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Source: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 60 (1997), pp. 215-229

Published by: The Warburg Institute

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/751230>

Accessed: 01-05-2020 13:11 UTC

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ON REYNOLDS'S USE OF DE PILES, LOCKE, AND HUME IN HIS ESSAYS ON RUBENS AND GAINSBOROUGH*

Amal Asfour and Paul Williamson

The considerable intellectual honesty which pervades Reynolds's tribute to Gainsborough in Discourse XIV is achieved through a concomitant dexterity. In almost every important respect Gainsborough represents the antithesis of the theoretical position worked out by the president in the course of his lectures to the Royal Academy. When Reynolds proclaims his intention of deriving instruction from Gainsborough's 'excellencies and defects', therefore, the ensuing discussion reveals that, in Gainsborough's case, 'excellencies and defects' amount to much the same thing—'genius in a lower rank of art'.¹ Nevertheless, Gainsborough is regarded as integral to the burgeoning English School.² In admitting Gainsborough's importance in this respect, Reynolds is recognising a series of characteristics, which, despite their divergence from his normal recommendations, he sees the need to acknowledge as distinguishing features of English art. This juxtaposition reflects the difficulty inherent in Reynolds's academic emphasis on emulation and generality which comes at a time when British thinking is increasingly pre-occupied with observation and the priority of the particular over the general.³ A series of heuristic pairs, explicit in the discussion of Gainsborough, articulates the awkwardness of Reynolds's position. In its concern with nature rather than past masters, that is, Gainsborough's art is mimetic rather than emulative; in treating particular nature rather than the general idea, it is empirical rather than ideal; for these reasons Gainsborough's art is low rather than high, but these are the qualities that make it characteristically English.

Consequently, Discourse XIV shows Reynolds searching for terminology with which to describe Gainsborough's achievement. An examination of the Discourse

* The following abbreviations are used throughout:
Abregés = Roger de Piles, *Abregé de la vie des peintres*, Paris 1699;
Conversations = Roger de Piles, *Conversations sur la connaissance de la peinture*, Paris 1677;
Cours = Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes*, Paris 1708;
Dialogue = Roger de Piles, *Dialogue sur le coloris*, Paris 1673, Paris 1699;
Discourses = Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses*, ed. P. Rogers, Harmondsworth 1992;
Dissertation = Roger de Piles, *Dissertation sur les ouvrages des plus fameux peintres*, Paris 1681;
Journey = Joshua Reynolds, *A Journey to Flanders and Holland*, ed. H. Mount, Cambridge 1996;
Puttfarken = T. Puttfarken, *Roger De Piles' Theory of Art*, New Haven and London 1985;
Premiers elemens = Roger de Piles, *Les Premiers Elemens de la peinture pratique*, Paris 1684.

¹ *Discourses*, pp. 301, 303.

² *Ibid.*, p. 301.

³ Accordingly, the Platonism which was formerly discovered in the Discourses has been reinterpreted as empiricism, with Reynolds's general ideas regarded not as universals but as 'the common, the usual, the widely distributed'. See H. Trowbridge, 'Platonism and Sir Joshua Reynolds', *English Studies*, xxi, 1939, pp. 1–7. Trowbridge is answering L. I. Bredvold, 'The Tendency towards Platonism in Neo-Classical Aesthetics', *English Literary History*, i, 1934, pp. 91–119. J. Barrell, 'Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Englishness of English Art', *Nation and Narration*, ed. H. K. Bhabha, London 1990, pp. 154–76, takes a similar approach to Trowbridge in his discussion of Reynolds's use of the 'discourse of custom'. For Reynolds and imitation see E. H. Gombrich, 'Reynolds' Theory and Practice of Imitation', in his *Norm and Form*, London 1966; E. Wind, "'Borrowed Attitudes" in Reynolds and Hogarth', *Hume and the Heroic Portrait*, ed. J. Anderson, Oxford 1986; and R. Wittkower, 'Imitation, Eclecticism, and Genius', *Aspects of the 18th Century*, ed. E. R. Wasserman, Baltimore 1965, pp. 143–61.

reveals that Reynolds discusses Gainsborough in terms derived directly from his own 'Character of Rubens', written 1781–2 and appended to the *Journey to Flanders and Holland*.⁴ That, in turn, draws heavily on the writings of Roger de Piles.⁵ Reynolds thus situates Gainsborough in an art-historical category whose principal features had been formulated by de Piles in conscious opposition to the norms of the French Academy. De Piles's championing of Rubens elevates colour over line, *coloris* over *dessin*; and the purely painterly aspect of Rubens is used to attack the academic principles, the literariness, represented for the Académie by the art of Poussin. Where the French Academy was concerned to develop the concept of *ut pictura poesis* with reference to Aristotle's *Poetics*, de Piles's interest is in the specifically visual properties of painting.⁶ In so far as the issue here is one of a painterly challenge to academic norms, Reynolds's assessment of Gainsborough is made in comparable circumstances. In his concern to establish an academy on Continental lines and to support the status of painting as a liberal art, Reynolds draws on French academic theory, adapting the idea of painting and literature as sister arts.⁷ The exception to academic norms represented by Gainsborough provokes a reversion to concepts originating in de Piles's challenge to the Académie.

This strategic use of the language of de Piles, however, allows Reynolds to include Gainsborough in his version of the English School. De Piles himself had been incorporated into the French Academy with his appointment, in 1699, as *Conseiller Honoraire Amateur*, and Reynolds's choice of theoretical model is clearly one way of institutionalising Gainsborough's achievement.⁸ Yet, despite this institutional sanction, Reynolds remains uncertain as to how to deal with the kind of painting perfected by Rubens, advocated by de Piles, and, in his view, practised by Gainsborough. Of fundamental importance here are the ways in which Reynolds diverges from de Piles. Reynolds interprets de Piles through a characteristically English set of ideas, incorporating the French critic into a framework provided by the English empiricists, particularly Locke and Hume. If Reynolds's usual concern is to apply academic ideas in an English context, then his adaptation of de Piles to account for Gainsborough reveals him yielding to the logic of Englishness, interpreting Gainsborough's art through a dexterous combination of de Piles and English empiricism.

⁴ See *Journey*, pp. 144–9, and introduction, pp. xx–xxi. The influence of Rubens on Gainsborough was established by J. Hayes in 'Gainsborough and Rubens', *Apollo*, Aug. 1963, pp. 89–97. This has recently been reconsidered, though on political rather than artistic grounds. See M. Rosenthal, 'Gainsborough's *Diana and Actaeon*', *Painting and the Politics of Culture*, ed. J. Barrell, Oxford 1992, pp. 167–94; and D. A. Brenneman, 'Thomas Gainsborough's "Wooded Landscape with Cattle by a Pool"', *Art Criticism and the Royal Academy*, *Gainsborough's House Review*, 1995/6, pp. 37–46.

