

JACEK JAŻWIERSKI
JAN KOCHANOWSKI UNIVERSITY

“THE JUDGMENT OF HERCULES”. SHAFTESBURY AT THE CROSSROADS OF ART THEORY

When in 1761 Sir Joshua Reynolds painted his *Portrait of David Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* (1760–1761, Waddesdon Manor, Aylesbury) he commented – with irony – on the supposed hesitation of his friend and famous actor whom he depicted at the moment of making decision in favour of the frivolous personification of Comedy while seemingly saying to her astonished and disappointed counterpart laughingly: “Sorry, Madame, I just cannot resist.” Reynolds’ painting was a travesty of the story of Hercules at the crossroads between Virtue and Pleasure, or the choice of Hercules, known from Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*¹ and explored in a moralizing manner by painters such as Albrecht Dürer, Annibale Carracci, Nicolas Poussin, Peter Paul Rubens and others. But Reynolds’ lighthearted appropriation revealed also his own, more serious artistic dilemma between two rhetorical aims of his art: pleasure and moral instruction. Tragedy was painted in the idealistic style of the Carraccis while Comedy in the lighter, ornamental and more pleasurable style of Correggio. As a portrait painter Reynolds was bound to ornamental and naturalistic mode of painting with the resemblance to a model at its core but always strived for elevating this style by introducing elements of narrative derived from history painting. *Portrait of Garrick* is one of the best examples of these efforts.

Half a century earlier, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, used the story of Hercules at a crossroads to pursue his views on painting. Shaftesbury spent last one and a half years of his life in Naples seeking in vain to sustain declining health. There he wrote in French an art-theoretical treatise titled *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules*² in which he explained the principles of painting and methods of executing an exemplary historical piece on the subject of Hercules which he subsequently commissioned from Neapolitan painter, Paolo de’ Matteis.³ The choice of the subject was deliberate. By putting in the centre of the picture the moral choice between virtuous and pleasurable way of living, Shaftesbury was

¹ Xenophon, *Memorabilia* (2.1.21-34), trans. E.C. Marchant, Cambridge, Mass.–London 1997, pp. 95–103.

² The treatise was a part of larger art-theoretical project which encompassed also three other texts: *A Letter Concerning Design*, *The Picture of Cebes* and *Plastics, or The Original Progress and Power of Designatory Art*. They were intended to be published as a single book titled *Second Characters* – an art-theoretical sequel to his collection of essays in moral philosophy *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, London 1711. Only *Hercules* was published in Shaftesbury’s lifetime, first in French as *Le jugement d’Hercule*, “Journal des Sçavans”, November 1712, then translated into English as *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules, According to Prodicus, Lib. II. Xen. de Mem. Soc.*, 1713 [all subsequent references will be to this edition of Shaftesbury’s treatise quoted as *Judgment of Hercules*]. *A Letter* was published in the fifth edition of *Characteristics* as *A Letter Concerning the Art, or Science of Design, Written from Italy, On the occasion of the Judgment of Hercules, to My Lord *****, in *Characteristics*, London 1732, Vol. 3, pp. 393–410. All four essays were eventually published two hundreds years after Shaftesbury’s death under original title *Second Characters or The Language of Forms*, ed. B. Rand, Cambridge 1914 [subsequently quoted as *Second Characters*].

³ On the *Hercules* project see M. Kirves, *Das Urteil des Herkules – Shaftesburys gemalte Kunsttheorie*, “Aufklärung”, 22, 2010, pp. 173–200.

able to link together two fields of his concern: art theory and moral philosophy. It also allowed him to set the hierarchy of values both between art theory and the morals as well as within art theory alone.

In the notes to his never completed treatise *Plastics*, Shaftesbury wrote that his aim was “to twist, as it were, and interweave morality with plasticks, that supreme beauty with this subaltern; those high and severe maxims with these curious and severe in their kind.”⁴ Shaftesbury’s predilection for moral philosophy did not recede with the rise of his interest in painting and art theory. At the end of his life, Shaftesbury *virtuoso* did not cease to be first and foremost a man of morals. In the Preface to the *Second Characters*, he admitted that the essays are in fact of the inferior significance. “The subjects which he [the author] here treats are presumed (he knows) to relate no further than to the ordinary pleasures and diversions of the fashionable world. But however they may have been rated if our author should by good fortune have been able to render them more speculative, or in reality more suitable to a taste and judgment than they have hitherto passed in the world, he may have reason perhaps to be satisfied with his attempt.”⁵ Aware of the secondary character of painting, Shaftesbury aimed at elevating it towards moral philosophy as its practical exemplification. This was the main aim of the *Hercules* project. “Such a piece of furniture might well fit the gallery, or hall of exercises, where our young Princes should learn their usual lessons.”⁶ Shaftesbury’s reform of painting, therefore, cannot be separated from his efforts to reform morals.

In accordance with his moral vision of the aims of art, Shaftesbury believed that pictures are created in artist’s mind and that the execution of the “real design” is only of secondary importance. Painter’s “idea before his hand”, as he noted in *Plastics*.⁷ He shared this belief with such writers on art as Franciscus Junius, Giovanni Bellori or André Félibien. It was also congruent with his mostly Platonic outlook.⁸ But the idea of painting as intellectual undertaking took quite a radical turn in his commission of *Hercules*. Now the inventor and executioner were two different persons. Shaftesbury neither could paint nor he considered painting worthy of a gentleman⁹ but he *was a painter* because he invented the story with its moral meaning, disposed it in imagination as well as ensured that the painting would be properly executed by providing de’ Matteis with detailed instructions contained in his treatise. In other words, he invented and disposed in mind and words what the actual painter was supposed only to execute.¹⁰ The inferiority of execution is also emphasized by the fact that de’ Matteis was entrusted with this commission despite his poor track record as historical painter. The decisive factor must have been his command of French which, with Shaftesbury’s lack of Italian, made the communication between two men, so crucial in the case of this commission, possible.

