

Alexander Pope and *Ut Pictura Poesis*

ROBERT W. WILLIAMS

The critical and aesthetic theory *Ut Pictura Poesis* (or, as Simonides expressed it: "a poem is a speaking picture, a picture is a silent poem") was a source of lively argument among literary and art theorists of the entire seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century. Its history as a painting theory has been excellently displayed in an essay by Rensselaer W. Lee,¹ while its pertinence to the study of the poetry of the first half of the eighteenth century has been dealt with extensively in Ralph Cohen's detailed study of James Thomson's *The Seasons*.² Its possible relevance to the poetry of Alexander Pope has been considered at some length in Jean H. Hagstrum's *The Sister Arts*³ and Morris R. Brownell's *Alexander Pope and the Arts of Georgian England*.⁴ That Pope knew of the theory is certain: it is expressed to a greater or lesser degree in most of the French literary critics of the seventeenth century, in Dryden's "A Parallel between Poetry and Painting",⁵ in the writings of Pope's friend Jonathan Richardson the elder, and reaches the heights of absurdity in Joseph Spence's *Polymetis* (1747).

In *The Sister Arts*, Professor Hagstrum's chapter on Pope's pictorialism is a treatment of pictorial passages from several of Pope's poems; but the overall subject of the book necessitates placing Pope in a larger context of a continuous line of poetic pictorialism and his investigation of Pope is necessarily brief. In addition, the main thesis of Hagstrum's book requires that he investigate, through a consideration of Addison's theory of the

- 1 Rensselaer W. Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting", *The Art Bulletin*, XXII, 4 (1940), 197-269.
- 2 Ralph Cohen, *The Art of Discrimination: Thomson's "The Seasons" and the Language of Criticism* (Berkeley, 1964).
- 3 Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: the Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago, 1958).
- 4 Morris R. Brownell, *Alexander Pope and the Arts of Georgian England* (Oxford, 1978).
- 5 Charles A. Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting, by C. A. Du Fresnoy. With Remarks. Translated into English; with an Original Preface, containing a Parallel between Poetry and Painting, translated by John Dryden*, in Dryden, *Works*, rev. and ed. G. Saintsbury, XVII (London, 1892). Further citations appear in the body of the text as Precept — for Du Fresnoy, and *Dryden*, p.— for de Piles' "Remarks", etc.

imagination (put forward in *Spectator*, Nos. 411–421) the viability of *Ut Pictura Poesis* as a theory. Morris Brownell, in his survey of Pope's personal interest in, and involvement with, his contemporary visual arts, has a chapter (*Brownell*, pp. 39–67) on Pope's critical interest in the theory. Drawing on the notes Pope appended to his translation of *The Iliad*⁶ and on critical statements embodied in some of his poems, Brownell concludes that Pope's application of the theory to both the practice and criticism of poetry (his own and others) is as metaphor only.

That literary critics and theorists of the early eighteenth century were fond of drawing comparisons between poetry and painting is well known, and it has become customary, to some extent, among modern commentators to note such comparisons as "traditional" or "standard" and go no further. Pope exhibited this fondness: in his major critical statement, *An Essay on Criticism*, as a glance at the footnotes in the Twickenham Edition shows (*TE*, I, 239–326) over seventy lines can be glossed by references to previous works on painting, or essays in which a direct comparison of poetry and painting is made. Three works provide the majority of annotations: Roger de Piles' *The Art of Painting*; Dryden's "A Parallel . . ."; and Dryden's poem, "To Sir Godfrey Kneller".

There are in addition a number of other lines in this poem not noted by the Twickenham editors as borrowings, the ideas of which can be found at first-hand—or not more than second-hand—in Charles Du Fresnoy's poem *De Arte Graphica*, a work which, as Pope was familiar with Dryden's "A Parallel . . .", he must have been familiar with in Dryden's accompanying translation. Pope's lines on the limitations of Man are an example:

Nature to all things fix'd the Limits fit,
And wisely curb'd proud Man's pretending Wit:
As on the *Land* while *here* the *Ocean* gains,
In *other parts* it leaves wide Sandy Plains;
Thus in the *Soul* while *Memory* prevails,
The solid Pow'r of *Understanding* fails;
Where Beams of warm *Imagination* play,
The *Memory's* soft Figures melt away.
One *Science* only will one *Genius* fit;
So *vast* is Art, so *narrow* Human Wit.

