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THE POLITICAL THEORY OF PAINTING
FROM REYNOLDS TO HAZLITT

'The Body of the Public'

John Barrell

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A REPUBLIC OF TASTE

1. Introductory: the scope of the book

THIS BOOK tells a story, and it can be summarised as follows. In the early decades of the eighteenth century in England, the most influential attempts to provide the practice of painting with a theory were those which adopted the terms of value of the discourse we now describe as civic humanism. The republic of the fine arts was understood to be structured as a political republic; the most dignified function to which painting could aspire was the promotion of the public virtues; and the genres of painting were ranked according to their tendency to promote them. As only the free citizen members of the political republic could exhibit those virtues, the highest genre, history-painting, was primarily addressed to them, and it addressed them rhetorically, as an orator addresses an audience of citizens who are his equals, and persuades them to act in the interests of the public.

This theory, enunciated by Shaftesbury and, less wholeheartedly but no less influentially, by Jonathan Richardson, was not so much challenged as attenuated in the middle decades of the century, by writers less persuaded than Shaftesbury of the importance of the distinction between public and private virtue. This development could be understood by the discourse of civic humanism, in its purest, severest form, only as evidence of the corruption of the state and the dissolution of public spirit, for it was related to the belief that in a complex, modern, commercial society, a society divided by the division of labour and united only in the pursuit of wealth, the opportunities for the exercise of public virtue were much diminished, compared to what they had been in, for example, the republics of Greece, and the importance of the private virtues, and even of what civic humanism regarded as private vices, was much increased. In fact, the mid-century writers on painting and on taste preserve the

language of civic humanism almost intact: we find the same denunciations of luxury, of selfishness, of those who fail to approach painting as a liberal art. But the function of painting has become crucially different: it is now to promote not public, but 'social' virtues, whether public or private.

With the foundation of the Royal Academy, however, in 1768, it became necessary to insist more firmly on the claim that painting had a definite public function; for the Academy was a public institution, at least insofar as its patron was the king; and though George III could occasionally extend his patronage to individual painters, 'not as a King, but as a private *Gentleman*', it was well understood that his task, as a patron of the Royal Academy, was to promote the arts in his capacity as 'the head of a great . . . nation'. The Academy was 'an ornament' to the 'greatness' of Britain; its institution was 'in the highest degree interesting, not only to . . . Artists, but to the whole Nation'. The President of the Academy was chosen for his 'known public spirit', the 'BODY of ARTISTS' was a public body, its members were 'public men'. As such, they had a duty to their country: to 'prove' their 'patriotism', and to justify the Academy as 'highly worthy of the protection of a patriot-king, of a dignified nobility, and of a wise people'.¹

If the Academy was to be represented, and its existence justified, as a public body, this could be done only by reiterating the claim that painting was an art whose function was to promote the public interest, and that claim could be made only by reasserting, in the language of civic humanism, that painting could create or confirm the 'public spirit' in a nation. But the very factors that had led to the attenuation of that claim in the mid-century made it impossible simply to reaffirm it now, without qualification or without an attempt to take account of how modern Britain differed from Periclean Athens, renaissance Florence, or from the ideal polity imagined by Shaftesbury. It was therefore necessary to consider how 'public spirit' might manifest itself otherwise than by acts of public virtue; or to ask how, in a nation where the division of labour had so occluded the perspectives of its members that none of them, or almost none, could grasp the 'idea' of the public, the art of painting could be used to restore that idea to them. It was necessary to ask if painting could represent the private virtues as, after all, public—in such a way as would make it possible to argue that history-painting was still the most dignified branch of the art, and dignified because, even when it promoted the private virtues, it was still promoting the public interest; or to ask whether, if the civic humanist vision of the public had now entirely faded, painting might still be understood as capable of representing a ground of

social affiliation which could substitute for that lost public space. The chapters that follow, on Reynolds, James Barry, Blake and Fuseli, and the pages on Haydon in my final chapter, examine how the civic humanist theory of painting was variously adapted, in answer to such questions, so as to permit the argument that the art could still perform a public function in a society in which, according to Fuseli, 'the ambition, activity, and spirit of public life is shrunk to the minute detail of domestic arrangements', and in which 'every thing that surrounds us tends to show us in private'.² This introduction examines the civic humanist theory itself, as it was propounded in the first half of the century by Shaftesbury, Richardson, and George Turnbull, and the attenuation of that theory by such writers as Burke, Alexander Gerard, and Daniel Webb; and it offers some account of how that process of attenuation occurred.

2. The discourse of civic humanism

Before we proceed, we shall need some account of the discourse of civic humanism, and I shall borrow one from J. G. A. Pocock:

Since the revival of the ideal of active citizenship by Florentine civic humanists, there had been a gathering reemphasis on the ancient belief that fulfillment of man's life was to be found in political association, coupled with an increasing awareness of the historical fragility of the political forms in which this fulfillment must be sought. *Virtue* could only be found in a *republic* of equal, active, and independent citizens, and it was a term applied both to the relations between these citizens and to the healthful condition of the personality of each one of them; but the republic was peculiarly exposed to *corruption*—a state of affairs often identified with the dependence of citizens upon the powerful, instead of upon the public authority—and the corruption of the republic must entail the corruption of the individual personality, which could only flourish when the republic was healthy.³

This section of my introduction is offered as a comment on that account, and will attempt to situate it in relation to civic humanist writings of the early eighteenth century in Britain.

When Pocock writes of the corruption of the 'individual personality', he does not intend to suggest that the discourse of civic humanism identifies the uncorrupted individual personality as a site or source of value, or not in such a way as a century and a half of the use of that phrase in liberal thinking about politics and ethics might

encourage us to interpret it. For, as he has pointed out, though it is an essential tenet of civic humanism that 'the integrity of the polity must be founded on the integrity of the personality', that integrity 'could be maintained only through devotion to universal, not particular goods'. An attention to 'individual personality', recognised as such by virtue of its difference from the individual personalities of others, invites the charge, in civic humanist writings, of 'singularity', or 'caprice', a wilful refusal, continually or occasionally indulged, to pursue one's true nature and identity: which is to be a *politikon zoon*, a being formed to live in a city, to live in partnership with others, and so to regard the fulfillment of personal development as being achieved only when one has entirely identified one's own interests with those of the public of which one is a member.⁴ The measure by which, in a civic humanist polity, the personality of an individual is distinctive, is the measure by which he has failed to subordinate his own interests to, or to identify them with those of his fellow-citizens, considered in their ideal fulfillment. It is the measure, indeed, of how much he has still to do, to become truly a citizen.

It follows that the virtue pursued by the citizen of a republic is public virtue: the private virtues, of which Hume offers as examples '*prudence, temperance, frugality, industry, assiduity, enterprise, dexterity*', are those which make men 'serviceable to themselves, and enable them to promote their own interest', but they are not 'such as make them perform their part in society'; and, evidently, if a man pursues those virtues with more zeal than he pursues the public virtues, he will attract the charge of pursuing his own interest more zealously than the interests of the public. What, then, are the 'public virtues'? James Thomson identifies them as 'independent life', 'integrity in office', and—supreme over these—'a passion for the commonweal': only on the basis of these, he insists, can a free state survive. Of these, the first defines the essential qualification for active citizenship, for participation in the councils of the state, and independence was represented and guaranteed either (according to Machiavelli) by the right of a citizen to 'bear arms of his own in the public cause and at the command of public authority', or (according to writers such as Thomson) primarily by the ownership of heritable property in land, the income from which also guaranteed to the citizen the leisure necessary for engagement in political life; or by both. On the first of these qualifications, Pocock comments: 'equality among citizens was an equality in arms, and to give up one's arms to another was to give up a vital part of one's capacity for equality, citizenship, and virtue and to become the dependent of those who controlled arms and power'; the second, he situates in the context of

the ideal civic humanist polis as envisaged by James Harrington, one composed of a free hierarchy of independent property owners, responsible and therefore fit to have dependents, and 'those whom lack of property rendered incapable of independence, and so of citizenship'.⁵

The second of Thomson's public virtues is one which can be exhibited, obviously enough, only by a man who has achieved an elective office in the polis; who is a 'public man' in the narrow sense of being a '*publicus*', a magistrate, and chosen to be so by virtue of his independence and his public spirit. 'Public spirit', on the other hand, a 'passion for the commonweal', or what Shaftesbury calls '*Common Sense*', the '*Sense of Publick Weal*, and of the *Common Interest*', was a virtue open to be exhibited by the citizen whether in office or not. It is the source of the principle of honour among men, which John Brown defines as 'the Desire of Fame, or the Applause of Men, directed to the end of public Happiness'. It is 'supreme', because it is the end for which 'independent life' exists, and the source of 'integrity in office'; as Shaftesbury explains, it is the term by which we distinguish 'the *natural Affections*, which lead to the Good of THE PUBLICK', from the '*Self-affections*, which lead only to the Good of THE PRIVATE'. 'To love the Publick', he writes, 'to study universal Good, and to promote the Interest of the whole World, as far as lies within our power, is surely the Height of Goodness, and makes that Temper which we call *Divine*'.⁶

The question reasonably occurs, can we really call that temper 'divine', when the scriptures take so little account of the public virtues as defined in the *Characteristicks*? To this, Shaftesbury offers an answer intended to secure the position that the pursuit of public virtue is not only compatible with the doctrine of the scriptures, but is positively the most virtuous pursuit open to us. The scriptures, he argues, concentrate on those virtues the exercise of which carries the promise of a heavenly reward, and they leave '*Private Friendship, and Zeal for the Publick, and our Country*' as 'Virtues purely voluntary in a Christian': for 'had they been intitled to a share of that infinite Reward, which Providence has by Revelation assign'd to other Dutys', then 'there wou'd have been no room left for *Disinterestedness*'—for virtue pursued for its own sake, exactly, indeed, as the public good is pursued by the ideal citizen.⁷

These remarks by Shaftesbury raise two issues which may seem to fit awkwardly within the account of public virtue I have so far been offering. First, surely '*Private Friendship*', even if it does not seem to be well-described by placing it among the '*Self-affections*', still leads only to 'the Good of THE PRIVATE', and is therefore a private virtue? So

it may be; but it differs from the private virtues listed by Hume in two important ways: it is represented by Shaftesbury as being, unlike them, disinterested; and it is so far from being the same thing, he explains, as 'that common Benevolence and Charity which every Christian is oblig'd to shew towards all Men', that it is one of the 'heroick Virtues'. It is found among heroes only, and, in civic humanist writing, Shaftesbury's included, a hero is one who does 'more than merely his duty' to the public. Private friendship may thus be a private virtue, but it is the private virtue peculiarly exhibited by 'the public Soul' of 'Patriots, and of Heroes'.⁸

Secondly, Shaftesbury's account of the divine temper surely extends far beyond simple patriotism, or simple love of the political public of which one happens to be a member? So it does: but so far are true patriotism and the attempt 'to promote the Interest of the whole World' from being incompatible, that they are, within the discourse of civic humanism, virtually identical. For the true patriot does not seek to promote the immediate and short term interests of the public in which he is a citizen: he promotes the interests of that public as it is composed of men who share a universal human nature, with each other and with the members of other publics. That universal human nature finds its fulfillment, as we have seen, in political life, in membership of 'a civil STATE or PUBLICK', where 'Virtue' is 'the Interest of every-one'⁹; and to promote that fulfillment in one's own country is to perform an exemplary function for the citizens of all countries. For that reason, states may even regard themselves as in competition with other states in the degree to which they enable their citizens to fulfill their civic destiny, for, when they do so, they are striving only to be examples of a universal civic virtue to each other.

From all that has been said so far of public virtue, it will be clear that it is not a mode of virtue open to be exercised by all the inhabitants of a country. If 'independent life' is a qualification for citizenship, and so for the opportunity of exercising 'integrity in office', then whether that independence is based on arms or on land it cannot be made a qualification that many possess. If the prime object of civic humanist political theory is to ensure, as far as possible, the security and the survival of the state, arms cannot regularly be entrusted to the majority of its inhabitants, for, as we shall see, the majority have no 'common sense', no 'passion for the commonweal', and to arm them would give 'the power to decide whether the constitution shall stand or fall' to those incapable of exercising it responsibly. If independence, on the other hand, is seen as primarily guaranteed by the ownership of land, still an individual would require to own land in considerable quantity to be truly independent, not only of others but

of the need to work for a living, and so to have the leisure to occupy himself in public affairs. For as Aristotle, most fully, had explained, leisure was needed for the development of civic virtue and for active participation in politics: a citizen must be released from the menial occupations of a mechanical or mercantile life; occupations that were 'illiberal'—unworthy of a free man.¹⁰

The distinction between the liberal, the free man, and the mechanic, was essential to the account of citizenship offered by civic humanism, as it had been to Aristotle. According to Aristotle, the condition of the mechanic or artisan made him as unfit for citizenship as was the slave. Though slaves differed from mechanics, insofar as slavery was a 'natural' state, whereas the mechanic life, a sort of 'limited slavery', was 'unnatural', both classes of men shared two related characteristics. To begin with, both were more or less unreasonable: slaves could 'apprehend' reason but could not 'possess' it, while mechanics 'neither understand reason nor obey it but obey their instincts only'. Both exist, finally, only for the satisfaction of the wants of those whom their labour supports, the independent citizens of a state.¹¹ Second, neither was fit for the practice of virtue: slaves have no 'purposive life', and are capable only of such passive virtues as fit them to be the ancillaries of those who do; and 'there is no element of virtue in any of the occupations in which the multitude of artisans and market-people and the wage-earning class take part'. In no polity, therefore, of whatever form, are slaves regarded as citizens; and though in 'extreme democracies' mechanics have been accorded the privileges of citizenship, in the best polities they are never to be found citizens, for the true citizen is capable of governing, which mechanics are not.¹²

In early eighteenth-century Britain, such arguments as these of Aristotle (and many of them have their equivalents in Plato and other classical writers) took on a form which was to be crucial, as we shall see, for the development of a civic humanist theory of art. Those who follow a mechanical trade will have three things in common, it was believed, which will disable them from the pursuit of public virtue. A man who follows such a trade, it was pointed out, will be following one, determinate occupation, and will discover an interest in promoting the interests of that occupation, and of his own success in it; and his concern with what is good for himself, or for one interest-group, will prevent him from arriving at an understanding of what is good for man in general, for the public interest, for human nature. Second, the experience that falls in the way of such a man will be too narrow to serve as the basis of ideas general enough to be represented as true for all mankind, or for the interests, even, of his own country.

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Third, because mechanical arts are concerned with *things*, with material objects, they do not offer the opportunity for exercising a generalising rationality: the successful practice of the mechanical arts requires that material objects be regarded as concrete particulars, and not in terms of the abstract and formal relations among them. We can sum up these beliefs by saying that, to the mechanic, the 'public' is invisible; and that is why, for Shaftesbury, the 'mere Vulgar of Mankind' cannot act virtuously out of public spirit, but only out of 'servile Obedience'; and, to ensure that obedience, they 'often stand in need of such a rectifying Object as *the Gallows* before their Eyes'. The man of independent means, on the other hand, who does not fret or labour to increase them, will be released from private interest and from the occlusions of a narrowed and partial experience of the world, and from an experience of the world as *material*. He will be able to see the public, and grasp the public interest, and so will be fit to participate in government.¹³

For these reasons, the discourse of civic humanism—at least in its aristocratic, which is arguably its only form—is concerned with virtue only insofar as it is public virtue, which is to say, only insofar as it is the virtue capable of being exercised by a political animal who is capable not only of being ruled but also of ruling. Civic humanist considerations of virtue are always directed to the questions of what factors affect 'the *Duration* of the public *State*', and, as John Brown explains, the 'three leading Circumstances on which the *internal Strength* of every Nation most essentially depends' are 'the *Capacity, Valour, and Union*, of those who *lead* the People'. For 'the Manners and Principles of those who *lead*, not of those who *are led*; of those who *govern*, not those who *are governed*; of those who *make* Laws or *execute* them, will ever determine the Strength or Weakness, and therefore the Continuance or Dissolution, of a State'. The distinction between those who do, and those who do not, have a claim to be regarded as citizens of a state, was taken, as Stephen Copley has written, 'as a providential fact of nature'—and it continued to be regarded as natural, long after it was easy to describe slavery, as Aristotle had described it, as a 'natural' condition.¹⁴ 'It' (simply) 'happens with *Mankind*', wrote Shaftesbury, 'that whilst some are by necessity confin'd to Labour, others are provided with abundance of all things, by the Pains and Labour of Inferiors'; and 'some men', wrote Bolingbroke, 'are in a particular manner *designed* to take care of that government on which the common happiness depends' (my emphasis).¹⁵

I have described civic humanism as a discourse, and by that I mean what is usually now meant by the term: that 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'.¹⁶ And most of all, I mean by that description to call attention to the fact that, as we shall frequently see in the chapters that follow, it is a mode of thinking or writing which may co-exist, whether comfortably or in conflict, with other discourses within the same text; and that it is not a static object, but may be modified by the contexts in which it is discovered, and may modify its vocabulary and its objects of consideration to some degree, before we may choose to decide that a new discourse can be identified as having emerged from the matrix of the old. If my account so far of the discourse of civic humanism has represented it as a body of doctrine which exists uncontaminated and self-contained in the texts I have cited, that impression will disappear, I hope, as this introduction proceeds. But it is an impression deliberately created, for if we seek to consider the progeny, the mutations, the transformations of a discourse, and its relations with other discourses, we seem to need to begin by picturing it as exactly the 'static object' which, in the texts we examine, we will find it never to be.

I make this point particularly to enable me to comment on my earlier suggestion, that the aristocratic form of the discourse we have been examining was 'arguably its only form'. Stephen Copley, among other intellectual historians, has recently claimed that:

From early on in the century, an alternative version of the humanist tradition is developed by advocates of the newly emergent bourgeois society. In the works of Defoe, Addison, Steele and their contemporaries the value of an aristocratic governing élite in society remains unquestioned, but traditional humanism is redefined to accommodate commerce in its vocabulary of civic virtues, and the definition of the establishment is widened to celebrate the place and values of the middle class citizen.¹⁷

It would be a lengthy exercise to discuss whether this 'bourgeois' form of civic humanism can be regarded as a form of it at all, if commerce and the private virtues of 'the middle class citizen' are included among its objects of approbation. It will be exactly by their inclusion, of course, that the 'traditional' humanism of Shaftesbury and others will be attenuated, in the middle and late eighteenth century, until it is made to seem too obviously obsolete to account for the social and

economic practices of a modern commercial nation. There is nevertheless a good deal of point in Copley's remark, for in the writings of the authors he mentions, these new objects of approbation appear to co-exist comfortably enough with the vocabulary which had been developed in order to represent them as concerns not worth much attention from the citizen. It is the achievement, perhaps of Steele in particular, that he implants within the matrix of civic humanism the embryo of a discourse which will eventually develop into a matricide, but which, until it does, will derive many advantages from its association with the virtues of its surrogate mother. As we come now to consider the theory of painting which is a part of the discourse we have been considering, we will find occasion to notice both the 'traditional' form of civic humanism, and something which, until it grows larger and more threatening, may plausibly be described as its 'alternative' form, in the writings of Shaftesbury on the one hand, and of Richardson on the other.

3. *The civic humanist theory of painting*

We have seen that civic humanist considerations of virtue are directed towards describing and recommending those virtues which will preserve a civil state, a public, from corruption. The nature of the corruption that may infect the body of the public we shall soon consider; for the moment, we should notice that civic humanist accounts of the theory of painting are directed towards the same end. Prince Hoare, one of the last writers on painting in Britain to use the vocabulary of civic humanism almost undiluted, was still asserting at the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century that 'the higher the state of public taste and public virtue can be raised in any nation, and the longer that state can be maintained, the higher and longer will be the glory and pre-eminence, nay, perhaps the safety and existence of the nation.' So obvious does this truth seem to him, as do the connection between 'public taste' and 'public virtue', and the consequent truth that it is the function of painting to instruct us in public virtue, that he claims his assertion is 'superfluous': 'these are truths which all acknowledge abstractedly', he writes, and it is only 'the attempts at realising them practically' which form the 'points of difference in opinion'.¹⁸

There may have been a good deal more hope than conviction in Hoare's claim that the connection between public taste and public virtue was, by 1810, a connection universally acknowledged; or if it was, that may have been because, as we shall see at the end of this

introduction, the meaning of the word 'public' was more capacious when Hoare was writing than it had been to Shaftesbury a century earlier, and a universal agreement on the truth of Hoare's claim may not have involved a universal agreement as to its import. George Turnbull, writing in 1740, could have anticipated a rather less ambiguous assent to the summary he offered of Shaftesbury's account of the moral purpose of painting. 'The liberal Arts and Sciences', he writes,

have but one common enemy, Luxury, or a false Taste of Pleasure; and to guard, defend, and fortify against the Disorder and Ruin which that introduces into the Mind, and brings upon Society, ought to be the main Design of Education: Which can only be done, by establishing early, in the tender, docile Mind, a just Notion of Pleasure, Beauty, and Truth, the generous Love of publick Good, and a right Taste of Life, and of all the Arts which add to the Happiness or Ornament of human Society. Thus alone can the Youth be qualify'd for publick Service, and for delighting in it; and thus only can they learn at the same time how to recreate themselves at hours of leisure, in a manly virtuous way, or without making one step towards Vice.

