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THE AMERICAN SKETCHBOOK OF BENJAMIN WEST.

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THE AMERICAN SKETCHBOOK
OF BENJAMIN WEST

by

William Townsend Oedel

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
University of Delaware in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Early American Culture.

May 1973

THE AMERICAN SKETCHBOOK
OF BENJAMIN WEST

by

William Townsend Oedel

Approved: R. Peter Moor
Professor in Charge of Thesis

Approved: George F. Frick
Coordinator of the Winterthur Program

Approved: Arnold L. Sypert
Dean of the College of Graduate Studies

FOR JETHRO

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PREFACE

The American Sketchbook (1756-1758) of Benjamin West is a significant document. It sheds light on the character of its eminent author, filling many gaps that an imperfect written record has left art historians. It constitutes a vivid statement of the nature of the craft of the American artist; it illuminates the way in which a young Colonist who aspired to pursue the painter's profession mastered the "mysteries" of the craft; it suggests the various sources that might have aided him in his self-training; and it reflects the tastes of the artist, his mentors, and his patrons. It relates West's early language of vision: that is, what he saw and how he recorded what he saw.

The Sketchbook is also important to the student of American art in another, equally intrinsic, respect. It is the largest series of drawings executed by a native-born American artist before the Revolution. In 1756, just before West began to fill the pages of his sketchbook, John Singleton Copley composed a small book of anatomical drawings, now lodged at the British Museum; and in 1760 John Greenwood finished two drawings--a self-portrait and a marine scene--now in the collection of the New York Public Library. This handful of drawings, however, are the few examples of American colonial draughtsmanship (whose authenticity is unquestionable) known to me. In the light of this fact, West's book of over sixty sketches assumes a unique position in the history of American art. One wonders if colonial painters never made preliminary drawings,

or if their drawings simply have not survived. One also might wonder why some enterprising art historian has not given the Sketchbook full treatment. In 1938 William Sawitzky devoted a full page (in a thirty-page article) and twenty-eight illustrations to the subject; his brief mention has since gained acceptance as the authoritative statement concerning West's American drawings. I have found the Sketchbook deserving of broader discussion.

I have encountered a great problem--perhaps the great problem which all students of Benjamin West face at some point--in the course of my courtship of West. Of all the major American painters, West is virtually the only one who has yet to find at least a competent biographer. John Galt, West's contemporary, defied fact so often in his biography that his reader must have handy a marvellous quantity of salt. Unfortunately, Galt's account has served as the basis for every subsequent discussion of West's life. Some writers have accepted his word; others have disbelieved or refuted it; others still have borrowed heavily from Galt and simultaneously discredited him. William Dunlap, who compiled his three-volume history of the arts in America in 1834, was so intent on discrediting Galt that even his account invites incredulity. To date the most believable if not the most accurate record of West's life is James Flexner's article of 1952; but Flexner never carries West beyond Philadelphia. So widespread and confusing are the myths which surround the artist's life, and particularly his early years in Pennsylvania, that I feel a responsibility to offer a cursory, revised edition in my initial chapter. I have presented a certain amount of speculation, but I have afforded a full explanation of the sources of my reasoning. I invite the industrious reader to reach his own conclusions.

In the preparation of the second chapter I found that the greatest difficulty lay in the assimilation of widely known material. E. P. Richardson has dealt extensively with the subject of the artistic community of Philadelphia before the Revolution, but I have taken issue with a number of his conclusions. Carl Bridenbaugh, in his pleasant style but without notes of his sources, has treated the matter clearly, incisively, and perforce incompletely. I have cited a good deal of the primary material which he unearthed and which I have not been able to peruse personally. I refer the reader to his discussion. I am happy to say, however, that my own researches have produced some new material which has led me to view Philadelphia painting from a different slant.

If, in the first two chapters, I have indulged in "contentious historiography" or the fine art of destroying myths, in my concluding chapter I offer observations concerning the Sketchbook itself that are considerably more original. I have avoided candid subjectivity as much as possible; for I have employed certain of the methods and criteria which art historians have patented in order to render personal expression and taste adaptable to principles of objectivity. In my effort to reconstruct West's early language of vision from an examination of his drawings, I have also disclosed much of my own. This cannot be helped: it is the lot of the art historian.

One must bear in mind finally, that the focus of the following discussion falls on the city of Philadelphia. I firmly believe that a man's character is more than roughly formed within the first two decades of his life. His situation may change continually until his death, to be sure, but in his youth he acquires the general tools and moral equipment which he employs habitually

throughout life to cope with the immediate situation. Benjamin West carried with him to Italy and England the same basic character that he had developed in Philadelphia during the 1750's.

I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to my father, Professor Howard T. Oedel, who offered many valuable suggestions concerning the cogency of my writing; to my friend, roommate, and proofreader, Gilbert T. Vincent, whose ideas lent objective direction to the final chapter; to Stephanie Munsing, Curator of Prints at the Library Company of Philadelphia, friend and cordial hostess, who assisted my researches; and to my special friend, Laura Penney Smith, who read and typed the manuscript. Above all, I am indebted to Dr. R. Peter Mooz, my advisor, who first brought the topic to my attention, and whose incisive advice and animated encouragement have been my mainstays of inspiration, not only in the preparation of this paper, but throughout the two years I have studied at Winterthur.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years art historians have alternately scourged and adulated Benjamin West, but few have honored him with understanding.¹ Even during his lifetime West seemed to resist compassion. Philadelphians, unable to satisfy his ambitions, sent him off to Europe; many of his contemporaries in England regarded him with distrust and envy and exploited every opportunity to slander him. He was, in Pope's words, "a man so very high, so very low." He was gifted with a Dickensian knack of stumbling upon good fortune, of unwittingly converting opportunities into blessings. Perhaps, as many art historians have maintained, he did simply blunder through life, never aware of the roots of his incredible success; or perhaps he was such a dedicated and forceful spokesman of his times that he was swept along on the cultural tide, oblivious of the source of his greatness.

Actually, Benjamin West was himself well-aware of the forces which lay at the foundation of his success. "It is the Times which make Artists," he said. "The feelings of the people for works of art made Phidias, because every stimulus was given to excite genius to the utmost exertion."² Often West paraded in the mainstream of his times and received praise; but now and then he raced ahead to the uncharted periphery and was subject to criticism. Truly great men, it seems, often sense the temper of their times, and their instinctive prescience provokes the wrath and envy of their mystified contemporaries.

This was one of West's greatest talents: his

intuitive ability to recognize cultural trends and realities and to ally himself with the tastemakers of his society. Until the last years of his life he maintained a delicate, sensitive control of his world; and he cultivated a penchant for aristocratic association. He was the unusual man who found himself in just the right place at precisely the right time and who possessed the energy fully to exploit his happy situation. He well knew that "the correct artist and a correct taste in the public must be in unison."³

He was not, however, simply born under a fortunate star; he embarked upon and pursued his career with an unswerving sense of purpose, with an awareness of his own destiny. Through his paintings he fulfilled his earthly role: he passed on to future ages a reflection of his times and a statement of the grand, heroic character--the inherent nobility--of man. So highly did he regard his self-assumed mission that he lived by its tenets; throughout his life he courted immortality to such an extent that he never knew failure.

He was more of an artist than a painter; that is, he regarded painting as one medium--his chosen medium--for the expression of eternal human ideals and truths. Painting to him was not simply an art in itself or a craft to be mastered and plied: he did not become preoccupied with relating the aesthetic or textural qualities of paint or with refining his technical expertise in the application of pigment to canvas. His main concern lay rather in the relation of ideas, ideas which he might translate into paint and express in his unique visual language.

West began his career during the 1750's in the city of Philadelphia. At the very time he determined to pursue the painter's profession, Philadelphians were

fostering and savouring the first fruits of a cultural awakening which laid the foundations of an indigenous tradition of artistic expression. West immersed himself in the city's thriving community of painters and print-sellers. He contributed significantly to Philadelphia's artistic maturation; and, in turn, Philadelphians encouraged his rapid development.

In the city he acquired a knowledge of the standards of his chosen profession. He came to realize the distinction between the painter and the artist--between the craftsman who dispassionately applied paint to canvas within the bounds of conventional formulae, and the creative genius who manipulated paint in order to improve upon natural form and to convey noble sentiments. He learned, too, of the nobility of the artist's profession and of the world of art that lay beyond the Delaware River, particularly in Europe. Finally, he learned of the hierarchy of the forms of expression which the artist employed. The scale ranged from the amusing, ornamental painting to the most meaningful, grand history painting. Although the history painter enjoyed virtually no audience in the Colonies, early in his life West aspired somehow to reach this highest rank of his profession. In Philadelphia he received a useful, practical education that was perfectly geared to his ambitions; even before he left for Europe he had developed the mentality of a history painter.

He kept good company in the city; his friends--learned, imaginative, enterprising young men--were leaders of a burgeoning intellectual community; his academic advisors were among the most reputable scholars and educators in the Colonies; his instructors in the craft of painting were accomplished, fashionable artisans; and his patrons were well-to-do, elitist gentlemen who emulated the life-style of the English gentry. The story of West's

stunning success was written as much by his peers, mentors and patrons as by his own talent and verve; and in Philadelphia, particularly, his associations with the best sorts of men played a key role in his meteoric rise.

In a professional sense, West was an impatient man. So forceful were his inherent artistic inclinations and so eager was he to become an artist that he disregarded or passed lightly over many of the technical rudiments of the painter's craft. Painting--in those days perhaps even more than now--required not only incessant practice and a total devotion of spirit, but also a full knowledge of materials and natural form. West never acquired such a knowledge; he was so entranced by the drama that he minimized the setting of the stage, so dazzled by the forest that he often did not see the trees.

He was, however, the first to admit his deficiencies in this respect; and from the outset of his long career he laboured arduously to master the mechanical problems of painting. In Philadelphia he carried about a sketchbook in which he made studies from prints and paintings, studies from nature, and preliminary drawings for his own compositions. In the pages of his book he recorded the artistic sources available to him, the subjects and forms of expression in which he was interested, and thus demonstrated his steady improvement as a draughtsman.

Every artist--indeed, every individual--develops his own language of vision; just as one would develop mannerisms of speech or a style of writing, the artist comes to view the forms of nature in his own unique way and to compose and represent them visually in his own style. From the innumerable images before his eyes he consciously selects but a few; from the infinite ways in which he might conceptualize that which he perceives he espouses a

particular mode.

The language of vision that the artist develops and articulates is derived also from factors other than his own sensory perception and mentality; for his very individuality is the child of his environment, society, culture, and age. The visual images that confront the artist today are hardly the same as those that confronted his counterpart in the eighteenth century. Their respective languages of vision, furthermore, are as different as the images available to them.⁴

In this respect, the artist's conception and visual language mature as he matures and change as his culture changes; for as he advances in life and becomes more proficient in his expression, he acquires a larger visual vocabulary and is exposed to new images. The point remains, however, that although the artist's manner of expressing that which he chooses to see develops and becomes more refined, its intrinsic nature remains the same, as implicit as his own character.

In America Benjamin West first articulated his unique language of vision. He began cautiously, for he was obliged first to satisfy the tastes of his times and to acquire a thorough knowledge of conventional idioms. Although he was thus bound to tradition, he continually sought new forms of expression, new channels through which he might direct his active imagination.

In the pages of his sketchbook he both admitted his debt to tradition and exercised his innovative energy. He drew not only idealized portraits but also classical figures, intimate genre-like scenes, and almost comic, true representations of fellow Colonists. In this vein, what West chose to see varied little throughout his life. He filled his canvases with representations of man and

images of man's noble qualities. A son of the Age of Enlightenment, possessed of infinite respect for and faith in the achievements and abilities of man and the nobility of human nature, West studied man thoroughly, at times with a trenchant sense of humor, but always with a sympathetic regard for the spiritual drama of the human condition.

Throughout his career he articulated one essential language of vision. His concern for planarity, unity of related elements, clarity, and closed, self-contained form instilled his compositions with blunt focus which precluded the full enjoyment and sensory awareness of simple perception. Since he regarded ideas as abstractions, he saw in nature a network of lines and patterns which he could manipulate in order to express those abstractions in visual terms. Simultaneously, however, he recognized the changing forces of nature and endeavored never to reduce such unfathomable mysteries to systematic organization. As he employed the pencil to define natural form, he was mindful of those two themes that influenced his perception of the world. His line, the ultimate determinant of his language of vision, was neither hard nor soft, static nor elusive, expository nor suggestive. He attained a balance between the extremes of permanence and transience, of linearity and painterliness. Thus he commanded a visual vocabulary which reinforced his views of nature and man.

This inbred, personal language of vision West first developed and expressed in America. Perhaps for this reason, West, who lived sixty of his eighty-two years in England, has justly been deemed an American artist, endowed with an American mind and his own American way of perceiving the world.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

¹For a survey of criticism of West by American art historians, the reader should consult the following works: Henry T. Tuckerman, Artist-Life: or Sketches of American Painters (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1847), pp. 9-19; S. G. W. Benjamin, Art in America: A Critical and Historical Sketch (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1880), pp. 17-26; Sadakichi Hartman, A History of American Art (1901; rev. ed. New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1934), pp. 16-17; Samuel Isham, The History of American Painting (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1905), pp. 40-63; Suzanne LaFollette, Art in America, From Colonial Times to the Present Day (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1929), pp. 52 ff.; Alan Burroughs, Limners and Likenesses: Three Centuries of American Painting (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1936), pp. 72 ff.; Oskar Hagen, The Birth of the American Tradition in Art (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), pp. 108-23; Virgil Barker, American Painting: History and Interpretation (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1950), pp. 156-69, 180-93, 199-211; and Matthew Baigell, A History of American Painting (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1971), pp. 45, 63 ff.

²Entry of May 21, 1808, Joseph Farington, The Farington Diary, ed. James Grieg (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923), V, 68. Farington (1747-1821) managed the financial accounts of the Royal Academy in London. Although he was himself an artist and member of the Academy, he has become best known as an indefatigable diarist and professional busybody.

³September 21, 1805, West, in London, to William Rawle, in Philadelphia, "Notes and Queries," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, XIII, 3 (1889), p. 482.

⁴For a broader discussion of the properties of visual language, see Heinrich Wölfflin, Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art, trans. M. D. Hottinger (1932; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950), pp. 1-17.

CHAPTER I
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Benjamin West enjoyed a full life. He was exceptionally resourceful and energetic, for he was ever aware of the finity of his life and of his limitations; he tirelessly challenged his limits. He was a paradigm of self-exploitation who continually strove to realize his elusive potential. He possessed an open mind and an active spirit of benevolence that bordered on naiveté. Nurtured in tradition and imbued with an aggressive penchant for innovation, he regarded himself as an agent of both the past and the future. If he were conscious of his human imperfection he was also proud of his achievements; if he were humble he was equally pompous.

In many respects, West's life paralleled the life of Philadelphia's first citizen, Benjamin Franklin. Both men found their roots in the American version of the Age of Enlightenment. Both were talented showmen who were able to turn tides in their favors by seemingly naive but timely exhibitions of aplomb. Both were diplomats, both possessed an inherent command of politics, a knowledge of human motives, strengths, and weaknesses. They were close friends (Franklin was the godfather of West's youngest son) who, although separated by years, shared a common homeland. For they both had embarked on their ultimate missions from the wharves of Philadelphia; and in Philadelphia West, at least, had acquired the sinewy fibers of his character that were to serve him in good stead in the palaces of Europe.

Part One: The American Prodigy

Benjamin West was born on October 10, 1738, in Springfield, Pennsylvania. His father, John West (1690-1776), was a cooper who had abandoned his trade when he emigrated from England in 1714, married Sarah Pearson (1697-1756), and established himself as an inn-keeper in Springfield. Although the Wests were Quakers and attended Meeting, they did not belong to the Society of Friends. They did not harbor any particular aversion to art, and when they discovered that the youngest of their ten children had a penchant for drawing, they offered no complaints.¹ Benjamin first tried his hand at drawing in 1745; years later his son, Raphael, recorded that West, "at the early age of seven years, by a spontaneous impulse, ... was first excited to use the pencil by beholding a beautiful child sleeping in a cradle."²

In 1747 Edward Penington, one of the wealthiest merchants in Philadelphia and a distant relation of the Wests, delighted nine-year-old Benjamin by escorting him to the city.³ "Mr. Edward Penington," West himself recalled,

... was in the habit of annually visiting my Father and family in Chester County ... as a relative.--Observing some of my childish attempts at the delineation of domestick objects in colours extracted from roots, herbs & bark of trees; he prevailed upon my Parents to take with him to the City his little cousin for some weeks, as he had never seen that place. This happened in ... 1747 ... and was a circumstance most grateful to my feelings--indulging the hope of seeing some pictures in the city.⁴

Penington bemusingly pampered his cousin. After "a few days" spent in Philadelphia, he gave West "colours, & all the other materials for making pictures in oil."⁵ He also

presented the youth to a circle of successful and learned merchants, including his brother-in-law, Samuel Shoemaker.⁶ Shoemaker, in turn, introduced West to William Williams, who "had been recently married to a respectable townswoman of our City, & settled here, & . . . followed the business of painting in general," and who exhibited a beneficent interest in the boy's artistic aspirations.⁷

In one act of generosity Williams gave new direction and vitality to West's ambitions. He lent the young artist copies of Jonathan Richardson's Two Discourses (London: W. Churchill, 1719) and John Dryden's translation of Charles-Alphonse du Fresnoy's De Arte Graphica: The Art of Painting with Remarks (London: F. Heptinstall, 1695).⁸ "Those two books," West later recalled, "were my companions by day, & under my pillow by night."⁹ They revealed to him a world of history, of artists and works of art, that he studied eagerly and insatiably. From Richardson, especially, he learned of the high station, the nobility, of the painter's profession and became acquainted with the "qualities [a painter] ought to have." Since "his profession is honourable," the painter "should render himself worthy of it by excelling in it, and by avoiding all low, and sordid actions, and conversation, all base, and criminal actions." "The way to be an excellent painter," Richardson concluded, "is to be an excellent man."¹⁰ Fortified with lofty thoughts such as these, West may well have snubbed the boy who hoped to be a tailor, informing him that painters associated only with "kings and emperors."¹¹

The duration of West's exciting first visit to Philadelphia remains a mystery; and, indeed, a chronological account of his activities for the next few years is similarly obscure. Apparently he was an ubiquitous lad; perhaps his liberal Quaker parents had determined that

travel and exposure to men of affairs constituted the most satisfactory mode of education for a youth of his inclinations. Before the fall of 1748 West had departed Philadelphia and had passed several weeks in Chester County at the home of Samuel Flower, a justice of the peace and owner of the rich iron veins at French Creek. Evidently Flower, who was raised in England, employed an English governess to educate his children. She also may have instructed West "from translations of the ancient historians and poetry, of which Mr. Flower had a choice collection."¹² However, West did not stay long with the Flowers. In March 1749, following the marriage of his sister Rachel to John L. Clarkson,¹³ he settled in the Clarksons' house in Strawberry Alley, Philadelphia. He remained there at least throughout part of the next year.¹⁴

One can only speculate as to his activities between 1750 and 1754. He may have returned to Springfield; or, more likely, he may have stayed in Philadelphia and journeyed to Springfield only for occasional visits. In 1754 he accepted the invitation of George Ross, to whom Samuel Flower had recommended his abilities, to paint portraits in Lancaster.¹⁵ Most of his biographers leave the unhappy youth stranded in Lancaster until August 1756. It would seem unlikely that West would remain in a small, although thriving, country town for almost two years. In August 1754 he probably met the man who, even more than William Williams, encouraged him to become a painter. At that time William Smith, Provost of the "Academy and Charitable School in the Province of Pennsylvania," visited Lancaster to advise the inhabitants upon the building of a public grammar school.¹⁶ He could not have failed to meet George Ross, one of the leaders of the community, and his guest, Benjamin West.¹⁷

Encouraged by Provost Smith, West determined to

return once again to Philadelphia and to undertake a course of study in keeping with his ambitions. He stopped at Springfield only long enough to acquire the blessing of his parents and the sanction of the community, and by the spring of 1755 he was settled in the city.¹⁸ The students of the first class to receive degrees from the Academy began their second year at the school on May 25, 1755. Although West's name was not listed in the account books of the Academy, at this time he may have met the four young intellectuals who were to become his close friends: Francis Hopkinson, Jacob Duché, Joseph Reed, and Thomas Godfrey.¹⁹ Both West and Godfrey, whose name also was not listed in the accounts of the Academy, may well have been enrolled in the Charitable School, the early records of which have not survived.²⁰

Before the beginning of the third term at the Academy in May 1756 West returned to Lancaster to paint the portraits of William Henry and his bride.²¹ He may have remained in Lancaster throughout the summer or he may have joined his classmates in Philadelphia at the commencement of the new academic year. In August his mother passed away after a brief illness, and West attended her funeral in Springfield. One might speculate that Sarah West exercised a restraining control or influence over her son, for almost immediately after her death West left the place of his birth, virtually never to return. In the fall of 1756, at the age of eighteen, he settled in Philadelphia, at the Clarksons' home in Strawberry Alley.²²

In Philadelphia West focussed his energies on painting; that is, after the death of his mother he resolved upon painting as his career and thrust himself into this profession with a seriousness of purpose that allowed no turning back. Within three years, however, he had mastered the conventional idioms of American portraiture and

yearned to explore higher forms of art. He was well-versed, by this time, in the artistic theories of Jonathan Richardson. He knew that a painter's "business is to express great, and noble sentiments" (p. 18) and that "the principal end of painting is the improvement of the mind, and next to that mere pleasure" (p. xii). He was also aware of the hierarchy of painting based on such criteria: "history, portraits, landscapes, battles, drolls, still-life, flowers and fruit, ships, &c" (p. 21).²³ The "latter kinds" Richardson, and West, deemed inferior to history painting because they "may please, and in proportion as they do so are estimable, ... but they cannot improve the mind, they excite no noble sentiments; at least not as the other naturally does" (p. 178).

From Richardson, then, West acquired a sympathetic distaste for portraiture and a high regard for history painting.²⁴ The latter form, however, enjoyed virtually no audience in the Colonies, even among cosmopolitan Philadelphians, while so great was the demand for portraits that the American painter was obliged to devote all of his energies to that relatively low form of art. Soon after he had resolved to follow a career as a painter West realized that this demand would restrict both his ambitions and abilities, that it would stifle his inherent drive for self-improvement. He aspired toward the exalted station of a history painter. Richardson informed him, however, that such an artist must follow a special course of training:

He must ... not only see, but thoroughly study the works of the most excellent masters in painting, and sculpture, ancient and modern; for though some few have gone vast lengths in the art by the strength of their own genius, without foreign assistance, these are prodigies, the like success is not ordinarily to be

expected; nor have even these done what probably they would have done with the advantages the study of other mens works would have given them. I leave to Vasari and Bellori to dispute whether Raphael was beholden to Michael Angelo's works for the greatness of his style, but that he improved upon his coming to Rome, and made advantages from what he saw there is incontestable (p. 11).

By the end of 1758 West found that no longer was he "making advantages" from what he saw in Philadelphia.

In 1759 he visited New York City, but before the year was out he noted that "the society of New York was much less intelligent in matters of taste and knowledge than that of Philadelphia," and he despaired of the "mercantile men" and "adventurers" who "contributed less to the improvement of his mind than might have been expected from a city so flourishing."²⁵ He may have gone to New York in search of an artistic community that offered him improvement beyond that which he had gleaned from resources in Philadelphia. Or, just as likely, he may have made the move in order to amass a sum sufficient to support the study in Italy that Richardson recommended.²⁶ Although he "found in that city much employment in taking likenesses," not one of his New York portraits has come to light.²⁷ He did, however, charge twice that which he had demanded in Philadelphia for portraits; and if he had designed his visit to New York as a financial venture which would increase his savings for an Italian tour, he certainly had hit upon a lucrative market.²⁸

While West thus was discovering that New Yorkers offered greater financial reward but less encouragement to his artistic maturation than Philadelphians, Provost Smith learned of the intention of Chief Justice William Allen to send his son on a tour of Italy. Smith "immediately waited on the old gentleman, and begged him to allow West to

accompany him, which was cheerfully acceded."²⁹ The dreamed-of moment had arrived; by the winter of 1760 West was back in Philadelphia making preparations for the voyage.

William Allen assumed the responsibility of determining the arrangements for the journey, for West was to sail on the sloop Betty Sally in company with Joseph Shippen, Jr. and John Allen.³⁰ To Jackson and Rutherford, merchants in Leghorn, Italy, Allen wrote: "In this Vessel comes a passenger, Mr. West, a young ingenious Painter of this City, who is desirous to improve himself in that Science, by visiting Florence & Rome." West had saved enough of the profits of his portrait commissions to meet the expenses of a brief tour, but, Allen noted, "being unacquainted how to have his money remitted [he] has lodged with me One Hundred pounds Sterling, which I shall remitt to Messrs David Barclay & Sons upon his Account." Allen concluded that he "should be ... obliged to you for any kindness you shew him, as he has among us the Character of a very deserving young man."³¹ To David Barclay and Sons, merchants in London, Allen recommended the "young Painter that goes Passenger in the ship with my Son, in order to impose himself in the science of painting."³² West departed Philadelphia in the spring of 1760 with an ample purse, substantial recommendations, and high hopes.

Part Two: Awakening in Italy

The present-day observer is perhaps hard-pressed to grasp fully the import of West's decision to study the art of the Old Masters. The Colonies, in true colonial fashion, consistently had looked to and relied upon the stylistic centers of England as the source of their artistic tradition and inspiration. In terms of style and fashion they were by definition imitators and they took

pride, in a naturally naive way, in their ability to transplant a semblance of the parent culture to America. Their architecture, furniture, and even dress reflected this pride as well as their dependence upon the mother country. Painting was no exception. The Colonists always welcomed the artists--such as John Smibert, Gustavus Hesselius, William Williams, John Wollaston, and Joseph Blackburn--who had been born and trained in Europe but had emigrated in search of adventure or of the income which their second-rate abilities had denied them in their native countries. Until Benjamin West left for Italy in 1760, however, not one native American artist had ventured to improve his skills by studying in Europe. West single-handedly initiated "the fashion for foreign study which has dominated American art ... His departure presaged the end of the Colonial period in painting, for his own personal influence was to flood our art into new channels."³³

West landed at Leghorn on July 9, 1760. Almost immediately he found ready access to renowned artistic circles. In Rome he met Gavin Hamilton, Pompeo Batoni, and Anton Mengs; and he was first introduced to the aesthetics of "noble simplicity and sedate grandeur" that Johann Winckelmann saw in ancient art.³⁴ West, the young provincial who presumably had rubbed shoulders with Indian warriors, was regarded simultaneously as a curiosity, marvel, and sensation. Upon first viewing the Apollo Belvedere, he probably did--as legend has stated--"mortify" his Italian audience when he likened the statue to a Mohawk brave. He was a real showman--as his neighbor, Benjamin Franklin, was to become in the Court of Louis XVI--who knew that when all eyes were turned on him, he would gain by playing the game to the hilt. He was indeed, "emphatically the lion of the day in Rome."³⁵

West's time under the spotlight was cut short,

however, by fever and a leg infection. In the summer of 1761, as he informed Joseph Shippen, the "Heats" of Rome "began again to bring on my Rhumetism pains."³⁶ This was the lowest point of his Italian visit, for his physical problems were compounded by an empty purse. Fortunately, "that good fortune which attended West's conduct throughout life" was not to forsake him at this crisis.³⁷ Hearing of his situation, his Philadelphia supporters, William Allen and Governor James Hamilton, responded immediately to his financial plight. On August 19, 1761 Allen advanced £160 to West's credit, explaining, in a modestly boastful tone, to David Barclay and Sons in London that "from all accounts he is like to turn out a very extraordinary person in the painting Way; and it is a Pity such a Genius should be cramped for want of a little Cash."³⁸

Assured at least of financial solvency, West passed four months with Rutherford at Leghorn; during this time the "swelling in my Ankle" became so acute that he consented to an operation.³⁹ Apparently recuperated, he hoped to return to Rome, but before he had prepared for the trip he succumbed again to his infliction. At this juncture Rutherford asked Sir Horace Mann, the British minister at the ducal court in Florence, to secure the services of the "eminent surgeon" Nanoni.⁴⁰ West went to Florence in December 1761 and suffered a second operation.

