

Victor Chan, 'Leader of My Angels': William Hayley and His Circle (exhibition catalogue). Edmonton. The Edmonton Art Gallery, in conjunction with the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies / The University of Alberta, 1982. 89 pp., illus.

Jennifer C. Watson

Volume 12, Number 1, 1985

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1073699ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073699ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Watson, J. C. (1985). Review of [Victor Chan, *'Leader of My Angels': William Hayley and His Circle* (exhibition catalogue). Edmonton. The Edmonton Art Gallery, in conjunction with the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies / The University of Alberta, 1982. 89 pp., illus.] *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 12(1), 80–81.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1073699ar>

Civile of 1711. Caserta can be read as a desperate attempt to salvage the intersubjective realm of meaning (convention, the public realm) as the *locus* of architecture still possible in the 18th century. This rhetoric is particularly clear in two very original features of the palace: the emphatic diagonal junctures of the massive vaulted corridors and entrances that link the courtyards, and the theatre, where the literal stage-set of a mythical play and the king's 'proscenium-box' engage in a dialogue, pointing to the transformation of the entire palace-theatre-garden complex into a stage-set. Taking for granted architecture as 'convention' in a perspective world, Vanvitelli's palace is far apart from the critical transcendence of the limitations of relativism and convention which was propitiated by Vico's hermeneutics and, correlatively, in the architecture of Lodoli, the 'Rigoristi' and Piranesi.

Vico's interest in number as *mathesis*, as a primordial form of symbolization, is obvious in his work on Pythagoras. His suspicion and criticism of apriori systems, exemplified by the philosophies of the 17th century, however warn us against reading into his concern for number an interest for systems of mathematical logic. It is well known that there are inconsistencies in Vico's oeuvre, but we can safely assume that he was being critical of the method of natural science, postulated as a model for all types of human knowledge. Having this in mind, Hersey's description of proportional relationships in the palace as 'close packing, plaid graphs, nesting, and vectors' seems inappropriate. It would be useful to differentiate between the author's reading of architectural order in terms of a vocabulary of functionalised mathematics (such as geometric planning) and the disclosure of the intentions as can be gleaned from the texts, architectural treatises and scientific culture of the time.

The perception of Caserta in the tradition of Renaissance palaces ruled by proportion, particularly seen in the reference of Gioffredo's scheme to the Escorial, and through it, to the primordial Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, is all very convincing. Gioffredo wrote that architectural order is 'the union of several things that by commutative proportions create the formation of a whole.' Hersey illuminates the sym-

bolic horizon of the rhythms, proportions and symmetries of the palace. These proportional relationships draw from the inveterate mythopoetic power of numbers to embody the ideals of order and justice of the monarchy through a synthesis of geometric structure and classical ornament in ways that seem to echo Vico's thought. What is less obvious, however, when one recognizes the *uncritical* use of Vitruvian traditional principles and metaphors in the building, is the assumption of both the most substantial (critical) aspects of Vichian philosophy, and the use of some planning methodology that may have promoted the reduction of plans and elevations to mathematical systems or series.

Perhaps the major lesson to be learned from Hersey's book is that the 'house' is architecture by virtue of it being a symbol. The concern of the architect is not comfort or aesthetics as subjective opinions to be realized in the private realm. For the house to be architecture it has to embody a transcendental myth and operate in the realm of the public – the domain of intersubjectivity – regardless of the contradictions that this may entail in the contemporary world. Only established in this domain does meaning appear, constituted by its own 'syntactic' horizon, historically layered, with all its richness and ambiguity.

ALBERTO PEREZ-GOMEZ
Carleton University

VICTOR CHAN *Leader of My Angels: William Hayley and His Circle* (exhibition catalogue). Edmonton. The Edmonton Art Gallery, in conjunction with the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies / The University of Alberta, 1982. 89 pp., illus.

This exhibition catalogue is an outgrowth of Victor Chan's doctoral dissertation on George Romney's drawings of *John Howard Visiting Prisoners*. Like other such catalogues, it is a substantial publication which breaks new ground. The Edmonton Art Gallery (in conjunction with the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies and The University

of Alberta) is to be commended for producing the catalogue and mounting the show itself.

'Though Hayley was not a major poet,' Chan notes in the Introduction, 'his better ideas were ... frequently filtered through his friends and expressed in their works,' ideas which in many ways, 'helped in the national crusade to create a new artistic identity through the formation of a school of history painting' (p. 9). Yet, except in connection with his patronage of William Blake – who once named him 'Leader of My Angels,' the title of this book – Hayley's role in the development of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English art has not been adequately assessed. Chan's object, therefore, is to examine Hayley's relationships and artistic involvements in an effort to bring to light some of the major issues confronting artists of the period. Dividing his essay into two main parts (plus Introduction and Conclusion), he deals with sensibility, sublimity, and modernity in the context of history painting, then specifically the Hayley circle itself. Eleven artists are represented by 151 drawings, prints, books and paintings, but the eleven surprisingly include Jean-Honoré Fragonard, to my knowledge unacquainted with Hayley, while an important omission is Joseph Wright of Derby, not to mention Jeremiah Meyer. Moreover, the author's observations are somewhat limited in scope, though his thesis is well founded and convincing, as he reconsiders for the first time all previous ideas from this meaningful point of view.