The liberal arts, by this account, guard the mind, and therefore society, against corruption, by teaching us a 'generous love of the publick Good'; and, as Turnbull elsewhere explains, whatever else they teach—'a just Notion of Pleasure, Beauty, and Truth', and 'a right Taste of Life'—is also conducive to 'the Good of Mankind', so that the study of the liberal arts is the study of public virtue.¹⁹ And because this is the case, an education in the liberal arts is of use to those who may hope or expect to make a career in 'publick Service': it is the virtue of the free—in the sense of 'independent'—man, of the liberal man, the citizen, that is learned from the 'liberal' arts. This seems to be not just their primary but their exclusive function: like Shaftesbury and Brown, Turnbull has no doubt that it is on the virtues of such men that the safety of the state ultimately depends, and he shows no interest in the virtues of anyone else, and no sign that he believes anyone else to be capable of active virtue.

The passages I have just been considering will make it clear, I hope, that when I speak of a civic humanist theory of art, I am not speaking of a theory which simply *borrow*s its terms of value from civic humanist writings on politics and morality. In early eighteenth-century Britain, as Pocock has pointed out, 'the dominant paradigm for the individual inhabiting the world of value was that of civic man', and the dominant language of value was a civic language.²⁰ It was certainly possible to employ this language in contexts which demanded

no particular reflection on the nature of the values it embodied—to use it, I mean, with no evident attention to the model of political life to which, in writers such as Shaftesbury, James Thomson, Bolingbroke and John Brown, it explicitly referred. But the values of civic humanism are not thus simply deposited as ideology in writings on the theory of art, except insofar as the objects and limits of any discourse are ideologically determined; its language is not adopted as a general language of approbation and disapprobation whose specific political reference is apparently unnoticed or left implicit, as it sometimes is in the literary criticism of eighteenth-century Britain; and this is so perhaps mainly because 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. When Joseph Weston remarked of the poetry of Pope, that it was ‘more elaborately correct and more mechanically regular’, ‘more delicately polished and more systematically dignified’ than Dryden’s,²¹ it is not clear that he intends by the use of that adverb ‘mechanically’, to accuse Pope of more than a certain laboured over-attention to technique. The same word used of a painter would have been unambiguous: it would have condemned the painter for a degree of over-attention that marked him as a mechanic, not as a citizen in the republic of the fine arts, and as one whose productions were not worth the attention of the citizens of the republic of taste, whose claim to citizenship was defined in more or less the same terms as defined their claim to citizenship in ‘a *civil STATE OF PUBLICK*’.

My point is that the civic origins of the value-language of literary criticism were not always displayed, and not that they never were, for those origins could always be indicated by reference, for example, to the ‘republic of letters’, the state-within-a-state on the model of which the republic of the fine arts, and a republic of taste, were imagined. As the civil state was divided, according to Brown, between ‘those who *lead*’, and ‘those who *are led*’, or, according to Burke, between those ‘formed to be instruments’ and those formed to be ‘controls’, so in the ‘Commonwealth of Letters’, some are ‘Controulers’ and some controlled, and the words that distinguish the two orders are invariably ‘liberal’ and ‘mechanic’. According to Lanzi, writing under the patronage of the Grand Duke of Florence,

the social structure of the republic of the fine arts, in which painters aspired to be citizens, was more complex than this: it contained ‘the senate’, ‘the equestrian order’, ‘the class of mediocrity’, and the ‘vulgar herd’; but, unsurprisingly, British writers are content with a simpler division, between liberal citizens and unfranchised mechanics, both in the republic of the fine arts, and in the republic of taste, where the consumers of the arts were imagined to be gathered.²² The structure of this republic is made clear by Burke, among numerous others, in his adaptation of Pliny’s anecdote of the shoemaker who correctly criticised the representation of a sandal by Apelles, and the next day presumed to criticise also the anatomy of a leg.²³ In Burke’s version, it is an anatomist who offers this second criticism; and though both men are right in their judgments, which are made with the authority of their occupational knowledge and directed towards the mere ‘representation of sensible objects’, Burke makes it clear that they are disqualified, by virtue of that very knowledge, to comment on the higher objects of art, ‘the manners, the characters, the actions, and designs of men, their relations, their virtues and vices’. These ‘come within the province of the judgment’, and judgment is a faculty possessed only by those who have studied in ‘the schools of philosophy and the world’, and who therefore have a ‘skill in manners, and in the observances of time and place, and of decency in general’. ‘Taste by way of distinction’ consists in ‘a more refined judgment’ than can be acquired by those who practice a particular trade, and whose narrow interests afford them no general view of ‘the world’. The ‘controulers’, the citizens of the republic of taste, are gentlemen.²⁴

4. *The qualification for citizenship in the republic of taste*

The suggestion that painting was not an art worthy of a free citizen had been made most authoritatively by Plato, who had argued that painting imitated the mere appearance of particular material objects; that in doing so it was ‘far removed from truth . . . and associates with the part in us that is remote from intelligence’, and that therefore the painter as well as the poet was rightly to be excluded from the properly run state, ‘because he stimulates and fosters’ the lower elements in the mind, and by strengthening them ‘tends to destroy the rational part, just as when in a state one puts bad men in power and turns the city over to them and ruins the better sort’.²⁵ The refutation of Plato’s arguments was already a routine exercise by the early eighteenth century, and one designed to reveal that painting

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respected the order of values by which the intellect, like the 'better elements' in a state, was maintained in a position of dignity above the lower elements in the mind and society alike, and that, therefore, the republic of taste did not threaten to invert the social distinctions essential to the proper running of a state, but confirmed those distinctions by replicating them in itself.

The first step was to assert that Plato's objections apply only to the abuse of painting, and not to its proper and moral use: though painting was indeed an imitative art, committed still more evidently than poetry to material representations of an apparently material reality, its true function was to represent, not the accidental and irrational appearances of objects, but the ideal, the substantial forms of things. Painting was thus a liberal art insofar as it was an intellectual activity, disinterested, concerned with objects which, because ideal, could not be possessed; it was an abuse of painting to practise it in pursuit of objects which, because actual, particular, material, could be made the objects of possession and consumption, and thus appealed to our baser, sensual nature. If it could be established that the materials of nature could be used to represent its ideal forms, and that it could 'address the imagination' in spite of the fact that it 'is applied to . . . a lower faculty of the mind, which approaches nearer to sensuality', then it could be freely acknowledged that, when painting departed from its idealising function, to represent mere appearance and the merely particular, it did indeed become the *merely* imitative art, 'the poor child of poor parents' that Plato had described it as. It became, in short, a manual, not an intellectual activity; not a liberal but a 'servile' art, the art produced by a class of men who, because they perform 'bodily labour', are 'totally void of taste', 'incapable of thinking', unable to arrive at ideal conceptions of things, and so who hardly deserve 'to be called men'.²⁶

Versions of this argument against Plato were common, of course, among French and German writers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writers who were by no means wholly committed to the civic humanist theory of art I am describing.²⁷ I shall attempt, later in this introduction, to disentangle the civic humanist tradition in Britain from the schools of French criticism from which it borrowed, as well as from the writings of Winckelmann and Anton Raffael Mengs; but for the moment it will be helpful to borrow from Mengs his unusually comprehensive remarks on the distinction between painting conducted as a liberal, or as a servile (or mechanic) art, which are presented in terms almost entirely congenial to the civic humanist tradition. According to Mengs, painting is 'a liberal Art composed equally of mechanism and of science', so that, if those

who pay most attention to the 'mechanism' of the art become 'low imitators of Nature', and address a 'propensity' for 'material things which fall under the senses', those who, in pursuit of the ideal, neglect that mechanism, 'will never produce more than sketches'. Nevertheless, argues Mengs, 'the ideal . . . is as much more noble than the mechanical part, as the soul is superior to the body': the argument seems to be based on the notion that mechanics, *qua* mechanics, have no souls, and that notion is spelled out, perhaps, when Mengs states that painting was degraded in imperial Rome by being consigned to the hands of 'miserable . . . slaves, incapable of thinking'.²⁸

A rational soul is essential to the right use of art, and so to the liberal artist, and for three reasons in particular. First, no art can be called liberal if it is not 'directed by a good theory', and though painting has such a theory, it cannot be understood by artists whose exclusive concern with mechanism is evidence of their inability to think. Second, 'a free man with inclination does all that he can, more or less according to his capacity', but 'a slave does only that which he is commanded to do, and his natural will is destroyed, by the violence it causes to obey'; so that the slave who is subject, either to an external power or to the promptings of his own sensual appetite for material things, cannot be a free man and cannot, therefore, practise painting as a liberal art. Third, a free man, independent both of external power and the promptings of appetite, will be able to follow the dictates of his 'generous soul', and produce works which promote the public interest; the 'pusillanimous' and servile artist, on the other hand, will 'aspire to nothing but interest'—to nothing, that is, but the pursuit of his own interest, a pursuit which aims only at the acquisition of the material objects of sensual gratification.²⁹

It is for these and other reasons that the words 'mechanical' and 'servile' carry so heavy a charge in eighteenth-century writings on art. 'Mechanical' continually occurs in contexts which are concerned with the process by which the theory of painting is reduced to a rule of thumb, a practical method, a receipt, and always with the sense that it is the nature of a mechanic to be able to obey the rules of art, but not to grasp the principles by which they are constituted. Thus Reynolds, for example, distinguishes between painting pursued as a 'liberal profession' and as a 'mechanical trade': as the former, 'it works under the direction of principle'; as the latter, it is carried on by men of 'narrow comprehension and mechanical performance', in obedience to 'vulgar and trite rules'. 'Servile' occurs continually in contexts concerned with 'mere' imitation: whether with the 'servile' copying of the great masters out of a humble deference to their authority, or with the servile imitation of 'common nature', through an inability to grasp

Reynolds

ideal or abstract form. In the first case, explains Daniel Webb, an artist becomes 'a slave to some favourite manner'; in the second, those whose 'chief merit is in the mechanic' become 'servile copiers of the works of nature'.³⁰

Plato's objections could be met also by appeals to classical authority: that of Plato himself, where he appears to adopt a more generous attitude to the fine arts, or of Aristotle, especially where he includes the art of design among the proper elements of a civic education. But the most popular appeal, by which painting could be established as a liberal profession, was to Pliny's remark that painting 'has always consistently had the honour of being practised by people of free birth, and later on by persons of station, it having been always forbidden that slaves should be instructed in it'. This passage had been borrowed by Alberti, with the comment that 'the art of painting has always been most worthy of liberal and noble minds'; it was repeated by Vasari; and it probably entered the English tradition of writing about art with Junius's translation of his own *De Pictura Veterum* in 1638.³¹ The remark was repeated by Aglionby in 1685, and thereafter it became a commonplace in English art theory.³² It is used most evidently in relation to Plato's worries about the political effects of painting by Webb, who writes that: 'The Athenians passed a law, that none who were not of a liberal birth, should practise in this art: They could not better show the sense they had of its power than in the care they took of its direction. They knew the dominion it had over our passions, and hence were careful to lodge it in the safest hands.' The edict against slaves practising painting can still be found as a justification of the liberal status of the art in the early years of the nineteenth century—until Haydon, lecturing in 1835, and appropriately enough at a Mechanics' Institution, announced that 'one of the most absurd laws in Athens, was the prohibiting the exercise of the fine arts to any but free-born men'.³³

By these various arguments, most if not all of them borrowed, and by a continual insistence, which we will have occasion to consider elsewhere,³⁴ of the vast learning necessary to the painter of history, the first task in the attempt to establish a civic humanist theory of art in Britain was performed: properly pursued, painting did not threaten the good order of the mind or of the state, but rather confirmed the grounds of the distinction, between reason and the senses, the franchised and the unenfranchised, on which good order was based. It was thus possible to refute that 'Notion of Painters' as little better than 'Joyners and Carpenters, or any other Mechanick', and to 'do Justice' to painting 'as a Liberal Art'; to claim that painting was a part of 'Liberall-Learning', and so did not 'misbeseem the quality of a

Gentleman', and that it was possible for 'gentlemen' to 'rise to an unprejudiced and liberal contemplation of true beauty' in the works of painters. It could be asserted by Shaftesbury, for example, that 'the TASTE of Beauty', in the contemplation of painting and in the other experiences of life, 'perfects the *Character* of the GENTLEMAN'; or by Richardson, writing as 'a Painter, and a Gentleman', and addressing himself 'chiefly' to other gentlemen, that painting, too, is addressed to gentlemen, and not to 'the Vulgar'.³⁵

If those concerned to assert so strenuously and so repeatedly that painting was a liberal art could often speak with one voice, however, they were not always quite of one mind. The apparent agreement between Shaftesbury and Richardson, in particular, conceals a difference between them which—and especially when taken along with other differences—can be understood in terms of Copley's distinction between 'traditional' humanism and its alternative, 'bourgeois' form.³⁶ What is at stake is the definition of a liberal, a free man, a gentleman. For Shaftesbury, 'real *fine Gentlemen*', the 'Lovers of *Art and Ingenuity*', are

such as have seen *the World*, and inform'd themselves of the *Manners and Customs* of the several Nations of EUROPE, search'd into their *Antiquitys and Records*; consider'd their *Police, Laws and Constitutions*; observ'd the Situation, Strength, and Ornaments of their *Citys*, their principal *Arts, Studys and Amusements*; their *Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Musick*, and their *Taste in Poetry, Learning, Language, and Conversation*.³⁷

To this identity, the leisure derived from a substantial unearned income is indispensable; and by virtue of this same independence the gentleman is always imagined to be a free citizen in a free polity, participating in the political life of the state, or at least in a position to do so if the circumstances should require it of him.

For Richardson, as for Steele or Defoe, a man may be a gentleman without being a man of leisure; thus, though only those gentlemen 'who have Leisure' may become connoisseurs, he acknowledges the existence of other gentlemen whose circumstances do not permit them to take a profound interest in painting.³⁸ And thus, as far as Richardson is concerned, a painter such as himself—and one, indeed, who follows the most commercial branch of the art, portraiture—may be a gentleman, whereas for Shaftesbury most portrait painters were 'mere mechanics'—Sir Godfrey Kneller, he considered, had not deserved the 'gentility' conferred on him by his knighthood. The genius even of 'capable' artists was 'checked and spoilt' by the genre; and only sometimes does Shaftesbury seem

willing to admit that those who practise in the highest genre were liberal artists. Painting, he claims (though not altogether seriously) was 'a vulgar science'; and though, as we shall see, he believed that in a free polity an artist himself is a 'freeman', he still regarded contemporary artists, perhaps without exception, as 'mere mechanics', whatever genre they worked in. When Shaftesbury required a painting to be produced which would exemplify his theory of painting, he felt himself obliged to invent and compose the picture himself, engaging a 'workman' for its mere execution, for the merely manual part of the task, by whose 'hand' Shaftesbury brought his invention 'into practice'.³⁹ Richardson, on the other hand, is adamant that if it was not 'unworthy of a Gentleman' to be 'Master of the *Theory of Painting*', then he could hardly forfeit his gentlemanly character if he was capable 'of Making, as well as of Judging, of a Picture'; for

Those Employments are Servile, and Mechanical, in which Bodily Strength, or Ability, is Only, or Chiefly required, and that because in such cases the Man approaches more to the Brute, or has fewer of those Qualities that exalt Mankind above other Animals; but this Consideration turns to the Painter's Advantage: Here is indeed a sort of Labour, but what is purely Humane, and for the Conduct of which the greatest Force of Mind is necessary.⁴⁰

5. *Painting and public virtue*

As we have seen, the civic humanist theory of painting distinguishes the liberal man from the mechanic in terms which emphasise that its value-language is a political language: the 'liberal' man is an enfranchised citizen, a participating member of a civil state or public. The highest genre of painting, according to this theory, is heroic history-painting, for this of all genres is best able to represent man according to his true nature and end, which is to be so entirely a citizen that he pursues no interest which is not the interest of the public. It is because the 'heroic kind' addresses itself primarily, if not exclusively, to a public of free citizens that its primary function is—as Turnbull and Hoare have already suggested to us—to teach public virtue, the virtue necessary to the full realisation of this civic identity. Precisely to whom, however, among the class of those capable of practising the public virtues, heroic painting addressed itself, was a question that admitted of different answers. The aristocratic Shaftesbury conceived of his invention, *The Judgment of Hercules*, as 'a piece of furniture' which:

might well fit the gallery, or hall of exercises, where our young Princes should learn their usual lessons. And so to see virtue in this garb and action, might perhaps be no slight memorandum hereafter to a royal youth, who should one day come to undergo this trial himself; on which his own happiness, as well as the fate of Europe and of the world, would in so great a measure depend.

On this occasion, at least, Shaftesbury seems to have thought of heroic painting, as Rapin and Dryden thought of epic poetry, as 'a kind of conduct-book for rulers'. George Turnbull was probably more typical, not only of the civic humanist theory of art in general, but also of Shaftesbury's more usual beliefs, in thinking of the genre as an appropriate ingredient in the education of 'Youth' likely to enter the 'publick Service', of 'Gentlemen, whose high Birth and Fortune call them to the most Important of all Studies; that, of Men, Manners and Things, or Virtue and publick Good'.⁴¹

The rules for the painting of history were closely modelled on the rules for the writing of epic:⁴² heroic history-painting, indeed, was often described as 'epic' painting, though later in the century the term came to be applied to a particular branch of the genre; and those writers on painting who adhered to the civic humanist theory of painting in its 'traditional' form would certainly have been willing to define the function of heroic painting in the terms in which John Dennis, transposing Le Bossu's theory of epic into the language of civic humanism, had defined the function of epic—though they might not have endorsed the tone of that transposition.⁴³ For Dennis, this function was 'to encourage publick Virtue and publick Spirit'; to this end the hero of epic was to be a man of public virtue; and because the dignity of epic did not allow it to be concerned with anything but the public character of its hero, the epic poet should not suggest that this character was either compromised by the private vices he might happen to indulge, or further dignified by the private virtues he exhibited. As far as the former were concerned, 'publick Virtue makes Compensation for all Faults but Crimes, and he who has this publick Virtue is not capable of Crimes'; and, as for the latter, 'the Virtues of Patience and long Suffering', writes Dennis, with a sneer at the advocates of passive obedience, may be left to be 'taught by Priests', who 'will not fail to inculcate such Doctrines frequently, as being at once consistent with their Duty and their Craft', and so with their 'Design to enslave' the people of Britain. Just as infallibly, priests will leave it to the poet to 'recommend publick Virtue and publick Spirit'.⁴⁴ Painting could promote public virtue, it was believed, by the representation of the 'great Actions' performed by public heroes, and also

(according to some writers) by portraits of the heroes themselves. Such images would preserve the memory of heroes and their actions, and would 'inflamm' the spectator, as, according to Dennis, they inflamed the reader of epic, 'with the love of his Country, and with a burning Zeal to imitate what he admires'. This belief in the exemplary value of heroic images is so universal that it is hardly necessary to instantiate it with quotations: it is summed up most effectively, perhaps, by James Harris, though in this apostrophe he is addressing 'Art' in general:

thou art enabled to exhibit to mankind the admired tribe of poets and of orators; the sacred train of patriots and of heroes; the god-like list of philosophers and legislators; the forms of virtuous and equal polities, where private welfare is made the same with public; where crowds themselves prove disinterested and brave, and virtue is made a national and popular characteristic.

'Equal polities', 'disinterested crowds', 'popular virtue': we should not be misled by such phrases into believing that Harris imagines that art should depict the ideal republic as one governed by the representatives of a popular majority, chosen by universal suffrage. The 'crowds' here—if Harris is being consistent with his usual beliefs—are crowds of enfranchised citizens, not the mob of ignorant mechanics, the 'mere Vulgar of Mankind'.⁴⁵

On the question, however, of the representation of exemplary virtue, as on many of the questions we have to consider, Jonathan Richardson is not wholly of one mind with the proponents of the 'traditional' form of the civic humanist theory of painting. What is at issue between Richardson and, say, Shaftesbury and Turnbull, is not whether art should offer instruction in public virtue, so much as how public virtue should be defined. In his account of the ideal exemplar of public virtue whom it was the duty of the painter to represent, Richardson departs considerably from Dennis's account of the epic hero, and from Shaftesbury's account of Hercules in the heroic painting he had invented. According to Richardson, the painter who seeks to depict exemplary virtue should show us 'A Brave Man, and one Honestly, and Wisely pursuing his Own Interest, in Conjunction with that of his Country'. This formulation is in line with Richardson's attempt to extend the definition of a gentleman to those men of liberal education who pursued private careers and did not aspire to public service, and the formation is made precisely to deny that such private men, if honest and wise, were not also servants of the public. It thus allows Richardson himself to continue in his lucrative trade as a 'face-painter' while claiming to be also a man of public spirit, and it

has the more general convenience of enabling a compromise between the civic virtues of 'traditional' humanism and the mercantile virtues of its alternative, 'bourgeois' form. For Richardson, there was no necessary contradiction between the pursuit of the interest of the public and the pursuit of one's own; and the same willingness to represent public and private virtue as compatible, or even, in certain circumstances, identical, is evident in the reassurance he offers to connoisseurs, that their love of painting is evidence at once of their patriotism, and their prudence: the pictures they buy will help with the 'Reformation of our Manners', and the 'Money laid out' on them 'may turn to Better Account' than almost any other kind of investment.⁴⁶

There is similarly no contradiction for Richardson between the claims that painting will promote the spiritual health of the nation and also its economic wealth, for each of those will promote the other: the reformation of manners, and particularly the cultivation of the private virtues—though by this argument those virtues are also 'public', of course—will enrich the individuals in a nation, which is the same thing as enriching the nation as a whole. To this end, he points out that painting, considered as a manufacture, has an advantage over all other manufactures, compared in terms of the difference in value between the original raw materials and the finished product. Considerations such as these do find a place in the writings of more traditional humanists—it is often claimed, as Richardson also claims, that good design in painting will have a spin-off effect in the improvement of manufacturing design.⁴⁷ But the fear of appearing too concerned with the pursuit of luxury, the chief enemy of civic virtue and so of the stability of the civil state, usually confines such suggestions to subordinate clauses and to parentheses, and they are made almost apologetically. Richardson, with the robustness of Defoe, makes them central to his version of how painting can promote the public interest.

