

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: 'A WORLD OF TROUBLE': JOSEPH
WRIGHT OF DERBY IN BATH, 1775-1777
Abram Jacob Fox, Master of Arts, 2009

Thesis directed By: Professor William Pressly
Department of Art History

Between November 1775 and June 1777, Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-1797) spent two social 'seasons' in the resort town of Bath. Shortly after returning from two years in Rome, Wright left Derby with his new wife and child in hopes of becoming the premier portrait painter in Bath, filling the void left by Thomas Gainsborough's departure the previous year. Rather than achieving success, Wright found himself ill-equipped for the complex social interactions of his new city and severely wanting for commissions. In light of Wright's professional failure in Bath, particularly contrasted with the artist's highly successful 1768-1771 Liverpool period, the Bath period has become a forgotten episode in critical literature on Wright. This thesis examines Wright's life during those two years, collecting for the first time all of his published Bath works and correspondence and exploring the dramatic effects of the experience on his career.

‘A WORLD OF TROUBLE’: JOSEPH WRIGHT OF DERBY IN BATH, 1775-1777

By

Abram Jacob Fox

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Advisory Committee:
Professor William Pressly, Chair
Professor June Hargrove
Professor Marjorie Venit

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Chapter 1: Joseph Wright of Derby

On November 4, 1775, Joseph Wright moved from his hometown of Derby in the East Midlands to the south-western resort town of Bath in Somerset. Fresh off a two-year-long Grand Tour through Italy, the thirty-one-year old Wright hoped to establish a portrait practice in the unofficial center of British society outside London. Previous artists had established their careers in much the same way, Thomas Gainsborough most famously. Gainsborough had left Bath the previous year, 1774, to move his studio to London after spending almost twenty-five years as the premier portraitist in the city, and Wright sensed a business opportunity created by the Royal Academician's departure. He was already known throughout England and across the Continent for his specialty in "candle light" paintings—a generic term referring to any landscape or genre scene demonstrating a dramatic interplay of light and darkness—but Wright's portraits were not critically or popularly acclaimed. From all indications Wright was not particularly adept at the social maneuverings required to be a successful portraitist.¹ Nonetheless, portraiture was far more lucrative than genre paintings or landscapes in terms of prices commanded versus time required² and Wright jumped at the opportunity presented in Bath. He had successfully forayed into the career of a portrait painter once before, during a three-year stint in Liverpool

¹Benedict Nicholson, *Joseph Wright of Derby: Painter of Light*, vol. 1, Studies in British Art (London: Routledge, 1968), 12-13.

² For example, in 1771 Wright received £31.10.0 for his 127x101.5 cm portrait of 'Captain' Robert Shore Milnes (Judy Egerton, *Wright of Derby* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990), cat. 31, p.75) and £63 for his double portrait of *Mr. and Mrs. Coltman* of the same size (Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, cat. 29, p.71), both of which were guaranteed money. By comparison, history paintings of the same size would command more money if a buyer was found (*Miravan Breaking Open the Tomb of his Ancestors*, executed in 1772, was purchased by Milnes for £105, according to Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, cat. 42, p. 93) but took considerably more time to execute and, if not purchased, represented a major loss in time and income for the artist. Wright's prices while in Bath are unknown, although they seem to have dropped precipitously after leaving the city (*Richard Cheslyn*, painted in the summer of 1777, was sold to the sitter for only £21, according to Egerton, cat. 136, p. 210).

between 1768 and 1771, and quickly established himself as the leading portraitist in that city before returning to Derby.³ Wright's unqualified success in Liverpool, where his prolific output caused one local rival to complain that he was "swallowing up all the business," encouraged the artist to embark on his 1773-1775 Grand Tour as a precursor to establishing a larger presence in the British art world. Rather than head to London, where his competition would have been greatest and where the sting of being passed over for Royal Academy membership⁴ would have been most evident, Wright chose the society center of Bath as his launching point.

For seven months, from the beginning of November 1775 to the beginning of June 1776, Wright, with his family by his side, lived and worked in Bath over the span of one social "cycle" in the city.⁵ After spending the summer of 1776 in Derby, he returned to Bath in October for a second season. Upon his return to Derby in June 1777, Wright lodged with his brother for several weeks before purchasing a house in the city of his birth, where he would remain for the rest of his life.⁶

Wright's attempt to launch his portraiture career in Bath was an unmitigated failure. However, despite coming at a crucial period of the artist's career in which he sought to break into the mainstream of London art world after decades of success in provincial England, the Bath period is rarely discussed and largely ignored in nearly all biographical and analytical literature on Wright's life. Several explanations for

³ See Elizabeth E. Barker, "'Swallowing up all the Business': Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool," in *Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool*, ed. Elizabeth E. Barker and Alex Kidson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 41-83.

⁴ Wright was not recommended for membership upon the Royal Academy's creation in 1768 or in the years after, and declined to apply for membership or even exhibit at the Royal Academy until 1783 and 1778 respectively.

⁵ Susan Sloman, *Gainsborough in Bath* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 5-6.

⁶ Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 13.

this willful negligence are relevant, depending on the intentions and methodologies of the various authors.

The artist's nineteenth-century biographers can be forgiven for mainly ignoring Wright's life in Bath. Both Hannah Wright, who wrote Joseph Wright's first known (unpublished) biography in 1850,⁷ and William Bemrose, Jr., who published *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby"* in 1885, were extensions of the Wright family tree. Hannah Wright's manuscript exists in only one copy, currently located in Derby, and so it is regrettably geographically (and financially) inaccessible to the author at this point. However, Benedict Nicolson frequently cites Hannah Wright,⁸ who was the artist's niece, and so we can get a sense of her generally positive but superficial account of Wright of Derby's life.

