempting to render poetical description visible, he acquiesces in confirming poetry's special power as the reproduction of successive action:

Poetry having a more extensive power than our art, exerts its influence over almost all the passions; among those may be reckoned one of our most prevalent dispositions, anxiety for the future. Poetry operates by raising our curiosity, engaging the mind by degrees to take an interest in the event, keeping that event suspended, and surprising at last with an unexpected catastrophe.

The Painter's art is more confined, and has nothing that corresponds with, or perhaps is equivalent to, this power and advantage of leading the mind on, till attention is totally engaged. What is done by Painting, must be done at one blow; curiosity has received at once all the satisfaction it can ever have. (VIII,145-6)

Reynolds's final sentence seems to contradict his estimation of the potential impact of painting on the spectator's imagination — "the only test, of the truth and efficacy

of the means" (230). He suggests that poetry exerts a greater power than its younger sister not simply by exploring regions unknown to the physical world, but because it creates interest by unfolding events sequentially over time.

In their references to the finest poetry, both Reynolds and Lessing praise the intuitive immediacy usually associated with painting. If poetry need not be a "speaking picture," it is nevertheless capable of inducing a semi-visual experience by imaginatively transporting the reader to the realm of sensuous presence. Ironically, the immediacy of painting (its "natural" quality) is seen to endow images with a power that encroaches on poetry's natural territory. Neither theorist is willing to examine the implications of viewing language, with its arbitrary signs, as a derivative mode of communication. Instead, Reynolds again implies that the immediacy of painting signals a removal from the spiritual dimensions of poetry to the finite objects of the material world:

I fear *we* have but very scanty means of exciting those powers over the imagination which make so very considerable and refined a part of poetry. It is a doubt with me, whether we should even make the attempt. (VIII,163)

Rather than simply "leading the mind on" and capturing the reader's attention, poetry uses an economy of language that makes the distinct and legible outlines of painting seem ponderous by comparison. Clearly painting, which creates a visual illusion through natural signs, can surpass the limiting effect of visibility on the imagination only by attempting to approximate poetry. In the end, Reynolds's series of interart analogies paradoxically reaffirm poetry's birthright as monarch of the existing artistic hierarchy.

As first president of the Royal Academy, Reynolds's chief difficulty in developing a national theory of art was to convince his public that painting was a *bona fide* liberal art. On the one hand, Reynolds insisted that painting can achieve the poetic, the sublime and the universal. Building on the work of earlier theorists, Reynolds implies that all successful art functions to reproduce an absent reality by communicating mental states. Although, Reynolds follows Burke's lead in distinguishing between the arbitrary and natural signs of poetry and painting respectively, he attempts to satisfy his primary objective in writing the *Discourses* by suggesting that the sublime applies to both painting and her elder sister. Part of the problem with this approach, however, is that Reynolds chose to align his work with that of writer-theorists who had a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo*. In other words, Reynolds — who admitted that reformation is a work of time — was unable to transcend the limitations that had been imposed upon painting for generations. Even if painting could achieve the sublime, its ability to stimulate the imagination remained within predetermined limits; it could not, for example, be illegible or aspire to obscurity as a viable source of the sublime. Despite a number of laudable attempts to prove painting's inherent equality, Reynolds remained, albeit unconsciously, trapped within a philosophy that dictated that painting, with its natural signs, was inevitably the inferior art.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The grand style prescribed by Reynolds in the *Discourses* became part of the heritage of English painting. Yet, although Reynolds earned a hallowed place among British aestheticians, the theory contained in the fifteen essays remained an uneasy import, a testament to the fading neoclassical values of order and reason espoused so succinctly by Pope some sixty years earlier:

Those RULES of old *discover'd*, not *devis'd*,
Are *Nature* still, but *Nature Methodiz'd*.²⁷

Much of the criticism centering on the *Discourses* has attempted to trace the gradual movement of thought from the rigidity of neoclassical rule to the emerging currents of Romanticism. Although some critics of Reynolds's aesthetic theory fail to see any underlying system, John Mahoney notes that W.J. Bate is representative of a second school of critics who "see definite anticipations of Romanticism, especially in the later *Discourses*" (126). Reynolds's perception of nature as an absolute eventually expanded to accommodate the cult of the sublime, which replaced the wish to reproduce a general image by the need to make an impact on

²⁷ Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism," (lines 88-89) 146.

the imagination — a shift which was also reflected in a renewed emphasis on the psychological experience of the beholder.

