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## Book Reviews Mom's

John Barrell. *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: "The Body of the Public."* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986. Pp. 366. \$30.00.

Most of the little that has been written about the theory of painting in England has been anemic. The typical mode has been unintegrated paraphrase, the typical manner a highhanded lassitude exemplified by Frederick J. Cummings' remark that "Reynolds' ideas were so completely out of date by the time he repeated them to his students that it is almost impossible to find any freshness in them" ("The Problem of Artistic Style as It Relates to the Beginnings of Romanticism," in *Irrationalism in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Harold E. Pagliaro [Cleveland: Case Western Reserve, 1972]). With *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* John Barrell makes superior use of history in turning theory to account and meanwhile sets an impressive new standard for scholarship in the field.

Barrell locates the coherence of his account of eighteenth-century British writing about painting in a single "discourse of civic humanism" adapted from the work of historian J. G. A. Pocock. A discourse can be recognized as such by the collocation of numerous factors that in effect select certain subjects for certain treatments and exclude others. For most purposes, I believe, it is sufficient to describe a discourse as a coherent cluster of metaphors, and the outlines, at least, of the metaphorical structure of civil humanist discourse are clear. A fundamental metaphor in the discourse identifies political with artistic behavior, giving rise to such characteristic remarks as "the criticism of painting [in the period] had no language to employ but a political language, and had no ambition to develop an approach to painting which was not political" (vii). The privileged, potent side of the metaphor is the political side: Barrell thus criticizes as "not sophisticated" any appeal (as by Joshua Reynolds or James Barry) to an "internal" (73) history of art; bonafide "processes of change" (200) originate outside.

This master metaphor authorizes a group of more specific key metaphors drawn from the identification of political and artistic terms: "the republic of the fine arts, or of taste" is thus "structured as a political republic" (34), with "citizens" who are supposed to display "civic vir-

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tues," avoid private vices (preeminently "luxury"), and promote the general good under conditions of "political liberty" (33). These terms are created dialectically, on the axis of an emphatic opposition between "public" and "private." The opposition anchors what Barrell would call the value-language of the discourse. "Public" is good. (As I recall, "public" and its cognates are never used negatively in the book, and "private" never positively.) The opposition of public to private organizes a set of antitheses, such as *republic* vs. *absolutist state* or *modern commercial state*; *citizen* or *free man* vs. *mechanic*; *civic virtue* or *public virtue* vs. *private vice* or *luxury*; and *rhetorical aesthetic* vs. *philosophical aesthetic* or *expressive aesthetic* (introduction, ad passim).

When the coherence of such a cluster of metaphors is described, the result is a narrative. "This book tells a story" (1), Barrell begins—or rather a series of stories, which become episodes in a more extensive story, which is, in a word, the argument. The series of stories is divided into two types, prototype and variations. The prototype is treated as a kind of original that structures the variations, which are arranged in a loose chronological order that has conceptual (and ultimately moral) significance. Barrell describes the prototype in a long introductory chapter ("The Republic of Taste") that emphasizes the contributions of John Dennis, James Thomson, George Turnbull, and, especially, Shaftesbury. The introduction is followed by a series of six significant variations in five chapters, one each on Reynolds, Barry, Blake, Fuseli, and a concluding chapter contrasting Haydon and Hazlitt. The treatments of Reynolds, Barry, and Fuseli are extensive, the treatments of Blake, Haydon, and Hazlitt less so.

Barrell's preferred metaphors for the two basic types of the one story are not my synchronic terms, prototype and variation, but a couple of diachronic counterparts, tradition ("the civic humanist theory of painting in its traditional form" 27) and adaptation ("the civic humanist theory of painting . . . variously adapted by those writers on art" 63). An adaptation will, typically, *dissent from* (39), *depart from*, or *compromise* (21), *complicate* (53), *confuse* (55, 58), or *devalue* (60) some aspects of the traditional form in the process of *reaffirming* (63) other aspects. The adaptations, though their differences from one another are scrupulously recorded, are all regarded as members of one set because they are traced to one source, the burgeoning capitalist economic order that was fast changing the terms on which life, including art and theories of art, could be carried on.