William Bemrose, Jr. was a more distant but direct relative of Wright's, having married the artist's granddaughter,⁹ and his biography of the artist is apologetic and openly biased in the artist's favor. Privy to the artist's private letters, Bemrose concludes his text by describing Wright in turn as a "genius," "man of great sensitiveness," and a "faithful and generous friend."¹⁰ Bemrose does not address Wright's time in Bath directly, instead publishing letters written by the artist or their excerpts and allowing the artist to speak for himself. The appearance of these otherwise unpublished primary sources is Bemrose's greatest contribution to our understanding of the life of Wright, but as they are admittedly incomplete—Bemrose

⁷ Hannah Wright, unpublished MS 2 in the Derby Local Studies Library, dated 1885.

⁸ Nicolson quotes repeatedly from Hannah Wright, which is cited as "MS. 2, Derby Public Library" in *Joseph Wright of Derby: Painter of Light*. He considered her relationship to Joseph Wright on page one of his monograph.

⁹ Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 22-23. Bemrose makes an oblique reference to his relationship to Wright in Bemrose, *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* (London: Bemrose, 1885), 115.

¹⁰ Bemrose, *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright*, 115.

attributes his stated views of the artist to the perusal of much private correspondence in addition to that here published”¹¹—it is impossible to know if the letters typify a consistent experience of Bath by Wright or if his experiences there were more varied.

The excerpts Bemrose does publish create a sense of Wright as a man deeply troubled by his lack of success and a perceived conspiracy by other artists, but they do not illuminate the underlying reasons for his original move to Bath. Furthermore, the letters quoted only date from January to May 1776; the reader grasps Wright’s emotions as he leaves Bath for the first time, but not his reason for returning in October 1776 or his state of mind during his second season in the city. Bemrose is less concerned about establishing a completely factual biography of his grandfather-in-law and more in correcting the various insults and dismissals leveled against Wright by Samuel and Richard Redgrave in their 1886 *A Century of Painters of the English School*.¹²

Bemrose’s text is notable as the first detailed biography of Wright’s life, but its primary impact has been many correspondences and other primary documents it reproduces. Benedict Nicolson’s monograph *Joseph Wright of Derby, Painter of Light* was both the first true monograph and first comprehensive catalogue raisonné for the artist,¹³ and effectively elevated Wright’s status from a mere minor provincial painter to a major player in the development of subjects of industry and labor in

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹² Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 23.

¹³ Though, of course, “comprehensive” is relative as the neglect of Wright in scholarship to that point forced Nicolson to reconsider attribution of many works ascribed to Wright and many others to contemporary British artists, and Wright’s full catalogue has since had numerous additions and continues to be evaluated through the present day.

British art¹⁴ and in continental Enlightenment art in general. However, while he promoted Wright's work as on par with the greatest of his Academician contemporaries, to Nicolson, Wright was, in personality and action, very much the provincial Midlands artist, comfortable in his industrializing world but unable to operate in cutthroat London society and its art world. In Bath, Nicolson perceives an equally, or even greater, competitive world than London, and a city where Wright was doomed to fail. In his dry manner, Nicolson writes off the years 1775 to 1777 as the "dismal Bath episode,"¹⁵ a pithy and powerful line that has informed our basic understanding of the artist's experience in Bath.

Although Wright lived in Bath for parts of fifteen months over two years, Nicolson only identifies one painting as definitively executed by Wright while in that city, a half-length portrait of *Mrs. Edward Witts* (1776-7), and is dismissive of the piece as an "uncomfortable compromised between glamour and truth."¹⁶ Nicolson is fond of creating an oppositional distinction between Wright and the elite art world, evident in his pairing of "glamour" and "truth." The lack of known works by the artist in Bath benefitted Nicolson, allowing him to reinforce the trope of Wright's culture shock as a provincial artist in the elite world of Bath without having to grapple with the artist's oeuvre to prove his thesis. That is not to say, however, that Nicolson's argument is invalidated by the intervening history in which additional Wright works from bath have been found or identified, as we will later see. The author bolsters his argument equating Wright and Midlands painters with an

¹⁴ Nicolson was not the first to discuss Wright in terms of labor and industry (that honor belongs to F.D. Klingender in *Art and the Industrial Evolution*) but his monograph introduced the concept in line with Wright's biography and complete oeuvre.

¹⁵ Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

unflinchingly realistic style that he contrasts with Thomas Gainsborough's soft, idealizing portraits that were favored in Bath for a decade and a half immediately prior to Wright's move there, and overly simplistic assertion based on expectations of reception and ignoring actual stylistic trends in Bath. Otherwise, Nicolson devotes more ink to the four months over the summer of 1776 Wright spent back in Derby¹⁷ than his preceding and succeeding Bath residencies.

Nicolson's reductive characterization of Wright stems from a significant issue in the literature of Wright that continues the plague scholars to this day—a lack of personal correspondence or any other introspective writings by Wright¹⁸ in which readers can explore his personal thoughts and artistic theories.¹⁹ In describing Wright as a naïve, provincial type, Nicolson strives to give a personality to an artist who, to that point, was almost entirely known to scholars through his art and his art alone. John Gage points out in his review of *Joseph Wright of Derby, Painter of Light* that while Nicolson goes to great lengths to show Wright as a person as well as an artist, the author succeeds only in providing a framework with which future scholarship can examine the real character of Wright of Derby. “What was he really like?” asks Gage

¹⁷ Of particular interest to Nicolson were two paintings executed by Wright in Derby, *William Alvey Carwin and Jane Darwin, and her Son William Brown Darwin*, which each bear the contemporary inscription “Painted by Mr. Wright of Bath (formerly of Derby) in September 1776” on the stretcher; in Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 193, 195.