(*EC*, ll. 52–61)

6 Alexander Pope (trans.), *The Iliad*, ed. Maynard Mack *et al.* (London, 1967), Vols. VII–VIII of the Twickenham edition. Further references to this edition appear in the body of the text as *TE* followed by volume and page.

Excepting the simile of the ocean, much of the thought can be found in Du Fresnoy:

Though there are many things in painting, of which no precise rules are to be given . . . yet I shall not omit to give some precepts, which I selected from among the most considerable which we have received from nature, that exact schoolmistress, after having examined . . . those masterpieces of antiquity which were the chief examples of this art; and it is by this means, that the mind and the natural disposition are to be cultivated, and that science perfects genius; and also moderates that fury of the fancy which cannot contain itself within the bounds of reason; but often carries a man into dangerous extremes. For there is a mean in all things. . . . (Precept II)

The thought here is also reflected in Pope's lines (ll. 80-7) on "wit" and the restraining force of "Judgement". Pope's image (ll. 58-9) of the dissolving power of imagination on memory is also adumbrated by Du Fresnoy:

It is very expedient to make a model of those things, which we have not in our sight, and whose nature is difficult to be retained in the memory. (Precept XXV)

On this Roger de Piles comments:

By this rule we plainly see, how necessary it is for a painter to know how to model, and to have many models of soft wax. (*Dryden*, p. 445)

Du Fresnoy and de Piles point out the necessity of making wax-models of things "difficult to be retained in the memory". Pope, in the lines quoted, uses the image of wax-models to stand for facts retained in the memory, and then points out how the warmth of "Imagination" (in the sense of unchecked fancy) can alter and dissipate these facts.

Immediately preceding Precept XXV in Du Fresnoy's poem is another which adumbrates a precept of Pope:

But let not the work be too much enriched with gold or jewels; for the abundance of them makes them look cheap, their value arising from the scarcity. (Precept XXIV)

Pope expressed it thus:

Poets like Painters, thus, unskill'd to trace
The *naked Nature* and the *living Grace*,
With *Gold* and *Jewels* cover ev'ry Part,
And hide with *Ornaments* their *Want of Art*.
(*EC*, ll. 293-296)

The thought is expressed again in *Epistle to a Lady* (ll. 185-6). As the Twickenham editors note (*TE*, I, 272n) this analogy between poets and painters was traditional, but they also note

that Pope's lines recall a similar passage in Dryden's "A Parallel . . .". Since, however, Dryden's essay was occasioned by his translation of *De Arte Graphica*, one might assume that Dryden either took the idea from Du Fresnoy, or else stated in his own terms an idea in Du Fresnoy conformable to his own. A double source might then be provided for Pope.

Enjoying accurate knowledge in the critic, Pope writes:

Know well each ANCIENT'S proper *Character*,
His *Fable*, *Subject*, *Scope* in ev'ry Page,
Religion, *Country*, *Genius* of his Age.

(EC, ll. 119-21)

Du Fresnoy says very much the same thing to the painter:

We are to consider the place where we lay the scene of the picture; the countries where they were born, whom we represent; the manner of their actions, their laws, and customs, and all that is properly belonging to them. (Precept XXVI)

De Piles, in his commentary on this, notes:

This is what Monsieur de Chambray calls, to do things according to decorum. See what he says of it, in the interpretation of that word, in his book of the Perfection of Painting. It is not sufficient, that in the picture there be nothing found which is contrary to the place . . .; but we ought, besides, to mark out the place, and make it known to the spectator by some particular address, that his mind may not be put to the pains of discovering. (*Dryden*, p. 447)

Thus, just as Du Fresnoy is asking for accurate historical knowledge in the painter, so Pope is asking for the same knowledge in the critic.