The "traditional" and "bourgeois" (21) or "unadapted" and "adapted" (46) forms of the civic humanist story are arranged on either side of a chronological dividing line. If we label 1700 "public" and 1825

"private," then we might predictably locate the "public-private" at the midpoint between them—in narrative terms a crisis of transition: ". . . by the mid-century, the distinction between public and private had become far less secure" (62). Barrell characterizes the transition in various ways. In ethical philosophy generally we can observe "a *steady devaluing* of the dignity of the public virtues," those virtues "useful to the community," such as heroism and magnanimity, "and a *steady elevation* of the dignity of private virtue," virtue "glorious to the individual alone," such as the "tender" virtues of love and fidelity, and especially those springing evidently from self-interest, such as frugality and enterprise. The mid-century Scots, Hume, Adam Smith, and Kames, for example, propose in different ways a "taxonomy of virtues and passions which . . . *complicates*, the earlier secure division between public and private" (my emphasis, 55).

Theories of painting dealt with such complications through various adaptive strategies. Joshua Reynolds shifted the emphasis from virtue to a "particular kind of social knowledge" (63) represented in the notion of "central forms," which are visual markers of "social affiliation" (123) based on common sense in one of the strong meanings of the term—a kind of earned perceptual uniformity that depends upon the citizen's "relative ability to abstract general ideas from the raw data of experience" (71). Reynolds was reestablishing, through this criterion of relative ability, the old opposition of liberal versus mechanic from traditional civic humanism. The doctrine of central forms calls for a deviation from the traditionally rhetorical aesthetic of painting to what Barrell calls a "philosophical aesthetic" (82) that promotes not virtuous action but intellectual agreement, confirming "the ground of community amongst us" (93) as citizens agree on the one central form of human beauty, etc. The mental exercise required to come to agreement is a kind of drill in the generalization that will, as it were, train a public into existence through perceptual uniformity despite the stresses of privatization. In painting, the only images conducive to such agreement are unambiguous—"an ambiguous art cannot be a public art" (112)—while privatization encourages interpretive latitude. Reynolds' response is to relegate latitude to lower genres reviewed in the privacy of one's own home, and to call for "public interpretation" of formal, finished paintings on public view (123).

In replacing the active pursuit of public virtue with the mere acknowledgment of membership in a public, Reynolds' adaptation becomes discernably weaker, in Barrell's terms, than its traditional predecessor. Further, as a "bourgeois" version (125) of civic humanist discourse, the *Discourses* naturally display contradictions and evasions. The most

Public/High  
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notorious are the bald contradictions from discourse to discourse that were mocked by Reynolds' contemporaries and remain to this day a standard topic. Barrell takes up a selected few of them in a challenging new way, arguing that the later discourses reflect a political turnabout from the universalism of the central forms—supposedly free of prejudice and singularity—to a nationalism based on the discourse of custom taken from Burke, who imagines a community “bound together by [national] custom and justifiable prejudice” (136). Barrell's explanation is considerably more persuasive than others known to me. However, his willingness to claim that the “foundation of Reynolds's aesthetic has thus changed entirely” (145) is a measure of his political approach to theories of art, which allows him to believe that there is “no doubt” that “Reynolds's theory of art is, at base, a theory of society” (145). Seen as a literary construct, however, the “foundation” of which is “at base” a metaphor that identifies the individual with society, Reynolds' theory allows him more flexibility than Barrell's approach can countenance. From that angle, the shift in Reynolds' positions is little more than moving from one term of the metaphor to the other. The “foundation” changes only if one grants that Reynolds' theory, “is, at base” a social theory (the proposition that a theory of art is a theory of society is suspiciously metaphorical in syntax), and that social theories are “at base” logical rather than metaphorical constructions.