⁵ For the range of Reynolds's sources see F. W. Hilles, *The Literary Career of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, Cambridge 1936, pp. 112–28; and L. Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England*, Princeton 1970, p. 39. Lipking (p. 61) notes that Reynolds 'borrows freely though tacitly' from de Piles. In the introduction to his edition of the *Journey*, Harry Mount emphasises the influence of Du Fresnoy, particularly in view of Reynolds's notes to William Mason's new translation of *De arte graphica* (1783). After Dryden, however, the British view of Du Fresnoy was filtered through de Piles. As the recent

editors of Dryden's translation of Du Fresnoy remark, it was 'faithful... to de Piles' French rather than Du Fresnoy's Latin.' See *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. A. E. Wallace Maurer and G. R. Guffey, xx, Berkeley and London 1989, p. 338. Similarly, in the words of Lipking (p. 57): 'From first to last, Mason's unquestioned intention was not so much to translate *De arte graphica*, as to adapt and improve it for British use.' For Dryden's use of de Piles see also *ibid.*, pp. 49–53; for Jonathan Richardson's use of critics including de Piles see *ibid.*, pp. 109–26, and S. H. Monk, *The Sublime*, 1935, repr. Michigan 1960, pp. 174–8.

⁶ See B. Teyssèdre, *Roger de Piles et les débats sur le coloris au siècle de Louis XIV*, Paris 1957; and Puttfarcken. Cf. also D. Posner, 'Concerning the "Mechanical" Parts of Painting and the Artistic Culture of Seventeenth-Century France', *Art Bulletin*, lxxv, 1993, pp. 583–97.

⁷ See R. W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting*, New York 1967, pp. 19–21, 67–9; and J. H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts*, Chicago 1958.

⁸ On de Piles's 'conquête' of the Académie see Teyssèdre (as in n. 6), pp. 451–62, 511–12.

The key terms of Reynolds's evaluation of Rubens are closely paralleled in his discussion of Gainsborough. Reynolds's opinion of Rubens's 'genius', his 'excellencies and his defects', is founded on three basic observations: Rubens's extraordinary ability to imitate nature, his facility of execution, and the power of his paintings to attract the attention of and stimulate a response in the viewer—a point linked with his use of colour and his overriding concern with the effect of the work as a whole. For Reynolds, Rubens is above all an imitator of nature:

After Rubens had made up his manner, he never looked out of himself for assistance: there is consequently very little in his works, that appears to be taken from other masters. If he has borrowed any thing, he has had the address to change and adapt it so well to the rest of his work, that the theft is not discoverable.

BESIDE the excellency of Rubens in these general powers, he possessed the true art of imitating. He saw the objects of nature with a painter's eye; he saw at once the predominant feature by which every object is known and distinguished...⁹

Similarly, Gainsborough's work shows a disregard for rules and past masters. Reynolds regards his study of Dutch and Flemish painters as simply a mechanical training, conceding that 'excellence in the department of the art which he professed' could be acquired without 'a general attention to the works of the various masters':

The want of them is supplied, and more than supplied, by natural sagacity and a minute observation of particular nature. If Gainsborough did not look at nature with a poet's eye, it must be acknowledged that he saw her with the eye of a painter; and gave a faithful, if not a poetical, representation of what he had before him.

Though he did not much attend to the works of the great historical painters of former ages, yet he was well aware that the language of the art—the art of imitation—must be learned somewhere; and as he knew he could not learn it in an equal degree from his contemporaries, he very judiciously applied himself to the Flemish School, who are undoubtedly the greatest masters of one necessary branch of art... What he thus learned, he applied to the originals of nature, which he saw with his own eyes; and imitated, not in the manner of those masters, but in his own.¹⁰

Where Rubens sees 'the predominant feature by which every object is known and distinguished', Gainsborough's interest is in the 'minute observation of particular nature', and in each case the predominance of the 'painter's eye' is at the expense of a more poetical 'representation'. Rubens, for example,

never possessed a poetical conception of character. In his representations of the highest characters in the christian or the fabulous world, instead of something above humanity, which might fill the idea which is conceived of such beings, the spectator finds little more than mere mortals, such as he meets with every day.¹¹

Further, as Reynolds says in Discourse XIV, 'The Dutch and Flemish style of landscape, not even excepting those of Rubens, is unfit for poetical subjects'.¹² The primary address of such painting, like that of Gainsborough, is to the eye rather than the mind:

It is to the eye only that the works of this school are addressed; it is not therefore to be wondered at, that what was intended solely for the gratification of one sense, succeeds but ill, when applied to another... The same skill which is practised by Rubens and Titian in their large works, is here exhibited, though on a smaller scale. Painters should go to the Dutch school to learn the art of painting, as they would go to a grammar-school to learn languages. They must go to Italy to learn the higher branches of knowledge.¹³

⁹ *Journey*, p. 147.

¹⁰ *Discourses*, pp. 307–8.

¹¹ *Journey*, p. 148.

¹² *Discourses*, p. 311.

¹³ *Journey*, pp. 107–10.

Accordingly, Reynolds's praise for Rubens focuses largely on 'manner'. He is particularly impressed by the facility and grace of Rubens's work; his imitations were executed with a facility that is astonishing; and let me add, this facility is to a painter, when he closely examines a picture, a source of great pleasure. How far this excellence may be perceived or felt by those who are not painters, I know not: to them certainly it is not enough that objects be truly represented; they must likewise be represented with grace; which means here, that the work is done with facility and without effort. Rubens was, perhaps, the greatest master in the mechanical part of the art, the best workman with his tools, that ever exercised a pencil.

THIS part of the art, though it does not hold a rank with the powers of invention, of giving character and expression, has yet in it what may be called genius. It is certainly something that cannot be taught by words, though it may be learned by a frequent examination of those pictures which possess this excellence. It is felt by very few Painters; and it is as rare at this time among the living Painters as any of the higher excellencies of the art.¹⁴

Equating it with grace, Reynolds regards Rubens's facility as a mechanical rather than a liberal accomplishment.¹⁵ Similarly, Gainsborough's 'grace was not academical or antique, but selected by himself from the great school of nature', the result of 'skilful and faithful' observation. Gainsborough possessed a

quality of lightness of manner and effect... to an unexampled degree of excellence; but it must be acknowledged, at the same time, that the sacrifice which he made to this ornament of our art, was too great; it was, in reality, preferring the lesser excellencies to the greater.¹⁶