Cumulatively, then, a significant number of lines in Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* (approximately ninety-odd) can be annotated by reference to texts, texts certainly known to Pope at this time, which deal directly with the practice and theory of the visual arts. While it might be safe to assume that a literary artist is making metaphoric comparisons which are "commonplace" or "traditional" when he expresses ideas in which poetry and painting are linked that may parallel or be derived from, for example, Aristotle's *Poetics* or Rapin's *Reflections*,⁷ the same assumption cannot be so easily made when the theorist appears to use as his source works which are devoted directly to the art of painting, or to the relationship between poetry and painting. Pope's critical theorizing along lines which seem to stem from and lead back to treatises which deal directly with the art and practice of painting (de Piles' *The Art of Painting* and Du Fres-

7 For example, *Essay on Criticism*, ll. 21-5, 169-74.

noy's *De Arte Graphica*) or to a work devoted to establishing a parallel, if not an identity, between poetry and painting (Dryden's "A Parallel . . .") would seem to indicate that Pope himself saw a close affinity between the criticism of poetry and the criticism of painting, and that critical and instructional statements intended for one could be equally applied to the other.

Critical observations in similar, even more specific terms can be found in Pope's correspondence, particularly that of the early years when he was forming his ideas. In an early letter to William Walsh he censures the fault of over-correction:

I am convinced . . . that one may correct too much; for in poetry as in Painting, a Man may lay Colours one upon another, till they stiffen and deaden the piece.⁸

Some years later, in 1712, he was suggesting to John Caryll (*Corresp.* I, 165) that his letters to Caryll "which were intended as sketches of my friendship, give as faint an imperfect image of it, as the little landships we commonly see in black and white do of a beautiful country." A few months before the publication of *An Essay on Criticism*, adversely commenting on poets of the school of Crashaw, who expend their energies not on "design" and "exactness of parts" but on "pretty conceptions; fine metaphors, glittering expressions", he observes to Cromwell:

These are only the pleasing parts of poetry, which may be judged of at a view, and comprehended all at once. And (to express myself like a painter) their *colouring* entertains the sight, but the *lines and life* of the picture are not to be inspected too narrowly. (*Corresp.* I, 110)

To remark on the resemblance of thought and expression that these passages (and others written in the same period) bear to similar passages in *An Essay on Criticism*⁹ would be to state the obvious. However, it is not so obvious that the literary critic Pope who intends "to express myself like a painter" to Cromwell on 17 December 1710, is also the painter Pope who, within a few weeks of this letter, presented a painting of his own to Mrs John Caryll (*Corresp.* I, 115). Pope expresses himself "like a painter" not so much because the linking of poetry and painting was traditional, but because he *was* a painter.

8 Alexander Pope, *Correspondence*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 volumes (Oxford, 1956). Further citations appear in the body of the text as *Corresp.* followed by volume and page. Spelling and capitalization have been modernized.

9 e.g. ll. 21-5, 58-9, 289-92.

Late in 1711 he was again writing to Cromwell about literature, but in terms which may reflect those difficulties he was experiencing as a painter, difficulties which led, in the following year, to his taking lessons from the artist Charles Jervas:

We grasp some more beautiful idea in our brain than our endeavours to express it can set to the view of others, and still do but labour to fall short of our first imagination. The gay colouring which fancy gave to our design at the first transient glance we had of it, goes off in the execution; like those various figures in the gilded clouds, which while we gaze long upon, to separate the parts of each imaginary image, the whole faints before the eye, and decays into confusion. (*Corresp.* I, 135)

The same sort of phrasing appears in a letter to Jacob Tonson Snr in 1732, about the "Man of Ross" lines in *Moral Essay III*. Pope notes:

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 the famous, or rich, or high-born men. (*Corresp.* III, 290)

One notes here the parenthesis, "as the painters call it".