Although confined to bed for long periods of time, he enjoyed his seven-month stay in Florence. He still pursued his career with remarkable industry; and through the agency of Mann he gained access to galleries and the patronage of a group of Englishmen. "It is to Sir Horace," he wrote Joseph Shippen, "I have the Notice taken of me by most of the English Travellers here particularly the Duke of Grafton, who desires of me a Coppy of the Madonna della Sedia."⁴¹ West devoted most of his energies to the

taking of copies after works by the great Masters; and, evidently, he executed the majority of these to fulfill commissions from his patrons Allen and Hamilton. "I shall spare no Pains [in these assignments]," he assured Shippen, "tho many of the Coppys will be laberous work, and any Single one of the Capital Pices may take up more then two or three Months, such as Guedo's St. Michal aspicialley, whare the Figures are more then half as big again as Life."⁴²

West enjoyed this business of making copies of Italian masterpieces and sending them back to Philadelphia. He had met with success all of his short life, and he was beginning to express that curious synthesis of humility and egotism--a strict regard for his reputation and for the special loftiness of his chosen profession--which pervaded his personality. He was as aware of his own faults as he was proud of his accomplishments; but at this moment, in Florence, he was particularly conscious of his unique position in relation to American art. He knew that the paintings which he sent to Philadelphia were bound to cause a stir among connoisseurs and patrons in that city, and he savoured the anticipation which this thought raised in his mind of recognition and personal influence. "It gives me great Satisfaction," he boldly emphasized in his letter to Joseph Shippen,

to hear that the two Copies of the Sybil and St. Cacilia are arrived safe, and judged deserving to be hung in the Governor's House. . . . I took the Liberty to desier Mr. Rutherford to recommend that no Copies of them be taken by any bodey . . . because the paintings themselves might lose a part of their Merit, of being the onely ones of the Kind in the Province.⁴³

If in America West had realized that success was one aim

of ambition, in Italy he became acquainted with one other: fame.

West finally returned to Rome in July 1762, but there he still suffered from his leg infection and spent a good deal of the next eleven months in bed. Remarkably, his debility did not drain his energy or obscure his ambition, for he assiduously painted and shipped off more copies to Philadelphia. On October 10 William Allen explained to the Barclays that

Mr. Hamilton and I have employed Mr. West to copy for us a Number of the best pictures in Italy, where he has been very much indisposed. ... I have already Supplied him with £150 Sterling--Mr. Hamilton has promised ... the like sum in Order to put the young Fellow in Cash. ... We have such an extraordinary Account of Mr. West's Genius in the painting way, that we venture to afford these Supplies, and for his Incouragement to take it out in Copies.⁴⁴

In Rome West also continued to "pursue the higher Exalances in the Art, ... the works of the Antiant Statuaries, Raphael, Michal Angilo, Corragio, and Titian, as the Sorce from whance true taste in the arts have flow'd."⁴⁵ He met with even greater success than that which he had found in Florence. His "pictures of Cimon and Iphigenia, and Angelica and Medora ... established his reputation as an historical painter, and obtained him the academical honors of Rome."⁴⁶ Recovered at last from his long illness in June 1763, he briefly toured through France and then determined, "by the advice of his father ... to visit England before returning home."⁴⁷

Part Three: Fulfillment in England

He arrived in England on August 20, 1763. His reputation, aggrandized by his association with Horace Mann

and other Englishmen whom he had met in Italy, preceded his arrival. On September 1 Samuel Powel, a Philadelphian then visiting London, wrote home to George Roberts that "Mr. West is arrived from Italy with a great character as a Painter. I had the pleasure of a deal of his company and of introducing him to Mr. Penn."⁴⁸ While his experience in Italy thus gave West cause to feel proud of and secure in his accomplishments and to see clearly his precociousness, it also made him aware of his faults as a painter. Just as Powel was extolling his reputation, West humbly admitted to Joseph Shippen that "I am very sensible of my own wants in regard to painting, and it will be the labor of my whole lifetime to supply them."⁴⁹

Since his departure from Philadelphia West had pursued one goal: the knowledge of the works of the Old Masters that would allow him to enter the ranks of the history painters. He had sacrificed a great deal to achieve this end, but he also had met with unparalleled success; and by the spring of 1764 he had reached the end of his self-imposed period of training and travel. In London he received several commissions for paintings of historical subjects and an offer, from Lord Rockingham, of a yearly salary of £700.⁵⁰ Although he did not accept this offer, he decided to settle in London and sent for his Philadelphia fiancé, Elizabeth Shewell (1741-1815).⁵¹ She arrived in London, accompanied by Matthew Pratt and West's father,⁵² on July 22, 1764; on September 2, after a separation of over four years, Benjamin and Elizabeth were married "to the entire satisfaction of all their friends and relatives."⁵³ West had made certain that his wife would be well provided for: Matthew Pratt recalled the Wests' "very elegant house ... where he kindly accommodated me with Rooms, and rendered me every good & kind office he could bestow on me, as if I was his Father, friend

and brother."⁵⁴

West hardly had settled in London when he was befriended by Dr. Drummond, Archbishop of York. Drummond's friendship was the windfall of his career, for the Archbishop was so impressed by his talent that in 1766 he introduced the young artist to George III.⁵⁵ The King immediately commissioned West to paint The Departure of Regulus and thus initiated a relationship of mutual respect and patronage that was to last for nearly half a century.⁵⁶ This and subsequent commissions from the Crown convinced West that Royal patronage awarded on a wide scale might raise English artists to a position of dominance in Europe. In 1768 he was one of the eight artists who seceded from the floundering Society of Artists; William Chambers, George Moser, Francis Cotes, and West then formed a committee to urge the foundation of a Royal academy. After their project had been condoned by George III and West had secured the essential support of Sir Joshua Reynolds, the Academy was formally founded, with Reynolds as President, on December 10, 1768.⁵⁷ Four years later, following the celebrated exhibition and reception of his Death of General Wolfe, West accepted the appointment of Historical Painter to the King. Thus he realized the dream that had spirited him from Philadelphia to London.

During the 1770's and 1780's West lived comfortably, but surprisingly modestly. He acquired a yearly pension of £1000 from the Crown and supplemented that income with private commissions from aristocratic patrons and the sale of prints engraved after his paintings.⁵⁸ The bulk of his expenditures was devoted to the support of his family, entertainment and servants, and the accoutrements of his profession, including, in 1788, £20 for a "Sky light in the Gallery."⁵⁹

Once he had settled in London and had provided for

his security, West unleashed the current of generosity which lay at the foundation of his character and for which he has, perhaps, become best known. He habitually opened his doors, purse, and mind to friends, fellow artists and strangers alike. Americans particularly he welcomed with warmth and compassionate interest. Henry Benbridge, in a letter to his aunt, Mrs. Mary Gordon, in Philadelphia, wrote of

the kind reception I met with from Mr. West & his wife, who insisted upon my eating at their house, & was very sorry they could not accommodate me with a room, having but a small house of only two rooms on a floor, everyone of which is occupied.⁶⁰

John Copley reported similar sentiments to Henry Pelham in Boston:

Mr. West when I first came would have had me to lodge at his House, but was just preparing to move to his New house and could not accomodate me; but had this not been the case I should have declined it; but he desired I would always come to dinner when I was not ingaged, with the same freedom as I should at home. indeed, he is extreemly friendly and I am under great obligations to him.⁶¹

Over the years every American artist who visited London in the course of his European tour (such as Charles Willson Peale, William Dunlap, John Trumbull, Gilbert Stuart, John Vanderlyn, and Washington Allston) found a warm reception and seasoned guidance at the studio of West.⁶²

In the fall of 1789 George III fell ill, and there was much talk of a regency and, among artists, of a revocation of Royal patronage. West himself realized that such an occasion would jeopardize his precious situation. When his nephew, John L. Clarkson, visited him in February 1789, West lamented in a letter to his brother William that

his ... coming has been at an unfortunate moment, it not being so much in my power to render him sarvices in the money way, there being a total stop to the Prive Purse by reason of the Kings Illness and as that was my great source of supply I am under the necessity of being sircum-spect with my ready Cash till I know how things will be situated at the close of present momentious Parlimentery Business respecting the Regencey--for, should the Kings demise take place or a Regencey be establish, it will lay me under the necessity of contracting my present situation and depend on my own resources.⁶³

Happily, the King regained his health later that very month, and West resumed his generous hospitality to visitors.

West's success during the 1770's and 1780's was so stunning that in 1792 he was elected, upon the death of Sir Joshua Reynolds, to the Presidency of the Royal Academy. He at once gave vent to the streak of egotism which ran through his personality by initiating the practice, which he continued throughout his Presidency, of wearing his hat on all formal occasions "to do honour to the office."⁶⁴ He soon discovered, however, severe liabilities in his conduct and his new position. Many of his contemporaries could not accept that their own ambitions had gone unrealized, while the simple, good-natured, at times haughty American had usurped the throne of English art. When West entered the competition for the design of a commemorative medal for the Academy in 1794, many of the members bluntly admonished him that he "ought not to grasp at or expect every honor, that the Academy had clothed him with a robe of velvet, but that He should not struggle for every strip of ermine."⁶⁵

The prolonged interest--whether based on pride or jealousy--which Americans and Englishmen alike maintained

in the story of West's success fostered a plethora of rumors concerning his financial status. On July 21, 1796 Benjamin Johnson, a Philadelphian who called on the artist in the course of his European tour, noted in his diary that West's "income, arising from his birth as painter to the king and paintings which he does for others is supposed to be ten thousand pounds Sterling a year."⁶⁶ By the end of the following year, however, the King's enthusiasm toward West apparently had cooled. On December 17, 1797 West lamented that "He had much money owing him from the Crown,--had an annuity but the bulk of his fortune remains unpaid. The King is shy when money is touched upon." West was obliged to discharge three of his six servants and to reduce his cost of living from £1600 to £1200 per year.⁶⁷ Eleven days later he explained to Joseph Farington that "his fortune is in the King's hands" and that he was "conscious that his security depends on the life of the King. He has indeed the works in his possession."⁶⁸

This first real setback in West's entire career set his mind wandering back to the placid days of his youth in America. A letter from his old friend, Jonathan Morris, opened with praise of "the attention thee has all ways Paid to the Americans it is a Demonstration of the friendship thee has for thy native Country." Morris then reminded him of the Indians who had lived near Springfield and of "the many Innocent & Diverting hours thou has spent in their Wigwams in thy Fhs [father's] woods in thy Younger days."⁶⁹ In his reply of July 20, 1798 West expressed an awareness of the unfolding of his own life and disclosed a consciousness of his singular achievement as well as a yearning for the untroubled life he once had known. Their long separation, he assured Morris,

has not diminished that attachment I feel
to early friendship; or that delight which

... your letter revived in me, of the morning of my life, when innocently sporting on the Banks of those refreshing streams which lie in the Shady Groves, that are in the neighbourhood of Newtown. That period when viewed with my present situation, presents an extensive scale in human progress; and I believe the single instance of one man participating in the amusements of the Wigwoms of American savages, and the refinements of the Royal Palaces of Europe.⁷⁰

By December 1798 West determined that "if He could not obtain payment from the King of the great demand on him, He would quit England for America."⁷¹ His anxiety stemmed, in part, from the widely acknowledged view--and perhaps fact--that without his royal patronage he would have plunged to the depths of financial insecurity. He found little market for his large historical canvases; and so pungent was his distaste for portraiture that he painted portraits only through friendship or the direst necessity. His concern also derived from dissension and potential schism within the ranks of the Academy. The malicious envy of his success among many members erupted when, in February 1800, "Beechey, Tresham, Bourgeois, Sandby, Copley, Rigaud & Cosway," embittered primarily by West's Royal patronage, "resolved to establish a Club in opposition to ... the Royal Academy."⁷² Many of his critics argued that West "certainly has not an English mind & is kept to this country only by the Income He receives from the King."⁷³

West may have dreamed of returning to America but he never seriously considered departing London. In the spring of 1804, when his enemies were plotting his impeachment from the Presidency of the Royal Academy, he claimed--perhaps unconsciously threatened--that

were he 10 years younger He would go to America, where He was sure much might be

done as the people had a strong disposition to the Arts, & it would be easy to encourage a spirit of rivalry in that respect between the cities of Philadelphia & New York.⁷⁴

In this statement West clearly revealed that he loved politics as well as art and that he had not lost his predilection for melodrama and showmanship which so well had served his ambitions throughout his life. He also may have expressed a latent desire to become involved with the infant American Academy of Fine Arts, founded in New York in 1803. He naturally would have been excited by the prospect of becoming the resident leader of the arts in the new nation. Over a year later he expressed a similar sentiment in a letter to John Trumbull:

I am happy to hear so good an Account of your Pencil being employed at New York-- I hope it is the beginning of the Arts in that city--and that they may take a firm possession there, as well as in other cities of America, is the sincere wish of all that love the fine arts: I believe here they have seen their zenith--⁷⁵

The opposition to West's leadership among many members of the Academy ultimately threatened the institution with dissolution in the fall of 1805. On December 2 West shrewdly resigned from the Presidency; but this move created even greater dissension, and the weak leadership of James Wyatt led to West's reelection the following year. Restored to the Presidency and a secure position among his peers, West abandoned his claims and threats of returning to America. On September 29, 1806 he wrote Robert Fulton of "the little chance there is of me, or any of my children coming to America."⁷⁶ Furthermore, once he had determined to remain in England, he enthusiastically maintained that "with proper encouragement the Arts would be advanced in this country to equal those of Greece and

Rome," that if classical times could have produced a Phidias, then this even more progressive era would give rise to even greater genius.⁷⁷

At this time, too, West began to suffer from the gout that was to plague him for the rest of his life. So acute were the attacks of this disease that he was absent "over long periods" from the Royal Academy. The Council Minutes for December 1, 1809 began with the remark, "The President in the Gout, Sir William Beechey in the Chair."⁷⁸ Soon after, just as his health was failing, the support which he had received from the Crown was rescinded. He received his last annual payment of £1000 from the Royal Treasury on December 1, 1810; during the following year George III succumbed irrevocably to porphyria, and the future George IV terminated West's Royal patronage.⁷⁹

During the last years of his life West remained remarkably active. He became increasingly interested in religion and executed a series of enormous canvases of Biblical subjects, including Christ Healing the Sick (1812) and Christ Rejected (1813).⁸⁰ After the death of his beloved wife in June 1815, he devoted all of his time to painting.⁸¹ On May 16, 1817 his son Raphael told an exasperated Joseph Farington that "His father will not go to bed till one o'clock in the morning, & ... does not sleep more than 5 Hours in the night, should He go to bed sooner He should wake at an early Hour & long before He could rise, which is painful to Him." He did not eat from breakfast to dinner because "if He takes anything in the intermediate time He cannot paint, as it makes Him heady & incapable of application."⁸² This schedule certainly did not strike Farington as fitting the life-style of an octogenarian. When he called on West a week later, West told him "that besides the great picture of 'Death on the Pale

Horse,' which He now has in hand, He has upon a canvass 36 feet high, by 28 feet deep, a picture drawn in, the subject, 'The Crucifixion'."⁸³

West completed Death on the Pale Horse on October 17, 1817. It was his last major work, perhaps his masterpiece; and as, in this painting, he brought together all of the streams of his artistic career, he brought to a close the substance of his life. He died on March 10, 1820.

Most art historians, particularly in the American field, have tended to regret Benjamin West's meteoric rise, his stunning success, and his influence on younger artists. They have regarded him as a man who "had ... gone too fast and too far for his meager talent."⁸⁴ In his paintings they have seen only mawkish colors, stultifying compositions, and incompetent draughtsmanship. They have lamented, furthermore, that West welcomed to his home and studio every artist who asked him for assistance; for most of these impressionable students carried something of West off with them. In his own time, however, West's benevolence was regarded with wonder and universally applauded; and even during his lifetime his harshest critics were those who, lacking his sensitivities, could not understand his generous character. Washington Allston, who first had met West in 1801, stated this case succinctly:

I shall never forget his benevolent smile when he took me by the hand; it is still fresh in my memory, linked with the last of like kind which accompanied the farewell in 1818. His gallery was open to me at all times, and his advice always ready and kindly given. He was a man overflowing with the milk of human kindness. If he had enemies, I doubt if he owed them to any other cause than this rare virtue, which (alas for human nature!) is too often deemed cause sufficient.⁸⁵

West himself realized and humbly admitted that his claim to greatness was not founded on masterful control of pencil and brush. He was more of an artist than a painter, more concerned with the relation of ideas than with technical expertise. He possessed high principles and a bluntly philosophical nature; and he viewed painting as a medium for expressing human ideals and truths. Many of his critics have contended that his ineptitude as a craftsman obliterated whatever ideals he may have intended to convey on canvas. Nevertheless, West did manage to render an urgent sense of moral purpose in the majority of his paintings; in his great historical canvases, particularly, he achieved a trenchant balance of morality and history. Despite his reputation for historical accuracy and authenticity, he unabashedly disregarded the historical record when it did not reinforce his estimation of the moral and spiritual lessons of history. "There was no other way of representing the death of a Hero," he explained to Joseph Farington,

but by an Epic representation of it. It must exhibit the event in a way to excite awe, & veneration & that which may be required to give superior interest to the representation must be introduced, all that can shew the importance of the Hero. Wolfe must not die like a common Soldier under a bush; neither should Nelson be represented dying in the gloomy hold of a ship To move the mind there should be a spectacle presented to raise & warm the mind, & all should be proportioned to the highest idea conceived of the Hero A mere matter of fact will never produce this effect.⁸⁶

Ultimately, it was West's grasp of eternal human ideals that has lent lasting relevance to the story of his life and enduring meaning to his art. All of the threads of West's life--the benevolence, the assimilation of

humility and conceit, the respect for tradition and the spirit of innovation, the awareness of human limitations and the infinite exigency of self-improvement--were all threads roughly woven in Pennsylvania. The span of his life does, indeed, "present an extensive scale in human progress," but, as the following pages will suggest, the fiber of his character, both as a man and as an artist, was conceived in "the morning of life." The child, after all, has always been father to the man.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹See Charles Henry Hart, "Benjamin West's Family," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, XXXII, 1 (1908), pp. 1-3; and James Thomas Flexner, "Benjamin West's American Neo-Classicism," The New York Historical Society Quarterly (January 1952), p. 8. Both Hart and Flexner refute John Galt's contention that West's father was a devout Quaker. cf. John Galt, The Life and Studies of Benjamin West (Philadelphia: Moses Thomas, 1816), pp. 11 ff. Other modern writers, however, adhere to the romantic notion of "young Ben's" "Quaker-induced innocence of all awareness of the arts." Richard Hirsch, comp., The World of Benjamin West (Allentown: Allentown Art Museum, 1962), p. 15.

²January 17, 1824, Raphael West, in London, to Joseph Hopkinson, President of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, in Philadelphia (hereafter referred to as PAFA). A copy of this letter is in the folder of documents that pertain to West's painting, Death on the Pale Horse, in the PAFA. Flexner cites Galt in his claim that West "drew his little sister as she lay in her cradle" in June 1745, when he was six. "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 9. However, Flexner proves himself guilty of the same crime of historical inaccuracy for which he chastises Galt. For Galt notes that West drew the likeness of the daughter of "one of his sisters, who had been married some time before" (p. 18).

³Galt claims that Penington had taken an interest in West's artistic progress during an earlier visit. Then "he promised to send the young artist a box of paints and pencils from the city. On his return home he fulfilled his engagement" (p. 33). cf. William Dunlap, History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States, ed. William Wyckoff (1834; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1965), I, 38. Penington (1726-1796) married Sarah Shoemaker in 1754. In 1761 he was appointed a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, a post he held for several years. In 1768 he was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society. He was one of the members of the committee of correspondence formed at the "Coffee House" in May 1774, and in July of the same year he became

a delegate to the Provincial Convention. During the Revolution, however, his Quaker principles of non-resistance led to his arrest as a Tory in 1777 and his exile to Virginia. After his return in 1790 he was elected to the City Council. He served as a Manager of the Pennsylvania Hospital from 1773 to 1779. Penington was a descendant of William Penn himself; he acquired much of his wealth from the sale, in 1767, of the Penington estate in Goodnestone, Kent, the seat of Penn's father-in-law, Isaac Penington. See Thomas G. Morton, The History of the Pennsylvania Hospital, 1751-1895 (Philadelphia: Times Printing House, 1895), pp. 417-18; Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 9; John W. Jordan, Colonial Families of Philadelphia (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1911), I, 577-79; Frederick B. Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), pp. 98n., 220-21; John F. Watson, Annals of Philadelphia (1857; rpt. Philadelphia: Leary, Stuart Co., 1927), I, 444-45.

⁴October 10, 1810, West to Thomas Eagles, in David H. Dickason, "Benjamin West on William Williams: A Previously Unpublished Letter," Winterthur Portfolio 6, ed. Richard K. Doud and Ian M. G. Quimby (Charlottesville: The Univ. Press of Virginia, 1970), p. 130.

⁵Ibid., p. 130; Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 9. These materials may have been the second set which Penington gave West. cf. Galt, p. 33. Galt notes that "doctor Jonathan Moris ... also made him a present of a few dollars to buy materials with" (p. 45).

⁶Shoemaker (1725-1800), like Penington, was a member of the American Philosophical Society. He served as Treasurer of Philadelphia and then as Mayor in 1769 and 1771. At the outbreak of the Revolution he fled to London, where he renewed his friendship with West. Galt writes that "this gentleman was afterwards introduced by Mr. West to the king, at Windsor, as one of the American loyalists" (p. 39n.). See Jordan, I, 446-47; Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 11; Benjamin H. Shoemaker, Genealogy of the Shoemaker Family (Philadelphia: 1903), pp. 60-64; Tolles, p. 131n.

⁷October 10, 1810, West to Eagles, in Dickason, p. 130.

⁸Williams also may have given West Richardson's An Essay on the Theory of Painting (London: A. Bettsworth, 1725). Dickason, p. 131n. For broader discussions of Williams, see William Sawitzky, "William Williams, First Instructor

of Benjamin West," Antiques (May 1937), pp. 340-42; and E. P. Richardson, "William Williams--A Dissenting Opinion," The American Art Journal (Spring 1972), pp. 5-23.

⁹October 10, 1810, West to Eagles, in Dickason, p. 131.

¹⁰The Works (1773; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1969), p. 18. Obviously West did not read this edition in 1747, but the book, compiled by Richardson's son, includes the Discourses and the Essay. cf. Hirsch, p. 13.

¹¹This famous story is recounted in Dunlap, I, 37-38. Also see James Thomas Flexner, First Flowers of Our Wilderness (1947; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), p. 183.

¹²Galt, pp. 45-47; Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 14. In 1761 Flower's daughter, Mary, married Dr. Gerardus Clarkson, the youngest brother of John. L. Clarkson, West's brother-in-law. Jordan, I, 901.

¹³John Levinus Clarkson, the son of Matthew Clarkson and Cornelia de Peyster, was born in New York in 1725. He may have been educated at Leyden, as Galt (p. 52) and Flexner ("West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 17) claim, although his name does not appear in the records of the university there. His connection with the West family obviously broadened Benjamin's horizons. His stepfather was the Rev. Gilbert Tennent; his brother, Matthew, a prosperous merchant in Philadelphia, married Mary Boude. In Lancaster West painted the portraits of her brother, Dr. Samuel Boude, and his wife. John L. Clarkson died in Philadelphia in the summer of 1760, shortly after West had sailed for Italy. The inventory of his estate describes him as "Scrivener" and includes "Six Walnut Compass Chairs, Damask Bottoms," "Six Walnut square frame Leather Bottom'd Chairs," and "Twenty-three small Glass fram'd Pictures." Administration Papers, #21 of 1760, City Hall, Philadelphia. In June 1761 Rachel West Clarkson (1725-1796) married John Mullen (1740-1793). This marriage proved unhappy. On September 23, 1772 West wrote his cousin, Peter Thomson, in Philadelphia, that Rachel's "life is a continuation of misfortune and unhappiness seems probable to over spread the remainder of her days." Letter appended to Hart, "West's Family," p. 23. Also see Jordan, I, 899-900; William Sawitzky, "The American Work of Benjamin West," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (October 1938), 451-52; Waldron Phoenix Belknap, Jr., The De Peyster Genealogy (Boston: 1956), p. 35; J. Robert T. Craine, comp., The Ancestry and Posterity of Matthew Clarkson (1664-1702) (n.p., 1971), pp. 17 ff. This author

is indebted to Francis James Dallett, University Archivist, Univ. of Pennsylvania, who generously furnished the material, much of which sheds new light on West's family, concerning the life of John L. Clarkson.

¹⁴Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," pp. 15, 17-18. West noted that William Williams wrote "a piece of ... Poetry addressed to me in my twelfth year--it was published in one of the daily papers in Philadelphia, & much admired, tho' no one knew who was the Author." October 11, 1810, West to Eagles, in Dickason, p. 132. This reference suggests that West was in Philadelphia in 1750.

¹⁵This date is conjectural. Galt notes that West made two trips to Lancaster, but the chronology which he offers is incorrect. He does write, however, that West met Ross shortly before William Smith visited Lancaster (pp. 48-51). Flexner, in attempting to correct Galt's errors, forgets that there may be a shred of truth in his story. He concludes that West worked in Lancaster only between 1755 and 1756. "West's American Neo-Classicism," pp. 19-24. cf. Hirsch, p. 18. Dunlap claims that West's first portrait was that of Mrs. Ross, painted in 1753 (I, 32).

¹⁶Smith attended the organizational meeting on August 23, 1754. Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 22. Also see Frank Gegenheimer, William Smith, Educator and Churchman, 1727-1803 (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1943), pp. 41 ff.

¹⁷In 1755 Ross subscribed a considerable sum of money so that the town might hire "a Latin schoolmaster." Ross (1730-1779) graduated from the University of Edinburgh; he was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a distinguished jurist. Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," pp. 19, 22.

¹⁸These statements are largely speculative. See Galt, pp. 52 ff.; Hirsch, pp. 19-20; Dickason, pp. 131-32; Dunlap, I, 40-41; and Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," pp. 20-22, 27.

¹⁹See the Book of Accounts Belonging to the Academy in Philadelphia (1751-1757), Archives of the Univ. of Pennsylvania; Univ. of Pennsylvania, Biographical Catalogue of the Matriculates of the College, 1749-1893 (Philadelphia: Avil Printing Company, 1894), pp. 1-3; MS copy of class rolls, 1754-1763, Archives of the Univ. of Pennsylvania; Edward Potts Cheyney, History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1940 (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), p. 93; and Thomas Harrison Montgomery, A

History of the University of Pennsylvania from Its Foundation to A. D. 1770 (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1900), Appendix F.

²⁰See Gegenheimer, pp. 100-01.

²¹Flexner argues convincingly that Henry commissioned West to paint these portraits after his wedding on March 8. "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 23. Henry (1729-1786) was a renowned gunsmith, an active member of the American Philosophical Society, and "one of the most valuable leaders in Pennsylvania's Revolutionary effort." Ibid., p. 19. Also see Galt, pp. 48-52.

²²Ibid., pp. 78-79, 88; Dunlap, I, 40; Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," pp. 17, 23.

²³Richardson differentiates between mere "face-painting" and the more laudable portrait which is "a sort of general history of the life of the person it represents" (p. 179).

²⁴For West's attitude toward portraiture, see Appendix II.

²⁵Galt, pp. 98, 103-04.

²⁶Dunlap wrote that "he visited New York with a view to the increase of his prices, that the object for which he desired money might the sooner be placed within his grasp--improvement" (I, 44). cf. Hirsch, p. 21; and Flexner, First Flowers, p. 193. West also may have gone to New York at the request of certain individuals in that city. Apparently he claimed, in January 1816, that he had been "sent for to paint some portraits." Quoted in Hart, "West's Family," p. 5.

²⁷Galt, p. 103; Dunlap, I, 44-45; Wayne Craven, "Painting in New York City, 1750-1775," American Painting to 1776: A Reappraisal, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby (Charlottesville: The Univ. Press of Virginia, 1971), pp. 274-76.

²⁸Dunlap, I, 45. Dunlap noted that in Philadelphia in 1758 West charged "for his portraits ... two guineas and a half for a head, and five for a half-length" (I, 44). cf. E. P. Richardson, Painting in America, From 1502 to the present (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1969), p. 74.

²⁹Galt, pp. 106-07.