Richardson departs from the traditional form of civic humanist theories of painting in his attitude, also, to religious paintings. The questions of whether artists should depict scenes from the scriptures, and whether images of such scenes should be displayed in churches, was a complex and even an embarrassing one for the most ardent proponents of a painting devoted to the promotion of public virtue, and for several reasons. The display of religious paintings in churches was regarded with suspicion on the grounds that it was one of the ways by which the Romish church encouraged superstition, and so exercised a kind of intellectual and social control abhorrent to the citizens of a free state and the members of a reformed church;⁴⁸ and

this suspicion often seems to mask another to which it is closely related: that such images tended to celebrate the private and passive virtues encouraged by Christianity, as opposed to the active public virtues—though no writer on painting acknowledges this anxiety with the candour of John Dennis, writing on the difference between the values of epic and of ‘priestcraft’. On the other hand, no theory of painting could take itself seriously which did not acknowledge the great Italian painters of religious subjects, and principally Raphael, as the models of the rules and the practice of painting, however much it could be claimed that these artists were themselves pale shadows of the great painters of the Greek republics, who were free citizens and free to celebrate their freedom in their work, while the Italians were forced to paint ‘as the priests commanded’ and as ‘popes enjoined’. By and large, the Italians were admired insofar as it was imagined that they eluded the dictates of their church, to paint images which exalted the ‘vile shrivelling passion’ of ‘beggarly modern devotion’, and idealised their figures as the Greeks had done. Insofar as they succeeded in this, their paintings gave an intimation of the eternal forms which, otherwise hidden in a platonic heaven which was adopted as a Christian heaven also, were made available as a new source of rational, natural revelation of the ‘Beauties of the Works of the great Author of Nature’.⁴⁹

The discourse of civic humanism was not opposed, of course, to intellectual and social control when it was directed against the potential enemies of the freedom of the citizen and the institutions of a free state—the mob of mechanics; and the usual solution to the problem of whether images of scriptural scenes should be encouraged, and whether they should be (in spite of the hostility of the Church of England) displayed in churches, was that they should be, because they would be of value in reforming the manners of the people at large, to whom they would teach lessons of faith and practical piety. The liberal man, however, at least in the early decades of the century, is treated as if in no need of such lessons in piety, and, as far as lessons in faith were concerned, they could best be drawn from images of ideal form, which could as well be represented in heroic as in religious subjects. Richardson often seems to endorse these views: he sees the value of displaying images of scriptural scenes in churches chiefly in terms of their power to ‘improve’ the ‘people’, who, ‘being now so well Instructed’ by the Church of England ‘as to be out of Danger of Superstitious Abuses,’ will be ‘more Sensibly affected than they can possibly be without This Efficacious means of Improvement, and Edification.’ The power of religious paintings to improve the gentleman-connoisseur, on the other hand, is described as largely a

function of the degree to which the ‘Ideas’ of nature they offer are ‘Rais’d’, and so enable the connoisseur ‘to get Noble Ideas of the Supreme Being’.⁵⁰

But Richardson’s extension of 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, leads him to claim, as Steele also claimed, that the connoisseur, as well as the people, could draw direct moral lessons from religious paintings, by which means ‘we are not only . . . Instructed in what we are to Believe, and Practise; but our Devotion is inflamed, and whatever may have happened to the contrary it may . . . also be Rectify’d’. Paintings of ‘the good Things of Religion’ are ‘useful to Improve and Instruct us’ as ‘a Book of . . . Divinity is’; so that a connoisseur, who has access to the lessons offered by paintings as well as by books, will have, not only ‘nobler Ideas, more Love to his Country’, and ‘more moral Virtue’, but also ‘more Faith, more Piety and Devotion’, than another not so instructed. He will be ‘a more ingenious, and a Better Man’. According to Steele, indeed, a less ambivalent proponent of ‘bourgeois humanism’ than Richardson, paintings of religious subjects are the only paintings which will form a ‘better man’.⁵¹

6. *The rhetorical aesthetic*

If painting, or if the worthiest branch of it, the heroic kind, addressed the spectator as the active citizen of a ‘civil State or Public’, and attempted not only to instruct him in the virtues necessary to that identity, but to ‘inflame’, to persuade him to exercise them, then it followed for traditional humanists among writers on painting that it must address him rhetorically. Rhetoric, according to Longinus—as here paraphrased by Hugh Blair—was an art peculiarly found among free men: ‘Liberty . . . is the nurse of true genius: it animates the spirit, and invigorates the hopes of men; excites honourable emulation, and a desire of excelling in every art. All other qualifications . . . you may find among those who are deprived of liberty; but never did a slave become an orator.’ Rhetoric—I mean political, as opposed to ecclesiastical, or judicial rhetoric—was the most appropriate model for explaining how it was that heroic painting addressed us, because, according to Blair, it proposes as its end ‘some point, most commonly of public utility or good, in favour of which’ it seeks ‘to determine the hearers’. It was, in short, ‘concerned with persuading men to act, to decide, to approve; it was intellect in action

and in society, presupposing always the presence of other men to whom the intellect was addressing itself'; and presupposing also that those others were such men as were able to act, decide, and approve—were free citizens.⁵²

The comparison between rhetoric and painting had been made by Quintilian and by Cicero; for Alberti, the most important task of painting was to 'move the soul', and he advised painters to get to know orators as well as poets if they wished to advance in their art.⁵³ The analogy is well established in England by the early eighteenth century: *The Judgment of Hercules*, for example, was, as we shall shortly see, conceived at once as an exhibition of the powers of rhetoric, and as a work which exercised those powers on the spectator. Turnbull defines painting as 'one of the instructing or moving Arts'; it was, like 'oratory', an art concerned with 'illustrating, embellishing, and impressing Truths'. There was, of course, an important distinction to be made between rhetoric and painting, in that the former was 'invariably and necessarily immersed in particular situations, particular decisions, and particular relationships'; it was always a call to the performance of some particular action in pursuit of some particular 'point . . . of public utility or good'; whereas painting was concerned rather to 'inflare' us with a general zeal to emulate the particular actions of heroes, should the occasion arise—it is in these terms that Shaftesbury and Turnbull conceive of heroic painting as of particular value in the education of youth.⁵⁴ This distinction was acknowledged implicitly, rather than openly recognised, by writers who believed that painting functioned by means of what I shall call a rhetorical aesthetic; it was acknowledged, in short, by the space accorded to painting in the imagined life of the citizen. For painting was there treated as the private recreation of a public man, indulged when public duties permitted, but properly a preparation for the resumption of those duties, or the exemplary study of a man who had earned the right to retire from them.⁵⁵

As Kames points out in relation to epic poetry, it was essential to an art which attempted to communicate rhetorically, that it should make us believe in the reality of the objects it represented—that it should be an art of illusion. 'If once we began to doubt' the 'reality' of an object or an incident, then 'farewell relish and concern'. He argues against the introduction of machinery, of 'imaginary beings' into epic, on the grounds that 'fictions of that nature may amuse by their novelty and singularity; but they never move the sympathetic passions, because they cannot *impose* on the mind any perception of reality' (my emphasis). From Aglionby onwards, those who argue for the rhetorical function of painting insist on the necessity of illusion.

Painting, explains Aglionby, 'by a strange sort of *Inchantment*, makes the little *Cloth* and *Colours* show *Living Figures*, that upon a flat *Superficies* seem *Round*, and deceives the *Eye* into a Belief of *Solids*, while there is nothing but *Lights* and *Shadows* there'. Dryden quotes Philostratus to the effect that painting must deceive the eye and the mind; and Shaftesbury argues that the 'pleasing illusion or deceit' of a painting makes the 'sole use and beauty of the spectacle'. Daniel Webb argues that the best paintings stand 'in the place of the things which they represent', by 'imposing' on our senses; and even in the early nineteenth century—by which time, as we shall see, the influence of Reynolds in particular had almost banished the vocabulary of deceit and illusion from the theory of painting—Opie still declared that one end of painting was 'the giving effect, illusion, or the true appearance of objects to the eye'.⁵⁶ As Kames's remarks on epic suggest, the failure of painting to deceive the eye—it is not my purpose here to consider how it could possibly have succeeded in doing so—would entail a failure in its power to persuade; for it is essential to a rhetorical art that we should not be distanced from it, so as to find ourselves in a position to compare a representation with its original in nature. A painting should strike, should move, and should not awaken our interest in the question of its 'likeness'.

This dependence of painting, considered as a rhetorical art, on illusion, gave rise to a problem which—though it was a problem also for late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century writers on painting in France—was potentially more embarrassing for writers in the British tradition of civic humanist criticism, and was therefore largely ignored. The problem, in the form in which it manifested itself to French critics, was discussed at some length by de Piles, and it is as follows. If the success of painting depends upon its power to deceive, to make it 'seem possible for the figures to come out of the picture, as it were, in order to talk with those who look at them', then surely the painter should depict simple appearances, an unidealised nature, and one we can recognise as continuous with the world outside the picture. On the other hand, argues de Piles, the pleasure of painting derives also from the ideal images it offers, for 'ideal', as opposed to 'simple' truth, 'comprehends an abundance of thoughts, a richness of invention, a propriety of attitudes, an elegance of outlines, a choice of fine expressions', and so on. The disadvantage, however, of ideal truth is that it cannot deceive us: though it may offer us more pleasure, it will also risk putting us in a contemplative frame of mind by which we are detached from the work, and are concerned to judge it. In order to preserve the mimicry of painting, and its power to

delight us with the ideal, de Piles proposes that the artist should endeavour to represent a 'compound truth', composed of simple and ideal, able at once to deceive and to please.⁵⁷

De Piles's solution to this problem is borrowed by a few writers on painting in England, notably by Opie, to whom perhaps it seemed to promise a way of coping with the particular form in which the problem was perceived in England. It was a rule constitutive of a rhetorical aesthetic that a good painting could move all who looked at it: as Turnbull explains,

the Unlearned are seldom wrong in their Judgment about what is good or bad in any of the Arts . . . the chief difference between the Learned and the Vulgar consists in this, that the latter are not able to apply Rules and Maxims, but judge merely from what they feel; whereas the former can reason about their feeling from Principles of Science and Art.⁵⁸

For civic humanist writers, the difficulty in this position, which had the authority of Quintilian and Cicero, was that the ability of a painting to move us, to persuade us to emulate the action of the great, depended on its success in deceiving the eye. But the fact that the vulgar were ignorant of the 'Principles of Science and Art' meant (as Du Bos, most influentially, had argued) that they were more susceptible to the power of illusion than the liberal, because it was harder for them to be distanced, by an awareness of those principles, to the point where their first reaction to a work of art was to criticise it, rather than to respond to it immediately. Heroic painting, therefore, was likely to be more successful in persuading the vulgar to emulate heroic actions than the liberal, at the same time as it was also true that the vulgar were incapable of performing such actions.⁵⁹

The problem could be dispatched, it might seem, and the value of ideal art reasserted, by acknowledging that the vulgar were more likely to be moved by images of simple or 'common' nature than the liberal: the latter were unlikely to be moved to virtuous actions by such images, because their ability to be so would be intercepted by their disgust at the vulgarity of common nature. If images of an entirely ideal nature, on the other hand, risked departing so far from common nature as to fail to persuade us of their reality, then the solution might appear to lie where de Piles had found it, in the imitation of 'compound truth', sufficiently simple to persuade, but sufficiently ideal to persuade us to act, specifically, in the interests of that universal human nature which was represented in ideal images of the body.

But in whatever way this 'compound truth' could be described, it

could not be concealed that it must involve a lessening of the rhetorical power of art by reducing its power to deceive; and perhaps for that reason traditional humanism did not adopt de Piles's solution, which, by reducing the rhetorical power of art, weakened also the association which the analogy with rhetoric offered, between the republic of taste and a political republic of free and active citizens. If traditional humanism was therefore left with the problem, that a rhetorical and deceptive painting was likely to be more effective in moving the ignorant than the learned, the problem could be diffused by conceiving of the ignorant as ignorant not (as the vulgar were) of 'Men, Manners . . . Virtue, and publick Good', but simply of the art of painting, and by leaving the power of painting to move the vulgar unconsidered, except as an occasion to exalt by contrast the judgment of the polite. The contradictions generated by the rhetorical aesthetic were thus left unacknowledged, until they were resolved by Reynolds, at the cost—though it did not seem to him to be so—of that aesthetic itself, and of the claim that the true function of 'public' art is to move us to emulate acts of public virtue. In achieving this resolution, Reynolds appears to have been anticipated, to some extent, by Richardson, who, like Reynolds, had little interest in the notion that art addresses us rhetorically, and none at all in an aesthetic of illusion. For him, as for Reynolds, painting addresses us by communicating ideas to our understanding, and it is thus that it puts 'the Soul in Motion'.⁶⁰ Richardson, I am suggesting (and I shall discuss the point at greater length in my first chapter) seems to develop what I shall describe as a 'philosophical' aesthetic, an aesthetic of contemplation, not of action, and one more appropriate to an audience which wished to claim that it was animated with public spirit, but which could not so easily claim the opportunity to perform acts of public—let alone of heroic—virtue.

7. 'The Judgment of Hercules'

I want now to collect up the various features we have so far considered of the civic humanist theory of painting in its traditional form, and I can do this best by a discussion of the essay, which Shaftesbury published in French in 1712, which was added to the *Characteristicks* in 1713, and which is a plan, following the account of the story in Xenophon, of a painting of the Choice of Hercules, a painting which he later 'brought . . . into practice' by 'the hand of a master-painter', Paolo de Matthaeis. The subject of the picture he describes as follows:



1. Simon Gribelin, after Paolo de Matthaëis, *The Judgment of Hercules* (1713).

HERCULES . . . being young, and retir'd to a solitary place in order to deliberate on the Choice he was to make of the different ways of Life, was accosted (as our Historian relates) by the two Goddesses, VIRTUE and PLEASURE. 'Tis on the issue of the Controversy between these *Two*, that the Character of HERCULES depends. So that we may naturally give to this Piece and History, as well the Title of *The Education*, as the *Choice or Judgment* of HERCULES.⁶¹

Hercules occupies the centre of the picture, dressed in the skin of the lion he was later to kill, and leaning upon his club. To his left Pleasure is half-reclining on the ground, in an inviting state of undress, with utensils at her side 'to express the Debauches of the Table-kind'. To his right stands Virtue, carrying the 'Magisterial Sword' which is 'her true characteristick Mark', and with a bridle and helmet, emblems of 'Forbearance and Indurance', on the ground beside her. Virtue is pointing into the distance: either, Shaftesbury suggests, to the 'mountainous rocky Way' which leads 'to Honour, and the just Glory of heroick Actions'; or 'to the Sky, or Stars, in the same sublime sense'; but in either case away from 'the flowry Way of the Vale and

Meadows', recommended to Hercules by Pleasure, though (perhaps so as not to make pleasure too attractive) barely represented in the picture.⁶²

The choice Hercules must make is not between virtue and pleasure in a loose and general sense, but between civic, public virtue and private vice: between the 'Inaction', the 'Supineness', the 'Eg-feminacy' of luxury, and 'a life full of Toil and Hardship, under the conduct of VIRTUE, for the deliverance of Mankind from Tyranny and Oppression'—a life devoted, that is, to the defence of republican liberty. And for that reason the picture must communicate with us *rhetorically*: it must recommend the life of public virtue in the same manner as a patriotic orator would recommend it to an audience of free citizens. The alternative to a rhetorical painting is represented by Shaftesbury as emblematic painting; and although Shaftesbury distinguishes his characters by emblems, these are not, he explains, 'absolutely of the *Emblem-kind*', but are—in the case, for example, of Virtue—'portable Instruments', such as she 'may be well suppos'd to have brought along with her'; and the Vale and Mountain, though they have emblematic significance, are still an appropriate and as it were a natural setting for the fable.⁶³

To Shaftesbury, emblematic and allegorical art is tainted with the illiberal and idolatrous superstitions of priestcraft; it is deliberately 'enigmatical' and 'mysterious', as if concerned to hide rather than to reveal its meaning. Allegorical figures, distinguished by emblematic attributes, have no 'manner of similitude or colourable resemblance to any thing extant in real Nature'; whereas a rhetorical work, as we have seen, must deceive the eye. 'The compleatly imitative and illusive Art of PAINTING'. Shaftesbury explains,

surpassing by so many Degrees, and in so many Privileges, all other human Fiction, or imitative Art, aspires in a directer manner towards Deceit, and a Command over our very Sense; she must of necessity abandon whatever is over-learned, humorous, or witty; to maintain her-self in what is *natural, credible, and winning of our Assent*: that she may thus acquit her-self of what is her chief Province, *the specious Appearance of the Object she represents*.

The introduction of allegorical figures, '*fantastick, miraculous, or hyperbolic*', into this 'compleatly imitative Art'—and I must confess it is unclear to me why, on the mere grounds that their attributes are not 'absolutely' emblematic, Shaftesbury excludes Virtue and Pleasure from this charge—is dangerous, insofar as we may be 'induc'd' to contemplate 'as Realitys' those 'divine Personages and miraculous Forms, which the leading Painters, antient and modern

have speciously design'd, according to the particular Doctrine or Theology of their several religious and national Beliefs'. What is more, the emblematic may 'distract or dissipate the Sight, and confound the Judgment' of even 'the most intelligent Spectators'; they may, in short, have the effect of making the painting ambiguous, an issue I shall discuss at greater length in a moment.⁶⁴

The painting may be described as 'rhetorical' in a double sense: for if its function is to be an instructive 'memorandum', the choice which Hercules is being persuaded to make is a choice we too must make, and he is a figure for the spectator. Thus the painting must display the response made by Hercules to Virtue's oratory, a response which is an image of how we, too, must respond to the painting as a whole. The moment to be represented by the painter must be chosen so as to display the rhetorical nature of the encounter: Shaftesbury considers various possible moments, and rejects three of them, as inadequate to represent the force of Virtue's powers of persuasion. At the start of the debate, when the goddesses first 'accost' Hercules, 'he admires, he contemplates; but is not yet engag'd or interested'; in the middle of the debate, Hercules will be 'interested', but 'divided, and in doubt'; at its end, when Hercules is 'intirely won by *Virtue*', there would be no room 'either for the persuasive Rhetorick of *VIRTUE* (who must have already ended her Discourse) or for the insinuating Address of *PLEASURE*, who having lost her Cause, must necessarily appear displeas'd, or out of humour: a Circumstance which wou'd no way sute her Character'. The correct moment to be represented, Shaftesbury decides, is 'when their Dispute is already far advanc'd, and *VIRTUE* seems to gain her Cause'.⁶⁵

This choice enables Virtue to be represented in an attitude and manner most fully rhetorical: she will be '*speaking* with all the Force of Action, such as wou'd appear in an excellent Orator, when at the height, and in the most affecting part of his Discourse'. She will be '*standing*'; since 'tis contrary to all probable Appearance . . . that in the very Heat and highest Transport of Speech, the Speaker shou'd be seen sitting, or in any Posture which might express Repose'. In order to express 'the *arduous* and *rocky* Way of *VIRTUE*', she will be shown in an 'ascending Posture . . . with one Foot advanc'd, in a sort of climbing Action, over the rough and thorny Ground'; and, 'as for the *Hands* or *Arms*, which in real Oratory, and during the strength of Elocution, must of necessity be active', she will point, as we have seen, to the mountain, sky or stars.⁶⁶ Pleasure must be shown as silent, for she has had her say. She may be drawn, Shaftesbury suggests, with a surprising generosity to 'the Painter's Fancy', 'either *standing*, *leaning*, *sitting*, or *lying*'; but however she disposes herself,

she must appear languid, so that her body expresses her 'Ease and Indolence', and her '*persuasive* or *indicative Effort*', in a proportion of four to one. Her head and body, however, should entirely suggest '*indulgent ease*': 'one Hand might be absolutely resign'd to it; serving only to support, with much ado, the lolling lazy Body'. Hercules, finally, may also be represented in a variety of poses; but, judging from the picture, Shaftesbury eventually decided on one which enabled the expression of a transient stage in his response to Virtue's speech, a growing determination, in which 'the Tracts or Footsteps' of an earlier doubt, even of an earlier inclination to pleasure, are still visible. In this attitude, 'he looks on *Virtue* . . . earnestly, and with extreme attention, having some part of the Action of his body inclining still towards *Pleasure*, and discovering by certain Features of Concern and Pity, intermix'd with the commanding or conquering Passion, that the Decision he is about to make in favour of *Virtue*, cost him not a little'—but that Virtue's persuasiveness has reconciled him to that cost.⁶⁷