In the Introduction to his *Judgment of Hercules*, Shaftesbury defined what in his opinion constituted a “real” painting or a “tablature” as he called it, by which he meant a genuine work of art. “By the word *Tablature* (for which we have yet no name in *English*, besides the general one of *Picture*) we denote, according to the original word *TABULA*, a Work not only distinct from a mere *Portraiture*, but from all those wilder sorts of Painting which are in a manner absolute, and independent; such as the Paintings in *Fresco* upon the Walls, the Ceilings, the Stair-cases, the Cupolo’s, and other remarkable places either of Churches or Palaces.”¹¹ It was the concept of a picture which departed from the Italian Renaissance ideal of fresco in *maniera grande* and was replaced by the French concept of *tableau* – a history painting with the figures usually smaller than life, perfected by Nicolas Poussin. The word “wild” used by Shaftesbury to describe the frescoes is interesting. Samuel Johnson defined it in his *Dictionary* as, *inter alia*, something “merely imaginary” as opposed to “such a one as may be easily put in execution” but also as something made “without consistent order and plan”.¹² “Absolute”, in turn, means “unlimited”¹³, and “independent” – impossible to grasp visually at once.

⁴ *Second Characters*, p. 9. In his *Dictionary*, Shaftesbury juxtaposed the word *ethic* with art terms: *heroic, epic and poetic*. *Second Characters*, p. 179.

⁵ *Second Characters*, p. 3.

⁶ *Letter Concerning Design*, [in:] *Second Characters*, p. 26.

⁷ *Plastics*, [in:] *Second Characters*, p. 142.

⁸ For Shaftesbury’s aesthetic theory see R. Uphaus, *Shaftesbury on Art: The Rhapsodic Aesthetic*, “Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, 27, 1969, pp. 341–348 and D. Townsend, *Shaftesbury’s Aesthetic Theory*, “Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, 41, 1982, pp. 205–213.

⁹ Shaftesbury also thought that none of contemporary painters deserved nobility and that Godfrey Kneller was knighted wrongly. J. Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, New Haven–London 1986, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Letter Concerning Design*, [in:] *Second Characters*, p. 18.

¹¹ *Judgment of Hercules*, pp. 3–4.

¹² S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, London 1785, vol. 2, sv. *Wild*.

¹³ *Ibidem*, vol. 1, sv. *Absolute*.

Thus the idea of order, together with the visual graspability of the picture, proves to be central to Shaftesbury’s notion of the *tablature*.¹⁴

In the second part of his definition, Shaftesbury emphasized the unity of *tablature*. “In Painting”, he wrote in a key statement, “we may give to any particular Work the name of *Tablature*, when the Work is in reality ‘a *Single Piece*, comprehended in one *View*, and form’d according to one single Intelligence, Meaning, or Design; which constitutes a real *Whole*, by a mutual and necessary Relation of its Parts, the same as the Members in a natural Body.’”¹⁵ In this short but complex characteristic, the unity of a picture seems to be based on a double principle: one visual – “a single piece, comprehended in one view”, the second intellectual – “one single intelligence, meaning, or design” where “design” means an idea or thought, not the way the picture is drawn. This ambiguity is further enhanced, still in the Introduction, by Shaftesbury’s comments on what makes the lower genres of painting, e.g. floral pictures, worthy of the name of *tablature*. He points to the visual unity of pictorial composition as a whole. In the lack of narrative and moral subject-matter, flowers, festoons, vases and other objects “serve as *Machines* to frame a certain proportionate Assemblage, or united Mass; according to the Rules of Perspective, and with regard as well to the different shapes and sizes of his several Flowers, as to the harmony of Colours resulting from the whole: this being the only thing capable of rend[er]ing his Work worthy the name of a *Composition* or *Real Piece*.”¹⁶ What makes a flower piece an art is the composition of objects based on the principle of visual unity and harmony. But in the closing part of the Introduction, Shaftesbury spoke of a different kind of unity. “So much more therefore is this Regulation [of unity] applicable to History-Painting [than to flower painting], where not only *Men*, but *Manners*, and human Passions are represented. Here the Unity of Design must with more particular exactness be preserv’d, according to the just Rules of Poetic Art; that in the Representation of any Event, or remarkable Fact, the *Probability*, or seeming Truth (which is the real Truth of Art) may with the highest advantage be supported and advanc’d”.¹⁷ The higher genre of history painting aimed at and was controlled by Aristotelian unity of time and action as well as by probability and verisimilitude rather than by any visual principle. Now the disposition of action and rhetorical clarity of narrative replaced the visual qualities of composition. This double principle on which Shaftesbury seemed to build his theory of painting is worth exploring, especially that it developed into critical rule. Few years after Shaftesbury’s death, Abbé Dubos was to distinguish between “poetic and picturesque compositions” as two different modes of “the ordonnance of pictures”.¹⁸