³⁰West was fortunate to find himself associated with

such capable young men. John Allen had just attained his majority; and Joseph Shippen, as William Allen informed Jackson and Rutherford, "has been an Officer in our provincial Troops for four or five years past, was Brigade Major to General Forbes at the taking of Fort Duquesne, and served as Lieut Colonel last campaign under General Stanwix--He is a very ingenious virtuous young man, and I think my self happy in my Son's having such a Companion." April 5, 1760, William Allen's Letterbook, Burd-Shippen-Hublely Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter referred to as HSP).

³¹Ibid. Galt wrote that West, "prior to his departure from Philadelphia, ... had paid into the hands of old Mr. Allen the money which he thought would be requisite for his expences in Italy, and had received from him a letter of credit on Messrs. Jackson and Rutherford" (p. 114). One wonders why Galt was so meticulous and historically accurate in this instance when he was so careless in many other details. This dilemma becomes even more perplexing when one considers that some writers have presumed that West's tour was financed from the outset by his famous patrons. In fact, West paid for his own passage; only after he had arrived in Italy did Allen, Hamilton, Shippen and Powel maintain his credit by paying him generous sums for copies of Italian paintings. In this vein, the man, other than Provost Smith, who actually determined West's departure for Europe was William Kelly, the only known patron of West in New York. Kelly's gift of fifty guineas doubled West's own savings. See Galt, pp. 107-108, 159-160; Dunlap, I, 46; Craven, p. 274; and Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 170. cf. Richardson, Painting in America, p. 74.

³²April 16, 1760, Allen's Letterbook.

³³Flexner, First Flowers, p. 193.

³⁴Winckelmann's treatise, entitled Gedanken uber die Nachamung der griechischen Werke in Malerie und Bilhauer-kunst, was first published in Dresden in 1755.

³⁵Dunlap, I, 47-48.

³⁶May 11, 1762, West, in Florence, to Shippen, in Philadelphia, Downs Manuscript Library, Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.

³⁷Dunlap, I, 53.

³⁸Allen's Letterbook.

³⁹ May 11, 1762, West to Shippen, Downs Manuscript Library.

⁴⁰ Galt, pp. 155-56. cf. Dunlap, I, 53.

⁴¹ Galt claimed that West enjoyed the patronage of Mann, "the marquisses of Creni and Riccardi, the late Lord Cooper, and many others of the British nobility, then traveling in Italy" (pp. 155-56). Rutherford and Mann received special acclaim for the generous assistance which they gave West. When, in the mid-1770's, John Singleton Copley considered abandoning the political turmoil of Boston for study of the fine arts in Italy, he was told that he would find friends in these two men. On November 24, 1773 Dr. John Morgan of Philadelphia assured him that "Mr. Rutherford was a considerable Merchant at Leghorn, a Man of great worth and Politeness, and particularly civil to his Countrymen, the English. He can ... procure you an Introduction to Sir Horace Man, the British Resident at Florence, which will be of great Use in obtaining easy Access at all proper times, to the Gallery of Paintings there, which contains one of the grandest Collections in Europe." He also recommended Isaac Jamineau, "the British Consul at Naples," whose "patronage was I believe of use to Mr. West." Massachusetts Historical Society, Letters & Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, 1739-1776 (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1914), pp. 205-06.

⁴² May 11, 1762, Downs Manuscript Library.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Allen's Letterbook.

⁴⁵ January 6, 1773, West to Copley, Copley-Pelham Letters, p. 194.

⁴⁶ Dunlap, I, 54. Also see Hirsch, p. 30.

⁴⁷ Dunlap, I, 54.

⁴⁸ Charles Morton Smith, comp., "Powel-Roberts Correspondence, 1761-1765," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, XVIII, 1 (1894), p. 37.

⁴⁹ September 1, 1763, Biographical and Genealogical Documents, Friends Library, Swarthmore College.

⁵⁰ Dunlap, I, 59.

⁵¹ One might contend that West had not married Miss

Shewell before he left for Italy because he had insisted that he make the trip alone, in order to concentrate fully on his studies. A decade later, when Copley was considering a tour of Italy, West offered him the advice which he himself may have followed in 1760. On December 20, 1772, Jonathan Clarke, then in London, told Copley that "Mr. West has an objection to your carrying Mrs. Copley to Italy with you, and that is the attention so good a wife will require from so good a Husband, and which it's probable will be so much as to retard you in the pursuit of the grand object. he says the eighteen months or two years that he supposes you will be in Rome will be the most important period of your life, and will require a constant application, and perhaps your having a Lady with you will oblige you to cultivate such acquaintance in order to make it agreeable to her" Copley-Pelham Letters, p. 191. Later West himself advised Copley: "I would have that time [in Italy] as uninterrupted as possible. And for this reason I would have you make this Tour without Mrs. Copley. Not that she would be of any great additional expanse, But would reather bring you into a mode of liveing that would throw you out of your Studyes. So my advice is, Mrs. Copley to remain in Boston till you have made this Tour, After which, if you fix your place of reasidanc in London, Mrs. Copley to come over." January 6, 1773, Ibid., p. 194.

⁵²John West resided alternately with his sister at Marlborough, his son Thomas (Benjamin's half-brother) at Reading, and Benjamin at Panton Square, London, until his death in 1776.

⁵³Charles Henry Hart, "Autobiographical Notes of Matthew Pratt, Painter," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, XIX, 4 (1895), pp. 461-62; Hart, "West's Family," pp. 8-10.

⁵⁴Hart, "Autobiographical Notes of Pratt," p. 462. On July 25, 1769 West wrote Jonathan Morris, in Philadelphia: "As this is the part of world my department in life has fixed me, I have indeavoured to accomadate and settle myself in a domastick life with my little Famely which consists of my Dear Betsey her little Boy, a Servant or two--one house in the country four miles distance from Town whare Betsey and her little Boy stays Eight months in the year and another in London whare I carry on my Paintings. And by that I gett exercise of coming into Town and going out to them every day. By which I secure my health in a good state, which otherways would be impossible by reason of my closs applycation to studies." Thomas Stewardson, comp., "Letters of Benjamin West," The Pennsylvania

Magazine of History and Biography, XVIII, 2 (1894), p. 220. The "house in the country" may have been "my house in Windsor" which West mentioned twenty years later. February 14, 1789, West to William West, in Upper Darby, Hart, "West's Family," p. 21. Also see Ann C. van Devanter, "Benjamin West and his Self-Portraits," Antiques (April 1973), p. 767. The Wests had two children, Raphael Lamar (b. 1766) and Benjamin (b. 1772). Benjamin's godfather was Benjamin Franklin.

⁵⁵ Drummond had commissioned West to paint Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus in 1766.

⁵⁶ West and George III shared many similarities of character as well as many peculiarities of fate. The King was born in May 1738, West in October of the same year; George acceded to the throne in October 1760, four months after West had arrived in Italy; and the King died in January 1820, two months before West passed away.

⁵⁷ See William Sandby, The History of the Royal Academy of Arts (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1862), I, 42-49; and Sidney C. Hutchinson, The History of the Royal Academy, 1768-1968 (London: Chapman & Hall, 1968), p. 42.

⁵⁸ West made a great deal of money from the sale of prints. "Before the War he sold 4 or £500 worth of prints in a year." December 17, 1797, Farington, I, 225. This business became even more lucrative as West's reputation advanced. On March 15, 1809 Farington wrote that West "had been seven weeks arranging prints & drawings, & shd. be employed 2 weeks more. He has made up 2 Portfolio of etchings, and has 2 proofs of every print engraved from his works. The Print seller said he would give £2000 for the whole." Ibid., V, 127.

⁵⁹ January 12, 1788, entry in the Household Journal kept by Mrs. West, 1785-1789, Friends Library. "A slight sketch of our exhibition room No. 14 Newman St."--an unsigned drawing in the Downs Manuscript Library--depicts a large gallery (70' long, 40' wide, 26' high). A series of free-standing columns support a glass skylight. James Henry Leigh Hunt recalled that "Mr. West had bought his house, I believe, not long after he came to England; and he had added a gallery in the back of it terminating in a couple of lofty rooms. The gallery was a continuation of the house-passage, and together with one of those rooms and the parlour, formed three sides of a garden, very small but elegant, with a grass-plot in the middle and

busts upon stands under an arcade. ... The Gallery ... was hung with the artist's sketches all the way. ... The two rooms contained the largest of his pictures; and in the farther one, after stepping softly down the gallery, as if reverencing the dumb life on the walls, you generally found the mild and quiet artist at his work" Hunt, Autobiography (London: 1860), p. 77. West had amassed a fine collection of art; and in those days, when there was no public gallery in London, many artists and art students visited his gallery and studio. See Richardson, Painting in America, p. 77.

⁶⁰ January 23, 1770, Henry Benbridge Papers, Gordon Saltar Manuscript Collection, Winterthur Museum. Benbridge profited by his European tour. On July 19, 1770 Benjamin Franklin reported to his wife in Philadelphia that Benbridge "has so greatly improved himself in Italy as a Portrait painter that the Connoisseurs in that Art here think few or none excel him. I hope he will meet with due encouragement in his own country and that we shall not lose him as we have lost Mr. West." Quoted in Robert G. Stewart, Henry Benbridge (1773-1812): American Portrait Painter (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971), p. 18. Two days later West recommended Benbridge in a letter to Francis Hopkinson: "You will find him an Ingenious Artist and an agreeable Companion--his Merrit in the art must procure him great incouragement and much as-teem--I dare say it will give you great pleasure to have so an ingenious artist residing amongst You." Gratz Collection, HSP.

⁶¹ August 5, 1774, Copley-Pelham Letters, p. 236. At this time the Wests were moving from Panton Square to No. 14 Newman Street.

⁶² See, for example, Charles Coleman Sellers, Charles Willson Peale (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 53; Richardson, Painting in America, p. 77; and van Devanter, p. 766.

⁶³ February 14, 1789, Hart, "West's Family," p. 21.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Hutchinson, p. 73. Also see William T. Whitley, Artists and their Friends in England, 1700-1799 (London: The Medici Society, 1928), II, 77-78.

⁶⁵ April 14, 1794, Farington, I, 46.

⁶⁶ Travel Diary, 1796-1797, n.p., Downs Manuscript Library.

- ⁶⁷Farington, I, 225.
- ⁶⁸December 28, 1797, Ibid., I, 225.
- ⁶⁹May 16, 1796, Benjamin West: Letters and Correspondence, HSP. cf. Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 9; Galt, pp. 28-29; and Dunlap, I, 37.
- ⁷⁰Stewardson, comp., "Letters of West," p. 221.
- ⁷¹December 8, 1798, Farington, I, 251. At this time West was seeking other sources of income. "It is understood," Farington recorded in the same entry, "that West is to proceed painting for Mr. Beckford to the amount of £1000 a year."
- ⁷²February 16, 1800, Ibid., I, 236-37. Also see December 10, 1804, Ibid., IV, 80-81; Sandby, I, 264; and Helmut von Erffa, "Benjamin West at the Height of His Career," The American Art Journal (Spring 1969), p. 20. Hutchinson described Tresham as "an irascible Irishman who took on the part of chief rebel against West" (p. 78).
- ⁷³November 16, 1800, Farington, II, 49.
- ⁷⁴May 31, 1804, Ibid., II, 245.
- ⁷⁵September 8, 1805, Autograph Collection of Simon Gratz: American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers, HSP.
- ⁷⁶A copy of this letter is in the collection of the Friends Library. West's financial situation, however, never did improve. In 1807 Mrs. West complained "of the little encouragement Mr. West had met with. She said any notions that Mr. West was rich were unfounded. That Mr. West never had a shilling in the funds in his life" Farington, IV, 133.
- ⁷⁷June 30, 1810, Ibid., VI, 82.
- ⁷⁸Quoted in Hutchinson, p. 83.
- ⁷⁹von Erffa, p. 20; Sandby, I, 263. The King first had suffered from his peculiar illness in November 1788, but by February 1789 he had regained his health. When his "insanity" "recurred with great severity in 1810 it was to involve the country in a Regency for the last ten years of his reign." R. J. White, The Age of George III (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), pp. 205n., 207.
- ⁸⁰West received lavish praise for these two paintings.

Upon viewing a smaller version of Christ Rejected at the Academy in June 1815, Sir George Beaumont commented that "since the time of C. F. Le Brun there has been no artist to be compared with West." June 5, 1815, Farington, VIII, 6. The painting now hangs in the PAFA. West sold the original version of Christ Healing the Sick, which he had promised as a donation to the Pennsylvania Hospital, in London for £3000. In 1817 he presented a copy to the Hospital; within one year the proceeds from the public exhibition of the painting totalled over \$4000, one of the most substantial contributions the charitable institution had received since its inception in 1749. West was intensely concerned that the picture be advantageously displayed to the public. He urged that the Hospital "erect a room ... as the place of a final deposit for the Picture." He even presented his own "geometrical plan" of a building that would "Dignify the Present, as well as the Hospital." Always concerned for the reputations of himself and his profession, he argued that "a place thus created with a proper light for the Picture to be seen in, would not only be seen with more pleasure and conveniency than that of its being placed in any room of the Hospital as a furniture picture; and it would also relieve the apartments of the Hospital from the press of people daily crowding to see the picture." March 17, 1814, West to Joseph Wharton, in Philadelphia, Hart, "West's Family," p. 29. See also Dunlap, I, 94-95; and August 5, 1817, West to Thomas Sully, in Philadelphia, MISC. MSS, Friends Library. The Hospital did erect a small rotunda for the sole purpose of exhibiting the painting.

⁸¹Historians disagree concerning the date of Mrs. West's death. The most convincing evidence is presented in Hart, "West's Family," p. 8. cf. Dunlap, I, 96; Hirsch, p. 63; and van Devanter, p. 771.

⁸²Farington, VIII, 126-27.

⁸³Ibid., VIII, 127.

⁸⁴John W. McCoubrey, American Tradition in Painting (New York: George Braziller, 1963), p. 24.

⁸⁵Quoted in Dunlap, I, 86.

⁸⁶June 10, 1807, Farington, IV, 151.

CHAPTER II

THE YOUNG INGENIOUS PAINTER: BENJAMIN WEST IN PHILADELPHIA

During the 1750's Philadelphia matured; it became the largest, most cosmopolitan city in the American Colonies. It was a heterogeneous town, rich in the diversity of its people. There were Germans and Englishmen, Quakers, Anglicans, and Presbyterians, merchants and artisans, rebels and gentlemen, many philanthropists and few beggars. There were those who favored classical education and those who preferred practical training, those who defended Proprietary rule and those who promoted Royal government.

A quiet revolution preceded and made possible Philadelphia's maturation. During the 1750's new, vital forces effected the demise of staid, passive institutions that no longer responded to the needs of society. Specifically, a coalition of dynamic, enlightened men wrested social dominance and political power from the traditional oligarchy of Quaker merchants and gentlemen. The Quakers had invited their ruin by refusing to support the colonial effort in the Seven Years' War; once their principles had clouded their pragmatism, they were obliged to surrender their city to combined Anglican-Presbyterian rule. They never recovered, but Philadelphia forged ahead.

This decade was a period of cultural awakening for the city--an awakening which stemmed largely from the economic growth that had begun in the 1720's and that resulted

in the shift of mercantile dominance in the Colonies from the port of Boston to that of Philadelphia. By 1760 the economic boom and a staggering influx of immigrants made Philadelphia the second largest city within the British Empire.¹ Prosperity enabled Philadelphians increasingly to import goods and fashion from England and to develop their own mature, urbane culture.²

The craft of painting burgeoned in Philadelphia during the 1750's. This decade was, as Carl Bridenbaugh has written, "the seedtime of Philadelphia painting. Always profitable, limning ... achieved a greater respectability with its wider patronage and its practice by sons of gentry as well as of tradesmen."³ Talented, precocious, resourceful, and ambitious, Benjamin West found a comfortable position--perhaps one of leadership--within a thriving artistic community. He did not, of course, achieve success without assistance. Guided by William Smith and others at the Academy he undertook a course of study well-suited to his professional aspirations. With his four closest friends he formed a little club of idealists and budding intellectuals whose conversations revolved around the enrichment of the mind and the pursuit of the arts. From William Williams and other painters he learned the rudiments of his craft, and in print and "color" shops he found sources and materials. Perhaps most significantly, West allied himself with many of the leaders of his society: well-to-do, learned men who entertained aristocratic pretensions and a benevolent interest in their "young ingenious Painter."

Part One: A Useful Education

When West first entered the fold of the Academy in Philadelphia (probably in the spring of 1755, but at least by the fall of 1756, following the death of his mother),⁴

he found an academic atmosphere that was in a state of flux and was not altogether suited to his needs. The organization of the Academy, which was originally founded in January 1751, derived in great measure from Benjamin Franklin's celebrated pamphlet of 1749, Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania. Franklin, the great realist, privately promoted a scheme of "useful" education or vocational training that would give the youth of Philadelphia proficiency in the practicalities of mercantile and civil life. He proffered a curriculum of logic, mathematics, foreign languages, history, and English grammar. In his Proposals, however, he recognized the need to compromise with the views of the many influential Philadelphia families who preferred that their sons acquire a more "ornamental" education based on the "gentlemanly studies" of the classics. As established in 1751, therefore, the Academy consisted of two departments, the English School, which incorporated the meat of Franklin's views, and the Latin School, which Franklin had condoned as a political expedient to gain broad support for the school.⁵

Almost immediately, however, the trustees of the Academy allowed the English School to languish and threw their support behind the Latin department. The trustees were an elitist group; steeped in tradition and aspiring to establish themselves and their families as paragons of Old World cultural values, they regarded the Academy as an agency through which they might secure the social dominance of gentlemen and the continued deference of ambitious artisans. The original board of twenty-four trustees included eighteen Episcopalians and only two Quakers, James Logan and Dr. Lloyd Zachary, whose participation was primarily nominal. Quaker leaders clearly saw that the Academy was not bound to uphold their ideals of practical

education and that it constituted a threat to their political influence.⁶ Their instinctive suspicions, and Franklin's worst fears, soon were realized. The movement for the founding of a degree-granting college in Philadelphia culminated in the establishment, in March 1755, of the "College, Academy and Charitable School." The organization of this new institution further subordinated useful to ornamental education. Under the provisions of the charter, the Academy, which was regarded as a feeder-school to the College, comprised the English school and the "school for the practical branches of mathematics;" and the College, which awarded the degrees, consisted of three philosophy schools and the Latin and Greek schools. No one doubted which institution was the more prestigious or which set the emphasis of educational policy.⁷

At the head of the incorporated institution was the Provost, Reverend William Smith. A graduate of the University of Aberdeen, Smith left England in 1751 after Parliament had snubbed his plans for promoting parochial education. Settled in New York as the tutor of the sons of Colonel Josiah Martin, he did not abandon his schemes for educational reform. In April 1753 he published A General Idea of the College of Mirania, a pamphlet which set forth a plan for the "making of good men and good citizens." This treatise soon came to the attention of Franklin, who found Smith's theories akin to his own. On May 3, 1753 he wrote Smith that

... I know not when I have read a Piece that has so affected men, so noble and just are the Sentiments, so warm and animated the Language. ... Mr. Allen ... directed me to procure him 6 of your Pieces, tho' he had not and has not yet seen it. Mr. Peters has taken 10.⁸

So impressed were the trustees of the Academy with the views of William Smith that when the College was

incorporated in 1755 they invited him, a newly ordained Anglican minister of under thirty years of age, to serve as Provost.⁹ Although Smith entered his new post as a moderate who defended the niceties of both useful and ornamental education, within two or three years the political realities of his situation altered his tune, and the College became increasingly a preening ground for young gentlemen. Smith also soon plotted publicly to bring the College under Anglican control. By 1766, when political intrigue seemed to have sapped the strength of educational reform, Francis Alison, the vice-provost of the College, complained to Ezra Stiles that "the College is artfully got into the hands of Episcopal Trustees. Young men educated here get a Taste for high life, and many of them do not like to bear the poverty and dependence of our ministers."¹⁰

Despite his shortcomings, William Smith was an extremely capable and learned man who possessed a substantial streak of generosity and an ability to judge, in academic if not political terms, the characters and potentialities of the young men placed under his charge. Perhaps in no single instance did he display these beneficial qualities more markedly than in his relationship with Benjamin West. He sensed that West was a youth of immense inherent talent, but he rightly ascertained that West could not realize his ambition of becoming a history painter without guidance and exposure to the classics. On the other hand, he knew that West was a painter and not a scholar and that he was impatient, too ambitious and devoted to his chosen profession to tolerate the standard academic trivialities. After West had moved in with the Clarksons in the fall of 1756, therefore, Smith honored him with a special brand of tutelage. He advised the youth to paint during the day; and he visited the

Clarksons "in the evenings, ... to direct his attention to those topics of literature which were most suitable to cherish the expansion of his mind."¹¹ The course of study which Smith designed for West was equally judicious. "He regarded him as destined to be a Painter," wrote John Galt,

and on this account did not impose upon him those grammatical exercises of language which are usually required from the young student of the classics, but directed his attention to those incidents which were likely to interest his fancy, and to furnish him at some future time with subjects for the easel. He carried him immediately to those passages of antient history which make the most lasting impression upon the imagination of the regular-bred scholar, and described the picturesque circumstances of the transactions with a minuteness of detail that would have been superfluous to a general student.¹²

Smith's scheme apparently worked well in that it opened West's eye to the world of classical history while still allowing him to devote the majority of his time to painting. Furthermore, Smith's vocational approach encouraged West to deal in generalities, to recognize themes which expressed "noble sentiments," and to study detail only when it enhanced historical accuracy in pictorial terms. On the other hand, such a selective education had its drawbacks. West never did learn how to spell--never even adopted a consistent system of orthography--and he always despaired of letter-writing. "I hope you will not take my omission in writeing to any slight," he apologized to a friend later in life, "but what it really is, and which is the truth that I dont like writeing--its as difficult to me as painting would be to you--every man in his way, I could as soon paint you a description of things ... as write."¹³ West did not boast excessively in this

statement; he had devoted his life to painting and rightly judged that for him painting was a more lucid means of communication than oratory or writing. He upheld that

it is ... the records given, by the Pen--the Pencil--and the Chisel, that transmits the civilized periods of men to distant ages, as having been civilized;--the fourth means have never been discovered. And as I hold one of these means professionally, I have ever devoted it to that purpose, as much as my humble abilities would permit me to do.¹⁴

West never laid claims to proficiency in any of the arts but painting; and the smattering introduction to the classics which he received from his tutor, Provost Smith, constituted the bulk of his "formal" education. He was, as his wife admitted to Joseph Farington years later, "so devoted to drawing while a child, and a youth, that every other part of education was neglected."¹⁵

Despite this apology for the intellectual poverty of his youth, in Philadelphia West probably did seek out or at least gain exposure to the basic literature that related to his self-assumed profession of history painter. Undoubtedly Reverend Smith attended the informal, evening tutorials with West well-armed with these pertinent books. Books treating virtually every subject were readily available; for by the 1750's Philadelphia had acquired a certain fame as the home of several reputable libraries, both public and private, and of a large community of printers. In 1757 the city could boast of four library companies: Franklin's original Library Company, the Union Library Company, the Association Library, and the Amicable Company. The College also had its own library, a legacy of the original Academy Library and well-stocked in standard educational texts.¹⁶ Furthermore, many individuals possessed substantial libraries: James Logan had amassed the

finest collection in the Middle Colonies, and Isaac Norris, Edward Shippen, and Robert Strettel had extensive but less catholic holdings.¹⁷ From such varied sources as these Reverend Smith could have compiled a list of readings that amply would have satisfied and promoted the interests of his tutee. In addition to his readings in DuFresnoy, Richardson, and Rollin's History of the Arts and Sciences of the Ancients,¹⁸ West may well have studied Hogarth's Analysis of Beauty, Spence's Essay on Mr. Pope's Odyssey, Trapp's Praelectiones Poeticae, and Pufendorf's Introduction to the History of the Principal Kingdoms and States of Europe.¹⁹

In the light of the controversy over education that was raging in Philadelphia during the 1750's, the course of study that Smith prepared for Benjamin West was primarily useful and only incidentally ornamental. West was trained, certainly as thoroughly as a young colonial painter could have been trained, as a history painter. The few academic rigors that he agreed to endure were geared to his professional ambitions; and the written word he came to regard simply as an aid to conceptualization, as a useful source for and parallel to the expression of ideas in visual terms.

William Smith did a great deal more to foster West's education than offer him private instruction in useful studies. He introduced him to the four young, exceptionally bright and creative students at the College who were quickly to become his fast friends: Joseph Reed, Francis Hopkinson, Jacob Duché, and Thomas Godfrey. Reed, who failed to graduate with his class in 1759, was the youngest of the group. Hopkinson (1737-1791), a wealthy Anglican of remarkably diverse talents, was unquestionably the leader of this coterie. Affable and a renowned wit, more precocious even than West, he pursued interests in

drawing and poetry. An accomplished organist, he soon became the foremost native musician in Philadelphia; in 1759 he helped found the Orpheus Club at the College, and in the early 1760's he wrote "the first secular composition of note in the colonies," My Days Have Been So Wondrous Free.²⁰ In 1764 he became librarian of the Library Company and in 1769 one of the founders of the American Philosophical Society.

Duché (1738-1798), the son of an Anglican minister, was, like Hopkinson, a member of the class of 1757 at the College, a poet and competent musician. During the 1760's, however, he forsook his artistic bent and became "an Anglican pulpit orator whose fervor surpassed both his invention and his capacity."²¹

Thomas Godfrey (1736-1763), the son of a lowly glazier, had been thwarted in his desire to become a painter and had been apprenticed by his family to a watchmaker. He detested this indenture and passed his spare time reading, composing poetry, and in the company of his "sole friend," the painter, John Green.²² Smith tutored him, like West, privately at the Academy, and he quickly rose "far above the common herd of versifiers, and others, too commonly honoured with the appellation of Poets."²³ In 1759, during a trip to North Carolina, he completed his famous drama, The Prince of Parthia, the first major play to be written and staged in America.

With these four young intellectuals Benjamin West enjoyed a close association that undoubtedly broadened his horizons.²⁴ Together the five artists passed many spare and idle hours walking along the banks of the Schuylkill River or in the countryside that bordered the city. These were the respites of leisurely activity, conversation, mutual criticism, and philosophical exchange that

contributed so much to the maturation of their intellects and the development of their artistic sensibilities. Thomas Godfrey remembered and vividly pictured these pleasant times in one of his pastoral poems:

How oft together Schuylkil's verdant side
 We've trac'd, or wanton'd in its cooling tide,
 Or soft reclin'd, where spreading shades were
 wove,
 With joyful accents fill'd the sounding grove.
 Then all was gay, then sprightly mirth was
 found,
 And nature bloom'd in vernal beauties round.²⁵

West particularly enjoyed the excursions into the country with his friends. No doubt he learned a great deal both from them and from the experience of articulating his own views to his more well-educated but immensely sympathetic peers.²⁶ On the other hand, as the only professional painter in the group, West could have offered a novel slant to discussions of poetry and music. Later in life he often recalled

... the actual enjoyment of the many Pleasing and happy hours I have spent ... in those Rural and innocent Juvenal amusements with which America alone abounds my Sighs are often intruding and vainly wishing again for those past pleasures which I have there so often experiance in those Solitary retreats²⁷

Through these lines of longing for simpler days, West expressed his appreciation of the fortuitous friendships he formed in Philadelphia. He was, indeed, lucky to have been associated with four such talented young men.

Provcst Smith was not satisfied simply to have brought together this group of college wits and artists. He provided them with a vehicle for the expression of their creative geniuses that inspired them to attain professional standards in their works. In October 1757 Smith

organized "A Society of Gentlemen" to sponsor the publication of The American Magazine, or Monthly Chronicle for the British Colonies. Printed by William Bradford, the periodical attracted over eight hundred and fifty original subscribers and enjoyed a circulation that extended from New England to the West Indies. Although abandoned after only one year of publication because of Smith's penchant for political intrigue, the literary magazine had considerable merit and constituted a sounding-board for the eager young writers of Philadelphia.

In the pages of the American Magazine the talents of Benjamin West, as well as of the other members of Smith's group, were first publicly announced and applauded. The issue for February 1758 included several poems which, although anonymous, were obviously composed by Smith's students. "With respect to the following little poems," the Provost began his editorial comments,

they are selected out of many that we have from their several authors, because the occasions on which most of them are written, require their immediate publication. The first upon one of Mr. WEST's Portraits, we communicate with particular pleasure, when we consider that the lady who sat, the painter who guided the pencil, and the poet who so well describes the whole, are all natives of this place, and very young.