Barrell's approach puts him in the awkward position of reading the tenth discourse as one “in which Reynolds was temporarily to reassert his original civic principles” (154) after having altered them to the very foundation in the seventh. We need not scrap Barrell's political analysis of Reynolds' contradictions to wonder why such deep changes back and forth (“reconversion,” “revised aesthetic,” “structure . . . dismantled” 155) seem to affect the surface so little. The answer lies in the extent to which any discourse is a complex amalgam of metaphorical and logical organization—not one base but two. Barrell is superbly sensitive to the shape of an argument, less sensitive to the shape of a plot and the literary elements that it comprises. I suspect that relative sensitivity here has much to do with the conviction, never expressed but often implied, that plots are “at base” ideas and, further, that significant ideas are “at base” social ideas. Instead, may we imagine plots and ideas so interactive that plots may be among the active causes of ideas, or, at another level, histories so interactive that “internal” history may be more than the slave colony of “external” history?

Barrell uses “character,” a stock category in eighteenth-century theories of painting, to distinguish Reynolds from his contemporary James Barry. By idealizing the kind of character produced by abstraction from particular instances, Reynolds set up a strong theoretical resistance to

variety. Barry, regarding particular instances as the effect of an ideal that was already known from either philosophy or religion, found a way of giving variety of character a legitimate form. In the Greek civic ideal that, according to Barrell, dominates Barry's *Inquiry*, minds and bodies vary as sanctioned civic tasks vary: the athlete will have one character, the philosopher another. Thus “an artist, according to Barry, should represent to us images not of what we have in common, but of what we ought to be, and, unlike Reynolds, he believes those two are different” (172). Though he criticizes certain rigidities in Barry's classifications of human types, Barrell generally celebrates Barry's “attempt to adapt the civic theory of history-painting in such a way as to enable it to represent and foster what he understands to be the properly egalitarian nature of a mass society” (217), accepting certain kinds of variety and division in the process.

In Barry the traditional opposition of beauty versus use takes a special form that devalues beauty, which he treats as the ideal potential for each and every—but for no particular—legitimate use. As soon as a human body has a sanctioned use, it becomes a character worthy of representation but loses its beauty—leaving painters little use for beauty and, since beauty and use are gendered female and male, little use for women. Provokingly, however, if the useless female body, ready for everything but doing nothing, represents ideal potential for use, and male bodies represent appropriate uses through specific actions, these specific actions when recombined become not a beautiful female again but “the [male] universal creator, and thus . . . the body of the public” (181). History painters imitate this body as they recombine the divided knowledge and divided skills required to paint in the more specialized lower genres.

Since, according to Barry, we are born with the ability to perceive general ideas of objects (leaving specific knowledge and, more important, general truths, to experience), his distinction between liberal and mechanic takes neither aristocratic form (traditional) nor meritocratic form (Reynolds) but a Christian-republican form, perhaps, that distinguishes moral believers acting for the greater good from selfish nonbelievers. Barrell persuasively contrasts Reynolds' emphasis on contemplation with Barry's emphasis on the duty of painting to represent exemplary actions in paintings that will urge the audience to act accordingly. On the grounds that a visual image of an action is likely to be strongly related to a verbal narrative that sanctions the action, Barrell makes the important point that Barry's narrative explanations of his paintings (such as the *Adelphi* series) are not just frantic advertising or verbal compensations for artistic inadequacies but coherent products of his theory.

