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Carol Gibson-Wood, *Jonathan Richardson: Art Theorist of the English Enlightenment*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000, 264 pp., 89 black-and-white illus., $75 U.S.

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and Priory Church of St Andrew, Rochester: Some Critical Remarks on the Hitherto Accepted Plan," *Archaeological Journal* 86 (1929), 187–212.

2 *Medieval Art and Architecture at Hereford Cathedral: The British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions*, David Whitehead, ed., (Leeds, 1995), 15–28.

3 Deborah Kahn, "The West Doorway at Rochester Cathedral," in N. Stratford, ed., *Romanesque and Gothic: Essays for George Zarnecki* (Woodbridge, 1987), 129–34.

4 Edward Prior and Arthur Gardner, *An Account of Medieval Figure-Sculpture in England* (Cambridge, 1912), 198.

5 Eric Fernie, *An Architectural History of Norwich Cathedral* (Oxford, 1994).

Carol Gibson-Wood, *Jonathan Richardson: Art Theorist of the English Enlightenment*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000, 264 pp., 89 black-and-white illus., $75 U.S.

This book combines the traditional strength of the artist's monograph with the appeal of more recent fashions for studies of small artistic communities, especially those based in London.[1] The main body of the text begins with an examination of the artistic micro-climate around Lincoln's Inn Fields, where Richardson spent the early and middle sections of his career. Richardson's diverse group of friends and acquaintances, we learn, included the surgeon William Cheselden, Edward Harley and other members of the Royal Society, Ralph Palmer, a barrister-at-law, together with that most celebrated member of Richardson's circle, Alexander Pope. The Richardson-Pope association is evocatively described as founded upon mutual respect for textual study of the ancients and spiced by hoaxes and jokes, such as a Miltonian pastiche that goes unnoticed by Richardson. This section also includes insights regarding pupil-master exchange in Richardson's studio and a glance at the professional relationship between the artist and his son Jonathan Richardson junior, co-author of *An Account of Some of the Statues, Bas-Reliefs, Drawings and Pictures in Italy &c. with Remarks. By Mr Richardson, Sen and Jun* (London, 1722). The unique character of a relationship based on the domestic *ménage* of Richardson's home, however, has yet to be explored in a way that will fully reveal its art-historical and art-critical implications.

Central to Gibson-Wood's text is the discussion of social aspiration and the painting of portraits. Part one, "The Annals of a Chequered Life," offers a detailed variant of a familiar argument first versed by scholars such as Iain Pears, David Solkin, and John Barrell,[2] in which the eighteenth-century portrait painter attempted to elevate the status of his craft by employing a generalized visual language, in order to approximate the dignity of history painting. In Joshua Reynolds's case, this was accomplished by the widespread use of classical dress and a lack of attention to trifling details. In Richardson's case, we read, portraiture was justified by its value as an "improving" exercise for the sitter (who is encouraged to engage in self-reflection) and, by association, a didactic experience for the viewer, who, it is hoped, will think highly of the sitter (pp. 187–88).

The tirelessness with which Richardson built up a lucrative portrait practice, and what amounted to a studio "empire" on more than one site, through hard work and a strategic marriage, is well conveyed by Gibson-Wood. This process of self-transformation from mere "face-painter" to professional artist is equally applicable to the careers of Richardson's contemporaries such as Godfrey Kneller, John Closterman, and Michael Dahl and extends to those of his seventeenth-century predecessors, including Richard Gibson (who became the King's painter) and, more famously, Anthony van Dyck.

And yet the reader is left in no doubt that Richardson's two major contributions to art theory were also central components of his self-made greatness. Although distinctive for reasons that the author makes clear, Richardson's case was, however, entrenched in a pre-existent pattern of financial, artistic, and social progress applicable to portraitists active in England after 1630, as I have suggested above. A full sense of this is not gained from Gibson-Wood's text, and is part of a broader omission to engage with the issue of Richardson's place in the artistic community and the art-critical canon of late sixteenth-century to mid-eighteenth-century Britain. This lacuna is no doubt due to the methodology chosen by the author as laid out in the introduction.

In the opening pages of this book we are told that the author's method of assessing the prolific portrait painter, collector, and art theorist is "philosophical analysis" (pp. 2–4). This technique does, indeed, allow a close examination of Richardson's place in the environment of ideas found in early eighteenth-century Britain. Richardson, in Gibson-Wood's view, offered an "alternative" programme of artistic discernment that drew from contemporary thought, particularly from the writings of John Locke. The constituent parts of this programme are laid out in part two of the book, "An English Theory of Painting," and prioritized as imagination, information, instruction, pleasure, and beauty.

