The Art theory of Sir Joshua Reynolds

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THE ART THEORY
OF
SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

by
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LIFE

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PREFACE

This thesis aims at the presentation of the main tenets of Sir Joshua Reynolds' art theory. The main source of Reynolds' views on art is a group of Discourses delivered to the students of the Royal Academy of Arts between 1769 and 1790 when Reynolds was its first president. Since his time Reynolds' Discourses have become a classic in criticism.

Although Reynolds is chiefly known as one of the greatest portrait painters of his age, his theory of art is not confined to painting and sculpture alone but extends to the whole of the fine arts, including literature.
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CHAPTER I

DEFINITIONS

Reynolds uses many common terms in a special sense. In order to avoid ambiguity resulting from such special usage, the first chapter has been devoted to definition. In this chapter the main terms in Reynolds' system of art theory are defined. This will give the reader a tool for clearer comprehension of the entire thesis.

I. Imagination-

According to Reynolds, the fine arts address themselves to the imagination. Art strikes and stimulates the mind; the instrument of stimulation is the imagination.

Reynolds' concept of the imagination is not that of the image-making faculty, but rather a kind of sensibility, a faculty through which the mind perceives beauty.

In order to clarify Reynolds' specific use of the term imagination, a series of quotations from Reynolds' writings are given and from this series a definition is educed.

1. ... all the arts with which we have any concern in this discourse ... address themselves only to two faculties of the mind, its imagination and its sensibility.¹

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2. ... the imagination is here the residence of truth. If the imagination be affected, the conclusion is fairly drawn; if it be not affected, the reasoning is erroneous, because the end is not obtained.\(^2\)

3. There is in the commerce of life, as in art, a sagacity which is far from being contradictory to right reason, and is superior to any occasional exercise of that faculty; which supersedes it; and does not wait for the slow progress of deduction, but goes at once, by what appears a kind of intuition, to the conclusion.\(^3\)

4. ... These arts, in their highest province, are not addressed to the gross senses; but to the desires of the mind, to that spark of divinity, which we have within, impatient of being circumscribed and pent up by the world which is about us.\(^4\)

Complaining about the dullness of Gaspar de Grayer, Reynolds says: "[He] has no music in his soul, no enthusiasm, no poetry or genius."\(^5\) In speaking of the feelings engendered in him by Michelangelo, Reynolds speaks again of enthusiasm and expansion of mind:

It was the greatness I felt, the happiness, the satisfaction and self congratulation. It could not be more than I experienced if I had myself produced those works ... the expansion of the mind.\(^6\)

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 108.
6 Ibid., 225-226.
Thus we see that the arts with which Reynolds is concerned address themselves to the imagination and sensibility (Quot.1), this being the end of the work of art (Quot.2). The imagination thus addressed is a faculty of the mind and yet above deductive reasoning (Quot.3). It is a faculty of immediate or intuitive perception (Quot.3), a kind of impatient spark of divinity within us (Quot.4). The stimulation of this imagination results in an enthusiasm, a happiness, an expansion of mind (Quot. 5 and 6).

For the sake of clarification I would like to present a quotation of Jacques Maritain dealing with the same question, the relation of art perceived to the mind:

... there can be no beauty unless the mind ... is in some way rejoiced ... the intuition of artistic beauty ... stands at the opposite pole from the abstraction of scientific truth ... the mind ... spared the least effort of abstraction, rejoices without labor and without discussion ... it drinks the clarity of being.7

It would seem that the imagination as thought of by Reynolds is essentially the same as this "intuitive" faculty of the mind spoken of by Maritain. Through the senses the mind is directly appealed to "without labor and without discussion" and it "rejoices" in this appeal.

For a definition of imagination as used by Reynolds we may say that it is that faculty of the mind which perceives beauty immediately and without the effort of abstraction, and which delights in beauty thus perceived.

II. Artistic Experience—

The work of art strikes the mind through the imagination and produces the artistic experience. This experience is produced only by great art, and an understanding of it is an essential step in understanding Reynolds' view on the end of art and the means of arriving at that end.

As in the case of imagination, a definition is educed from a series of quotations.

1. ... never cease looking at them [i.e. the works of Michelangelo and Raffaello] till you feel something like inspiration come over you ... 8

Or again, speaking of his appreciation of Michelangelo and Raphael, Reynolds says:

2. ... a united pleasure originating from two different sources, one of which proceeded from the real ... expansion of the mind ... the pride of the soul as it has been called, and the other, the self congratulation that I [possessed] a mind capable of feeling ... those refined sensations which are the great prerogative and distinction of man. 9


3. The pictures of Rubens have this effect on the spectator, that he feels himself in no wise disposed to pick out and dwell on his defects. 10

4. I confess that I was so overpowered with the brilliancy of this picture of Rubens [The altar of the choir at St. Augustin, Antwerp], whilst I was before it, and under its fascinating influence, that I thought I had never before seen so great powers exerted in the art. 11

Again I should like to bring in Maritain as an aid to clarification: "the labor of the Fine Arts is ordered to beauty . . . their object is . . . to produce an intellectual delight, that is to say a kind of contemplation." 12

As we have already seen, according to Reynolds, the object of the arts is to strike that part of the mind which he calls the imagination. When the imagination is so affected, there is produced a delight "something like inspiration" (Quot.1), an "expansion of the mind", "refined sensations" (Quot.2), which overpower the mind (Quot.4) and so elevate it that it tends to grasp the work as a whole and not dwell on the individual parts (Quot.3).

We may say that, according to Reynolds, the artistic experience is that experience whereby, through the imagination, there is produced an intellectual "delight" or "refinement."

11 Ibid., 229.
III. Taste

In order to produce a work of art that will give the beholder an artistic experience, the artist must develop his taste. The entire training of an artist is basically, in Reynolds system, a training of taste. An artist with taste can pick out universal beauty and create a great work of art.

1. Those perfections which lie scattered among various masters, are now united in one general idea, which is henceforth to regulate his taste [i.e. the artist's] and enlarge his imagination. With a variety of models thus before him, he will avoid that narrowness and poverty of conception which attends a bigoted admiration of a single master, and will cease to follow any favorite wherever he ceases to excell.13

2. I cannot help imagining that I see a promising young painter equally vigilant, whether at home or abroad, in the streets or in the fields. Every object that presents itself, is to him a lesson. He regards all Nature with a view to his profession, and combines her beauties, or corrects her defects.14

3. ... there is but one presiding principle, which regulates, and gives stability to every art. The works, whether of poets, painters, moralists, or historians, which are built upon general nature live forever.15

4. The first idea that occurs in the consideration of what is fixed in art, or in taste is ... the general idea of nature ... the terms beauty, or nature, which are general ideas, are but different modes of expressing the same thing.16

13 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 2.
14 Ibid., 36.
15 Ibid., 87.
16 Ibid., 158.
5. It is from knowing what are the general feelings and passions of mankind, that we acquire a true idea of what the imagination is.\(^{17}\)

6. \ldots all the rules which this theory, or any other teaches, can be no more than teaching the art of seeing nature.\(^{18}\)

To bring in Maritain by way of clarification:

\ldots however beautiful a created thing may be, it may appear beautiful to some and not to others, because it is beautiful only under certain aspects which some discover and others do not see; it is therefore "beautiful in one place and not beautiful in another."\(^{19}\)

Maritain thus says that the beauty of a work of art will be seen by some and not by all; that there is no universal appreciation of the same beauty.

Reynolds, however, feels that there is a general and universal beauty which is nature (Quot.3, 4, and 6) and which becomes known to the artist by studying the works of many artists (Quot.1), acquiring a knowledge of human nature (Quot.5), and going to nature herself with the purpose of combining her beauties and correcting her defects (Quot. 2 and 6).

We may say that taste, according to Reynolds, is that faculty, which when developed, can pierce through the varieties of nature and art, and extract the beautiful, which will have a universal appeal.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.,170.


\(^{19}\) Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, 24.
IV. Grand Style-

An artist with taste is able to extract the beautiful from nature. He is able to create a work of art that will startle the mind through the imagination. The style which the artist uses in such a work is termed, by Reynolds, the grand style. It is the style of Michelangelo and Raffaelle. It is the style which Reynolds himself, in his own way, strove to attain.

1. The wish of the genuine painter must be more extensive [than mere copying of nature] ... he must strive for fame, by captivating the imagination. 20

2. The idea of the perfect state of nature, which the artist calls the ideal beauty, is the great leading principle by which works of genius are conducted. 21

3. ... What pretence has the art to claim kindred with poetry but by its power over the imagination? To this power the painter of genius directs his aim ... 22

4. To give a general air of grandeur at first view, all trifling, or artful play of little lights, or an attention of a variety of tints is to be avoided; a quietness and a simplicity must reign over the whole work. 23

20 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 42.
21 Ibid., II, 47.
23 Reynolds, Discourses, II, 70.
5. How much the great style exacts from its professors to conceive and represent their subjects in a poetical manner, not confined to mere matter of fact, may be seen in the cartoons of Raffaello. In all the pictures in which the painter has represented the Apostles, he has drawn them with great nobleness; he has given them as much dignity as the human figure is capable of receiving; yet we are expressly told in Scripture they had no such respectable appearance.  

6. The style of Michael Angelo, which I have compared to language, and which may, poetically speaking, be called the language of the gods...

The painter thus aims at captivating the imagination (Quot. 1 and 3), by creating a work as close as possible to the perfect state of nature (Quot. 2 and 5), and having an over-all simplicity, quietness and godlike quality. (Quot. 4, 5, and 6).

Thus, according to Reynolds, the grand style is that style which captivates and overpowers the imagination by creating a work built on the perfect state of nature.

V. Ideal Beauty

The beauty which the artist with taste extracts from nature is above all accident. It is a general beauty which is unchanging and universal. It appeals to the basic, immutable nature of man. Such beauty is termed, by Sir Joshua, ideal beauty.