To enforce its rhetorical point—to ensure that we understand its subject, the choice it asks us to make, the appropriate response it demands—the painting must declare unambiguously to what genre it belongs, or 'what *Nature* it is design'd to imitate', and that it is '*historical* and *moral*', not '*merely natural*'. In landscape-painting, Shaftesbury argues: 'Inanimates are principal: 'Tis the Earth, the Water, the Stones and Rocks which live. All other Life becomes subordinate. Humanity, Sense, Manners, must in this place yield, and become inferior'. But in history-painting, the '*first and highest Order*' of the art, the painter must ensure that the representation of '*intelligent Life*', of figures divine and human, is what principally engages us. To these, the '*other Species* . . . must . . . surrender and become subservient'; for 'nothing can be more deform'd than a Confusion of many Beautys: And the Confusion becomes inevitable, where the Subjection is not compleat'.⁶⁸

The painting must, in short, be as unambiguous as possible, if it is to carry its rhetorical point: a painting, as Shaftesbury explains elsewhere in the *Characteristicks*, must be '*a Whole*, by it-self, compleat, independent'; so that 'Particulars . . . must yield to the general Design', and 'all things be subservient to that which is principal: in order to form a certain *Easiness of Sight*; a simple, clear, and *united View* which wou'd be broken and disturb'd by the Expression of any thing peculiar or distinct'.⁶⁹ This general injunction against ambiguity applies in every 'part' of painting, and in every aspect of the particular painting we are considering. As far as the invention is concerned, if all three figures were represented as speaking at once,

the effect would be the same 'as such a Conversation wou'd have upon the Ear were we in reality to hear it'; and if it is not clear from a painting which of the various possible moments in an action the painter had chosen to depict, the mind of the spectator will be left in 'uncertainty'. In the composition of the picture, Hercules, 'the *first* or *principal Figure* of our Piece', should be 'plac'd in the middle', so that we cannot doubt that 'his Agony, or inward Conflict . . . makes the principal Action'. In the matter of character and expression, if the '*persuasive Effort*', for example, of Pleasure, were 'over-strongly express'd', 'the Figure wou'd seem to speak . . . so, as to create a double Meaning, or *equivocal Sense* in Painting'. The colouring, finally, should have a harmonious unity: a 'Riot of Colours'—this is the first use in English, as far as I have been able to discover, of this intriguing phrase—would 'raise such a Confusion' and 'Oppugnancy . . . as wou'd to any judicious Eye appear absolutely intolerable'.⁷⁰

This concern that painting should be as unambiguous as possible is not unique to Shaftesbury: it is expressed, among critics that Shaftesbury may be presumed to have read, by Du Fresnoy, Félibien, Bourdon, Lebrun, and de Piles; even the figure by which an ambiguous work is compared with a roomful of people, all speaking at once, is borrowed from de Piles, as it would be again by Richardson, Hogarth, Winckelmann and Algarotti.⁷¹ It seems to me, however, that this concern receives an unusual degree of emphasis in civic humanist criticism—not only in Shaftesbury, but in Richardson and (as we shall see) in Reynolds—and that it derives from the specifically civic concern which takes such different forms in those writers. I can best explain what I mean by pointing out that the most important argument used by Plato to justify the exclusion of painters from his republic, was that they introduce 'faction and strife' into 'the domain of sight' by distorting the measurements of objects in the process of representing them in two dimensions. The result of this is that a man cannot remain of one mind with himself when he looks at a painting, for the best, the rational part of his mind, which contradicts the measurements of painted objects, is in conflict with the inferior part, which agrees with them. The painter thus introduces dissension into the mind of the citizen, a dissension which is specifically related by Plato to the inversion of the proper relations of the social orders within a state.⁷²

I have already had occasion to quote a remark by Pocock to the effect that it was a leading doctrine of civic humanism that 'the integrity of the polity must be founded on the integrity of the personality, and that the latter could be maintained only through devotion to universal, not particular goods'; and in the context of this doctrine,

and Plato's, it will not escape our notice that all the examples that Shaftesbury offers of how ambiguity may threaten the unity of a painting involve a disturbance of the proper relations of general and particular, or of principals and inferiors. 'Particulars' must 'yield to the general Design'—just as, we may reflect, particular good must give way to universal in the state, and within the hierarchy of desires in the mind of the citizen. 'All things' must be 'subservient' to the 'principal'—in the same way as a 'Riot of Colours' must not threaten, or distract our attention from, the clear outline of the hero of Shaftesbury's design, and as inferior nature must yield to '*intelligent Life*' in the highest, the heroic kind. The concern in civic humanist theories of painting, that 'all ambiguity must be removed',⁷³ may be, in short, a concern with the integrity of the personality of the citizen, achieved by a subordination of private to general interests, and with the order of society, maintained by a submission of inferiors to their natural rulers. If painting does not ensure this integrity and order, it can have no place in the political republic which civic humanism seeks to create or to preserve.

8. *Liberty and luxury: the history of painting*

I want in this section to consider the history of art, or what might better be called the philosophy of the history of art, which belongs to the discourse I am describing—the account it offers of the 'moral causes' responsible for the rise and decline of painting in particular societies. And though I have so far been concerned to characterise a civic humanist theory of painting in the forms it took before the intervention of Sir Joshua Reynolds, there is on this topic a large measure of agreement among writers on painting at the beginning and end of the eighteenth century, and even at the start of the nineteenth. As far as the rise of painting was concerned, this was invariably understood as, pre-eminently, the effect of liberty: not just the political liberty of a state which is not subject to the dominion of another, and not just that kind of personal freedom which is enjoyed by all who are not slaves; but the freedom, political and personal, which is enjoyed by free citizens who are able to participate in the government of themselves. On the importance of other, subsidiary moral causes—the prevalence of peace, the availability of patronage—there was room for some diversity of opinion; but this belief in political liberty as the efficient cause of excellence in the arts in general, and in painting in particular, is a defining characteristic of

civic humanist theories of civilization. To question it is to place oneself outside the orbit of the discourse, and to occupy a position where, though it might still be possible to deploy the critical vocabulary of civic humanism, it would be impossible to represent the values it embodies as authorised by a coherent political philosophy, or to maintain that the republic of the fine arts, or of taste, was structured as a political republic.

The argument that liberty, in the sense I have specified, is essential if the arts are to flourish, was spelled out in detail by Shaftesbury and by Turnbull. 'There can be no public', insists Shaftesbury, 'but where' the 'people' are 'included': the 'people' understood, of course, as the aggregate of free citizens in a state, sufficiently numerous to establish the state as 'free', sufficiently few to exclude the mob, who cannot aspire to public spirit, and who cannot *see* the public of which they are therefore denied membership. 'And without a public voice', Shaftesbury continues, one 'knowingly guided and directed' by wise rulers and arbiters of taste, 'there is nothing which can raise a true ambition in the artist; nothing which can exalt the genius of the workman, or make him emulous of after fame, and of the approbation of his country'. In a state animated by 'the genius of liberty', in which property is secured by equal laws, issuing from and administered by free institutions, 'everything co-operates . . . towards the improvement of art and science'; and:

when the free spirit of a nation turns itself this way, judgments are formed: critics arise; the public eye and ear improve; a right taste prevails, and in a manner forces its way. Nothing is so improving, nothing so natural, so congenial to the liberal arts, as that reigning liberty and high spirit of a people, which from the habit of judging in the highest matters for themselves, makes them freely judge of other subjects, and enter thoroughly into the characters as well of men and manners, as of the products or works of men, in art and science.

The arts flourish where they are made the objects of free and equal debate, and that can happen only where the government of a state is similarly a matter on which its citizens may judge 'for themselves'. For Turnbull, the most important moral cause 'to which the mutual Growth, or Declension of all the Arts and Sciences is ascrib'd by ancient Authors' (he has Longinus chiefly in mind) is:

the Prevalence or Fall of Liberty and publick Spirit. Liberty and publick Virtue are the common Parent under whose Favour and Patronage alone they can prosper and flourish; and without it they sink, decline and perish.

Liberty or a free Constitution is absolutely necessary to produce

and uphold that Freedom, Greatness and Boldness of Mind, without which it cannot rise to noble and sublime conceptions. Slavery soon unmans and dispirits a People; bereaves them of their Virtue and Genius, and sinks them into a mean, spiritless, enfeebled Race that hardly deserves to be called Men.⁷⁴

The model of a free constitution was to be found in the free republics of Greece, and especially in the Athenian democracy. 'Freedom', Hume explained, 'naturally begets public spirit, especially in small states'; and, according to John Robert Scott, in the city-states of Greece, 'each citizen felt himself equally interested with any other to extend the reputation, to exalt the glory, and to enlarge the consequence of the state'. The result of this equal interest was productive, according to James Thomson and numerous others, of a spirit of emulation: a competition among the individuals in a state, each attempting to establish himself as a paragon of civic virtue; and between one state and another, each striving to create a form of government best fitted to serve the interests of its citizens. Because the aim of the competition was thus to furnish exemplary models for all mankind, the reward for victory was enjoyed by everyone: it was 'the prize of all'. It still is, according to James Harris:

The Grecian commonwealths, while they maintained their liberty, were the most heroic confederacy that ever existed. They were the politest, the bravest, and the wisest of men. In the short space of little more than a century, they became such statesmen, warriors, orators, historians, physicians, poets, critics, painters, sculptors, architects, and (last of all) philosophers, that one can hardly help considering that golden period as a providential event in honour of human nature, to shew to what perfection the species might ascend.⁷⁵

The exemplary public spirit of the Greeks was a continual stimulus to arts: 'whatever flourish'd in the ancient world, writes Shaftesbury, 'or was rais'd to any degree of Correctness, or real Perfection' in the arts, was 'by means of GREECE alone'; 'nor can this appear strange, when we consider the fortunate Constitution of that People', 'animated' by a 'social publick and *free* Spirit'. That spirit ensured that the arts 'served public virtue': 'such was the spirit of patriotism in Greece', writes Flaxman, 'from the age of Pericles to the death of Alexander the Great', that 'the richest citizens did not endeavour to exceed others in the magnificence of their houses or tables, but employed their wealth for the security and defence of

their country, and in raising noble public buildings and works for the service of religion, and in honour of public and private virtue.⁷⁶

'Vast sums', writes Scott, were 'expended by the Grecian states on their public monuments and their public works', and the art of painting no less than of architecture and sculpture was consecrated to public purposes: 'I wish', writes Mrs Montagu, of Reynolds, 'he was employed by the public in some great work that would do honour to our country in future ages . . . The Athenians did not employ such men in painting portraits to place over a chimney or the door of a private cabinet.' The artist was regarded in Greece, according to Pliny, as 'res communis terrarum', 'the common property of the world', a phrase usually rendered by writers in England to mean that he was 'the property of the public'. The 'professors' of the fine arts, according to West, were regarded as 'public characters', or, according to Scott, as 'champions' of the 'people', not 'the combatants in a private contest'. Because the artist in Greece was actuated entirely by public spirit, the demand that he should serve the public accorded fully with his inclinations: he was a 'freeman', not only insofar as only those who were not slaves were allowed to practise painting, but because his duty was at one with his inclination. He was free, too, in the sense that the dignity of his calling and the value of his productions were recognised by the public, so that 'he was not obliged to solicit for employment with humiliating applications, and, when employed, to labour under the multiplied disadvantages of deficient or stinted means, of complying with vitiated judgments, of submitting to the senseless whims of folly and caprice'. He was judged by the public, as by a tribunal of his equals.⁷⁷

It was virtually an article of faith among civic humanist writers on painting, as on other topics, that in Britain the Glorious Revolution had established a form of government comparable with that of Athens in the freedom it vouchsafed to its citizens. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss just how it could be believed that a mixed constitution, a limited franchise, and a limited monarchy, could offer a form of liberty at once equal to, and likely to last longer than, that of republican Athens, or how therefore a republican political vocabulary could be used to describe the constitution of Britain; but a couple of quotations may serve to exemplify that very general belief. According to Dennis,

As the Athenians had Liberty with a Common-wealth, the English enjoy the very same Liberty under the Government of the best of Queens, and in so doing are the happiest People in the World . . . I desire the Reader to believe, that I am not such a fool to contend

for Names but for Things; that Liberty is Liberty under a limited Monarchy, as much as under a Common-wealth.

And according to Shaftesbury, the differences between a republican government and the 'national constitution, and legal monarchy' of Britain were fully explained by the far greater population and area of Britain as compared with the Greek city-states. The constitution of Britain was 'fitted' to 'hold together' 'so mighty a people; all sharers (though at so far a distance from each other) in the government of themselves; and meeting under one head in one vast metropolis'. The newly-established liberty of Britain appeared to ensure, therefore, that, as Richardson prophesied (and here he is entirely at one with more 'traditional' humanists), 'if ever the Ancient Great, and Beautiful Taste in Painting revives it will be in *England*'; for 'there is a Haughty Courage, an Elevation of Thought, a Greatness of Taste, a Love of Liberty, a Simplicity, and Honesty among us, which we inherit from our Ancestors, and which belongs to us as *Englishmen*'. Shaftesbury was similarly convinced that a 'united Britain would soon become the principal seat of arts; and by her politeness and advantages in this kind, will shew evidently, how much she owes to those counsels, which taught her to exert herself so resolutely on behalf of the common cause, and that of her own liberty, and happy constitution.'⁷⁸

This theme was taken up by Thomson, Akenside, Turnbull, Algarotti, and even by Benjamin West, who still believed that no people were 'so likely to revive good art as the English', at a time when it had become more usual to wonder why they had failed to do so. There was however one slight difficulty in pronouncing these prophecies: for had not the France of Louis XIV succeeded in resuscitating the arts, if not in restoring them to full health, much more effectively than Britain appeared to be doing? 'Where absolute Power is', Shaftesbury insisted, 'there is no PUBLICK'; but where absolute power had been, there Poussin and Lebrun had been also, hardly the equals of the painters produced by the republics of Florence and Venice, but a class or two above Sir James Thornhill and the managers of the British portrait-factories. The most usual way out of this difficulty was the way taken by Shaftesbury and Thomson: the tyranny of Louis had indeed produced painters of genuine merit, because he had endowed the arts so generously— which only went to show how much Britain, when 'imperial bounty'— royal or public patronage—was equally forthcoming, would excel France in the arts, for in Britain they would also have, as their stimulus and subject, a system of liberty.⁷⁹

The freedom of its constitution once established, it might seem that

a state would also need a prolonged period of peace to ensure the successful cultivation of the fine arts; but the necessity of peace is conceded reluctantly, at best, by a discourse on which the example of Sparta is almost as influential as that of Athens. Peace may be inimical to public spirit, which, as Hume pointed out, 'must increase, when the public is almost in continual alarm, and men are obliged every moment to expose themselves to the greatest dangers for its defence'. And so, according to Turnbull, peace will promote the arts in a free society, only if 'Opulence and profound Quiet' do not lull the mind into an equally 'profound Lethargy, apt to effeminate and enervate it'. Better than that would be 'War and Contests', which 'keep the Mind awake, lively and vigilant, rouse the Spirits', and 'inflame the Love of Liberty, by keeping up a warm sense of publick Good, and of our Obligations to contend for it vigorously'. The chief danger, then, to public spirit and therefore to the arts that served it, is the 'vain, luxurious, selfish EFFEMINACY', represented by Pleasure in her debate with Virtue for the soul of Hercules; and luxury is the inevitable result of commerce conducted on any large scale. As Blake, as committed as anyone of his generation to the civic humanist ideal, explains: 'Empires flourish till they become Commercial', and commerce is 'destructive' to the arts.⁸⁰ 'The long reign of luxury and pleasure under King Charles the Second', Shaftesbury believed, had stunted the development of the arts in England. Voluptuousness and acquisitiveness, according to Kames, 'contract the heart, and make every principle give way to self-love; benevolence and public spirit . . . are little felt, and less regarded; and . . . there can be no place for . . . the fine arts' in a mind or in a society so corrupted. And luxury, argued Berkeley, had effects still more fatal than this: 'a corrupt luxurious People must . . . fall into Slavery', for their weakness will expose them to foreign invasion; and even if 'no Attempt be made upon them', they will fall into slavery 'of themselves'—they will become the slaves of their own insatiable appetite for luxury and the pleasures of sense.⁸¹

The consequences for painting of this decline into luxury will be considered on various occasions by the writers to whom the following chapters are devoted, and there is no need to examine them in detail here. It was extremely difficult for traditional humanists to believe anything other than that, as John Brown claimed, painting was 'debased into Effeminacy' by the decline of public spirit that is brought about by luxury. For luxury, as Kames has already made clear to us, is generated by, and itself generates a selfishness which seduces, because it can afford to seduce, the fine arts from their proper public function. It creates a demand for paintings as articles of private

property; artists become no longer the 'property of the public' but the servants of individual patrons; they are employed to gratify the self-interest of those individuals; of men, that is, not in their uniform civic identity, but as private persons, who differ widely in their tastes, and who will only hesitate to dissolve the public consensus as to what constitutes good taste, if that consensus is represented to them as based, not on the universal principles of human nature, but on fashion. By luxury, the demand for paintings is increased; men set themselves up as painters when their abilities give them no title to do so; and what follows from here had already been described at length by the critics of seventeenth-century France. Thus, as Fréart de Chambray, for example, had explained, painting becomes a trade ('un mestier')—just as, in luxurious societies, war had become a trade, carried on by armies of mercenaries; it declines into mannerism, because men who cannot grasp the principles of art must practise it mechanically, by rule and rote; it becomes ornamental, so as to gratify the sensual appetites of its patrons; and so on.⁸²

There were writers, of course, who dissented from this analysis: who could halt the explanatory machine of traditional humanism for long enough to suggest, as Richardson did, that paintings might reasonably be considered as, among other things, articles of trade; or that the increase of commerce, which need not, perhaps, be synonymous with luxury, could lead to an improvement in the art of painting, in the same way as it could stimulate the improvement of other manufactures. But suggestions such as these could not easily be advanced with conviction, because their application could not easily be controlled. They could not be confined to the discussion of a particular issue in the history of art, but threatened the coherence of the whole vocabulary of the criticism of painting, and, in particular, the distinction between liberal and mechanic on which the republic of the fine arts, and the political republic, were both founded.

9. *Theories of painting in France*

I want now to glance at an issue which will probably have been exercising those of my readers who are familiar with German and, especially, with French writings on painting of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: that I have been describing, as a specifically British, and civic humanist theory, what is no more than the common currency of the criticism of painting in other countries of Europe where such criticism was being written. There is, of course, a good deal of truth in this: writers on art in eighteenth-century Britain were

much dependent on French writers of the later seventeenth century in particular, and on Du Bos, whose *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* were first published in 1719; and German writers of the middle and late eighteenth century were much dependent on their predecessors in France and Britain, as well as in Italy. Much of what I have claimed as characteristic of the discourse of civic humanism—the distinctions, for instance, between liberal and mechanic, and between rhetorical and emblematic, could be exemplified from continental writings on art. I have already found it convenient to draw on Mengs's account of the first of those distinctions, and I could have used Du Bos, in particular, to describe the second.⁸³

But my claim that the British writings on painting that I have been considering employ a civic discourse, and that this distinguishes them from the writings of their predecessors and contemporaries abroad, does not depend on the argument that particular ideas within the British critical tradition were unique to it, but that those ideas develop a distinctive coherence by virtue of their connection with a coherent, and—by the early eighteenth century—distinctively British political philosophy. And I want now to suggest that the writings especially of the French critics from whom the British borrowed, owe their coherence not to a republican account of social and political organisation, but to one best understood in terms of a feudal distinction between estates; that, consequently, the account they offer of how painting addresses us, and what its function might be, is significantly different from what we have encountered in Britain; and that because they do not employ a specifically republican account of history, they did not develop a specifically social and political account of the decline of painting, such as we have found among British writers. Where appropriate, I shall suggest that some of this may be true, also, of Winckelmann and Mengs, who may have been influential, respectively, on Fuseli and James Barry.

