Images Reflect from Art to Art; Pope's *Epistle to a Lady*

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Alexander Pope's great interest in painted or sketched portraits, especially in the middle and later years of his life, is well documented in his correspondence.[1] His involvement with the large number of portraits of himself produced during his lifetime is the subject of an exhaustive study by William Wimsatt.[2] Nowhere in Pope's poetry is this interest displayed so extensively as in his *Moral Essay II,* the *Epistle to a Lady* of 1735. Reuben Brower has summed up the main points made to date about the poem's connection with Pope's interest in painting;[3] Brower draws his information from F. W. Bateson's edition of the poem,[4] and Jean Hagstrum's *The Sister Arts.*[5] Bateson supplies information on specific paintings Pope may have seen, and draws attention to the technical terms drawn from painting that occur in the poem; Hagstrum, commenting on the poem's structure, regards it as an example of a well known genre—the "gallery" of portraits of men and women, either in prose or verse, of which Andrew Marvell's poem "The Gallery" is a typical example. A thorough investigation of the poem's use of the "gallery" device and the techniques of painting proves instructive. In expressing the complex and subtle ideas of *Epistle to a Lady,* Pope draws very fully on his interest in, and knowledge of, painting.

That a verbal "portrait" and a pictorial portrait were very alike, and tended to have the same affective value, was long held by Pope. Writing in 1722 of La Bruyère's *Caractères* he observed " 'Tis certainly the proof of a master-hand that can give such striking likenesses in such slight sketches, and in so few strokes

1 Alexander Pope, *Correspondence* ed. George Sherburn, 5 volumes (Oxford, 1956). See for example vol. II, 142 (Pope to Judith Cowper, 5 November 1722). Further citations appear in the body of the text as *Corresp.* followed by volume and page. Spelling and capitalization have been modernized.

2 William K. Wimsatt, *The Portraits of Alexander Pope* (Yale, 1965).

3 Reuben F. Brower, *Alexander Pope; the Poetry of Allusion* (Oxford, 1959).

4 Volume III Part ii of the Twickenham edition of *The Poems of Alexander Pope,* 6 volumes (London, 1939-61). Further citations appear in the body of the text as *TE* III-ii followed by page number.

5 Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: the Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago, 1958).

on each subject" (*Corresp.* II, 142). Here he implies that La Bruyère's "characters" are not finished portraits, but "sketches" only; but that they are nonetheless effective, and "striking likenesses". While the identification of La Bruyère with a "master" of pictorial painting may be no more than metaphoric here, it was Pope's tendency when discussing psychological "character" description, to make this identification of writer with painter, sometimes in extreme detail. Discussing a projected biography based on the private papers of Peter the Great, he commented to Aaron Hill:

> The eye of candour, like the sun, makes all the beauties which it sees; it gives colour and brightness to the meanest objects merely by looking at them. I agree with you that there is a pleasure in seeing the nature and temper of Man in the plainest undress; but few men are of consequence enough to deserve, or reward, that curiosity. I shall indeed ... be highly pleased to see the Great Czar of Muscovy in this light, drawn by himself, like an ancient Master, in rough strokes, without the heightening or shadowing. What a satisfaction to behold that perfect likeness, without art, affectation, or even the gloss of colouring, with a noble neglect of all that finishing and smoothing, which any other hand would have been obliged to bestow on so principal a figure? (*Corresp.* II, 405)

As with his assessment of La Bruyère, Pope here identifies the writer with a painter executing a portrait; he goes even further and compares the writer to a master sketch-artist, and implies that a good sketch from a master-hand is more truthful, more effective, than a finished work coming from a lesser craftsman.

In both of these quotations there is the assumption, in terms of the *ut pictura poesis* theory of poetry prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that affectively, the excelling pictorial portraitist and the excelling writer can be subsumed under the one term "Artist", or "master", though one uses the medium of paint and crayon, the other that of words. The other main idea expressed in Pope's observations on Peter the Great is that the truest portraits are those that show the "nature and temper of men in the plainest undress", portraits in which one can "behold that perfect likeness, without art [or] affectation"; though, he concludes, few subjects can measure up to such scrutiny: "few men are of consequence enough to deserve, or reward, that curiosity". This, and the idea that good writers and painters work in the same way to the same affective ends, form one of the central ideas he published later in *Epistle to a Lady*:

> Poets heap Virtues, Painters Gems at will,
> And show their zeal, and hide their want of skill.