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24 Ibid., 68.
1. . . . all the arts receive their perfection from an ideal beauty, superior to what is found in individual nature . . . the artist is supposed to have ascended the celestial regions, to furnish his mind with this perfect idea of beauty.26

2. . . . there neither are, nor can be, any precise invariable rules for the exercise, or the acquisition of these great qualities, yet we may truly say, that they always operate in proportion to our attention in observing the works of Nature, to our skill in selecting, and to our care in digesting, methodizing, and comparing our observations.27

3. This great ideal perfection and beauty are not to be sought in the heavens, but upon the earth . . . and the whole beauty and grandeur of the art consists, in my opinion, in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind.28

4. He [the artist] corrects nature by herself, her imperfect state by her more perfect. His eye being enabled to distinguish the accidental deficiencies, excrescences, and deformities of things, from their general figures, he makes out an abstract idea of their forms more perfect than any one original.29

5. . . . when he [the artist] has reduced the variety of nature to the abstract idea; his next task will be to become acquainted with the genuine habits of nature as distinguished from those of fashion.30

26 Ibid., I, 43.
27 Ibid., 45.
28 Ibid., 46.
29 Ibid., 46-47.
30 Ibid., 51.
6. ... in consequence of having seen many, the power is acquired, even without seeking after it, of distinguishing between accidental blemishes and excrescences which are continually varying the surface of nature's works, and the invariable general form which nature most frequently produces, and always seems to intend in her productions.31

Thus there is an ideal beauty to be sought on earth (Quot. 1 and 3), which is, in practice, an observing and selecting and correcting of nature (Quot. 2 and 4) until the artist arrives at that which is general, and above local customs as well as deformities (Quot. 3, 5, and 6).

Ideal beauty, then, is, according to Reynolds, that beauty, drawn from nature, which is invariable, and perfected, as far as possible, from individual blemish.

31 Reynolds, Three Letters to the Idler, II, 177.
CHAPTER II

THE END OF ART

The ultimate end of all art, according to Reynolds, is to spiritualize man, to refine his sensibilities from grossness, and to lead him to virtue.

Art strikes the mind through the imagination and leads the mind thus to an appreciation of general truth and general beauty. Through art man is led upward from the individual things of sense to an appreciation of the general beauty on which the individual is founded.

Of this process of purification from gross sensuality Reynolds says:

In this gradual exaltation of human nature, every art contributes its contingent towards the general supply of mental pleasure. Whatever abstracts the thoughts from sensual gratifications, whatever teaches us to look for happiness within ourselves, must advance in some measure the dignity of our nature.¹

From this removal of sensual gratification to a higher and purer level of enjoyment, we at last reach into the realm of virtue itself, on the natural level, and our taste, our sensibility, is improved to an extent that we are given an aversion to the ugliness accompanying evil. Of this Sir Joshua says:

¹ Reynolds, Discourses, II, 5.
... [art] if it does not lead directly to purity of manners, obviates at least their greatest deprivation, by conducting the thoughts through successive stages of excellence, till that contemplation of universal rectitude and harmony which began at taste, may, as it is exalted and refined, conclude in virtue.  

Thus, it is seen that art has for its ultimate end a spiritualization of man by teaching him the higher pleasures of the spirit as opposed to and beyond the lower pleasures of sense. Now with spiritualization as its ultimate end, art must act upon the spiritual faculty of man: his rationality. Of this, Sir Joshua says: "The value and rank of every art is in proportion to the mental labour employed in it, or mental pleasure produced by it." Thus, rather than a gratification of the senses ending there and extending no further, we have, through the senses, an uplifting to the pleasures of the spirit.

Now we come to a particularly difficult part of Reynolds' theory: the immediate means of arriving at this higher pleasure. It would seem that art addresses itself not to the reasoning faculty as such, but rather to the imagination or sensibility, the effect of the art on the imagination or sensibility being its mode of spiritualization. Of this Sir Joshua says: "[the fine arts] address themselves to two faculties of the mind, its imagination and its sensibility." He goes on

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2 Ibid., 7.
3 Ibid., I, 64.
4 Ibid., II, 87.
to equate the imagination and truth. He says that the value of
the artistic experience lies in its effect on the imagination:

... the imagination is here the residence of truth. If the imagination be affected, the conclusion is fairly drawn; if it be not affected, the reasoning is erroneous, because the end is not obtained; the effect itself being the test, and the only test, of the truth and efficacy of the means. 5

Next, he goes even further along this line and says that we must extend beyond the ratiocinative faculties to an almost intuitive perception of the truth by use of what he calls the "habitual reason," 6 which is, in his view, an accumulated way of viewing things, what could almost be called a taste or a habit of the individual.

It would seem that Sir Joshua here is referring ultimately to what we may call the "artistic experience": the immediate effect of the work of art on the beholder. The idea of the effect of the totality, the whole work, on the beholder is one that occurs again and again in his writing. For example when speaking of genius in Discourse XI he says:

... this genius [genius of mechanical performance] consists ... in the power of expressing ... whatever it may be, as a whole; so that the general effect and power of the whole may take possession of the mind, and for a while suspend the consideration of the subordinate and particular beauties or defects. 7

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 88.
7 Ibid., 35.
Applying this effect of the totality on the beholder to the idea of the imagination as truth, and as a kind of unreasoned, habitual or intuitive truth, we can see that Sir Joshua is referring ultimately to the effect which the work of art has in touching or stimulating the mind.

The art object strikes the imagination and stimulates it. This stimulation is the purpose of art.

We are spiritualized, in art, not by the use of the ratiocinative faculties but rather by the imagination being acted on by the total work. This effect and its spiritualizing of the individual is the "truth" of art.
CHAPTER III

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDENT

So far we have spoken primarily of the relation of art to the viewer: the individual for whom the work of art is created. We have said that art is created to spiritualize by extending the "artistic experience" to the mind through the imagination. Now we shall consider the formation of an artist so that he may ultimately produce a work that will extend this experience and will spiritualize.

Sir Joshua in opposition to those who "gravely talk of courting the Muse in shady bowers; waiting the call and inspiration of Genius,"¹ believes in hard work and application arriving at excellence and even genius. He gives little pampering to those whose inspiration seems to fail them as they wait around for "the dictates of a little winged boy or genius."² Instead of such an indefinite and airy lack of method, he purposes a concrete and practical course of acquiring greatness as an artist.

The stages of development in the painter he gives as three. The first of these is the mechanical:

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1 Ibid., I, 150.
2 Ibid., 152.
the first of them . . . is confined to the rudiments; including a facility of drawing any object that presents itself, a tolerable readiness in the management of colours and an acquaintance with the most simple and obvious rules of composition.  

This first stage of proficiency he compares to grammar in literature. It is learning the tools of the art: the elements and their basic arrangements.

The second stage is one of imitation, in which the student becomes acquainted with the work of past artists, amassing from them a stock of ideas and learning to discriminate as he looks to the ultimately prime source, nature. This period is one in which the artist becomes grounded in the tradition of his art:

he must then endeavor to collect subjects for expression; to amass a stock of ideas, to be combined and varied as occasion may require. He is now in the second period of study, in which his business is to learn all that has been known and done before his own time.

He must look through all the various attempts that have been made before him in his particular art. This stage, too, is one of discipline and is under the strict guide of reason.

The third stage is one in which the student is emancipated from mere imitation and comparison of various works of art.

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3 Ibid., 20.
4 Ibid., 21.
Now he, as it were, strikes out on his own, and judges past works in relation to nature and in relation to his own individual ideas:

Comparing now no longer the performances of Art with each other, but examining the Art itself by the standard of nature, he corrects what is erroneous, supplies what is scanty, and adds, by his own observation, what the industry of his predecessors may have yet left wanting to perfection.5

Reynolds stresses especially the complete knowledge and continual reference to the works of the past. He says: "Labour to invent on their general principles and way of thinking. Possess yourself with their spirit."6 Thus, we can see that he does not urge the study and imitation of one man, or even the imitation of many, but rather a capturing of the spirit of greatness that is in these works and an inculcating of the same spirit, if not the exact rule, into the artist's own works.

The general idea underlying these three stages and their final result is that a man may achieve greatness in the arts through a reasoned and sensible pursuit of studies aimed toward this greatness:

The purpose of this Discourse, and, indeed, of most of my other Discourses, is, to caution you against that false opinion, but too prevalent among artists, of the imaginary powers of native genius and its sufficiency in great works."7

5 Ibid., 22.
6 Ibid., 28.
7 Ibid., 144.
We have generally indicated that the student is to refer to both nature and to the works of past masters. Now we shall indicate specifically how this is to be done.

Reynolds indicates that the primary source from which the artist is to draw is nature. The study of other artists is beneficial primarily in that they lead us back to the principles to be found in their own source, which must be nature:

The great use of studying our predecessors is, to open the mind, to shorten our labour, and to give us the result of the selection made by those great minds of what is grand or beautiful in nature.  

Further, in the study of other artists we must eventually delve back into the past and study the classics, for they are "the father of modern art," and are closer than others to the universal concepts of nature that the artist strives for. Again and again Reynolds refers to nature as the primary source of all our conceptions:

It is only in nature we can find that beauty which is the great object of our search; it can be found nowhere else . . . we are forced to confine our conception, even of heaven itself, and its inhabitants, to what we see in this world.

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8 Ibid., 127.
9 Ibid., 135.
10 Ibid., 164.
11 Reynolds, Notes on the Art of Painting, III, 156.
The reason for such an insistence on reference to nature lies ultimately in relationship to the "artistic experience" previously mentioned.

It is only when the work of art is in conformity to universal nature that it can extend this experience to the individual. Thus, the artist must seek in the past masters, in the classics, and in nature herself, the broad and general principles that govern nature, for it is only in conforming his art to these principles that he can efficiently produce the "artistic experience," for there is in the human mind itself a certain general "internal fabric and organization"12 with which the artist must conform.

Thus we see an attempt on the part of Reynolds to create an art based, as much as possible, on the universal laws of nature, both of external nature itself, and the natural relationship between the human mind and this same nature, in order, ultimately, to produce the greatest and most lasting "artistic experience."13

Further, the method of arriving at this universal art is not capricious and vague but is rather through reasoned effort. This, again, is in line with his entire approach to art as something learned through effort. He says:

12 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 158.
13 Ibid., 184.
To form this just taste [taste in relation to universal principles] is undoubtedly in your own power, but it is to reason and philosophy that you must have recourse; from them you must borrow the balance, by which is to be weighed and estimated the value of every pretension that intrudes itself on your notice. 14

He lays stress on the reasonable and stable way of approaching learning in contradistinction to hidden or flighty methods which he calls "dreams of a distempered brain." 15

This extreme sanity and balance in approaching art is Reynolds' prime characteristic and in it lies his greatest value as a master to be followed, because in this approach we have a method, which, if true, all but guarantees success.