In his concern with 'this air of facility', Gainsborough 'ingeniously contrived to cover his defects by his beauties' and 'cultivated that department of the art, where such defects are more easily excused'¹⁷—the mechanical part at the expense of invention. Further, if Rubens is a craftsman, skilled in the handling of his 'tools', the instinctive quality of his 'genius' is comparable with Gainsborough's 'natural sagacity'. In each case the ingenuity of handling distracts from the defects inherent in this kind of art. Thus, Rubens's painterly genius lends his work its characteristic fascination for the viewer:

THE works of Rubens have that peculiar property always attendant on genius, to attract attention, and enforce admiration, in spite of all their faults. It is owing to this fascinating power that the performances of those painters with which he is surrounded, though they have perhaps fewer defects, yet appear spiritless, tame, and insipid... The striking brilliancy of his colours, and their lively opposition to each other, the flowing liberty and freedom of his outline, the animated pencil with which every object is touched, all contribute to awaken and keep alive the attention of the spectator; awaken in him, in some measure, correspondent sensations, and make him feel a degree of that enthusiasm with which the Painter was carried away. To this we may add the complete uniformity in all the parts of the work, so that the whole seems to be conducted, and grow out of one mind; every thing is of a piece, and fits its place.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹⁵ Reynolds converts the earlier view of Michelangelo and Raphael, as characterised by *difficultà* and *facilità* respectively, into a contrast based on the sublime and the beautiful: 'Raffaelle had more Taste and Fancy; Michael Angelo more Genius and Imagination. The one excelled in beauty, the other in energy. Michael Angelo has more of the poetical Inspiration; his ideas are vast and sublime' (*Discourses*, p. 142). For Reynolds facility has become a purely painterly and so mechanical skill which Raphael is even criticised for not having in sufficient measure: 'if he had expressed his ideas with the facility and eloquence, as it may be called, of Titian,

his works would certainly not have been less excellent' (*ibid.*, p. 255). For Raphael's *facilità* see the 'Dialogo della pittura di M. Lodovico Dolce' in M. W. Roskill, *Dolce's "Aretino" and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, New York 1968, p. 176; A. Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600*, Oxford 1956, pp. 84, 94-7; and M. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 2nd edn, Oxford 1988, pp. 141-2.

¹⁶ *Discourses*, pp. 308, 316.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁸ *Journey*, pp. 145-6.

As this suggests, Rubens's excellence lies 'in the general effect, in the genius which pervades and illuminates the whole'.¹⁹ Comparably, Gainsborough 'was always attentive to the general effect, or whole together'.²⁰ In each instance, the priority of the whole over the parts, coupled with the handling, has a peculiarly powerful effect. Speaking of Rubens's altarpiece in the church of St Augustine in Antwerp, Reynolds admits that, although its 'subject' has 'no means of interesting the spectator', he was fascinated by Rubens's painterly 'eloquence':²¹

I was so overpowered with the brilliancy of this picture of Rubens, whilst I was before it, and under its fascinating influence, that I thought I had never before seen so great powers exerted in the art. It was not till I was removed from its influence, that I could acknowledge any inferiority in Rubens to any other painter whatever.²²

The force of Rubens's work stems from his skill as a colourist, and his pictures act directly on the spectator's 'sensations', provoking an emotional response or 'enthusiasm'. Gainsborough, who also had 'a painter's eye for colouring, cultivated those effects of the art which proceed from colours'.²³ In both cases there is a direct link between painterly qualities and the emotive effects of the work. It is Gainsborough's 'style' or 'handling', 'the language in which he expressed his ideas', that has the 'power' of 'exciting surprise',²⁴ and Reynolds is 'captivated with the powerful impression of nature, which Gainsborough exhibited in his portraits and in his landscapes'.²⁵

Reynolds also applies a linguistic analogy to both artists. There is an 'eloquent' art. Gainsborough's is a 'natural eloquence',²⁶ whilst with Rubens:

The best pictures of the Italian school, if they ornamented the churches of Antwerp, would be overpowered by the splendour of Rubens; they certainly ought not to be overpowered by it; but it resembles eloquence, which bears down every thing before it, and often triumphs over superior wisdom and learning.²⁷

That Reynolds is willing to regard Rubens as eloquent rather than learned is itself a consequence of the way in which de Piles had taught his contemporaries to understand Rubens as a painter 'more interested in the way images seduce the eye than in the way they address the mind'.²⁸ For de Piles, the definition of painting is as a visual art whose primary purpose is the imitation of the visible world.²⁹ The visual nature of the medium centralises the importance of painterly skills: colour and the 'oeconomie du tout-ensemble'. Nature is visible only because it is coloured.³⁰ If painting aims to imitate nature, therefore, the artist's proper concern is with colour.

De Piles's 'oeconomie du tout-ensemble' is a way of accounting for the organisation or 'disposition' of the picture as a whole in purely painterly terms. He separates disposition from its former academic associations with the subject of a painting and gives it a purely visual importance, changing the emphasis from disposition as

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁰ *Discourses*, p. 314.

²¹ *Journey*, p. 55.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 60. The picture is the *Virgin and Child with Saints*, 1628, still belonging to the St-Augustinuskerk but at present hanging in the Koninklijk Museum, Antwerp. Reynolds owned a sketch for the painting which was sold after his death in 1795.

²³ *Discourses*, p. 315.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

²⁷ *Journey*, p. 18.

²⁸ S. Alpers, *The Making of Rubens*, New Haven and London 1995, p. 72.

²⁹ De Piles's thought develops primarily through the following works: *Dialogue* (1673); *Conversations* (1677); *Dissertation* (1681); *Premiers Elemens* (1684); *Abregé* (1699); *Cours* (1708). Puttfarken (p. xii) regards the *Cours* as the 'fullest realization of his theory'. On painting as the imitation of the visible world see de Piles, *Dialogue*, p. 23 (edn Paris 1699); *Dissertation*, p. 33; *Abregé*, pp. 3, 27; *Cours*, pp. 3, 313; and cf. Puttfarken, p. 42.

³⁰ *Conversations*, p. 275; *Abregé*, pp. 6–9; *Cours*, pp. 311–13; cf. Puttfarken, p. 43.

ordering of subject matter to disposition as a visual effect, 'pour contenter les yeux'.³¹ This 'oeconomie du tout-ensemble' has an immediate effect on the spectator. It works in the 'premier coup d'oeil' to attract the viewer.³² De Piles's emphasis on these points opens the way to the separation of subject and painterly effect which informs the way Reynolds sees Rubens, allowing Reynolds, despite his better judgement, to respond enthusiastically to painterly effects alone.