Shaftesbury could learn the principles of visual thinking about painting only from French art theoreticians. The very word “*tablature*”, despite its etymology in Latin “*tabula*” mentioned by the author, is an obvious equivalent of French “*tableau*” and indicates unavoidable French influence.¹⁹ In this respect, the words “unity” and “the whole” as applied to painting are of much more interest and together with other concepts will be the subject of the subsequent analysis. Shaftesbury must have known them from *De arte graphica* by Charles Antoine Dufresnoy, the treatise on art written as a Latin poem and published in Paris by Roger de Piles in 1668 after author’s death, translated into French prose by the same de Piles and published together with his substantial commentary in the same year. Arguably, de Piles’ edition of Dufresnoy, translated *in extenso* into English by John Dryden in 1695, was the most popular book on art available at the beginning of the eighteenth century and must have had a decisive influence on Shaftesbury, both as an encouragement and a source of objection.²⁰ Shaftesbury kept

¹⁴ In his *Dictionary of Art Terms* Shaftesbury notes: “Venture the word and call the *tablature* sometimes the *poem* after P. Bellori’s example (p. 36, l. 8) of his pictures of Raphael in the Vatican.” (*Second Characters*, p. 180) Bellori described three frescoes by Raphael: *Attila*, *San Leone* and *‘E’l ritorno*’. “Tutte tre le quali azzioni surondo ben da lui ristrette all’unità di questo suo Poema, disponendo le figure nel fermarsi, nello scorrere avanti, e nel tornare in dietro con gli stessi affetti, che si convengono al moto di ciascuna.” P. Bellori, *Descrizione delle immagini dipinte da Raffaello d’Urbino nelle camere del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano*, Roma 1695, p. 36.

¹⁵ *Judgment of Hercules*, p. 4.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

¹⁸ Abbé Dubos, *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting and Music*, trans. T. Nugent, vol. 1, London 1748, pp. 220–222.

¹⁹ The coinage was strange enough not to take root in subsequent art theory written in English. Contrary to Shaftesbury’s intentions, Samuel Johnson defined ‘*Tablature*’ as “Painting on walls or ceilings”. Johnson, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, sv. *Tablature*.

²⁰ Ch.A. du Fresnoy, *De arte graphica liber*, Lutetiae Parisiorum 1668; *L’art de peinture de Charles Alphonse du Fresnoy, Traduit en François, avec des remarques nécessaires & tres-amplés [par Roger de Piles]*, Paris 1668; Ch.A. du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, trans. J. Dryden, London 1695. In his translation and commentaries, de Piles interpreted Dufresnoy’s original to suit his own views on art. Dryden, in turn, translated de Piles’ text rather than the Latin original. L. Lipking, *The Shifting Nature of Authority in Versions of De arte graphica*, “Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, 23, 1965, pp. 489–493. De Piles elaborated his *Observations* into full-fledge treatise on painting which was published in English as *The Art of Painting and the Lives of the Painters*, London 1706. Shaftesbury did not mention this book.

Dryden's translation in his library²¹ and he mentioned Dufresnoy in his writings along with other French authors, Fréart de Chambray and Abraham Bosse, as well as the Dutch humanist Franciscus Junius.²²

Shaftesbury's definition of the tablature reveals his dependence on all those authors despite substantial differences in their approach to painting in general and to pictorial unity in particular.²³ Junius and Fréart considered painting as imaginative and intellectual undertaking which revolved around the history invented by the painter-poet; for them, the unity of pictures was guaranteed by Aristotelian rules of poetical narrative. This view was sustained or even augmented by John Dryden who in the *Parallel of Poetry and Painting* which prefaced his translation of *De arte graphica* shifted the balance in *ut pictura poesis* doctrine sharply towards poetry. "[T]he chief end of Painting is to please the Eyes: and 'tis one great End of Poetry to please the Mind. Thus far the *Parallel* of the Arts holds true: with this difference, That the principal end of *Painting* is to please; and the chief design of *Poetry* is to instruct. In this the latter seems to have the advantage of the former."²⁴ In order to mitigate this stance, hardly suitable for the preface to the book on painting, he added: "But if we consider the *Artists* themselves on both sides, certainly their aims are the very same: they wou'd both make sure of pleasing, and that in preference to instruction. Next, the means of this pleasure is by Deceit. One imposes on the Sight, and the other on the Understanding."²⁵ Dufresnoy and de Piles were first to challenge this long established history-first approach. For them, especially for de Piles, the pivotal principle of painting was no longer the Albertian *storia* but *tout ensemble* – a pleasurable visual effect of the whole picture based on orderly interplay of colours, lights and shades. Dufresnoy not only maintained the balance between the visual aspects of the picture and its ability to instruct but also linked them together into coherent system. The subject of the picture should allow the painterly "charms and graces, that Colours, and the elegance of Design can possibly give [...] and to produce somewhat to the sight which is excellent, judicious, and well season'd; and at the same time proper to instruct, and to enlighten the Understanding."²⁶ De Piles in his *Observations* made painting and poetry equally capable of imitation, expression, deceiving and representing truth by means of fiction, because both equally relied on imagination. What is more, painting "often give[s] more Light to the Understanding than the clearest discourses we can make."²⁷ The visual effect championed by de Piles replaced rhetorical clarity of narrative as an aim of art and set both on colliding course.²⁸

Shaftesbury's definition of the tablature indicates that he was both versed with recent art-theoretical ideas and aware of different approaches to painting. In what follows, I would like to analyze the *Judgment of Hercules* seeking the answer to the question how Shaftesbury interpreted, reinterpreted and accommodated the cluster of interrelated concepts of disposition, unity, the whole, single view, the eye, harmony and colour by which Dufresnoy and de Piles tried to grasp and explain the visual effect of pictures.