¹⁸ Elizabeth E. Barker, co-curator of the outstanding Joseph Wright in Liverpool exhibition, will thankfully rectify this situation in the pages of the *Journal of the Walpole Society* soon, hopefully in 2009, with the first comprehensive publication of Wrights correspondences and other personal documents.

¹⁹ Excepting, of course, William Bemrose, Jr., who provided selected excerpts from Wright's letters in his 1885 biography of the artist.

of Wright continuing, “It is the achievement of [Nicolson’s] book to have defined [Wright’s] art and life sufficiently clear to make this sort of question possible.”²⁰

After Nicolson, Judy Egerton was the next author to tackle the question of Joseph Wright’s character and identity, though the 1990 Tate Gallery exhibit she curated, *Wright of Derby*, as well as the accompanying comprehensive exhibition catalogue. Egerton’s catalogue includes four essays by other scholars: three cover the technical side of Wright’s works, and the fourth discusses the artist’s association with the Lunar Society. Wright’s peripheral involvement in the Lunar Society, which included such luminaries (and patrons of Wright) as Erasmus Darwin, John Whitehurst, and Josiah Wedgwood, allowed him “to draw from the mainstream of this transforming current of ideas” which, according to David Fraser, included “radical developments in scientific, religious, intellectual, philosophical and literary thought and practice.”²¹ Egerton touches on the Bath period briefly in her short introductory essay, but much of the content regarding Bath appears in the catalogue entries. Several of the entries provide compelling information relating particular works to Bath, in some cases overlooked by Nicolson and in others traced in the decades after the monograph. Because of the limitations of form imposed by the nature of her study, Egerton primarily discusses each work as it stands alone, and does not connect the works to a greater conversation of Wright in Bath.

Nicolson’s argument has fallen under greater scrutiny thanks to recent scholarship that has suggested the upper-class individuals encountered by Wright

²⁰ Gage, John. “Light Heavyweight?” review of *Joseph Wright of Derby, Painter of Light, The Burlington Magazine* 111 (May, 1969): 304-6. For a familiar sentiment, see Alfred Neumeyer, review of *Joseph Wright of Derby, Art Journal* 30, no. 2 (Winter 1970-1971): 216-128.

²¹ David Fraser, “Joseph Wright of Derby and the Lunar Society,” in *Wright of Derby*, ed. Judy Egerton, 15.

were not entirely out of his league.²² For this reason, Chapter 2 considers the unique social structure of Bath created under “Beau” Nash as a reason for Wright’s lack of success. Additionally, while Nicolson is correct in asserting that Wright’s style was not originally looked upon positively in Bath, the reasons are far more complex than a simple assertion that his style was unlike that of Gainsborough.

Since Nicolson’s monograph, two other Bath portraits by Wright have been positively identified: *John Milnes*, which was known as “Portrait of an unknown man” until Alex Kidson ascertained the sitter in 1985;²³ and *Dr. Thomas Wilson with his adopted daughter Catherine Sophia Macauley*, which is in a private collection and was first published by Susan Sloman in *Pickpocketing the Rich* in 2002. Sloman’s book, an overview of artists in Bath in the eighteenth century, provides the most comprehensive study of Wright in Bath to date. Much of what she wrote about Wright, both in the six-page catalogue entry for the artist²⁴ and in her introductory essay in which she discusses Wright as part of the larger body of artists in Bath,²⁵ was previously known, but Sloman’s catalogue collects the information in one place for the first time.

Possibly the most important contribution to the study of Joseph Wright has yet to be published. Elizabeth E. Barker originally intended to publish for the first time a complete collection of Wright’s papers, correspondences and other documents in *The Journal of Walpole Society* in 2008, partially in conjunction with the *Joseph Wright*

²² Andrew Graciano, “Art, Science, and Enlightenment Ideology: Joseph Wright of Derby and the Derby Philosophical Society” (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 2002).

²³ Judy Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, 68-69. Kidson was the first to identify the portrait, in 1985, but Egerton in 1990 was the first to mention this identification in print, describing the circumstances of Kidson’s identification.

²⁴ Susan Sloman, *Pickpocketing the Rich* (Bath: Holbourne Museum of Art, 2002), 72-77

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-29.

of Derby in Liverpool exhibition she co-curated, but the publication was delayed. At this writing, “Documents related to Joseph Wright ‘of Derby’ (1734-97)” is expected to see print in volume 71 of *The Journal of the Walpole Society*, in the summer of 2009.

Even though they have little or nothing to say about Wright in Bath, no overview of previous literature about Wright would be complete without the mention of several works of seminal importance in the advancement of the study of Wright. These examinations ignore the artist’s biography and instead focus entirely on the subject matter of his works as an indicator of the Enlightenment and proto-Industrial Revolution in European art. The most well-known and influential was *Art and the Industrial Revolution* by F.D. Klingender, a late 1940’s Marxist reading of art which promoted Wright as the first painter of the Industrial Revolution. In such interpretations, Wright’s actual career, his Grand Tour and portraiture are rendered inconsequential to his history paintings and contemporary landscapes, as reflections of both popular English society as well as developing academic theory. After Klingender, Ronald Paulson in *Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century* and more recently David Solkin in *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* in 1993 and then more specifically in his 2003 article “Joseph Wright and the Sublime Art of Labor” have addressed Wright’s relation to contemporary thought.