For de Piles, however, imitation is not simply a matter of copying. Proper imitation, 'la parfaite imitation',³³ demands a series of artistic choices which produce a heightened version of the visible world. Rubens is the artist who best fulfils this requirement, taking 'la Nature comme l'objet des ses études': by a 'sçavante exagération de ce caractère ... il a rendu la Peinture plus vivante et plus naturelle, pour ainsi dire, que la Nature même.'³⁴ The use of colour is rather artificial than simply natural, a carefully constructed series of striking juxtapositions whose value and effect is painterly as well as imitative. For de Piles, 'coloris' is not simply a mechanical or ornamental skill but an attribute which qualifies the painter as one who professes a liberal art.³⁵ The heightened version of nature is thus a painterly construction, an 'ordre artificiel', whose aim is to stimulate an emotional response in the viewer.³⁶ To this end, paintings should attract, surprise, seduce, and deceive the eye, calling the spectator into 'conversation'.³⁷

As applied to Rubens and Gainsborough, Reynolds's categories of imitation, colour, facility, general effect, and hence the viewer's response all reflect the influence of de Piles's art theory. Thus de Piles praises Rubens for 'l'heureuse facilité dans l'exécution'.³⁸ And when Reynolds describes the 'pleasure' produced by the 'facility' or 'grace' of a painting, ascribes this to 'genius' which 'cannot be taught by words', and then makes the transition to 'enthusiasm', he is effectively condensing a line of argument developed by de Piles to account for the effects of the specifically visual properties of painting.³⁹ De Piles's early works treat grace as a painterly skill consisting in 'le tour que le Peintre sait donner à ses objets'.⁴⁰ Further, 'la Grace ... doit suivre le Genie' and 'plaît sans les règles'. Its effect works on the spectator's heart: 'On peut la définir, ce qui plaît, & ce qui gagne le coeur sans passer par l'esprit'.⁴¹ In de Piles's later works, the term 'Grace' is replaced with 'Enthousiasme' and 'Sublime',⁴² used in a way closely paralleled in Reynolds's account of the corresponding sensations felt by viewer and painter. As Puttfarcken explains: 'In de Piles, enthusiasm refers to the overall visual effect of the painting, but it also refers to the state of mind in which the artist conceives this effect, and to the state of mind which it produces in the spectator.'⁴³

³¹ *Abregé*, pp. 3, 40. Cf. Puttfarcken, pp. 39–46, 75, 80–3; and Alpers (as in n. 28), p. 76.

³² *Conversations*, pp. 77–8; *Cours*, pp. 9 and 19. Cf. Puttfarcken, pp. 40, 96–105.

³³ *Dissertation*, p. 33.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57; see also pp. 61–2.

³⁵ On the distinction between natural and artificial colour see de Piles's definition of the terms 'couleur' and 'coloris' in his 'Termes de Peinture' at the end of the *Conversations*. See Puttfarcken, pp. 67–8.

³⁶ On artificial order and rhetoric in de Piles see Puttfarcken, pp. 59–63. On rhetoric and painting see J. Lichtenstein, *La couleur éloquente rhétorique et peinture à l'âge classique*, Paris 1989 (= *The Eloquence of Colour, Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*, tr. E. McVarish, Berkeley and Oxford 1993).

³⁷ On seducing the eye see *Conversations*, pp. 77, 79, 80, 99, 101; *Premiers elemens*, pp. 50, 60; *Dissertation*, p. 33; and *Cours*, pp. 3, 9, 17. On 'conversation' see *Cours*, p. 6.

³⁸ *Abregé*, p. 407.

³⁹ According to S. H. Monk, 'A Grace Beyond the Reach of Art', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, v, 1944, pp. 131–50, 18th-century aesthetic theory replaces 'grace' with the 'sublime'.

⁴⁰ *Abregé*, p. 64.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11. See Puttfarcken, p. 109.

⁴² Eg. *Cours*, pp. 114–15. See Puttfarcken, p. 113. On Longinus as the source for these ideas see Monk (as in n. 5), p. 176.

⁴³ Puttfarcken, p. 118.

Despite such obvious similarities, however, inherent in Reynolds's use of de Piles is an altered view of the painter's proper task, which emerges principally in the changed meaning of the rhetorical analogy and the change in the understanding of imitation, both of which are due primarily to the intervention of Locke. De Piles and Reynolds both employ a rhetorical analogy to account for painterly qualities, but where de Piles sees painterly eloquence as a defining feature of the art, Reynolds is distinctly uncomfortable with 'eloquence, which bears down every thing before it, and often triumphs over superior wisdom and learning.'⁴⁴ The rhetorical model which de Piles uses to describe the effect of painting gives priority to the persuasive power of words over their ability to carry a reasonable argument, and the painter is like an orator in the sense that both have the power to sway the emotions.

What is new here is not de Piles's use of an oratorical comparison but the precedence which he gives to emotion over the understanding. In the preface to the French Academy's *Conférences*, André Félibien regarded disposition, the unity of action, as a kind of rhetorical exordium preliminary to the spectator's recognition of the primary idea or subject which the painting contains;⁴⁵ for de Piles, the 'tout-ensemble' corresponds not with an intellectual aspect of the orator's art but with the emotional, non-rational content of the oration. Its value is in persuasion rather than meaning. Applied to painting, the analogy is with visual rather than narrative properties and the appeal of the art is to the emotions rather than the intellect.⁴⁶

By contrast with both of these approaches, the linguistic model which Reynolds applies to painting is founded on the relationship between a word and an idea. The analogy here is between words and painterly qualities, ideas and the subject of a painting. Just as words serve the expression of ideas, so painterly effects should be subservient to the idea contained in a painting.⁴⁷ Reynolds is therefore suspicious of eloquence exercised in the service, not of an idea, but for its own sake. This represents a shift from the rhetorical formalism of the French Academy and the autonomy of visual qualities advocated by de Piles, to Lockean epistemology.⁴⁸ As for Locke, the dichotomy here between word and idea results in the devaluation of rhetoric with respect to knowledge:

Since Wit and Fancy finds easier entertainment in the World, than dry Truth and real Knowledge, *figurative Speeches*, and allusion in Language, will hardly be admitted, as *an* imperfection or *abuse* of it. I confess, in Discourses, where we seek rather Pleasure and Delight, than Information and Improvement, such Ornaments as are borrowed from them, can scarce pass for Faults. But yet, if we would speak of Things as they are, we must allow, that all the Art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat: And therefore however laudable or allowable Oratory may render them in Harangues and popular Addresses, they are certainly, in all Discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided; and where Truth and Knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great

⁴⁴ *Journey*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ See the preface to the *Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, Paris 1669; and Puttfarken, pp. 55, 103, 118, 134.

⁴⁶ See Puttfarken, pp. 57–79.

⁴⁷ Cf. Monk (as in n. 5), p. 186, who notes the influence of Boileau.