This shifting philosophical context has often been used as a forum to explore or justify apparent inconsistencies in the *Discourses*. Certainly, the backdrop of political turmoil and social change, which culminated in the French Revolution, has been associated with the artistic genesis of the gothic grandeur and primitive conceptions of the natural world so characteristic of Romanticism. Turner's landscapes and Blake's remarkable independence of vision are often viewed as the result of the liberation of the painter's poetic imagination from the imposition of the rules that Reynolds, particularly in his early discourses, advocated wholeheartedly.

Reynolds struggled to synthesize a definitive aesthetic theory without a vocabulary sufficient to reflect a changing tradition. For the most part, however, he self-consciously avoided charges of perpetuating contradictions in the *Discourses*. Reverting to the neoclassical emphasis on reason, Reynolds anticipates and refutes potential objections by charting a course between extreme positions. He qualifies his initial veneration for the ancients by admitting that their unconditional valorization is as prejudicial as the barbarisms of modernity from which they deliver us. In this way, Reynolds rehabilitates the value of custom without threatening his mandate to produce a civic republic of taste, distinguishing between those "universal" customs capable of promoting the national interest, and elevating the dignity of the dying art, and those based on a private fund of reason. Far from being a denial of subjectivity for members of the republic of art, the general and

therefore "natural" uniformity in the minds of men is confirmation of their citizenship. The judgment resulting from the individual's freedom to distinguish between beauty and deformity will naturally coincide with that offered by the head of state or, in this case, Reynolds as his legitimate representative.

Condemned as mere mechanics, early defenders of art in Britain focused their efforts on elevating painting to the status of a liberal art, and true sister of poetry. Again and again, Reynolds applied the arguments used to justify poetry's preeminent position to prove painting's entitlement to an equivalent rank. Reynolds believed he could elevate and define English art by creating an audience capable of approaching painting with the same artificial state of mind required by poetry. But, before he could be assured of a public literate in the pictorial sign, he had first to develop a rhetoric of iconoclasm by excluding all images unable to conform to his immutable prescription for academic art.²⁸

In the fourth discourse, Reynolds says that "words should be employed as the means, not as the end: language is the instrument, conviction is the work" (64). Although, in this instance, Reynolds is merely comparing the "language" of painting to language proper, he implies that words, rather than obscuring ideas, should be the transparent vehicle for their communication. This notion of a pure form of communication, unimpeded by conflicting agendas, appears particularly idealistic in the context of the eighteenth-century fascination with language's potential to both reveal and disguise a given "truth." Far from serving the subject matter, the word

²⁸ Significantly, Reynolds's criteria for the efficacy of images, which appeal primarily to the imagination, alienate the existing canon of (non-academic) English painting by forcing it to occupy the lower spheres of the hierarchy of art.

became a means of exercising control over every aspect of the image, from production to consumption.

Burke asserts that the passions are the proper province of poetry alone. Reynolds suggests, on the other hand, that academic art, by distinguishing "that which addresses itself to the imagination, from that which is solely addressed to the eye" (XV,268), is capable of achieving effects previously limited to poetry. Although Reynolds seems to attack certain pictorial conventions with a revolutionary fervour, his vision is limited by the philosophical and aesthetic milieu in which the *Discourses* were produced. Despite his efforts to prove that both arts achieve an equivalence of effect, Reynolds is unable to escape completely the notion that poetry affects the imagination without the intervention of imitation — that is, in the absence of the primitive contours of physical existence.