I have suggested that the distinction between liberal and mechanic, in terms of the qualifications for citizenship in a political republic, is constitutive of the 'traditional' discourse of civic humanism, and so of civic humanist theories of painting in whatever form they take. The same distinction is made by writers on painting in France: according to Félibien, for example, the art of painting is worthy of occupying a distinguished rank among the liberal arts, but those who have attempted to furnish it with rules have, by concentrating on the less noble parts of the art, left it still among the mechanical arts. Significantly, however, the distinction is more usually made in the form of one between 'nobles' and 'ouvriers'. I make this point with some caution, for both words are ambiguous: 'noble', as well as meaning

'of noble blood', has a range of meanings suggestive of elevation about the common run of things, as it has in English, and as, arguably, it has in the paraphrase of Félibien I have just offered; and in these senses it may be used with varying degrees of emphasis on its connection with notions of the aristocratic. 'Ouvrier', as adjective and noun, can refer to those who perform manual labour, but in seventeenth-century France it can refer also to those employed in professions as well as in trades, and who perform them, by way of distinction, particularly well. When God is described as 'le grand ouvrier', no aspersions are being cast on his condition or employment; nor does van Opstal intend any, when he comments on the profound learning of the 'ouvrier' who created the Laocoon.⁸⁴

When, however, the two terms are directly opposed, they seem to take on the function of the distinction between liberal and mechanic in English criticism, but with the difference, that what is opposed to 'ouvrier' is less a civic than a specifically aristocratic elevation above the merely workaday. We may glimpse this in Poussin's remark on the subject-matter of painting, that 'elle doit estre prise noble, qui n'aye receu aucune qualité de l'ouvrier'; we may see it more clearly in Félibien, when he remarks that different 'ouvriers' apply themselves to different subjects, and adds that 'il est constant qu'à mesure qu'ils s'occupent aux choses les plus difficiles & les plus nobles, ils sortent de ce qu'il y a de plus bas & de plus commun, & s'anoblissent par un travail plus illustre' (my emphases). The point becomes unambiguous in Du Bos's account of genius: geniuses are born, he insists, and so they are 'nobles Artisans'; those without natural genius remain all their lives 'de vils ouvriers & des manoeuvres, dont il faut payer les journées'.⁸⁵ The word 'noble' occurs, of course, often enough in British writings on painting: the ideas of a painter, his subject-matter, may be noble; but the word does not appear as one of a pair of terms, in such a way as to call attention so directly to the suggestion that a distinction in terms of intellectual dignity is being figured as a distinction in terms of birth, blood, or condition.

Accordingly, when writers on painting in France refer to Pliny's account of the edicts in Greece against slaves setting up as painters, they interpret it differently from the British, and both interpretations are selective. Pliny's words are 'semper quidem honos ei fuit, ut ingenui eam exercerent, mox ut honesti, perpetuo interdicto ne servitia docerentur': 'painting has always consistently had the honour of being practised by people of free birth, and later on by persons of station, it having always been forbidden that slaves should be instructed in it'. If in Britain writers on painting chose to emphasise the civic function of art, by ignoring the word 'honesti', with its

suggestion of 'aristocratic', writers in France ignore 'ingenui', men of free birth, and translate 'honesti' only. Thus, according to Fréart, the Greeks permitted only the most 'noble' men to paint; and according to de Piles, 'it was not permitted to any but those of noble blood', 'because it is to be presumed', that the 'Ingredients of a good Painter are not ordinarily found in Men of vulgar Birth'— though he goes on to suggest that we should now employ this distinction only figuratively, and that painters need a noble soul, rather than noble progenitors. Mengs, too, sometimes distinguishes between liberal and mechanic as between a 'noble' profession and a mechanical trade, and explains that in Greece painting was not to be taught to any but free people, 'which in this time signified Nobles'.⁸⁶

The fact that distinctions, within what I had better now describe as the 'realm' rather than the 'republic' of the fine arts, were figured in terms of a distinction between 'noble' and vulgar, rather than 'citizen' and vulgar, may influence too the belief in France that painting functions rhetorically, and by means of illusion, though this belief is less universal in late seventeenth-century France than in early eighteenth-century Britain. As Marian Hobson has pointed out, critics such as Fréart, Poussin and Félibien have little or no interest in the notion that painting deceives the eye or the mind. Du Fresnoy, however, characterises painting as a 'fallacious' art: we must feel able to 'walk round' the figures it depicts. Du Bos argues that though painting may not deceive the mind, it should counterfeit nature, and deceive the eye; and for de Piles, the 'end' a painter should aim at, is 'to impose on the sight': his task is to 'deceive the eye'. In each case, these remarks on the deceptive nature of painting are closely related to its rhetorical function. The connection is made most elaborately by Du Bos, who quotes approvingly the comparison made by Quintilian between the powers of painting and of oratory; and on the nature of the respect paid by the great masters of painting to the rules of their art, he writes:

Ils ont observé les regles, afin de gagner notre esprit par une vraisemblance toujours soutenue, & capable de lui faire oublier que c'est pour une fiction que notre coeur s'attendrit . . . Ils ont voulu arrêter nos sens sur les objets destinez à toucher notre ame. C'est le but de l'Orateur, quand il s'assujettit aux préceptes de la Grammaire & de la Réthorique: Sa dernière fin n'est pas d'être loué sur la correction & sur le brillant de sa composition, deux choses qui ne persuadent point; mais de nous amener à son sentiment par la force de ses raisonnemens, ou par le pathétique des images.⁸⁷

In some remarks on oratory in France, Hugh Blair acknowledged that France under Louis XIV had been productive of eloquence 'within a certain sphere': in the pulpit, especially, but sometimes also in 'orations pronounced upon public occasions'. But the eloquence of the French, he argues, is 'flowery' rather than 'vigorous'; 'calculated more to please and soothe, than to convince and persuade'; and he accounts for this by the fact that arbitrary governments give 'a general turn of softness and effeminacy' to 'the spirit of a nation'. There is some jingoistic stereotyping here, in the very British, and very eighteenth-century, notion of the French as a light, frivolous nation, dancing in their chains. But that said, Blair's remarks may point to an important distinction between the function of the rhetorical aesthetic in France and in Britain; for to anyone who comes to read the French critics I am considering after a reading of Shaftesbury, or Turnbull, for example, what is most remarkable is the detachment of that aesthetic in France from the civic context it has in Britain. The nearest thing I have found in French criticism of painting of around 1700 to the demand that painting should teach specifically *public* virtue, is a remark by Du Bos to the effect that painting reinforces the grounds of social affiliation, 'le premier fondement de la société', by detaching us from our own interests, and persuading us to feel for the sufferings of those unknown to us. This idea, which was to be influential on Kames, speaks to us rather of a virtue at once private and disinterested, than of the public virtue of 'traditional' humanism in Britain; and, more usually, the task of painting, to teach, rather than simply to please and touch us, is made very little of by Du Bos. The greatest merit, he claims, of poems and of pictures, is to please: this is the final end they propose to themselves. Du Fresnoy seems to agree:

Quod fuit auditu gratum cecinere Poetae;
Quod pulchrum aspectu Pictores pingere curant,

which Dryden translates, freely, but with a sense of what is at issue, 'the Poets have never said anything, but what they believed would please the Ears: And it has been the constant Endeavour of the Painters to give Pleasure to the Eyes'. 'The design of poetry and painting is to touch and to please', Du Bos writes elsewhere; and, perhaps most strikingly significant, 'the sublime of poetry and painting is to touch and to please, as that of eloquence is to persuade'. The comparison between painting and eloquence is here made in terms which, in Britain, would have been understood rather as enforcing a contrast: to traditional British humanism, it is the task of both to please, to move, and so to persuade us to emulate the virtues of heroes.⁸⁸

Whatever the didactic function of painting as it is conceived by the

critics I am now discussing, it remains true that in France, it is a legitimate and final end of painting that it should please as well as move us, whereas in Britain it may please us only in order to move and persuade; that whatever instruction painting has to offer, it does not teach virtue as conceived by the discourse of civic humanism; and that however we might wish to interpret it, to writers on painting in eighteenth-century Britain this emphasis on pleasure would certainly have been understood (as Blair's remarks on French eloquence suggest) as the result of the absence of opportunities for the exercise of public virtue in an absolutist state.

The relative resistance of writers in France to republican ideals of virtue is evident also in their accounts of the rise and decline of art. The most comprehensive explanation, in terms of 'moral', of social causes for the rise of painting, is offered by Du Bos. It depends on the 'happy state' of the country, the inclination towards art of its sovereign and citizens, their consequent generosity towards painters, the availability of good instruction, and a period of prolonged peace. He does not suggest that, as Shaftesbury, Richardson, Thomson, Turnbull, Scott, Barry and Fuseli suggest, the first and pre-eminent cause of good painting is a constitution which is republican, or thoroughly informed with republican values. When he considers the moral causes, more specifically, for the rise of Greek art, he acknowledges the importance of Greek liberty, but it is liberty from the domination of other states, and from the need to work for the necessities of life, that concerns him, not the civic liberty to participate in government—and as it were to underline the point, he promptly offers an encomium to Louis XIV and to Colbert, for securing, to French painters, liberties comparable with those of the painters in Greece.⁸⁹

As for the decline of painting, this may be represented as, according to de Piles, the result of war, of unspecified 'vice', or of regal neglect; more often it is explained in terms of the natural cycle of things human, or of nature, that ensures their inevitable decay; in terms, that is, of the various ideas of cyclical and unavoidable decline that have been catalogued by Peter Burke, and which French writers on painting probably borrowed mainly from Vasari, without borrowing, however, his explanation in terms of the decline of virtue. It is suggested by Fréart that decline may be the result of 'the tyranny of evil government' ('mauvais regnes'), but not, of course, with the suggestion that the government of an absolute monarch is by nature tyrannical, and evil. The notion of natural decay, disjoined from that of the natural decay of political institutions, is at the heart, also, of Winckelmann's account of the decline of art,

which became so perfect, he argues, that it was unable to progress further, and was bound to decay. Such explanations do sometimes crop up in British authors: in Aglionby, for example, and even in Turnbull—who, however, gives far greater prominence to the social and political causes we examined in the previous section.⁹⁰

10. *The 'privatisation' of society and the division of labour*

Earlier in this introduction, I suggested that we can plausibly describe the attempt made by writers like Defoe, Steele and Richardson, to adapt the discourse of civic humanism so as to make it more hospitable to the concerns and interests of a mercantile class, as constituting an 'alternative' form of civic humanism. I suggested also, however, that it was a form which would eventually divide from its host discourse and threaten to destroy it, and I want now to make good that suggestion, but also to qualify it somewhat. We can hardly be wrong, if with hindsight we describe that attempt in terms of a conflict between the literary representatives of different social and economic interest-groups: a struggle for hegemony between a mercantile class, relatively powerful economically but, politically, relatively weak, and a ruling class which represented itself—from whatever various sources its wealth was in fact derived—as a landed élite, which had claimed for itself a virtual monopoly of the public spirit and public virtues which alone gave a title to rule. In terms, however, of eighteenth-century perceptions, to describe this process of adaptation as the manifestation of a conflict between the interests of land and commerce would have been to over-dramatise one part of that process, which took two related but distinct forms, each dictated by the discursive possibilities open to those who found the traditional form of civic humanism inadequate to the expression of their interests.

On the one hand, the developing discourse of political economy, especially before it was represented as a science by Sir James Steuart, Adam Smith, and their successors, does often appear to be issuing a direct challenge to traditional humanism: a challenge made by writers who, often explicitly identifying themselves as spokesmen of the mercantile interest, assert the necessity of acquisitiveness, of self-interest, to a modern mercantile economy. Such writers, too, offer an account of the social organisation of a mercantile nation which implicitly or explicitly denies the possibility of a 'public spirit' that claims to be based on a comprehensive understanding of the structure and interests of society, available to the disinterested and

preferably landed citizen. Because traditional humanism had no means of understanding trade and commerce except as destructive of the commonwealth, and of public spirit, it could not avoid recognising this economic discourse as a threat to its hegemony; and for the same reason, those who wrote as spokesmen for the mercantile interest had no means of developing their distinctively economic account of human nature and of social organisation, except in the form of a direct challenge to traditional humanism.⁹¹

But if the discourse of civic humanism had no language in which to describe commerce except as a malignant tumour on the body of the public, it did have—indeed, it *was*—an authoritative language for the discussion of ethical values. For those writers, therefore, who felt that traditional humanism failed to address their interests and concerns, but who did not understand that failure, in some contexts at least, simply as a failure to represent their economic interests, it was neither necessary, nor would it have been prudent, to develop an oppositional mode of thinking and writing about value, even if it was possible for them to do so. It was unnecessary, for it was open to them simply to appropriate the traditional discourse—to inject it with a concern for the private virtue of those who could not aspire to public office, while still asserting—though with considerable qualification—the value and necessity of public virtue. It would have been imprudent, because the authority of the discourse in matters ethical was such as would have made it difficult for an account of value which was not a civic humanist account to be recognised as an account of value at all; and because, properly adapted, the discourse could be used to distinguish a liberal middle-class from its inferiors, in just such a way as, unadapted, it had distinguished a liberal ruling-class from a middle-class now claiming to be its equal in virtue.

Thus, when it is ethics rather than economics which is primarily at issue, writers who find traditional humanism inadequate to their concerns do not come forward as the aggressive spokesmen for the mercantile class but, if they identify themselves at all, as pacific members of ‘the middle station of life’;⁹² they seem to restate, rather than to redefine, the ethical ideas of traditional humanism, as if their intention is benign, and their aim only to strengthen those ideals, when in fact they are changing the ethical priorities on which the discourse is based. What seems to be happening is less a direct challenge than a quiet debate, the outcome of which, however, will determine which interest-group will inherit the discourse and the authority it embodies, and so whose interests it will express and serve. This seems to be what is at issue in Richardson’s departures from the ethical and critical priorities of Shaftesbury; and if, except in his discussions of

painting in relation to trade and commerce, Richardson gives few signs of conscious disaffection from the critical assumptions of the traditional discourse, that is because it appears to him as the one legitimate form for critical endeavour, the form he must adopt if he is to legitimate his own theory of painting, and one which can accommodate without strain his concern for the virtues and interests of ‘private gentlemen’.

The claim that, to a modern commercial economy whose health depended on its continual growth, self-interest was of more use than public virtue, or than such disinterested private virtues as kindness and compassion, is most memorably associated with Mandeville, but was asserted, less scandalously but with no less conviction, by Hume, Josiah Tucker, Sir James Steuart and Adam Smith, among many others. Thus, according to Tucker and Smith, there was a ‘natural Disposition . . . to *Commerce*’ among mankind, a ‘propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another’. It was clear that men did not enter into these transactions out of any spirit of disinterestedness: as Smith explains,

man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them . . . It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love.

It then seemed to follow, as Tucker puts it, that ‘*Self-Love* is . . . the great Mover in human Nature’; the ‘principle of self-interest’ is, according to Steuart, ‘the universal spring of human actions’, so that:

the best way to govern a society, and to engage everyone to conduct himself according to a plan, is for the statesman to form a system of administration, the most consistent possible with the interest of every individual, and never to flatter himself that his people will be brought to act in general, and in matters which purely regard the public, from any other principle than private interest.

This belief leads Steuart to issue a direct challenge to the principles of traditional humanism:

It might perhaps be expected, that, in treating of politics, I should have brought in public spirit also, as a principle of action; whereas all I require with respect to this principle is merely a restraint from

it; and even this, perhaps, is too much to be taken for granted. Were public spirit, instead of private utility, to become the spring of action in the individuals of a well-governed state, I apprehend, it would spoil all.

Steuart acknowledges the necessity of a form of public spirit, redefined as mere honesty in economic transactions, and to be enforced, of course, by law, since it would be 'absurd' to 'suppose men, in general, honest'; but, he insists, 'were the principles of public spirit carried further; were a people to become quite disinterested; there would be no possibility of governing them. Every one might consider the interest of his country in a different light, and many might join in the ruin of it, by endeavouring to promote its advantages.' As we shall see, it is in the nature of modern societies that it is difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at a vision of the public and its true interests.⁹³

An exclusive belief in public spirit as the ground of social affiliation would not only render a nation ungovernable; it would stunt the will to industry, and therefore to the growth of the economy. Thus, according to Hume, the principles of public spirit are simply 'too disinterested, and too difficult to support': 'it is requisite to govern men by other passions, and animate them with a spirit of avarice and industry, art and luxury'. For Hume, 'it is a violent method . . . to oblige the labourer to toil, in order to raise from the land more than what subsists himself and his family': he is, like Smith, an advocate of a high-wage economy, which seems to him best to guarantee the safety of the state; for if the labourer is furnished with 'manufactures and commodities', 'you will find it easy to seize some part of his superfluous labour', in times of war, and 'employ it in the public interest'. Mandeville, on the other hand, believes in artificially depressing the wages of labour: it is, he argues, 'Prudence' to relieve the wants of the poor, 'but Folly to cure them', for 'the Poor should be kept strictly to Work', and will be industrious only if their self-interest compels them to be so. But what is at issue here is not the relative benevolence of Hume and Mandeville, or any disagreement as to the degree of disinterestedness in mankind, for both positions depend on the belief that men are actuated only by self-interest, in their pursuit whether of the necessities or the accommodations of life.⁹⁴

The growth of the economy, as Ferguson explains, depends entirely on the recognition and management of the principle of self-interest: 'men are tempted to labour, and to practise lucrative arts, by motives of interest. Secure to the workman the fruit of his labour, give him the prospects of independence or freedom, the public has found a faithful minister in the acquisition of wealth.' And, therefore,

according to Steuart, 'every man is to act for his own interest in what regards the public; and, politically speaking, every one *ought* to do so' (my emphasis). If men are so blind as not to perceive that, or not to act as if, they are motivated only by interest, then self-interest is to be proposed to them as an article of political morality; if they are insufficiently acquisitive, then their natures must be managed, and they must be 'animated' with 'a spirit of avarice'. By arguments such as these, the 'public good', as it had appeared to traditional humanism, is entirely redefined. Thus, for Tucker, the two questions to be resolved by the study of economics are 'In what Particulars doth the Public Good consist? And how shall the Passion of Self-love be directed so as to produce the happy Effects intended?'—the second question precedes the answer to the first, and it effectively determines that answer. For Steuart, 'it is the combination of every private interest which forms the public good'; and 'publick happiness', therefore, as Smith explains, is often the unintended result of all the members of a society acting 'merely from a view to their own interest', and in pursuit of the principle 'of turning a penny wherever a penny was to be got'.⁹⁵

This account has stressed the similarities among the writers I have cited at the expense of the considerable differences among them—in particular, I have concealed a disagreement as to whether mankind has always been acquisitive, or whether it is only, or is particularly so, in modern commercial societies. There would be little point, however, in distinguishing more carefully among those who argue that self-interest is, or should be, the primary ground of social affiliation: the belief in disinterested virtue, of one kind or another, was so far constitutive of the discourse of civic humanism, and therefore of any account of moral or artistic value in the eighteenth century, that all such arguments were homogenised and rejected by those who adhered to that discourse, whether in its traditional form or in the forms to which, in the mid-century, it was adapted; and, at least until the writings of Fuseli and Martin Archer Shee, they were so treated by all writers on painting of any influence.

The response of traditional humanism to these writers on economics was articulated most forcefully, often in advance of the fact, by John Brown. Brown does not deny the efficacy of the 'Spirit of Commerce' to the promotion of one kind of economic growth: it 'tends', he acknowledges, 'at once to the Increase and Preservation of Property'. But the health, and even the wealth of a nation, are not to be measured by the accumulation of individual fortunes; and while the spirit of commerce 'begets a kind of regulated Selfishness', its opposite, 'the Spirit of Liberty and Humanity' begets 'a Spirit of

Equity'. Without such equity, the 'national Spirit of Union', which requires that 'the separate and partial Views of private Interest be in some Degree sacrificed to the general Welfare', must 'ever be thwarted or destroyed by selfish Views and separate Interests'.⁹⁶ Brown does not see himself as involved in a merely theoretical debate with the views he rejects: his complaint, indeed, is that accounts of mankind as actuated entirely by self-interest appear to describe only too accurately the present condition of Britain; and so his problem is not simply to redescribe the state of the nation, and to show that the rulers of Britain are in fact motivated by public spirit, but to consider how it might be possible, once again, for them to become so. And this, as we shall see, was almost the same problem as was confronted by writers on art, who derived their critical principles from the same discourse as Brown derived his political principles, and who were wedded, in particular, to an account of the hierarchy of genres by which the various kinds of painting were valued in proportion to their tendency to promote public virtue. Such writers were faced with the task of considering how history-painting could be described or redescribed so as to counter the spirit of self-interest they saw prevailing in contemporary Britain.