> 'Tis well—but, Artists! who can paint or write,
> To draw the Naked is your true delight:
> That Robe of Quality so struts and swells,
> None see what Parts of Nature it conceals.
> (ll. 185-90)

This is one of the central ideas of *Epistle to a Lady,* and the point that clothes do *not* make the man (or woman) is made at two levels, by means of visual references: the "Robe" may be of "Quality"—i.e. of rich materials, and the clothes so designed that the voluminous skirts of the female, the padded chest and codpiece of the male, conceal quite other attributes than those they suggest;[6] or the "Robe" may be a robe of "Quality"—i.e. birth, breeding and office displayed in the outward forms of rich and costly materials—and, as in *The Rape of the Lock,* glorious appearance may mask a meaner reality. Bateson's gloss (*TE* III-ii, 65n.) that "write" (l. 187) = "sketch, paint" can scarcely be held. Pope had in the previous couplet (ll. 185-6) carefully distinguished "Poets" and "Painters"; he is seldom, if ever, a loose user of words, and to gloss "write" as "paint" is to accuse him of tautology. The point that Pope is making here is one of contrast between non-"Artists" (both poets *and* painters) who lack "skill" and "Artists" (both poets *and* painters) who *have* skill. What follows (ll. 187-90) applies equally to both skilled painters and skilled poets.[7]

More specific evidence of Pope's belief that a poem could contain a portrait appears in the way he saw the lines on "The Man of Ross" (ll. 251-90) in *Epistle to Bathurst.* Writing about it to Jacob Tonson in 1732, he said:

> To send you any of the particular verses will be much to the prejudice of the whole; which, if it has any beauty, derives from the manner in which it is *placed,* and the *contrast* (as the painters call it) in which it stands, with the pompous figures of famous, or rich, or high-born men. (*Corresp.* III, 290)

It is fairly evident that here, bearing in mind the use of a technical term from the visual arts to make the point, Pope is thinking of "The Man of Ross" lines as being to some extent the equivalent of a painted portrait, one whose moral significance in the

6 Compare, on this theme, Pope's *Sober Advice from Horace,* ll. 112-28.
7 See also Pope's friend Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (London, 1715), 24: " 'Tis not enough [for the portrait-painter] to make a tame, insipid resemblance of the features, so that everybody shall know who the picture was intended for. . . . . A portrait-painter must understand Mankind, and enter into their characters, and express their minds as well as their faces."

poem is enhanced by the quasi-visual "contrast" it has with surrounding figures. Indeed, this quasi-visual contrast is not only moral, it is aesthetic.

It would seem that for Pope, then, a true portrait involves more than a treatment of exterior appearances; and to achieve that true portrait requires an artist "who can paint or write", where the emphasis falls on "can" and stresses ability. As Dryden, quoting Philostratus, put it: "He who will rightly govern the art of painting, ought of necessity first to understand human nature".[8] However, Pope argues in *Epistle to a Lady,* the "human nature" of women is such that "Most women have no Characters at all" (l. 2) or are, alternatively, so changeable that "Chameleons who can paint in white and black?" (l. 156). The resolution of this artistic dilemma, and an attempt to demonstrate the "human nature" of women, are the main concerns of the poem. This resolution and demonstration are achieved not, as Professor Hagstrum maintains, by *creating* a "gallery" of portraits, but rather by showing that the attempt to create such a "gallery" must fail. It is in and from this demonstration of failure that Pope makes his own attempt to demonstrate something of the "characters" of women.