According to Reynolds, there is no substitution for study. He deplores those who avoid study and effort with the excuse that they are, at the moment, uninspired and must await inspiration. Great talent, with the accompaniment of great teachers and examples of great art, is to no avail if the individual artist will not exert himself:

... the beauties and defects of the works of our predecessors may be pointed out; the principles on which their works are conducted may be explained; the great examples of ancient art may be spread out before them; but the most sumptuous entertainment is prepared in vain, if the guests will not take the trouble of helping themselves. 16

14 Ibid., 184-185.
15 Ibid., 185.
16 Ibid., II, 61.
Thus, he admonishes the student first to develop within himself the habit of industry, for through it he will eventually arrive at proficiency and greatness.

Now if the student has the desire and the drive to work, there are certain pitfalls to beware of on the way to achievement. These are, in the main, determined from the ultimate result, which is to be a work that will give to the individual "artistic" or "spiritualizing" experience.

In speaking of the genius of Gainsborough, Reynolds provides us with the basic requirement necessary to effect this experience: the creation of the work as a whole, the totality of it. He refers to Gainsborough's excellence in producing the "effect of the whole together," the "general effect," the "forming of all parts of his picture together," and praises him for this gift which, to him, is the most important.

In order to achieve this effect of totality, the artist must avoid extremes or overemphasis of any parts. Thus, Reynolds stresses the need for variety in the work: "Variety re-animates the attention, which is apt to languish under a continual sameness," and yet he warns against an overaffecting of variety.

17 Ibid., 130.
18 Ibid., 118.
19 Ibid., I, 191.
which will dissipate the whole: "the pursuit ... of novelty and variety may be carried to excess."20 Further he warns against incongruity of parts and whole. A work may assume any style if the style is managed, in the relationship of parts to whole, in such a way as to form a totality capable of exciting feeling in the individual. Thus, in criticizing an incongruity in the work of "our late ingenious academician, Wilson,"21 Reynolds again shows his concern for the harmony of the whole. He says:

To manage a subject of this kind [Supernatural and natural intermingled], a peculiar style of art is required; and it can only be done without impropriety, or even without ridicule, when we adapt the character of the landscape, and that too, in all its parts to the historical or poetical representation.22

He then goes on to speak of two examples of works in which the artist has achieved a perfect balancing of parts in relation to the whole: one is 'Jacob's Dream,' by Salvator Rosa, and the other the 'Return of the Ark from Captivity,' by Sebastian Bourdon.23 In explaining the effectiveness of these two works, Reynolds again returns to his idea that the ultimate effectiveness of any work lies in its effect on the individual. This effect, if it is to have any strength, must proceed from a well

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., II, 124.
22 Ibid., 125.
23 Ibid., 126.
balanced, harmonious, work of art. He says of these works:

... these subjects are so poetically treated throughout, the parts have such a correspondence with each other, and the whole and every part of the scene is so visionary, that it is impossible to look at them, without feeling, in some measure, the enthusiasm which seems to have inspired the painters. 24

Here Reynolds stresses the correspondence of parts to whole. The ultimate effect here is to capture the "enthusiasm" which inspired the painter, or, in terms we have used before, to effect the "artistic experience."

The effect of the whole on the individual is of such prime importance that there may even be an ineptitude in the parts which, nevertheless, produces a great picture if the totality has the needed strength of effect. Thus, Reynolds in speaking of the "odd scratches and marks ... which appear rather the effect of accident than design" 25 in the works of Gainsborough overlooks these in preference to the over-all effect. He says:

This chaos, this uncouth and shapeless appearance, by a kind of magic, at a certain distance assumes form, and all the parts seem to drop into their proper places, so that we can hardly refuse acknowledging the full effect of diligence, under the appearance of chance and hasty negligence. 26

24 Ibid., 127.
25 Ibid., 128.
26 Ibid.
With Reynolds, the general effect always assumes precedence over the specific effects of the parts. Of portraits he says:

The likeness of a portrait ... consists more in preserving the general effect of the countenance, than in the most minute finishing of the features, or any of the particular parts.27

Thus, Gainsborough, although there is an almost slapdash mannerism in his parts, always creates a finished picture of great total effect. This effect ultimately determines the greatness of the picture.

We have already shown the stress Sir Joshua puts on the methodology of the student in learning the mechanical rudiments of his art. However, if the effecting of the artistic experience can be achieved without cumbersome rudimentary groundwork Reynolds makes provision for it. We have a provision for genius: "eloquence ... bears down every thing before it, and often triumphs over superior wisdom and learning."28 Reynolds does not, by any means, do away with his previous admonition to mechanical perfection. This perfection should be the groundwork for even those of genius. He says of Michelangelo:

I will not say Michael Angelo was eminently poetical, only because he was greatly mechanical; but I am sure that mechanical excellence invigorated and emboldened his mind to carry painting into the regions of poetry,

27 Ibid., 130.

28 Reynolds, A Journey to Flanders and Holland, II, 196.
and to emulate that art in its most adventurous flights. Michael Angelo equally possessed both qualifications. However, he does recognize that mechanical perfection, alone, does not necessarily produce a great work, and that often a great work can be produced without a completeness of this perfection, as in the case of Gainsborough.

In speaking of Rubens, Sir Joshua places him beside a group of painters whose defects are fewer and whose mechanical craft is higher. However, they do not have the overpowering totality of effect that Rubens has, in spite of his mechanical defects. Of Rubens, Sir Joshua says:

The works of Rubens have that peculiar property always attendant on genius, to attract attention, and enforce admiration in spite of all their faults. It is owing to this fascinating power that the performances of those painters with which he is surrounded, though they have perhaps fewer defects, yet appear spiritless, tame, and insipid.

Reynolds brings in this contrast between the insipid perfect mechanic and the inspired imperfect mechanic in order to show that genius can often outstrip rules. He warns against too much of a dependence on rules and not enough dependence on the breadth of vision which we have previously called taste.

The works of the "mechanics" are cramped and confined.31

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29 Reynolds, Discourses, II, 149.
30 Reynolds, A Journey to Flanders and Holland, II, 297.
31 Ibid.
whereas the works of Rubens "seem to flow with a freedom and prodigality, as if they cost him nothing." 32 Yet Rubens achieves the ultimate end of his art: "the complete uniformity in all the parts of the work, so that the whole seems conducted, and grown out of one mind." 33

This does not mean that mechanical studies are to be abandoned, or that they are to be ignored in the learning of the art. It means, rather, that the artist should not be confined, throughout his career, to these rules. They are an early part of his development. He must go beyond them:

Rubens appears to have had that confidence in himself, which it is necessary for every artist to assume when he has finished his studies, and may venture in some measure to throw aside the fetters of authority; to consider the rules as subject to his control, and not himself subject to the rules; to risk and to dare extraordinary attempts without a guide, abandoning himself to his own sensations and depending on them. 34

Thus, the surest way to excellence is through a following of the mechanical, imitative and then distinctively creative pattern of studies. With the ultimate result always in mind it is possible to decrease the concentration on the mechanical aspect of the art, if there be a proportionate increase in the strength of concept

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 297-298.
34 Ibid., 298.
and execution. Also, for all artists there must be a point in their work when they go beyond rules, when they confront the work as something made, as it were, out of the rules that they have within themselves.

If the genius can take this step of self-creation before he has perfected his mechanics, Reynolds encourages him to do so, and later fill in his mechanical defects. The effective work is always the end to be sought and the means may vary according to the individual artist. 35

However, we should again remember that basically Reynolds proposes a course of study by which the artist is formed by rationally directed stages of development. If he says:

... Something must be conceded to great and irresistible impulses; perhaps every student must not be strictly bound to general methods, if they strongly thwart the peculiar turn of his mind. 36

he means that some "may" quickly go beyond rules and mechanics, but even these few would do better to first ground themselves in a craftsman's dexterity of execution. He goes on to say:

To encourage a solid and vigorous course of study, it may not be amiss to suggest, that perhaps a confidence in the mechanic produces a boldness in the poetic. He that is sure of the goodness of his ship and tackle, puts out fearlessly from the shore. 37

35 Reynolds, Discourses, II, 146.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 149.
Reynolds makes a provision for impulse; yet this provision is quickly hedged in again with admonitions to method rather than impulse.

We have seen that the end of the artist is to create a work that "overpowers, and takes possession of the whole mind." To be able to create such a work the artist should first become "master of the rudiments." Then he should strike out on his own "to consider the rules as subject to his control, and not himself subject to the rules."

This is all in terms of the making. Now the question arises of what exactly has been formed within the maker enabling him to create. We have seen the end of studies is the production of an artist that can create a work that will fulfill the end of art. Now we shall consider what type of person this artist is, how his mind differs from any other mind, how his training has formed him to produce the sublime, what exactly it is in him that has been thus formed.

The mind which is to be formed in the artist is a mind such as Rubens or Michelangelo possessed. It is a mind that has the judgment to pick out the beautiful and avoid the deformed

38 Ibid., 154.
39 Ibid., I, 10.
40 Reynolds, A Journey to Flanders and Holland, II, 298.
or incorrect. It is a mind with a "taste" for the beautiful:

... we should accustom ourselves ... to see beauty only, and to avoid as much as possible deformity, or what is incorrect.41

Whatever is got this way may be said to be property made our own; it becomes a part of ourselves, and operates unperceived. The mind acquires by such exercise a kind of instinctive rectitude which supersedes all rules.42

The mind, then, forms a habit, a virtue43 which "instinctively" selects and edits the things the artist sees in such a way as to provide him with the elements of the beautiful.