Perhaps not until Martin Archer Shee, writing in the early years of the nineteenth century, did the doctrine that self-interest was natural, necessary, and even laudable, have any serious appeal to writers on painting. In fact, Shee launches a violent attack on the 'mercenary sentiments' encouraged by writers on economics, and, in particular, on 'those . . . who consult Adam Smith for their theory of taste as well as of trade; and would regulate the operations of virtù on the principles of the pin manufactory; . . . to whom the world is but as one vast market—a saleshop of sordid interests and selfish gratification'. 'It has of late become so much the fashion', he complains, 'to view every thing through the commercial medium, and calculate the claims of utility by the scale of "The Wealth of Nations"', that it is to be feared, the Muses and Graces will shortly be put down as unproductive labourers, and the price current of the day considered as the only criterion of merit.' It quickly emerges, however, that Shee's main objection to Smith is not that he has allowed self-interest to come out of the closet, and to announce itself as a legitimate component of human nature, but that he encourages the belief that the value of art is to be determined by 'the wants and caprices of the million', and not by those occupying 'the summits of civilization', and that this represents 'a political jacobinism, as unworthy of the liberal merchant as of the loyal citizen'. There is, he warns,

a levelling of the principles and feelings, as well as of the ranks and distinctions of society, and perhaps, in this country at this moment, the more dangerous of the two; for it works unseen and uncensured; strikes at the ancient nobility of the mind—the privileged powers of genius and virtue, and would pull down all human perfection to be estimated according to the lowest rate of exchange. If our heads and hearts are to be overrun by a mob of mercenary sentiments, we shall have escaped to little purpose the disorganization of one revolution, to be reserved to suffer the degradation of the other. Of a system like this, the arts must ever be the first victims; for they flourish only in the prevalence of feelings which the sordid and selfish passions effectually destroy.⁹⁷

This defence, however, of the 'ancient nobility of the mind' against the revolutionary mob of levelling Scotch philosophers, elsewhere finds expression in an argument that Shee has borrowed from Burke, and that Burke had adapted from the tradition of economic thought to which Smith himself had been the most notable contributor. The argument presents itself as an attack on 'the ingenious speculations of men whose minds are wound up to an Utopian enthusiasm', which 'inculcates contempt for the gathered wisdom of ages', and which pretends that it would be both possible and beneficial 'to simplify society', and so check—and here Shee seems to abandon the civic principles on which his own theory of painting elsewhere seems to depend—the progress of wealth, luxury, and inequality'. To such a simplification, Shee is furiously opposed: 'the finer arts and ornaments of life', he claims, 'all the delicate flowers of taste and genius', are threatened by 'the axe of modern amelioration'; and the echo, there, of the language of Thomas Paine would have been missed by none of his readers. Suddenly, the '*Chain of Self-Interest*', which to Smith had been the cement of society, and to Brown had been 'no better than a *Rope of Sand*', with no '*Cohesion* between the Parts', but only 'a mutual *Antipathy* and *Repulsion*', becomes for Shee the basis of all social happiness and cultivation:

From the innumerable complications of civil interest and social dependence; from the influence of wealth and luxury in their most unrestrained and extended operations; from the inequalities of fortune, rank, and degree, holding out object to ambition, and impulse to labour; spurring the poor by necessity, the rich by distinction; offering ease to diligence, and leisure to curiosity; and furnishing every individual with his appropriate motive of exertion in the general struggle, may be traced to arise, whatever softens, refines, elevates, adorns, and dignifies the character of human

nature . . . those brilliant sparks of civilization, those electric lights of arts and sciences, which irradiate the otherwise sombre scene of our existence, and shine the beneficent planets of the social firmament . . . Society is a grand machine . . . Interest, self-interest, is the firm supporting pivot on which the whole enginery rests and turns; want, passion, ambition, are the main springs of its operation; wealth, power, pleasure, glory, luxury, the principal wheels, which communicating motion to all the dependent arrangements of minuter mechanism, at length set forward the golden hands of genius and taste to move on the dial of existence, and point to the brightest periods of time, and the most memorable epochs of man.

But these, as Mr Burke says, 'are high matters', not to be . . . touched by a *rhymer on art* . . .⁹⁸

I have quoted at such length, partly because Shee's argument enables me to exemplify an attitude to the relations of art and interest which will be notable by its absence from the writings we shall consider later in this book; but partly, also, because his entire abandonment here of the civic principles of Shaftesbury can give us a foretaste, nevertheless, of how fragile those principles had become by the early decades of the nineteenth century, and how much in need of whatever defence could be mounted on their behalf. What unifies the contradictions in Shee's argument, of course, is a cynical concern for his own market: where the discourse of political economy threatens the consensus of taste essential to the marketing of art, it is characterised by the most efficacious term of abuse currently available, as *jacobinism*, the enemy of the 'ancient nobility of mind' of the *ancien régime*. Where it justifies the accumulation of wealth which makes possible the patronage of the arts, then it is an authority so far superior to the civic discourse which was the enemy of luxury, that civic humanism also comes to be represented as *jacobinism*—and not at all implausibly, for by now there were radical writers, also, vigorously competing in the struggle to appropriate the one legitimate account of political virtue. Both the arguments that Shee advances so intransigently co-operate to assert that a society exists for the benefit of its most economically successful members, who exist for the benefit of the arts, which exist not so much—though Shee will claim they do—for the improvement of virtue, as for the benefit of the practitioners of those arts. All this however, as my quotations from Shee have suggested, is advanced under the cover of a moral tone so elevated, that his *Rhymes on Art* can at times manage to appear as a defence of art promoting public virtue in its most Spartan form.

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The discourse of political economy was further to complicate the civic humanist account of the public function of painting by the attention it paid to the division of labour as the primary structural principle of commercial society, by virtue of the chain of mutual dependence that was established when men came to specialise in the provision of particular goods and services, rather than attempting to satisfy all their needs by their own various industry. As long as the division of labour did not appear to challenge the distinction between liberal and mechanic; it could be regarded, of course, as actually constitutive of that distinction. The practitioners of particular trades and professions were disabled, by virtue of their specialisation, from perceiving the public interest; and it seemed to follow, as Burke's anecdote of the shoemaker has already suggested, that those who did not pursue such specialisations were thereby enabled to develop a vision of the public, and a public spirit, denied to everyone else, and so also to grasp the true, the public function of the liberal arts; and the same point had been made by Shaftesbury. The developing sense, however, of the enormous complexity of the structures of production and exchange in commercial societies, had the effect of making the claim that anyone could now understand those structures increasingly implausible. Thus, as Ferguson explained,

under the *distinction* of callings, by which the members of polished society are separated from each other, every individual is supposed to possess his species of talent, or his peculiar skill, in which the others are confessedly ignorant; and society is made to consist of parts, of which none is animated with the spirit of society itself.

In 'simple or barbarous ages', Ferguson argues, 'the public is a knot of friends', but in prosperous, commercial nations, 'the public becomes an object perhaps too extensive' for the conception of its members. No one, as Smith as well as Ferguson had speculated, was exempt from this occlusion of the view of the public: the liberal arts, and even 'the business of state', become, in complex societies, 'the objects of separate professions'; 'thinking itself', in an 'age of separations', 'may become a peculiar craft', and even the philosopher is discovered to be implicated in an economy of exchange, and so is not exempt from the self-interest which conceals a view of the interest of the public. All men, in short, liberal and mechanic alike, 'cease to be citizens'.⁹⁹

Not all of this account of the effects of specialised occupations and interests was contested by adherents to the discourse of civic

humanism, which indeed informs Ferguson's and Smith's considerations of the topic. John Brown too had claimed that even among the supposedly liberal there were those dedicated to the 'Pursuit of Gain', in whose minds 'the Idea of a Public has no Place'; and the difference between his position and Ferguson's was that he felt bound to protest at a process he refused to believe was irreversible, and that he declared it to be the result more of a failure of the will and intellect than of inexorable forces of social and economic change. As we shall see, writers on painting, anxious to defend the political and ethical functions of their art, and to justify the foundation of a public body to promote them, were inevitably committed to the same belief. The belief however that the public was disappearing, that it lay somewhere in the centre of an entirely impenetrable labyrinth of intertwined occupations and interests—a belief which had been voiced by Johnson as well as by the political economists of Scotland—made it difficult to assert the old civic humanist belief that the liberal minds of the citizens of a state were still in a position to perceive its interests. In casual moments, and on unimportant occasions, that could still be done: the discourse of political economy could be characterised as the production of illiberal minds, of minds as blind and mechanical as those engaged in the manufactures they promoted: of Tucker's observation that 'a pin-maker was a more useful and valuable member of society than Raffaele', Reynolds remarked in conversation—though he thought the remark worth committing to paper—that it was the 'observation of a very narrow mind; a mind that is confined to the mere object of commerce, that sees with a microscopic eye but a part of the great machine of the economy of life, and thinks that small part which he sees to be the whole'. But in public pronouncements, and, in particular, in public lectures at the Academy, the commitment to an idea of painting as still capable of promoting public spirit could no longer express itself in a simple rehearsal of the confident assertions of writers such as Shaftesbury and Turnbull.¹⁰⁰

11. *The 'privatisation' of virtue and of painting*

Within the field of ethics, insofar as it could be disjoined from economics, it was unnecessary, I have argued, for those who sought to construct a space in which the private virtues could be more appreciated, to issue a direct challenge to the discourse of civic humanism, and to frame a new discourse of their own. The traditional discourse could be adapted, so that the private virtues, in particular the soft virtues of amiability, kindness, compassion, could appropriate to themselves some of the dignity of the public virtues. This is a part of

the process which has been named 'the privatisation of virtue' in the eighteenth century, but we should be wary of the phrase. If we look upon works of ethical philosophy in the period as constituting a continuous tradition of thought disjoined from its historical context, we may persuade ourselves that what we observe, from Shaftesbury through, say, to Paley, is a steady devaluing of the dignity of the public virtues, and a steady elevation of the dignity of private virtue, until, by the end of the century, it became possible to represent it as a cause of complaint, that 'by far the greater share of glory attends upon what are called great actions'—which are in fact 'glorious to the individual alone'—than to 'a sober train of benevolence', such as is 'useful to the community'.¹⁰¹ On its own terms, this account is true enough; but it may be more helpful to understand this phenomenon in the terms of conflict and appropriation I proposed at the start of my previous section. For what seems to be happening is that a discourse, whose function, at the start of the century, was to define the ethical ideals of a ruling class, is being appropriated by the literary representatives of their polite but unenfranchised social inferiors. There seem to be two motives for this appropriation: to adapt it, so as to enable it to describe the virtues of the unenfranchised—I use the term here to apply to those who may be eligible for, but cannot aspire to, public office; and to confuse the distinctions between public and private virtue in such a way as to suggest that, in point of virtue, there is no clear distinction between the moral capacities of the franchised and the unenfranchised.

This is another subject that requires a book to itself, and perhaps only a conspicuous brevity can escape the objections of those better qualified to write this section than I am. So let me ignore, for example, the distinction between Shaftesbury's account of public virtues and affections and Hutcheson's softer and more compassionate 'public sense', and pass over the borrowings from Hutcheson made by the writers whom I shall, briefly, discuss.¹⁰² These are the Scottish writers Hume, Adam Smith and Kames, far more thoroughgoing in their attempt to 'privatise' virtue than any writers in mid-century England.

Each of these writers proposes a taxonomy of virtues and passions which cuts across, or in some other way complicates, the earlier secure division between public and private. Hume, for example, remarks that in 'panegyrics that are commonly made of great men' a distinction is observed between their public virtues—'such as make them perform their part in society'—and their private virtues—'such as render them serviceable to themselves'. But this description of public virtues is evidently different from Dennis's, for example, for

whom all but the heroic virtues were private: for Hume, the public virtues are represented as '*generosity and humanity*'; they are not the exclusive virtues of 'public men', but such as may be exercised by anyone who acts disinterestedly in the service of others. Hume also divides the passions and the virtues they prompt into the 'tender' and the 'sublime', where the virtues that derive from the tender passions are '*generosity, humanity, compassion, gratitude, friendship, fidelity, zeal, disinterestedness, liberality*, and all those other qualities which form the character of the good and benevolent'. This list includes within its scope virtues which had often previously been divided among the public and private, according to the extent of their operation and their tendency to promote general rather than particular good: as Hume acknowledges, some small 'delicacies' of love or friendship 'have little influence on society', but must be recognised as 'social' virtues as compared with the self-directed virtues of enterprise and frugality.¹⁰³

The 'sublime' passions, however, are those which Shaftesbury and Dennis would have recognised as truly heroic, but they may, according to Hume, be far from disinterested:

in general, we may observe, that whatever we call *heroic virtue*, and admire under the character of greatness and elevation of mind, is either nothing but a steady and well-establish'd pride and self-esteem, or partakes largely of that passion. Courage, intrepidity, ambition, love of glory, magnanimity, and all the other shining virtues of that kind, have plainly a strong mixture of self-esteem in them, and derive a great part of their merit from that origin. Accordingly we find that many religious declaimers decry those virtues as purely pagan and natural, and represent to us the excellency of the *Christian* religion, which places humility in the rank of virtues, and corrects the judgment of the world, and even of philosophers, who so generally admire all the efforts of pride and ambition.

Heroic actions, Hume claims, benefit chiefly those who perform them, not the inhabitants of the countries whom heroes claim to have saved from destruction. Thus, though 'heroism, or military glory, is much admir'd by the generality of mankind', who consider it 'sublime', 'men of cool reflexion are not so sanguine in their praises of it':

the infinite confusions and disorder, which it has caus'd in the world, diminish much of its merit in their eyes. When thy wou'd oppose the popular notion on this head, they always point out the

evils, which this suppos'd virtue has produc'd in human society; the subversion of empires, the devastation of provinces, the sack of cities. As long as these are present to us, we are more inclin'd to hate than admire the ambition of heroes.

In his account of heroic virtue, Hume comes as close as ever he does in his writings on morals to a direct challenge to the values of traditional humanism; the challenge, however, remains indirect, partly by virtue of his continual use of local irony—we have heard it, for example, in the phrase 'many religious declaimers', whose opinion we cannot quite believe he endorses—and partly by means of a more general relativism.¹⁰⁴

For, Hume continues, when 'we fix our view on the person himself, who is the author of all this mischief . . . we cannot refuse it our admiration. The pain, which we receive from its tendency to the prejudice of society, is overpower'd by a stronger and more immediate sympathy.' This sense that our judgments of passions and virtues may be a function of the point of view from which we regard them, is repeated also in Hume's observation that we admire virtues and passions rather according to their conformity with our own dispositions, and our sense of our own capacities, than according to a moral arithmetic of the kind by which Hutcheson had demanded that virtues should be estimated. 'The man of a mild disposition and tender affections', Hume explains, will particularly admire benevolence and humanity; a man of 'courage and enterprize' will place more value on 'a certain elevation of mind'; and this phenomenon 'must evidently proceed from an *immediate* sympathy, which men have with characters similar to their own'. In short, Hume is offering, not a system of morals so much as a phenomenology of our reactions to different kinds of actions and passions; and the effect of this, too, is to complicate the notion that virtues may be estimated by the place they occupy on a scale of public utility. According to who we are—and according, we might add, to our position within society—we sympathise with different virtues; and no moral arithmetic can persuade us that we ought not to esteem acts of friendship more highly than acts of heroism, or even selfish passions and self-directed virtues more than tender acts of charity.¹⁰⁵

Hume also distinguishes between virtues in terms of those which are 'amiable' and excite our love, and those which are 'aweful', and elicit our respect. This distinction was borrowed and adapted by Smith, to describe, on the one hand, 'the virtues of candid condescension and indulgent humanity', and, on the other, 'the virtues of self-denial, of self-government, of that command of the passions which

subjects all the movements of our nature to what our own dignity and honour, and the propriety of our own conduct require'. Both kinds of virtue, Christian and Stoic, are equally necessary for 'the perfection of human nature'; but though Smith gives no preference to the 'amiable virtue of humanity' over the more heroic virtue of 'magnanimity', it is clear that, like Hume, he regards the latter as owing its origin more to self-esteem than to the social affections. Kames, finally, proposes a distinction between 'social' and 'selfish' passions and actions, where the 'social' however, include acts of particular friendship no less than those of comprehensive benevolence, and where the selfish are perfectly estimable, so long as they do not encroach upon the social.¹⁰⁶

The point of these remarks has been simply to indicate how the writers I have mentioned all contributed to a complication of the distinction between public and private virtue that had been proposed by traditional humanism. They do not entirely undermine it, but they separate the hard virtues of heroism from the softer virtues of universal benevolence: the former, once prized as public and disinterested, are represented as self-directed, and those once recognised as disinterested but private are grouped alongside those which manifest a comprehensive public spirit, so that all 'social' virtues may now claim to be 'public'. And the effect of this complication was to suggest that social, or public, virtues were capable of being exercised, not perhaps by the vulgar, but by a wider class of men than could aspire to the opportunity of displaying the public virtues described by Shaftesbury, Dennis, or Thomson.

This is the first aspect of the 'privatisation of virtue' whose effect, on the theory of painting, I want briefly to consider, and I want to suggest that it led, in the mid-century, to an account of the function of painting and of the higher genres of literature, whereby their task was to teach social rather than specifically public virtue. This, for example, is Daniel Webb, reflecting on the danger of conceiving of the 'usefulness of Painting' in terms of a hard republican notion of virtue:

It should seem that legislators, for the most part, divide men into two extremes; to those of finer temper, they propose the good of society, and beauty of virtue, as sufficient motives to action: But the vulgar and sordid natures are, by their leading passions, as pride, fear and hope, to be compelled into virtue. Such systems as these may produce a Spartan severity, or Roman patriotism, but never an Athenian politeness. To effect this, the softer passions, and even elegant habitudes, are to be employed: These only can

humanize the mind, and temper it into a sensibility of the slightest impressions, and most exquisite feelings.

Accordingly, when Webb comes to the criticism of particular history-paintings, he describes them in terms of their ability to refine the amiable passions, rather than to inspire us to emulate the awful virtues of the heroes they depict. In Poussin's painting of the death of Germanicus, we are not, he imagines, prompted to an admiration for stoic magnanimity, but 'to a generous indignation at the cruelty of his oppressor, and an equal compassion for happy virtue'; the *Plague of Athens*, then believed to be by the same painter, 'melts the soul into a tender participation of human miseries: These impressions end not here; they give a turn to the mind advantageous to society; every argument of sorrow, every object of distress, renews the same soft vibrations, and quickens us to acts of humanity and benevolence.' Painting, for Webbs may inflame us to the emulation of virtue, but it does so by softening our resistance, not by steeling our resolve.¹⁰⁷

In Burke's *Enquiry*, the passions excited by the sublime and the beautiful are divided according to a system similar to Hume's division between the sublime and the tender. Just as, for Hume, sublime actions owe their origin largely to self-esteem, so the sublime is related by Burke to our concern for our self-preservation. For Hume, the tender virtues derive from our social affections, and for Burke the origin of our love of beauty is a love of society; and Burke may derive from Hume a contrast between the sublime Cato and the beautiful Caesar, as exemplars of the awful and the amiable passions, the first inspiring fear and admiration, the second love. Alexander Gerard proposes a similar distinction between the sublime and the beautiful; and though the sublime of heroism includes for him a complex of power and humanity—the hero has the 'power' to subject to 'his dominion' 'multitudes of nations', and 'wide extended countries', and a 'benevolence' hardly less imperious, which 'comprehends multitudes', and 'grasps whole large societies'—Gerard does not imagine that the function of representations of such heroism is to inflame us to emulate it. The moral function of painting, on the contrary, is to 'soften' the mind by its 'charms', and to 'dispose' us to 'friendship, generosity, love, and the whole train of kind affections'.¹⁰⁸

Reading these passages from Webb and Gerard, we may reasonably suspect that one of the advantages of the increasing emphasis on the 'tender' virtues was that it could put an acceptable face on a commercial society in which economic activity was being extracted, by writers on economics, from the sphere of public morality. As Blake was to point out, in 'The Human Abstract', the

upgrading of such virtues as 'humanity' and 'pity' was especially of benefit to the *victors* of the commercial system, who were offered thereby the consolation of engaging in private moral transactions with its *victims*—transactions necessary to alleviate the suffering caused by a system whose own tough 'necessity' the rhetoric of tenderness was rarely deployed to challenge, and whose effects it was more often employed to conceal. Insofar as painting came to be seen, in the mid-century, as concerned with the promotion of what, from the viewpoint of traditional humanism, were private virtues, it was itself being 'privatised', was being invested with the task of teaching its spectators to take a private pleasure in alleviating the results of activities of which they were the economic beneficiaries, and, either more or less directly, the agents. A privatised painting is thus made complicit with a commercial system assumed to be outside the sphere of the moral, so that its function comes to be to clear up after the accidents—the 'collisions', as they came to be known—which are the inevitable effects of commercial capitalism. This relation of complicity will be rejected by most of the writers we shall be considering in this book, on the grounds, of course, not only that it represented commercial activities as amoral, but that it devalued painting; though this is not to say that they could do other than propose—as perhaps only Fuseli recognised—a range of relations between painting and commercial society in which their complicity is visibly more strained but was invisibly confirmed.

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The suspicion for, and devaluation of, the heroic virtues that we have been observing, engendered also a belief that, while the sublime of heroism may have been useful to the republics of antiquity, in constant danger of invasion, and small enough to enable an active concern for the whole body of a people, in the more secure, polite, and extensive societies of modern Europe, representations of heroic virtue may be of small relevance to men whose experience of life was at once more pacific and more private. The sense which continually hovers above mid-century discussions of heroic painting and poetry, that the age of heroism had long passed, was perhaps as much a hope as an anxiety; for if it were true, it would challenge the distinction, in terms of a capacity for public virtue, between those capable of governing and those capable only of being governed. The belief, however, was usually represented as, at least partially, a matter for regret. Smith notices among the 'inconveniences . . . arising from a commercial spirit', that 'the minds of men are contracted, and

rendered incapable of elevation', so that 'the heroic spirit is almost utterly extinguished'. In commercial societies, as it seems to Ferguson, the poetry of heroic action is also, regrettably, an anachronism. The superiority of the Greeks, he writes, 'is in no circumstances more evident than in the strain of their fictions, and in the story of those fabulous heroes, poets, and sages, whose tales . . . served to inflame that ardent enthusiasm with which this people afterwards proceeded in the pursuit of every national object'. The members of those 'illustrious states',

from the habit of considering themselves as part of a community . . . were regardless of personal considerations: they had a perpetual view to objects which excite a great ardour in the soul; which led them to act perpetually in the view of their fellow-citizens; and to practise those arts of deliberation, elocution, policy, and war, on which the fortunes of nations, or of men, in their collective body, depend.¹⁰⁹

But if 'to the ancient Greek, or the Roman, the individual was nothing, and the public every thing', then 'to the modern, in too many nations of Europe, the individual is every thing, and the public nothing. The state is merely a combination of departments.' We can now have no occasion for a poetry which attempts to animate the heroic virtues to act in the furtherance of the public interest. 'The remains of an active spirit', the 'examples and the experience of former and better times', are preserved by writings which have become 'literary monuments'; and their function is not to provoke emulation, but to mark the distance between the societies that produced them, and the modern age.¹¹⁰ In passages such as these, the civic discourse is invited to pronounce its own funeral oration: if civic virtue is buried with the city-state, its passing is mourned; if word comes that it has been seen alive, a posse of Scotch philosophers is sent out to detain it for re-education.