While *Epistle to a Lady* does have some affinities with "gallery" poems, it has a more varied background than this. The "advice-to-a-painter" genre of poems was already well established by Pope's day, having been introduced into England, as a vehicle for panegyric or satire, by Waller with his *Instructions to a Painter* of 1665.[9] As a literary method of depicting in verse a portrait of the beloved it existed in English poetry at least as early as Ben Jonson's *Eupheme,* and had its classical origins in the *Anacreontea.* Pope himself was the victim of one such satirical poem on the occasion of his sitting to the sculptor Rysbrach, and other poems in the same genre were written by Matthew Prior and John Sheffield, which would certainly have been known to him. In number three of his *Eupheme* cycle, "The Picture of the Body", Jonson gives instructions to a painter for painting the lady's outward form. In the following poem of the cycle, "The Mind", however, Jonson discovers the difficulty that the painter

8 John Dryden, "A Parallel between Painting and Poetry" in *Works* ed. George Saintsbury (London, 1892), XVII, 298.

9 See Mary T. Osborne, *Advice-to-a-Painter Poems 1633-1856/An Annotated Finding List* (Austin, 1949) for full details of the genre and many examples.

is always under—the same difficulty Pope points out in *Epistle to a Lady*—of portraying the intangible:

> Painter, yo'are come, but may be gone,
> Now I have better thought thereon,
> This worke I can perform alone;
> And give you reasons more than one.
>
> Not, that your Art I do refuse:
> But here I may no colours use.
> Beside, your hand will never hit,
> To draw a thing that cannot sit . . .
>
> No, to expresse this Mind to sense,
> Would ask a Heaven's intelligence;
> Since nothing can report that flame,
> But what's of kinne of whence it came.
> (ll. 1-8, 13-16)

At much the same time the poet Thomas Carew had referred to the same difficulty, in his poem "To the Painter":

> Say, you could imitate the rays
> Of those eyes that outshine the days,
> Or counterfeit in red and white
> That most uncounterfeited light
> Of her complexion; yet canst thou,
> Great master though thou be, tell how
> To paint a virtue?

Here Carew challenges the painter to "paint a virtue", and to differentiate if he can the blush of virtue from the blush of shame, the pallor of innocence from the pallor of illness.[10]

The painter's difficulty and the implied challenge to him of Jonson's two poems, and the overt challenge to the painter by the poet Carew, is a challenge that, by implication, lies behind *Epistle to a Lady,* a poem which is a sustained effort to depict the intangible, and causes Pope, who was both poet and practising painter, to meet it. To do this he assumes the role of painter, and commences the poem by investigating the traditional painter's methods of depicting women.

After the opening truism (ll. 1-4) which provides the theme whose variations and aspects the poem considers, Pope goes on to observe:

> How many pictures of one Nymph we view,
> All how unlike each other, all how true!
> Arcadia's Countess, here, in ermin'd pride,

10 Noted by Hagstrum (pp. 113-14) in quite a different connection. Pope knew the work of Carew, whom he called "a bad Waller".

> Is there, Pastora by a fountain side:
> Here Fannia, leering at her own good man,
> Is there, a naked Leda with a Swan.
> Let then the Fair one beautifully cry,
> In Magdalen's loose hair and lifted eye,
> Or drest in smiles of sweet Cecilia shrine,
> With simp'ring Angels, Palms, and Harps divine.
> (ll. 5-14)

As Bateson points out[11] some of the portrait-styles here mentioned may be recollections of paintings Pope had seen at Wilton House, the Pembroke family home; but one can, I think, assume that Pope has larger intentions in the poem than mere local reference. Pope had a wide acquaintance with picture collections, and a large collection such as that at Wilton would be likely to contain examples of the types Pope proposes,[12] for the types are what Pope offers them as—commonplaces of female portraiture. Pope's friend the painter Charles Jervas, for example, had an awful facility for turning out aristocratic shepherdesses and milkmaids, and was a constant copier of Guido Reni Magdalens with "loose hair and lifted eye". The St Cecilia theme is another commonplace—as the sarcastic tone of "with simp'ring Angels, Palms, and Harps Divine" makes clear; so also are the Leda-and-swan and the husband-and-wife. Peter Lely's series of "Windsor Beauties" and Godfrey Kneller's "Hampton Court Beauties", both of which Pope knew, would provide another example of sets of feminine portraits, and are in their format suggestive of the "gallery" genre.

The six portrait-types Pope reviews in these lines represent polarities: haughty Countess/humble shepherdess; loving wife/licentious woman; smiling saint/weeping prostitute. But these polarities, which seem to represent the polarities of female types, are themselves stereotyped and clichés; they have no real significance but are, as Pope pointed out in a note to the lines, "Attitudes in which several ladies affected to be drawn, and sometimes one lady in them all". They are also, however, the standard poses and attitudes used by the average painter in female paintings to

11 *TE* III-ii, 48-9n.