Other examples relating biography to portrait-painting are frequent in the correspondence of the years 1730-1740, years when Pope was at work on the *Moral Essays* and the *Imitations of Horace*.¹⁰ Perhaps his last linking of literature to painting in the correspondence comes in the tribute he paid to Warburton in 1742:

It is certain you have a full right to any favours I could do you, who not only monthly but weekly of late have loaded me with favours, of that kind which are most acceptable to veteran authors; those garlands which a commentator weaves to hang about his poet, and which are flowers both of his own gathering and painting too, not blossoms springing from the dry author. (*Corresp.* IV, 400)

As noted earlier, there are numerous occasions in *An Essay on Criticism* when Pope draws an analogy between the "sister arts" of poetry and painting. In some of these comparisons the distinction between poetry and painting is kept fairly clear. Speaking of the debilitating effects of false learning on the "seeds" of true judgement for instance, he writes:

Yet if we look more closely, we shall find
Most have the *Seeds* of Judgement in their Mind;
Nature affords at least a *glimm'ring Light*;

10 e.g. *Corresp.* III, 101; 209; 291; *Corresp.* IV, 43.

The *Lines*, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.
 But as the slightest Sketch, if justly trac'd,
 Is by ill *Colouring* but the more disgrac'd,
 So by *false Learning* is *good Sense* defac'd.
 (EC, ll. 19–25)

In this comparison, “*good Sense*” is likened to an accurate sketch, and “*false Learning*” is likened to “ill *Colouring*”. The comparison is kept simple, the equation of term to term is loose, and the comparison is kept to a minimum: two lines (ll. 23–4) are devoted to the simile from the visual arts, one line (l. 25) sums up the critical, literary point Pope wishes to make. The same economy is practised in a couplet on varying one’s writing style:

As shades more sweetly recommend the Light
 So modest Plainness sets off sprightly Wit.
 (EC, ll. 301–2)

Here again there is an economy of expression of the simile and the literary critical point Pope wishes to make: one line for one, one line for the other. Elsewhere in the poem, however, Pope’s concentration on making literary critical points wavers. Lamenting the fact that language changes, and a poet’s meaning will be lost to future generations, he compares words to the colours used by a painter:

So when the faithful *Pencil* has design'd
 Some *bright Idea* of the Master’s Mind,
 Where a *new World* leaps out at his command,
 And ready Nature waits upon his Hand;
 When the ripe Colours *soften* and *unite*,
 And sweetly *melt* into just Shade and Light,
 When mellowing Years their full Perfection give,
 And each Bold Figure just begins to *Live*;
 The *treach’rous Colours* the fair Art betray,
 And all the bright Creation fades away!
 (EC, ll. 484–93)

This is an extended simile of the standard kind found in Homer and Virgil; but it is also an analogy from painting which sums up the entire history of a painter’s created work from its first inception in the artist’s mind to its ultimate fading. The analogy is elaborated in extreme detail over ten lines, and serves only an attendant significant purpose in making a literary critical point, for the point it is intended to support had already been made in the preceding half of the verse-paragraph (ll. 474–83). Pope’s account of the “life” of a painting assumes its own importance; it is not only a rhetorical device to enforce a literary point, but a digression directly into the field of the visual arts.

This tendency to draw illustrative material from the field of the visual arts, or fields in which the visuality of the simile is enlarged upon beyond the stage necessary to demonstrate a literary critical point, occurs frequently in the poem. A point to illustrate "a *Grace* beyond the Reach of Art" is made by a three-line excursion into landscape aesthetics (ll. 158-60); the point that "the more we learn the more we discover remains to be learnt" requires an analogy thirteen lines long of a climber in an Alpine landscape (ll. 220-32); a plea for observing the *gestalt* in literature is illustrated by a six-line parallel drawn from a contemplation of the architecture of St Peter's in Rome (ll. 247-52); the distinction between "*False Eloquence*" and "true *Expression*" requires a consideration of the colour-refracting powers of the prism (ll. 311-7). Finally, Pope describes the revival of the arts in "*Leo's golden days*" (ll. 697-704) and here, at least for the moment, Pope's attention is concentrated on the visual arts of sculpture, architecture, and painting; poetry, as an art, occupies an attendant position in the subsuming phrase "*Sculpture and her Sister Arts*", and, in the general catalogue of revivals, occupies only half a line (l. 704). Lesser examples are scattered throughout the poem.