Turning from Barry to Blake, Barrell offers "A Blake Dictionary," which comes as an inspired polemical interruption rather than as a fluent continuation. It abandons topics broached in previous chapters (and picked up again in later ones) to concentrate on a small cluster of Blake's terms, "original," "character," "individual," and "public," with the aim of showing that his theory is yet another late eighteenth century adaptation of civic humanism. My 1982 study, *William Blake's Theory of Art*, has the honor or misfortune to serve as the symbolic focus of Barrell's opposition to "liberal individualism," which, as "the prevailing ideology of 'Blake Studies'" (224), is said to have forced Blake into the orbit of romanticism. (The prevailing ideology of Blake studies stems indisputably, I should say, from the work of Northrop Frye. It strikes me as perfunctory indeed to dismiss the theory of deep convention, or archetypalism, that emerges in *Fearful Symmetry* as liberal-individualist ideology.) The rhetorical edge gained by casting himself as the outspoken stranger in a dogmatic community of liberal individualists might have been usefully traded for an open acknowledgment that the quarrel over Blake's role (artist or poet?) and position (neoclassic or romantic?) has a venerable and unfinished history. This wobble continues to be a leading feature of the "ideology" of "Blake studies."

In *Blake's Theory of Art* I argued that Blake's theory indeed belongs to the eighteenth century visual arts but slips sideways into literary romanticism by recontextualizing key elements of the earlier discourse. While I would not construct an argument in quite the same terms today, I would defend some major features, especially its answerability to the Blakean wobble, the contrarious feature of Blake's thought and its associated reading habit: "Both read the Bible day & night / But thou readst black where I read white" (*The Everlasting Gospel*, Erdman edition, 1982 [hereafter E] 524). The upshot: it is seldom enough to show what Blake meant by showing what others in his community of discourse meant.

One might wonder how, after a century and a half of complaints about Blake's solipsism, someone can concoct a Blake so public he belongs with the civic humanists. First, Barrell refocuses the documentation, banishing Blake's annotations to Reynolds to the periphery and promoting the most neoclassical of his statements about art, his accounts of his Canterbury-pilgrims painting and engraving. But using Blake's Chaucer in isolation creates profound difficulties because he treats Chaucer in a pair with Spenser (the paintings match in format and composition) to represent the opposition of nature and vision—perhaps the central opposition in Blake's work. The Chaucer commentary must be read accordingly, as reflections on a great poem about human life at the

natural level. When Blake mentions "Universal Human Life beyond which *Nature* never steps" (Barrell 232; E 570, my emphasis), we must not be distracted by common enlightenment or romantic notions of nature into forgetting that "Nature has no Supernatural & dissolves: Imagination is Eternity" (*The Ghost of Abel* E 270). As a harbor for Blake's theories of art, the account of Chaucer is mined.

Second, Barrell often assumes that if Blake seems conventional, he must be conventional. Thus Barrell assumes that the existence of a standard civic humanist interpretation of the contest of Apelles and Protegenes (Blake's "Protogenes") by "Blake's predecessors and contemporaries" (245; see also 354 n. 21) suggests that Blake's interpretation is standard. But Blake's work is riddled with verbal and visual examples of interpretations (of Milton, Job, Dante) that appear superficially conventional but turn out to be profoundly unconventional. He certainly shared reading and viewing habits with others in his culture, but the manner and extent of the sharing cannot be taken for granted.

The shape of Barrell's reinterpretation is well exemplified by the following remark: "When Blake condemns 'walking in another man's style,' this is because to walk in the style of any individual artist, who has his own individual style, is *ipso facto* to abandon the 'true Style'—for any man's personal 'style and manner' must be 'unappropriate' to the invention it is intended to represent. It is for that reason that Blake does not 'intend' that his execution should be 'like Any Body Else'—it should be 'like' the invention, the vision . . ." (246). Thus Barrell saves Blake for the civic humanist project in three steps: by allowing, as the only admissible definition of "individuality," an enlightenment notion of "singularity of personality" that leaves us with "mere individuals" (247, 238); by arguing (as in the excerpt) rather tendentiously that Blake's theory of art is not based on that preskimmed definition; and then by proceeding to the claim that Blake's ideas about art, so construed, are more like Reynolds' and Barry's than unlike—as they are, once the differences are removed.