12 See James Kennedy, *A New Description of the Pictures . . . at the Earl of Pembroke's House at Wilton* (1758). As well as the paintings noted by Bateson, Kennedy lists "Mr. James Herbert and his Wife" by Lely; "The Earl and Countess of Bedford" by Van Dyke; "Mary Magdalene" by Titian (?); "Magdalene as a Penitent" by Domenichino; and "A Shepherdess in a Straw-hat, Representing the Princess Sophia" by Honthorst.

be found in the average gallery; but since the average painter caters only to his client's affectations such portraits are never more than clichés, for there is no attempt to infuse the work with that knowledge of "human nature" which Pope, Richardson and Dryden held to be essential for the best, the truest portraits. Painted thus, "Most Women have no Characters at all".

By now, Pope has examined the traditional "gallery" of portraits, and found that, at least in the case of female character, it is an inadequate means of expression. What then *is* the nature of female "character"? and how can it be represented? These are the questions posed by Pope's opening lines, and he goes on to answer them by demonstrating two propositions: (1) female character is not representable at all by the average painter; and (2) female character is a constantly changing thing. Both these propositions Pope proves simultaneously by a highly subtle and sophisticated drawing on the techniques and terms of painting. He enables himself to do this by transcending the old-fashioned and inadequate device of the "gallery" of portraits where the poet played only the role of cicerone, and by adopting the "advice-to-a-painter" device. Instead of acting as a guide on a conducted tour, Pope combines in himself the roles of "instructing" poet and "instructed" painter, and places himself in the immediacy of an artist's studio. Here, to his audience Martha Blount (the addressee of the poem), Pope endeavours to display the facets of female character one would need to try to get into any really accurate portrait:

> Whether the Charmer sinner it, or saint it,
> If Folly grows romantic, I must paint it.
> Come then, the colours and the ground prepare!
> Dip in the Rainbow, trick her off in Air,
> Chuse a firm Cloud, before it fall, and in it
> Catch, ere she change, the Cynthia of this minute.
> (ll. 15-20)

The dramatic immediacy of these lines is apparent, and it is obvious that here, with "I must paint it", and in the "portraits" that follow, Pope is not casting himself as a cicerone in a gallery of already existing works, but as the creator of the "portraits" that follow, i.e. as a painter and sketcher. Having set himself up thus Pope begins to prove his propositions and to attempt to show not only some of the qualities of female character by showing what it is not, but also, in showing this, to demonstrate just why the average painter will always fail to depict it.

The average painter, if he knows his job at all, would certainly

know about preparing colours and ground, dipping (= immersing in a colouring solution) and tricking off (= drawing in outline). Yet female character, says Pope, is such that it cannot be depicted using the physical media (paint, crayon, canvas) of the average painter, for it requires the media of the insubstantial, ever-changing hues of the rainbow for colour and the air for 'ground'. As Pope asks later in the poem,

> How should Equal Colours do the knack?
> Chameleons who can paint in white or black?
> (ll. 154-5)

Unable to answer this question, the average painter must confess himself beaten: if the "characters of women" are chameleonlike, no conventional painted portrait will ever do justice to them.

The answer to Pope's question, and the solution he advances in *Epistle to a Lady,* had already been given by the seventeenth-century poet and painter Thomas Flatman:[13]

> Strike a bold stroke, my Muse, and let me see
> Thou fear'st no colours in thy poetry,
> For pictures are dumb poems; they that write
> Best poems do but paint in black and white.
> (ll.1-4)

Flatman, a poet and a painter, is not in these lines valuing either poetry or painting as less than the other, but as identical. His argument here, paraphrased, is that pictures are *really* dumb poems, and the best poems are *really* black-and-white (i.e. in the words on the page) paintings. Here the phrase of Simonides, *mutum est pictura poema,* so central to the theory of *ut pictura poesis,* is unambiguous. By a consideration of the media used by the conventional painter, Pope has demonstrated that painter's inability to cope with female character; now, as a poet-painter who practises *ut pictura poesis,* he answers his own questions in Flatman's terms—words, not paint, make the better medium to attempt to depict chameleons.[14]

The artist Pope, as he talks to Martha Blount in the poem, takes up the poet's tools for portraiture, and they are found in

13 "On the Noble Art of Painting" (ll. 1-4). See *Poems* in *The Caroline Poets* ed. George Saintsbury, volume III (Oxford, 1921).