That eighteenth-century literary critics were able to speak, with apparent sincerity, of such things as "the fine poetical pictures" of Milton, for example, is well known. Indeed, Dryden had already done this in his essay "A Parallel . . ." where he equated the defects in a tragic character with the warts and moles of a portrait, and the sub-plots in a tragedy with the subsidiary figures in a history-painting. Pope does not go quite so far, but the tendency is apparent in his own literary criticism generally. In his annotations to *The Iliad* "the Image of the Goddess of Battels blazing with her immortal Shield . . . is agreeable to the bold painting of our Author"; "This Simile contains as proper a comparison, and as fine a picture of Nature as any in *Homer*"; "There never was a finer Piece of Painting than this". Pope also criticizes other poets in these terms. In an early letter to Cromwell (*Corresp.* I, 101) he commends a piece of verse by Ambrose Philips on the Danish Winter as "a very lively piece of poetical painting, and I recommend it." Thomas Tickell's poem on the Peace of Utrecht, so Pope told Caryll (*Corresp.* I, 157) contained "several most poetical images and fine pieces of painting." A month later he was again telling Caryll (*Corresp.* I, 168) that "Mr Philips has two lines which seem to me what the French call very picturesque."

From a survey of all the foregoing instances in which Pope relates poetry to painting,¹¹ it can easily be seen that he held that there was a close relationship between the art of poetry and the art of painting, especially perhaps since such a relationship combined the two arts of which he was a practitioner. It is evident that Pope felt himself to be making critical statements which were meaningful, that there was a close relationship, a relationship which was in some way visual, or at least potentially visual, between poetry and painting. This tends towards an acceptance of at least one half of the idea *ut pictura poesis*, that a poem is or can sometimes be a speaking picture.

The problem of dealing with critics such as Pope, who seem to be thinking in terms of *ut pictura poesis*, finally reduces itself, as Ralph Cohen has shown (*Discrimination*, 188–248) to one of semantics: what did such critics mean by terms such as “paint”, “picture”, “sketch”. An inspection of Pope’s use of a number of such words, as they occur in his poetry, reveals certain definite patterns. The following table is a sampling of likely words as they are used in his poetry:¹²

COLOUR (<i>n.</i>)	15 times	hue = 12; poss. metaphoric = 2; flesh tints = 1
DESIGN (<i>n.</i>)	10 times	visual sketch = 2; intention = 8
DESIGN (<i>v.</i>)	5 times	to sketch visually = 4; intend = 1
DRAW(S) (<i>v.</i>)	42 times	pull(s) = 34; sketch(es) = 3; poss. metaphoric = 2
PICTURE (<i>n.</i>)	10 times	visual painting = 8; poss. metaphoric = 2
SKETCH (<i>n.</i>)	2 times	visual depiction = 2
PAINT (<i>n.</i>)	3 times	artist’s colours = 3
PAINT(ED) (<i>v.</i>)	15 times	visually depict = 9; cosmetics = 1; poss. metaphoric = 5
PAINTS (<i>v.</i>)	4 times	visually depict = 4
PAINTING (<i>pres. p.</i>)	1 time	poss. metaphoric = 1
PAINTED (<i>past p.</i>)	15 times	visually depicted = 9; cosmetics = 5; poss. metaphoric = 1
PAINTER (<i>n.</i>)	3 times	visual artist = 3

11 Minor references also occur in such of Pope’s early prose works as have been identified. See Pope, *Prose Works*, vol. I, ed. Norman Ault (1935), 77, 90, 91, 143.

12 Counts are taken from Abbott, *A Concordance to the Works of Alexander Pope*. They thus do not include Pope’s translations or poetic “imitations”. An eye-check of these (including *The Temple of Fame*) did not alter these frequencies.