The first poem, signed "LOVELACE," was entitled "Upon seeing the Portrait of Miss **__** by Mr. West."²⁸

Since Guido's skilful Hand, with mimic art,
Cou'd form and animate so sweet a face,
Can nature still superior charms impart,
Or warmest fancy add a single grace?

Th'enliven'd tints in due proportion rise;
Her polish'd cheeks with deep vermilion glow;
The shining moisture swells into her eyes,
And from such lips nectareous sweets must flow.

The easy attitude, the graceful dress,

The soft expression of the perfect whole,
Both Guido's judgment and his skill confess,
Informing canvass with a living soul.

How fixt, how steady, yet how bright a ray
Of modest Lustre beams in ev'ry smile!
Such smiles as must resistless charms convey,
Enliven'd by a heart devoid of guile.

Yet sure his flattering pencil's unsincere,
His Fancy takes the place of bashful truth,
And warm Imagination pictures here
The pride of beauty and the bloom of youth.

Thus had I said, and thus deluded thought,
Had lovely Stella still remain'd unseen,
When grace and beauty to perfection brought,
Make ev'ry imitative art look mean.

The author of this poem has suggested the artistic values and aims of the young intellectuals whose professional careers Provost Smith so actively promoted. Both painter and poet sought, "with mimic art," to improve upon nature, to bring "grace and beauty to perfection," by qualifying reality and natural form with subjective meaning and eternal truths. If in the second, third, and fourth stanzas the poet has praised West's attention to fact and "enlivening" details, in the first and final two stanzas he has applauded West's ability to convey in his painting more than a true representation of his sitter. Apparently West had managed to capture "the pride of beauty and the bloom of youth" in his portrait of (an unidentified) Stella; because his "warm imagination" had allowed him to proceed beyond a literal rendition of visual fact, he had made mere "imitative art look mean." Both West and "Lovelace," then, were as concerned with relating ideas as with recording a faithful description of what they saw. Both aimed to achieve a certain synthesis of the real and the ideal; both applied subjective judgment or "fancy" to "bashful truth" in order to extract noble sentiments from their direct observations of nature.²⁹

This enlightened, surprisingly refined mentality undoubtedly represented the fruits of the special educational programs that William Smith devised for his prize students. The Provost must have derived a great deal of satisfaction and gratification from "Lovelace's" complimentary poem, for he was an indefatigable supporter and advisor of West and, as his mentor, assumed the responsibility of giving direction to the painter's ambitions. In conjunction with the poem, he published editorial notes which announced West's abilities and aspirations. "We are glad of making known to the world," he trumpeted,

the name of so extraordinary a genius as Mr. West. He was born in Chester county in this Province, and without the assistance of any master, has acquired such a delicacy and correctness of expression in his paintings, joined to such a laudable thirst of improvement, that we are persuaded, when he shall have obtained more experience and proper opportunities of viewing the productions of able masters, he will become truly eminent in his profession.

Although Benjamin West must have been thrilled at this tribute, many Philadelphians might have wondered what the Provost meant by "the productions of able masters." Nearly every colonial painter of note had worked in Philadelphia at one time or another in his career, and there were many "productions" hanging on private and public walls that West might have viewed. Indeed, by 1758 West probably had studied a great many of the paintings lodged in the city. In this statement, therefore, Smith was referring to paintings with which Philadelphians were not familiar; that is, he was suggesting that West's "thirst of improvement" would not long be satisfied in Pennsylvania. Within the next year, of course, West moved to New York, and within the next two years he began to prepare

for his voyage to Italy. One might safely assume that even at this early date West seriously had determined to study the Old Masters in Europe, and that Provost Smith whole-heartedly promoted his plan.³⁰

In retrospect, West profited from his brief flirtation with the College, Academy and Charitable School of Philadelphia. As his tutor, William Smith provided him with a useful education, scholastic training that was, in its limited focus, perfectly suited to his professional needs and personal desires. As his friend, the Provost offered direction and every encouragement to his ambitions and promoted his interests both publicly and privately. From his close-knit group of friends West gained exposure to other artistic disciplines and a high regard for the free exchange of ideas. He learned the difference between craftsman and artist; for he learned that while the painter simply described visual fact within the confines of convention, only the artist was able to extract noble sentiments from his observations of nature and to express eternal truths in his imaginative treatment of natural form. He knew, however, that the successful artist was first the accomplished craftsman; and if he acquired the mentality of an artist through his association with the Academy, he achieved the proficiency of a craftsman through his relationships with the painters and patrons of Philadelphia.

Part Two: Patronage and the Craft:
Painting in Philadelphia during the 1750's

"As I am from America," Benjamin West wrote John Singleton Copley on August 4, 1766, "[I] know the little Opertunities is to be had their in the way of Painting."³¹
"In this Country as You rightly observe," replied Copley,

there is no examples of Art, except what is to be met with in a few prints indifferently executed, from which it is not possible to learn much I was almost tempted the last year to take a tour to Philadelphia, and that chiefly to see some of Your Pictures, which I am informed are there. I think myself peculiarly unlucky in Liveing in a place into which there has not been one portrait brought that is worthy to be call'd a Picture within my memory, which leaves me at a great loss to gess the stile that You, Mr. Reynolds, and the other Artists pracktise.³²

In both Philadelphia and Boston the craft of painting flourished, but the art of painting was at a low ebb. Portraiture (and to some extent landscape) was the only acceptable form of expression; prints and existing portraits (not the painter's imagination) were virtually the only stylistic guides and sources of inspiration.

At the foundation of this limited, stunted artistic atmosphere lay a number of cultural realities. During the eighteenth century painters worked within the society from which they received their livelihood; they responded to demand and painted to order. There was no society-bet damned attitude among painters in the American Colonies; there were no renegades or "bohemians" who measured their own personal success by the degree of their isolation from society. Handsome financial and social reward attended the painter who conformed, as each did, to a few basic rules, rules established by the patrons of the arts. The patrons were, above all, Englishmen; they hungered for and adopted the latest fashion from England and they expected that their craftsmen be conversant with this fashion. The craftsmen--cabinetmakers, silversmiths, painters--complied instinctively, automatically. For were they not Englishmen too, trained to perpetuate this fashion? The rapport between patron and craftsman, however, was not wholly

symbiotic, for fashion required an initial impetus. In general terms, the tastemakers of colonial society were the patrons; only occasionally did craftsmen--immigrants such as the cabinetmaker Thomas Tufft or the painter John Wollaston--set the standards of taste.³³

No painter seriously questioned this inbred system of affinitive tastes and elementary demand and supply until Benjamin West determined to explore the whole world of art that lay beyond portraiture. When he told Copley of the lack of "opportunities" for the American painter, he was, of course, speaking in relative terms; having little at hand with which to compare his notion of what painting ought to be, Copley could only accept West's word and refer naively to the dearth of "worthy" portraits in Boston. Even West, however, could not have entered upon the uncharted course he followed unless his Philadelphia patrons had afforded him some direction. Surprisingly, when he decided to pursue the profession of a history painter, his patrons encouraged his ambition. Their enlightened attitude and West's talents engendered a transformation in colonial painting.

Another cultural reality which characterized colonial painting was the relative stature of the painter's profession. Although "respectable," painting was "mysterious" just as any craft--such as cabinetmaking--was "mysterious." Matthew Pratt, the painter, served his time as an apprentice just as Benjamin Burnham, the cabinetmaker, "served his time." In the Colonies, then, painting was a craft and it was regarded as such. Even the most accomplished colonial painters--Robert Feke, for instance--were referred to as painters or limners, but never as artists. Largely self-taught (even Pratt was largely self-taught), these men had to be resourceful and inventive; a great deal of experimentation went into the mixing of pigments,

the application of sizing to a canvas, or the preparation of glazes and varnishes. Once the painter had mastered these mysteries of his craft he needed only to color the spaces that had been predetermined by convention; that is, the portraitist plagiarised the pose and setting of his sitter from the latest English engraving; he then had only to render a "true" representation of his sitter's facial features and add color.

This method was not simple--it required a great deal of skill. Nor was it sinful; on the contrary, it was the rage, the expected, accepted manner in which the painter plied his craft. To a large extent, however, it did preclude original thought, imagination, inspiration, creativity--the bywords of the artist. It did not allow for the expression of great and noble sentiments. In Boston, Copley noted,

a taste of painting is too much wanting ... to afford any kind of help; and was it not for preserving the resemblance of particular persons, painting would not be known in the place. The people generally regard it as no more than any other useful trade, as they sometimes term it, like that of carpenter, tailor, or shoemaker, not as one of the most noble arts in the world, which is not a little mortifying to me. While the arts are so regarded, I can hope for nothing either to encourage or assist me in my studies but what I receive from a thousand leagues distance, and be my improvements what they will, I shall not be benefited by them in this country, neither in point of fortune or fame.³⁴

If a colonial painter was at all creative in his treatment of subject matter, either he possessed the immense talent and insight of Copley or he unintentionally strayed from the conventional idioms of his craft. Or, like Benjamin West and later Copley himself, he changed his environment; he consciously substituted less restrictive values for the

stifling norms of colonial portraiture.

Before 1747, West's artistic ability received benign encouragement but no guidance from an experienced hand. When in that year West accompanied Edward Penington to Philadelphia, however, he acquired an exposure to the mysteries of the craft of painting. As we have seen, Samuel Shoemaker introduced him to William Williams, a colorful, romantic character. Born in 1727, Williams had bolted from grammar school in Bristol, set off to sea, survived a shipwreck off the coast of Nicaragua, reneged on his indenture to a ship's captain, spent two years with the Rama Indians on the Mosquito Coast, and finally managed to find his way to Philadelphia.³⁵ Such wild adventures must have impressed West as substantially as Williams's artistic abilities. The landscape that Williams showed him at their first meeting was, West later recalled, "the first picture I had seen except the small essays I made in the country, and the one I was then attempting to paint in oil." His esteem for his first teacher must indeed have been great; "most undoubtedly," he asserted, "had not Williams been settled in Philadelphia I should not have embraced painting as a profession." The two painters developed a close friendship, "which continued without interruption until ... 1760."³⁶

Williams freely imparted his knowledge to his exuberant young friend. "It was to his books and prints," West specifically recalled, "I was indebted for all the knowledge I possessed of the progress which the fine Arts had made in the world, & which prompted me to view them in Italy."³⁷ These books included, of course, writings of Richardson and du Fresnoy, who both urged their readers to study the works of ancient sculptors and the Old Masters. The prints, however, undoubtedly were less illustrative of classical art and more representative of the rococo style

then current in England. Williams himself expounded the rococo aesthetic; his portraits and conversation pieces reflected the informality, frivolity, luxurious ease, and aristocratic ideal of the new fashion.³⁸ He lived in "Loxley's Court, at the Sign of Hogarth's Head," an apt advertisement of his artistic tastes.³⁹

Although he admired and appreciated Williams's talents, West did not become his protégé, for he found ample opportunity to study with a number of other established painters. John Winter, one of the most versatile artisan-painters of his day, had settled in Philadelphia in 1739. On March 20, 1739/40 he proclaimed in the pages of the Pennsylvania Gazette:

Done by John Winter, Painter, from London, at the sign of the easy Chair in Chestnut street, Land skip and Coach Painting, Coats of Arms, Signs, Shew-boards, Gilding Writing in Gold or common Colours and Ornaments of all Kinds very reasonable.⁴⁰

"The sign of the easy Chair" denoted the shop (until at least 1775) of the equally versatile upholstery and cabinetmaker Plunket Fleeson;⁴¹ and throughout his career Winter continued to paint both furniture and landscapes. He left Fleeson's shop within the year and entered into a partnership with Gustavus Hesselius (1685-1755), the Swedish immigrant painter and organ-maker. On December 11, 1740 they advertised in the Gazette:

PAINTING done in the best MANNER, by Gustavus Hesselius, from Stockholm, and John Winter, from London, VIZ: coats of Arms drawn on coaches, chaises, &c, or any other kind of Ornaments, Landskips, Signs, Shew-boards, Ship and House Painting, Gilding of all Sorts, Writing in Gold or Colour, old Pictures clean'd and mended, &c.⁴²

In 1750 Winter assumed the title of "Landskip painter" and made known that he taught "drawing in perspective, as

building, figures, landskips, &c. ornaments of all kinds, proper for those who intend to be painters, carvers, engravers, or for pleasure" ⁴³

West may well have known and even studied with John Winter. Between 1752 and 1754 Winter painted two landscapes and a chariot for Governor James Hamilton, who was a lavish patron of the arts in general and, later, of Benjamin West in particular. ⁴⁴ If West knew Winter he also may have met Gustavus Hesselius before the old man died in May 1755. In his later years Hesselius virtually abandoned painting; in his prime he had been singled out for commissions only as the last resort of his patrons. On May 31, 1733 James Logan tactfully expressed the attitude of Philadelphians toward Hesselius's talents in a letter to his brother William in Bristol:

We have a Swedish painter here, no bad hand, who generally does Justice to the men, expecially to their blemishes, which he never fails shewing in the fullest light, but is remarked for never having done any to ye fair sex, and therefore very few care to sitt for him [.] nothing on earth could prevail with my spouse to sitt at all, or to have hers taken by any man, and our girles believing the Originals have but little from nature to recommend them, would scarce be willing to have that little (if any) ill treated by a Pencil the Graces never favour'd. ⁴⁵

Although the Logans harbored, to some extent, the Quakers' aversion to art, their estimation of Hesselius's abilities was shared by most of his would-be patrons. However, since he had been, by default, the foremost resident-painter in Philadelphia during the 1730's and early 1740's, Benjamin West may have paid his respects to his shop.

In his will Hesselius bequeathed his house,

"Chamber Organ, Books, Paints, Oyls, Colours and all my other painting materials and Tools, and my unfinished pictures" to his son John.⁴⁶ John Hesselius (1728-1778) began in earnest to paint portraits in 1750 and proved at once that he was a more talented and accomplished painter than his father (from whom, presumably, he had learned to paint).⁴⁷ Until 1758 he was the most fashionable resident-painter of Philadelphia; so far-reaching was his fame that he travelled extensively to fulfill commissions from patrons in Maryland and Virginia.⁴⁸ While in his early works he exhibited his indebtedness to his father and to Robert Feke, whom he probably had met in the fall of 1749, in the mid-1750's he fully developed a decorative, rococo style.⁴⁹ If perchance West never met or worked with John Hesselius, he was certainly familiar with the work of the foremost native painter in Philadelphia during the 1750's.⁵⁰

West did receive some private tutoring in the craft of painting after he became associated with the Academy. One Mr. Hide, a German immigrant, "gave him some instruction."⁵¹ Another German, William Creamer, the master of French and German Languages at the College from 1754 until 1775, offered lessons "in some kinds of Painting."⁵²

West also acquired some training from James Claypoole (1720-1786), "Limner and Painter in general."⁵³ At his shop in Walnut Street, which had grown from a modest affair in 1743 to an extensive, thriving concern in 1750, Claypoole offered for sale a wide variety of painters' materials: "colours, brushes, &c. for painting," and "most Sorts of Painter's Colours, ready prepar'd for Use and neatly put up in Bladders."⁵⁴ His advertisement in the Pennsylvania Gazette for May 31, 1759 announced the full spectrum of his stock:

Bristol crown, glass, 8 X 10 and 9 X 11" in boxes, or by the light, white lead, yellow oaker, spanish brown, Prussian blue, verdigrease, strewing smalt, vermilion, lake brown pink, yellow pink, rose pink, and other colours, either ground ready for use, or dry, hard, white and brown varnishes and lacquers, best gold leaf, Dutch metal ditto; all sorts of brushes, camel hair, and other pencils; also London and Bristol crown glass, in sheets, or cut, and fitted for clocks, samplers, pictures; &c., curious metzo-tinto pictures of the king of Prussia, and William Pitt Esq, secretary of state, taken from original paintings. N.B. Painting, gilding and glazing done by said Claypoole, as usual.⁵⁵

Benjamin West was a frequent visitor at Claypoole's shop and came to know well both the elder craftsman and his son James, a capable young painter. Charles Willson Peale noted this close relationship when he described his first visit to Philadelphia in 1762:

I went to see the paintings of Mr. James Claypoole. He was not at home. I see his pictures & among them one done by Miss Rench, whom if I mistake not he married. After her death he intended to go to London to visit Mr. West with whom he had been intimate--but meeting with a storm was drove into the West Indias. In the Island of Jamaica he married & settled there.⁵⁶

In 1749 Claypoole, who was himself proficient in "all Sorts of Painting and Glasing," signed as apprentice his nephew, Matthew Pratt (1734-1805).⁵⁷ From his uncle Pratt learned "all the different branches of the painting business, particularly portrait painting, which was his favorite study from ten years of age."⁵⁸ After he had "served my time out 6 years and 8 months," Pratt "set my trade up, in company with Francis Foster, and followed it till ... October 1757." Perhaps business was poor, for

Pratt then embarked upon a "Trading voyage to Jamaica." His three-year venture was disastrous: French privateers plundered his ship, and by the time he finally returned to Philadelphia, his cargo of limes, which "would have made me a good gainer," was rotten. His fortune improved in Philadelphia, however, when, in May 1758,

I began to practice portrait painting.
Took suitable Rooms at George Claypoole's,
and met with great encouragement, having
full employ, and much to my satisfaction;
making money fast, with the approbation of
every Employer⁵⁹

In close contact with these professional craftsmen was a group of enterprising young painters--including Benjamin West--who studied at the Academy. John Groath, the son of a successful miniature painter, entered the Academy in 1756. While Francis Hopkinson pursued independently his interest in drawing, both Henry Benbridge, who was enrolled in the Academy from March 1751 to July 1758, and John Green studied painting with William Creamer.⁶⁰ This clique often gathered at Christopher Marshall's "Oil and Colour Shop at the Sign of the Golden Ball, opposite Strawberry Alley ... in Chestnut-street."⁶¹ Significantly, Marshall's shop was less than a block away from the Clarkson's house in Strawberry Alley, where West lived. West, then, enjoyed ready access to the materials and the "collection of neat perspective views" that Marshall kept in stock;⁶² and he obviously attracted his young fellow-painters to gather on his home ground.

The Clarksons themselves contributed significantly to West's artistic education. As noted earlier, John L. Clarkson possessed a sizable collection of prints; the inventory of his estate, taken after his death in 1760, listed "Twenty-three small Glass fram'd Pictures." John's brother Matthew, who became an extremely successful mer-

chant, also entertained a special interest in the graphic arts and offered for sale at his shop a wide selection of engravings. On July 25, 1754 he advertised in the Pennsylvania Journal that he had in stock,

For ready money or short credit: the four seasons painted on glass and in mezzotinto; the six sciences painted on glass and in ditto; the five senses on glass and in ditto; ... the jolly sailor, the twelve months, several history pieces, and sundry humorous scenes printed on glass; ... views about London, ditto in Rome, on the river Tiber, in Florence, in Holland, on Greenland whale fisheries.⁶³

West became a close friend of Matthew Clarkson; and he certainly must have acquired from this man a knowledge of current fashion and a certain professionalism.⁶⁴

In general terms, fine art--art that derived from or emulated current conventions of aristocratic English taste--was the peculiar possession of the new "establishment" in Philadelphia. The patrons of the fine arts were the gentlemen--Anglican and Presbyterian--who took pride in their wealth, classical education, and close ties with England. "Popular" art--the signboard, the fraktur, the third-rate portrait, for example--was an immensely democratic institution enjoyed by all but the staunchest Quakers. Fine art, however, was far from a democratic institution; dependent on great wealth and aristocratic pretensions, it was elitist to the core.

One of Benjamin West's greatest and most decisive gifts was his natural inclination toward aristocratic association. He possessed an inherent penchant for seeking out the guiding lights, the leaders of the society in which he found himself, and for automatically allying and adjusting his talents to their tastes. In turn, they responded favorably to his ambitions and abilities. Even as

a youth in Philadelphia, West was adopted by the elite, those individuals who had established themselves as cultural paragons. To be sure, the encouragement that West received from Philadelphians constituted the trigger of his career. Natural ability alone was not the key to his success. He needed to know ambition and the right people. He knew both.

In a different light, attaining proximity to the colonial elite was not a taxing problem for a talented and motivated painter such as West. Many Philadelphians had visited or had been reared or educated in Europe; they had tasted the security and pride which a deep-seated artistic heritage afforded. Perhaps they realized, however, that they could not transplant to America either this heritage or the comforting knowledge of cultural continuity and longevity that Europeans enjoyed. As Englishmen they emulated the material trappings and amenities of Old World culture,⁶⁵ but as American colonists they encouraged, by their patronage of native craftsmen, the growth of their own indigenous artistic tradition.

If in 1747 West was a newcomer to Philadelphia, by 1756 he knew the city well. Within ten years he had expanded greatly his associations with the social elite; and after 1756 his reputation as a painter gained him further entrance to the circles of wealthy, leading families. He knew the Allens, Turners, Hamiltons, Morrisses, Powels, Mifflins, Peels, Carmicks, Inglises, and Galloways.⁶⁶ Through his alliances with the upper echelons of Philadelphia society West acquired an aristocratic taste and professional mentality, and he developed a fluent comprehension of elitism that was remarkable for a man of his lowly origins and that he was to use to advantage throughout his life.

As well-connected and resourceful as he was, West must have enjoyed and exploited every opportunity to view many of the best paintings in the city. During the 1740's wealthy Philadelphians had commissioned the two currently most fashionable and accomplished painters, the New Englanders John Smibert (1688-1751) and Robert Feke (1707-1752), to paint portraits in Philadelphia. Smibert visited the city in June and July of 1740 and completed fourteen portraits, including those of Joseph Turner (see fig. 6), John Sober, William Till, William Allen and his wife, Andrew Hamilton, and James Hamilton.⁶⁷ The Hamiltons, Tills, and Allens were related by marriage; Turner was William Allen's business partner.

The relationships among patrons and between patrons and painter were extremely close-knit. When Smibert finally was rewarded for his work, his payment came in the form of elaborate exchanges of bills of credit between his merchant-patrons and their agents in London and Boston. On September 23, 1742 James Hamilton noted in his Cash Book:

I sent by Mr. Vassal to be dd to Mr. Smibert at Boston the following Bills of Exchange, viz.

Emerson & Graydon on Messrs Beckford & Neat pble to A:H.	£22:1:--
Joseph Turner on David Barclay & Son pbl to J:S.	£22:10
Joseph Turner on David Barclay & Son pbl to Jno Smibert	10:10:--
William Till on Laurence Williams pbl to White & Taylor	30:--
William Allen on Jno Simpson & Compe. pble to Jno. Smibert	£31:10--
John Sober on David Barclay & Son pbl to Jno. Smibert	7:17:6.

and ten guineas in gold.

James Hamilton

Mr. Smibert aknowledd the receipt of these Bills in a Letter to me.--68

In these accounts Hamilton suggested that painters circulated primarily within the far-reaching circles of mercantile relationships. Therefore, once a painter had gained a foothold within the sphere of a particular group of merchants, often his patronage ramified well beyond his original commitments. Most significantly, Smibert's patrons were the same eminent individuals with whom West became closely associated.

Robert Feke painted for a different circle of Philadelphia patrons. During his first visit to the city in 1746 he executed the portraits of Tench Francis, Mrs. Charles Willing, Mrs. George McCall and her daughters Mary and Anne, Thomas Hopkinson, Phineas Bond, Alexander Graydon, and Benjamin Franklin. In 1749 Feke travelled to Philadelphia a second time to take the likenesses of Margaret McCall (see fig. 23), Mrs. William Peters, and Lynford Lardiner and his wife. He also fulfilled repeat orders from the Willing and Francis families. Feke exercised a considerable influence on Philadelphia painters: Gustavus Hesselius exhibited his debt to Feke in his later portraits, such as those of Mrs. Ericus Unander (see fig. 24) and Faithful Richardson; and John Hesselius, who "drew" Lardiner's "picture" in 1749 and probably studied with Feke, borrowed directly from Feke's work in his early portraits.⁶⁹ West himself was at least conversant with Feke's style; if indeed he had not met the fashionable painter in 1749, he must have seen a number of his portraits by 1756.

Clearly, however, Feke's patrons comprised a group of a different complexion from the circle of merchants who had commissioned portraits from Smibert. There were, therefore, two patterns of patronage in Philadelphia during the 1740's. Perhaps there were also two currents of

taste; for Smibert was a purebred spokesman of the baroque aesthetic, while Feke, as a transitional figure, presaged the arrival in the Colonies of the more delicate rococo style. Or perhaps, too, the simple passage of time determined the two phases of patronage; that is, Smibert's patrons may not have felt a need for artistic "expression" in 1750, while Feke's patrons may not have been able to support such a need in 1740.⁷⁰ Oddly enough, Feke's sitters did not become ostensibly committed to the artistic fortune of Benjamin West; but in 1760 Smibert's former patrons were to launch West upon his career.

Through his close associations with William Allen and James Hamilton, West gained access to their celebrated art collections. In 1753 Allen retired from the commercial ventures that had made him the wealthiest man in Pennsylvania and moved from his town house on Water Street to his country seat at Mt. Airy. There he lived the life of a man of leisure; he entertained lavishly, pursued his keen interest in gardening, and added to his fine collection of paintings, mainly copies of the works of Italian masters.⁷¹

The finest art collection in Pennsylvania was that of Allen's brother-in-law, James Hamilton. The son of Speaker Andrew Hamilton, James served as mayor of Philadelphia in 1745 and became the first native-born Governor of Pennsylvania when he was appointed Lieutenant Governor of the Colony in 1748. He resigned the office in 1754; but in 1759, during one of his three visits to England, he again accepted the commission. With happy foresight, he finally relinquished the post to John Penn in 1763.⁷²

James Hamilton was an active patron of the arts. He constructed an imposing house at Bush Hill, the estate of one hundred and fifty acres which his father had laid

out in 1714. This mansion comfortably rivalled the estates of the English gentry, for Hamilton expended large sums and a great deal of time on its appointments, particularly its celebrated and "very elegant garden in which are seven statues in fine Italian marble curiously wrought." He cordially opened his doors to all visitors and frequently entertained well-to-do Philadelphians within the "very splendid and grand apartments magnificently decorated and adorned with curious paintings, hangings and statuary, and marble tablets."⁷³

Over the years Hamilton brought together a fine collection of paintings. In 1745 he purchased two historical tableaux by Richard of Paris, The Atonement and the Elevation of Proserpine. His collection was usually open to the public. In 1759 a party of young Quakers "view'd the Paintings," and later the same year Hannah Callender, who accompanied a group of friends on a visit to Hamilton's estate, praised "particularly a picture of St. Ignatius at his devotions, exceedingly well done."⁷⁴ Benjamin West was also a regular visitor to Bush Hill and a special admirer of the St. Ignatius. "Hamilton had a collection of paintings," wrote William Dunlap,

which were placed at West's disposal as objects of study, and among them a Murillo which had been captured in a Spanish prize. This picture, a St. Ignatius, was copied by the youth, and added to his reputation and ... skill.⁷⁵

Even at this early stage of his career, then, West displayed a keen--perhaps intuitive--interest in Italian painting.

Affluent colonists generally regarded their Governors as their ultimate models of fashion; and often the Governors single-handedly set the standards of taste--in

architecture, furniture, painting--which their associates adopted and popularized as the latest style.⁷⁶ The Penns' Lieutenant Governor, James Hamilton, played a particularly significant role in the establishment of an "official" portrait style in Philadelphia. On October 20, 1752, three years after he had assumed the post of Governor, Hamilton noted in his Cash Book the expense of two new paintings:

pd Mr. Woolaston for 2 half length Pictures
£36--

John Wollaston, a second-rate English painter,⁷⁷ had emigrated to New York in the spring of 1749. A spokesman of popularized rococo taste, he was recognized immediately as the most fashionable portraitist in that city. Like other second-rate English painters who visited the Colonies, he became, by American standards, first-rate. During the next decade he completed over three hundred portraits in the Middle and Southern Colonies and left an indelible mark upon colonial painting.⁷⁸ Most art historians previously have maintained that Wollaston did not visit Philadelphia before 1758.⁷⁹ After he left New York in April 1752, however, he passed about eight months in Philadelphia--long enough to paint two portraits for James Hamilton--before he moved on to Annapolis in March 1753. The presence of this stylish painter in Philadelphia in 1752 may have altered the entire complexion of the city's artistic community. John Hesselius, for example, may have embraced Wollaston's stylized "almond-eye" motif much earlier than most art historians have suspected.⁸⁰ Certainly Benjamin West, a frequent caller at Bush Hill, was familiar with his work well before Wollaston returned to Philadelphia in the spring of 1758.