This "taste" is the power of distinguishing right from wrong as applied to art. It enables the artist to select the correct means whereby he will arrive at the desired end:

... of these studies, and this conversation, the desire and legitimate offspring is a power of distinguishing right from wrong; which power applied to works of art, is denominated taste.44

Taste, indeed, determines what is beautiful and differentiates the beautiful from the ugly. It determines what is part of universal nature, and what is only passing custom. It arms the artist with a discrimination and a judgment to select and perform in such a way as to create a work which will affect

41 Reynolds, Notes on the Art of Painting, III, 151.
42 Ibid., 152.
43 Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, 16.
44 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 149.
the individual with the "artistic experience."

The ultimate end of all arts is to please, to spiritualize, and the ultimate end of an artist's training is to shape him as a man who can discern what it is in nature and the works of others that does please and spiritualize, and to apply these elements in the creation of his own work:

We may therefore conclude that the real substance, as it may be called, of what goes under the name of taste, is fixed and established in the nature of things; that there are certain and regular causes by which the imagination and passions of men are affected; and that the knowledge of these causes is acquired by a laborious and diligent investigation of nature, and by the same slow progress as wisdom or knowledge of any kind, however instantaneous its operations may appear when thus acquired.

Thus the ultimate end of the artist's training is to form an artistic habit, an artistic judgment, or what Reynolds calls "taste," which enables him to select from nature what, in turn, will universally apply to effecting the "artistic experience."

As Reynolds says:

... this knowledge [taste] is derived from the uniformity of sentiments among mankind, from whence proceeds the knowledge of what are the general habits of nature; the result of which is an idea of perfect beauty.

46 Ibid., II, 7.
47 Ibid., I, 173.
48 Ibid., 184.
This implies principles in external nature, art, and the nature of man which the artist with "taste" or artistic judgment educes and applies in his own work, arriving at a harmony between the principles of his art, the principles of external nature--ultimately referable to "an idea of perfect beauty,"\(^{49}\) and the principles that constitute the nature of man.

Reynolds says:

... this taste, we must never forget, is regulated and formed by the presiding feelings of mankind,—by those works which have approved themselves to all times and all persons.\(^ {50}\)

It is this discernment of the principles of things, this formation of the artistic judgment and its application, that is the end of all the artist's studies. The artist with this taste will have: "a power of selecting from whatever occurs in nature that is grand ... and will pass over whatever is commonplace and insipid."\(^ {51}\) This power is the habit and the method of a Michelangelo or a Rubens. Again, in relation to this formation of taste, Reynolds insists on labor led by reason to arrive at its attainment. It is not a gift from the air, but rather something achieved through effort and guided by reason. He says:

\(^{49}\) Ibid.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 176.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., II, 160.
To form this just taste is undoubtedly in your own power, but it is to reason and philosophy that you must have recourse; from them you must borrow the balance, by which is to be weighed and estimated the value of every pretension that intrudes itself on your notice.52

This insistence on labor led by reason, through all the mechanical stages of the artist's formation, up to this crowning achievement, this acquiring of the artistic judgment, is the prime characteristic of Reynolds' thinking. It is the underlying reason for the discourses themselves.53 It is the note with which he ends the discourses.

In commending Michelangelo as the supreme model for artists, Reynolds says:

It is an ancient saying that labour is the price which the gods have set upon every thing valuable ... Indeed, from all the circumstances related of his life [Michelangelo's], he appears not to have had the least conception that his art was to be acquired by any other means than great labour.54

It is in this approach to art, in all its sanity and assurance of success that the prime worth of Reynolds' ideas lies. It is only through labor, through successive stages of development, and always led and controlled by reason, that eventually the great artist is formed.

52 Ibid., I, 184-185.
53 Ibid., 144.
54 Ibid., II, 162.
CHAPTER IV

CRITICISM OF REYNOLDS' THEORY

PART I

Reynolds' theory of art is primarily attacked in his ideas of reason and inspiration. Lord Gower accuses Reynolds of saying that industry rather than genius produces great works of art, which to Gower is absurd. He says:

... industry and continual study make a great artist rather than genius ... such a statement is tantamount to saying that industry alone will produce the works of genius.¹

Sir Walter Armstrong goes yet another step and accuses Reynolds of theoretically holding the domination of reason and painting under the domination of emotion. Armstrong claims that in theory Reynolds holds to industry and study and the guidance of reason while in practice he abandons everything for the formation of a suitable picture. Armstrong says:

... the first thing to strike us is the remarkable contradiction between his expressed opinions and his own practice. The whole drift of his Discourses is toward the promotion of those forms of art which spring from and appeal directly and solely to the reason, over those which excite emotion ... . Reynolds the theorist did all he could to promote the belief that fine art is a question of teaching and

good memory . . . while Reynolds the painter spent his energies in showing that all the risks may be run for the sake of clothing a pictorial idea in a gorgeous envelope.2

Thus we have Lord Gower attacking the basic idea that great art can be produced by industry without genius. Further, Armstrong claims that Reynolds actually never practiced his ideas of industry and reason but instead fell back on inspiration.

To understand the extreme stress that Reynolds puts on industry and application as prerequisites to the production of great art, the setting of the *Discourses* must be kept in mind. They were delivered from the Royal Academy of Art to students still in their formative years as artists, and thus in that particular stage of development where industry and application are of such prime importance. As Redgrave says:

> The foundation of our Academy . . . imposed on its first President the duty of laying down rules for the guidance of the pupils, and of enunciating certain general principles derived from the practice of the earlier schools and more especially of those in which the aim of Art had been lofty, and the subjects chosen of a more elevated character than those by which our artists were then surrounded.3

We can, then, expect a certain stress on necessity of application in studying the rudiments of art.

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The question now arises whether Reynolds says that this application and industry, alone, can produce the great artist. Lord Gower affirms that Reynolds does hold such a view. Gower calls it nonsense.

As we have seen before, the ultimate end of the artist's training, according to Reynolds, is to form an artistic "taste," which will enable the artist to select the beautiful and pass over the ugly. The artist with this taste will: "have . . . a power of selecting from whatever occurs in nature that is grand . . . and will pass over whatever is common-place and insipid." As to forming this taste by industry, Sir Joshua says:

To form this just taste is undoubtedly in your own power, but it is to reason and philosophy that you must have recourse . . . a man of real taste is always a man of judgment in other respects. Reynolds is not, by any means, saying that the mechanic is the end of artistic training and that the mechanic will produce great works of art. Quite the contrary, the mechanic may be perfect as a mechanic and never produce great works of art. In speaking of Rubens and his defects, and Crayer, Shut, Seghers, Huysum, Tyssens and Van Balen and their lack of defects, Reynolds says:

The works of Rubens have that peculiar property always attendant on genius, to attract attention, and enforce admiration in spite of their faults. It is owing to

4 Reynolds, Discourses, II, 160.
5 Ibid., I, 134-135.
this fascinating power that the performances of those painters with which he is surrounded, though they have perhaps fewer defects, yet appear spiritless, tame and insipid. 6

This "fascinating power," this "peculiar property" which Reynolds speaks of is taste. It enables the artist to select the beautiful and create a work that startles the mind of the viewer, giving him the artistic experience. It is within the ability of the student to acquire it by the means already stated: the various steps of development from the mechanical, 7 the traditional, 8 and finally the self-creative. 9

In a letter written from Rome to Barry, in the year 1769, Reynolds, speaking of Michelangelo, gives us the ultimate goal the artist is striving for. He says:

If you should not relish them [the works of Michelangelo and Raffaelle] at first, which may probably be the case, as they have none of those qualities which are captivating at first sight, never cease looking till you feel something like inspiration come over you, till you think every other painter insipid in comparison and to be admired only for petty excellences. 10

The mind that produces a work such as that of Michelangelo is one that "must both possess a comprehensive mind that takes in the whole at one view, and at the same time an accuracy of eye or

6 Reynolds, A Journey to Flanders and Holland, II, 297.
7 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 20.
8 Ibid., 21.
9 Ibid., 22.
10 Armstrong, Sir Joshua Reynolds, 83.
mind that distinguishes between two things that, to an ordinary spectator, appear the same . . . the nice discrimination on which expression and elegance depend."\textsuperscript{11} Such a mind is the mind with taste, and such a mind can be formed.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus, in reply to Lord Gower, we may say that Sir Joshua does hold that industry can produce great works, if this industry is aimed at the acquiring of taste by the artist.

As we have seen, Sir Walter Armstrong accuses Reynolds of promoting, in theory, those forms of art which appeal to the reason and not to the emotion. He says:

The whole drift of his Discourses is towards the promotion of those forms of art which spring from and appeal directly and solely to the reason, over those which excite emotion by the expression of more or less sensuous ideas.\textsuperscript{13}

We must here distinguish between the means and the final end of art, according to Reynolds' theory. As we have already pointed out, Reynolds stresses the leadership of reason in the formation of taste. He says: "To form this just taste is undoubtedly in your own power, but it is to reason and philosophy that you must have recourse."\textsuperscript{14} Reason also is the leader in the

\begin{enumerate}
\item Reynolds, Notes on the Art of Painting, III, 143.
\item Reynolds, Discourses, I, 134-135.
\item Armstrong, Sir Joshua Reynolds, 220.
\item Reynolds, Discourses, I, 134.
\end{enumerate}
creation of a picture, and yet, the artist who has acquired "taste," or "artistic reason," in a sense supersedes reason or rules when he creates with the final end of the picture in mind.

The end of art is to strike the imagination. The purpose of all the artist's efforts is to instill "something like inspiration" in the viewer. All else must be subordinate to this end of the work. As Reynolds says: "... all lesser considerations, which tend to obstruct the great end of the work, must yield and give way." Reynolds does not, by any means, promote those forms of art which appeal to reason alone. He always refers to the end of art as that which uplifts the viewer through the sensibility and imagination. He says:

"... all the arts with which we have any concern in this discourse ... address themselves only to two faculties of the mind, its imagination and its sensibility."

Reason governs the formation of taste and underlies the creation of a great work of art. The end result of the artist's work, however, is not the formation of an object that appeals to

15 Ibid., 67.
16 Armstrong, Sir Joshua Reynolds, 83.
17 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 165.
18 Ibid., II, 87.
19 Ibid., I, 185.
the reason, but rather of one that appeals to the imagination and the emotions. Reason underlies the formation of the work; emotion is the desired result effected in the viewer. Thus, when Armstrong says that Reynolds promoted works that appealed to reason, in theory, while in practice he "spent his energies in showing that all the risks may be run for the sake of clothing a pictorial idea in a gorgeous envelope," he is not so much distinguishing between Reynolds the theorist and Reynolds the executor, as between Reynolds the maker, and the work Reynolds was making.