14 Pope almost certainly knew Flatman's work (see *Corresp.* I, 159n.). His knowledge of Flatman's "On the Noble Art of Painting" must, however, have come from one specific source—William Sanderson's drawing-manual *Graphicé. Or the Use of the Pen and Pensil. Or the most Excellent Art of Painting* (1658, and frequently reprinted), in which the poem first appeared. The poem was never included in any edition of Flatman's verse published during his lifetime, and remained "uncollected" until Saintsbury's edition of 1921.

the very lines which showed the conventional painter's tools to be inadequate. The poet, working in words—which are capable of many nuances—can use the changing colours of the rainbow, and the "tricking off" or sketching can be done "in Air". Here the ambiguity is rich: "In Air" can mean "with air" (as we say "in pencil") and so another insubstantial medium (contrasting with the firmness of a brush-stroke or a pencilled line) is added those already in the poet's hand; or "In Air" might mean a medium of an altogether different kind, one more suited to a poet, who uses words. Then "Air" might mean "breath", and "breath" might mean "words", and "words" might mean "poem", i.e. *this* poem *Epistle to a Lady*—a progression which conforms to Flatman's idea.

In as far as *Epistle to a Lady* is, formally, a conversation between two people, Martha Blount and Pope in his role of artist —or rather, a lecture and demonstration with intelligent interjections—then "Air" in the sense of "words" *is* the medium by which the ensuing "portraits" are depicted; and again, since Pope is *creating* these portraits as he speaks, he is not acting as a guide, and the setting of the poem is not a gallery but an artist's studio. This transcendence of the "gallery" device, and the union of instructing poet and instructed painter, function more significantly than as devices merely for dramatic or narrative variety.

The lines I have been considering (ll. 15-20) which point out the conventional painter's lack of suitable media for depicting female character, point out also another facet of the difficulty conventional painting is under in this area—that of depicting in paint, and on canvas, that which is of its very nature changeable:

> Chuse a firm Cloud, before it fall, and in it
> Catch, ere she change, the Cynthia of this minute.
> (ll. 19-20)

As Bateson observes, the cloud as a modesty-veil for otherwise nude mythological goddesses is a common device of Renaissance painting (*TE* III-ii, 50n.). But one must not overlook the fact that Cynthia also represents the moon and is thus not only, or necessarily an image of chastity, but of straightforward inconstancy and changeability. Pope's rainbow-air-cloud-Cynthia cluster also enriches the painting imagery of the poem by its celestial reference—the "colours" are the "Rainbow", the "ground" (i.e., the primed canvas) is the "Air" (i.e., the night sky) and the painting imagined on this "ground" is that of the moon concealed and revealed by moving clouds. As Pope uses it, however, the

"Cloud" is mostly symbolic (clouds in the sky seldom if ever "fall") of female chastity, fragile and liable to change and "fall" at any moment. To depict chastity, Pope argues, the conventional painter needs to be able to depict a "firm Cloud" (a contradiction in ideas) and consequently to depict, "before it fall", one point of time, "this minute". This is the other difficulty painting is under, and brings up one of the major points of *ut pictura poesis* theory.

Pope's friend the painter Jonathan Richardson the elder had stated the conventional painter's viewpoint on this matter thus:

> Painting has another advantage over words, and that is, it *pours* ideas into our minds, words only drop them. The whole scene opens at one view, whereas the other way lifts up the curtain by little and little.[15]

James Harris, writing in 1744, went further. A good painting, he said,

> shews all the *minute* and *various concurrent Circumstances* of the Event in the *same* individual Point of Time, as they appear in *Nature*; while Poetry is forced to *want* this Circumstance of Intelligibility, by being ever obliged to enter into some degree of Detail.[16]

This also elaborates another of Richardson's contentions that "every picture is a representation of one single point in time; this then must be chosen; and that in the story that is the most advantageous must be it" (p. 8). Both Richardson and Harris, following traditional lines of argument, differentiate poetry and painting on the ground that painting is a spatial art, poetry a temporal one.[17] Pope, however, as I have argued elsewhere, inclines towards a theory of the *gestalt* in poetry, where individual images and lines can, cumulatively, present a total picture.[18] As Pope presents it in his Cynthia-cloud image, the conventional painter's problem is one of some difficulty: what to do when the subject is of its very nature so changeable that to choose *one* moment might be to misrepresent the "character" of the subject. Again something has been said about the nature of the characters of women, and the point has been made through the sophisticated use of

15 *An Essay* . . . , 6.