Reynolds recognized the delicacy of "carry[ing] the principles of one art to another" (XIII,242); in particular, the interart analogies of *Discourse XIII* threaten to tip the painter's scales in favour of poetry. Ultimately, Reynolds agrees that painting is incapable of approaching the sophisticated semiotics of poetry. Rather than stressing the identities and aims of the two arts, this uneasy alliance served as the source of further tension by referring to comparisons that emphasized the figural and descriptive components of painting. However, evaluating this tension in the context of the particularly eighteenth-century rivalry between word and image sheds new light on our understanding of the real nature of Reynolds's struggle.



Figure 1. Reynolds, *Cupid as Link Boy*



Figure 2. Reynolds, *Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse*



Figure 3. Gainsborough, *Mrs. Siddons*



Figure 4. Reynolds, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire with her Daughter*



Figure 5. Reynolds, *Three Ladies Adorning a Term of Hymen*

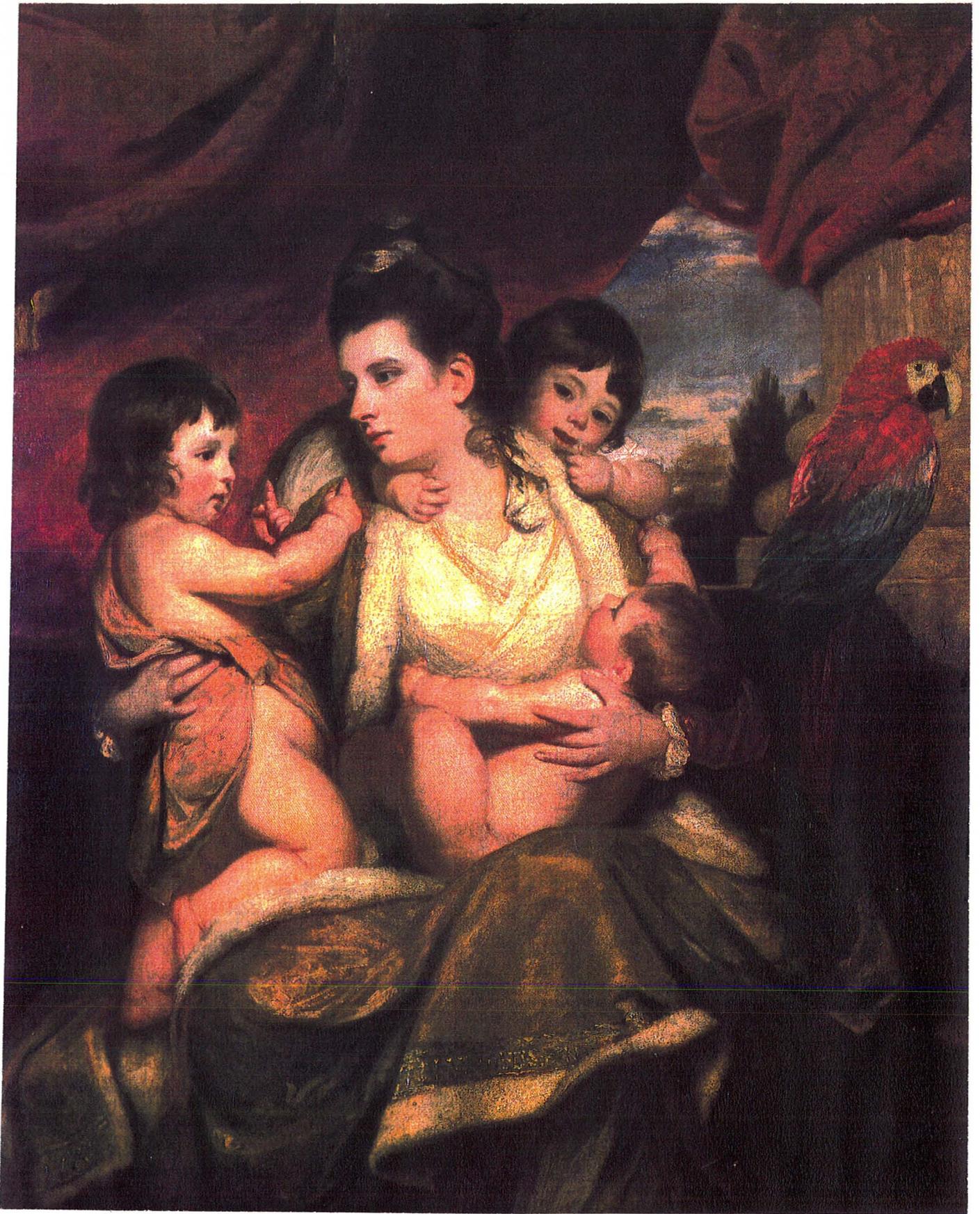


Figure 6. Reynolds, *Lady Cockburn and her three Eldest Sons*

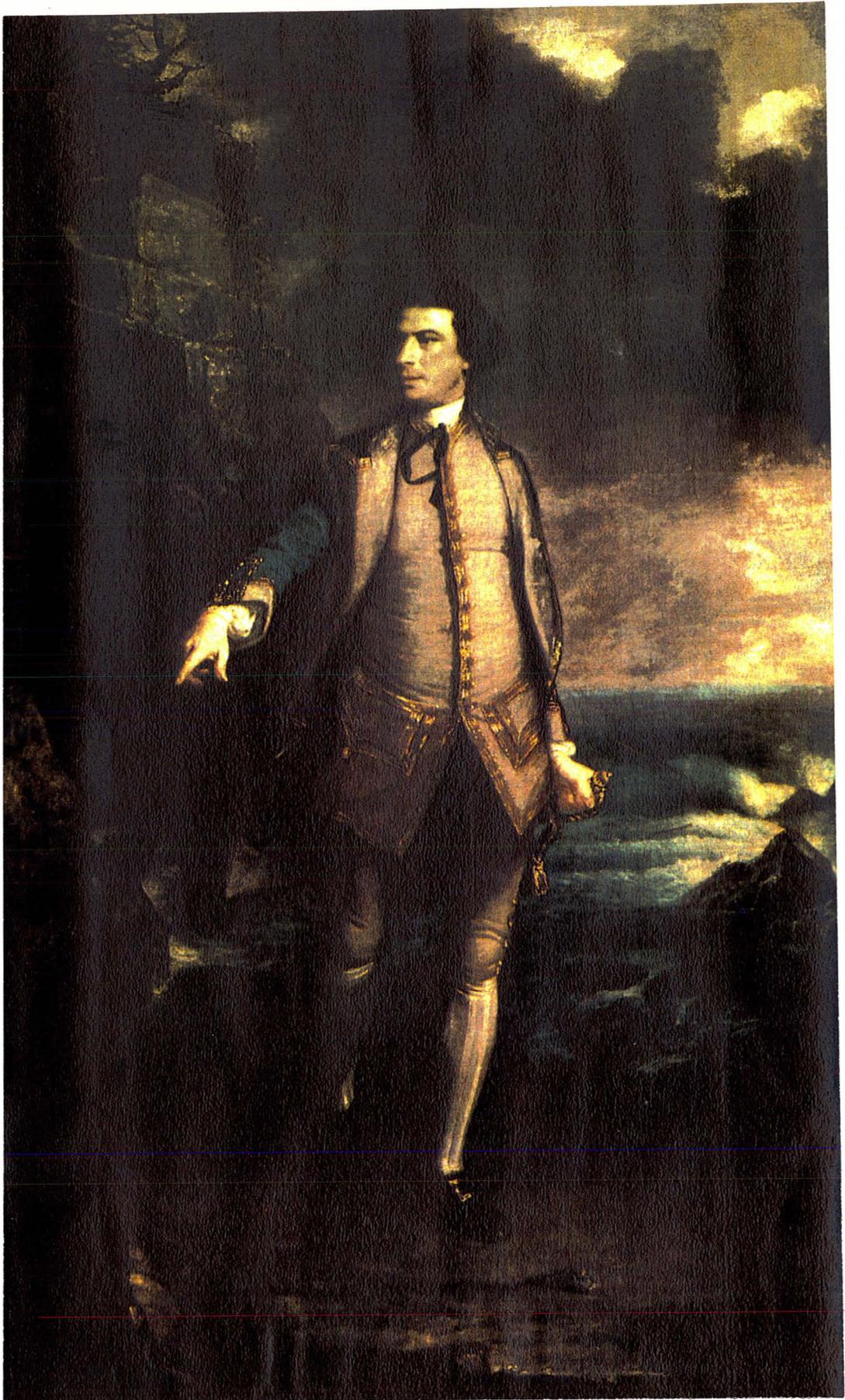


Figure 7. Reynolds, *Commodore Augustus Keppel*



Figure 8. Reynolds, *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*

WORKS CITED

- Addison, Joseph. No. 411. (Saturday, June 21, 1712) The Spectator. Ed. and intro. Donald F. Bond. Vol. 3. London: Oxford University Press, 1965. 5 vols.
- Aristotle. The Poetics. "Longinus": On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style. Trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe. London: William Heinemann, 1927.