Wollaston exerted a substantial influence on West

during his second brief stay in Philadelphia from the spring of 1758 to the spring of 1759.⁸¹ He received portrait commissions from men who were on the periphery of West's sphere of patronage, including William Peters, Reverend Richard Peters, and Alexander Gordon. Through various associations West probably knew many of Wollaston's sitters: Reverend Peters was president of the trustees of the College from 1756 to 1764; and Gordon's brother Thomas financed Henry Benbridge's studies at the Academy.⁸² In 1758 Benbridge, West's young friend, "received his instruction from ... Wollaston."⁸³

West himself also studied painting under Wollaston. In his portraits of Elizabeth Peel (see fig. 29) and Thomas Mifflin, especially, he exhibited direct borrowings from Wollaston and a total adoption of his teacher's stylized treatment of facial features and attention to textiles.⁸⁴ West's personal relationship with Wollaston, however, was even more deep-seated than his stylistic affinity; for Wollaston became, in 1758, the champion painter of William Smith's coterie of young artists. In the September issue of the American Magazine his abilities were highly praised: Smith paid tribute to the fame of the "eminent face-painter, whose name is sufficiently known in the world," and Francis Hopkinson proudly identified himself as the author of the "Verses inscribed to Mr. Wollaston." In his second stanza the poet divulged that Wollaston often permitted the young artists of Smith's group to observe him at work:

Oftimes with wonder and delight I stand
To view th' amazing conduct of your hand.
At first unlabor'd sketches lightly trace
The glimm'ring outlines of a human face;
Then by degrees the liquid life o'erflows
Each rising feature

After applauding Wollaston's talents, Hopkinson devoted

the last stanza of his poem to Benjamin West:

Nor let the muse forget thy name O West,
 Lov'd youth, with virtue as by nature blest!
 If such the radiance of thy early Morn,
 What bright effulgence must thy Noon adorn?
 Hail sacred Genius! mayst thou ever tread,
 The pleasing paths your Wollaston has lead.
 Let his just precepts all your works refine,
 Copy each grace, and learn like him to shine.
 So shall some future muse her sweeter lays,
 Swell with your name, and give you all his
 praise.⁸⁵

In this stanza Hopkinson belied an almost apologetic tone; he recognized that Wollaston's talents and style were more accomplished and more fashionable than West's. Apparently the transient portraitist had eclipsed the rise and popularity of the native painter. Hopkinson urged West to "copy each grace" of Wollaston's style and to master the more refined techniques of his instructor. Only then could West, whom Hopkinson regarded as endowed with greater inherent ability and genius, surpass Wollaston's achievements. In all likelihood, the poet's assessment of the relationship between West and Wollaston was just.

West himself readily acknowledged Wollaston's superior expertise and, quick to satisfy his thirst for self-improvement, eagerly "tread the pleasing paths" that his teacher opened for him. Undoubtedly he profited from his association with Wollaston; before the prolific portraitist returned to England in the spring of 1759, West already had journeyed to New York to practice his new skills and to find his fortune. One might maintain that Wollaston, who had begun his American career with unprecedented success in New York, personally encouraged his ambitious protégé to make the trip.⁸⁶

If one may judge from West's experiences, the de-

cade of the 1750's was indeed the "seedtime of Philadelphia painting." Coincident with the demise of the Quaker political establishment, the craft of painting flourished in Philadelphia. A new, outgoing, cosmopolitan group of men established themselves as tastemakers--as the cultural elite--and lent vital support and direction to the craft. Benjamin West readily allied himself with this new breed of patrons of the arts; and through his aristocratic associations he acquired social grace, notoriety, financial encouragement, and exposure to the great art collections in Philadelphia. Furthermore, in the city West found ample opportunity to master the mysteries of his craft. He exchanged ideas with fellow-painters and other young artists who circulated within the sphere of the Academy and College. A frequent visitor to the city's many print and "color" shops, he gained a knowledge of the painter's models and materials. Finally, as the student of a number of professional painters he received instruction--unusually thorough for a young colonial painter--in the methods and actual execution of the craft.

After West left Philadelphia and found the success which Francis Hopkinson had promised him, he seemed to forget the remarkably extensive education that he had received in Philadelphia. As he viewed his years in the Colonies from the window of his studio in London, he thought only of the world of art he had not known as a youth and not of the thriving artistic community he had helped to establish in Philadelphia. When, in 1771, a Boston merchant requested that his untutored son be admitted as a student in West's studio, the artist advised that the youth acquire, through his own initiative, some knowledge of natural form and the rudiments of the craft before he contemplated studying in Europe. "My Advice," he began his lengthy reply,

is that he may be indulged in the Pursuit of the Art by his own Observations after Nature, and that he may the more speedily accomplish it, I beg he may be permitted the Use of Colours, tho' this is not the modern Receipt to make a Painter. ... [painters must] surmount, early in Life, the mechanical Difficultys of Painting, that is the Handling of the Pencil and the Management of Colours, that their Hand might keep pace with their Ideas, so as to receive Pleasure from their Performances. ... young Artists should receive great Pleasure from what they do, as it is that alone can compensate for the great Fatigue which must arise from the prodigious Length of Time necessary to make a painter, let him have ever so great a share of Genius.

West concluded with a note on his own experience as an aspiring young painter in Philadelphia:

I write my Opinion on this Matter with greater Warmth than I should have done, had I not been once in your Son's Situation, which I have found since my Arrival in Europe was the most fortunate circumstance that could have happen'd to me: My having no other Assistance but what I drew from Nature, while had I come to Europe sooner in Life, I should have known nothing but the Receipts of Masters.⁸⁷

This passage raises a number of poignant questions. To what extent did Benjamin West, as a young man in Philadelphia, "pursue art by his own observations after nature?" Why did he claim that his youth was "quite obscured from art," when, as we have seen, he lived in a city which took pride in its patronage of art and when he found, through his association with Provost Smith and his group, an outlet for the expression of noble sentiments? How did he "surmount the mechanical difficulties of painting?" More specifically, how did he train his hand to "keep pace with his ideas?" What did West see in Phila-

delphia and how did he record and interpret what he saw? How did he relate his ideas in visual terms? Of course, one may attempt to resolve these questions only by examining the documents--the visual documents--which West left behind in Philadelphia. The remainder of this discussion treats one--perhaps the most significant one--of these documents: the American Sketchbook of Benjamin West.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹Bridenbaugh, p. x. Also consult E. B. Greene and V. D. Harrington, American Population Before the Census of 1790 (New York: 1932).

²This prosperity first gained expression in the erection of monumental public buildings: Christ Church (1727-1744, steeple added 1754), the State House (1731-1751), the Pennsylvania Hospital (begun 1755), and St. Peters (begun 1758). Private individuals followed suit by constructing fashionable country estates and city houses: Mt. Pleasant (1761), Port Royal (1762), Cliveden (1763-1764), and the Stamper-Blackwell House (1764) and Powel House (1765). The wealthiest men, of course, already had set the precedents for these great houses: Hope Lodge had been built for Samuel Morris in 1723, Stenton for James Logan in 1728, and Bush Hill for James Hamilton in the mid-1740's. As wealth increased and disseminated, Philadelphians increasingly emulated the Georgian aesthetic. They adopted both the baroque and rococo styles first in their architecture and then in their furniture, silver, and painting. For architecture see George B. Tatum, Penn's Great Town (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), pp. 27-38; Joseph Jackson, Early Philadelphia Architects and Engineers (Philadelphia: 1922), pp. 29-71; and Robert C. Smith, "Two Centuries of Philadelphia Architecture, 1700-1900," Transactions of the American Philosophical Society (March 1953), pp. 289-95. Also consult Verner W. Crane, Benjamin Franklin and a Rising People (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1954).

³Bridenbaugh, p. 168.

⁴As noted earlier, West was not actually enrolled in the Academy. Furthermore, the exact time at which he began his studies in conjunction with the school remains a mystery. Galt claimed that he began his tutelage well before "he attained his sixteenth year," or before 1754 (p. 65); but Flexner has discredited that statement in "West's American Neo-Classicism," pp. 22-24.

⁵See Bridenbaugh, pp. 40-47.

⁶Reverend Richard Peters and Tench Francis were Anglicans, William Allen and William and Edward Shippen were Presbyterians, William Plumsted was a Quaker-turned-Anglican. Among the trustees elected between 1749 and 1758 were Franklin (who served as President of the board from 1749 to 1756), Charles Willing, Samuel McCall, John Inglis, Joseph Turner, James Hamilton, and John Mifflin. See Biographical Catalogue of the Matriculates, pp. xi-xvii; Bridenbaugh, pp. 42-43; Tolles, p. 151; Montgomery, pp. 43-45, 118.

⁷Bridenbaugh, pp. 56-57, 59. About 100 students were enrolled in the College, 90 in the Academy, and 120 in the Charity Schools. Smith, I, 60.

⁸Quoted in Gegenheimer, pp. 31-32.

⁹See Ibid., pp. 36-41; Charles J. Stillé, A Memoir of the Rev. William Smith, D. D. (Philadelphia: Moore & Sons, Printers, 1869), pp. 5-6; Bridenbaugh, pp. 56-57.

¹⁰Quoted in Ibid., p. 61. Despite this kind of criticism, Smith did effect many beneficial changes at the College. He broadened the curriculum, toughened criteria for admission, and upgraded standards of instruction. He served as Provost until 1791.

¹¹Galt, p. 88.

¹²Ibid., pp. 59-60. Also see Gegenheimer, pp. 105-06; and Dunlap, I, 41, 43.

¹³February 23, 1772, West, in London, to Peter Thomson, in Philadelphia, Hart, "West's Family," p. 13.

¹⁴August 5, 1817, West, in London, to Mrs. Sarah Robeson, in Philadelphia, Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁵December 24, 1804, Farington, III, 36. Also see Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 27.

¹⁶See Bridenbaugh, p. 92; and Appendix I.

¹⁷Although many collectors acquired books--particularly specialized works--through agents in London, the majority traded directly with the numerous booksellers, printers, and publishers in Philadelphia. In the Pennsylvania Gazette of March 2, 1758, for example, the printer David Hall sponsored a lengthy advertisement of his stock of books, including Gibb's Rules of Drawing and Livy's Roman History. For general discussions of the availability

of books see Bridenbaugh, pp. 70 ff.; and Tolles, pp. 144 ff.

¹⁸Flexner has established that West employed the frontispiece of the fourth volume of Rollin's work as a source for his painting, The Death of Socrates. West completed this canvas before he finally settled in Philadelphia. "West's American Neo-Classicism," pp. 20-22.

¹⁹See Smith, I, 58-59; and the first volumes, respectively, of the Folio, Quarto, Octavo, and Duodecimo Accession Books of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

²⁰Bridenbaugh, p. 154. Also see Ibid., pp. 104-06, 156, 338; Gegenheimer, pp. 66 ff., 98 ff.; and consult Hastings. Reed became an attorney, a General of the Continental Line during the Revolution, and, later, Governor of Pennsylvania. Hopkinson found a happy median between patriotism and art; he designed the American flag.

²¹Bridenbaugh, pp. 107-08. In 1759 Duché married Hopkinson's sister Elizabeth.

²²Very little is known of John Green. Apparently he was a successful portraitist in Philadelphia and a member of Smith's group. In the August 1758 issue of the American Magazine, Godfrey published his tribute to Green: "A Pindaric Ode on Friendship." The introverted poet begged Green's company, "If now no Charming maid/ Waits thy pencils pow'rful aid" Green was also a close friend of West, who drew the likeness of his fellow-painter in his sketchbook (see Figure 9). In 1773 Green and his wife moved to Barbados, where he evidently made a tidy sum through the sale of prints engraved after West's paintings. Before November 1773 he left Barbados, "engravings from Mr. West's paintings having so rapid a sale," and settled in Bermuda. In the summer of 1774, however, he visited London and was received at West's studio "truly like a Brother." There he continued to paint and found West "very flattering; I have painted a small picture since my arrival to let him judge of my strength in the art." August 1774, John Green, in London, to Thomas Smith, in Philadelphia, West's Letters, HSP. Also see Dunlap, I, 31.

²³Ibid., p. 109. Also see Gegenheimer, pp. 65, 95 ff.; Cheyney, p. 93; and Thomas Clark Pollock, The Philadelphia Theatre in the Eighteenth Century (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), Appendix A.

²⁴Both Hopkinson and Duché kept in touch with West and

later visited him in London. On September 23, 1766 Hopkinson wrote home to his mother that "Mr. West & Mrs. West entertain me with the utmost Hospitality--this House is my Home in London, where I live quite agreeably. . . . Dr. Franklin is very kind to me--I am very happy in his good Company--He made up a Party the other Day--Mr. and Mrs. West, Mrs. Stevenson, Miss Stevenson, one Miss Blunt & myself--We all went down the Thames in a Boat & spent the Day at Greenwich most agreeably." Quoted in Hastings, p. 137. On January 24, 1767 he wrote: "Mr. and Mrs. West are extremely kind to me--they are my Friends indeed--I live with them in a Manner perfectly agreeable to myself--And I shall never think I have sufficiently repaid the Obligations I am under to them." Quoted in Ibid., p. 141. Hopkinson soon returned to Philadelphia and supported the Revolution. Duché, however, became a Loyalist and eventually settled in London. In 1779 he used engravings after paintings by West for the frontispieces of his two-volume Discourses on Various Subjects. His son, Thomas Spence, studied painting under West for a brief period. See Gehenheimer, p. 160.

²⁵Quoted in Ibid., p. 107. Another of Godfrey's pastoral poems, entitled "The Invitation," was published in the January 1758 issue of the American Magazine.

²⁶See Galt, 52-58. Hopkinson attended the Academy from 1751 until May 1754, when he enrolled in the College (although he continued to pay tuition at the Academy until April 17, 1756). Duché studied at the Academy from 1751 to the quarter ending in April 1753. He was employed as a tutor at the College from 1753 to 1756. Both youths received their degrees from the College in 1757. Clearly they had acquired a broader education than either West or Godfrey. See the Book of Accounts Belonging to the Academy in Philadelphia; and Biographical Catalogue of the Matriculates, pp. xxix, 1.

²⁷July 25, 1769, West, in London, to Jonathan Morris, in Philadelphia, Stewardson, p. 219. Apparently the young men often wandered as far as the Treaty Tree in Shackamaxon, where William Penn concluded his famous treaty with the Indians in 1683. West completed his equally famous painting of the scene (PAFA) in 1771. In 1783 he recalled that "this tree . . . was held in the highest veneration by the original inhabitants of my native country . . . and I well remember about the year 1755 . . . often resorting to it with my schoolfellows (the spot being a favorite one for assembling in the hours of leisure) . . ." Quoted in Dunlap, I, 40; Marceau, p. 31; and Memoirs of the

Historical Society of Pennsylvania (1825), p. 97.

²⁸This celebrated poem has never been cited or discussed in full. Perhaps the best treatment is offered in Gegenheimer, pp. 102 ff. Gegenheimer erroneously speculates that the subject of West's portrait was Rebecca Moore, "of whom West is known to have painted a portrait about this time," and who became the wife of William Smith on June 3, 1758.

²⁹These same themes recur in a poem written by Francis Hopkinson during his stay with the Wests in London in 1767. Entitled "Genius," the poem was dedicated to West and the Bishop of Worcester. Of West Hopkinson wrote: "E'en West, whose Genius Nature made to rise,/ And claim Attention from uplifted Eyes;/ Which, like an Eagle, meets the Blaze of Day,/ While little Birds but hop from Spray to Spray,/ Whose quick Conception forms the great Design,/ Whose skilful Hand runs o'er the flowing Line;/ Soft on the Canvas spreads the glowing Thought,/ And views the Wonder which his Hand has wrought." Quoted in Hastings, p. 151. So similar are the sentiments expressed in this poem to those in the work of "Lovelace" that one might reasonably attribute the earlier lines to the hand of Hopkinson. cf. Bridenbaugh, p. 168.

³⁰Presumably Smith later visited West in London. He sailed from New York on February 13, 1762 for an extended stay in England, and he may have met up with West after the artist arrived in London in August 1763. See Gegenheimer, p. 111; and Smith, p. 289. Apparently, however, West's relationship to this former tutor soon became somewhat sour. Smith complained that West was slow to thank him for the leading role he had played in arranging the marriage of the painter to Betsy Shewell. On December 13, 1766 he objected to Francis Hopkinson, who was then staying with the Wests in London, that "I wrote him by his Bride & did every Thing he expected of me in that Affair; but he has never been kind enough to send me a Line." Quoted in Hastings, p. 138.

³¹Copley-Pelham Letters, p. 45.

³²November 12, 1766, Ibid., p. 51. See Richardson, Painting in America, p. 75.

³³cf. Ibid., p. 71.

³⁴Quoted in Ibid., p. 76.

³⁵Williams died in an almshouse in Bristol, England, on

April 27, 1791. For Williams's career, see Dunlap, I, 30, 39; Sawitzky, "William Williams," pp. 240-42; Dickason, pp. 128-32; Flexner, First Flowers, pp. 177-82; and Richardson, "William Williams," pp. 5-23.

³⁶October 10, 1810, West to Eagles, Dickason, pp. 131-32.

³⁷Ibid., p. 131.

³⁸See, for example, his portraits of William and David Hall (1766), the sons of Benjamin Franklin's former partner in the printing business, at the Winterthur Museum. Williams also painted theater scenery. In 1759 David Douglass, manager of the travelling Hallam Company of players, paid Williams the considerable sum of £100 for "a New set of Scenes" which he designed for the Southwark Theater. Pollock, pp. 14-15; and Richardson, "William Williams," p. 12.

³⁹On January 13, 1763 Williams announced in the Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser: "WILLIAM WILLIAMS Limner &c, Being lately returned from the West-Indies; desires to acquaint the Publick, that he now lives in Loxley's Court, at the sign of Hogarth's Head, his former place of Residence, where he intends to carry on his Business, viz. Painting in General. Also an Evening School, for the Instruction of Polite Youth, in different branches of Drawing, and to sound the Hautboy, German and common Flutes . . ." Quoted in Alfred Coxe Prime, The Arts & Crafts in Philadelphia, Maryland and South Carolina, 1721-1785: Gleanings from Newspapers (Philadelphia: The Walpole Society, 1929), p. 13; and Richardson, "William Williams," p. 13. Also see Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 17.

⁴⁰Prime, p. 308.

⁴¹See Ibid., pp. 201-02.

⁴²Quoted in Richardson, Painting in America, p. 42; and Charles Coleman Sellers, Benjamin Franklin in Portraiture (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1962), p. 16.

⁴³May 31, 1750, Pennsylvania Gazette. This advertisement also appeared in the Gazettes of June 7 and 20. Winter had good reason to publicize his abilities; for earlier that spring Thomas Penn, through his agent Richard Peters, had awarded the commission for a view of Philadelphia to George Heap, after first finding both Winter and James Claypoole incapable of the task. This must have been a bitter blow to Winter, for his shop was next-door

to Heap's. Heap, however, died before his drawing was engraved, and Winter profited by improving the design, from which was issued the famous 1754 engraving of "Scull and Heap's East Prospect of Philadelphia." See E. P. Richardson, "James Claypoole, Junior, Re-Discovered," The Art Quarterly (Summer 1970), p. 160; Sellers, Franklin in Portraiture, p. 17; and Nicholas B. Wainwright, "Scull and Heap's East Prospect of Philadelphia," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (January 1949), pp. 16-25. Winter remained active until at least 1771, when, on June 1, he advertised in the Pennsylvania Chronicle: "To be disposed of ... one landscape of cattle going out in the morning, being four feet six inches by three feet six inches ...; one other landscape, representing the evening painted after the manner of Pusine" Prime, pp. 13-14. Winter died late in 1782; his estate included "16 Boards painted" and "18 Doz. and 5 Prints." Cited in Sellers, Franklin in Portraiture, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁴On March 23, 1752 Hamilton noted in his Cash Book (1739-57): "paid Jno Winter in full for Landskip Gilding painting &c prect." On August 1, 1754 he paid Winter £8-10 "for a Landskape," and on February 20, 1755 £10-7 "for painting Charict &co." James Hamilton Papers, HSP.

⁴⁵Quoted in Frederick B. Tolles, "A Contemporary Comment on Gustavus Hesselius," The Art Quarterly (Autumn 1954), p. 271. Hesselius's portrait of Logan is now in the HSP. Hesselius was born in 1682 and trained in Stockholm as a portrait painter; he emigrated to Wilmington, Delaware, in 1711 and moved to Philadelphia the following year. For general discussions, see Christian Brinton, comp., Gustavus Hesselius (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1938); Roland E. Fleischer, "Gustavus Hesselius: A Study of His Style," American Painting to 1776, pp. 127-58; Flexner, First Flowers, pp. 95-102; R. Peter Mooz, comp., Philadelphia Painting and Printing to 1776 (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1971), pp. 18-22; and Sellers, Franklin in Portraiture, pp. 13-15.

⁴⁶Cited in Theodore Bolton and George C. Groce, Jr., "John Hesselius," The Art Quarterly (Winter 1939), p. 79.

⁴⁷Sawitzky, "American Work of West," p. 442. For Hesselius's career, see Richard K. Doud, John Hesselius: His Life and Work (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Univ. of Delaware, 1963). Sawitzky attributes the portrait of Mrs. Thomas Freame (1742, HSP), daughter of William Penn, to John Hesselius. Catalogue Descriptive and Critical of the Paintings and Miniatures in the Historical Society of

Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1942), pp. 41-42.

⁴⁸John Hesselius was immensely successful: he "married well and lived like a country gentleman on the Eastern Shore" of Maryland. Flexner, First Flowers, p. 103. He had always enjoyed comfortable circumstances. Even in 1749, at the age of twenty, he could afford £3 to become a member of the Philadelphia Dancing Assembly. See Bolton and Groce, p. 79; and Joseph P. Sims, The Philadelphia Dancing Assemblies, 1748-1948 (Philadelphia: George H. Buchanan & Co., 1947), p. 50. Dr. Mooz argues that Hesselius met Feke through his association with the Assembly; for many members were painted by Feke. See "Robert Feke: The Philadelphia Story," American Painting to 1776, p. 211.

⁴⁹Compare his portraits of John Wallace (1751, Powel House, Philadelphia) and Henry Slaymaker (ca. 1760, private collection). These are illustrated in Mooz, comp., Philadelphia Painting and Printing, pp. 23-24, figs. 16 and 17.

⁵⁰West's relation to John Hesselius must have been close. One of West's patrons in Philadelphia was Benjamin Franklin, who, in 1756 or 1757, noted in his household accounts two payments of £2-10 to "B. West for drawing Sally's Picture." Quoted in Sellers, Franklin in Portraiture, p. 47. In the fall of 1757 Franklin commissioned John Hesselius to take a second likeness of his daughter Sally (Sarah; later Mrs. Richard Bache). See Ibid., pp. 52-53; and Bolton and Groce, p. 80. Since West and Hesselius were in Philadelphia at the same time and painted for the same patron, one might contend they were well-acquainted. At least West, who may have felt a pang of bitterness at Franklin's request for a painting of a subject he had just treated, might have been curious to discover in what respects Hesselius's talents were superior to his own.

⁵¹Hide had been one of a group of "foreigners" who, in 1732, had established a small academy of art in Fleet Street in London. He later settled in Philadelphia. March 23, 1803, Farington, II, 88.

⁵²Quoted in Bridenbaugh, p. 168. Also see Biographical Catalogue of the Matriculates, p. xxi.

⁵³Hart, "Autobiographical Notes of Pratt," p. 460.

⁵⁴May 17, 1750, Pennsylvania Gazette; and Bridenbaugh, p. 165. Claypoole also sold books.

⁵⁵Also quoted in Richardson, "Claypoole Re-Discovered,"

pp. 160-61.

⁵⁶October 28, 1812, to Rembrandt Peale, quoted in Ibid., p. 161. Richardson argues that the James Claypoole whom Peale hoped to see was James, junior. This would seem unlikely; for Claypoole's son, who was born between 1743 and 1749 (as Richardson himself proves), would have been, in 1762, but a youth between thirteen and nineteen years old. One can only doubt Richardson's contention that Peale travelled from Maryland to Philadelphia intent upon viewing the paintings of the younger Claypoole, when the father's works were readily available for study. Bridenbaugh set forth the same argument as Richardson, but he was not aware that Claypoole's son was a painter. He claimed that "Peale went to call on James Claypoole. The older artist generously shewed him his work, including his portrait of Miss Wrench of Maryland, who later became Mrs. Claypoole" (p. 166). By "the older artist" he could not have referred to James, junior, for Peale (1741-1827) was at least two years his senior. The source of all the confusion is clearly Peale himself. The fifty years which had elapsed since his first visit to Philadelphia must have clouded his memory. Whatever the case, one might safely maintain that Benjamin West developed "intimate" friendships with both Claypooles.

⁵⁷Quoted in Ibid., p. 165.

⁵⁸Dunlap, I, 111.

⁵⁹Hart, "Autobiographical Notes of Pratt," pp. 460-61.

⁶⁰Bridenbaugh, p. 168.

⁶¹January 30, 1749/50, Pennsylvania Gazette. Also see Bridenbaugh, p. 165.

⁶²February 6, 1749/50, Pennsylvania Gazette. Both Marshall and Claypoole advertised in the Gazette throughout the 1750's. Marshall also carried on his trade as a house painter. On June 10, 1755 Edward Shippen wrote his father that he had commissioned Marshall "to paint the Stair Case" of Dr. Thomas Graeme's city house, which Mrs. Graeme "had got nobody to do." Papers of the Shippen Family, I, 191, HSP. This seemingly insignificant reference actually sheds light on the nature of patronage in Philadelphia. Graeme's daughter Elizabeth, the fiancé of William Franklin until forsaken in 1762, was a good friend of Francis Hopkinson and other members of Provost Smith's group and a poetess in her own right. Obviously she was well-acquainted with the Shippen family and, in all

likelihood, with Benjamin West as well. Through these associations and the proximity of his lodgings to Marshall's shop, West must have enjoyed a close relationship with Marshall himself. See Bridenbaugh, pp. 111-14, 192; and Smith, I, 289.

⁶³Quoted in Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 18; and in Gegenheimer, p. 97. Apparently Clarkson was known as a mapmaker. Bridenbaugh, p. 245.

⁶⁴Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 18. Clarkson was a member of the American Philosophical Society and four times mayor of Philadelphia.

⁶⁵Neil Harris has asserted that, "for some patrons, clientele [of painters] was a means of identifying with the practices of the mother culture, an imitation of the lavish patronage of gentry and nobles on the other side of the Atlantic." The colonial elite "may have turned to painters for physical evidence of their accomplishments, lacking the social certifications they might have expected from more stable establishments." "Keynote Remarks," American Painting to 1776, pp. 10, 12.

⁶⁶See Sawitzky, "The American Work of West," pp. 452-58.

⁶⁷See John Smibert, The Notebook of John Smibert. With Essays by Sir David Evans, John Kerslake and Andrew Oliver. And with Notes Relating to Smibert's American Portraits by Andrew Oliver (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1969), pp. 22, 28, 96-97. Most of these men were trustees of the Academy. See Biographical Catalogue of the Matriculates, p. xi. The reader should also consult Henry Wilder Foote, John Smibert, Painter. With a Descriptive Catalogue of Portraits, and Notes on the Work of Nathaniel Smibert (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950); and Stephen T. Riley, "John Smibert and the Business of Portrait Painting," American Painting to 1776, pp. 159-80.

⁶⁸These accounts coincide with the relevant entries in Smibert's Notebook, p. 28.

⁶⁹Quoted in Mooz, "Robert Feke," p. 211. Also see Ibid., pp. 187-212; and consult Henry Wilder Foote, Robert Feke, Colonial Portrait Painter (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1930); and R. Peter Mooz, The Art of Robert Feke (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1970).