⁴⁸ Hagstrum (as in n. 7), pp. 129–50, describes the English, Lockean basis of *ut pictura poesis*. Cf. W. J. Hipple Jr., 'General and Particular in the *Discourses* of

Sir Joshua Reynolds: a Study in Method', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, xi, 1953, pp. 231–47; and C. Hussey, *The Picturesque*, London 1927, p. 52, who remarks that the difference between Du Fresnoy and Reynolds is Reynolds's greater emphasis on 'observation'. See also Trowbridge (as in n. 3), *passim*, and, on the political significance of Reynolds's use of Locke, J. Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, New Haven, Conn. and London 1986, pp. 137–9.

fault, either of the Language or Person that makes use of them ... I cannot but observe, how little the preservation and improvement of Truth and Knowledge, is the Care and Concern of Mankind; since the Arts of Fallacy are endow'd and preferred. 'Tis evident how much Men love to deceive, and be deceived, since rhetorick, that powerful instrument of Error and Deceit, has its established Professors, is publickly taught, and has always been had in great Reputation: And, I doubt not, but it will be thought great boldness, if not brutality in me, to have said thus much against it. *Eloquence*, like the fair Sex, has too prevailing Beauties in it, to suffer it self ever to be spoken against. And 'tis in vain to find fault with those Arts of Deceiving, wherein Men find pleasure to be Deceived.⁴⁹

As William Blake spotted, the Discourses are worked out on an empiricist plan and Reynolds's Lockean attitude to eloquence reflects a broader Lockeanism running through them which is manifested as a hierarchy of particular and general, ornamental and grand, mechanical and liberal.⁵⁰ In each case, the lower, mechanical parts of the art should be subordinated to a higher rational purpose. In this regard, it is to 'reason and philosophy' that the painter must have 'recourse':

The general objection which is made to the introduction of Philosophy into the regions of taste, is, that it checks and restrains the flights of the imagination and gives that timidity, which an over-carefulness not to err or act contrary to reason is likely to produce. It is not so. Fear is neither reason nor philosophy. The true spirit of philosophy, by giving knowledge, gives a manly confidence, and substitutes rational firmness in the place of vain presumption. A man of real taste is always a man of judgement in other respects; and those inventions which either disdain or shrink from reason, are generally, I fear, more like the dreams of a distempered brain, than the exalted enthusiasm of a sound and true genius. In the midst of the highest flights of fancy or imagination, reason ought to preside from first to last, though I admit her more powerful operation is upon reflection.⁵¹

It is the fact that Reynolds reads de Piles in the light of Locke that allows him to see Rubens through de Piles's eyes and yet to maintain, in direct contrast, that Rubens's 'mechanical' excellencies exclude poetic greatness. The intervention of Locke also clarifies the different ways in which Reynolds and de Piles understand the role of the imitation of nature. De Piles's emphasis on vision and colour came at a time when the English empiricists maintained the priority of sense data. His insistence that 'Le Peintre qui est un parfait imitateur de la Nature, doit donc considerer la couleur comme son objet principal; puis qu'il ne regarde cette mesme Nature que comme imitable, qu'elle ne lui est imitable que parce qu'elle est visible, et qu'elle n'est visible que parce qu'elle est colorée'⁵² finds a suggestive parallel in Locke's view of sensation:

Our Senses, conversant about particular sensible Objects, do convey into the Mind, several distinct *Perceptions* of things, according to those various ways, wherein those Objects do affect them: And thus we come by those *Ideas*, we have of *Yellow, White, Heat, Cold, Soft, Hard, Bitter, Sweet*, and all those which we call sensible qualities, which when I say the senses convey into the mind, I mean, they from external Objects convey into the mind what produces there those *Perceptions*. This great Source, of most of the *Ideas* we have, depending wholly upon our Senses, and derived by them to the Understanding, I call *SENSATION*.⁵³

The principal transmitter of a Lockean development of de Piles is the Abbé Du Bos.⁵⁴ By stressing the continuity between the interpretation of sensation in the

⁴⁹ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch, Oxford 1975, p. 508 (iii.10.34).

⁵⁰ For Blake's comments see *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley Jr., Oxford 1978, ii, pp. 1450–1500, esp. 1487, 1488, 1496–7. For a discussion of Blake's response to Reynolds see E. Wind, 'Blake and Reynolds', *Hume*

and the Heroic Portrait (as in n. 3), pp. 81–5.

⁵¹ *Discourses*, pp. 202–3.

⁵² *Conversations*, p. 275.

⁵³ *Essay* (as in n. 49), p. 105 (ii.1.3).

⁵⁴ A. Lombard, *L'Abbé Du Bos, Un initiateur de la pensée moderne (1670–1742)*, Paris 1913, pp. 194–221. On Du

natural world in Locke's sense, and the interpretation of painterly signs deriving from de Piles, Du Bos links art and knowledge. This allows him to play down the independence of painterly effects in favour of subject matter. Applied to de Piles's painterly qualities, Locke's argument that knowledge derives from sensations means that painterly signs have a value comparable with Locke's 'sensible qualities'. So much so that Du Bos is reluctant even to admit their status as 'signs': 'Perhaps I do not express myself properly, in saying, that the painter makes use of signs; 'tis nature herself which he exhibits to our sight.'⁵⁵ Analogous with the interpretation of ordinary reality, painterly effects, like sensible qualities, become the basis of rational understanding.⁵⁶ But stressing this continuity between the experience of paintings and of the real world undermines the 'ordre artificiel' on which de Piles insists. The distinction between visual artefact and the real version of the thing portrayed is negated.

For Reynolds, as for Richardson, painting is a language and accordingly he is more sensitive to the stages in Locke's epistemology than Du Bos. For Locke, the conversion of sense impressions into ideas relies on an act of judgement:

Because Sight, the most comprehensive of all our Senses, conveying to our Minds the *Ideas* of Light and Colours, which are peculiar only to that Sense; and also the far different *Ideas* of Space, Figure, and Motion, the several varieties whereof change the appearances of its proper Object, *viz.* Light and Colours, we bring our selves by use, to judge of the one by the other. This in many cases, by a settled habit, in things whereof we have frequent experience, is performed so constantly, and so quick, that we take that for the Perception of our Sensation, which is an *Idea* formed by our Judgment; so that one, *viz.* that of Sensation, serves only to excite the other, and is scarce taken notice of it self; as a Man who reads or hears with attention and understanding, takes little notice of the Characters, or Sounds, but of the *Ideas* that are excited in him by them.⁵⁷

For Reynolds, a 'man of real taste is always a man of judgment', and reason and philosophy control the 'highest flights of fancy or imagination'.⁵⁸ Art follows an empiricist model of the mind in which sensations are the path to ideas. Sensations received by 'the organ of seeing, or of hearing' are merely the 'vehicle' 'by which our pleasures are conveyed to the mind'.⁵⁹ Reynolds regards the basic contents of minds as ideas or 'mental pictures'.⁶⁰ The function of the imagination is to combine ideas, while taste, governed by reason and judgement, enables the execution of beautiful and pleasing combinations. The artist needs 'to collect subjects for expression; to amass a stock of ideas, to be combined and varied as occasion may require'.⁶¹ Based on judgement and reason, the painterly imagination selects by 'leaving out particularities, and retaining only general ideas'.⁶² The process of artistic selection is one which, as for Locke, begins with the senses and ends in the mind:

The internal fabrick of our minds, as well as the external form of our bodies, being nearly uniform; it seems then to follow of course, that as the imagination is incapable of producing any thing originally of itself, and can only vary and combine those ideas with which it is furnished by means of the senses, there will be necessarily an agreement in the imaginations, as in the senses of men.⁶³

Bos, Addison and Locke see Lee (as in n. 7), p. 60. On the importance of Locke and de Piles for Jonathan Richardson see Lipking (as in n. 5), pp. 109–26.

