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Preface

This essay defends the idea of art as a distinctive form of insight into our life as reflective beings. Its purpose, therefore, is to elucidate some of the ways in which different expressions of aesthetic intention, in the media of literature, music and painting, can be identified with a true representation of our moral and psychological experience. It is well known that many artists, philosophers and critics are sceptical about this cognitive value, and that art is seen variously as merely intoxication, entrancement and consolation, or, at best, a refined form of deception which distracts us from the boredom and horror of life. Attitudes of this kind are so widespread that to answer the sceptics individually would take several lifetimes, and (with the exception of Plato) I do not engage directly with any of them. Instead, the argument of this book reveals the weaknesses in theories of art that are based on the idea of mimesis, which is the most influential foundation for theories of art in Western thought. Thus an examination of this concept, as it is expounded in Plato's *Republic* and the *Poetics* of Aristotle, enables me to revise and transform our most powerful assumptions concerning the cognitive value of art.

The concept of mimesis lies at the heart of Aristotle's theory, and its vulnerability is a source of encouragement to the sceptics. His assumption that the creation of resemblances, and by extension the assembling of appearances, provides us with an adequate conception of knowledge is a fatal weakness in this theory. When we are considering reflective life, the theory of resemblance fails to incorporate a true sense of how judgement and understanding, and indeed cognitive experience in general, are affected by personal inclination. This means, for example, that while characters in a drama may represent the general moral and psychological features of a reflective being as they appear to superficial observation, resources that go far beyond the creation of resemblances are necessary to the true interpretation of these features. In the chapters that follow a conception of form in works of art emerges,

which shows how participation in a common life, and our inner experience, perception, judgement and understanding are coherently integrated in the portrayal of human life in action.

Attention to the nature of aesthetic form, as it is realized in works of literature, music and painting, is necessarily related to a cogent theory of reflective life itself, to a conception of the nature of life and experience for a reflective being. This means that, in showing how art is able to truly represent life, a radical transformation of the cognitive value of art is implied. Whereas Aristotle's theory of resemblance attributes to art a special way of representing knowledge that can be acquired by other means, a true portrayal of reflective life in action, in which the form of representation corresponds appropriately to the life that is represented, gives us insight into ourselves and the world that cannot be generated in any other way.

This preface is followed by a list of the editions and relevant sources I have used. This includes the editions of Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles and Shakespeare from which I have quoted and the scores and recordings of the music of Bach and Beethoven which I have used. I have also listed the galleries which hold the paintings discussed in Chapter 4, and books with good reproductions of the paintings.

Editions and relevant sources

Chapter 1

Aristotle. 1995. *Poetics*. Edited and translated by Stephen Halliwell. In *Poetics*, with *On the Sublime* and *On Style* (Loeb Classical Library No. 199). Cambridge, Mass. and London.

Plato. 1955. *The Republic*. Translated by H. D. P. Lee. London.

Sophocles. 1960. *Oedipus the King*. Translated by David Grene. In *Greek Tragedies*. Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago and London.

Chapter 2

Burrow Colin (editor). 2002. *Complete Sonnets and Poems*. The Oxford Shakespeare. New York.

Chapter 3

Bach J. S. 1994. *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Part 1*. Edited and annotated by Richard Jones. London.

Angela Hewitt piano. 1998. *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1*. Hyperion Records.

Beethoven. 2002. *Streichquartet opus 132*. Edited by Emil Platen. München.

The Takács Quartet. 2004. *The Late String Quartets*. Decca.

Beethoven. 2009. *Symphony No. 3*. Edited by Richard Clarke. London.

Manchester Camerata, Douglas Boyd. 2009. *Beethoven Symphonies No. 1 & No. 3 'Eroica'*. Avie Records.

Chapter 4

Galleries

Tate Britain

Portsmouth; The Lake of Geneva with the Dent d'Oche: Tending the Vines; The Lake of Geneva with the Dent d'Oche, from Lausanne: A Funeral; The Bay of Uri from Brunnen; Lake Lucerne: Sunset; The Rigi with Full Moon and the Spires of Lucerne Cathedral.

Website: <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/>

Victoria and Albert

The Lauerzersee with the Mythens.

Website: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/>

National Gallery of Washington

Houses in Provence – The Riaux Valley near L'Estaque.

Website: <http://www.nga.gov/>

Museu de Arte, São Paulo

Rocks at L'Estaque.

Website: <http://masp.uol.com.br/>

National Gallery, London

The Grounds of the Château Noir.

Website: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/>

Musée Picasso

Château Noir.

Website: <http://www.musee-Picasso.fr/>

Musée d'Orsay

Rocks near the Caves above the Château Noir.

Website: <http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/home.html>

Recommended reproductions

Shanes Eric. 2000. *Turner: The Great Watercolours*. London: *Portsmouth* (p. 159); *The Lauerzersee with the Mythens* (p. 238).

Wilton Andrew. 1980. *Turner and the Sublime*. London: *The Lake of Geneva with the Dent d'Oche: Tending the Vines* (p. 96); *The Lake of Geneva with the*

Dent d'Oche, from Lausanne: A Funeral (p. 94); *The Bay of Uri from Brunnen* (p. 92).

Wilton Andrew. 1982. *Turner Abroad*. London: *Lake Lucerne: Sunset* (plate 122).

Tate Gallery. 1974. *Turner 1775–1851*. London: *The Rigi with Full Moon and the Spires of Lucerne Cathedral* (p. 166).

Philadelphia Museum of Art. 1996. *Cézanne*. Philadelphia: *Houses in Provence – The Riaux Valley near L'Estaque* (p. 221); *Rocks at L'Estaque* (p. 187); *Rocks near the Caves above the Château Noir* (p. 450).

Machotka Pavel. 1996. *Cézanne: Landscape into Art*. New Haven and London: *The Grounds of the Château Noir* (p. 105); *Château Noir* (p. 110).