⁷⁰This statement is subject to qualification. Chief Justice Allen may have commissioned portraits from both

Smibert and Feke. The portrait of Allen (Independence National Historical Park), formerly thought to have been painted by Benjamin West, has recently been attributed to Feke by Dr. Mooz. cf. Hirsch, p. 49, fig. 1.

⁷¹See Bridenbaugh, pp. 186-91. West, as we have seen, contributed to Allen's collection. On May 11, 1762 he wrote from Florence to Joseph Shippen, in Philadelphia: "I ... thank both you and my worthy friend Mr. John Allen in making my performances so deserving the Attention of his worthy Father and the Governor, as to procure their orders for a Collection of Copyes from some of the great Masters, and their Patronage and generous assistance have contributed so much to facilitate my Studys in Italy I shall ceertainly think it my Duty to apply my Talents as much as possible to their service" Downs Manuscript Library.

⁷²See Bridenbaugh, p. 194; Morton, p. 13n.; and Theodore Thayer, Pennsylvania Politics and the Growth of Democracy, 1740-1776 (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1953), pp. 25-30, 75 ff.

⁷³Ezra Stiles, 1754, quoted in Bridenbaugh, p. 218.

⁷⁴Quoted in Ibid., p. 214.

⁷⁵Dunlap, I, 44. Also see Galt, p. 91.

⁷⁶These ideas are presented in Mooz, The Art of Robert Feke, Chapter 4.

⁷⁷Flexner writes: "the pupil of 'a noted drapery painter in London,' Wollaston was one of the least subtle of fourth-rate English artists, but his pictures had a beef-eating impressiveness." First Flowers, pp. 189-90.

⁷⁸For Wollaston's career, see Theodore Bolton and Harry Lorin Binsse, "Wollaston, An Early American Portrait Manufacturer," The Antiquarian (June 1931), pp. 30-33, 50, 52; George C. Groce, "John Wollaston (Fl. 1736-1767): A Cosmopolitan Painter in the British Colonies," The Art Quarterly (Summer 1952), pp. 132-48; Richardson, Painting in America, pp. 49-50, 69 ff.; and Craven, pp. 256-65. Note that Hamilton recorded payment to "Mr. Woolaston," not "Wollaston." See Dunlap, I, 167-68. cf. Groce, p. 133.

⁷⁹The chronology of Wollaston's early painting career in America has baffled art historians for a number of years. Bolton and Binsse maintained that Wollaston worked in New York from 1751 to 1755 (p. 32). Groce introduced new

evidence. On April 1, 1752 the vestry of Trinity Church in New York commissioned Wollaston to copy a portrait of Reverend William Vesey, a former rector. Wollaston next appeared in Annapolis when, on March 15, 1753, the Maryland Gazette published an anonymous poem in his praise. Groce speculated that Wollaston spent the interim between these two dates in England (pp. 138-39). Richardson rejected this interpretation and claimed that Wollaston worked in New York from 1749 to 1752 and in Annapolis from 1753 to 1754. Painting in America, p. 50. None of these writers devoted attention to an incisive study of the stylistic development of Wollaston or his contemporaries. In 1970 Dr. Mooz, in his reevaluation of the work of Robert Feke from a stylistic approach correctly postulated that Wollaston painted in Philadelphia in the early 1750's. The Art of Robert Feke, p. 180. Also see Mooz, comp., Philadelphia Painting and Printing to 1776, pp. 39-40, 44-47; Sawitzky, "American Work of West," p. 443; and Bolton and Groce, pp. 83 and 88, n. 16. Hamilton's account establishes that Wollaston worked in Philadelphia prior to the spring of 1758. He did not remain in New York until 1755; he did not journey to England in 1752. Indeed, he followed the most logical itinerary: he paid an early visit to Philadelphia.

⁸⁰Bolton and Groce rightly maintained that Wollaston "was the main influence on John Hesselius" and speculated, in contrast to their later assumptions, that Wollaston painted in Philadelphia "much earlier" than 1758 (p. 83). cf. Doud, p. 39. The idealized, "almond-eye" motif was not peculiar to Wollaston alone; a group of lesser artists in England regarded the almond-shaped eye as a fashionable refinement. See Craven, pp. 257-58.

⁸¹See Sawitzky, "American Work of West," pp. 443-44; and Flexner, First Flowers, p. 190. cf. Richardson, Painting in America, p. 74.

⁸²See the Book of Accounts Belonging to the Academy.

⁸³Stewart, p. 14. Benbridge and the Gordons must have known Wollaston well. On March 2, 1770, Thomas Gordon, in Philadelphia, imparted to his stepson (Benbridge) in London this practical advice: "I ... wish if you should have a Patient, as Woolaston [note the spelling] used to Call the Ladies whose Pictures he Drew, worth ten or twenty thousand Pound and you should like her then you would make use of all the address that an Accomplish'd Cavilear from Italy is Master of to gain her Affections" Benbridge Papers, Winterthur Museum.

⁸⁴Sawitzky found Wollaston's influence also in West's

portraits of Mrs. William Smith and Ann Inglis. "American Work of West," p. 443. Also see Groce, p. 147; and Flexner, First Flowers, p. 190.

⁸⁵This poem is cited in Ibid., p. 190; Bolton and Binsse, p. 33; and Groce, p. 142. Also see Bolton and Groce, pp. 83-84.

⁸⁶cf. Groce, p. 143.

⁸⁷June 18, 1771, to Shrimpton Hutchinson, in Boston, Copley-Pelham Letters, pp. 118-19.

CHAPTER III

THE SKETCHBOOK

The American Sketchbook of Benjamin West, now in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, offers a fascinating account of the artist's development during his prolonged stay in Philadelphia from 1756 to 1759. The drawings illuminate four aspects of West's life in the city: the individual personalities with whom he was familiar, the nature of the artistic community of which he was an active member, the degree to which his style was influenced by painters who had worked or were working in Philadelphia, and the development of his abilities as a draughtsman.

The Sketchbook consists of thirty sheets, or sixty pages, of chain-laid paper; each sheet measures $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height by $3\frac{7}{8}$ inches in width. On the first page two of the former owners, both Philadelphia merchants, have signed their names: "Robert Enoch Hobart 1779," and "5th April 1820 R. E. Hobart." The sketches are all--save one important ink composition--pencil drawings. West added ink outline to many of the pencil studies; one of the later owners applied a fixative over several others and identified eight of the individuals drawn by the artist.

There is no way to determine the chronological sequence in which West made his drawings. In the following discussion twenty-five sketches have been removed from their paginal sequence and arranged within a stylistic framework.¹ From this approach they best illuminate the development of the artist's expertise as a draughtsman and

the increasing refinement of his visual language.

Part I: Sources and Methods

Why did Benjamin West own a sketchbook? Apparently there was no precedent in Philadelphia for his interest in drawing; few of his fellow painters bothered to make preliminary sketches for their canvases, or studies from nature or from others' pictures.² What set West apart from the vast majority of colonial painters? He was, as we have seen, eager to improve his inherent abilities. He harbored an intensely serious attitude toward his profession; he was a man with a mission, a definite goal. To meet the challenge he had set before himself, he exploited every source and method at his disposal. Drawing was one medium both of expression and of refinement, which he began to master in Philadelphia and which he was to rely upon throughout his life.³

Jonathan Richardson, in his "Essay on the Theory of Painting," defined drawing as

giving the just form and dimension of visible objects, according as they appear to the eye; if they are pretended to be described in their natural dimensions; if bigger or less, then drawing or designing signifies only ... giving those things their true form, which implies an exact proportionate magnifying, or diminishing in every part alike.

And this comprehends also, giving the true shapes, places, and even degrees of lights, shadows, and reflections; because if these are not right, if the thing hath not its due force, or relief, the true form of what is pretended to be drawn cannot be given (pp. 77-78).

In this definition Richardson characterized drawing as a "mere imitative art," dependent upon visual truth and exactitude. He argued that,

as there are not two men in the world who at this instant, or at any other time, have exactly the same set of ideas, ... so, neither are there two men, nor two faces, ... perfectly alike.

A designer therefore must consider, when he draws after nature, that his business is to describe that very form, as distinguished from every other form in the universe (pp. 78-79).

On a very elemental level, then, the draughtsman was no more than a "visual scribe" who recorded, within strict limits of realism, the images before his eyes.

If the drawing was first a true representation of nature, Richardson concluded that it was also a primary record of the noble thoughts which the painter intended to convey in his finished works. Drawing was thus both an academic exercise and a medium through which the artist roughed out and first articulated his ideas. In the sketch, Richardson maintained, the artist trained his eyes

to see the beauties that are really there; the perception of which lets us into another world, more beautiful than is seen by untaught eyes: And which is still improveable by a mind stored with great and lovely ideas, and capable of imagining something beyond what is seen. Such a one every designer ought to have (p. 80).

The drawing incorporated both the true representation of nature which the artist perceived and the lofty thoughts which he conceived from his study of natural form. Richardson claimed that, since drawings comprised the fundamental statements of the artist's language of vision, they were "the very spirit and quintessence of the art..." (p. 82).

When one considers the rarity of colonial drawings, he must appreciate the unique force of West's ambition, his professional impatience, his unswerving drive

for self-improvement. Even in the pages of his sketchbook, the young artist aimed to rise above the banalities of colonial portraiture and to acquire a facility in the mysteries of his craft that would allow him to devote his energies to the expression of noble sentiments.

The most striking feature of the Sketchbook is its subject matter: each drawing focuses on the human figure; each reflects urban images--the tastes, culture, and characters of Philadelphians. The sketches comprise single and multiple studies, studies of isolated elements, and cameos. Many are true representations of nature based upon direct observation; others are studies of engravings and paintings which West saw in Philadelphia; a select few are almost wholly imaginative. West drew on these three themes--perception, imitation, and conceptualization--to create preliminary studies for finished drawings and paintings. Although concerned solely with the human figure, he experimented with a number of modes of expression: portraiture, genre, and treatment of classical subjects.

On the first page of his sketchbook West made studies of six male faces, five in profile and one three-quarter-face (fig. 1). The undeniably unlearned, almost childish quality of these drawings reflects the rudimentary stages of observation. As a novice draughtsman, West found the study of the human profile the least complex and demanding exercise in drawing; for the profile was an image which he might successfully capture in two dimensions. He has relied on line to define form; only in his treatment of hair did he afford an embellishment to stark outline. He emphasized this linearity by the application of ink over the pencilled lines in certain areas and by the omission of shading. The figure at lower left, however, indicates the direction West follows in subsequent sketches. By turning the profile to three-quarter-face



Figure 1

and suggesting foreshortening in the plane of the shoulders, he has attempted to depart from the two-dimensional plane of the paper and to achieve depth in three dimensions.

In these multiple studies West has offered a scaled-down but true representation of reality. From Richardson he learned that the draughtsman's

business is to consult the life, and to make drawings of particular figures, or parts of figures, or of what else he intends to bring into his work, as he finds necessary; together also with proper ornaments, or things belonging to his invention ... till he has brought his picture to some perfection on paper, either in ... loose studies, or in one entire drawing (p. 81).

In his "diminishing" of "every part alike," however, West has not employed proportional axes or grids; he has relied upon his eye and his own free-hand sense of proportion. He may have realized the value of recording faithfully his observations, but he was unaware of the technical aids which the draughtsman used to assure that "particular" elements be accurately interrelated.

If West was first concerned with the true representation of natural form, in most of his drawings he incorporated his perception of nature within the framework of conventional formulae. In the sketch of his father (fig. 2) he has borrowed the pose from Faber's mezzotint of Sir Isaac Newton (fig. 3).⁴ Many colonial portraitists derived their compositions from this popular but dated mezzotint. John Hesselius, in particular, borrowed, almost line for line, the pose and setting of the source in his portrait of Joshua Maddox, dated 1751.⁵ West has used the engraving (or, perhaps, Hesselius's painting) only as a rough model for his sketch; unlike Hesselius, he did not



Figure 2

John West



Figure 3

Sir Isaac Newton, 1726.

Mezzotint by John Faber, after John Vanderbank (1694-1739).

imitate literally the outmoded print but was more concerned to relate his father's likeness and character. He has altered significantly the basic pose; by changing the positions of legs, hands, and fingers, he has rejected the academic formality and rigidity of the model to achieve a feeling of spontaneity and ease more in keeping with rococo taste.⁶ Furthermore, he has subtly shifted the perspective to offer a more lateral view of his father, rather than the bold frontality of Newton's position. By these compositional devices, he has lent subjective meaning to his perception. Although he borrowed heavily from the model, he gave vent to his imagination and conveyed his feeling that a good portrait be a true representation of likeness and character, not a slavish copy of precedent.

Here West again has employed line to establish basic form, particularly in the articulation of clothing. In specific areas, however, he has progressed beyond linear and planar (or two-dimensional) vision to a more plastic treatment which characterized his sitter as a three-dimensional form in space. While his treatment of the hands is flat, hurried, and incomplete, his rendering of textiles (especially in the right sleeve) and the carved scroll of the arm of the chair indicates his concern to express tactile qualities. In his relation of the facial features, West has achieved a sense of modelling and three-dimensional form. The eyebrows, eyes, nose, and hair are unusually detailed, and the loose treatment of the mouth and chin suggests the fullness of flesh. West has tempered his reliance on line by including shading to the right of the nose and along the right side of the face and chin--sculptural qualities which he probably borrowed from Faber's print. These areas of shadow contrast with the area of light in the hair to

suggest a source of light above and to the left.

In his drawings of two half-length cameos (fig. 4), one a self-portrait, West further exhibited his dependence upon established pictorial models. He has subdued the heavy lines which define the forms of these finished sketches through a liberal use, particularly in the rendering of the garments, of smudge shading. He has related the tactile qualities of the textiles by a careful delineation of their prominent folds and details. In contrast to the portrait of his father, here West has established that the clothes cover--rather than simply define--human frames (note the ruffle of lace at the woman's right shoulder). In his handling of the torsos, therefore, he has represented these figures as masses which displace space. In the self-portrait he has emphasized depth of form by shading the blank area behind the torso. He employed none of these plastic effects, however, in his relation of the two faces. He did not consider, as he did in the drawing of his father, the qualities of flesh: he established the shapes with simple, blunt ovals and determined the features with crude, awkwardly oriented lines. Through his borrowing of conventional idealizations which denied individuality and consciousness of direct observation, West displayed an affinity with Gustavus Hesselius; he may have derived this generalized conception from studies of Hesselius's works, such as the portraits of Lydia Hesselius and Mrs. Ericus Unander (see fig. 24).⁷

West executed a number of cameo drawings in his sketchbook. All have a finished quality and are confined by the oval outline (see particularly fig. 37)--elements which suggest that they are preliminary studies for miniatures. Indeed, West did employ this drawing of himself as a model for his miniature self-portrait (fig. 5), the earliest known likeness of the artist.⁸ Years later West



Figure 4



Figure 5

Benjamin West

Self-portrait, 1756.

Water color on ivory, oval, 2½ by 2 inches.

Yale University Art Gallery, gift of Mrs. John Hill Morgan.

recalled that it "was done for me, and by me ... and well I remember it, I was then 18 years old, it is now 60 years ago."⁹ From this statement and the inscription on the back of the original silver frame,¹⁰ one is able to assign a date of 1756 to the miniature. Furthermore, since the sketch is clearly a preliminary study for the self-portrait, one can assert that West began to fill the pages of the Sketchbook in the same year.¹¹

If West borrowed many elements of the sketches of his father and of himself from sources other than his own observation of nature, he was simply adhering to one of Richardson's fundamental principles. The artist who desired ultimately to convey ideas through the conceptualization of natural form first had to study in depth both nature and the works of other artists. "In order to give this just representation of nature," wrote Richardson,

... a man must be well acquainted with nature I will add to these, an acquaintance with the works of the best painters and sculptors, ancient and modern: For it is a certain maxim, "No man sees what things are, that knows not what they ought to be" (p. 79).

This adage played a key role in the development of West's language of vision; if he were at times excessive in his reliance upon tradition, he was conscious of the artist's responsibility to master the idioms of the most accomplished of his predecessors before he might proceed to subjective expression.

Although he borrowed heavily from traditional forms, West exercised, particularly in the drawing of his father, his inventive genius and active imagination. While he utilized the pictorial formulae of the baroque aesthetic, he consciously embraced the less formal conventions of rococo taste. Into these standard themes he

injected the fruits of his own perception and conceptualization: that is, his concern to record and satisfy the tastes of his times and to convey the intrinsic character of his subject. As he attained increasing proficiency in each of these determinants of expression, West began to realize a style of his own.

His stylistic development may be seen in a general comparison of a series of his sketches with John Smibert's portrait of Joseph Turner (fig. 6). Smibert, as noted earlier, was one of the "best painters" to have visited Philadelphia; West must have been familiar with his work, even if he did not specifically study the Turner portrait. From a single model, similar to Smibert's painting, West made three studies on one page of his sketchbook (fig. 7). In the first drawing (that is, on the left), he imitated the pose of the figure in his source, updating elements of fashion and the outward appearance of his subject (note that West's figure displays shorter hair and sleeve-cuffs than Smibert's). In the central sketch he adapted the same pose to the bounds of the cameo oval. Finally, in the drawing on the right, he altered the pose while maintaining the figure's general position and relation to space.

Just as he had first imitated and then transformed his original model, West elaborated upon the last of his three sketches to create a finished portrait-study (fig. 8). In this drawing, which strongly reveals the influence of John Hesselius,¹² he embellished the heavy lines which defined the forms of the three small studies. He filled in detail, facial features, and shading (under the arm and on the side of the face) to render a sense of volume and displacement of space. Having attained sufficient mastery of conventional idioms to allow freer reign to his own visual involvement, he has begun to assimilate his self-



Figure 6

John Smibert

Joseph Turner, 1740.

Oil on canvas, 54 by 44 inches.

Private Collection.



Figure 7



Figure 8

imposed academic training with his imaginative bent and direct observations. He displays his concern for planarity, clarity and unity of distinct elements, and closed, self-contained form; but he hints, in the slight broken line of the figure's right sleeve, that he is becoming less dependent on harsh outline as the determinant of form.

In the final drawing of this series, the portrait of his fellow-painter John Green (fig. 9), West expressed a more subjective, imaginative way of looking at the world. Although the application of a fixative to this study has rendered the lines more pronounced than they originally were conceived, to a great extent West has abandoned his reliance upon outline as the arbiter of form. His lines, with the striking exception of those which establish the sweep of the right arm and the shape of the palette, are broken, indistinct, suggestive, rather than definitive. Shading is no longer harsh or local but meaningfully distributed in gradations of tone. West has seen his subject more as a form in space than as a flat, two-dimensional plane which defied depth. Moreover, he has presented the painter as a man of his times, engaged in his profession. Through his relation of Green's casual stance, purposeful expression, and piercing glance, West has captured an immediacy, a breath of life, a statement of character.

Although, in this sketch, West has conveyed a certain realism, he still has expressed, through the use of a standard pose, his reliance upon conventional idiom. He disclosed a fundamental inability to articulate objective observation and subjective conceptualization within the confines of traditional formulae. He was most successful, as we shall see, when he rejected such bounds altogether and freely stated his unique visual language. Here, at



Figure 9

John Green

least, he has struck a middle ground between a statement of his own perception and an imitation of conventional idealizations. He has reached a compromise, as Richardson urged, between "clair-obscur, relief, and perspective," and "giving the true form of what is pretended to, that is, the outline." The drawing, Richardson argued,

must be just, ... pronounced boldly, clearly, and without ambiguity: Consequently, neither the outlines, nor the forms of the lights and shadows, must be confused and uncertain, or woolly, upon pretence of softness; nor, on the other hand, may they be sharp, hard, or dry; for either of these are extremes, nature lies between them (p. 78).

In his portrait of John Green, West has attained a breakthrough: he has resolved, in his own terms, the relationship between the perception and conception of natural form. His lines are less bold, more subtle; they are neither wholly explicit nor wholly implicit. In his development away from unqualified linearity, West has begun to formulate his own style.

Part II: From Portraiture to History:
Problems of Conceptualization

When one considers the extent to which West subordinated his ambitions of becoming a history painter to the study of conventional compositions of portraiture, he is perhaps surprised to discover a number of drawings of classical subjects in the Sketchbook. As noted, history painting, the highest form of expression of the artist's profession, enjoyed sparse audience in Philadelphia. The art collections of Allen and Hamilton were exceptional in their inclusion of paintings of historical subjects; they did, however, reinforce West's interest in history and

afford models for study. Significantly, West pursued his interest more extensively within the private pages of his sketchbook than on canvas.

In his full-length representation of Mercury (fig. 10), West borrowed isolated forms from a variety of sources and then failed, abysmally, to assimilate them. He has taken the pose from a rococo print--a three-quarter-length portrait--perhaps the same which he employed in the drawing of John Green. He may have determined the shape of the legs from one life-study and the features of the head, arms, and torso from another.¹³ Over the whole he has superimposed pertinent classical accoutrements, the iconography of Mercury, borrowed undoubtedly from an engraving, or a book such as Ripa's Iconologia.¹⁴ Clearly he encountered a great deal of trouble in assembling all these elements. West may have been interested in classical subject matter, but he was unaware of the intrinsic, studied proportion and order of classical art; he paid no attention to the harmonic relationships of bodily components.

Of greater significance, perhaps, is what West attempts, not what he does not know. This is a daring, ambitious, imaginative composition, truly an American Mercury. Although the artist has simply added the trappings of a classical subject to a sexless American body and set his figure in a standard pose, he has exhibited progress in certain technical facets of draughtsmanship. He has suggested depth and volume through his use of smudge shading on the right side of the face, under the chin, and on the neck between the collarbones. He also used, for the first time, diagonal-line shading (not cross-hatching) to darken the right latissimus dorsus (the lateral muscle under the figure's right arm), the entire right side of the chest, the upper portion of the left arm, and the inside

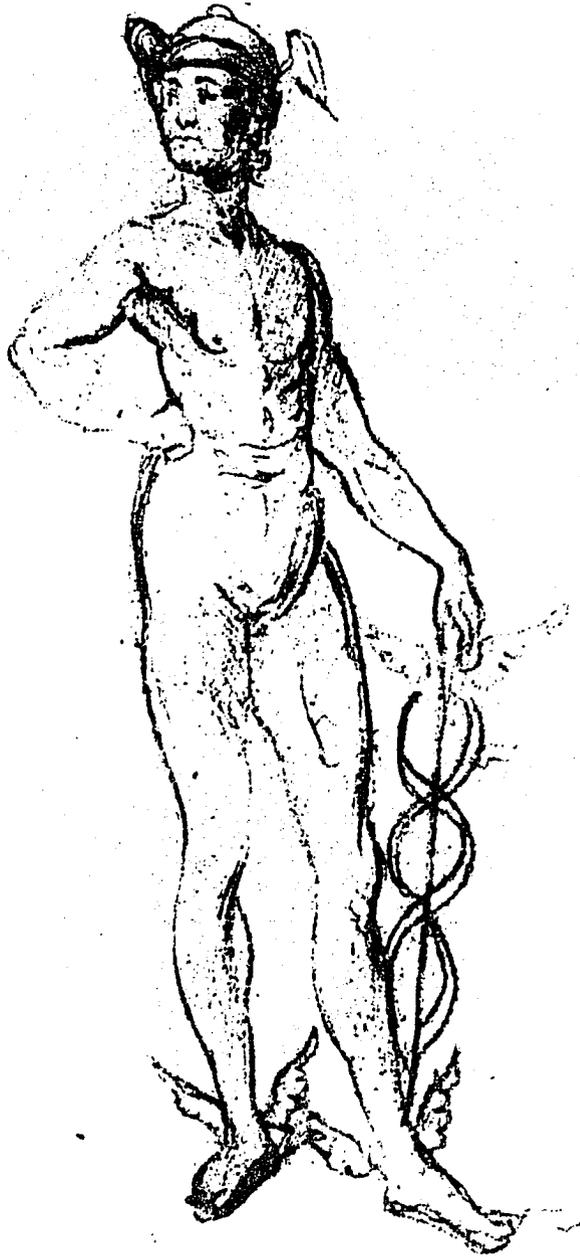


Figure 10

of the right thigh.

In this sketch, West emphatically has stated his almost total ignorance of human anatomy and proportion. So eager was he, in the early years of his career, to attain his specific goals that he skimmed lightly over such fundamental studies. Here he exhibits little understanding of the interrelationships of elemental shapes and size: the left arm is larger than the right; the abdomen is larger than the chest; the legs are disproportionately larger than the torso. Furthermore, West's rendering of muscular structure is impressionistic rather than scientific (note, for example, the stylized loops which define the pectoralis major of the chest).

West may have felt justified in his neglect of the study of anatomy. Richardson noted that since even the best painters always had been

deficient in anatomy, there are more instances of faults in this part of painting than in any other; for it is not enough to understand the true structure and form of the muscles of a human body, but to know how they will appear in every attitude and operation; a science which probably no man hath ever had leisure and genius to acquire sufficiently (pp. 80-81).

If no man had acquired a thorough knowledge of anatomy, West might have reasoned, why should he complicate his grand design by undertaking such a study? The artistic needs of colonial culture condoned and reinforced these personal priorities. Patrons of portraitists demanded only a reasonable, idealized likeness, not proficiency in the refinements of visual language. As a spokesman of colonial taste, West intuitively overlooked certain technical considerations; as an aspiring history painter, he consciously chose to channel his energies into overcoming

problems of the visual expression of ideas.

West's rationale was not shared by his young counterpart in Boston. In 1756, at the age of eighteen, John Singleton Copley composed a book of anatomical drawings as a reference for his own use. Copley employed two sources in the compilation of his book; specifically, in his ninth plate (fig. 11) he used the trace-and-transfer method to produce a nearly exact copy of Plate III of Jacob Van Der Gracht's Anatomie (fig. 12).¹⁵ Copley selected anatomical studies especially suited to the needs of the artist: Van Der Gracht carefully noted that his plates had been designed to impart "a thorough knowledge of the different relations of the body most necessary for the art of painting."¹⁶ Although Copley obviously took pains to assure that his drawings be accurate, he could not conceal that the study of anatomy was essentially foreign to his mentality and immediate artistic needs. In this plate, for example, he failed to capture the strained but natural juxtaposition of the fingers of his model's left hand.

By compiling an anatomy book Copley did not intend to acquire greater technical knowledge which he might apply to portraits of Boston sitters; rather, he prepared himself to satisfy his own desire to become a history painter.¹⁷ While both Copley and West entertained this ambition, they separately developed distinctive systems of self-training which they felt would prepare them to proceed beyond portraiture. Copley endeavored to master the technical difficulties of draughtsmanship; West concentrated in his drawings on the relation of ideas and associative images.

West expressed his ignorance of anatomy in other drawings of classical subjects. In his sketch of a winged figure (fig. 13) he has achieved a more accomplished concept of proportion and spatial relationships but has

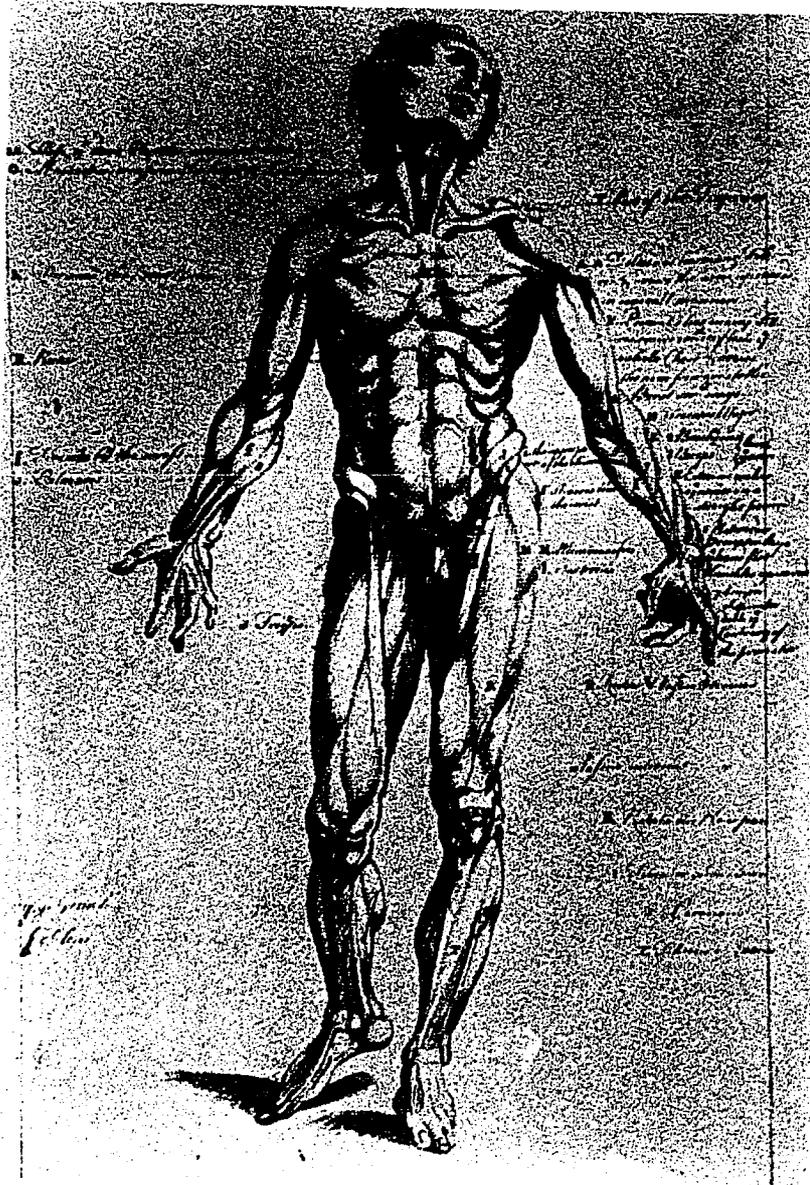


Figure 11

Plate IX of
John Singleton Copley's
Anatomy Book (1756).