⁵⁵ Abbé J. B. Du Bos, *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*, tr. Thomas Nugent, London 1748, i, p. 322.

⁵⁶ See Puttfarcken, pp. 126–9.

⁵⁷ *Essay* (as in n. 49), pp. 146–7 (ii.9.9).

⁵⁸ *Discourses*, pp. 202–3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 184–5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 191. On nature and the general idea cf. *ibid.*, p. 182, and a comment by Blake (as in n. 50, p. 1495): 'Here is a Plain Confession that he Thinks Mind & Imagination not to be above the Mortal and Perishing Nature. Such is the End of Epicurian or Newtonian Philosophy; it is Atheism.' For an outline of theories of

Conversely, the centrality of painterly means advocated by de Piles would amount to a subversion of the rational order, subordinating ideas to sensations. In borrowing from de Piles in his discussion of Rubens, Reynolds thus differs from the French critic in regarding Rubens's facility with colour as mechanical because it is merely imitative, addressed to the eye rather than the mind. De Piles's painterly effects are incorporated into a Lockean framework in which too much emphasis on colour is an error of judgement.⁶⁴ If judgement working on sensations is the means by which ideas are conveyed to the mind, the painter's task is a proper subordination or reduction of 'the variety of nature to the abstract idea';⁶⁵ this allows the realisation of 'that superiority with which mind predominates over matter'.⁶⁶ In this context, too much attention to 'colouring... will appear a mere struggle without effect; *a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing*';⁶⁷ the triumph of the signifier over the signified, of words over ideas.⁶⁸

If, in general terms the Discourses are worked out according to Reynolds's vision of the relationship between nature and reason, then the adaptation of de Piles is typical of the way in which he resolves the problem of the non-rational or sensational component of art. Analogous with Lockean sensible qualities, the sensationalism of art should be subordinated to the higher pursuit of ideas. In Discourse XIII, however, the balance is redressed in favour of artifice and emotion.⁶⁹ Painting, like poetry, is here recognised as a 'general system of deviation from nature'⁷⁰ whose address is 'only to two faculties of the mind, its imagination and its sensibility'.⁷¹ Reynolds now warns against 'an unfounded distrust of the imagination and feeling', recommending that 'intuition and impression', the result of 'accumulated experience... ought to prevail over that reason, which however powerfully exerted on any particular occasion, will probably comprehend but a partial view of the subject; and our conduct in life, as well as in the Arts, is, or ought to be, generally governed by this habitual reason'.⁷²

In this oddly sceptical Discourse Reynolds articulates the limits of reason: 'Reason, without doubt, must ultimately determine every thing; at this minute it is required to inform us when that very reason is to give way to feeling.'⁷³ The discovery of feeling is accompanied by an alternative theory of the imagination. In Discourse VII the imagination should be governed by reason; in Discourse XIII 'the imagination is... the residence of truth. If the imagination be affected, the conclusion is fairly drawn; if

the imagination relevant to Reynolds see M. Malmanger, 'Sir Joshua Reynolds' Discourses: Attitude and Ideas', *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia*, iv, 1969, pp. 167–8.

⁶⁴ Cf. the comment in Discourse IV on the Venetian, Flemish, and Dutch schools (*Discourses*, p. 124): 'The language of Painting must indeed be allowed these masters; but even in that, they have shown more copiousness than choice, more luxuriance than judgment.'

⁶⁵ *Discourses*, p. 109.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁶⁸ Reynolds's point resurfaces as a key strand of Norman Bryson's discussion of French rococo art in *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien régime*, Cambridge 1981, esp. chs 1–4.

⁶⁹ On the idea that the Discourses contain a changing theory of art see Monk (as in n. 5), pp. 186–90; Lipking (as in n. 5), pp. 184–92; and W. J. Bate, *From Classic to Romantic*, Cambridge, Mass. 1946, who finds the later Discourses increasingly characterised by a union of 'ethos' and 'pathos' (p. 81). On the coherence

of Reynolds's approach see R. R. Wark's introduction to his edition of Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, New Haven, Conn. 1975. D. Mannings, 'An Art-Historical Approach to Reynolds's *Discourses*', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, xvi, 1976, pp. 354–66, argues for 'unity' despite the absence of 'a high degree of consistency in argument' (p. 360). A more historical approach to this question is taken by M. Macklem, 'Reynolds and the Ambiguities of Neo-Classical Criticism', *Philological Quarterly*, xxxi, 1952, pp. 383–98. Similarly, J. L. Mahoney, 'Reynolds's "Discourses on Art": the Delicate Balance of Neoclassic Aesthetics', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, xviii, 1978, pp. 126–36, argues that Reynolds holds differing theoretical traditions in a state of 'balance'. Hipple (as in n. 48) suggests that Reynolds's method is based on the centrality of the grand style. For a useful general summary of critical opinion on this issue see Barrell (as in n. 48), pp. 70, 348 n. 3.