Armstrong himself elsewhere points out the thorough grounding that Reynolds had in mechanics of his art. He speaks of the technical notes Sir Joshua made in preparation for his own work. Speaking of the Florentine notes, Armstrong says:

Tom Taylor, no doubt, is quite right in saying that many of the notes imply no particular admiration for the works they deal with but were made simply as technical memoranda; for at this period of his life Sir Joshua was a conscientious self-educator.

Or elsewhere in speaking of the character of Sir Joshua, Armstrong observes:

Reynolds distrusted genius; and from his own point of view he was right. He arrived at results scarcely to be distinguished from those of genius, and did so

20 Armstrong, Sir Joshua Reynolds, 220.

21 Ibid., 25.
entirely by the action of an original mind and a profound taste upon accumulated materials. His path toward excellence was conscious, discriminative, judicial.\textsuperscript{22}

Thus, Armstrong points out the supremacy of method and reason in the formation of the artist in relation to the execution of his work. This certainly was also Reynolds' theory as well as his practice: that reason must dominate in the formation of the "artistic taste" and that reason must underlie the formation of a great work of art.

The basis of Armstrong's remark that Reynolds in practice showed that "all the risks may be run for the sake of clothing a pictorial idea in a gorgeous envelope,"\textsuperscript{23} lies in Sir Joshua's seeming disregard for rules in the execution of his own work. Reynolds always took advantage of a chance pose or arrangement of figures rather than reasoning the entire composition out beforehand. As Armstrong observes: "In spite of his forethought, Reynolds was quicker than most men to profit by a happy inspiration or an accidental hint."\textsuperscript{24} In Reynolds' system, however, this is not a disregarding of the rules that he held in theory. It is merely rising above the rules, using them instead of being straightened by them.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 220.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 203.
Reynolds has said that the finished artist, the artist with "taste," rises above rules because he is so disciplined that this rising will produce the desired result, a picture which will strike the imagination of the viewer. As he says:

"He is from this time to regard himself as holding the same rank with those masters whom he before obeyed as teachers; and as exercising a sort of sovereignty over those rules which have hitherto restrained him." 25

It would seem that Armstrong is unjustified in claiming a disparity between Reynolds the theorist and Reynolds the practitioner. Rather it should be said that Reynolds held reason's lead supreme in the formation of the artist and the work of art. The artist uses his own "artistic reason" or taste, in creating a work which will produce an effect on the imagination and sensibility of the viewer.

PART II

Reynolds is accused of following the Grand Style of painting drawn from the Italian Renaissance, which meant, ideally, pictures with mythological or religious subjects, these subjects being as far as possible removed from particularized nature. Andrew C. Ritchie, in a lecture delivered at Johns Hopkins University, says:

25 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 22.
His [Reynolds'] emulation of what he calls the 'Great or Grand Style' becomes an all absorbing preoccupation... In the Renaissance theory from which Reynolds derives these ideas... history or imaginative painting [which in practice meant usually pictures with mythological or religious subjects] was considered the ideal branch of art, since it was of necessity furthest removed from the documentation of a particularized nature.26

Thus, the art sought after by Reynolds, according to Ritchie, is one dealing with mythological or religious subjects. Removed from particular nature, it deals with an ideal or general nature. In his portraits of women and children Reynolds is accused of a certain "hollowness,"27 and lack of intimacy,28 which, however, he is said to escape from in his portraiture of men.29 Ritchie contends that when Reynolds did put into practice his teaching on the "Grand Style" and the portrayal of the "ideal" or "non-particularized," he failed in almost every attempt. He says:

To justify his preaching he was forced... to attempt an occasional subject or history picture. His colossal failure in almost every one of these would not be so important... had he not stressed in almost every Discourse the lesser importance of the portrait beside the picture of imaginative invention.30

27 Ibid., 22.
28 Ibid., 21.
29 Ibid., 22.
30 Ibid., 23.
According to Reynolds, the end of art, as we have already seen, is to strike the imagination of the viewer, to inspire in the viewer "something like inspiration." Especially when he is talking of Michelangelo does Reynolds speak of art as uplifting, as raising the mind. In the letter to Barry, already quoted, he says:

If you should not relish them [Michelangelo and Raffaele] at first, which may probably be the case . . . never cease looking at them till you feel something like inspiration come over you, till you think every other painter insipid in comparison, and to be admired only for petty excellences. 31

Thus Reynolds thinks Michelangelo and Raffaele supreme as painters and all other painters to be merely admired for "petty excellences" beside them. It is to be noted that because Reynolds holds Michelangelo and Raffaele in such esteem, the emotion felt and advocated by him is "something like inspiration." The work of Michelangelo is said to be "all genius and soul." 32 It "so overpowers, and takes possession of the whole mind, that no room is left for attention to minute criticism." 33 Such an overpowering of the mind, such a stimulation to inspirational feelings, then, is the end of art according to Reynolds.

This "grand style" is precisely that style which effects feeling in the viewer. If a picture effects the "artistic

31 Armstrong, Sir Joshua Reynolds, 83.
33 Reynolds, Discourses, II, 154.
experience" in the viewer, if it stimulates in him "something like inspiration," it is in the grand style.

It does not consist in contemplating the "ideal" apart from the "real," but rather is a drawing of the ideal from the real, exempting the final product from the deformities and aberrations that must exist in actual nature.

As Reynolds says:

The wish of the genuine painter must be more extensive: (than merely copying nature) instead of endeavouring to amuse mankind with the minute neatness of his imitations, he must endeavor to improve them by the grandeur of his ideas; instead of seeking praise, by deceiving the superficial sense of the spectator, he must strive for fame, by captivating the imagination.34

Thus, the genuine painter seeks to work upon, to stimulate, the imagination. If the painter can arrive at this end he then creates in the "Grand Style." To quote Sir Joshua:

The Moderns are not less convinced than the Ancients of this superior power existing in art; nor less sensible of its effects. Every language has adopted terms expressive of this excellence. The gusto grande of the Italians, the beau ideal of the French, and the great style, genius, and taste among the English, are but different appellations of the same things.35

Thus grand style consists in reducing accidental blemishes, deformities, and customs to a general and universal beauty:

34 Ibid., I, 42.
35 Ibid., 44.
"all the arts receive their perfection from an ideal beauty, superior to what is to be found in individual nature."36 Yet this ideal is not to be considered as excluding intimacy and introducing "hollowness" as Ritchie maintains, because the ideal is based on the actual: "This great ideal perfection and beauty are not to be sought in the heavens, but upon the earth. They are about us, and upon every side of us."37 The actual sitter is not ignored for the ideal portrait, but blemish and disproportion are removed from him and he is elevated to the position of an unblemished beauty: "the whole beauty and grandeur of the art consists . . . in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind."38

In getting above these "singular forms" and "particularities" and achieving a general or total effect the individual is best portrayed:

The likeness of a portrait, as I have formerly observed, consists more in preserving the general effect of the countenance, than in the most minute finishing of the features, or any of the particular parts.39

Sir Joshua, in order to achieve this general, over-all effect, always has immediate recourse to actual nature. Norcote tells

36 Ibid., 42-43.
37 Ibid., 46.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., II, 130.
us of Reynolds' precepts to him regarding the fixing of drapery to be painted:

He remarked that it would not make good drapery if set so artificially, and that, whenever it did not fall into such folds as were agreeable, I should try to get it better, by taking the chance of another toss of the drapery stuff, and by that means I should get nature which is superior to art.\textsuperscript{40}

There is in all of Reynolds' portraiture a certain intimacy and identification with the subject; yet the individual is raised above a sweep of gown or style of hat which would, perhaps, be appreciated in the time when it was painted, but which would, over any larger length of time, be outmoded. Reynolds believed in a certain general or universal taste among all mankind that, as it were, rises above time. In speaking of taste, we have seen how he stresses this universality: "this taste \ldots is regulated and formed by the presiding feelings of mankind \ldots by those works which have approved themselves to all times and all persons."\textsuperscript{41}

Thus, we have the individual portrayed usually with a fidelity which is striking ("the likeness is most striking, and the execution most masterly")\textsuperscript{42} and yet an extension from mere time-confined likeness to an ideal or universal beauty which can be appreciated in any times.

\textsuperscript{40} Armstrong, \textit{Sir Joshua Reynolds}, 96.
\textsuperscript{41} Reynolds, \textit{Discourses}, I, 176.
\textsuperscript{42} Armstrong, \textit{Sir Joshua Reynolds}, 111.
Reynolds is always striving for this general effect, this effect of grandeur. "The great end of art is to strike the imagination." If he should speak favorably of historical paintings or allegorical paintings, it is because they afford the painter an opportunity to arrive at this universal concept of beauty:

Strictly speaking, indeed, no subject can be of universal, hardly can it be of general, concern; but there are events and characters so popularly known in those countries where our art is in request, that they may be considered as sufficiently general for all our purposes. Such are the great events of Greek and Roman fable and history. . . . such too are the capital subjects of Scripture history.

This does not exclude the portrait from the universal and it does not destroy the individual likeness of the subject. Portraits must aim for the general and universal: "Even in portraits, the grace, and we may add, the likeness, consists more in taking the general air, than in observing the exact similitude of every feature." but yet they must be exact representations of the individual: "A painter of portraits retains the individual likeness; a painter of history, shows the man by showing his actions."