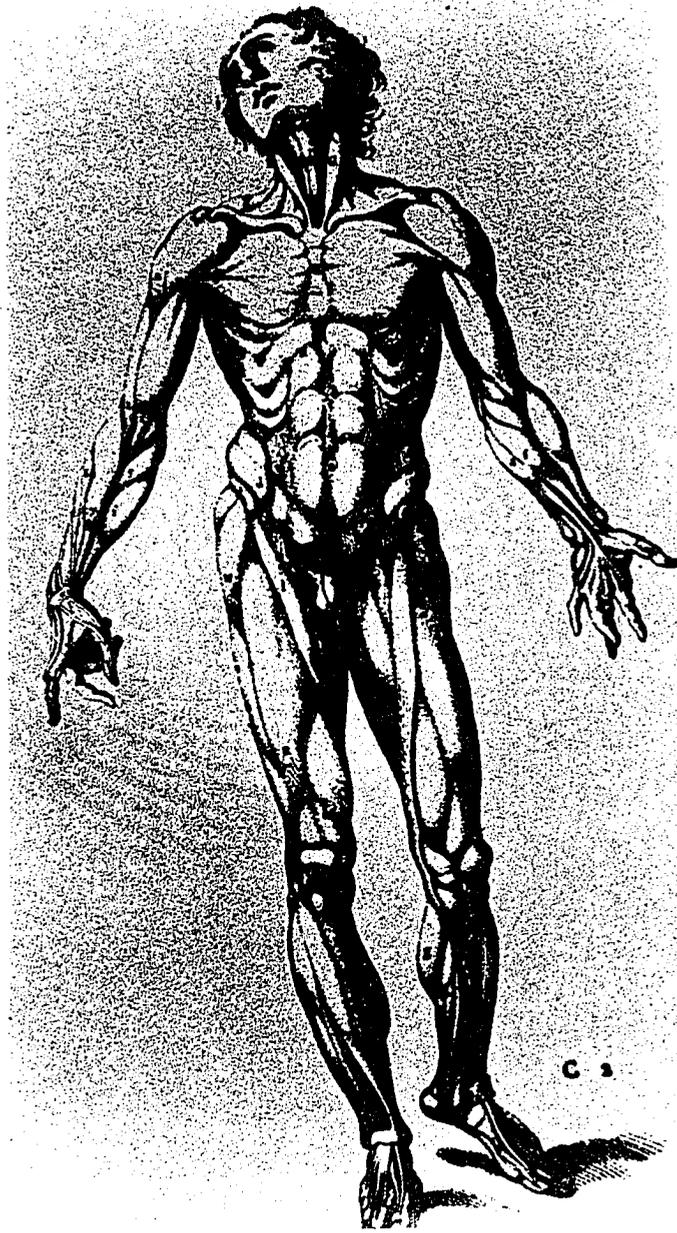


Figure 12

Plate III of Jaccb van der Grecht,
Anatomie der wtterlicke deelen
van het Menschelick Lichaem.



Figure 13

failed to convey perspective, foreshortening (in the sharply turned shoulders), or anatomical realism (in the arms and legs).¹⁸ He has, however, minimized his dependence on outline to define form; he has employed loose, broken lines to enhance the sense of movement established by the trailing garment and the extension of the gown suspended above the wings.

In his second representation of a winged female figure (fig. 14), West further has displayed his reliance upon prints and books for the basic composition and accoutrements of his drawings of classical subjects.¹⁹ He may have based this sketch upon the central figure of the frontispiece of Charles-Alphonse du Fresnoy's De Arte Graphica (fig. 15); his rendering of the shape and tilt of the head and the placement of the feet suggests general borrowings from this engraving by Simon Gribelin after Henry Cooke.²⁰

West was indeed familiar with the work of Gribelin. The English engraver had executed the frontispieces for at least two editions of De Arte Graphica (see also fig. 17), one of the books which William Williams had given West in 1749. John Galt wrote in his biography that during the artist's first visit to Philadelphia Edward Pennington presented West with "six engravings by Grevling." Since no engraver by this name is known, one might speculate that Galt was referring to Simon Gribelin.²¹ Gribelin's book illustrations were well-known in the Colonies and a source of inspiration for American painters. In Newport in 1744 Robert Feke had copied Gribelin's "Judgment of Hercules," the frontispiece to Shaftesbury's Characteristicks.²² Since both Feke and West resided in Philadelphia in 1749, one might suggest that Feke himself directed West's attention to these engravings. West probably knew, in addition to the plate in



Figure 14



Figure 15

Frontispiece to du Fresnoy's
De Arte Graphica (1695).
 Engraving by Simon Gribelin,
 after Henry Cooke (d. 1700).



Figure 16

Frontispiece to Trapp's
Praelectiones Poetica.
 Engraving by Simon Gribelin.



Figure 17

Frontispiece to du Fresnoy's
De Arte Graphica (1756).
Engraving by Simon Gribelin.

du Fresnoy, the frontispiece of Joseph Trapp's Praelecti-ones Poetica, one of the books recommended as supplementary reading to students at the College (see Appendix I; fig. 16).

Unlike Feke, however, West did not slavishly imitate Gribelin's designs; rather, he borrowed only in general terms, imaginatively combining direct observation with elements from Gribelin and other sources. In the second drawing of a winged figure (fig. 14) he has allowed free reign to his own visual conceptions. He has crossed the right leg in front of the left instead of adhering to the reverse stance; in thus resolving his own composition, however, he has established an awkward, almost impossible pose and has disrupted the weight/support relationship of torso and legs. Here, too, West encountered anatomical problems: he compressed the torso and the legs below the knees and reduced the sternocleidomastoid (the muscle at the side of the neck) to an unnatural bulge.

In the final drawing of this series (fig. 18)--the only one in the Sketchbook composed completely in ink--West probably used the trace-and-transfer method to copy an engraving of a religious subject. Through direct imitation he has achieved foreshortening (in the recessive slant of the shoulders) and a greater proficiency in the handling of ink. He has developed a feel for the angle of the stylus and the requisite rapidity of the stroke (compare with figs. 1 and 21). However, his attempts to convey depth and muscular definition through repeated, short flecks of ink (on the chest, left knee, and ankles) are hesitant and irrational in comparison with Copley's tracings of anatomical plates. In this, as in all of his drawings of classical subjects, West disclosed an inability to assimilate his own creative genius with imitation. By adapting his perception to conventional models, he



Figure 18

obscured the force of his own conceptualization.

Part III: Tradition, Fashion, and Expression

Despite his keen interest in classical subject matter, West realized that he could not overcome problems of conceptualization by treating associative images with which he was not completely familiar and which he did not wholly understand. Portraiture was the task at hand; through his numerous studies in this formal medium, West ultimately developed competence as a draughtsman and began to formulate a consistent language of vision.

As his artistic sensibilities matured, West increasingly substituted fashionable for traditional forms and injected his own visual concepts into his work. One can sense this development from an examination of a single page of the Sketchbook (fig. 19). West probably derived the central male figure from a seventeenth-century engraving (note the collar in the seventeenth-century style), which he then updated by including a modern wig and reducing the large gauntlet to a modern ruffled cuff. Similarly, in the drawing of the female figure he has altered many details of his source. He may have borrowed (but reversed) the pose from an engraving which reflected current taste, Van Haecken's mezzotint of Catherine Clive (fig. 20); he then made several changes to his original composition, adding a hat and exchanging flowers for the book. The first oval of his subject's face was wider and lower than the present, and her waist was considerably larger. In his attempt to improve upon his source, however, West has sacrificed the basic scheme of proportion (note the grotesque left arm) and compromised his own visual honesty. Here again he was torn between adherence to convention and imaginative self-expression.



Figure 19



Figure 20

Catherine Clive, 1735.

Mezzotint by Alexander Van Haecken,
after Joseph Van Haecken.

This primary theme recurs in all of West's portrait studies. After he had settled upon a model for his composition, he made alterations and additions which reflected current tastes and his own observations and conceptualizations. He may have borrowed the composition of his drawing of a seated woman (fig. 21), for example, either from Smith's mezzotint of Princess Anne (fig. 22) or from Robert Feke's portrait of Margaret McCall (fig. 23). While Feke literally copied the pose and many details of the prototype, West more freely departed from convention. He changed the disposition of the head, the clothing, and the hair-style in order to express current fashion and natural ease, and he changed the physical proportions of the model to represent the slighter frame of his subject. Whether he borrowed directly from the mezzotint or from Feke's derivative work, West was determined to make his composition his own.

Feke's style influenced other artists in Philadelphia. In his portrait of Mrs. Ericus Unander (fig. 24), aged Gustavus Hesselius emulated--in his setting, rendering of textiles, and stylized treatment of expression--the New Englander's work. Even Hesselius, however, progressed beyond Feke's transitional style; he altered the position of the arms of Feke's subject to conform to the graceful, informal pretensions of rococo taste. In addition, he adopted the almond-eye motif associated with the idealized portrait formula of John Wollaston, who, as we have seen, visited Philadelphia in 1752.

West may not have been influenced directly by Gustavus Hesselius, but he did develop a similar basis of composition. He expressed his espousal of the new aesthetic--which Wollaston and, to a lesser extent, Feke had brought to Philadelphia--in a series of sketches taken from life and of studies for portraits in oil. Perhaps



Figure 21



Figure 22

Princess Anne, 1692.

Mezzotint by John Smith,
after Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646 or 1649-1723).



Figure 23

Robert Feke

Margaret McCall, 1749.
Oil on canvas, 50 by 40 inches.
The Dietrich Corporation.



Figure 24

Gustavus Hesselius

Mrs. Ericus Unander (Mary Hesselius), ca. 1750.
Oil on canvas, $30\frac{5}{8}$ by $25\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
Mrs. Nedjibe Ott Unander.

the most significant of these is the multiple study of three figures (fig. 25). West has employed only a few lines to define the form of the male profile but has succeeded in suggesting the character of his sitter (note the fleshy jaw, upturned mouth, and clear eye). Both sketches of female subjects further substantiate the ease and facility of West's maturing style. In the figure at the bottom (or left) of the page, the artist has articulated only the dominant lines of form and established a gesturing pose. In the genre-like scene at the top (which he enclosed with a frame of dashing lines), he adapted this predetermined, standard pose to a commonplace situation. The woman extends her arms toward the heat issuing from a type of Franklin stove; she looks casually at the artist, her shoe exposed beneath her gown as if she were walking toward him. Here West has captured the spontaneity of the moment through his choice of subject and--of greater importance--his handling of line. He drew hastily in broad, sweeping strokes, omitting all but essential details.

As West gained confidence, facility, and proficiency in his draughtsmanship, he was able more fully to assimilate the disparate streams of knowledge which he had acquired from his self-imposed training within the artistic community of Philadelphia. He studied prints and the works of local painters so that he might realize, as Richardson advised, how, as an artist, he ought to see the world. Ultimately, as illustrated in this sketch (fig. 25), he so thoroughly understood and mastered the views of others that he was able to express his own. He substituted current for traditional norms; and through his treatment of fashionable conventions he found a medium for self-expression. He was, after all, a man of his times, best able to expound modern taste and to develop his own visual language through modern modes.



Figure 25

These themes are particularly evident in sketches which West employed as preliminary studies for portraits on canvas. In his drawing of a seated woman (fig. 26), the artist has derived his general pose and composition from Smith's mezzotint of Ann Roydhouse (fig. 27). He placed the right arm on a plinth and arranged the fingers of both hands in direct imitation of this baroque source (note also the large ruffle of lace of the sleeve and the button which holds the gathered material). Even here, however, he has introduced details representative of rococo informality; specifically, he has shifted the direction of his sitter's glance and dropped the left arm to the waist. In working this latter change, West evidently encountered some difficulty, for he labored over the lines which defined the hand.

In a second sketch of a seated woman (fig. 28), West has departed further from baroque formulae. He portrayed his sitter in a position of ease and grace, her hand resting comfortably in her lap rather than propped artificially upon a plinth. In many respects, the visual systems of the baroque aesthetic denied both the natural disposition of the human form and the artist's own perception of nature. West's use of a relaxed pose and his omission of traditional props and details suggest his adoption of a style derived more directly from forms found in nature than from visual standards defined and disseminated by prints. Indeed, the artist may have made this drawing from life; he employed free, rapid strokes of the pencil to record only the general form and shape of his subject and a few essential details (the prominent folds of the garment and the features of the face). The sketch bears such striking similarities to his portrait of Elizabeth Peel (fig. 29) that one may safely assume West intended it as a study for the painting.



Figure 26



Figure 27

Ann Roydhouse, 1701.

Mezzotint by John Smith,
after Sir John Baptist Medina (1659-1710).



Figure 28



Figure 29

Benjamin West

Elizabeth Peel, ca. 1758.

Oil on canvas, 47 by 34 inches.

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts,
gift of John Frederick Lewis.

Both the sketch and the painting reflect a new influence upon West's stylistic development: the work of John Wollaston (see fig. 30). The success of the English portraitist, who expounded the idealized informality of popular rococo taste, bolstered West's confidence in his departure away from traditional models. While West adopted certain elements of Wollaston's style (the almond shape of the eye and the treatment of textiles), he did not share Wollaston's view of the world. Wollaston soon developed a stylistic formula which allowed him to paint quickly but precluded a study of nature as the basis of artistic expression. Although West improved upon and organized nature to conform to the pictorial standards of his times, he continued, in the pages of his sketchbook, to draw from life and to refine his ability to record what he perceived.

In his sketch of a woman walking (fig. 31), West exhibited a more accomplished assimilation of imitation and expression. Here he has enlivened a fashionable pose through the use of tentative line in certain areas. By defining the upturned edge of the shawl and the lace of the subject's right sleeve with light, broken lines, he has suggested the force of a gentle breeze and the movement of walking. The same indistinct lines impart a feeling of sympathetic movement to the garland which the woman holds and to the bushes in the background. Through his inclusion of trees and bushes--the only elements of landscape in the Sketchbook--West has created an integrated scene. The figure appears to occupy real space, to respond to a real environment. The artist employed this drawing as a preliminary study for his portrait of Jane Galloway (fig. 32). In the painting he captured a similar feeling of presence by portraying his subject on a walk in a garden or wood, carrying a garland, her laced shawl



Figure 30

John Wollaston

Mrs. Samuel Gouverneur, ca. 1750.

Oil on canvas, 29 by 24 inches.

Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.

Photo courtesy of Winterthur.



Figure 31



Figure 32

Benjamin West

Jane Galloway, ca. 1758.

Oil on canvas, 50 by 39 inches.
Historical Society of Pennsylvania,
gift of Elizabeth Swift Shippen.

blown back over her left shoulder. He has suggested immediacy and spontaneity by placing his subject within a scene to which she might react naturally. Wollaston, on the other hand, denied his sitter's involvement with her setting (fig. 30); he simply superimposed her placid likeness over a stylized landscape not unlike a theater set.

In his placement of the arms of Jane Galloway, West departed from both the composition of his preliminary sketch and precedents established by Wollaston. He borrowed directly from a modern English source: the work of Joseph Highmore.²³ In a drawing of a three-quarter-length female figure (fig. 33), he imitated, almost line for line, Faber's mezzotint, after Highmore, of Teresia Constantia Phillips (fig. 34). He raised the left arm and altered slightly the fingers of the right hand, but in general copied his model, using bold, sweeping lines to establish outline. His strong reliance on this particular print is significant; for Miss Phillips was a celebrated actress, who personified the ideals of rococo taste. One might maintain that in using this print West has identified himself and his subject with a sophisticated statement of English culture.

The influence of Highmore upon West is further revealed through a comparison of West's sketch of a standing gentleman (fig. 35) with Highmore's portrait of John Penn (fig. 36), whose likeness Philadelphians may have known.²⁴ Apparently West intended to copy the composition of his model and then changed his mind. By eliminating the plinth upon which Penn rested his hand, the artist was obliged to place his subject's hand elsewhere. This change created problems: West had to establish a new arc for the arm and a new pose for the hand.²⁵ Finally, he was forced simply to apply the hand to the coat rather than extend it upward to the hip, its natural support.



Figure 33



Figure 34

Teresia Constantia Phillips, 1748.

Mezzotint by John Faber,
after Joseph Highmore (1692-1780).

Photo courtesy of Winterthur.



Figure 35



Figure 36

Joseph Highmore

John Penn, 1744.

Oil on canvas, 50 by 40 inches.
Historical Society of Pennsylvania,
gift of Mrs. John Frederick Lewis.

Even at this advanced stage of his stylistic development, West was still unable completely to assimilate traditional and modern--baroque and rococo--pictorial standards with his observations and visual ideas. However, he has mastered the compositional formulae of these conventional modes of expression. He has settled upon a treatment of line which is neither explicit nor implicit--linear nor painterly--but lies, as does nature, between the two extremes. Thus he completed the course of self-training that Richardson recommended for the draughtsman. As West worked within conventional confines, he attained his greatest success when he adhered strictly to conventional norms. In his finished study for a miniature (fig. 37), he clearly exhibited a thorough knowledge of current taste, of the trappings and idealizations of the rococo aesthetic. Such a command of idiom, however, was the meager achievement of the craftsman-painter; it precluded, to a large extent, imagination and creativity. West, bestowed with the mentality of an artist, aspired to more meaningful expression. He desired to exercise his own powers of perception and conceptualization, to glean ideas from his observations of nature and to express them in visual terms. If publicly he were obliged to work within conventional bounds in order to satisfy the tastes of his times, then privately, at least, he sought modes of expression that would allow him to perceive and conceptualize in his own visual language.

Part IV: Synthesis

In a final series of sketches West achieved a synthesis of the various elements which contributed to his artistic consciousness. He found that by abandoning the traditional idioms of portraiture he could create his own compositions, see the world through his own eyes, and



Figure 37

express his own ideas. As he looked about him in Philadelphia, he was struck by the changing temper of human character, the essential nobility of human nature, and the emotional qualities of the common scene. He determined to represent man as engaged in the pursuit of life. Thus he eschewed idealization--the subjection of natural form to pictorial formulae and systems--which denied the individuality of man and the creative genius of the artist. When West abandoned established systems of vision and formulated his own, he truly became an artist.

"Common nature," wrote Jonathan Richardson,

is no more fit for a picture than plain narration is for a poem. A painter must raise his ideas beyond what he sees, and form a model of perfection in his own mind which is not to be found in reality; but yet such a one as is probable and rational. Particularly with respect to mankind, he must... raise the whole species, and give them all imaginable beauty and grace, dignity and perfection; every several character, whether it be good or bad, amiable or detestable, must be stronger and more perfect (pp. 93-94).

Richardson urged the artist to perfect and organize nature within a visual system which automatically would idealize and express man's noble character. Such a formal systematization of nature lay at the base of the baroque aesthetic--a way of regarding the world which, by the late 1750's, was losing its viability. The artistic tenets of the rococo movement had begun to undermine the belief that nature must be controlled, organized, and perfected. Finally, Edmund Burke, in his Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (London: 1757), explained the visual revolution which had occurred since Richardson's day.²⁶ Burke maintained that nature, like man himself, could not be manipulated

meaningfully to conform to idealized systems. Beauty lay in the eye of the beholder, in his response to specific emotive qualities embodied in each natural form. The artist, who desired to express ideas and to evoke reactions from his audience, could extract only minimal meaning from nature if he submitted nature to system; conversely, if he combined in his composition forms whose physical properties and juxtapositions generated certain emotional reactions, he could powerfully unleash and express the noble sentiments locked within natural forms. Burke, then, rejected the baroque theory that beauty was a quality of an object; he upheld that beauty gained expression through the pleasurable emotions which objects--animate and inanimate--might inspire.

In nearly all of his sketches West attempted to improve upon nature; he was so intent upon meeting the traditional mandates of artistic expression--the baroque organization of nature that Richardson expounded--that he largely suppressed his own creative genius. Even as he worked within the confines of conventional systems, however, he made slight changes in pose and composition and increasingly laid faith in his own perception and visual ideas. Those seemingly insignificant alterations reflected West's growing confidence as a draughtsman as well as his concern to adjust his talents to the changing aesthetics of his times. While other colonial artists, with the notable exception of Copley, worked within the bounds of tradition or of idealized, current fashion, West already sensed the artistic temper of his day and began, in the pages of his sketchbook, to move in new directions.

In his sketch of men and women playing cards (fig. 38), West has applied his training as a portraitist to genre. Although the two ladies strike poses reminiscent of conventional portraiture, the poses and arrangement of

figures are West's own compositional devices. The artist made this sketch from life; seated in the parlor of a Philadelphia home, he simply recorded what he saw. He has minimized detail, leaving facial expressions undetermined and using shading only on the lateral surfaces of the Queen Anne chair (note the simple vase splat, sharply raked rear legs, and wavy stretcher). He has employed broken, rapid lines to approximate the momentary image before his eyes and to convey a sense of the spontaneity of direct observation.

From this general view of an ordinary scene West expanded certain elements--the two figures at the left--to create a finished drawing (fig. 39). One of the former owners of the Sketchbook identified these figures as Francis Hopkinson and Elizabeth Graeme, both close friends of West. During a visit to Philadelphia, John Adams described Hopkinson as

one of your pretty, little, curious, ingenious men. His head is not bigger than a large apple. . . . I have not met with any thing in natural history more amusing and entertaining than his personal appearance; yet he is genteel and well bred, and is very social.²⁷

If West's sense of proportion seems again to have run amok, the fault apparently falls on his subject's head. West has achieved a subtly pleasing composition in this drawing. By establishing the diagonal, upward sweep of Hopkinson's sword and the forward bent of his back, he has led the eye up to focus upon the faces. The tilted ovals of the heads, emphasized by the diagonal of Hopkinson's arm, interact so expressively that the void between them seems charged with emotion. In his composition West has conveyed an attitude of nonchalance and social ease and comfort.



Figure 38



Figure 39

Francis Hopkinson and Elizabeth Graeme.

This drawing is indeed far-removed from West's initial study of male profiles (fig. 1). Here the artist has offered a statement of his refined language of vision; he has settled upon a line, particularly in his treatment of the male figure, which is bolder than that which he employed in the preliminary sketch but which is still discontinuous and roughly rendered. He has, however, tempered his reliance on outline to define form by a liberal use of smudge shading (again, the application of a fixative to this and subsequent drawings has hardened the original lines). He has achieved certain sculptural, plastic effects by varying the tonal gradations of light and dark areas. The shadows which obscure the inside of Hopkinson's coat and the area under his arm, for example, are much darker than the shades which define the contour of his sleeve and the modelling of his face. West also has rendered lavish detail to establish the patterns of Hopkinson's clothes and the folds of Miss Graeme's dress. By these devices--liberal shading and detail--he has mollified his essentially linear conception of form and suggested his total perception of the scene. Although he creates depth and volume within the figures themselves, his vision is intrinsically planar; the figures both establish and occupy a single plane in space. Here, too, West expresses his concern for clarity of form and unity of related elements, both within each figure and between the two figures. All these aspects of West's visual language lend specific focus to his view of man; for he has seen and recorded these figures as living beings. Their forms stand out sharply, embellished only with the iconography of the pursuit of life, simultaneously common and noble.

In these and subsequent drawings West has recorded images and impressions in a spontaneous manner, unencum-

bered by the idealized formulae which he had labored to master. By proceeding beyond the confines of the artistic tradition in which he was reared, West has proven himself capable of original composition and accomplished draughtsmanship. His true genius--as these drawings attest--lay in his ability to capture the spirit of the world he saw and of the times in which he lived. He was most comfortable and fluent when he directly observed nature and trusted his visual judgment.

In his drawing of an inebriated gentleman (fig. 40), West developed his concepts of immediacy and his talent to relate ideas by carefully selecting natural forms charged with emotional content. Through his composition, choice of pose, and manipulation of line, he was able to extract and record the inherent expressive potential of nature. Thus he finally rejected the baroque demand that nature be perfected and organized within visual systems. Here he clearly refuted Richardson's contention that artists

ought to view all things in the best light, and to the greatest advantage: They should do in life as I have been saying they must in their pictures; not make caricatures and burlesques; not represent things as worse than they are; not amuse themselves with drollery and buffoonery; but raise and improve what they can, and carry the rest as high as possible (p. 116).

One might well wonder why West, who was determined to become a history painter, bothered to treat such a frivolous subject as a tipsy drunk. He realized that one of the artist's major concerns was the study of character and expression in man, not simply in the isolated rendering of facial features, but in the integration of all the components of man's outward appearance. If the artist

correctly interrelated these components, he might convey the intangible character of man--his emotions, mentality, consciousness. West learned that he, at least, could not wholly achieve such a synthesis of perception and conceptualization within the medium of conventional portraiture.

In this drawing West has geared every element to reinforce his conceptual theme. The figure exudes--in his stance, the curve of his mouth, and the lines which disclose the rotundity of his belly--the pungent air of recent satiation. His feet planted widely apart to expose his bandaged leg, he reels backward, uncertainly clutching a walking stick. Undoubtedly this man has just emerged from a good-natured tavern scuffle to summon a servant or carriage; his fingers are poised, ready to snap. In this vivid picture, the artist forcefully has expressed his concern for pictorial honesty, for a true representation derived from his own observations of the world.