⁷⁰ *Discourses*, p. 289.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

it be not affected, the reasoning is erroneous'.⁷⁴ Imagination is now the test of reason. Pat Rogers notes that this recalls Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste' (1757);⁷⁵ but it also bears comparison with the *Treatise*, where Hume argues for the 'senses, or rather imagination' as the antidote to scepticism⁷⁶ and for the interdependence of reason and feeling: 'Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us.'⁷⁷

This alternative emphasis finds a focus in the discussion of Gainsborough in Discourse XIV. Reynolds regards Gainsborough as an artist characterised by 'strong intuitive perception', 'natural sagacity', 'genius', and 'inspiration'.⁷⁸ Accordingly, when applied to Gainsborough, the language analogy becomes distorted. Gainsborough's 'manner, or style, or we may call it—the language in which he expressed his ideas' is regarded as a 'novelty and peculiarity':⁷⁹

It is no disgrace to the genius of Gainsborough, to compare him to such men as we sometimes meet with, whose natural eloquence appears even in speaking a language which they can scarce be said to understand; and who, without knowing the appropriate expression of almost any one idea, contrive to communicate the lively and forcible impressions of an energetick mind.⁸⁰

Gainsborough is an irrational orator who deals in words without ideas. In the *Journey* Rubens's eloquence 'bears down', persuades, and 'triumphs over superior wisdom and learning'. As a colourist, Rubens imitates nature through an appeal to the senses so powerful that it confounds the judgement. Gainsborough's imitation of 'particular nature' takes this a stage further, producing an effect which is independent of its inability to carry an idea. Accordingly, Reynolds characterises Gainsborough's 'manner' as 'odd' and 'peculiar':

it is certain, that all those odd scratches and marks, which on a close examination, are so observable in Gainsborough's pictures, and which even to experienced painters appear rather the effect of accident than design; this chaos, this uncouth and shapeless appearance, by a kind of magick, at a certain distance assumes form, and all the parts seem to drop into their proper places, so that we can hardly refuse acknowledging the full effect of diligence, under the appearance of chance and hasty negligence.⁸¹

Despite their uncouthness, Gainsborough's images persuade the viewer of their verisimilitude and convey a 'powerful impression of nature'. In seeking a language in which to describe the effect of Gainsborough's art, Reynolds modifies his Lockean application of de Piles's theory in a manner that is essentially Humean.⁸² Gainsborough's handling is so loose that it prompts Reynolds to apply de Piles's account of the effect of unfinished drawings, 'Les Desseins touchez & peu finis': 'l'imagination y supplée toutes les parties qui y manquent, ou qui n'y sont pas terminées, & que chacun les voit selon son Goût.'⁸³ Yet Reynolds is forced to acknowledge 'the full effect of diligence' in Gainsborough's work, and its completeness or wholeness requires

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 399, n. 2.

⁷⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn, revised P. H. Niddich, Oxford 1978, pp. 217–18 (i.4.2).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 270 (i.4.7).

⁷⁸ *Discourses*, pp. 313, 308, 313, and 303.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 312–13.

⁸² The Humean affinities in Gainsborough's work to which Reynolds is responding have been outlined by

E. Wind, 'Hume and the Heroic Portrait', *Hume and the Heroic Portrait* (as in n. 3), pp. 1–52. Reynolds's use of ideas deriving from Hume has been remarked on in passing by Mannings (as in n. 69), p. 356; and Malmanger (as in n. 63), pp. 167–8.

⁸³ *Abrégé*, p. 70. See E. Rothstein, "Ideal Presence" and the "Non-Finito" in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, ix, 1976, pp. 307–32. Reynolds discusses sketches in Discourse VII (p. 225); cf. also Puttfarken, p. 91.

further explanation. The distinction between ideas and impressions is used to equate the 'painter's eye for colouring' with the imitation of 'particular nature', suggesting that mimesis is achieved through an appeal to the senses so direct that it precedes the intervention of ideas. When Reynolds refers to 'lively and forcible impressions', therefore, there is a marked similarity with the sense in which Hume defined those terms.

For Hume, the mind has two kinds of perceptions: 'impressions', by which he means 'all our sensations, passions and emotions'; and 'ideas', which are weaker versions of impressions. Impressions 'take precedence of their correspondent ideas':

To give a child an idea of scarlet or orange, of sweet or bitter, I present the objects, or in other words, convey to him these impressions; but proceed not so absurdly, as to endeavour to produce the impressions by exciting the idea. Our ideas upon their appearance produce not their correspondent impressions, nor do we perceive any colour, or feel any sensation merely upon thinking of them.⁸⁴

Ideas are copies of impressions retained either in the memory or the imagination. Those in the memory are livelier, stronger, and more distinct than those in the imagination: 'Tis evident at first sight, that the ideas of the memory are much more lively and strong than those of the imagination, and that the former faculty paints its objects in more distinct colours, than any which are employ'd by the latter.' Unlike the memory, which is 'ty'd down' to the 'original impressions', the imagination has '*the liberty*' to vary ideas. On the basis of resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect, the imagination combines ideas and 'runs easily from one idea to any other that *resembles* it.'⁸⁵ Through these operations of the imagination, moreover, an idea can be converted into an impression:

The component parts of ideas and impressions are precisely alike. The manner and order of their appearance may be the same. The different degrees of their force and vivacity are, therefore, the only particulars, that distinguish them: And as this difference may be remov'd, in some measure, by a relation betwixt the impressions and ideas, 'tis no wonder an idea of a sentiment or passion, may by this means be so inliven'd as to become the very sentiment or passion. The lively idea of any object always approaches its impression;⁸⁶

Accordingly, 'an idea of the imagination may acquire such a force and vivacity, as to pass for an idea of the memory'.⁸⁷

In the absence of ideas, Reynolds identifies the imagination as the key player in the transformation of Gainsborough's painted image into an impression:

I have often imagined that this unfinished manner contributed even to that striking resemblance for which his portraits are so remarkable. Though this opinion may be considered as fanciful, yet I think a plausible reason may be given, why such a mode of painting should have such an effect. It is pre-supposed that in this undetermined manner there is the general effect; enough to remind the spectator of the original; the imagination supplies the rest, and perhaps more satisfactory to himself, if not more exactly, than the artist, with all his care, could possibly have done.⁸⁸

Gainsborough does not 'proceed...so absurdly, as to endeavour to produce the impressions by exciting the idea.'⁸⁹ The special power of Gainsborough's portraits is a consequence of their working on the viewer's memory and imagination. They act on the memory to recall the person portrayed; the indistinctness of the handling then gives latitude to the imagination to combine with the memory and complete the

⁸⁴ *Treatise* (as in n. 76), p. 5 (i.1.1).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–11 (i.1.3).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 319 (ii.1.11).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86 (i.3.5).

⁸⁸ *Discourses*, p. 314.

⁸⁹ *Treatise* (as in n. 76), p. 5 (i.1.1).

image. Its lifelikeness derives from the way Gainsborough's 'lively and forcible impressions' act on the viewer to produce, in turn, a 'powerful impression of nature'. The quality of Gainsborough's imagery is enacted in the imagination without the mediation of reason.