The main part of Shaftesbury's treatise consists in detailed discussion of the (still) imaginary picture of Hercules. Shaftesbury reflected on how the parts and elements of the picture should be arranged and why. This type of analysis was adopted in French Academy and Shaftesbury knew it from Fréart's *Idea*.²⁹ Fréart discussed several pictures by Raphael (some engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi), Michelangelo and Giulio Romano in order to demonstrate how the principles of invention, proportion, colouring, expression and disposition ("Of the Regular *Position* of Figures") worked in practice.

What in the Introduction to *Hercules* looked like an ambitious mixture of intellectual and visual unity, now was given less equivocal interpretation. As the history tablature, which in his *Dictionary of Art Terms*³⁰ attached to the *Second Characters* Shaftesbury called simply a poem, *Hercules* was disposed on poetical prin-

²¹ *Librorum Anglicorum, Gallicorum, Italicorum, &c. utriusque Bibliothecæ vizt. Ægidiana, & Chelseyana Comitiss de Shaftesbury. Ægidis Anno Aeræ Christianæ 1709*, available at the Shaftesbury Project website: https://www.angam.phil.fau.de/fields/enst/lit/shaftesbury/reading-room/english-french-italian/#collapse_3 [13.09.2020].

²² R. Fréart de Chambray, *An Idea of the Perfection of Painting*, trans. J. Evelyn, London 1668; A. Bosse, *Le peintre converty aux précises et universelles regles de son art*, Paris 1667; F. Junius, *De pictura veterum*, Amsterdam 1637. Shaftesbury mentioned them in the *Idea of the Work*, the *Prefaratory Anticipatory Thoughts* and the *Plastics*, [in:] *Second Characters*, pp. 8, 16, 155 and note 2, 171.

²³ On the pictorial unity see T. Puttfarken, *David's Brutus and Theories of Pictorial Unity in France*, "Art History", 4, 1981, no. 3, pp. 296–299.

²⁴ Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, p. xx.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. xx.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 80–81.

²⁸ For the detailed discussion of de Piles' theory see T. Puttfarken, *Roger de Piles Theory of Art*, New Haven–London 1985.

²⁹ Fréart de Chambray, *An Idea of the Perfection of Painting*, pp. 24–136.

³⁰ *Second Characters*, p. 180.

principle of unity of time and action rather than with any visual effect in mind. Disposition was determined by the narrative: what was disposed was history, not *a picture*. Like for Fréart, “composition is [...] the *Ordonance of Figures*”³¹ – the idea of composition reaching back to Alberti’s *De pictura*.³² Similarly Dryden in his introductory *Parallel of Poetry and Painting* kept silent about the visual effect of the picture and emphasized the poetical aspects of composition. “The *Compositions* of the *Painter* shou’d be conformable to the *Text* of *Ancient Authours*, to the *Customs*, and the *Times*”³³, he wrote. In *Hercules*, the unity of time and action, which Shaftesbury called “the rule of consistency”, was a guiding principle of the tablature as opposed to the “mere confus’d Heap, or Knot of Pieces”³⁴ in which different stages of action were represented by the same figures as in medieval pictures. Any attempt to project the future or recall the past should be made by means of “Emblematical Devices”³⁵ or accessories used as prefigurative or retrospective symbols. The choice of the moment of action was therefore a key decision to be made. This choice should take into account not what is most beneficial to the visual composition of the scene but what contributes to the drama, sublimity, intelligibility and moral impact of the story. Painter who did not create such a unified poetical concept of the picture was not a historical painter at all even if he or she executed all other aspects of the picture to the highest degree.

For Dufresnoy and de Piles, composition of the bodies and disposition of the story was controlled by the visual effect of the whole picture and aimed at the satisfaction of the eye. Nothing should “steal [the principal Figure] from our Sight”³⁶, noted Dufresnoy. And he added: “Members [should be] combin’d in the same manner as the Figures are, that is to say, coupled and knit together. And the Groupes be separated by a void space, to avoid a confus’d heap [...] [which] divides the Sight into many Rays, and causes a disagreeable Confusion”,³⁷ “[o]ne side of the Picture must not be void, while the other is fill’d to the Borders; [...] let matters be so dispos’d, [...] that they shall appear in some sort equal”,³⁸ “[m]any dispers’d Objects breed confusion, and take away from the Picture that grave Majesty, that soft silence and repose, which give beauty to the Piece, and satisfaction to the sight. But if you are constrained by the subject, to admit of many Figures, you must then conceive the whole together; and the effect of the work at one view; and not every thing separately and in particular.³⁹ [...] Avoid also those Lines and Out-lines which are equal [...] all which by being too exact give to the Eye a certain displeasing Symmetry, which produces no good effect.”⁴⁰

Disposition of action was no longer subordinated to the clarity of narrative but, again, to the visual effect of the whole. “’Tis the business of a Painter, in his choice of Postures, to foresee the effect, and harmony of the Lights and Shadows, with the Colours which are to enter into the whole; taking from each of them, that which will most conduce to the production of a beautifull Effect.”⁴¹ Painter was expected to compose the figures and dispose the story in such a way as to achieve an agreeable visual effect based on the interplay of lights, shades and colours. Because they are always the lights, shades and colours of the objects imitated, especially of the figures employed in action, they must be disposed and grouped according to their contribution to the visual effect of the whole picture. For de Piles the visual order was an ultimate goal of painting. While commenting in his *Observations on the Art of Painting* on the disposition of the picture which he considered truly pictorial part of painting as opposed to invention and design based on “foreign” arts and sciences, such as general learning, mathematics, anatomy etc., de Piles reversed the significance of the visual and intellectual components of the picture. “[F]or the *Oeconomy* or ordering of the whole together, none but only Painter can understand it, because the end of the Artist is pleasingly to deceive the Eyes, which he can never accomplish if this part be wanting to him. A Picture may make an ill effect, though the *Invention* of it be truly understood, the *Design* of it correct and the Colours of it the most beautifull and fine that can be employ’d in it. And on the contrary we may behold other Pictures ill invented, ill design’d and painted with the most common Colours,

³¹ Fréart de Chambray, *An Idea of the Perfection of Painting*, p. 54.