From this table it is clear that, with the exception of the verb "draw" which is seldom used with a possible visual significance, Pope's use of such words as "colour", "picture", "paint" as they appear in his poetry, is almost entirely in terms of their direct visual meaning; the frequency of possible metaphoric use is small, almost in all cases depending for meaning on the visual arts, as also the references to facial cosmetics (itself an extension of the visual arts). This high frequency of usage of such words in their specifically visual sense must lead one to doubt that possible metaphorical uses in Pope's prose are necessarily metaphorical.

Pope's willingness to see description in poetry as capable of being "fine poetical painting" can, when required, extend to the formal and structural aspects of a scene. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the copious notes he added to his translation of *The Iliad*. Here one example of structural analysis, chosen from many, may suffice. In *Iliad* Book VIII occurs the well known incident in which Diomedes goes to the aid of the aged Nestor, in the face of a furious onslaught by Hector. The passage is too long to quote in full, but the climactic incident, after Diomedes has taken Nestor into his own chariot, is translated by Pope as follows:

Hector they face; unknowing how to fear,
Fierce he drove on; *Tydidēs* whirl'd his Spear.
The Spear with erring Haste mistook its way,
But plung'd in *Eniopeus'* Bosom lay.
His opening hand in Death forsakes the Rein;
The Steeds fly back; He falls, and spurns the Plain.
Great *Hector* sorrows for his Servant kill'd,
Yet unreveng'd permits to press the field;
Till to supply his place and rule the Car,
Rose *Archeptolemus*, the fierce in War.
And now had Death and Horror cover'd all;
Like tim'rous Flocks the *Trojans* in their Wall
Inclos'd had bled: but *Jove* with awful Sound
Roll'd the big Thunder o'er the vast Profound:
Full in *Tydidēs'* Face the Light'ning flew;
The Ground before him flam'd with Sulphur blew;
The quiv'ring Steeds fell prostrate at the Sight;
And *Nestor's* trembling Hand confess'd his Fright.

(ll. 149-66)

Pope's annotation to the line "The Ground before him flam'd with Sulphur blew" (*TE* VII, 405) is lengthy and elaborate:

Here is a battel described with so much fire, that the warmest imagination of an able painter cannot add a circumstance to heighten the surprise or horror of the picture. Here is what they call the *fracas*, or hurry and tumult of the action in the utmost strength of colour-

ing, upon the foreground, and the repose or solemnity at a distance, with great propriety and judgement. First, in the *eloignement* we behold Jupiter in golden armour, surrounded with glory, upon the summit of Mount Ida; his chariot and horses by him, wrapt in dark clouds. In the next place below the horizon, appear the clouds rolling and opening, thro' which the Lightning flashes in the face of the Greeks, who are flying on all sides; Agamemnon and the rest of the commanders in the rear, in postures of astonishment. Towards the middle of the piece, we see Nestor in the utmost distress, one of his horses having a deadly wound in the forehead with a dart, which makes him rear and writhe, and disorder the rest. Nestor is cutting the harness with his Sword, while Hector advances driving full speed. Diomed interposes, in an action of the utmost fierceness and intrepidity: these two heroes make the principle figures and subject of the picture. A burning thunderbolt falls just before the feet of Diomed's horses, from whence a horrid flame of sulphur arises.

The dramatic, visual qualities of this scene were justly recognized by Pope and his contemporaries: the scene was illustrated in a highly baroque manner in Ozell, Oldisworth and Broome's translation of *The Iliad* and illustrated in much the same way as the headpiece to Book VIII of Pope's translation.¹³ In this annotation Pope demonstrates his belief that poets can create paintings in poetry not only in visual detail, but also in spatial arrangement of height, depth, foreground and background. He "reads" Homer's lines as a history-painting displaying a horizontal dimension in width and depth, with a "Foreground" of action, a middleground where "we see Nestor in the utmost distress", and a background with "Agamemnon and the rest of the commanders in the rear". The picture also possesses a vertical dimension with an elevated, distant view in "the *eloignement*" of Jupiter and his chariot on Mount Ida, dark clouds opening "in the next place below the horizon", and then the ground-level on which the "action" takes place. Pope concludes this annotation thus:

This is only a specimen of a single picture design'd by Homer out of the many with which he has beautified *The Iliad*. And indeed every thing is so natural and so lively, that the history-painter would generally have no more to do but to delineate the forms, and copy the circumstances just as he finds them describ'd by this great Master. We cannot therefore wonder at what has been so often of Homer's furnishing ideas to the most famous painters of antiquity.