16 *A Discourse on Music, Painting and Poetry* (1744), reprinted in *Aristotle's 'Poetics' and English Literature* ed. Elder Olsen (Chicago, 1965), p. 10.

17 Later in the century Joshua Reynolds (*Discourses,* IV) was still making the point. One recalls Sterne's problem in *Tristram Shandy*: to give a simultaneity of impression of that which can only be described analytically and in temporal succession.

18 Robert W. Williams, "Alexander Pope and *Ut Pictura Poesis*", *Sydney Studies in English,* 9 (1983-4), 74.

painting theory.

The poet-painter, however, who espouses *ut pictura poesis* and who can use the more flexible and insubstantial media, may be able to achieve in words that which the conventional painter is unable to achieve on canvas. Richardson held that words as a medium were at a basic disadvantage compared to paint:

> Words paint to the imagination, but every man forms the thing to himself in his own way: language is very imperfect: There are innumerable colours and figures for which we have no name, and an infinity of other ideas which have no certain words universally agreed upon as denoting them. (pp. 5-6)

Richardson views language as a shifting and imprecise thing, and therefore incapable of expressing specific ideas; yet this very defect of imprecision is what makes language so suitable as the medium for depicting "Chameleons", who have no specific colours, and for depicting the ever-changing female character.

In the "portraits" that follow the "Cynthia" image (ll. 21-150) Pope uses the insubstantial medium of words and, to refute Richardson's objection, uses language as precisely as he can in delineating them. Since the action of the poem is set in an artist's studio and extends over only one conversation, Pope does not achieve, nor does he attempt, finished portraits but only, as he points out to Martha Blount, *sketches*:

> Pictures like these, dear Madam, to design,
> Asks no firm hand, and no unerring line;
> Some wand'ring touch, or some reflected light,
> Some flying stroke alone can hit 'em right:
> For how should equal colours do the knack?
> Chameleons who can paint in white and black?
> (ll. 151-6)

"Design" here carries its primary meaning (current in the eighteenth century) of "to sketch preliminarily" and, as Pope comments on his foregoing efforts in terms which refer to pictorial art, it is evident that he views his efforts as sketches only. Here again the painting terms, used skilfully by a poet, imply something more of the nature of female character—not firm, not unerring, wandering, oblique and exterior only, "flying" and changing rapidly, unequal, chameleonlike. As importantly, they also imply something of the nature of the suitability of the poet's medium for depiction. Words, imprecise though they may appear to be, *are* capable of indicating those qualities of character that the conventional painter's media are unable to depict.

What Pope the poet-painter has attempted to do in the port-

raits of lines 21-150, is to achieve in them something akin to the quality he discerned, as discussed previously, in the *Caractères* of La Bruyère: "striking likenesses in . . . slight sketches". But this role of lightning sketch-artist which Pope assumes is one that is also essential to the poem's moral point, for the characters of women are so changeable that a leisurely painting, even in the airy medium of words, is scarcely possible. Only a lightning-sketcher who can rapidly delineate the main lines of a portrait as he talks, can attempt a woman's character adequately.

The portrait-sketches that occupy lines 21-150 are not therefore exhaustive. In the quick alternation of mood within each portrait Pope manages to suggest both the change in "character" that a woman can undergo, and the rapidity with which that change can take place. Pope's sketching itself becomes more rapid as the poem proceeds, as does the rate of change within each sketch. The early portrait of Silia, for example, devotes four lines to each side of her character:

> How soft is Silia! fearful to offend,
> The Frail one's advocate, the Weak one's friend:
> To her, Calista prov'd her conduct nice,
> And good Simplicius asks of her advice.
> Sudden, she storms! she raves! you tip the wink,
> But spare your censure; Silia does not drink.
> All eyes may see from what the change arose,
> All eyes may see—a Pimple on her nose.
> (ll. 29-36)