³² Albertian idea of composition as, *inter alia*, a proportional construction of the figure out of parts is reflected by rather unusual reference of “Disposition or Ordonance” to the single figure. *Judgment of Hercules*, p. 26.

³³ Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, p. xxxvi.

³⁴ *Judgment of Hercules*, p. 9.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³⁶ Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, pp. 19–20.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

which shall make a very good effect, and which shall more pleasingly deceive.”⁴² And he further amplified the significance of disposition while diminishing that of invention: “The *Invention* simply finds out the subjects, and makes a choice of them suitable to the History which we treat; and the *Disposition* distributes those things which are thus found each to its proper place, and accommodates the Figures and the Groupes in particular, and the *Tout Ensemble* (or whole together) of the Picture in general: so that this *Oeconomy* produces the same effect in relation to the Eyes, as a *Consort of Musick* to the Ears.”⁴³

De Piles explained “the whole” in terms of visual effect resulting from perception. “[I]f you so assemble them [the Figures], that some of them sustain the others, and make them appear; and that all together they make but one entire Whole, then your Eyes will be fully satisfied: But if on the contrary, you divide them, your Eyes will suffer by seeing them *all together* dispers’d, or each of them *in particular*.”⁴⁴ The visual effect was achieved by such distribution of objects that the colours, lights and shadows naturally attached to them created orderly composed masses. De Piles wrote that a “Painter ought to collect the objects, and to dispose them in such a manner, as to compose one whole; the several contiguous parts of which, may be enlighten’d; many shodow’d and others of broken Colours to be in the turnings, as on a Bunch of Grapes.”⁴⁵ This effect was pleasurable. “[A]fter the great Lights, there must be great Shadows, which we call repose: because in reality the Sight would be tired, if it were attracted by a Continuity of glittering objects. The Lights may serve for a repose to the Darks, and the Darks to the Lights.”⁴⁶

De Piles’ concepts of the whole and deceiving of the eyes appeared here and there in Shaftesbury’s treatise, for example when he wrote that “the fewer the Objects are [...], the easier it is for the Eye, by one simple Act and in one View, to comprehend the *Sum* or *Whole*.”⁴⁷ Perhaps nowhere was Shaftesbury closer to de Piles than when he tried to distinguish painting from emblematical art of sculpture. “[F]or the completely imitative and illusive ART of PAINTING,” he wrote, “whose character it is to employ in her Works the united Force of different Colours; and who surpassing, by so many Degrees, and in so many Privileges, all other human Fiction or imitative Art, aspires in a directer manner towards Deceit and a Command over our very Senses; she must of necessity abandon whatever is *over-learned*, *humorous*, or *witty*; to maintain her-self in what is *natural*, *credible*, and *winning of our Assent*: that she may thus acquit her-self of what is her chief Province, the *specious* [deceiving] *Appearance of the Objects she represents*.”⁴⁸ This affinity, however, was only superficial and itself illusory. Not only Dufresnoy and de Piles went further in defining painting in terms of illusion and its ability to deceive the senses by means of colours, they also turned it into the main virtue of art. Dufresnoy wrote (in words chosen by de Piles and Dryden): “And as this part [Colouring] we may call the Soul of Painting and its utmost perfection, is a deceiving Beauty, but withal soothing and pleasing: So she has been accus’d of procuring Lovers for her Sister, and artfully ingaging us to admire her. But so little has this Prostitution, these false Colours, and this Deceit, dishonour’d Painting, that on the contrary, they have only serv’d to set forth her Praise, and make her merit farther known.”⁴⁹ This passage must have shocked Shaftesbury and raised his objections. Indeed, his concept of the whole bears less resemblance to the radical stance of de Piles.

In *Plastics*, Shaftesbury linked the whole to invention, not *collocation*, which he defined as “general symmetry, disposition”⁵⁰, and he considered symmetry as formal beauty “abstract from the moral part”⁵¹: “Invention. Story. Imagery. This being the first of the (five) parts in painting; though in poetry ’tis the Σύνεσις, collocation, whole, unity, as the French author (Mon^rFréart de Chambray) has made it also in painting [...].”⁵² Much more interesting is a passage in his *Characteristics*, where he derived the notions of the whole and the unity of sight directly from Aristotle. “A PAINTER, if he has any Genius, understands the *Truth* and Unity of Design [...] Piece, if it be beautiful, and carrys *Truth*, must be a *Whole*, by it-self, compleat, independent, and

⁴² R. de Piles, *Observations on the Art of Painting*, [in:] Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, p. 112.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 114.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 130–131.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 166.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 161–162.

⁴⁷ *Judgment of Hercules*, p. 39.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁴⁹ Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, p. 36.