Here Pope argues clearly that the transfer to canvas of visual images already present in the poetry is not only possible but the practical thing to do. He makes no suggestion that reinterpret-

13 Both illustrations are reproduced in *TE VII*, plates 10-11.

tation to suit a different medium would be necessary; rather, that "the history-painter would generally have no more to do but delineate the forms, and copy the circumstances". Consequently, if these lines are "only a specimen of a single picture design'd by Homer out of the many with which he has beautified *The Iliad*", one must hold that when Pope makes observations such as "There never was a finer piece of painting than this" then he usually means precisely that: not that the description is "fit to be the subject of a picture", but that it is, to all intents and purposes, a picture itself which can be transferred, without reinterpretation, to canvas.

The summation of Pope's complete acceptance of the theory *ut pictura poesis* and the identity of poetry and painting can be found in his extended essay "Observations on the Shield of Achilles" (*TE* VII, 358-70) which he appended to Homer's description (*Iliad* XVIII, ll. 557-704) of the shield made for Achilles by Vulcan. The shield was a contentious issue for seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century critics using *ut pictura poesis* theory, and Pope opens his essay by asserting that, in the description, Homer's intention "was no less, than to draw the picture of the whole world in the compass of this shield." He first brings forward counters to "the loose and scatter'd objections of the critics", second he demonstrates that all the scenes described could be depicted on a normal-sized circular shield. His third consideration of Homer's description, and one which occupies by far the major portion of the essay, is as follows:

And lastly, I shall attempt what has not yet been done, to consider it as a work of *painting*, and prove it in all respects conformable to the most just ideas and established rules of the art.

Pope opens this third section of the essay by making it perfectly clear that he intends to discuss Homer's description:

It now having been shown, that the shield of Homer is blameless as to its design and disposition . . . what remains is to consider this piece as a complete *idea* of painting, and a sketch for what one may call an *universal picture*. This is certainly the light in which it is chiefly to be admired, and in which alone the critics have neglected to place it.

This is followed by the assertion that the description *is* a "universal picture", not only as a picture of the whole world (including the oceans and the firmament) but as a complete exercise in all types of painting:

There is scarce a species of branch of this art of painting which is not here to be found, whether History, Battle-painting, Landskip, Architecture, Fruits, Flowers, Animals, etc.

This is an assertion of belief in the poet's ability to create in poetry the equivalent of all the standard classes of painting—landscape and still-life, genre, portraiture, history. The poet may be sculptor also, for "the shield is . . . described as a piece of sculpture" as well as a piece of painting. Pope points out that there is *colour* in the description as well, since Homer mentions the "blackness" of the ploughed earth, the "several colours" of the grapes and vines, the yellow of the harvest, and so on. He next demonstrates that Homer, as well as creating visual images in great detail, also observes the standard requirements of the good visual artist—invention, composition, expression, etc.¹⁴ He proves that Homer makes use of perspective in his visual images, and then that these images obey the standard injunctions to the visual artist (to be found in Du Fresnoy, for example): in each of his visual images Homer observes one principal action, one moment of time, and one point of view. Pope's remarks on the way in which Homer contrasts the various scenes on the shield are especially full of praise:

Nothing is more wonderful than his exact observation of the *contrast*, not only between figure and figure, but between subject and subject. The city of Peace is a contrast to the city in War; between the seige in the fourth picture, and the battle in the sixth a piece of *paysage* is introduced, and rural scenes follow after. The country too is represented in war in the fifth, as well as in peace in the seventh, eighth and ninth.