These two sets of couplets are mutually exclusive; and though the change in Silia is rapid ("Sudden she storms!") yet we are given two separate and distinct sides of her character. The later portrait of "Sin in State" is different:

> See Sin in State, majestically drunk,
> Proud as a Peeress, prouder as a Punk;
> Chaste to her husband, rank to all beside,
> A teeming Mistress, but a barren Bride.
> What then? let Blood and Body bear the fault,
> Her Head's untouch'd, that noble Seat of Thought:
> Such this day's doctrine—in another fit
> She sins with Poets thro' pure Love of Wit.
> What has not fir'd her bosom or her brain?
> Caesar and Tallboy, Charles and Charlema'ne.
> (ll. 69-78)

Here the alternations of character occur within the same line: "Peeress-Punk", "chaste-frank", "teeming Mistress-barren Bride", "Caesar-Tallboy", "Charles-Charlema'ne" alternate in such quick

succession that Pope is almost achieving his ideal of showing contradictions of character existing in the one person simultaneously. The "either/or" polarities of conventional portraiture shown to be inadequate at the beginning of the poem become "both/and" polarities here, in the hands of a poet-painter.

Pope continues this telescoping process in the clipped, elliptic phrases, almost notes, in the portrait of Flavia (ll. 86-100). Then, in an endeavour to build up material for a composite portrait, Pope sketches more rapidly still: "Look on Simo's Mate" (l. 101) "Or her" (l. 103) "Or her" (l. 105) "Or her" (l. 107) "Or who" (l. 109). Finally, in the lines on Atossa he attempts a definitive portrait and achieves it (ll. 115-150) as far as is *humanly* possible, with a summary of all that has gone before. By massing paradox upon paradox he draws a sketch of a woman who is "Scarce once herself, by turns all Womenkind!" (l. 150). Pope ends his sketching with the paradoxical question: "Chameleons who can paint in white and black?"; and, bearing in mind the *tour-de-force* Pope has accomplished in lines 21-150 culminating in the Atossa portrait, one feels that Flatman's is the answer: "they that write/ Best poems . . . paint in Black and White".[19]

Up to this point in the poem Pope, as he acknowledges in his own notes to the various portraits, has been dealing with female "character" which has some flaw in it. Now Martha Blount rightly lodges the objection that *all* "characters" have not been considered:

> "Yet Cloe sure was form'd without a spot."
> (l. 157)

Pope replies:

> Nature in her then err'd not, but forgot.
> . . . she wants a heart.
> (ll. 158, 160)

In the sketch of Cloe which follows, Pope argues that even the "decent" woman often lacks something in character—"a Heart", generosity, "Virtue"; again these are desiderata which no conventional painter in oils could show.

In the verse-paragraph which follows the sketch of Cloe, Pope goes on to argue that even in the most finished portraits, written or painted, something may still be lacking:

19 For a discussion of the moral implications of time and speed in this poem see Rebecca F. Parkin, "The Role of Time in Alexander Pope's *Epistle to a Lady*" *ELH*, 32 (1965), 490-501.

> One certain Portrait may (I grant) be seen,
> Which Heav'n has varnish'd out, and made a *Queen*:
> The same for ever! and describ'd by all
> With Truth and Goodness, as with Crown and Ball:
> Poets heap Virtues, Painters Gems at will,
> And show their zeal, and hide their want of skill.
> (ll. 181-6)

"Certain" here carries its primary dictionary meaning of "unvarying", "fixed", and, consequently, this portrait is, unlike those Pope has been sketching, a portrait of an unchanging "character"; but it is a portrait which has been "varnish'd out" (= completed) by "Heav'n", not by an earthly painter. Conventional painters, either in oils or in words, lack the skill and art to show this unvarying "character" in any but the most repetitive and obvious ways: "Poets heap Virtues ("Truth and Goodness"), Painters Gems ("Crown and Ball") at will/ And show their Zeal, and hide their want of Skill".[20] The second half of this verse-paragraph (ll. 187-98) then argues that despite the existence of *this* "certain Portrait", it is not necessarily true that all portraits which appear to contain "Virtues" and "Gems" are accurate, for

> That Robe of Quality so struts and Swells,
> None see what Parts of Nature it conceals.
> (ll. 189-90)