A recent international exhibition of Wright’s work inspired this thesis and the framework through which this author approaches Wright in Bath. *Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool* was co-curated by Elizabeth E. Barker and Alex Kidson and

organized jointly and shown by the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool and the Yale Center for British Art. The exhibition and accompanying catalogue²⁶ provide a framework for the examination of Wright's activity in a specific chronological and geographic period, and provides a helpful analysis of a successful period of the artist's life to compare to his much less successful Bath period.

In the face of such lofty scholarship, the hope of this paper is to combine the various disparate fragments of information about Wright's stay in Bath into one comprehensive study. Furthermore, it hopes to expand upon Wright's unsuccessful two years in Bath as a vital part of his greater, successful post-Italian career. When it is discussed, his life in Bath is written about as a temporal aberration with no source in the artist's previous experience and with no effect on the final three decades of his life. This was not the case, and the aftershocks of Wright's experience in Bath unquestionably inform noticeable shifts in subject matter, personal and professional associations, and physical and mental health that color the remaining decades of his life.

²⁶ Barker and Kidson, eds., *Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool*.

Chapter 2: Wright in Bath

I. Bath in the 18th Century

Bath in the early and mid-eighteenth century was the site of a seemingly unexplainable anachronism. A city intimately tied to the interest and involvement of English elite society, Bath broke down the traditional class boundaries through which the London upper class demonstrated its superiority. Under the dictatorial control of its Master of Ceremonies, Richard “Beau” Nash, Bath was a place where the wealthy and privileged—or those wishing to become wealthy and privileged—gladly allowed themselves to be told when and where to dine, dance, and entertain.

Bath of the eighteenth century was a wholly unique experience in England, and indeed throughout much of Europe. Whereas Derby, Liverpool, and London, to mention the three other English cities which play roles in the arc of Wright’s life, had reasons to exist, be they agricultural, commercial, or political, Bath had no greater purpose. The reason to go to Bath, far more than bathe in its curative waters, was simply to be seen in Bath and relax and gossip with others who were there for the same purpose. Peter Borsay, who authored a revealing study on the internal and external perception of the city, describes Bath as such: “Perhaps more than any other town in eighteenth-century Britain, its success and its very identity depended not upon what it was, but what it was imagined to be.”²⁷

Bath’s original reason for existence and the nominal reason that some of its eighteenth-century visitors traveled to the city was its eponymous baths. The denizens of southwest England, as early as the Roman occupation, were aware of the

²⁷ Peter Borsay, *The Image of Georgian Bath, 1700-2000: Towns, Heritage, and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19.

baths at Bath, and their supposed curative properties were known from the Middle Ages onward, but the city nonetheless was primarily the province of Britain's sick and poor through the seventeenth century.²⁸ Those who could afford medical treatment sought it elsewhere, and only those who could not ventured to Bath. When a succession of royalty, culminating with the patronage of Queen Anne in the first decade of the 1700s, sought to put the baths to work on their own ailments,²⁹ the city gained the national attention of the English aristocracy and merchant class.

By the mid-eighteenth century the city of Bath became a favorite vacation destination for England's elite, where individuals would go for weeks at a time, either to prepare themselves for London high society or as a respite from the capital city.³⁰ The Bath experienced by Wright was, for all intents and purposes, built in the early eighteenth century in response to the renewed interest in the city as a destination. Guiding Bath's social rise was one man, a gregarious former army officer and lawyer, and gambling addict, called the "King of Bath": Richard "Beau" Nash.

II. The "King of Bath" and Bath's Social Order

The history of Bath in the eighteenth century is impossible to trace without beginning with the man who, almost by the sole force of his personality, defined the city as experienced by its inhabitants and its visitors. Richard Nash (fig. 1), who went by the nickname Beau, moved to Bath in 1704 at the age of twenty-nine and almost immediately became the city's Master of Ceremonies, an unofficial position whose

²⁸ David Gadd, *Georgian Summer: Bath in the Eighteenth Century* (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press, 1972). Gadd traces the historical development of Bath from Roman times, when it was thought to have been a spa villa, through the Middle Ages to its role as a Catholic ecclesiastical center, and through to the modern day.

²⁹ "Realms of Enjoyment," *Apollo* 98 (1973): 329. The first notable visit by royalty was in 1663 by Charles II and Catherine of Braganza, hoping to prevent the latter's miscarriages.

³⁰ Sloman, *Gainsborough in Bath*, 5-6.

duties mostly included greeting notable visitors and organizing social events.³¹

Whereas two of his contemporaries, architect John Wood and businessman Ralph Allen, are often credited with transforming the physical face of Bath, Nash transformed the social structure of the city, creating a completely public society in which order and ceremony were king.

The mixing of various social classes in Bath, particularly in the baths and gambling halls, often led to confusing and indecorous situations. To quell potential class disruptions and ensure pleasant visits for his guests—for he considered all visitors to Bath his guests—Nash made Bath into a completely public and polite society.³² All balls, concerts and games had to be open to the public; the only allowable reason for turning someone away was the contravention of one of Nash's rules of behavior. Nash was concerned with order, but not morality. He was a womanizer and a gambling addict, and when criticized for his practice of keeping various mistresses, he famously (and apocryphally) replied: "A man can no more be termed a whoremonger for having one whore than a cheesemonger for having one cheese."³³

Nash's social structure was the most well-defined and self-contained example of the eighteenth-century notion of politeness. Accessible to any individual, irrelevant of social status, politeness was "associated with decorum in behavior and personal style," based on an individual's agreeableness, and interest rather than

³¹ Gadd, *Georgian Summer*, 53-54.

³² *Ibid.*, 58.