James Northcote believed that the 'grand', the heroic style of painting was 'held very disagreeable' in Britain because it was 'an article totally useless and unfit in respect to the habits of private life'; in some remarks about 'Brutus', Pope's projected epic, Joseph Warton comes near to offering the same opinion. Had Pope completed it, Warton imagines, he would:

have given us many elegant descriptions, and many GENERAL characters, well drawn; but would have failed to set before our eyes the REALITY of these objects, and the ACTIONS of these characters: for Homer professedly draws no characters, but gives us to collect them from the looks and behaviour of each person he introduces

... It would have appeared (if this scheme had been executed) how much, and for what reasons, the man that is skilful in painting modern life, and the most secret foibles and follies of his contemporaries, is, THEREFORE, disqualified from representing the ages of heroism ... which alone epic poetry can gracefully describe.

Warton's particular point, I take it, is that Pope's preoccupation with character was, by definition, a preoccupation with the private—with secret foibles and follies—and that he could not therefore lift himself to the representation of action, and (the symmetry of the argument requires) of public concerns. But this does not seem to be, from one point of view, a failing in Pope but in the age: Pope was, after all, 'skilful' in the painting of modern life, which was, quite simply, the painting of *general* character in terms of *private* characteristics; the heroic age is past, and the public world of epic is not the world before our eyes. But Warton will not take the next step and question the value of writing epic at all, in an age to which the epic is foreign, an age not of action but of character; and though the epic may still be defensible, in Warton's terms, as a lesson in action to an age of character, he does not see the need to make that defence, for the notion of epic as the highest kind of poetry seems to him so far from needing a new justification that it remains to Warton one of Pope's greatest failings that he did not succeed in a genre, the function of which Warton imagines he does not need to consider. And yet, quite evidently, his argument requires him to consider the question—as writers, also, on history-painting were obliged to consider it: if epic is the representation of 'the ages of heroism', and those ages are understood as opposite in their character to 'modern life', then what has modern life to do with the heroic, and how can the heroic survive as a mode of art, if it is not also a mode of life?¹¹¹

I shall say more about this issue in my chapter on Fuseli, and more, in my chapter on Barry, about that aspect of the 'privatisation of virtue' by which the private virtues (which, according to Hume, enable men to 'promote their own interest') were capable of being represented, also, as public virtues, contributing directly to the interest of the public. But as I hope this section has shown, we—or the writers I am about to consider—have already enough problems to worry about. If, by the mid-century, the distinction between public and private had become far less secure than it had been to Shaftesbury, Dennis, Thomson and Turnbull; and if, so far as it was secure, public, or specifically heroic virtue, could seem to have no such function as would justify the preeminence of heroic art among the genres of writing and painting; then however the notion of public art could

be redefined, it is clear that those charged by the Academy with the responsibility of restoring 'the dignity of the dying Art' were faced with a difficult task.¹¹² On the one hand, their membership of the Academy, and all the institutions of criticism, committed them to a defence of those genres of painting which seemed to fulfil a public moral function; on the other hand, they were themselves members of 'the middle station of life', and it may have been a matter of concern to them to question an idea of painting which, by requiring them to exalt the pretended public virtues of a civic élite, obliged them to deny, at the very same time, their own moral qualifications for citizenship.

12. Summary of argument, and remarks on the 'public' and gender

The chapters that follow discuss the ways in which, in response to these difficulties, the civic humanist theory of painting was variously adapted by those writers on art who, I believe, had most to contribute to the discussion of the issues raised in this book. Reynolds, it is argued, attempted to ground public spirit not on virtue but on a particular kind of social knowledge. To this end he replaced the rhetorical with a philosophical aesthetic, which attempted to promote, in the doctrine of the 'central forms', a uniformity of perception: by central forms we are enabled to discover, not how to act in the public interest, but what our individual characters have in common; and thus the 'public' is made a visible object, as is the basis of our affiliation to it. Barry is represented as attempting to argue that painting should depict the diversity of a society divided by the division of labour, but in such a way as enables its members to grasp the common ends, political and religious, which their divided labours co-operate to achieve. The chapter on Blake, which is in the form of a 'Blake Dictionary' reveals his great dependence on Barry's writings, and argues against those critics who have claimed that his own writings on art promote a 'romantic individualism', or a specifically 'romantic' humanism. Barry and Blake, I claim, were the first writers on art in Britain to attempt to extend the idea of the 'public' of art so that it could include all the members of a state—or rather all its male members—and to develop a theory by which history-painting could represent them all, and reveal to them the terms of their citizenship.

Fuseli, I shall suggest, attempts at times to reaffirm the values of the civic discourse in its purest, its most traditional form, and at others to adapt that discourse so that painting can be argued as capable of creating a substitute for a now-lost public sphere, by enabling the modern spectator, individualised and isolated by the conflicts generated in the

pursuit of artificial wants, to recognise, by a mode of private sympathy, the same plight in others. The final chapter argues that Haydon, the last writer who attempted to defend the pre-eminence of the 'grand style' in civic terms, was unable to assert that it could still perform any public function, and was reduced to defending it simply as a *style*; and that Hazlitt launched the first fundamental attack on the civic humanist theory of art and the 'public' painting it promoted, by claiming that the ends and satisfactions of painting were primarily private, and by denying the traditional interdependence of the republic of taste and the political republic.

Finally, some remarks on the language of this book, where it may, for one reason or another, be open to misinterpretation.

When Reynolds was writing his early discourses, it was still easy to believe that the recently founded Academy could achieve its main end, of promoting an art which would promote the public interest. By the turn of the century, however, there was, to most commentators, no sign that the Academy had succeeded in encouraging the development of a school of history-painting worthy of a great and free nation. Various explanations were canvassed, but all of them came back to the same point: that there was no longer a 'public' in Britain, in the sense of a body of citizens animated with the public spirit which alone could encourage a public art; the body of the public was now a corpse, corrupted by the luxury and commerce that the civic humanist discourse had so strenuously attempted to arrest; the account of society offered by the economists, that it was structured as a market, was only too accurate.

Under the pressure of this perception, whether of decline or (to the political economists) of development, the meaning of the word 'public' itself was perceived to be changing. The word came to be used less and less to signify 'the commonwealth', 'the community or people as an organised body', or the government of a 'civil state'. It came increasingly to signify, instead, 'the country as an aggregate, but not in its organised capacity', and hence, simply, 'the members of the community' (*OED*). But it developed another meaning as well. I mentioned earlier that the Latin *publicus* signified a 'public man', a magistrate; I did not add that *publica* signified a 'public woman', a prostitute, a woman who would do anything for anyone, if the price was right. And around the turn of the century, 'public' comes to refer more often, not simply to the mass, the totality of a people, but also to an undefined group of rich consumers of the arts, who had appropriated the term to themselves, without also assuming the civic identity and the civic responsibilities of a true public. This public was frequently perceived as mercenary, ignorant, vain, capricious, with

no steady attachment to principle, 'ever governed', as Wordsworth described it, 'by factitious influence' and blown every which way by the breath of fashion. It was, in short, a luxurious, an 'effeminate' public, of easy virtue. The phrase 'the public voice', signifying something like the general will of the citizens of a state, comes to be supplanted by 'public opinion', the mere will of all; or else, as Blake explained, what we now call the 'Public Voice' is the public's error.¹¹³

This usage, however, is more complicated than my account so far has suggested, because the memory of the unambiguous authority the word had recently embodied is still powerful. Anthony Pasquin, in denouncing those who regarded themselves as the 'public' for art in the late eighteenth century, declared that:

the mightiest evil to be regretted is, that the VULGAR, who have no knowledge of propriety, should, from their numbers, their riches, and consequently their power, have the national patronage within their dominion; and yet these bipedal reptiles must be uniformly soothed and solicited, under such a forcible designation, as

THE PUBLIC.¹¹⁴

Pasquin's point is complex, and it goes to the heart of the complexity of the word. There is, he is suggesting, a conspiracy in its use, between the rich but vulgar purchasers of paintings, and the artists who satisfy their demand for ornamental, sensual images to gratify their caprice, vanity, and self-interest. The first demand to be called 'the public', so that their taste will be dignified as civic and disinterested; the painters agree to call them that, to encourage the pretence that when this public buys paintings, they are doing so out of a civic duty to promote the arts; and to encourage them, therefore, to buy more. Pasquin's anger exploits the tension between the two senses of public, as *publicus* and as *publica*, a tension we may often observe in the period before the 'public' for the arts came to signify simply the aggregate of its consumers. But, until that time, it is often difficult to gauge the relative strength of the two senses in any particular instance of its use; and when, in the chapters that follow, I cite passages in which the word appears, my interpretations of it will need to be scrutinised, and tested against the reader's own understanding of the relation between its positive and its pejorative meanings.

I had better also explain—if it is not already too late—that throughout this book I have been careful *not* to use a vocabulary purged of sexist reference. When I speak of what 'men' thought, of 'Man' in general, of the spectator as 'he', I am doing so with forethought, and in order to emphasise the point that, in the civic humanist theory of art and the various mutations of it we are about to

consider, women are denied citizenship, and denied it absolutely, in the republic of taste as well as in the political republic. They could not claim full civic membership of the republic of taste because, in the first place, they had no public identity in the political republic, and were thus incapable of public virtue; in the second place, the theories of art discussed in this book all presume that the ability to grasp the relations of general and particular is fundamental to correct taste. But as Mary Wollstonecraft pointed out, 'the power of generalizing ideas, of drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations . . . has not only been denied to women; but writers have insisted that it is inconsistent, with a few exceptions, with their sexual character'; and this 'imbecility', as Robert Lowth and Samuel Johnson described it, of the 'female mind', meant that women were capable of thinking only in terms of—the phrase is Hazlitt's—'personal ideas'. These were no doubt among the reasons why writers on painting continually assumed that their readers were only men: Archibald Alison distinguishes between male and female beauty in terms of the different forms of 'our sex' and of 'the other sex'; we prefer to see paintings of the naked female, explains Mengs, because, among other reasons, 'we' are at liberty to look at naked men whenever we please.¹¹⁵

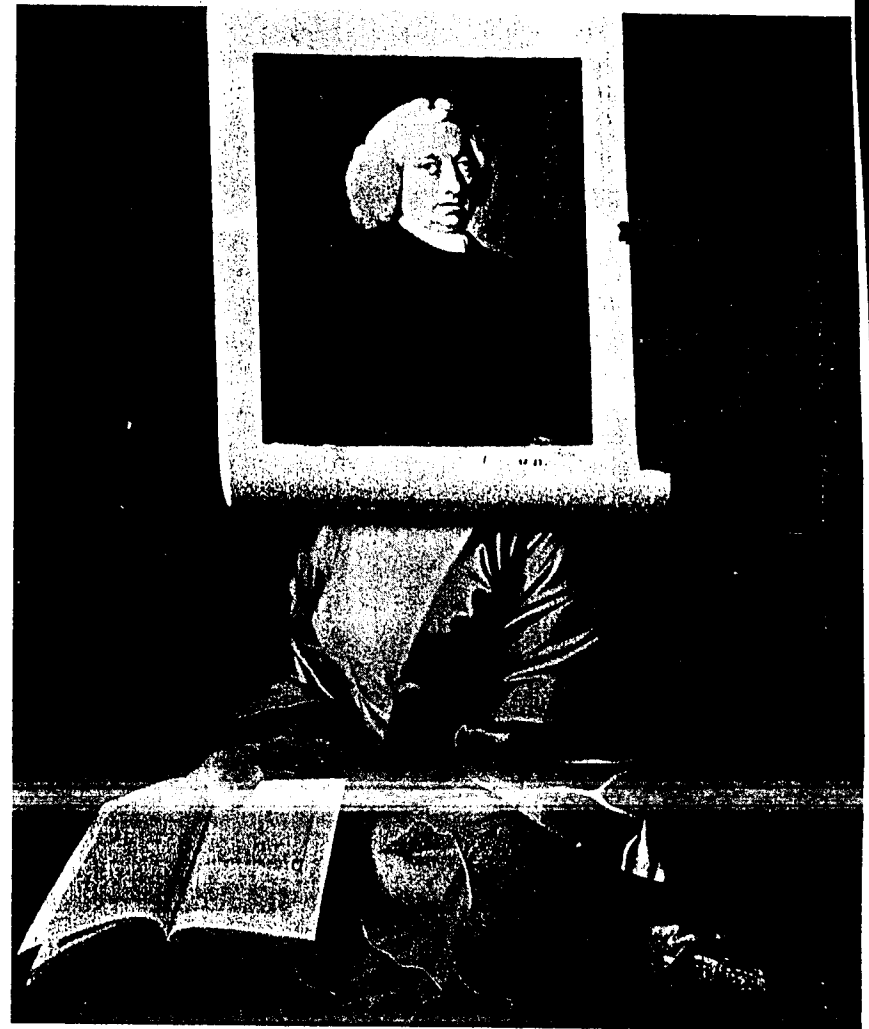
It was no doubt also with the disabling characteristics of women in mind that Wollstonecraft began the thirteenth chapter of *Mary* (1788) like this:

When the weather began to clear up, Mary sometimes rode out alone, purposely to view the ruins that still remained of the earthquake: or she would ride to the banks of the Tagus, to feast her eyes with the sight of that magnificent river. At other times she would visit the churches, as she was particularly fond of seeing historical pictures.

One of these visits gave rise to the subject, and the whole party descanted on it; but as the ladies could not handle it well, they soon adverted to portraits; and talked of the attitudes and characters in which they should wish to be drawn. Mary did not fix on one—when Henry, with more apparent warmth than usual, said, 'I would give the world for your picture, with the expression I have seen in your face, when you have been supporting your friend.'

This delicate compliment did not gratify her vanity, but it reached her heart.¹¹⁶

Mary's fondness for history-painting, and her refusal to take a vain pleasure in considering how she would wish to be portrayed, are directed by Wollstonecraft against the assumptions about women



2. Thomas Hudson(?), *Miss Irons* (mid-18th century, date uncertain), private collection. 'A nineteenth century label is on the back of the picture: A picture with a scroll over face by Hudson, Sir Joshua Reynolds Master. The original portrait was one of Miss Irons, a well-known beauty. When the picture came home she did not think it did her justice & returned it to Hudson to have it improved. He painted over her face the scroll having the portrait of (?) Thomas Mudge saying he would put some sense into her head somehow & that Thomas Mudge was the wisest man he knew.' (*Thomas Hudson, 1701-1779*, catalogue of an exhibition at Kenwood, London, 1979, no. 66).

embodied in the civic humanist theory of painting. That theory assumes that, as Shaftesbury had put it, 'Ladies hate the great manner'; that women cannot understand history-paintings, which are public and idealised works, the comprehension of which demands an understanding of public virtue, an ability to generalise, and 'an acquaintance with the grand outline of human nature', which (whether by nature or nurture) is denied to women, who are obliged to remain 'satisfied with common nature'¹¹⁷. If the 'ladies' cannot discuss history-paintings, that is because it has been presumed impossible for them to learn how to do so. Portraits, however, work in terms of 'personal' ideas; they aim to present particular likenesses; where they represent virtue, they favour the private virtues; and they gratify the vanity of those who sit for them, and so of women especially, who are known to be especially vain. That women are happy to discuss portraits, only confirms their inability to comprehend the higher, the public genre of art.

I

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

1. *Introductory: the coherence of the 'Discourses'*

IN HIS seventh discourse, delivered at the Royal Academy in 1776, Sir Joshua Reynolds considers the opinion that only 'the good and virtuous man' can acquire a 'true or just relish' of works of art. This opinion, he suggests:

will not appear entirely without foundation, when we consider that 'the same habit of mind which is acquired by our search after truth in the more serious duties of life, is only transferred to the pursuit of lighter amusements. The same disposition, the same desire to find something steady, substantial, and durable, on which the mind can lean as it were, and rest with safety, actuates us in both cases. The subject only is changed. We pursue the same method in our search after the idea of beauty and perfection in each; of virtue, by looking forwards beyond ourselves to society, and to the whole; of arts, by extending our views in the same manner to all ages and all times. (134)*

If all men of taste are also men of virtue, they are so, it seems, because they have cultivated a particular habit of mind: the habit of taking 'comprehensive views', and of subordinating their personal interests and concerns to the interests and concerns of some wider 'whole'. Reynolds will not, it seems, explicitly endorse the opinion he has considered: to do so would be to engage in an argument too complex to be determined before his audience at the Academy. But it is everywhere clear that he regards the opinion as well-founded, and indeed the connection between taste and 'the more serious duties of life' is crucial to an understanding of the *Discourses*;¹ which, as I shall be

* All page-numbers in this chapter refer to *Reynolds's Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark, 2nd edition, New Haven and London 1975.

NOTES

Works cited on a second and subsequent occasions are referred to simply by the author's name, or (in the cases where more than one work by an author is cited) by the author's name and a short title. Italicized page-numbers in the Index refer to the first citation of a work, where its full title and publication details are given. Where an edition other than the first is cited, the date of original publication is given in brackets immediately following the title. The place of publication is London unless otherwise stated. Volume and page-numbers are given thus: 1: 234.

Introduction: A Republic of Taste.

1. 'Anthony Pasquin' (John Williams), *Memoirs of the Royal Academicians; being an attempt to improve the national taste*, 1796, 99n, 89; Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark, 2nd edition, New Haven and London 1975, 13, 11; James Northcote, *The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1813), 2nd edition, 1819, 1: 173; John Flaxman, *Lectures on Sculpture* (1829), 1865, 17; John Galt, *The Life, Studies, and Works of Benjamin West, Esq.* (hereafter 'West'), London and Edinburgh 1820, 2: 80.
2. John Knowles (ed.), *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli* (hereafter 'Fuseli'), 1831, 3: 48; the fullest discussion of the body of writing considered in this book is Johannes Dobai, *Die Kunstliteratur des Klassizismus und der Romantik in England*, Bern, 3 vols, 1974-77.
3. J. G. A. Pocock, 'Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophical Historian', *Daedalus*, Summer 1976, 153-4; for an exceptionally full account of civic humanism, see Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Republican Thought and the Atlantic Tradition*, Princeton, N. J., 1975; see also Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle: the Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole*, Cambridge, Ma., 1968, and Donald W. Hanson, *From Kingdom to Commonwealth: The Development of Civic Consciousness in English Political Thought*, Cambridge, Ma., 1970.
4. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays in Political Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, 1972, 90; the phrase 'politikon zoon' is Aristotle's; see for example *Politics*, Loeb edition, tr. H. Rackham, Cambridge, Ma., and London, 1977, 8.
5. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1719-40) eds. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, Oxford 1978, 587; James Thomson, *Liberty* (1735-6), *The Complete Works of James Thomson*, ed. J. Logie Robertson, 1908, pt. 5, lines 121-3, 93-4; Pocock, 'Between Machiavelli and Hume', 154; *Politics, Language and Time*, 113.
6. Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), 4th edition 1737, 1: 104; 2: 86-7; 1: 37; John Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, 2nd edition, 1757, 58.
7. *Characteristics*, 1: 98-9; for a full discussion of these issues, see John Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics of the Earl of Shaftesbury*, 2nd edition, London 1751, Essay III, section vi.
8. *Characteristics*, 1: 98 and n.; Reynolds, *Discourses*, 151; James Thomson, *The Seasons* (1730-46), ed. James Sambrook, Oxford 1981, 'Winter', lines 596-7.
9. *Characteristics*, 1: 63.
10. Aristotle, 577, 575, 197, 637.
11. Aristotle, 23, 203, 65, 17-19.
12. Aristotle, 213, 65, 503, 575, 193-7.
13. *Characteristics*, 1: 127; 2: 55; for an amplification of the points raised in this paragraph, see John Bartell, *English Literature in History 1730-80: An Equal, Wide Survey*, 1983, 25-49, 51-168.
14. Brown, *Estimate*, 24, 72, 25; Stephen Copley (ed.), *Literature and the Social Order*, 1984, 6.
15. *Characteristics*, 2: 133, quoted by Copley, 6; Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Spirit of Patriotism* (1740), in Copley, 49.
16. Copley, 2.
17. Copley, 6-7; for more on this topic, see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, chs. 13, 14; A. O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before*