⁵⁰ *Plastics*, [in:] *Second Characters*, p. 131.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 99. At the same time it is not without moral significance: “beautiful forms beautify; polite, polish.” *Ibidem*, p. 123.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 141.

withal as *great* and comprehensive as he can make it. So that Particulars, on this occasion, must yield to the general Design; and all things be subservient to that which is principal: in order to form a certain *Easiness of Sight*; a simple, clear, and *united View*, which woul’d be broken and disturb’d by the Expression of any thing peculiar or distinct.”⁵³ The fragment is based on Shaftesbury’s own translation from chapter VII of *Poetics* where Aristotle discussed the qualities of the structure of events. Shaftesbury modified the text and applied it to painting, especially Aristotle’s comparison of the proper extent of dramatic action to something visually graspable as a whole. Despite superficial similarity to de Piles’ concepts, the source of Shaftesbury’s views was Aristotle’s theory of tragedy. It is also Aristotle who bears responsibility for Shaftesbury’s definition of tablature as a picture graspable in one view, contrary to a fresco which is apparently not.

The problem of interpreting the concept of the whole went hand in hand with understanding the role of sight in responding to pictures. It was usually agreed that historical pictures required time for sequential reading of the narrative, figure after figure and group after group, and for gradual understanding of the expressive actions of the figures, the intentions behind those actions, the use of symbols and emblems in order to comprehend them into one meaningful whole. The main value of the picture was its intelligibility. Charles Lebrun’s analysis of Nicolas Poussin’s *The Gathering of the Manna* (1637–1639, Louvre Museum, Paris) was the model example of this kind of viewing which rewarded spectators with catharsis-like experience of the story.⁵⁴ But Lebrun also made use of the concept of the quick eye which grasped the mood expressed by colours, lights and shadows at one glance. For Dufresnoy and de Piles, as we have seen, the visual effect of the whole was graspable in one view. Throughout *De arte graphica*, they considered the eye as an ultimate judge of the quality of pictures, even if it contradicted the consistency of narrative. “Let the Eye be satisfy’d in the first place, even against and above all other reasons.”⁵⁵

Shaftesbury spoke of both these ways of looking at pictures, sequential and momentary, as if they were two modes of viewing the same picture: “When the Ordonnance is such, that the Eye not only runs over with ease the several Parts of the Design, (reducing still its View each moment to the principal Subject on which all turns) but when the same Eye, without the least detainment in any of the particular Parts, and resting, as it were, immovable in the middle, or centre of the Tablature, may see at once, in an agreeable and perfect Correspondency, all which is there exhibited to the Sight.”⁵⁶ The problem is that immovable contemplation of the whole had no real object in Shaftesbury’s picture because everything that appeared in it was subordinated to the clarity of the subject-matter. Moral meaning of the narrative could not be comprehended by contemplating distribution of the figures.⁵⁷ Shaftesbury linked together the sight with moral sense of the story by means of the concept of “judicious eye”⁵⁸ which he must have borrowed from Junius.⁵⁹ “Judicious eye” was controlled by the moral expectations of reason rather than any visual effect for which the sensual eye would be sufficient. Thus the eye, encompassing the whole of the picture, became an instrument of reason which comprehended the story, controlled emotional response to actions and made moral sense of the picture. Shaftesbury’s concept of judicious eye was consistent with academic ideal of a *peintre sçavants*, most fully described by André Félibien who equalled art with rational knowledge.⁶⁰ In the same spirit, perhaps also encouraged by Junius,

⁵³ Shaftesbury, *An Essay on the Freedom*, [in:] *Characteristics*, vol. 1, London 1711, pp. 142–143.

⁵⁴ Ch. Le Brun, *Les Israélites recueillant la manne dans le désert par Nicolas Poussin*, [in:] H. Jouin, *Conférences de l’Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, Paris 1883, pp. 48–65; English translation: Ch. Le Brun, *Sixth Conference*, [in:] *Art in Theory 1648–1815. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Ch. Harrison, P. Wood, J. Gaiger, Malden, MA–Oxford–Carlton 2000, pp. 123–131.

⁵⁵ Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, p. 60.

⁵⁶ *Judgment of Hercules*, p. 39.

⁵⁷ Dryden rightly doubted that painting may reveal its moral meaning in one view: “I must say this to the advantage of *Painting*, even above *Tragedy*, that what this last represents in the space of many Hours, the former shows us in one Moment. The Action, the Passion, and the manners of so many Persons as are contain’d in a *Picture*, are to be discern’d at once, in the twinkling of an Eye; at least they would be so, if the Sight could travel over so many different Objects all at once, or the Mind could digest them all at the same instant or point of time.” Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, p. xxv. De Piles thought that the object of contemplation is visual order of the picture which “infinitely delights the Eyes, which thereby contemplate the Work with more repose.” R. de Piles, *Observations on the Art of Painting*, [in:] Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting*, p. 132.

⁵⁸ *Judgment of Hercules*, p. 29.

⁵⁹ Junius wrote about “learned eyes” (“*eruditos oculos*”) which meant not only the sensuous eye but the whole apparatus of perception, including an eye, imagination and judgment, trained to be able to see beauties that only painters could see. F. Junius, *The Literature of Classical Art. I. The Painting of the Ancients*, ed. by K. Aldrich, Ph. Fehl, R. Fehl, Berkeley, Los Angeles–Oxford 1991, p. 66.