As the excerpt shows, Barrell's case turns on a "public" interpretation of Blake's idea of vision. Acceptable vision must be "the vision," not unlike recent Mormon publicity that provides return envelopes addressed to "THE PLAN." One vision, one style: all true artists recover the vision in the fitting style. That is, a primary goal of Barrell's project is to write the wobble out of Blake's theory in a spirit that can seem closer to Urizen—"Let each one chuse . . . / One King, one God, one Law" (*The Book of Urizen* E 72)—than to Blake. Supporting this interpretation calls for some aerobic hermeneutics. Key terms must be overhauled to constrict their range of reference and steer them away from nineteenth-

century meanings. "Original"—as in "They put the original Artist in fear and doubt of his own original conception" (*Descriptive Catalogue* E 547)—is narrowed exclusively to its diachronic sense, referring to the original vision that has been lost, while we are asked to believe that "his own" has nothing to do with romantic originality. Similarly, "individual" (as in the extract) is said to refer always to a class: "your own individual character" is synonymous with "generic character" (247). In fact, every positive use of "individual" and its cognates—of more than sixty instances, most of them positive—is said to be in a collective seventeenth-century sense established by reference to Milton and the *OED* (241-42)!

Barrell protects this straitjacketed lexicon with a lone transcendent metaphor: "the vision is a gift of God" (230). The notion of a single external deity as the single original source of "the same vision" (248; also 243, 245, 257) becomes a theme frequently reiterated and augmented. "Christian community," deployed in a similarly unexamined way, turns up at the end of a paragraph asserting the likeness of Blake's theory to Barry's—as if Blake's notion of a Christian community and Barry's were identical. My own reading of Barry suggests that he moved rather far along toward an ethical Christianity of the sort that Blake frequently attacked ("If Morality was Christianity Socrates was the Saviour," *Laocoon* E 275).

Where is the Blake who felt a profound need to assert the difference between his Christianity and others? Barrell passes by "The Man who never in his Mind & Thoughts traveled to Heaven Is No Artist" (Barrell 229, E 647) without commenting on the relocation of Heaven (or the adjacent jibe at Reynolds as "this President of Fools"). What if we augment *the vision is a gift of God* with the situational intelligence that heaven is in the mind, all deities reside in the human breast (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* E 38), God is the eternal body of man, God is Jesus, and Jesus is imagination (*Laocoon* E 273-74)? Barrell treats the god-terms in Blake's discourse as consonant with the *simply* public orientation of civic humanism. In fact these terms direct his theory simultaneously inward toward self (imagination, Jesus as personal savior) and outward toward a devoted audience (the body of Jesus), the only place where, if anywhere, claims for the public efficacy of poetry can be registered.

In the long run, the strenuous displacements required to uphold Barrell's line on Blake, so resistant to variety and difference, inevitably manifest themselves in conspicuous misinterpretations. Overvaluing the Chaucer commentary causes several problems. Chaucer's knight becomes Blake's hero—leading to the odd conclusion that his "democratic aims are partially compromised" (253) by his esteem for this aristocratic

figure. Ignoring Blakean connotations allows Barrell to quote "nor can a child be born, who is not one of these characters of Chaucer" (236) and "varied the heads and forms of his personages into all Nature's varieties" (233) as if they were excerpts from an aesthetic manifesto unaffected by the negative affinities of "born" and "nature" with "generation" and "vegetation." The chapter concludes with the assertion that "only the obstructions of commerce . . . cause nature to be an obstruction" (my emphasis, 257)! Those who have inspected the vast empire of Blake's "Goddess, Nature" (*Laocoon* E 274) may be surprised.

Barrell's devotion to the opposition of individuality and collectivity is so complete that he imposes it on the following description from *A Vision of the Last Judgment*: "these various States [says Blake] I have seen in my Imagination when distant they appear as One Man but as you approach they appear Multitudes of Nations" (E 556-57). Barrell comments: "The more remote the situation, the more the states are in danger of appearing as mere individuals" (250). However, Blake's (several) other analogous statements show clearly that he values not one end of the scale over the other but the ability to see flexibly: "such was the variation of Time & Space / Which vary according as the Organs of Perception vary & they walked / To & Fro in Eternity as One Man reflecting each in each & clearly seen / And seeing: according to fitness & order" (*Jerusalem* 98: 37-40, E 258).