It is hard to disagree with Gibson-Wood that Richardson's *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715) was a distinctive contribution to the literature on taste published after 1711. Its emphasis on the potentially didactic notion of painting was, indeed, the most significant since Anthony Ashley Cooper's *Treatise, vii. viz. A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature*

of the Judgement of Hercules of 1714. Richardson's text, however, was also a response to a specific, and rather materialistic, cultural moment in which markets for British art expanded and a need was felt to harness the notion of painting as a luxury product to its cerebral valency, as a tool for improving the mind. Little sense of this trend, however, is gained from Gibson-Wood's discussion, which does not fully address the knock-on effect of Richardson's writings in this context. Gibson-Wood rightly places Joshua Reynolds, rather than Horace Walpole, as Richardson's natural successor. It is patently clear that Reynolds was also dedicated to elevating the status of British portraiture and its consumption by the viewing and commissioning public. The mushrooming of texts that responded to the need for traditional priorities in connoisseurship after the publication of Richardson's books, however, does not feature in Gibson-Wood's text. Commentators of similar intellectual authority, who shared the conservative affinities that distinguished Jonathan Richardson from other writers, voluminously argued in favour of Shaftesbury's principles for aesthetic judgement during the 1750s, 1760s, and 1780s. They were Allan Ramsay, Frances Reynolds, George Lyttleton, and Elizabeth Carter.

The bourgeois rationalism associated with Richardson becomes something of a leitmotif in Gibson-Wood's text. Richardson's viewpoint is characterized as a form of "armchair connoisseurship" that privileges the action of individual thought, possibly at some distance from the artefact itself (and most commonly in the form of a print or old master drawing). Deeply influenced by Locke – in the author's view – Richardson sought to take the Lockean *tabula rasa* as a starting point for analysis of painting or sculpture. Gibson-Wood's espousal of the notion of "armchair connoisseurship," however, occasionally leads to some far-fetched arguments about Richardson's writings. On page 150, for example, the reader is told that the "abstract" principles informing Richardson's programme are directed to painters "in so far as they are framed in terms of rules that should be followed, and examples to emulate, in creating a picture." This, it is claimed, makes them like "Félibien's presentation of the *Conférences de l'Académie Royale*" (p. 150).

The comparison appears plausible, but it ceases to recognize the contrast between an academic, public discourse such as Andre Félibien's printed lectures to students of painting or sculpture and the audience of connoisseurs, artists, and literate private individuals reading Richardson's text in spaces that were comparatively privatized prior to the foundation of an English Royal Academy in 1768. Such a linkage betrays the shortcomings of selecting the author's methodological approach (placing Richardson in the abstract realm of the philosopher's study as a result) and not taking his audience fully into account. Absence of a reading of Jonathan Richardson's discourse in the context of its actual reading public, or an assessment of its critical reception into the 1770s, represents a central flaw in the author's otherwise compelling argument.

Carol Gibson-Wood's text is, none the less, a positive response to the current dearth of writing on eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. However, a significant departure from the biographical mode of single-author studies in Enlightenment art theory, offering both detailed research about its erudite contributors and critical diagnoses of debates current from 1688–1789, has yet to be made.

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Notes

1 See Kitt Wedd and Lucy Peltz, *Creative Quarters*, exh. cat., Museum of London, (London, 2000); and Martin Myrone, "Body Building: British Historical Artists in London and Rome: the Remaking of the Heroic Ideal," Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1998.

2 I refer to Iain Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the arts in England 1680–1768* (New Haven and London, 1988); David Solkin, *Painting for Money* (New Haven and London, 1992); and John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (New Haven and London, 1986).

Lawrence Gowing, *Vermeer*, 3rd ed. London, Giles de la Mare, 1997, 8 colour plates, 116 black-and-white illus., $21.95 U.S.

Part of the impetus behind Lawrence Gowing's 1952 study of Vermeer was the perceived need to redress a decline of serious interest in the painter after the Second World War.[1] It is perhaps difficult to imagine Vermeer taking his place among the overlooked; however, from the seventeenth century onward, the appreciation of this painter and his work has been characterized by periods of neglect. This is obviously no longer the case. Since the blockbuster exhibition in Washington, D.C., and The Hague in 1995–96, interest in Vermeer only seems to burgeon. The past five years alone have seen the appearance of at least ten scholarly studies, another major exhibition, as well as numerous articles and essays. Paradoxically then, it seems that the publication of a third edition of Gowing's book by Giles de la Mare Publishers in 1997 is calculated – not to remedy neglect – but to ride a growing tide of serious interest in Vermeer. Here, as so often, Gowing's insights offer fruitful ways to interpret paradox. As he noted in 1952: "The vicissitudes of his reputation are a warning; the truth is that Vermeer with his incomparable evasive talent has eluded us" (p. 66). Thus, it may be that the very