- us Triumph, Princeton, N.J., 1977; C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, Oxford 1962; John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett*, Baltimore, Md., 1977, chs. 2 and 3.
18. Prince Hoare, in Hoare (ed.) *The Artist*, 1810, 2: 309.
19. George Turnbull, *A Treatise on Ancient Painting, containing Observations on the Rise, Progress, and Decline of that Art amongst the Greeks and Romans*, 1740, 15: 134-7.
20. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 366.
21. Joseph Weston, 'An Essay on the Superiority of Dryden's Versification over that of Pope and the Moderns', prefixed to his translation of John Moritt's *Philoxeni-Ardene, The Woodmen of Arden: A Latin Poem* (1708), reproduced in F. W. Bateson and N. A. Joukovsky (eds.) *Alexander Pope*, Harmondsworth 1971, 154.
22. Brown, *Estimate*, 25; Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* 1790, in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 5 (1815): 96; Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1: 192; Abate Luigi Lanzi, *The History of Painting in Italy* (final revised ed. 1809), tr. Thomas Roscoe, 1847, 1: 16.
23. Pliny, *Natural History*, Loeb edition, tr. H. Rackham, 9, Cambridge, Ma., and London 1984), 323-5 (all subsequent references to Pliny are to this volume and this edition); Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757-9), ed. James T. Boulton, Notre Dame, Ind., and London 1968, 19-20; see also Franciscus Junius, *The Painting of the Ancients*, 1638, 214; Roger de Piles, *The Art of Painting* (1707), 2nd English edition, 1744, 80-1, and *The Principles of Painting* (1708), translated into English by a Painter, 1743, 183; Johnson, *The Rambler*, no. 4, March 31 1750; Reynolds, *Discourses*, 233.
24. Burke, *Enquiry*, 22-3.
25. Plato, *Republic*, Loeb edition, tr. Paul Shorey, London and Cambridge, Ma., 1970, 2: 451-459.
26. Reynolds, *Discourses*, 170; Plato, 2: 451 (I have preferred the translation here of H. D. P. Lee, Harmondsworth 1955, 380); Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism* (1762), 1839, 454; *The Works of Anthony Raphael Mengs*, tr. Don Joseph Nicholas D'Azara, 1796, 2: 126; Turnbull, 99.
27. See Marian Hobson, *The Object of Art: The Theory of Illusion in Eighteenth-Century France*, Cambridge 1982, 13-15, 18-61; also André Fontaine, *Les Doctrines d'art en France. Peintres, amateurs, critiques, de Poussin à Diderot*, Paris 1909.
28. Mengs, 1: 136; 2: 114, 126.
29. Mengs, 3: 69; 2: 21; 3: 75.
30. Reynolds, *Discourses*, 93, 117, 97; Daniel Webb, *An Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting; and into the Merit of the Most Celebrated Painters, Ancient and Modern* (1760), 3rd edition, 1769, 5, 18.
31. Aristotle, 639, 643; Pliny, 319; Leon Battista
- Alberti on *Painting* (1435-6), tr. John R. Spencer, revised edition, London and New Haven, Ct., 1966, 66; Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550-68), tr. Mrs Jonathan Foster, 1870, 1: 12-13; Junius, 91; see also below, 41-2.
32. William Aglionby, *Painting Illustrated in Three Dialogues*, 1685, 44-5; Conte Francesco Algarotti, *An Essay on Painting Written in Italian*, 1764, 183; Thomas Hope in *The Artist*, May 2 1807; see also John Robert Scott, 'A Dissertation on the Progress of the Fine Arts' (1804), Augustan Reprint Society, Los Angeles, Ca., 1954, 148.
33. Webb, 31; Benjamin Robert Haydon, *Lectures on Painting and Design*, 1 (1844): 6.
34. See below, 209-14.
35. Aglionby, 98; Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, 1725, 26; William Sanderson, *Graphicæ, The Use of the Pen and Pencil. OR, The Most Excellent Art of Painting*, 1658, preface (unpaginated); Webb, 18; Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 3: 162; Richardson, *Theory*, iii, and *Two Discourses*, 1719, 1: 218 (mispaginated for 198), 2: 222.
36. For Richardson, see Carol Gibson-Wood, 'Jonathan Richardson and the Rationalization of Connoisseurship', *Art History*, March 1984, 38-56; Lawrence Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England*, Princeton, N.J., 1970, 109-26; Dobai, *Kunstliteratur*, 1: 613-64.
37. Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 3: 156.
38. For Steele and Defoe, see Barrrell, *Survey*, 37-9; Richardson, *Two Discourses*, 2: 229.
39. Shaftesbury, *Second Characters, or, The Language of Forms*, ed. Benjamin Rand, Cambridge 1914, 135, 134, 18, 22, 16 (but see 4); see Edgar Wind, 'Shaftesbury as a Patron of Art', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 2 (1938): 185-8; W. Wells, 'Shaftesbury and Paolo de Matteis. The Choice of Hercules', *Leeds Art Calendar*, 3 (1950): 37-50; Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters*, New Haven Ct. and London, 1963, 198ff.
40. Richardson, *Theory*, 26-8.
41. Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 19, 26; *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, Baltimore, Md., 1 (1939): 455; Turnbull, 15, xvi.
42. For the rules of epic, see H. T. Swedenberg, *The Theory of Epic in England*, Berkeley, Ca., 1944; Hooker's introduction to vol. 2 (1943) of Dennis, sect. 4, and vol. 1: 454-5. Peter Høeglin, *The Epic Hero and the Decline of Heroic Poetry*, Bern 1964.
43. René Le Bossu's *Traité du poème épique*, Paris 1675, was translated by 'W. J.' and published in 1695 as *Treatise of the Epic Poem*.
44. Dennis, 2: 113-14.
45. Turnbull, 114; Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 117; John Gilbert Cooper, *The Power of Harmony* (1745), in *The British Poets including Translations*, Chiswick 1822, 72, 70; Dennis, 1:

- 114; James Harris, *Three Treatises* (1744) in *The Works of James Harris*, Oxford 1841, 22.
46. Richardson, *Theory*, 174, and *Two Discourses*, 2: 62, 48, and see also 216-17.
47. Richardson, *Theory*, 15-16, and *Two Discourses*, 2: 46-7; see also Reynolds, *Discourses*, 13; West, 2: 79; and below, 357, n. 10 (for Haydon).
48. Among the numerous discussions of this topic, see Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 103-4; Richardson, *Two Discourses*, 2: 44; *The Guardian*, no. 21 (4 April 1713); Hogarth, 'Autobiographical Notes' in *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), ed. Joseph Burke, Oxford 1955, 203-9; Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (1762-80), revised Rev. James Dallaway, ed. Ralph H. Wornum, no date, 1: xxii; Reynolds, 'A Journey to Flanders and Holland', in *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. Malone, 2nd edition, 1798, 2: 339-42; Hoare, *An Inquiry into the Requisite Cultivation and Present State of the Arts of Design in England*, 1806, 16-18, 193; William Hazlitt, *Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., R. A.* (1830), in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (1930-4), 11: 250, 268; *The Works of James Barry, Esq., Historical Painter*, ed. Dr Edward Fryer, 1809, 2: 210; John Opie, *Lectures on Painting* (hereafter 'Opie'), 1809, 93; Martin Archer Shee, *Rhymes on Art*, 2nd edition, 1805, 102; West, 2: 52-3; Haydon, *Some Enquiry into the Causes which have obstructed the Advance of Historical Painting ... in England*, 1829, 13ff.
49. Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 118-19; Richardson, *Two Discourses*, 2: 203.
50. Richardson, *Two Discourses*, 2: 62, 44, 15, 196.
51. *Spectator*, no. 226 (November 19 1711); Richardson, *Two Discourses*, 2: 16-17, and *Theory*, 10-11, 13.
52. Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), Edinburgh 1813, 2: 168, 214; see Longinus, *On the Sublime*, ed. W. Rhys Roberts, Cambridge 1907, 155-7; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 58.
53. See, e.g., Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, tr. H. E. Butler, Loeb edition, London and New York City 1921, 1: 295; Cicero, *De Oratore*, tr. H. M. Hubell, Loeb edition, London and Cambridge, Ma., 1952, 359-61; Alberti, 77, 90.
54. Turnbull, ix, x; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 59.
55. See for example Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 19.
56. Kames, 40; Aglionby, preface (unpaginated); Dryden, *Prose Works*, ed. Malone, 1800, 3: 305; Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 149; Webb, 182; Opie, 18.
57. De Piles, *Principles*, 19-20; the problem is also discussed by Junius, 257-65.
58. Opie, 18; Turnbull, 45; Quintilian, book 9, sect. 4; Cicero, *De Oratore*, book 3, sect. 50.
59. Though Du Bos is firmer than anyone in arguing that it is a rule constitutive of a rhetorical aesthetic that the 'public' are competent judges of
- art (*Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), Paris 1746, 2: 232-40), he limits his definition of the 'public' to a considerable degree. The public are 'ignorant', but only of the principles of painting—they are not generally ignorant (2: 334). Everyone, including 'le bas peuple', can judge whether an individual work is good or bad, whether it pleases or moves them (2: 325, 331-2, 338-9), but the 'public' are only those who by their reading or knowledge of the world are in a position to compare works of art (2: 334-6). See also Félibien, *Conférences de l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture*, Paris 1669, preface (unpaginated); painting teaches the ignorant, but it 'satisfies' the 'plus habiles'; de Piles, *Art*, 61: the ignorant are sensible of the effects of a work, but not of the principles of its production; Sanderson, 50: paintings are 'to be perceived by each observer; to be liked of the most part; but to be judged, only, of the learned'; Allan Ramsay, 'A Dialogue on Taste', 2nd edition, in *The Investigator*, 1762, has no doubt that the 'lowest and most illiterate of the people' can judge paintings, and do so, for example, when they remark that they are 'vastly natural'—the only judgment Ramsay allows (56-7); for James Barry's view, see below, pp. 182-9.
60. Turnbull, xvi; Richardson, *Two Discourses*, 2: 16.
61. Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 18, and *Characteristicks*, 3: 349-50; for Prodicus's version of the story, see Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II, i, 21; for other uses of the story in the eighteenth century, see Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744 version), book 2 and the opening of book 3; Robert Lowth's poem, 'The Choice of Hercules', in *Sermons and other Remains*, 1784—the poem originally appeared in Joseph Spence, *Poly-metis*, 1747, 155-62, and see also 139-43; Turnbull, xix. For other examples see Ronald Paulson, *Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century*, 1975, 237, n. 22, and see also his account of Shaftesbury's 'invention', 38-40. For useful general discussions of Shaftesbury's views on art, see Dobai, 1: 47-91, and R. W. Uphaus, 'Shaftesbury on Art. The Rhapsodic Aesthetic', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 27, no. 3, Spring 1969, 341-8.
62. Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 3: 386, 363, 360, 366-7.
63. *Characteristicks*, 3: 371, 351, 385-6, 382.
64. *Characteristicks*, 3: 381-2, 385.
65. Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 26; *Characteristicks*, 3: 350-2.
66. *Characteristicks*, 3: 362-3, 365-6.
67. *Characteristicks*, 3: 370-1, 355, 360.
68. *Characteristicks*, 3: 378-9.
69. *Characteristicks*, 1: 143.
70. *Characteristicks*, 3: 362, 357-8, 352, 370, 374.
71. Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting, with Remarks and Observations* (by

- de Piles), tr. Dryden, edition of 1769, lines 132-6 and 159-61, and, in de Piles's commentary (henceforth 'de Piles, "Observations"'), see for example 89, 101-2, 129-30; Félibien, preface (unpaginated), 83 (Lebrun), 135, 143 (Bourdon). 'All speaking at once': de Piles, *Principles*, 65; Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*, tr. Fuseli, 1765, 34; Algarotti, 111 (and citing Hogarth, 111n.).
72. Plato, 2: 449-53.
73. De Piles, *Principles*, 42.
74. Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 22-3; Turnbull, 99 (and for Longinus, 99n.).
75. Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (1741-2), Oxford 1963, 265; Scott, 147; Thomson, *Liberty*, part 2, lines 159-70; Harris, *Hermes* (1751), in *Works*, 239.
76. Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 3: 138; Thomson, *Liberty*, part 2, lines 365-6; Flaxman, 183-4 (for art as coming to be seen as promoting 'private' as well as 'public' virtue, see below, 58-60).
77. Scott, 165, 149-50, 162; Northcote, 1: 301; Pliny, 347-9 (and see Fuseli, 3: 53); West, 2: 89; Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 22; and see also Junius, 186; de Piles, *Art*, 81, and 'Observations', 66; Du Bos, 2: 139-40.
78. Dennis, 1: 320, 322; Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 23, 20; Richardson, *Theory*, 223-5, and *Two Discourses*, 2: 52-6; see Barrell, *Survey*, 119ff.
79. Thomson, *Liberty*, part 5, lines 440-548; Akenside, book 2; Turnbull, 109-10; Algarotti, iv; for West, see Haydon, *Lectures*, 2 (1846): 102 ff.; Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1: 107.
80. See Elizabeth Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought*, Oxford 1969; Hume, *Essays*, 265; Turnbull, 108; Brown, 29; *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 1966, 593-4. For discussions of eighteenth-century notions of the encraving effects of luxury, see Sekora, esp. chs. 2 and 3 (Sekora's notes contain an excellent bibliography of the topic); Pocock, 'Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1972), 119-34, and *Machiavellian Moment*, esp. chs. 13 and 14.
81. Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 20; Kames, 454; George Berkeley, *An Essay towards preventing the Ruin of Great Britain* (1721), in *The Works of George Berkeley*, ed. A. C. Fraser, Oxford 1871, 3: 203, and also in Copley, 93; for a general account of the topics raised in this and the following paragraph, see John D. Schiffer, 'The Idea of Decline and the Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century England', *Modern Philology*, vol. 35 (1936), 155-78.
82. Brown, *Estimate*, 47, and see his *Essays*, 389-90; Roland Fréart de Chambray, *An Idea of the Perfection of Painting* (1662), tr. John Evelyn, 1668, 77, and see 2: for 'war', see
- Pocock, 'Between Machiavelli and Hume', p. 157; Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), ed. Duncan Forbes, Edinburgh 1966, 153; J. R. Western, *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century: The Story of a Political Issue*, 1965; discussions of the decline of painting into mannerism, and into a trade, are so common in the period covered by this book as to make exemplification unnecessary.
83. Du Bos, 1: 184-92. This section of my introduction is not to be read as arguing that there is no evidence, in eighteenth-century France, of a republican discourse in the discussion of painting. There is, of course, as Thomas Crow has shown (*Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, New Haven and London 1985), ample such evidence. But it emerges, as Crow reveals, in the unofficial and oppositional writings on *Salon*-exhibitions, and is almost entirely absent from writings on art before the re-institution of the *Salon* in 1737. Before that date, the attempt to invent a 'public' for art—an attempt indeed obliged to borrow the terms of republican discourse—was one which always envisaged that the public thus invented would become a constituent element of an absolutist state, its function to confirm the absolutism of the crown; and as such, the republicanism inherent in the notion of the public could find no coherent discursive presence in theoretical writings on art in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.
84. Félibien, preface (unpaginated), and 111 (van Opstal).
85. Poussin, quoted in Anthony Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, text volume, London and New York City 1967, 372, and see Blunt's remarks on the passage, 355, n. 74, and, in *Nicolas Poussin: Lettres et Propos sur l'art*, ed. Blunt, Paris 1964, 164, n. 20; Félibien, preface (unpaginated); Du Bos, 2: 72, 6-7 (he may have in mind the painters of the *maîtrise*, the 'journeymen'-members of the Guild in opposition to which the Academy was founded—see Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 23-8).
86. Pliny, p. 319; Fréart, preface (unpaginated); de Piles, 'Observations', 66, 157-8; Mengs, 1: 135, 204.
87. Hobson, 45—the opening chapters of this book are of great importance to the topic of illusion in French art-criticism; Du Fresnoy, line 261; Du Bos, 1: 388, 37-8; 2: 4-5; de Piles, *Art*, 36; *Principles*, 2.
88. Blair, 2: 168, and see the distinction between republican and imperial oratory made by Tzvetan Todorov, *Théories du symbole*, Paris 1977, ch. 2, and esp. 63-4: 'Dans une démocratie, la parole pouvait être efficace. Dans une monarchie (pour parler vite), elle ne le peut plus (le pouvoir appartient aux institutions, non aux assemblées): son idéal changera nécessairement: la meilleure parole sera celle

- qu'on jugera belle' (Todorov's emphasis); Du Bos, 1: 38-9; 2: 331, 338, 1; for Kames, see *Elements*, 34-7; Du Fresnoy, lines 5-6 and, for Dryden's translation, 3.
89. Du Bos, 2: 130ff., 135ff., 143-4.
90. De Piles, 'Observations', 91; Peter Burke, 'Tradition and Experience: The Idea of Decline from Bruni to Gibbon', *Daedalus*, Summer 1976, 137-52; Vasari, 1: 19-22, 32-3; Fréart, 3; Winckelmann, *History of Ancient Art* (1764), IV, vi, 50 and 55; and see also Lanzi, 1: 155; 2: 233; Aglionby, 83; Turnbull, ch. 5.
91. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 461; *Politics, Language and Time*, 90.
92. See Hume, *Essays*, 579ff.
93. Tucker, *The Elements of Commerce and Theory of Taxes* (1755), in Copley, 113; Stuart, *Principles of Political Oeconomy* (1767), in Copley, 120-2; Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, eds. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner and W. B. Todd, Oxford 1976, 1: 25-7.
94. Hume, *Essays*, 268-9; Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* (1714-24), ed. Phillip Harth, Harmondsworth 1970, 256.
95. Ferguson, 143; for Stuart and Tucker, see Copley, 121, 115; Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, I: 422.
96. Brown, *Estimate*, 22, 102-3.
97. Shee, lvi-lviii.
98. Shee, 51-2; Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (1791-2), ed. Henry Collins, Harmondsworth 1969, 80, and see Matthew 3: 10; Brown, *Estimate*, 111.
99. Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, 115; Ferguson, 218-19, 183; Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 1: 21-2, 30 and n.
100. Brown, *Estimate*, 220; Northcote, 2: 78; see also Barrell, *Survey*, esp. 40-9.
101. *The Microcosm*, no. 4 (27 November, 1786).
102. For a good account of the ethics and aesthetics of Hutcheson, see W. J. Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque*, Carbondale, Ill., 1957.
103. Hume, *A Treatise*, 587, 603, 605.
104. *A Treatise*, 599-601.
105. *A Treatise*, 601, 604, 588.
106. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), eds. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, Oxford 1976, 23-5, and, for Hume, 23n.; Kames, 14, 44.
107. Webb, 28-9, 34; Poussin's *Death of Germanicus* (1628) is in the Institute of Arts, Minneapolis; *The Plague of Athens* (private collection) is no longer attributed to Poussin.
108. Burke, *Enquiry*, 51, 111, and see Hume, *A Treatise*, 607-8; Gerard, *An Essay on Taste*, 1759, 18, 204.
109. Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, eds. R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael, P. G. Stein, Oxford 1978, 539-41 (Report of 1776); Ferguson, 77, 55.
110. Ferguson, 56, 178-9; I have borrowed this and the surrounding paragraphs from my essay 'The Functions of Art in a Commercial Society: The Writings of James Barry', in *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, vol. 25, no. 2, Spring 1984: 117-40. And on the subject of that essay, I would like to take this opportunity of dissociating myself from almost all the opinions in the article 'Marxism, Ideology, and Eighteenth-Century Scholarship', by G. S. Rousseau, the editor of this special number of the journal. In particular, I take strong exception to Rousseau's characterisation of Raymond Williams's lack of 'erudition' (113), and still stronger exception—for here Rousseau expresses himself more strongly—to what I take to be an offensive caricature of Donald Davie's critical and scholarly procedures (107ff.).
111. Northcote, 2: 313; Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756), 5th edition, 1806, 1: 275-6. Thomas Warton, in his *History of English Poetry* (1774-81; 2: 462-3); argues that modern manners are not conducive to epic, and the belief became a common one in the middle and late eighteenth century; see, for example, Berkeley, 'Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America' (1752), in *Works*, 3: 232; Thomas Blackwell, *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer*, 1735; Kames, 401n.; William Hayley, *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, 1782; Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian*, 1763; John Brown, *Dissertation on the Rise, Union, and Power, the Progression, Separations, and Corruptions of Poetry and Music*, Dublin 1763; Robert Wood, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Homer*, 1775; Scott, 'A Dissertation'.
112. Pliny, 281, quoted by Reynolds, *Discourses*, 21.
113. Wordsworth, 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface' (1815), *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser, Oxford 1974, 3: 84; Blake, 597.
114. Pasquin, *Memoirs*, 148.
115. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), ed. Carol Poston, New York 1975, 54. Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1753), tr. G. Gregory, 2 vols. London 1787, 2: 127; Johnson, anonymous dedication in Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote* (1752), ed. Margaret Dalziel, London 1970, 1 or 3 (pagination faulty); Hazlitt, 20: 41; Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790), 6th edition, Edinburgh 1825, 2: 309; Mengs, 3: 147.
116. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, and The Wrongs of Woman*, eds. James Kinsley and Gary Kelly, Oxford 1980, 28.
117. *Second Characters*, 131. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, 24.

Chapter One: Sir Joshua Reynolds

1. Compare the observation of West (2: 107): 'there is no surer way, either to fame or fortune, than by acting in art, as well as life, on those