Barrell uses this error to support the contention that, for Blake, "differences among artists . . . are to be regretted and are usually the result of their relative remoteness from their visions of eternity" (250). Barrell can purge the diversitarian elements from Blake's theory only by leaving totally out of account one of its operating principles, the energy of opposition that he sometimes figures as mental warfare. If all differences among artists are to be regretted, what do we make of "the Arrows of Intellect" or the spirited conversations "in Visionary forms dramatic . . . varying / According to the subject of discourse," in Blake's vision of eternity at the end of *Jerusalem* (98: 7, 28-35)?

Barrell's effort to install Blake in the party of Reynolds is bold and challenging. His argument even fortifies a general truth in need of constant reinforcement: that Blake does indeed belong to the eighteenth century and to the discourse of the visual arts in profound ways that the (other) English romantic writers, especially, do not. But ultimately the Blake whom Barrell wants to fabricate refuses to emerge satisfactorily. He accuses commentators of appealing to "the vocabulary of fixed meanings" (224)—fixed in the liberal ideology of a conventionalized academic romanticism. Even if we agree, Barrell's is only another fixed vocabulary of another conventionalization. The moves that serve so well in shaping

credible profiles of Reynolds and Barry turn out a subdued, regularized Blake, at worst a mere projection of Barrell's own arguments.

Blake is not beyond contradiction or criticism, nor need Blake studies be an endless celebration of the proto-Freudian-Marxist-Jungian-Joycean guru. For all that, Blake is too multifarious to settle into a trinity with Reynolds and Barry. In my opinion, what is needed to make better sense of Blake is not a drastic opposition between the individual as "a member of no class" (237) and the collective as the Only-Class-Going but a concept of self sufficiently enriched to participate in the private-public continuum he was trying to imagine.

If Barrell treats Barry as a near-model of the public artist at war with an age of private corruptions, he treats Henry Fuseli less sympathetically as one who battled sometimes but capitulated at other times. Barrell structures his discussion with the metaphor of Fuseli's "two voices," the critic of history and its victim, the "stoic guardian of public virtue" who rails at (what else?) the privatization of modern culture and the "milder voice" of one "who sees himself as inescapably part of the corruption he attacks" (259-60). Since the two voices cannot be reconciled, the "epic art" of history painting that Barry and Blake want to reaffirm is an impossibility for Fuseli, who must make the best of an ideal of "dramatic art" that can "acknowledge the tension" by exhibiting individual character "in the conflict of passions with . . . society" (262). Barrell's Fuseli, a fin d'epoch transition figure, comes across as a tad decadent in his willingness to acknowledge that paintings must address us as acquisitive individuals to get to us at all, the "modern fall into privacy" being "irredeemable" (261-62).

Fuseli's history of art is thus predictably a history of corruption (by privatization) in three cycles, ancient Greek, Italian renaissance, and modern European. While Barrell admits that this cyclical history of decline is common enough, he proposes that Fuseli's difference lies in his belief that the decline has been "determined by historical forces which are irremovable" (279). Facing irremovable forces that have drastically altered the essential factors of public religion and political liberty, Fuseli gradually realizes that modern painters have no choice but to compromise. Barry clung to a "desperate faith" in the efficacy of public art that Fuseli could not emulate. Thus the expression of hope that concludes his final Academy lecture is only a "show of optimism" (282) forced on him by the public occasion. (We might wonder why public institutions said to be "disjoined from social and political life" [283] are still credited with such coercive power. Fuseli's tardy optimism might be due to any number of factors, such as the founding of the new British Institution about the time of his final lecture.)