Therefore, it is concluded, since one cannot compel great people to reveal their true natures, the real artist, either painter or writer, who seeks to depict unambiguous reality, is forced to go to "models of an humble kind". "Truth and Goodness" may exist among the great, but, masked and presented in commonplaces as they may all too easily be, one can never know this for sure. Only the excelling artist, interested in truth rather than a fee, will depict the humble, seeking for the real;

> If QUEENSBURY to strip there's on compelling,
> 'Tis from a Handmaid we must take a Helen.
> From Peer or Bishop 'tis no easy thing
> To draw the man who loves his God, or King:
> Alas! I copy (or my draught would fail)
> From honest Mah'met, or plain Parson Hale.
> (ll. 193-8)

20 This seems to me the most likely reading of these lines on Queen Caroline, despite the ambiguity and possible covert denigration in "varnish'd out" etc. noted by some critics. I cannot see that "Heav'n" here acts differently (or is a different Heaven) from the "Heav'n" which "Shakes all together, and produces—You" (ll. 271, 280). If, as Bateson notes (*TE* III-ii, 65n.) "Pope's antipathy to the Queen was political", it seems unlikely that she should be included unfavourably in a poem which deals with personal, private "character".

Having demonstrated by his sketching activities some of the qualities and types of female "character", Pope now ceases his active painting labours and begins to generalize his theme (ll. 199-248). He does not drop his role of painter, however, and the transition to generalization is not abrupt, but modulated and in keeping with this role:

> But grant, in Public Men are sometimes shown,
> A Woman's seen in Private life alone:
> Our bolder talents in full light display'd,
> Your Virtues open fairest in the shade.
> (ll. 199-202)

This is a close echo of the original *ut pictura poesis* simile which Pope found in Horace's *Ars Poetica*:

> Poems, like pictures, are of different sorts,
> Some better at a distance, others near;
> Some love the dark, some choose the clearest light,
> Some please for once, some will for ever please.[21]

It is a simile Pope was fond of quoting, and one appropriate to a painter-poet who, in *Epistle to a Lady,* so delicately integrates the two to create an *ut pictura poesis* poem.

Finally, after considering the "Love of Pleasure" and the "Love of Sway" (l. 210) as the two ruling passions of the female sex, Pope concludes the poem, as he himself notes, with "the Picture of an estimable Woman" (ll. 269-80) which is on the one hand a portrait complimentary to Martha Blount and on the other, with its massed paradoxes, the antithesis of the earlier portrait of Atossa. This portrait also, it is maintained, echoes the portrait of the Queen (ll. 181-4) in being the finished product of no earthly painter for it is again "Heav'n" (l. 271) which "Shakes all together and produces You" (l. 280).[22]

The placing of the "action" of *Epistle to a Lady* in a painter's studio rather than in a gallery is not only decorative but necessary to the poem's aims. Recent criticism of the poem's argument has tended to find it fragmented and incomplete;[23] yet, as Pope demonstrates in his role of lightning sketch-artist, the subject of

21 Horace, *The Art of Poetry,* trans. Earl of Roscommon.

22 The statement that Heaven alone can produce the "finished" portrait was not, of course, original to Pope. Jonson, in his *Eupheme,* had stated that "to express this Mind to sense,/ Would ask a Heaven's Intelligence"; Francis Barnard, concluding a commendatory poem to Thomas Flatman (see Flatman, *Poems* ed. Saintsbury) went further and classed Flatman and Heaven as equally excelling:

> Only thyself and Heav'n can paint thy soul.

23 See, for example, Frank Brady, "The History and Structure of Pope's *To a Lady*", *SEL,* IX (Summer 1969), 439-62.

the poem, "the Characters of Women", is itself so changeable, so capable of infinite variation, that an exhaustive survey is an impossibility. By making himself a sketch-artist Pope is able to give force to a generalization about female human nature, and the poem as a whole rests solidly upon the continued device of sketches in a poet-painter's studio.

This shows a sophisticated advance on the traditional picture-gallery mechanism; and this, and the continued use of terms and techniques of the pictorial art of painting, provide not only the structure for the satire of the poem, but also the very means by which that satire is brought into being. Without these uses of the visual arts, the poem, as poetry, would cease to exist.