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43 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 67.
44 Ibid., 64.
46 Ibid., 68.
If we glance through Reynolds' work we can see a fusion of the individual and the general, an elevation of particular persons to a universal level. I think especially of the portrait of Jane, Countess of Harrington, the representation of a young woman on a terrace, her hair, her clothes and the sky behind her caught up in the wind. We have both the Countess of Harrington and woman as woman. This is far from the hollow and cold portrayal spoken of by Ritchie. It lies more in the line of taste exhibited by the writer of Sir Joshua's Memoirs: "His great felicity lay in portraying the beautiful forms of females, but in painting children he stood unrivalled." 47 Thus, the ideal beauty of Reynolds refers, not to removal from the likeness of the subject, but rather an uplifting of the subject, by concentrating on the subject's essence rather than accidentals, from the particular and time-bound to the universal and timeless: "The general idea constitutes real excellence. All smaller things, however perfect in their way, are to be sacrificed without mercy to the greater." 48

De gustibus non est disputandum. Whether Reynolds achieved the "Grand Style" which inspires the viewer, is something that cannot be determined completely. It is sufficient for

48 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 66.
this paper that we know what he strove for, and the reasons for this striving:

Eloquence ... bears down everything before it, and often triumphs over superior wisdom and learning.49

The sublime in painting ... so overpowers, and takes possession of the whole mind, that no room is left for attention to minute criticism.50

... what pretence has the art (of painting) to claim kindred with poetry, but by its power over the imagination? To this power the painter of genius directs his aim.51

Thus Reynolds strives for eloquence in his work. The Grand Style is, to him, that style which will be eloquent, which will uplift and overpower the imagination of the viewer. The individual likeness is to be portrayed, and yet this likeness removed as far as possible from the confines of changing particulars to a general and unchanging beauty.

Ultimately Reynolds sought to create an art that would evoke the "artistic experience" from the viewer; an art that would "overpower" and "take possession of" the mind. This view can be traced back to his visit to Rome and his contacts with the work of Michelangelo, which evoked this experience in him. As he writes to Barry from Rome:

49 Reynolds, A Journey to Flanders and Holland, II, 196.
50 Reynolds, Discourses, II, 154.
51 Reynolds, Three Letters to the Idler, II, 173.
The Capella Sistina is the production of the greatest genius that was ever employed in the arts: it is worth considering by what principles that stupendous greatness of style is produced.\footnote{52}

Thus, we have the effect he aimed for: an analogue to Michelangelo. The 'principles' by which this analogue is produced constitute, in the main, Reynolds' rules for achievement in painting. If Reynolds tries to bring the individual to the general\footnote{53} it is because the general will more readily produce the "artistic effect," as he felt it produced in him by the work of Michelangelo. And certainly the figures of Michelangelo do have that generality about them that raises them above any one time or style. If Reynolds insists that ultimately we must always rely on nature,\footnote{54} it is because nature, corrected and shaped to the ideal,\footnote{55} contains within itself, the secret of the Grand Style, the style of Michelangelo. If Reynolds recommends a "rational" and mechanical groundwork of study,\footnote{56} it is because Michelangelo,\footnote{57} as well as Sir Joshua himself, went through such

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{52 Memoirs, I, xxii-xxiii.}
\item \footnote{53 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 66.}
\item \footnote{54 Reynolds, Notes on the Art of Painting, III, 156-157.}
\item \footnote{55 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 68.}
\item \footnote{56 Ibid., II, 145.}
\item \footnote{57 Ibid., 162.}
\end{itemize}
study to attain to their art. Thus, the effect achieved by Michelangelo in his work was the effect sought for by Reynolds. If there is a hollowness and overemphasized "ideal," about Reynolds' work, perhaps such qualities could also be ascribed to the master Reynolds followed, Michelangelo.

It is interesting to note, in this connection, Roger Fry's remarks describing exactly how Reynolds followed Michelangelo. Reynolds very seldom follows the letter of Michelangelo: the athletic figures with titan-like anatomy. Rather, he follows the spirit of Michelangelo, in bringing the particular to the general and universal. As Fry says in his "Introduction" to the Discourses:

... he [Reynolds] scarcely ever attempted the Michelangelesque--the Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse, is, indeed, almost the only work which gives palpable proof of Reynolds' prolonged study of the Sistine Chapel . . .

Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse, as Ritchie has pointed out, is modeled in pose, almost exactly on Michelangelo's figure of Isaiah in the Sistine Chapel. Fry goes on to say that Reynolds realized his weakness in draughtsmanship and saw that his real work lie in portraiture into which he could infuse the spirit of the Grand Style:

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He saw . . . that his real work lay in giving to portraiture something of the representative and universal character which is the mark of the greatest creations. 59

Thus we see Reynolds giving to English portraiture an expansive and universal style. Although he paints few allegories or historical paintings, he infuses into all his work the spirit of the Grand Style. He tries to get above the fashions of one particular historical period and penetrate to a depth of human nature that is universal and unchanging. Of the two levels of nature, the accidental and the essential, Reynolds tries to inject as much as he can of the essential into his work.

There is a remark of Reynolds reported by Norcote that illustrates much of the painter's attitude toward changing fashion in relation to the unchangeable:

Some fellow-artist deplored the unfitness of the dresses of the period—coats, wigs, hats and bonnets—for pictorial effect. 'Never mind', replied Reynolds, 'they all have light and shade.' 60

Thus, particular fashions, particular cuts and styles of clothes, become, in the mind of Reynolds, as universal a thing as vehicles of light and shade. He seems to say: If you must wear wigs and bonnets and ruffs, fine; it's my business to paint you in these and yet paint you as a man.

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59 Ibid., viii-ix.
60 William B. Boulton, Sir Joshua Reynolds P.R.A., 1905, 22.
The purpose of these Discourses is ultimately:

... to caution you against that false opinion, but too prevalent among artists, of the imaginary powers of native genius, and its sufficiency in great works. This opinion, according to the temper of mind it meets with, almost always produces, either a vain confidence, or a sluggish despair, both equally fatal to all proficiency,61

and it is in the expansion of this idea that their prime value lies. As we have seen, throughout this work, Reynolds is neither a full-fancied poet without a solid foundation of reason, nor a cold-reasoner without poetry. He recognizes inspiration and genius, and poetry,62 but he wants to have the solid ground of reason and craftsmanship beneath him:

He that is sure of the goodness of his ship and tackle, puts out fearlessly from the shore; and who knows that his hand can execute whatever his fancy can suggest, sports with more freedom in embodying the visionary forms of his own creation.63

He was a man who worked well during the day and by appointment, and then enjoyed an evening out with friends. He is reported to have been of an even and constant temper,64 without the freaks and humors of temperament that seem so much the parcel of painters. He neither sank to the depths nor was raised to the

61 Reynolds, Discourses, I, 144.
62 Reynolds, A Journey to Flanders and Holland, II, 196.
63 Reynolds, Discourses, II, 149.
64 Reynolds, Discourses, ed. Roger Fry, i.
impossibly airy heights. Instead he maintained a constant and even humor. Yet if we place his pictures beside those of all the strange-veined painters whose lives were aberrations, Reynolds will appear as inspired and poetical as any of them.

A point we can learn from both the Discourses and the life of Reynolds, is that an artist can be great without being odd. If Roger Fry says: "[the Discourses] contain principles, and exhibit mental attitudes, which are the highest value to the artist," we may say that the mental attitudes most valuable to the artist which are displayed by Reynolds, are attitudes of sanity, and what is more, a sanity which produced strong and inspiring works of art.

65 Ibid., x.
CHAPTER V

REYNOLDS AND HIS TIMES

Reynolds' Discourses are the meeting place of all the various critical trends of the eighteenth century. He represents no one school exclusively but is rather a compendium of all the schools. As W. J. Bate says of him: "When taken together, Reynolds' Discourses comprise perhaps the most representative single embodiment in English of eighteenth-century aesthetic principles."¹ Or elsewhere: "the premises of English neo-classicism found in Reynolds their most broadly representative expression."²

The main elements which are found in the eighteenth century and in Reynolds, its representative, can be broadly spoken of as reasonable method and emotion or taste. The stress on reason or method can be traced back to the whole emergence of Cartesian doctrine in the field of philosophy. The great amount of stress laid on method in the criticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth century can perhaps be traced back to Descartes:

¹ W. J. Bate, From Classic to Romantic, Cambridge, Mass., 1946, 79.
² Ibid., 92
The long chains of simple and easy reasonings by means of which geometers are accustomed to reach the conclusions of their most difficult demonstrations, had led me to imagine that all things, to the knowledge of which, man is competent, are mutually connected in the same way, and that there is nothing so far removed from us as to be beyond our reach, or so hidden that we cannot discover it, provided only we abstain from accepting the false from the true, and always preserve in our thoughts the order necessary for the deduction of one truth from another.3

Thus, according to Descartes all things within the mental scope of man can be known by man, if man preserves "order," in his thinking. From this stress on method the French literary critics formed a school which is based—true to Descartes' original plan—on a geometrically akin order.

As Bate says of the influence of Descartes: "It was not the historical evolution of Cartesianism but rather its primary assumptions which strongly affected neo-classic aesthetic criticism."4 Bate goes on to say:

Although he is reported to have said that Descartes "cut the throat of poetry," Boileau's Art Poétique (1674) has been called, and with some justice, "the Cartesian Discours de la Méthode of French poetry". . .5


4 Bate, From Classic to Romantic, 30.

5 Ibid., 32.
Or Bosker on the same subject:

In France the Cartesian doctrine became the basis of literary aesthetics, in England it is the materialistic philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, in which the movement is generally believed to have found its origin.6

The French methodology soon permeated England. The age of Pope became an age of rules: "England loudly echoed, through Dryden, Rymer, Pope, the rules set down in France by Malherbe, Boileau, Rapin."7 In England the general seeking after methodology took two forms: the method of reason and the method of the classics. Literature was to conform to the rules of right reason and the rules of the neo-classicists. From the basic feeling for method a set of canons culled from the classic critics was evolved:

Besides the rules of Aristotle, as commented upon by the French exponents of neo-classicism, the Horatian precepts, either in their original or their translated form, were considered as laws for artistic creation.8

The literature of the age of Pope, the Augustan Age, tried to mirror as closely as possible the literature created under the reign of the Emperor Augustus (27 B.C.-A.D.14), which included such poets as Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Tibullus. As


8 Bosker, Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, 4.
the literature of the original Augustan Age is characterized as being mainly "Rhetoric, Metrics, and careful diction . . . and a beautiful, refined, and elegant form," so too the Age of Pope, the Augustan Age in English literature, is characterized by a predominance of stylistic precision with a minimum of emotion and originality. As Bosker points out:

Pope's Essay on Criticism, the Rape of the Lock, the Satires, and Moral Essays all exemplify the Horatian ideal of precision, but it is especially in the Intimations of Horace . . . that the direct influence of the great critic is traceable. What Pope did in poetry, Addison did in prose.10

Thus, the craving for methodology was satisfied in one way by an appeal to the rules of the ancients as interpreted by the neo-classic critics.