In changing interpretations of Michelangelo, Raphael, and Leonardo Barrell finds Fuseli's vision of a modern art that might not only "reflect" irreversible historical depravations but also "redeem" (284) the depraved society. In his eleventh lecture Fuseli suddenly shifts from the "epic" model of Michelangelo to the "dramatic" Raphael, whose painting offers at least a place where those who have fallen "into individuality" can "recognise" (297) the fallen condition of themselves and others. This recognition of utter separateness—of diverse characters in paintings, of diverse viewers of paintings—is relieved from total irony (Satan and his fallen compatriots consoling each other in hell) by a theory, or a fantasy, of composition. If characters cannot be united by their character, Fuseli wonders, then can they be united by compositional devices that relate characters to each other geometrically and by the unifying effects of color and chiaroscuro? The master example suddenly becomes Leonardo's *Last Supper*, where dramatic sympathy "involves" the spectator in an image of "human connexion" so powerful that he can "experience his own membership of the body of Christ through that of the disciples" (306). Unfortunately, since modern painters are too impotent even to reproduce Leonardo's compositional devices, *The Last Supper* dwindles to a mere occasion for uplifting modern interpretations of paintings painted in a more public age. But "Fuseli's argument with himself" continues in the last lecture, which reverts to "a demand for public art so uncompromising as to end in desperation" (actually in a "show of optimism") (307).

If his irreconcilable two voices make Fuseli the most transitional of this transitional sequence, then the subjects of the final chapter, Benjamin Robert Haydon and William Hazlitt, are two voices in two bodies—the voice of the past suicidally haunting the present and the voice of the new age, privatism itself, respectively. Barrell sees Haydon as a continuation of the self-subverting theorist found in Fuseli. But "the poverty of Haydon's theory" and its contradictions doom his attempt to found a public art of epic history on ideas of private genius: "the closer Haydon, in his history of art, approaches to the painters of his own day, the more he attributes to genius a power unlimited or unaided by contingency [such as historical circumstances], and the more he abandons the civic humanist discourse of Barry and of Fuseli *publicus*" (312).

Barrell's argument terminates in Hazlitt, whose theory reads as "a statement of determined opposition to the civic theories of art" (315). The best painters are best by virtue of original genius, their paintings represent individual characters, and a proper audience is finally an audience of one person finding personal satisfaction in the painter's work. The hitch comes, perhaps, with Hazlitt's desire to retain nature and

imitation as artistic subject and process, respectively, for he must then allow the artist to leave the mental for the potentially public external world: "Where there have been the finest models in nature, there have been the finest works of art" (319). Barrell traces Hazlitt's attempts to deal with the difficulties created by so valuing nature and making the imitation of it dependent on historical circumstances while simultaneously maintaining that the transactions between nature, artist, work, and spectator are private.

Hazlitt's history of art thus tends to become a history of individual encounters, amalgamated contradictorily with the old standard cyclical patterns and attended by the notable elevation of Dutch and Flemish painting to the first rank previously monopolized by the Greeks and Italians. Barrell may not give this elevation its due in providing critical support for the rise of Hogarth. Reynolds may have painted Dutch and Flemish but he theorized Michelangelo and Raphael and allowed Hogarth only a toehold. By the time of Alan Cunningham's *Lives of the Painters* (completed around 1830), however, Hogarth was making appearances as the quintessential English painter often enough to indicate that a competing history of art had grown up alongside the old civic humanist ones. Barrell treats Hogarth as a major exception in Hazlitt's theory, but on narrow grounds (see 325). A broader view might reveal that Hogarth's historical status is an index of the very developments Barrell is tracing.

In any case, we learn that Hazlitt's theory, based in individual genius and character, incorporates the division of labor in a disabling form: painters must be specialists with no comprehensive view, while spectators have to assemble for themselves a comprehensive view from the fragments offered by a range of painters. But the effect of this comprehension is merely to prove the abilities of a "meritocratic elite group" with refined taste, which "has nothing to do" and thus has "nothing to do with the public world" (332).