This assessment, at first glance, could easily be taken to refer to Pope's own *Windsor Forest*. Certainly, Pope held, a number of discrete "scenes" could still form part of one harmonious whole, a "universal picture" or a poem; to object to this "is as much as absurd as to object against so many of Raphael's Cartoons appearing in one gallery". Finally, Pope concludes his essay on "The Shield of Achilles" with a detailed analysis of each of the twelve "scenes" into which it may be divided, and demonstrates that in each case Homer has fulfilled all the require-

14 The requirements for a finished painting were well classified by Pope's day. Jonathan Richardson, for example (*An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715) 43–147) lists seven: invention, expression, composition, design, colouring, handling, grace and greatness. The similarity to the traditional terms of rhetoric is apparent. On this see Lee, "*Ut Pictura Poesis . . .*", 264–5.

ments necessary for a painting.

From a general consideration of the foregoing of Pope's statements in which poetry and painting are connected, and with special reference to his observations on Homer, certain formulations concerning his idea of the relationship of poetry and painting can be made.

Firstly, there is the general statement that the visual image-making faculty of the poet enables him to create equivalents to the work of the painter and sculptor. He may borrow an already-created image from the visual arts, or he may create his own. Secondly, such an image can be organized in terms of horizontal depth and both horizontal and vertical perspective. By an ordered disposition of visual images the poet can indicate foreground, middleground, background and achieve ordered vertical height and distance.

Thirdly, the visual images in such a description can conform to the standard requirements of the good visual painting. The poet can create visual images capable of being tested in terms of invention, expression, contrast, etc.; and he can, in creating such images, observe one point of view, one principal action, and one moment of time. This one moment of time may be flexible in its application; despite the fact that individual images occur successively in Homer's description of the Diomedes incident quoted earlier, cumulatively they present a total picture which Pope accepts may be viewed at one moment of time. Pope inclines to the theory of the *gestalt*, where

'Tis not a *Lip*, or *Eye*, we Beauty call,
But the joint Force and full *Result* of *all*.
(*EC*, II. 245-6)

Fourthly, the image-making faculty of the poet can provide equivalents for all classes of painting—landscape, genre, portraiture, history. It can also do this for architecture and sculpture. Finally, these images can have colour, through the use of verbal equivalents.¹⁵

These formulations supply all the necessary requirements for accepting that "a poem is a speaking picture" and that Pope both as critic and poet accepted the doctrine *ut pictura poesis* in theory and in practice. With Homer as the model to follow, the poet and painter Alexander Pope would have found it not only desirable but necessary to emulate that model in his work.

15 For a detailed analysis of Pope's own "palette" see Norman Ault, *New Light on Pope* (London, 1949), ch. V.

To see Pope, both as painter and poet, exercising his own picture-making ability as a landscape-painter we can look at a letter he wrote to Robert Digby in the Autumn of 1725:

Don't talk of the decay of the year, the season is good where the people are so: 'Tis the best time of year for a painter; there is more variety of colours in the leaves, the prospects begin to open, thro' the thinner woods, over the vallies; and thro' the high canopies of trees to the higher Arch of heaven: the dews of the morning impearl every thorn, and scatter diamonds on the verdant mantle of the Earth. (*Corresp.* II, 330)

This is a conscious piece of "fine writing" and also a perfectly composed landscape painting on Claudian principles: the eye moves from a reasonably detailed foreground close enough to discern the "variety of colours in the leaves", to a middleground with "thinner woods" where "prospects begin to open", and then onward and upward to a distanced background "thro' the high canopies . . . to the higher Arch of heaven". It is also the *enactment* of a painting, the artist creating and directing, in the very progress and arrangement of his images, the movement of the eye as it moves over the scene. The landscape completed in words, Pope, always the meticulous artist, returns to his canvas to add "the dews of morning [which] impearl every thorn and scatter diamonds". These are the indispensable finishing touches and highlights in a painting, which can only be added last.