- Barrell, John. The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: "The Body of the Public". New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Bryson, Norman. Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Burke, Edmund. A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757). Ed. and intro. James T. Boulton. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958.
- Coleridge, Samuel T. "On Poesy or Art." English Romantic Writers. Ed. David Perkins. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967. 491-496.
- DaVinci, Leonardo. "On Painting as an Art." Main Currents of Western Thought: Readings in Western European Intellectual History from the Middle Ages to the Present. Ed. Franklin Le Van Baumer. 4th ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978.
- Gaunt, William. English Painting: A Concise History. London: Thames and Hudson, 1964.
- . The World of William Hogarth. London: Jonathan Cape, 1978.
- Hagstrum, Jean H. The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Hilles, Frederick Whaley. The Literary Career of Sir Joshua Reynolds. 1936. n.p. Archon Books, 1967.
- Hogarth, William. The Analysis of Beauty. (1753) Menston: Scolar Press, 1971.

- Hudson, Derek. Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Personal Study with Reynolds's Journey from London to Brentford. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958.
- Jackson, Wallace. Immediacy: The Development of a Critical Concept from Addison to Coleridge. Amsterdam: Rodopi NV, 1973.
- Lee, Rensselaer W. Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting New York: W.W. Norton, 1967.
- Leonard, Jonathan Norton et al. The World of Gainsborough: 1727-1788. Amsterdam: Time-Life Books, 1969.
- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. Laocoon. Selected Prose Works of G.E. Lessing. Trans. by E.C. Beasley and Helen Zimmern. Ed. Edward Bell. London: George Bell and Sons, 1900.