From here we can look back on the structure of Barrell's "story." In the opening chapter we learn prophetically that civic humanism, invaded by "the embryo of a discourse which will eventually develop into a matricide" (10), "would eventually divide from its host discourse and threaten to destroy it" (45). Through the *adaptation to privatization* that provides the mechanism of confrontation and change, then, Barrell's "story" becomes a narrative of decline, moving through a series of increasingly desperate attempts at compromise until the values of the old discourse—public values maintained through a republic of equal citizens—are supplanted by an every-man-for-himself mock-order characterized by a division of labor enforcing a privatism that permits no one to achieve the public vision essential to civic humanism. Since the

value-language of Barrell's own discourse identifies him with the victim over the triumphant victimizer, the narrative is permeated by a sense of loss and a mood of elegiac lament, climaxing on the last page with a call for a return to "representational painting, to deliver us from the free-for-all of an art whose meaning is whatever we each choose to say it is" (341).

At its simplest this narrative champions civic humanism and deplors liberal individualism, mourning losses without giving much thought to possible gains. Thus Barrell's account of Hazlitt becomes one-dimensional in failing to convey his sense of liberation from oppressive public restrictions. But at its best *The Political Theory of Painting* strives toward a more balanced view of the dilemma of civic humanism. Barrell is far too smart to forget that one function of ideology is to put the best face on the activity of an interested class. The reach of the argument seems greatest when he considers how concealed interests motivate both sides of the opposition generating his narrative progression:

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 unfranchised social inferiors. There seem to be two motives for this appropriation: to adapt it [the discourse], so as to enable it to describe the virtues of the unfranchised . . . 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 unfranchised. (55)

Although Barrell often seems loath to surrender the advantage of having a side to favor, doubling the motivations in this way adds the intellectual depth needed to divulge the most comprehensive form of his narrative: one deficient social order created a discourse laudable but corrupted by its ideological duties in defense of an unjust social structure, that was replaced by a more inclusive order that enfranchised "a wider class of men" (58) by surrendering any viable notion of a public life; an improved social order will combine the latter's vision of universal franchise with the former's vision of a public life that makes the franchise worth having. That is, Barrell seems to be hinting at the desirability and even the possibility of a twentieth-century adaptation of civic humanist discourse, returning from exile free of its original obligations to ruling-class ideology.

On the negative side, *The Political Theory of Painting* can be long-winded, the chapter on Blake is heavily slanted, and the chapter on Haydon and Hazlitt is too sketchy to deliver on its promise. The nar-

rownness of the larger argument, produced by isolating one discourse from a network of others, leaves many relevant issues, such as the uses of artistic theory in meeting commercial goals (as in the great commercial art projects of the 1790s such as the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery), unaddressed. But Barrell is an exceptionally useful writer, and *The Political Theory of Painting* is a very fine and strong book that must be debated seriously. While his arguments are indebted to a marxist tradition that has been known to lean toward brittle, not to say deterministic, arguments, he can seldom be charged with having the argument ready before the evidence comes in, nor is he inclined to critique before meticulously representing—"in terms, however, of eighteenth-century perceptions" (45)—the object of critique. He writes a precise, closely argued, densely and scrupulously documented kind of comparative analysis—not sexy, and, though capable of brilliance, almost free of wit or fascination, but steadfast, toughminded, broad, penetrating, generous, and flexible.

Art historians should esteem the book, and it will serendipitously supplement recent historical literary theory, which, though on average superior to the art-historical kind, has suffered from parochialism. It has only recently been understood, for example, that Blake's critical theory, which Wimsatt and Brooks once denied was theory at all, seemed so only because literary theorists knew too little about theories of painting to see where Blake found his categories. Similarly, if students of literature are to connect Wordsworth's notions of painting with his ideas about representations of landscape, or Coleridge's uses of the painter Allston with his ideas of literary unity, or Keats's pictorialism with his grasp of Hazlitt and Haydon, then they must understand not just the paintings, but also the theories of painting, of the time. They can commence with John Barrell's *Political History of Painting*.

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