³³ Richard Nash, quoted in Gadd, *Georgian Summer*, 76.

demonstration of advanced knowledge.³⁴ Politeness was demonstrated by all classes, but particularly by the middle class attempting to transcend into the social stratosphere, and the open nature of Bath encouraged the further elimination of social barriers. Equality was not complete by any means, but the opportunities for cross-class interactions and demonstrations of social deftness were far greater in Bath than in heavily-stratified London.³⁵

III. Wright's Experience of Bath

Beau Nash died in Bath in 1762, at the age of 88, having spent the last 58 years of his life as the de facto ruler of the city and its surrounding environs. Joseph Wright moved to Bath just slightly a decade after Nash's death, in 1775, but the city had changed considerably since the death of its pre-eminent resident. The popularity of the city among London's elites had reached its apex in the first few decades of the eighteenth century, beginning its decline in the 1750s, and Bath's physical expansion expectedly followed a similar arc several decades later.³⁶

Wright entered the city on November 4, 1775 and remained until June 1776, when he moved back to Derby for the summer and early fall. This partial residence was standard in Bath, whose calendar was comprised of two distinct seasons—the busy season lasting from October or November to April or May, in which visitors took up residence in the city, and the dead season from mid-spring to mid-fall when

³⁴ Lawrence Klein, "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (2002): 872-873.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 879.

³⁶ The geography of Bath as experienced by Wright was drastically different than that known by Nash. John Wood the Younger, working in part from his father's designs, completed the iconic Circus, Royal Crescent, and Bath Assembly Rooms in the years between Nash's death and Wright's arrival. See Gadd, *Georgian Summer*, 83 for more.

its temporary population returned to London. A writer at the turn of the eighteenth century described the changing seasons of Bath as such:

Tis neither Town nor city, yet goes by the Name of both: five Months
in the Year 'tis as Populous as London, the other seven as desolate as a
Wilderness... 'tis a Valley of Pleasure, yet a sink of Iniquity; Nor is
there any intrigues or Debauch Acted in London, but is Mimick'd
here.³⁷

The busy season expanded by several months between the visits of the anonymous author of this critique of Bath in 1700 and Wright in 1775, encompassing just over half of the calendar year. Artists and other working individuals lived in Bath the entirety of the busy season, while a given visitor from London might only stay in Bath a few weeks or a month.³⁸ Because of the nature of the city as a multi-week destination, the body of potential portrait buyers for an aspiring portraitist like Wright was constantly self-refreshing.

Establishing a portrait practice was Wright's primary and self-proclaimed reason for moving to Bath. His move came shortly after his return from a two-year sketching tour of Italy, and the quick turnaround from his return to Derby to his move to Bath indicates that the idea to move to Bath had been planted in Wright mind while he was still in Rome. Bath was an alluring place for a portraitist to set up shop because of the wealth of potential patrons, the frequency with which new potential patrons entered the city, and the pleasurable goings-on of the city itself. In 1775, it was even more appealing for Wright because of the previous year's departure of

³⁷ Anon., *A Step to the Bath with a Character of the Place*, 1700, quoted in R.S. Neal, *Bath 1680-1850: A Social History or A Valley of Pleasure, Yet a Sink of Iniquity* (London: Routledge, 1981), 12.

³⁸ Sloman, *Gainsborough in Bath*, 5-6.

Thomas Gainsborough, the preeminent portraitist in Bath for the preceding two decades. The demand for portrait commissions was so great that the city could support a great number of portraitists at any given time—indeed, a dozen other portrait painters were active in Bath at the same time as Wright³⁹—but Gainsborough was by far the most famous painter to work there, and his fame and popularity played a large part in making Bath a place where persons went to have their portrait painted rather than seek the services of portraitists near wherever ‘home’ may be.⁴⁰

Gainsborough’s departure left Bath without a big-name portraitist, a void Wright intended to fill. Gainsborough and Wright unwittingly participated in a game of musical chairs: Gainsborough moved from Bath to London in part hoping to take over the spot left vacant by one of the capital’s leading portraitist, George Romney, who had left to study in Rome, where Wright was studying shortly before moving to Bath to take Gainsborough’s place. Gainsborough had another reason for leaving, however, that Wright acknowledged in a letter back home to Derby early in 1776: “I have heard from London, and by several gentlemen here, that the want of business was the reason of Gainsborough’s leaving Bath.”⁴¹

None of Wright’s published correspondence explicitly states the artist’s intentions to take Gainsborough’s place as the leading portraitist in Bath. The idea was first expressed in Bemrose’s biography, where the author states, “Gainsborough having left Bath in 1774, it was thought by Wright that there would be a good opening for a portrait painter in that city, and accordingly in December of that year he

³⁹ See Appendix I in Sloman, *Gainsborough in Bath*, 199-203.

⁴⁰ Gadd, *Georgian Summer*, 136.

⁴¹ Wright to unknown recipient, Derby, February 9, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called “Wright of Derby,”* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885), 44-45.

left Derby with his family.”⁴² Bemrose’s dates are slightly off (Wright did not return to Derby from his trip to Italy until August 1775 and left for Bath at the beginning of November) but, considering that Bemrose had access to Wright’s personal letters and notes, it is a safe assumption that he is speaking from the basis of fact. Since Wright was in Rome at the time Gainsborough left Bath, it is unclear who informed the Derby native of his counterpart’s departure. Wright traveled with Romney at various points on the way to Rome, and through Romney he would have had access to the latest news and gossip despite not being an active participant in the circle of British artists in Rome. One of Romney’s friends in Rome, Ozias Humphry, worked for several years in Bath and presumably would have suggested that Wright set up shop in Bath because of Gainsborough’s departure.⁴³ Wright’s idea was also not an original one. Gainsborough’s move to the city in 1759 was at the prompting of his first major patron, Captain Philip Thickness, who convinced the young artist to leave the Suffolk countryside for Bath and take on William Hoare’s portrait monopoly,⁴⁴ and even before Gainsborough’s departure, other artists moved to the city in order to capitalize on the growing demand for portraits created by Gainsborough’s success.⁴⁵

Regardless of who convinced Wright to move to Bath, the quick turnaround between his return from Italy in late August or early September and his move to Bath in early November indicates that before the former he was planning the latter. Upon his arrival in the city, Wright lodged and maintained a studio in the upper town area

⁴² William Bemrose, Jr., *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called “Wright of Derby,”* (London: Bemrose, 1885), 44.