At this stage of his career, however, West could not have departed from the traditional notion of portraiture without some reliance upon established models. Just as he had refined his style by imitating works of modern painters such as Wollaston and Highmore, here he betrayed general borrowings from the popular engravings of William Hogarth, particularly A Midnight Modern Conversation (fig. 41).²⁸ West was not exceptional either in his use of the genre mode or in his interest in Hogarth. The Boston painter John Greenwood also explored this form; from the same engraving he borrowed--perhaps more blatantly than West--the inspiration for his American Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam (1757-1758).²⁹

Hogarth's visual honesty--often grotesque and mercilessly critical of man's hypocrisy and the moral debasement of society--appealed to West's conceptual sensibili-



Figure 40

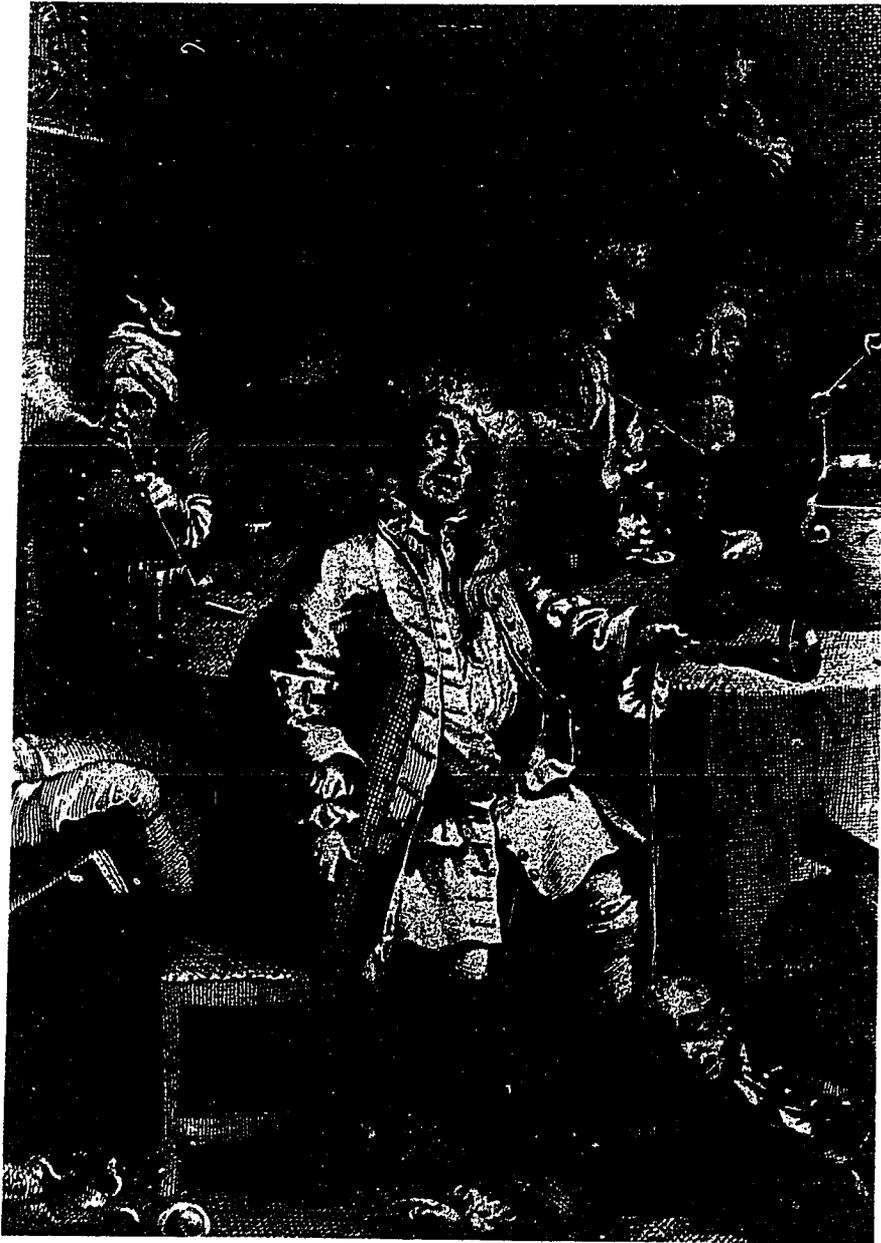


Figure 41

Detail of William Hogarth's
A Midnight Modern Conversation (March 1732/33).

ties; for it reinforced his desire to study character and expression in his figures. In his drawing of two men fighting (fig. 42), West has conveyed a sense of real energy and boisterous movement akin to that which Hogarth captured in the second plate of his Analysis of Beauty (fig. 43), a book West may have owned.³⁰ Through his rendering of flailing limbs and the dislodged wig and tricorner, West has projected a full sense of sensory perception (one can almost hear this unfriendly exchange); and through his detailed drawing of the expression of the figure about to be tripped, he has invited emotional involvement and sympathy for the beleaguered victim.

In his portrait of David James Dove (fig. 44), West has developed further his ability to portray the inner spirit of his subject. He has represented Dove, a former instructor at the Academy and a successful private tutor of English grammar, as a purposeful man, walking intently, his eyes set on the ground ahead.³¹ West has lavished a great deal of attention upon the articulation of Dove's facial features; in his shading he used tonal gradations of varying intensities to express plastic effects--the roundness of the nose and chin, the fleshy fullness of the cheek. He has also included shading under the feet to suggest that they were placed on solid ground. Despite these efforts to create three-dimensional space and depth, however, West's conception is so planar and self-contained that it departs but little from two-dimensionality.

In one of the last drawings in his sketchbook (fig. 45), West offered a full expression of the synthesis he had attained between imitation and expression--between tradition and fashion on the one hand and perception and conceptualization on the other. Here, to a greater extent than in the other drawings of this series, he has



Figure 42



Figure 43

Plate II (detail) of
Hogarth's Analysis of Beauty.



Figure 44

David James Dove



Figure 45

progressed beyond observation to create an imaginative composition. His device is simple indeed: he achieves unity through the repetition of an undulating line. The curve of the brim of the hat recurs in the mouth, the scarf, the hem of the coat, the loose ties of the breeches, and, of course, in the prominent wavy line of the walking stick. The use of this battered line, furthermore, reinforces the facial expression of the forlorn figure. Here West has combined--rather than idealized--natural forms in order to convey the character of his subject and to release the emotional energy of natural forms.

In the pages of his sketchbook West developed his powers of perception until he was able to see nature on his own terms, and he refined his inherent ability to conceptualize--to view nature as a repository of noble sentiments--until he was able to observe ideas. Finally, he trained his hand to record his synthesis of images and thoughts: that is, he espoused a language of vision which expressed his unique view of the world. Perhaps he felt that in order to extract ideas from nature, the artist was obliged to represent nature in a visually truthful manner. Thus his visual language was blunt, straightforward, explicit; thus he possessed a high regard for unity, planarity, clarity, and developed a line that was neither indistinct nor all-defining. By assimilating these elements, he ultimately found a style of his own. In the pages of his sketchbook, even more than in his canvases, he parted ways with the craftsman-painter; he became an artist.

Part V: After America

Throughout his life West continued to draw; he made meticulous studies of everything which appealed to

his fancy and of every form which he desired to translate to canvas. He became, of course, increasingly proficient in the art of drawing; he allowed greater freedom to his line, tempered much of his concern for planarity and clarity, studied atmospheric effects, and acquired a broader knowledge of the appearance of volumes in space (see fig. 46). While he improved as a draughtsman, however, he simply refined the basic manner in which he saw the world--simply enlarged the vocabulary of the visual language he had first expressed in the Colonies.

West himself must have realized that he had determined the nucleus of his style in America; for, having raised himself to the throne of English art, he encouraged students and fellow artists to study specific artistic virtues which he had not acquired as a youth. When John Singleton Copley submitted his portrait of Henry Pelham to an exhibition in London in 1766, he asked West for criticism of his work. In his long reply, West noted that

at first sight the Picture struck the Eye as being to liney, which was judged to have arose from there being so much neatness in the lines, which indeed as fare as I was Capable of judgeing was some what the Case. for I very well know from endevoring at great correctness in ones out line it is apt to Produce a Poverty in the look of ones work. when ever great Desition is attended to they lines are apt to be fine and edgey. This is a in works of great Painter I have remark has been strictly a voyded, and have given Correctness in a breadth of out line when closely examined; tho when seen at a short distanc, as when one looks at a Picture, shall appear with the greatest Bewty and freedom. for in nature every thing is Round, or at least Partakes the most of that forme which makes it impossible that Nature, when seen in a light and shade, can ever appear liney.³²



Figure 46

Benjamin West

The Family of the Artist, ca. 1780.

Pen and wash drawing on paper, 7¼ by 9½ inches.

Toledo Museum of Art, gift of Edward Drummond Libbey.

Perhaps West, who never completely abandoned his reliance on outline, noted that American painters, ignorant of the works of European masters, naturally entertained a predilection for linearity, that they employed distinct lines to define, almost to control, forms in nature.

West was also aware of his shortcomings in certain technical aspects of draughtsmanship, particularly in his scanty knowledge of human proportion and anatomy. In 1792, in his "Discourse" delivered to students at the Royal Academy, he urged young artists to acquire a command of anatomy and to practice drawing. He warned the student that "without the execution of which I am speaking, he will find himself at last far short of the goal for which he ran, but when he is thus accomplished, nature will be sure to follow his pencil in every line."³³ West himself never overcame his deficiencies in the treatment of anatomy which he first betrayed in his American drawings.

Finally, in 1807, West advised his students to emphasize "the study of Character in figures" and "a close and continued study of the Antique in order to acquire a pure taste and knowledge of perfect form."³⁴ The Elgin Marbles, the masterpieces of Phidias, he deemed "the perfection of art," for in them "nature predominated everywhere, and was not resolved into & made obedient to system."³⁵ In encouraging his students to study classical art, West simply perpetuated Richardson's maxim that "No man sees what things are, that knows not what they ought to be." He proffered a scheme of training not unlike that which he had prescribed for himself in Philadelphia. The artist, he felt, must master the techniques of his more accomplished predecessors before he attempts to express his own ideas with incisive force and meaning. West, however, was careful to recommend study, not imitation, of the works of other artists, for he knew that imitation was

an inhibitive business. Since his youth in Philadelphia he had realized that different men see "with different eyes; for, as no two things in nature are perfectly alike, so neither do any two persons eyes see the same thing exactly alike"³⁶

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

¹Flexner maintains that West did realize his own style in Philadelphia. First Flowers, p. 187.

²This claim bears qualification. As noted in the prefatory remarks, only a handful of drawings by professional colonial painters (West, Copley, and Greenwood) have come to light. However, in Philadelphia, as perhaps in other urban areas, drawing was evidently a popular pursuit, or, rather, a fashionable amusement among young ladies and gentlemen of the wealthy, leisured stratum of society; it was a form of entertainment and a corollary of social grace. Some painters, such as Winter and Williams, supplemented their incomes by offering lessons in various kinds of drawing. The fact remains, however, that most colonial painters (and, one might speculate, their second-rate counterparts in Europe) were not draughtsmen. On a professional level, drawing was practiced by artists, not craftsmen-painters. The craftsman, such as Wollaston, relied on standard formulae which precluded the need for preliminary studies or for a trenchant knowledge of natural form. His object was to make money by disseminating fashion. On the other hand, the rare artist, such as West, regarded expertise in draughtsmanship as essential and embraced drawing at an early stage in his career. Simultaneously, West belittled, with candid but defensive haughtiness, the "fashionable" drawing master who popularized this crucial element of the artist's noble profession. In this vein, he advised a young Bostonian who aspired to be an artist to become "acquainted with the Making of Pictures, and qualify himself for a Painter, and not as a Drawing Master." June 18, 1771, to Shrimpton Hutchinson, Copley-Pelham Letters, p. 119. Also see above, pp. 61-62, 83, n. 39; and Bridenbaugh, p. 169.

³Large collections of West's later drawings are housed in the Friends Library, Swarthmore College, and the archives of the PAFA. The HSP possesses a monumental, annotated edition of Galt's biography which contains letters and sketches by West.

⁴For further discussion of the prints which West employed

as sources for many of his compositions, the reader should consult Waldron Phoenix Belknap, Jr., American Colonial Painting: Materials for a History (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), pp. 271-329 and plates; and Charles Coleman Sellers, "Mezzotint Prototypes of Colonial Portraiture: A Survey Based on the Research of Waldron Phoenix Belknap," The Art Quarterly (Winter 1957), pp. 407-68. West included likenesses of his father in at least two of his later works: Penn's Treaty with the Indians (1771) and The Artist's Family (1772).

⁵The portrait (oil on canvas, 38 by 49 inches) of Maddox (1685-1759) is now in the collection of the Powel House, Philadelphia.

⁶Note also that West has updated the style of the chair.

⁷Hesselius's portrait (oil on canvas, 28 by 36 inches) of his wife is owned by the HSP. For illustrations, see Mooz, comp., Philadelphia Painting and Printing, p. 19, fig. 12; and Sawitzky, Catalogue, pp. 61, 211.

⁸van Devanter, p. 765. An advertisement in the Historical Magazine, London, of November 1857, offered for sale this "first miniature ever painted by the great artist and his earliest likeness extant." Cited in Hart, "West's Family," p. 6.

⁹January 24, 1816, in an interview with a Mr. Cook. Apparently West had given the miniature to Elizabeth Steele, Cook's mother-in-law, before he left for New York in 1759. "We were very much in love with one another," he recalled. Entry from the catalogue of the Sixth Annual Exhibition of the PAFA, 1817, quoted in Ibid., p. 5. Also see Sawitzky, "American Work of West," p. 436.

¹⁰In the same interview, West requested that Cook "have engraved on the back of it that it was painted in 1756, by himself." Quoted in Hart, "West's Family," p. 5. The inscription reads: "Benjamin West/ age 18/ Painted by himself/ in the year 1756/ and presented to Miss Steele/ of Philadelphia." See van Devanter, p. 765.

¹¹West continued to draw in the Sketchbook until just before his departure for New York in the spring of 1759. The drawings, then, illustrate his activities from late in 1756 to the winter of 1758/59.

¹²The drawing bears certain similarities to John Hesselius's portrait of John Wallace, signed and dated 1751 (oil on canvas, 32 by 42 inches), now exhibited in the

Powel House, Philadelphia. More striking affinities are found by comparing the sketch to Hesselius's half-length portrait of Henry Slaymaker (oil on canvas, 23 by 28 inches; private collection). The pose, shape of the head, and articulation of facial features are virtually identical. Significantly, the influence of John Wollaston permeates both works. For discussions of the paintings, see Mooz, comp., Philadelphia Painting and Printing, pp. 23-24, figs. 16 and 17.

¹³ Evidently West often used life-studies in his portrayals of classical figures. In his Death of Socrates, particularly, he "drew his characters from living figures." Flexner cites Galt in "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 28.

¹⁴ Caesar Ripa, Iconologia: or, Moral Emblems (London: Printed by Benjamin Motte, 1709). There is no direct evidence that West referred to this well-known text. A copy of the book is in the Downs Manuscript Library.

¹⁵ Copley copied plates in Van Der Gracht, Anatomie der wtterlicke deelen van het Menschelick Lichaem (The Hague, 1634; second ed. Rotterdam, 1660); and Bernardino Genga and Giovanni Maria Lancisi, Anatomy Improv'd and Illustrated with Regard to the Uses thereof in Designing: Not only laid down from an Examen of the Bones and Muscles of the Human Body, but also Demonstrated and Exemplified from the most Celebrated Antique Statues in Rome ... Intended Originally for ye Use of the Royal French Academy of Painting and Sculpture ... A work of great Use to Painters Sculptors Statuaries and all others Studious in the Noble Arts of Designing (London: John Senex, 1723). A full discussion of Copley's drawings and illustrations of his and Van Der Gracht's plates are offered in Jules David Prown, "An 'Anatomy Book' by John Singleton Copley," The Art Quarterly (Spring 1963), pp. 31-46, figs. 14 and 15. Clearly West was not familiar with such sources. He may have perused books without illustrations, such as James Keill's Anatomy of the Human Body (London: Printed for John Clarke, 1731). Copies of this text were owned by James Logan and the College Library. Apparently the study of anatomy did not become widespread in Philadelphia until 1762, when Dr. John Fethergill donated his anatomical drawings to the Pennsylvania Hospital. See The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, ed. Leonard K. Labaree (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961), IV, 126 n.

¹⁶ Quoted in Prown, "Anatomy Book," p. 42.

¹⁷ Copley "did not go to the considerable trouble of

actually learning anatomy merely to improve himself as a painter of colonial portraits. However, there was no market in Boston for history painting, in which his knowledge of anatomy could be applied" Jules David Prown, comp., John Singleton Copley, 1738-1815 (Meriden, Conn.: The Meriden Gravure Co., 1965), p. 17.

¹⁸Again, West probably borrowed his pose and composition from an engraving and the iconography of his subject from a book.

¹⁹West may have modelled the wings and garments after Ripa's representation of "Affection," plate 9, #36.

²⁰Cooke (d. 1700) was a "minor history painter" in England. Ellis Waterhouse, Painting in Britain, 1530-1790 (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 84. Gribelin (1661-1733) was born in Blois and studied with his father in Paris. He settled in London in 1680, published his first book in 1697, and gained some notoriety from his volume of engravings after Raphael's Cartoons. Horace Walpole described him as lacking "any thing of greatness in his manner or capacity." A Catalogue of Engravers, Who have been born, or resided in England (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1782), p. 205. Also see Ulrich Thieme and Felix Becker, Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Kunstler (Leipzig: E. A. Secman, 1922), xv, 19. Foote noted that Gribelin engraved portraits of King William and Queen Mary and was, "doubtless, the best engraver of the day in London." Robert Feke, p. 62 n.

²¹Galt, p. 33. Galt habitually misspelled and Anglicized names. For "Hopkinson" he wrote "Hopkins," and for "Duché" "Duchey." p. 52. Galt's error has led art historians to assume that the engravings were by Hubert-François Gravelot (1669-1773), a long-lived French illustrator who worked for many years in England. See Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," p. 9. Hirsch proffers the more plausible explanation that Galt simply Anglicized "Gribelin" to "Grevling." pp. 16-17. West's drawings substantiate his view.

²²See Foote, Robert Feke, pp. 60-62; and Flexner, "West's American Neo-Classicism," pp. 28-29.

²³For a discussion of Highmore's career, see Waterhouse, pp. 85-86, 113 ff.

²⁴John Penn was born in 1699/1700, the eldest son of William. He was a joint proprietor--with his brothers Thomas and Richard--of Pennsylvania until his death in

1746. See Sawitzky, Catalogue, p. 122.

²⁵There was ample precedent for the pose of the hand that West finally used. John Hesselius employed the same scissor-like arrangement of fingers in his portraits of John Wallace and Colonel Joseph Shippen (oil on canvas; destroyed by fire in 1923).

²⁶The thrust of Burke's treatise is summarized in Grose Evans, Benjamin West and the Taste of His Times (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1959), pp. 55-65.

²⁷Quoted in Bridenbaugh, pp. 105-06.

²⁸For an exhaustive treatment of Hogarth's career, consult Ronald Paulson, Hogarth: His Life, Art, and Times (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971). In this context, see specifically I, 305-07.

²⁹This painting is now in the collection of the City Art Museum of St. Louis. It is illustrated in Richardson, Painting in America, fig. 19.

³⁰Published in 1753, the book undoubtedly had found its way to Philadelphia by 1758. The copy owned by the Library Company of Philadelphia, from which the photograph of fig. 43 was taken, bears this revealing, hand-written inscription: "Presented by Francis Hopkinson, Esq. to James Peale."

³¹In the issue of the Pennsylvania Gazette for January 5, 1758, Dove advertised that "on Monday, the Ninth Instant, Messieurs DOVE and REILEY propose to open a School for the Education of Youth; in which will be taught by Mr. DOVE Greek, Latin, and the English Language." Also see Biographical Catalogue of the Matriculates, p. xxi; and Bridenbaugh, pp. 36 ff., 49-50, 121-23.

³²August 4, 1766, Copley-Pelham Letters, p. 44.

³³Quoted in Charles E. Slatkin and Regina Shoolman, Treasury of American Drawings (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), p. 8.

³⁴December 10, 1807, Farington, IV, 223.

³⁵May 21, 1808, Ibid., V, 68. One must bear in mind that in 1808 the Elgin Marbles were attributed solely to the hand of Phidias.

³⁶Richardson, Works, pp. 79-80.

APPENDIX I
SUGGESTED READINGS FOR STUDENTS
IN THE PHILOSOPHY SCHOOLS

Students enrolled in the Philosophy Schools of the College in Philadelphia were encouraged to read, during their "private hours," material which supplemented their regular studies. The following list, entitled "Books recommended for improving the youth in the various branches," was employed in 1755. It is published in Horace Wemyss Smith, Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith, I, 59.

First Year:

Spectator, Rambler, etc., for the improvement of style, and knowledge of life.
Barrow's Lectures. Pardie's Geometry. Maclaurin's Algebra. Ward's Mathematics. Keil's Trigonometry.
Watt's Logic and Supplement. Locke on Human Understanding. Hutcheson's Metaphysics. Varenus's Geography.
Watts's Ontology and Essays. King de Orig. Mali, with Law's Notes. Johnson's Elem. Philosophy.

Second Year:

Vossius. Bossu. Pere Bohours. Dryden's Essays and Prefaces. Spence on Pope's Odyssey. Trapp's Praelect. Poet. Dionysius Halicarn. Demetrius Phalereus. Stradae Prolusiones.
Patoun's Navigation. Gregory's Geometry, on Fortification. Simson's Conic Sections. Maclaurin's and Emerson's Fluxions. Palladio by Ware.
Helsham's Lectures. Gravesande. Cote's Hydrostatics. Desaguliers. Muschenbroek. Keil's Introduction. Martin's Philosophy. Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy. Maclaurin's View of do. Rohault per Clarke.

Third Year:

Puffendorf by Barbeyrac. Cumberland de Leg. Sidncy.

Harrington. Seneca. Hutcheson's Works. Locke on Govern-
ment. Hooker's Polity.
Scaliger de Emendatione Temporum. Preceptor. Le Clerc's
Compend of History.
Gregory's Astronomy. Fortescue on Laws. N. Bacon's Dis-
courses. My Lord Bacon's Works. Locke on Coin. Daven-
ant. Gee's Compend. Ray Derham. Spectacle de la Nature.
Religious Philosopher. Holy Bible, to be read daily from
the beginning, and now to supply the deficiencies of the
whole.

APPENDIX II

WEST'S ATTITUDE TOWARD PORTRAITURE

Early in life Benjamin West acquired a distaste for portraiture. From his study of Jonathan Richardson's Two Discourses, which William Williams had given him in 1747, West learned of the relatively low stature of the portraitist and of the exalted station of the history painter. Throughout his years in the Colonies, he was, to a great extent, restricted by his patrons to the taking of likenesses. A handful of his patrons and teachers--such as William Williams, William Henry, Provost Smith, and James Hamilton--encouraged him to explore other forms of expression; because of their interest and his own inclinations and ambitions, he was able to complete Ships at Sea, Landscape with a White Cow, Death of Socrates, and the drawings of classical subjects in his Sketchbook. For the most part, however, West found himself confined during his youth to the painting of portraits.

He was not alone. Throughout the Colonies, men with money to spend on paintings demanded portraits and did not extend their patronage to other forms of art (with the possible exception of landscape painting). Significantly, however, few colonial painters objected to this restrictive atmosphere; most craftsmen-painters were satisfied with their lot. West and John Singleton Copley were notable exceptions. In Boston, Copley lamented that "were it not for preserving the resemblance of particular persons, painting would not be known in the place."¹ In a more specific vein, he confided to an English engraver,

whom he had commissioned to issue a mezzotint after his portrait of Reverend Joseph Sewall, that "I shall ... depend on Your perticular care in the preservation of the likeness that being a main part of the excellency of a portrait in the oppinion of our New England Conoseurs."² Not until late in the eighteenth century did American artists--following the leads of West and, to a lesser extent, Copley--complain that their talents were being wasted on likenesses.³

A full discussion of the visual priorities and standards of taste that underlay the colonial predilection for portraiture falls beyond the scope of this paper. Neil Harris has illuminated many of the deep-seated reasons for this preference. The portrait, he noted, "could memorialize after death" and "establish family continuity." Through their patronage of portraitists, colonists articulated "an urge to self-definition," a desire "to see themselves, their power, wealth, and solidity, through the eyes of another; they were objectifying their confidence and self-assertion."⁴

The almost exclusive focus on the portrait form, however, did not reflect cultural realities peculiar to the Colonies alone; rather, it was shared and perpetuated by all Englishmen. In 1753 William Hogarth discussed the English preference for portraiture and corelative denial of other forms of art. Objecting to the establishment of a "public academy for the improvement of painting, sculpture, and architecture," he argued that

portrait-painting ever has, and ever will, succeed better in this country than in any other. ... Among other causes that militate against either painting or sculpture succeeding in this nation, we must place our religion, which, inculcating unadorned simplicity, doth not require,--nay,

absolutely forbids,--images for worship, or pictures to excite enthusiasm. Paintings are considered as pieces of furniture; and Europe is already over-stocked with the works of other ages. ... Can it excite wonder that the arts have not taken such deep root in this soil as in places where the people cultivate them from a kind of religious necessity ...? ... the fact is indisputable, that the public encourage trade and mechanics rather than painting and sculpture.⁵

Hogarth died in 1764, one year after Benjamin West had settled in London and four years before the founding of the Royal Academy, in which West was to play an active, leading role. The King's patronage allowed artists to pursue artistic forms other than portraiture; but lesser patrons--the vast majority of Englishmen--continued their support of the portraitist.

Although in England West continued to paint many portraits, he did so only through friendship or financial necessity. As the successful Historical Painter to the King, he objected to portraiture on principle. The public taste, he felt, should be elevated to an appreciation of historical and moral art. Like his fellow artists in the Royal Academy, however, he was a businessman of sorts and was obliged occasionally to sacrifice his artistic ideals for financial considerations. His royal patronage may have been a surprisingly unstable source of income, but he was the first to admit that without it he would have been confined, as most English artists were, to portraiture. On March 31, 1804 he complained to Joseph Farington of "the little encouragement He had had for Historical painting & that He wd. have been obliged to have turned to Portraits had He not been patronised by the King." Even when his royal patronage waned, West stubbornly maintained his aversion to portraiture and attempted to win acceptance of

historical subjects among private patrons. In this crusade his success was, at best, minimal. During his first thirty-five years in England, Farington observed, "what He [West] has received for pictures painted for various persons has not exceeded 6000 guineas,--so little disposition Has there been in this country to give encouragement."⁶ Similarly, on May 8, 1807 West "said there was no encouragement for the higher branches of art, not so much as there was 40 years ago.--All the encouragement went for trifling works."⁷

Disappointed in the state of the arts in England, West actively promoted the elevation of the painter's profession in America. "I have a lively interest," he wrote, "in the elevation of the fine arts in my native country--and I shall at all times be gratified to hear of their prosperity."⁸ Until 1803, when the American Academy was founded in New York, there was in America no institution, no counterpart to the Royal Academy, that set the standards for painters and patrons to follow. When, in 1805, a group of Philadelphians proposed the establishment of an academy of the fine arts in their city, West readily offered his advice. "It is my wish," he wrote William Rawle,

that your academy should be so indowed in all the points which are necessary to instruct, not only the mind of the student in what is excellent in art--but that it should equally instruct the eye and judgment of the public to know, and properly appreciate excellence when it is produced --because the correct artist and a correct taste in the public must be in unison⁹

Despite West's advice, neither the American Academy nor the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts was, at its inception, an outgoing, useful institution. Both represented the specific interests of elite groups of would-be

aristocrats; both failed to serve as schools for the elevation of taste on a democratic scale or for the instruction of young painters.

West attempted to provide the students who came to his London studio with some notion of the hierarchy of painting. He hoped especially that young American painters, properly reared and imbued with a knowledge of the potential loftiness of their profession, might return to their native land as artists, not as craftsmen, and as proselytes of history painting. When Thomas Sully, who studied with West in 1809 and aspired only to paint portraits, asked his instructor for critical advice, West bluntly told him "I don't paint portraits, go about and see whose portraits you like best."¹⁰ He expressed similar sentiments in a letter to Charles Willson Peale, who was launching his son Rembrandt on a painter's career. "Although I am friendly to portraying eminent men," he admitted, "I am not friendly to the indiscriminate waste of genius in portrait painting; and I do hope that your son will ever bear in his mind, that the art of painting has powers to dignify man."¹¹

When West did execute a portrait, he insisted on painting on his own terms. His inherent honesty and straightforward nature, coupled with the attention to relevant detail and fact which characterized his historical paintings, lent to his portraits a quality of accuracy and unembellished representation. In his estimation a portrait should only be "a true Representation of the man without artificial fancies of dress &c."¹² West did not idealize his sitter to an overbearing degree but portrayed him as a man of his times, engaged in his profession or accompanied by symbols of his fame, achievements, and contributions to society.¹³

NOTES TO APPENDIX II

¹Copley to West or Captain R. H. Bruce, n. d., quoted in Harris, p. 11.

²January 25, 1765, Copley-Pelham Letters, p. 31.

³See Harris, p. 11; and McCoubrey, pp. 23-24.

⁴Harris, pp. 11-12.

⁵Quoted in Sandby, I, 27-28.

⁶Farington, II, 243.

⁷Ibid., IV, 134.

⁸September 21, 1805, West to William Rawle, in Philadelphia, "Notes and Queries," p. 482.

⁹Ibid., pp. 481-82.

¹⁰Quoted in van Devanter, p. 764.

¹¹September 19, 1809, quoted in Dunlap, I, 92-93.

¹²April 29, 1803, Farington, II, 94.

¹³For example, West painted Colonel Guy Johnson (1775-1776), Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the Colonies, in his professional garb, including mocassins; behind Johnson he placed an Indian scout, and in the distance an Indian village. In 1802 West portrayed Thomas Hope and family in a room furnished with objects from their famous art collection.

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