⁶⁰ A. Félibien, *Conférences de l’Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, London 1705, Preface: “Et cette connoissance que l’on acquiert, & dont l’on fait des regles, est à mon avis ce que l’on peut nommer Art [...] Comme l’instruction & le plaisir qu’on reçoit des ouvrages des Peintres & Sculpteurs ne vient pas seulement de la science du dessein, de la beauté des couleurs, ni du prix de la matiere, mais

Fréart de Chambray explained that “*Paynting* [...] will indeed require different *Eyes* to contemplate and enjoy her Beauty intirely: For the *Eye* of the *Understanding*, is the first and principal *Judge* of what she undertakes.”⁶¹ According to Fréart, the fifth part of painting, i.e. “the Regular Position of Figures” consists mainly in what he calls “*Perspective*” or “*Optica*” “that ’tis an *Art of seeing by our Reasons and Eyes intellectual*.” Accordingly, the painter “should first adjust his *Eye* with his *Reason* by the *Principles of Art*, which teaches us to behold things, not as they appear in *themselves* only, but as they *ought* to be.”⁶²

Similarly, colour and landscape, two most obvious candidates for creating the visual principle of the tablature, escaped Shaftesbury’s all pervading moral order only partially. Shaftesbury did not recognize the significance of lights and shadows but he did recognize the role of colours and their harmony. For him, harmony was not a visual tuning of colours but “one and the same Spirit” which “without contest [may] reign through the whole of the Design.”⁶³ Colours, however, should harmonize not with themselves but with character of the story. In *Plastics*, Shaftesbury admitted expressive role of colours which Charles Lebrun called *l’expression generale*⁶⁴ and noted: “*Colouring and tints* in the same manner suitable: if tragical, tragic, and so in general and particular each figure with harmony considered.”⁶⁵ In *Hercules*, after stressing that the true master should always observe “the Agreement or Correspondency of things”, he used the comparison with musical composition to explain the role the harmony of colours. “[T]is necessary he [a painter] shou’d form in his Mind a certain Note or Character of *Unity*, which being happily taken, wou’d out of the many Colours of his Piece, produce (if one may say so) a *particular distinct Species* of an original kind: like those Compositions in Musick, where among the different *Airs* (such as *Sonatas, Entrys, or Sarabands*) there are different and distinct species; of which we may say in particular, as to each, ‘That it has its own proper Character or Genius, peculiar to itself’.”⁶⁶ This musical metaphor resembles Poussin’s conception of *modi* utilized by subsequent French theoreticians, including Lebrun and de Piles, as a bridge spanning history with formal structure of the work (light, shade and colour) by means of expression and decorum – lights, shades and colours should harmonize with emotional tone of the story, tragic or joyous. But it turns out that for Shaftesbury, who replaced the word “*modus*” with the “*Key*”, this uniform character was not emotional but ornamental. He meant by it the affinity between the richness of colour of the principal figure and the rest of the picture. Thus the musical harmony of colours was subordinated to the general rule of decorum, with the character of the main hero as its source. For Shaftesbury, colours should not distract the eyes by any formal or visual independence but lead them to recognize the moral order of the story. Colours were “instruments, [...] [m]eans: not end. Imitation, lesson, instruction, pedagogy of the eye.”⁶⁷ The judicious eyes use colours as instruments of rational extraction of the moral meaning from visual means.

Another part of painting which contributed to Lebrun’s *l’expression generale* was the type of landscape which Shaftesbury called “perspective”. Contrary to Lebrun, for whom landscape, together with colours, lights and shades, was an expressive vehicle of general mood of the picture, Shaftesbury considered it as “*Episodick*”, unnecessary addition to the subject-matter. It “wou’d prove a mere Incumbrance to the Eye, and of necessity disturb the Sight, by diverting it from that which is principal, the *History and Fact*.”⁶⁸ For him, the landscape by no means participated in the picture as a whole, not in terms of academic *l’expression generale*, nor de Piles’ harmony of colours, but stood in opposition to history and could potentially degrade moral nobility of the subject. “Whatsoever appears in a historical Design, which is not essential to the Action, serves only to confound the Representation and perplex the Mind.”⁶⁹ “A just Design, or Tablature, shou’d at first view discover what *Nature* it is design’d to imitate [...] The Piece must by no means be equivocal or

de la grandeur des pensées, & de la parfaite connoissance qu’ont les Peintres & les Sculpteurs des choses qu’il y a un Art tout particulier qui est détaché de la matiere & de la main de l’Artisan, par lequel il doit d’abord former ses Tableaux dans son esprit, & sans quoi un Peintre ne peut faire avec le pinceau seul un ouvrage parfait, n’étant pas de cét Art comme de ceux où l’industrie & l’adresse de la main suffisent pour donner de la beauté.”

⁶¹ Fréart de Chambray, *An Idea of the Perfection of Painting*, p. 4.

⁶² *Ibidem*, pp. 20–21.

⁶³ *Judgment of Hercules*, pp. 30–31.

⁶⁴ In his *Conference sur l’Expression generale & particuliere* (Amsterdam–Paris 1698) Lebrun distinguished between two kinds of expression, general and particular, the first being a mood of painting created by formal aspects of painting, colour, light, shadows as well as the type of landscape, the second consisting in facial and bodily movements of the figures.

⁶⁵ *Plastics*, [in:] *Second Characters*, p. 131.

⁶⁶ *Judgment of Hercules*, p. 30.

⁶⁷ *Plastics*, [in:] *Second Characters*, p. 146.

⁶⁸ *Judgment of Hercules*, p. 33.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

dubious; but must with ease distinguish it-self, either as *historical* and *moral*, or as perspective and merely *natural*."⁷⁰ History and landscape were mutually exclusive and one must have given place to the other. Shaftesbury remained the devotee of Felibien's strict hierarchy of genres based on the nobility of the intelligent life as opposed to that unanimated. "The *merely natural* must pay homage to the *historical* or *moral*."⁷¹ For Shaftesbury, there is no "Ordonnance or Composition of a Work" without "Subordination". Like for Plato, order, which guarantees beauty, requires hierarchy. Pictorial order reflected moral order of the world, with God providing laws for humans, and humans imposing laws on the rest of nature.