⁴³ Sloman, *Pickpocketing the Rich*, 74.

⁴⁴ William Lowndes, *The Royal Crescent in Bath: A Fragment of English Life* (Bristol: Radcliffe, 1981), 45.

⁴⁵ Mary Holbrook, “Painters in Bath in the Eighteenth Century,” *Apollo* 98 (1973): 378.

on Brock Street, the main thoroughfare between the Royal Crescent and the Circus, two expensive Georgian works of architecture built by John Wood the Younger finished in 1774 and 1768, respectively. Upper town was the fashionable, desired area of Bath and rent was much more expensive than in the lower town, where the actual baths were located and where several of the other more prominent portraitists kept their studios.⁴⁶ Information on Wright's lodgings survives only for his first of two seasons in Bath, but Wright's success at generating income by charging admission to his studio suggests his living situation for his second season was similar to the first. Following his return to Derby after his second season in Bath in 1777, Wright remained in the city of his birth the remainder of his life, never returning to Bath or seeking to establish a business elsewhere in England.

Our knowledge of Wright's work is sparse. His business ledger, which he kept his entire life, is notoriously confusing and disorganized, so most of the surviving information on his activity in Bath comes from his letters or from exhibition catalogues. Ten paintings have been definitively identified as being executed by Wright while in Bath. Eight portraits are known, only three of which survive and only one of which was executed during Wright's second season in Bath. The other two paintings are landscapes, both exhibited at the Society of Artists exhibition in the summer of 1776, one of which is extant. Wright's portraits are discussed at greater length in the next chapter, and his landscapes in Chapter 4.

IV. What Went Wrong?

By any standard, Wright's two years in Bath were failures. He was unable to garner any interest as a portraitist, let alone establish himself as the premier portrait

⁴⁶ Sloman, *Gainsborough in Bath*, 49-54. See Figure 40, p. 50.

painter in Bath, and the experience left him broken and demoralized at age forty-two, his chances of reaching the highest echelon of English artists seemingly out of reach. Various reasons can be identified for Wright's failure: hostile competition, social ineptitude and lack of connections, and possibly even latent health issues.

Wright, from an early point in his time in Bath, identified the competitive and hostile community of painters as the root of his lack of portrait commissions. Many other artists called Bath home, including at least a dozen portraitists in the two years Wright resided there but, for the most part, his fellow artists were slight in reputation. The only other artist of note was William Hoare, an early member of the Royal Academy,⁴⁷ who had made his living in Bath since 1738. Wright did not make it clear if he blamed entrenched artists like Hoare or lesser artists who may have felt threatened by Wright's talents, but in a letter dated February 9th, 1776 he expressed his frustration to an unknown recipient:

...I am confident I have some enemies in this place, who propagate a report that I paint fire-pieces admirably, but they never heard of my painting portraits; such a report as this was mentioned to her Royal Highness, after she had given me the commission for a full length, as I was told by one of her domestics... This is a scheme of some artists here (who to our shame be it said, seldom behave liberally to one another) to work me out, and certainly it proves at present very injurious to me, and I know not whether it will be worth my while

⁴⁷ Hoare was one of the thirty-six artists listed as founding members of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1768, but did not actually become a member of the academy until the next year. See Sidney C. Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy, 1768-1986*, 2nd ed. (London: Robert Royce Limited, 1986), 25-26.

(considering how little business is doing here, and has been done these four or five years past) to stay and confute 'em. I have heard from London, and by several gentlemen here, that the want of business was the reason of Gainsborough's leaving Bath. Would I had but known this sooner, for I much repent coming here. The want of encouragement of the Arts, I fear, is not only felt here but in Town also, and artists are becoming so numerous that the share which falls to each is small. I wish I had tried London first, and if it had not suited me, I would then have retired to my native place, where, tho' upon smaller gains, I could have lived free from the strife and envy of illiberal and mean-spirited artists. What I have seen since I have been here has so wounded my feelings, so disturbed my peace, as to injure my health, but I will endeavour to shake it off.⁴⁸

With only seven portraits executed between the beginning of November and the end of May, a rate of one commission a month, Wright certainly had a surfeit of free time with which to ponder his poor decision and envision conspiracy theories against him.

Wright's February 9th letter is one of a series of correspondences over the course of his first season in Bath, published by Bemrose, in which the artist expresses his growing frustration over his lack of success in Bath. In a letter Wright sent to his brother Richard on April 15th, shortly after the one quoted above, he describes his first non-bust portrait and touches on another reason for troubles in securing commissions:

⁴⁸ Wright to unknown recipient, Derby, February 9, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885), 44-45.