Part 1 serves primarily as background, being concerned with sensibility, the Sublime, the religious revival, and literature in relation to a search for dramatic subjects; the 'modern' concept of a national school of history painting is seen as their converging point. Particular reference is made to the artists of Hayley's own circle: Thomas Stothard, John Flaxman, and Romney in the eighteenth century. The poet's life is summarized – Chan neglecting to mention that he was an enthusiastic amateur artist, a salient point – and his publications especially *The Triumphs of Temper* presented as projects which involved both artists and literary figures. However, the first biographer of Romney was not Hayley, as stated (p. 11), but

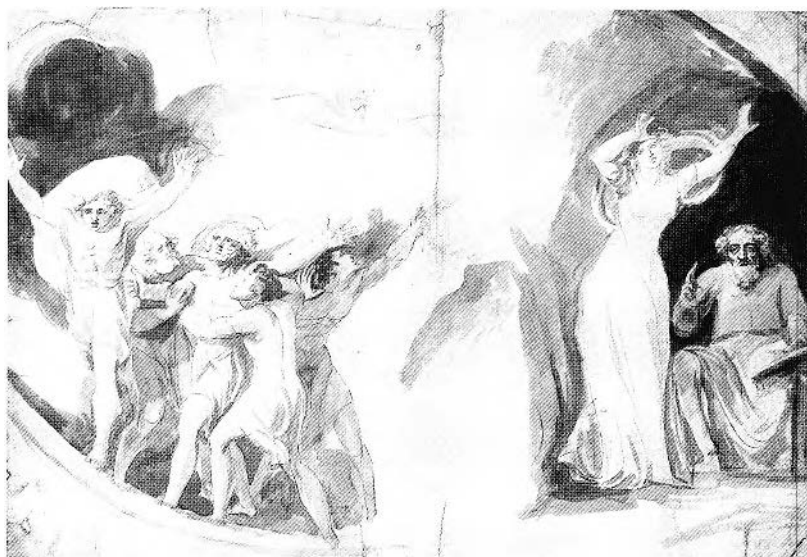


FIGURE 3. George Romney, *Study for the Shipwreck in 'The Tempest.'* Ottawa, The National Gallery of Canada. Chan, cat. 85.

Richard Cumberland. In my view this essay is too brief to be completely successful.

More satisfactory is Chan's discussion in Part II, where he elaborates his theories concerning the poet's circle and necessarily clarifies his arguments. Focusing (for the first time) on 'the artists who were directly connected with Hayley and who worked in the realm of history painting' (p. 29), he investigates in turn scenes from classical antiquity, literary episodes principally from Dante, Shakespeare and Milton, and contemporary social subjects. Flaxman's illustrations became the best known and the most influential, yet it is Romney who is treated at considerable length, above all, his drawings of *Howard* and Shakespeare's plays. While Chan rightly maintains that few of his paintings exist, with regard to *The Tempest* (Fig. 3) this is partly misleading, for three head fragments, one of them Hayley in the character of Prospero, survive in the Museum and Art Gallery at Bolton. To state that Romney's *Ages of Man* 'emphasizes only two stages in the human cycle' (p. 47) is equally misleading, for his letter (to Hayley) of 12 December 1793 indicates 'the number of the set [to be] twelve.' Finally, in the nineteenth century, Blake and to a lesser extent Stothard are commented on, though Chan nowhere identifies clearly the Hayley circle members.

As an exhibition catalogue, too, the publication reveals a few flaws. More than half of the works in the show are reproduced, integrated in the catalogue essay – an admirable design decision. But the quality of the plates is only adequate. Further, the exhibition list (pp. 81 ff.) lacks any reference to the illustrations and the entries being arranged seemingly at random, catalogue numbers are assigned to the artist rather than the work of art. The entries themselves are not always consistent; cat. 2, for example, is ascribed to Caroline Watson who engraved the work with no mention of Romney, the painter, yet cat. 52 is ascribed to Flaxman with no mention of the engraver, and cat. 98 to 'Blake ... (after Romney).' It is also unfortunate that the typeface chosen is too small for easy readability. Nevertheless, the catalogue ends with two useful appendices, one of Hayley and his writings, the other of artists' biographies (which perhaps would have been more effectively confined to the poet's circle), followed by a selected bibliography (p. 80). If some additions are mentioned here, it is simply as publications contributing further to the issues discussed in this book: Winifred H. Friedman, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1976); Peter Tomory, 'A Blake Sketch for Hayley's Ballad "The Lion" and a Connection with Fuseli,' *The Burlington*

Magazine, cxvii (1975), 376-78; Mary Webster, 'Poet Patron of the 18th Century: William Hayley and George Romney,' *Country Life*, CLXIX (1981), 266-67.

Notwithstanding the above criticisms, Chan's catalogue, with its novel approach, constitutes a telling interdisciplinary study, as his exhibition correspondingly served to make visible little-known American and especially Canadian holdings of English art. Too often the nationalistic emphasis on Canadian art can be limiting; the example of The Edmonton Art Gallery should spur (it is hoped) similar institutions to originate European shows of consequence.

JENNIFER C. WATSON
Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery

MILTON BROWN (ed.) with the assistance of JUDITH H. LANIUS *One Hundred Masterpieces of American Painting from Public Collections in Washington, D.C.* Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983. 240 pp., colour illus., \$63.00 (cloth).

This book, as we are told in the introduction, grew out of an exhibition of ninety American paintings in Washington collections that was sent to Mexico in 1981. Those who organized the exhibition found it so intriguing that they hoped to have it shown in Washington and elsewhere. Since this could not be done, they contended themselves with translating into English what is, in effect, a modified and expanded version of the catalog (originally published in Spanish) which accompanied the exhibition to Mexico.

As one looks through the reproductions in the volume, one understands their enthusiasm. It is an interesting and impressive array of works arranged in chronological order from Copley's *The Copley Family* (1776-77), to Richard Diebenkorn's #111 (1978). The exhibition must have been stunning. Unfortunately, it is with leafing through the colour reproductions that one's interest in the book ends. The catalog entries accompanying each reproduction as well as the prefatory text, a brief survey of the