Despite some modest attempts at transgressing the limits of poetical and moral approach to painting, in Conclusion Shaftesbury strongly restored the supremacy of moral reason over sensual pleasure. "[N]othing is more fatal, either to Painting, Architecture, or the other Arts, than this *false Relish* which is govern'd rather by what immediately strikes the Sense, than by what consequentially and by reflection pleases the Mind, and satisfies the Thought and Reason."⁷² "For of this *imitative Art* we may justly say, 'That tho it borrows help indeed from Colours, and uses them, as means, to execute its Designs; it has nothing, however, more wide of its real Aim, or more remote from its Intension, than to make a *shew* of Colours, or from their mixture, to raise a *separate* and *flattering* Pleasure to the SENSE."⁷³ And in the footnote he made it clear that "[t]he Pleasure is plainly foreign, and *separate*; as having no concern or share in the proper Delight or Entertainment which naturally arises from the Subject, and Workmanship it-self. For the Subject in respect of Pleasure, as well as Science, is absolutely completed, when the Design is executed, and the propos'd Imitation once accomplish'd. And this it always is the best, when the Colours are most subdu'd, and made subservient."⁷⁴

Shaftesbury recognized the visual requirements of painting but restrained from applying them to history pictures which aimed at moral instruction rather than sensual pleasure. His preference of the history was consistent with rhetorical tradition revived by Junius and adopted by French Academy. It emphasized the narrative and the expressions of figures as the means of conveying poetical meaning, dramatic sense of action and its moral significance. The principles of order, unity and the whole responded to the requirements of reason as a residuum of moral judgment and not to the sensual eye. Nothing in the picture should arrest the gaze on merely visual level and prevent the Platonic journey from the sensual to the rational and moral.

At the same time, Shaftesbury was looking for critical language to formulate his ideas on art. French art theory was a natural source of artistic language, with *De arte graphica* by Dufresnoy and de Piles the most comprehensive one. But much of what Shaftesbury found there must have appalled him. He must have decided to retain de Piles' language while reversing its meaning. He attempted to reinterpret and apply some of de Piles' visual concepts, like "the whole" or "one view", to suit his moral theory of painting but his theory clearly could not accommodate them. What we witness in his *Hercules* is the confusion of language rather than confusion of ideas. His ideas were clear, his language was not.

The source of this clarity was moral philosophy. Shaftesbury considered art as subsidiary to morals and like morals art became for him black-and-white, with intellectual aspects opposed to visual ones. It is hard to overlook that his art theory became a victim of this binary way of thinking. Like the hero of his exemplary picture, he faced the choice between two competitive visions of painting. He made no attempt at reconciling them – his critical tools being too blunt – but did make a choice based on the moral judgment, not aesthetic pleasure.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, pp. 46–47.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

„SĄD HERKULESA”.
SHAFTESBURY NA ROZSTAJNYCH DROGACH HISTORII SZTUKI

Streszczenie

Na początku XVIII w. brytyjska teoria sztuki była niemal dziewiczą dziedziną, otwartą na nieuniknione wpływy z kontynentu. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Trzeci Lord Shaftesbury, który poświęcił ostatnie lata życia problemom sztuki, podjął próbę stworzenia pierwszej poważnej teorii sztuki w Anglii. W niniejszym artykule próbuję pokazać, że Shaftesbury stanął przed koniecznością dokonania wyboru pomiędzy dwoma konkurencyjnymi podejściami do sztuki rozpowszechnionymi we Francji na przełomie wieków: podejściem tradycyjnym, opartym na poetyckim rozumieniu malarstwa, którego istotą była historia i jej moralne znaczenie, i nowym, zaproponowanym przez Rogera de Piles, opartym na działaniu koloru i światłocienia, które tworzą całościowy efekt wizualny niezależny od przedstawionej w obrazie historii. Shaftesbury wybrał tradycyjne podejście, wiedziony obawami natury moralnej i niechętny obraniu przyjemności zmysłowej za cel sztuki. Zawłaszczył jednocześnie kluczowe pojęcia Rogera de Piles: obrazową jedność i całość obrazu, ignorując związane z nimi idee. Należy to rozumieć jako półśrodek, który pozwolił mu uwspółcześnić język sztuki bez uszczerbku dla moralnego znaczenia malarstwa.

“THE JUDGMENT OF HERCULES”. SHAFTESBURY AT A CROSSROADS OF ART THEORY

Summary

In the early 18th century, British art theory was an almost virgin field, open to inevitable influences from the continent. Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Lord of Shaftesbury, who devoted the last years of his life to various problems of art, made an attempt to create the first serious theory of art in England. In this article, I try to show that Shaftesbury was faced with the need to choose between two competing approaches to art widespread in France at the turn of the century: the traditional approach, based on the poetic understanding of painting, the essence of which was history and its moral meaning, and the new one, proposed by Roger de Piles, based on the action of color and light and shade, which create a comprehensive visual effect independent of the story presented in the picture. Shaftesbury took a traditional approach, driven by moral fears and rather reluctant to make sensual pleasure the goal of art. At the same time, he appropriated the key concepts of Roger de Piles: the pictorial unity and the whole picture, ignoring the ideas associated with them. This should be understood as a half-measure that allowed him to modernize the language of art without the danger of compromising the moral importance of painting.

Keywords: art theory, aesthetic theory, literary theory; 18th Century British aesthetics; 18th Century French Art Theory; 18th Century moral philosophy; neoclassicism; aesthetic experience;