The second development of methodology took the form of the methodology of reason, or, as it is often called, "rationalism." Of this second trend Bosker says:

The other important critical tendency of the seventeenth century, which gained a much firmer foothold in England than the dogmatic belief in the rules ever did, was that of making reason the final criterion of literary merit.11

Rationalism insisted that everything be according to correct


10 A. Bosker, Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson,4.

11 Ibid., 6.
judgment and right reason. There was no room for the absurd or impossible, but only for the realistic and possible:

This conception of the verisimile, the vraisemblable, measured by purely rational standards, came to be one of the tenets of the pseudo-classic creed. Conformity to the laws of experience became the final criterion. 12

Davenant, in his preface to Gondibert, censures Tasso for his expeditions into the fantastic. Rymer censures Spenser's neglect of probability. 13 The poetic romances of the Middle Ages and Renaissance are looked down upon as being strange flights of fancy, as "characteristic of the inventive use in structural form of 'fancy' rather than 'reason.'" 14

This predominance of rationalism became even stronger than the dogmatism of classic rules and these rules were used mainly because they were thought to conform to right reason, to the state of nature as it is: "Aristotelian and Horatian canons . . . continued to be regarded as authoritative laws, because it was believed that they conformed with reason." 15 Literature, in its creative aspects, thus reached a state in which reason predominated and held in check the inferior powers of emotion and imagination. Restraint and conformity to rules were treated

12 Ibid., 10.
13 Ibid., 13.
14 Bate, From Classic to Romantic, 37.
15 Bosker, Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, 6.
almost as ends in themselves. These rules were aimed at producing a literature which was the mirror of general nature. As Pope says:

First follow nature, and your judgment frame
By her just standard, which is still the same:
Unerring Nature! still divinely bright,
One clear, unchanged, and universal light,
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
At once the source, and end, and test of art.16

Truth became synonymous with general nature and right reason. Both the rules of the neo-classicists and the general rule of the rationalists to follow reason, are aimed at the reproduction in art of general nature. "Imitation of nature meant for them the invention of something, which, though not actually existing, was in strict accordance with the laws of nature and reason."17 Shipley remarks that "the individual items of existence were submerged in the typical."18 Thus, in the creation (production) of art, the use of rules aimed, ultimately, through restraint of emotion and guidance of reason, at the reproduction of general nature: the typical rather than the individual.

17 Bosker, Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, 10.
Although the importance of reason was stressed over the importance of emotion in the production of works of art as well as in its appreciation, the function of emotion in the art's impression on the individual for whom it was written was never forgotten.

The rationalists as well as the neo-classicists realized that "it [art] achieves its effects by administering the natural sources of pleasure in the mind of man." Or as Bosker says: "The rationalistic critics by no means denied that it was the poet's duty to move the heart of his audience or readers." The importance of reason was never neglected, but neither was it presented entirely to the exclusion of emotion. This provision for emotion as being one of the ends of art in relation to the person for whom the art was created maintained emotion in a system that was predominantly reasonable:

... though the figurative adornment of art may evoke emotional reaction, the essential form, which is rationally portrayed in art, must be rationally known; and that response to "invention" and the comprehension of its significance which comprise aesthetic taste are less the function of feeling than of "judgment."

Thus, one of the main elements in seventeenth and eighteenth century thought in England was an element which I have

20 Bosker, Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, 38.
21 Bate, From Classic to Romantic, 38.
called method. This general attitude found expression in two main trends: neo-classicism, which obtained its rules from the ancients by way of the neo-classic critics, and rationalism, which based its rules on right reason.

In its creative aspects (the aspects of the artist in relation to his work) method had for its final end a re-creation of general nature through a reasonable, emotionally restrained procedure. It allowed in its final end, as far as the viewer or reader was concerned, a provision for emotional experience.

The second trend in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is what I have already called emotion or taste. Other terms have been used to designate this trend which can, in general, be said to be antithetical to the trend of Cartesian philosophy or what I have designated as Method. As Benedetto Croce says:

The obscure world of wit, taste, imagination, feeling and the je ne sais quoi was not selected for examination or even, so to speak, included in the picture of Cartesian philosophy.\textsuperscript{22}

Taste was something outside the regularity of rules. It was above rules. As Bosker says of the proponents of taste:

\ldots they did not believe in the infallibility of the rules; they were convinced that there was something in poetic art that fell beyond their pale, something that could be explained only by what they vaguely designated taste.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} Benedetto Croce, \textit{Aesthetic}, New York, 1953, 204.

\textsuperscript{23} Bosker, \textit{Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson}, 16.
Thus, in contrast to the methodical schools of neo-classicism and rationalism we see developed a school based on a non-methodical sixth sense. Taste concentrated on the will rather than reason, on immediacy rather than on any long process of judgment:

... the conception of taste as non-rational frequently found its keynote in the phrase, *je ne sais quoi*, a phrase... which became a modish expression in both France and England by the close of the [seventeenth] century.

The school of Taste or Will can probably be traced to a dual origin: Longinus (through Boileau's translation in 1674), and the Earl of Shaftesbury.

In passages such as:

... we see skill in invention, and due order and arrangement of matter, emerging as the hard-won result not of one thing nor of two, but of the whole texture of the composition, whereas Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of the orator in all its plenitude,

the advocates of emotion found classic precedence to back them up and give authoritative weight to their theory. As Bate says:

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24 Ibid., 138.
25 Bate, *From Classic to Romantic*, 44.
The neo-classic "School of Taste" in England both facilitated and in turn drew encouragement from the rising popularity of the famous Greek treatise, attributed to Longinus, On the Sublime.27

Longinus had stressed the superiority of the poet who, even at the cost of paltry rules, overpowers and enthralls the reader. He had stressed the importance of art flashing forth like a thunderbolt unhampered by rules,28 and so quite naturally he had found exponents in the non-methodical School of Taste: "In the works of several English critics, most of all in those of Dryden and Addison, his [Longinus'] statements are cited and endorsed."29

To Shaftesbury, taste became a kind of instinct, a feeling for the beautiful akin to his feeling for the moral good. As Croce says, "Shaftesbury (1709) raises taste to a sense or instinct of the beautiful."30

This attitude of Shaftesbury and the attitudes of his lineal descendants in the school of sensibility can be grouped under the general idea of instinct for the good and the beautiful. They viewed art, and often morality, as something to be evaluated purely by feeling. Emotion was stressed rather than intellect.

27 Bate, From Classic to Romantic, 46.
28 Bosker, Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, 19.
29 Ibid.
30 Croce, Aesthetics, 206.
The exponents of taste had, then, really two main components in their theory: art is to be judged by instinct, and the test of that instinct is to be a feeling for the sublime, a feeling of being uplifted. The final meaning of taste in England after it has passed through the meanings we have so far ascribed to it, a meaning closely connected with instinct, became one of a kind of schooled instinct, a judgment operating with the quick selectivity of the instinctive:

The word "taste" itself became broadened to include, not an unschooled and innately trustworthy feeling, but a far wider capacity of judgment, which is augmented and directed by experience and by learning, and which in time may acquire an almost intuitional sagacity in its objective insight.31

Thus, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England there were two major trends, in some ways antithetical to each other: The first was the trend of method, comprising the method of reason (rationalism) and the method of the ancients (neo-classicism); the second was the trend of taste, which began as a kind of instinct and later became reconciled with reason. This latter trend is indicated in the words of R. S. Crane, when he says of the eighteenth century:

31 Bate, From Classic to Romantic, 58.
Its characteristic appeal, on all issues that involved the end or good of art was . . . to the trained taste and sensitive judgment of men expert in the enjoyment of poetry, painting or music.\textsuperscript{32}

It is now my task to demonstrate how Reynolds manifests the main trends of the eighteenth century, in line with my original thesis of this chapter that Reynolds is the "most representative single embodiment in English of eighteenth century aesthetic principles."\textsuperscript{33}

Reynolds, like the neo-classicists, the methodologists of the ancients, had a great respect for the classics. He says, in relation to these classics:

\dots we must not rest contented even in this general study of the moderns; we must trace back the art to its fountain head; to that source from whence they drew their principal excellencies, the monuments of pure antiquity. All the inventions and thoughts of the ancients, whether conveyed to us in statues, bas-reliefs, intaglios, or coins, are to be sought after and carefully studied; the genius that hovers over these venerable relics may be called the father of modern art.\textsuperscript{34}

Reynolds' study of classic as well as other art, is not, as with many of the Augustans, aimed at servile imitation, but is rather a short cut to the primary source of all art which must be

\textsuperscript{32} Crane,"English Criticism," \textit{Dictionary of World Literature}, 118.

\textsuperscript{33} Bate, \textit{From Classic to Romantic}, 79.

\textsuperscript{34} Reynolds, \textit{Discourses}, I, 134-135.
nature. The rules of the ancients were not set up as absolute models as they were with many of the Augustan age, but were used by Reynolds mainly to arrive at general nature:

The great use of studying our predecessors is, to open the mind, to shorten our labour, and to give us the result of the selection made by those great minds of what is grand or beautiful in nature . . .35

Furthermore, Reynolds uses the past not so much for rules as for the spirit of the work. If the ancients are great, it is the greatness of their spirit that he strives after:

It is the proper study and labour of an artist to uncover and find out the latent cause of conspicuous beauties, and from thence form principles of his own conduct . . .36

Thus, Reynolds shows a veneration and appreciation of the ancients. He finds them beneficial in forming taste and leading us back to the great teacher, Nature, but he will not let his art be choked and restricted by trying to exactly imitate them.