...I am now painting a half-length of Dr. Wilson & his adopted daughter; Miss Macauley; this is for reputation only, but you must not say so. The Doctor is a very popular man, and is fighting in my case stoutly, for he thinks me ill-treated; he wishes he had known of my being in Bath five or six months ago, he could have been of use to me before now, and I wonder my friend Coltman (if he knew) did not mention him to me; indeed, if I stay I shall have need of all the friends I can make...⁴⁹

So unsuccessful were Wright's attempts at finding patrons that he was forced to execute a double portrait for free to demonstrate his ability. Bath's transparent social system made it easy for artists with frequent patrons to cultivate others, but also made it extremely difficult for artists without connections to establish any. Dr. Thomas Wilson, the patron mentioned in Wright's letter, was indeed "a very popular man" and one of the principles in Bath's social scene after Beau Nash's death; the fact that he did not learn of Wright's presence in Bath for nearly an entire social season speaks to the artist's lack of connection. Wright did indicate some contacts courtesy of "my friend Coltman," the same Thomas Coltman of Wright's double portrait *Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Coltman* (fig. 9) executed earlier in the decade. If the artist was encouraged to go to Bath by Ozias Humphry, as Sloman suggests, then the latter would also have provided Wright with contacts for establishing his studio. The absence of any notable patrons for Wright six months into his stay in Bath speaks more toward his lack of

⁴⁹ Wright to Richard Wright, Derby, April 15, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885), 45.

success in developing and maintaining contacts than a conspiracy against him by other artists.

While it seems clear that Wright's failure was a direct result of his inability to establish himself in the Bath social scene and to cultivate a stable of patrons, the root cause of this failure is still unknown. For the past half century, the traditional line of thought introduced by Nicolson and accepted since has been that Wright's provincial upbringing and introverted personality left him ill-fitted for the fast-paced demands of Bath society.⁵⁰ A recent dissertation has suggested, however, that Wright may have been more comfortable with Bath's elites than Nicolson believed. While investigating Wright's social standing in his 2002 dissertation "Art, Science and Enlightenment Ideology: Joseph Wright of Derby and the Derby Philosophical Society," Andrew Graciano examined the artist's account book and social relationships, and came to the conclusion that Wright was much wealthier and traveled in higher social circles than previously expected. Often his Grand Tour between 1773 and 1775 is cited as proof Wright needed to further his training in order to establish a self-sustaining career as an artist, but Graciano suggests that as early as the 1760s Wright was independently wealthy and did not need to sell his paintings to maintain a living. Indeed, as Graciano notes,

As early as October 1773 [Wright] was financially secure enough to travel to Italy. Artists and architects who took part in the Grand Tour often accompanied wealthy patrons who footed the bill, sometimes employed as a tutor or chaperone for a young gentleman of means.

But, as far as we know, Wright not only financed his own journey, but

⁵⁰ Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 67-68.

also was able to bring with him his pregnant wife and a pupil named Richard Hurleston.⁵¹

Rather than requiring a patron to finance his trip, Wright earned enough from lending money and renting out his family's sizable land holdings to treat his travel to Italy as part honeymoon and part training for his apprentice Hurleston.⁵² Furthermore, through the portraits he executed in Derbyshire and his association with Derby's Lunar Society, Wright was friendly with figures like Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgwood—luminaries of English society and outsized personalities equal to any Wright may have encountered in Bath. If anything, the structure of Bath's social life rather than the participants would have given Wright pause. He was known for his stubbornness and it is quite conceivable that a poor reaction to the completely public nature of life in Bath played a role in his inability to find work.

Wright's letters closely document his lack of success in executing portraits during his first season in Bath, but an excerpt from a correspondence with his brother in April 1776 reveals that the artist was nonetheless successful in drawing visitors to his studio. Writing again to his brother, Wright said:

...From the month of June till the latter end of September there is no company in Bath. I intend to follow the fashion this year and go to Derby, & it will give me an opportunity (if the old room is disengaged) of painting the sea-piece, or some blacksmith's shop which will bring company to my rooms next season, for there is some advantage arising

⁵¹ Graciano, "Art, Science, and Enlightenment Ideology," 51.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 55.

from their seeing only; there has been given at the doors £22 already
w^{ch} more than pays a qtrs. rent...⁵³

Portrait painting was the intended primary source of income for portraitists in Bath, but Wright and others earned secondary income by keeping part of their studios open and charging admission. In 1770 a young woman named Dorothy Richardson visited the studios of Hoare and Gainsborough, and her notes written in the back of her copy of Christopher Antsey's *The New Bath Guide* provide the most detailed account of the nature of such studio visits.⁵⁴ First entering Gainsborough's studio, Richardson describes entering the primary room where the artist hung finished portraits of famous subjects for anyone familiar with Bath society. She then proceeded into a second room in which recently-finished portraits hung alongside Gainsborough's landscapes and paintings and prints purportedly by Rubens and Van Dyck.⁵⁵ With paintings by other famous artists, as well as portraits of individuals well-known to anyone in Bath, the painter's studio was just as much a means of entertainment as a concert or ball. On Brock Street, which connected the Royal Crescent and the Circus, Wright's studio was along the most heavily trafficked road in Bath in the wealthiest section of town,⁵⁶ and his name would have certainly aroused the occasional curiosity of passers-by. As Wright indicated to his brother, interest in the Derby native's work was high enough to allow him to pay for his rent solely with admission charges for visits to his studio.

⁵³Wright to "Mr. Wright, Surgeon," Derby, April 30, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885), 45-46.

⁵⁴Dorothy Richardson's unpublished manuscript appears in the appendix of Hugh Belsey, "A Visit to the Studios of Gainsborough and Hoare," *The Burlington Magazine* 192, no. 1007 (Feb., 1987): 107-109.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 108-109.

⁵⁶Lowndes, *The Royal Crescent in Bath*, 11-13.