- Lipking, Lawrence. The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.
- Mannings, David. "An Art-Historical Approach to Reynolds's *Discourses*." British Journal of Aesthetics 16 (1976): 354-366.
- Mahoney, John L. "Reynolds's 'Discourses on Art': The delicate balance of Neoclassic aesthetics." British Journal of Aesthetics 18 (1978): 126-136.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Paulson, Ronald. Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Pope, Alexander. The Poems of Alexander Pope: a one-volume edition of the Twickenham text with selected annotations. Ed. John Butt. London: Methuen, 1963.
- Reynolds, Sir Joshua. Discourses on Art.(1769-1790) Ed. and intro. by Robert R. Wark. New Haven: Yale University Press (for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art), 1975.
- . Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds. 1929. Ed. and comp. F.W. Hilles. New York: AMS, 1976.
- . Portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Ed. F.W. Hilles. London: William Heinemann, 1952.

- . The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, First President of the Royal Academy. Ed. Henry William Beechey. Vol. 2. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1852. 2 vols.
- Richardson, Jonathan. Essay on the Theory of Painting. The Works. (1773) Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1969.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. A Defence of Poetry. The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck. Vol. 7. London: Ernest Benn, 1965.
- Waterhouse, Ellis K. Reynolds. Boston: Boston Book and Art Shop, 1955.
- Wendorf, Richard. "Jonathan Richardson: The Painter as Biographer." New Literary History 15 (1984): 539-57.
- . The Elements of Life: Biography and Portrait-Painting in Stuart and Georgian England. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.