Reason, his kinship to Rationalism, plays a large part in Reynolds' theory. Labor under the direction of reason will be the method of the student acquiring the ability of his art: "Nothing is denied to well-directed labour: nothing is to be obtained without it."37 Reason is the director in the acquisition

35 Ibid., 127.
36 Ibid., 128.
37 Ibid., 34.
of taste, which is the end of the artist's training:

A man of real taste is always a man of judgement in other respects; and those inventions which either disdain or shrink from reason, are generally, I fear, more like the dreams of a distempered brain, than the exalted enthusiasm of a sound and true genius. 38

Further, Reynolds comes particularly near to the Rationalists in his use of reason in the formation of taste, which, as I have stated in my definition (Chapter I) deals with general or universal nature. According to Reynolds and the Rationalists, it was the role of reason to select the general and the universal in nature. Reynolds and the Rationalists show a further kinship in their position that art ultimately appeals to the emotions. As I have already stated, the rationalist position allowed that art does provoke emotional response in the viewer although this response is not the primary end of art.

Reynolds differs from this position in so far as he contends that the ultimate appeal of art should be to the emotions and imagination: "all the arts . . . address themselves only to two faculties of the mind, its imagination and its sensibility." 39

Unlike the rationalist position which allows the entrance of emotion into the artistic experience, Reynolds neces-

38 Ibid., 185.
39 Ibid., II, 87.
situates its presence: "The great end of those arts is to make an impression on the imagination and the feeling." 40

The early concept of taste as something instinctive and unformed is alien to Reynolds. To him, taste is something which is developed under the guidance of reason: "A man of real taste is always a man of judgement in other respects." 41 Yet placing the ultimate criterion of the worth of a piece of art in the imagination rather than in the reason, ties Reynolds directly to the School of Taste:

... the imagination is here the residence of truth. If the imagination be affected, the conclusion is fairly drawn; if it be not affected the reasoning is erroneous. 42

Especially evident in Reynolds is the Longinian stress on the sublime as being the end of art. Like Richardson, Reynolds is interested in the "Grand Style," the "Grand Gusto," 'Grace and Greatness.'" 43 Reynolds' sublime, in general, agrees with the view of Trumbell:

Those paintings are sublime which represent great objects with greatness of manner; 'which by exhibiting sublime Objects in the proper Light ... with all

40 Ibid., 103.
41 Ibid., I, 185.
42 Ibid., II, 87.
their natural Strength and Loftsiness, inspire great Sentiments into the Minds of Beholders and mightily move and elevate them.44

Reynolds' stress on Michelangelo stemmed from the view of the sublime popularized by Burke: "Michelangelo could best illustrate the sublime that Burke made popular."45 It is interesting to note the similarity to Longinus' statement that "Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt,"46 and the statement of Reynolds that "eloquence . . . bears down every thing before it and often triumphs over superior wisdom and learning."47

Reynolds, then, "inveighs against the popular opinion that taste has nothing to do with reason and that it is free from any restraint of rules,"48 yet does agree that a trained taste, a taste with the ability to discern general nature, is the faculty which ultimately, through the instrumentality of the imagination, can evaluate art. Reynolds has the emotional stress of the school of taste without having its vagueness.

Thus, we can see in Reynolds in varying degrees and

44 Ibid., 180.
45 Ibid., 188.
47 Reynolds, A Journey to Flanders and Holland, II, 196.
48 Bosker, Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, 139.
with various stresses the main currents of eighteenth century criticism. He is, as Bate has said, the "most broadly representative" of his century.

Nor is it any wonder that we find in Reynolds such a mirror of his times. His friends were the celebrities and thinkers of his times and from them he drew his fund of contemporary thought. As Cotton says:

... he [Reynolds] may be said to have numbered among his friends and acquaintances, almost all the celebrated characters of his day... Johnson, Burke, Garrick, Goldsmith, the two Wartons, Beatie, Mason, Malone, all cultivated and enjoyed his friendship; as well as persons of the highest rank and station, who admired his genius, as much as they respected the excellence of his private character.49

Many men might have sat among such great wits as Johnson or Burke and profited little, but it was the practice of Reynolds to glean most of his knowledge from conversation, from direct contact with men. His character had a great need for the companionship of society. It is fortunate for us, even as it was for him, that this society was such a brilliant training ground for the mind.50

Besides his conversational gleanings, Reynolds was a man of a well-stocked library and good literary tastes. The men


50 F. W. Hilles, The Literary Career of Sir Joshua Reynolds, 117.
he did not know personally, he probably knew from their writings. He was familiar with Shaftesbury and probably knew du Bos, Burke and Bouhours. He is greatly indebted to Algarotti's An Essay on Painting for many of his fundamental ideas and phrases, as well as the anthological work of Junius, Painting of the Ancients. This work by Junius "little more than an overpowering collection of quotations from more than two hundred Greek and Roman writers relating to painting" provided Reynolds with many of the quotations and ideas in his literary works.

Possibly the greatest single source for Reynolds' ideas was Samuel Johnson. Not only did he know Johnson intimately but was quite familiar with his works:

... the bulk of Sir Joshua's reading could be characterized as philosophical. He read "to improve and enlarge his mind." The author who best served him in this respect was Samuel Johnson.

It was probably from Johnson that Reynolds obtained his idea of general nature, a nature above accidents of fashion, appealing to the unchanging aspects of man. As Bate says:

For, like Johnson, he [Reynolds] never wavered from his conviction that the true province of art is to imitate the objective and unchanging truth "general

51 Ibid., 121.
52 Ibid., 123.
53 Ibid., 117.
nature," and to shape in accordance with this truth
the ethical character of man; and, somewhat more than
Johnson, he combined with this conviction a belief that
imitation of the ideal can be effectively presented and
realized only if it is rendered vital, impressive, and
emotionally immediate.54

Thus, Reynolds is his time because he knew his time
and the ideas of his time flowed in his veins. However, his
value is not merely historical. His ideas are above the changes
of history and rooted in the nature of man. Reynolds was
valuable in his day, in our day, and will be valuable in the
future as a guide for young artists who wish to mix the sublime
with common sense and perhaps achieve greatness in their art.

54 Bate, From Classic to Romantic, 92.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have tried to give the main points of Reynolds' art theory.

The first chapter was written to serve as a key to the rest of the work. It was designed to give the meaning of the basic terms used by Reynolds and, thus, enable the reader to feel at ease in Reynolds' world.

The second chapter dealt with the ultimate end of art as Reynolds viewed it. Art, according to Reynolds, strikes the imagination and sensibility, giving the viewer the "artistic experience." It leads him from confinement in individual things of sense to an appreciation of the general beauty on which the individual is founded. Ultimately, art, by refinement of man's appetites, leads him to virtue on the natural level.

In the third chapter I dealt with the means to be used in striving for the end discussed in Chapter II. The questions I attempted to answer were: How does the student prepare himself to create a work of art that will strike the imagination? What specific quality must be developed within the student himself in order to arrive at this goal?

I pointed out the three stages through which the student
must go: the learning of the rudiments of his art, the grounding in tradition, and, the striking out on his own. All of these stages aim ultimately at the development of taste in the artist. The artist who has successfully passed through these stages will develop a kind of instinct for the beautiful.

In Chapter IV I dealt with various criticisms directed at Reynolds.

The charge that Reynolds equated industry and genius was answered by showing that, although Reynolds stressed industry, he never called a mere artistic mechanic a genius. It was shown that to Reynolds study was important only in so far as it formed taste.

The charge by Armstrong, that Reynolds never actually practiced his own ideas on industry and reason but fell back on emotion, was answered by showing exactly what place both reason and emotion have in Reynolds' theory. Reason is the leader in forming taste; emotion is the desired result effected in the viewer.

The accusation by Ritchie that Reynolds' work has a hollowness and lack of intimacy because he strove for the ideal and general and neglected the real or particular, was answered by examining Reynolds' views on ideal or general nature. Reynolds sought to elevate a particular subject to the realms of universal or general nature, always seeking to preserve the likeness of the particular.
In Chapter V I endeavored to show how Reynolds was representative of his time. In varying degrees his work contains all the major ideas of the century. Like the neo-classicists, he reverenced the ancients. Like the rationalists, reason plays a large part in his theory.

Reynolds' concentration on the imagination as the ultimate judge of art and his stress on the sublime ties him with the school of taste.

His works are truly a compendium of the ideas of his time. Nor is it any wonder that we find so many ideas of the time in Reynolds, for he was a man thoroughly in touch with his age, both through friends and reading.

The two main trends with which I characterized the eighteenth century, method and taste, were found in Reynolds in a kind of conflict. There is a progression from his early to his later discourses that shows an increased emphasis on inspiration.

In the early discourses he warns the students to study assiduously and not to rely on their own powers:

You must have no dependence on your own genius. If you have great talents, industry will improve them; if you have but moderate abilities, industry will supply their deficiency.¹

Gradually there is an increased emphasis on genius. In Discourse IV, for example, Reynolds says:

¹ Reynolds, Discourses, I, 34.
The errors of genius . . . are pardonable and none even of the most exalted painters are wholly free from them; but they have taught us, by the rectitude of their general practice, to correct their own affected or accidental deviation,\(^2\)

and in Discourse V he begins his praise of Michelangelo:

"Raffaelle had more taste and fancy; Michael Angelo more genius and imagination. The one excelled in beauty, the other in energy.\(^3\)

It was not until after his trip to Flanders and Holland in 1781, however, that Reynolds fully realized the force of genius over the works of mere artistic mechanics. It was only on viewing the works of Crayer, Schut, Seghers and Huysum next to those of Rubens, that Reynolds bowed humbly before genius.\(^4\)

It is worthy of note that the subject of Reynolds' discourse in 1782, after his return from Flanders and Holland was genius.

The final step in this progression took place in 1790, when Reynolds delivered his last discourse before the Royal Academy. Here we have a great man and a great painter taking leave of the world and acknowledging his humility before genius:

I feel a self-congratulation in knowing myself capable of such sensations as he [Michelangelo] intended to excite. I reflect, not without vanity, that these Discourses bear testimony of my admiration of that

\(^2\) Ibid., I, 87.

\(^3\) Ibid., I, 101.

\(^4\) Reynolds, A Journey to Flanders and Holland, II, 297.
truly divine man; and I should desire that the last words which I should pronounce in this academy, and from this place, might be the name of Michael Angelo.5

5 Reynolds, Discourses, II, 164.
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III. ARTICLES


The thesis submitted by Hugh Bernard Fox, Jr. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.