Although Hume also speaks of the imagination as the link between words and ideas, he does so in order to underline the fundamentally irrational nature of the operations of the mind.⁹⁰ Similarly, Reynolds introduces the language comparison in Discourse XIV to emphasise Gainsborough's facility with words alone, his all-absorbing attention to 'those effects of the art which proceed from colours'. According to this view, Gainsborough is a master of the non-rational. The theory of colouring derived from de Piles is here linked with Humean impressions to explain the effect of a mode of painting whose concern is with handling rather than the communication of ideas. If Reynolds feels 'enthusiasm' before a canvas by Rubens, he is 'captivated' by the effects of Gainsborough's handling. In both cases, painterly qualities result in an emotional effect. Hume again provides an instructive comparison:

impressions and passions are susceptible of an entire union; and like colours, may be blended so perfectly together, that each of them may lose itself, and contribute only to vary that uniform impression, which arises from the whole.⁹¹

Reynolds's alignment of Rubens, de Piles, and Gainsborough shows him accounting for a kind of painting which demands, after de Piles, to be seen as a purely visual art. This is an aesthetics which runs counter to his usual assertion that painting becomes a sister art of poetry when it speaks to the mind rather than the eye and, at a key Lockean moment in Discourse VIII, Reynolds tackles the question of emotion and imagination by referring the reader to Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757). According to Reynolds, Burke has explicated 'the connection between the rules of art and the eternal and immutable dispositions of our passions'.⁹² The relationship is clearest in Burke's 'Introduction on Taste', which regards the senses as 'the great originals of all our ideas', the 'whole ground-work of Taste' as 'common to all', and 'a wrong Taste' as 'a defect of judgment'.⁹³ Yet, the *Enquiry* as a whole investigates kinds of experience, aesthetic and natural, that precede the action of reason. Like Du Bos, Burke recognises painting as a manipulator of natural signs but, in conscious opposition, he believes that the 'greater clearness of the ideas it represents' undermines its power of 'moving the passions'.⁹⁴ In poetry, by contrast, the obscurity attendant upon words adds to their emotional power:

If I make a drawing of a palace, or a temple, or a landscape, I present a very clear idea of those objects; but then (allowing for the effect of imitation which is something) my picture can at most affect only as the palace, temple, or landscape would have affected in the reality. On the other hand, the most lively and spirited verbal description I can give, raises a very obscure and

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 92–3 (i.3.6).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 366 (ii.2.6).

⁹² *Discourses*, p. 224. Blake was certain of the connection between the *Discourses* and the *Enquiry*. See *William Blake's Writings* (as in n. 50), pp. 1496–7: 'Burkes Treatise on the Sublime & Beautiful is founded on the Opinions of Newton & Locke; on this Treatise Reynolds has grounded many of his assertions in all his *Discourses*. I read Burkes Treatise when very Young; at the same time I read Locke on Human Understanding & Bacons Advancement of Learning; on Every one of these Books I wrote my Opinions & on looking them over I find that my Notes on Reynolds in this Book are

exactly Similar. I felt the Same Contempt & Abhorrence then; that I do now.'

⁹³ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. A. Phillips, Oxford 1990, pp. 22–3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56. For a discussion of Burke and Du Bos on poetry and natural signs see Hagstrum (as in n. 7), pp. 152–4. For Burke's later modification of this position in his *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1795) see Lipking (as in n. 5), pp. 173–5.

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.⁹⁵

For Burke the affective hierarchy in poetry is not word, idea, emotion but a direct leap from word to emotion. Mimetically, poetry is weak but that weakness merely invigorates its capacity to affect the feelings, and poetry is forceful not because it is representational but because it is a medium for sympathy:

In reality poetry and rhetoric do not succeed in exact description so well as painting does; their business is to affect rather by sympathy than imitation; to display rather the effect of things on the mind of the speaker, or of others, than to present a clear idea of the things themselves... The truth is, all verbal description, merely as naked description, though never so exact, conveys so poor and insufficient an idea of the thing described, that it could scarcely have the smallest effect, if the speaker did not call in to his aid those modes of speech that mark a strong and lively feeling in himself. Then, by the contagion of our passions, we catch a fire already kindled in another, which probably might never have been struck out by the object described.⁹⁶

For Burke the power of poetry comes from its ability to affect the reader without the intervention of ideas, and this strongly recalls Reynolds's description of Gainsborough. Similarly, the way in which poetry acts on the reader to induce a feeling corresponding with that felt by the poet recalls Reynolds's description of the 'enthusiasm' he feels in front of Rubens. Yet Reynolds's response draws on de Piles's 'grace' which pleases and captivates the heart without reference to the understanding, and on de Piles's later thoughts on enthusiasm and sublimity.⁹⁷ In using de Piles in this way, Reynolds, like Burke, is developing a theory which accounts for certain kinds of aesthetic experience in psychological rather than formal terms. What Burke fails to appreciate about painting in the *Enquiry*, however, is precisely that which de Piles sees as its primary mode. Burke regards painting as simply reproductive and its pleasures as equivalent to those produced by the object 'in the reality', plus the delight of recognising the painter's reproductive skill in the manipulation of natural signs ('which is something'). De Piles by contrast sees the pleasure of painting in the play of painterly language, an artificial order which itself produces emotion. In the theory of art which emerges in the discussion of Gainsborough, therefore, Reynolds differs from Burke because of his use of de Piles and yet differs from de Piles because of Locke and Hume.

Ironically, Reynolds's denial of Gainsborough's poetic abilities adumbrates a definition of *ut pictura poesis* that is not Aristotelian or even Lockean but post-Humean. This presupposes a constellation of ideas linking exactness of representation, painterly indistinctness, imaginative latitude, and emotive power. Whether this represents a genuine shift in Reynolds's thinking is beside the point. More importantly, it constitutes a definite response to what was really happening in British art rather than a pedagogical suggestion about what ought to be. Referring to Discourse IV, Gainsborough notoriously commented that Reynolds's ideas were irrelevant to the actual practice of British painters: 'his Instruction is all adapted to form the History Painter, which he must know there is no call for in this country.'⁹⁸ Looking back in 1808, Blake could see little difference between Gainsborough and Reynolds; significantly, he

⁹⁵ *Philosophical Enquiry* (as in n. 93), p. 55.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 160.

⁹⁷ One should note that Burke simply equates grace and beauty (*ibid.*, p. 109): 'Gracefulness is an idea not very different from beauty; it consists in much the same things.' De Piles, by contrast, distinguishes between

them (*Abregé*, p. 11): 'La Grace & la Beauté, sont deux choses différentes: la Beauté ne plaît que par les règles, & la Grace plaît sans les règles.'

⁹⁸ *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, ed. M. Woodall, 2nd edn, London 1963, no. 46.

thought them both too much like Rubens.⁹⁹ Yet what Reynolds is tentatively reaching towards in the discussion of Gainsborough is an identification of the English school which provides the groundwork for the recognition of a continuity between the premises of Gainsborough's art and those of Blake. As Blake puts it: 'Mechanical Excellence is the Only Vehicle of Genius'.¹⁰⁰

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⁹⁹ *William Blake's Writings* (as in n. 50), pp. 1450, 1457. ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1463.