If Wright was not quite as unknown to greater Bath as he suggests, then why was he still unable to find work on more than a once-monthly basis? A hint can be found in Miss Richardson's record of her visit to the studios of Gainsborough and Hoare. First, encountering Gainsborough's portraits, Richardson records, "Gainsborough Paints only in Oil, & excells [sic] most in Landscape; his Portraits are painted in a harsh manner, but said to be strong likeness's..." On the other hand, upon viewing Hoare's pastels, she writes, "I believe he is the best Crayon Painter in the Kingdom, & I can form no higher Idea of that Art, either as to Delicacy Colouring or expression than what I saw in his Pictures, which if they do not reach perfection, I am sure are very near it."⁵⁷ Gainsborough had surpassed Hoare in reputation by the time the former left the city, but the latter's lengthy presence in Bath heavily influenced the preferred art style of the city. Hoare was extremely skilled at making his subjects look exactly the way they wanted, a talent scathingly described by Judy Egerton as "the remarkable ability to gloss over human individuality in the interests of dignified blandness."⁵⁸ By comparison to Hoare, Gainsborough's ephemeral brushstrokes were shocking. Famously, both artists executed portraits of Ann Ford. Upon seeing Gainsborough's likeness (fig. 2), writer Mary Delany, a contemporary of the artist, described the work thusly: "Miss Ford's picture, a whole length with her guitar, a most extraordinary figure, handsome and bold; but I should be very sorry to have any one I loved set forth in such a manner."⁵⁹ Gainsborough's portrait of Ford, who would later marry Captain Thicknesse, is currently held as one of the artist's

⁵⁷ Dorothy Richardson, quoted in Belsey, 109.

⁵⁸ Judy Egerton, review of *William Hoare of Bath*, by Evelyn Newby, *The Burlington Magazine* 133 (1991): 47.

⁵⁹ Mary Delany, to unknown recipient, October 23, 1760, quoted in Ellis Waterhouse, "Bath and Gainsborough," *Apollo* 98 (1973), 362.

early masterpieces, but the bold juxtaposition of white chiffon dress and red draper, and the sensual curve of Ann Ford's body may have been too audacious for the visitor to Gainsborough's studio.⁶⁰ Alternatively, other have suggested Mrs. Delany was speaking about Ann Ford's crossed-leg pose, either because of the fatigue inevitable from maintaining such a pose during a lengthy portrait sitting, discomfort from the unintended bending of the rigid dress stays caused when the wearer's legs are crossed, or the simple 'unladylike' perception of crossing one's legs.⁶¹ By comparison, Hoare's exceedingly straightforward and 'bland' portrait of the same subject (fig. 3) avoids any potential for problematic or confusing readings and was admired by the contemporary Bath audience.

One can only imagine, given the response at first to Gainsborough's style, the extreme lack of enthusiasm that met Wright's portrait. His works were on the opposite end of the spectrum from the academic viewpoint, best articulated in Reynolds' *Discourses*, of finding beauty through idealization, as taken to a stereotypical universality by Hoare. Wright sought to explore the unique characteristics of his sitters with science-like precision rather than to gloss them over with idealized features.⁶² He avoided the painterly finish of Hoare, instead blocking out his subject's faces in large swathes of color and emphasizing the ruddiness of their complexions, seemingly excessively so as in the case of Erasmus Darwin (fig. 4) and others. Wright emphasized the intellectual and professional achievements of his

⁶⁰ Sloman, *Gainsborough in Bath*, 74.

⁶¹ Waterhouse and others take Mrs. Delany's statement as a reference to the style of the painting, but Aileen Ribeiro suggests the reason for the writer's disdain is the Ann Ford's crossed-leg pose, which would have been extremely difficult to maintain considering the rigid stays that gave the dress its form. Aileen Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress: Fashion in England and France 1750 to 1820* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 54.

⁶² Frederick Cummings, "Boothby, Rousseau, and the Romantic Malady," *The Burlington Magazine* 110 (1968): 663.

sitters by painting them with the attributes of their own industriousness—Richard Arkwright’s spinning frame (fig. 5), for example, or Sarah Clayton’s architectural plans (fig. 6)—rather than implements of leisure like Ann Ford’s guitar.

V. Poor Health Leading to Business Failure?

Rarely discussed in conjunction with Wright’s time in Bath, but a subject of increasing importance later in the artist’s life, is the decline of the artist’s health. From his late 30s until his death in 1794 at age 63, Wright repeatedly complained of various physical and mental ailments that by the end of his life would leave him unable to paint for months at a time.⁶³ Nicolson, Egerton and others have attempted to diagnose Wright’s sickness two hundred years after the fact. The frequency and variety of his complaints indicate that, while many of his health issues were certainly real, Wright was also a hypochondriac. The point at which his health began to decline is unclear. Wright family tradition, as related by Bemrose, held that the artist “injured his health by over-work when in Rome, and that, for greater ease when working these drawings, he lay upon his back on the cold floor of the Sistine Chapel, and contracted an affection of the liver...”⁶⁴ George Romney corroborated the claim, according to William Hayley, who recounted a conversation between the two in his biography of Romney:

In 1773, Romney went to Italy, where he acquainted himself with all the artists of his country, for I recollect his having repeatedly lamented that our amiable friend, Wright, the painter of Derby, had laid the

⁶³ Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 15-20.

⁶⁴ Bemrose, *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright*, 42.

foundation of those cruel nervous sufferings which afflicted his later years, by excess of application during his residence in Rome.⁶⁵

Bemrose contradicted this hypothesis earlier in his text, however, when he reproduced a 1774 letter from Wright to his sister Nancy in which the artist commiserates with his sibling about previous health issues: "...Ill health is one of the greatest evils that can befall man in my opinion, the truth of w^{ch} both you and myself have had woeful experience..."⁶⁶ Even more conclusive is a letter sent by Wright directly to Hayley, one of Wright's early champions, in 1783. In the letter, Wright describes suffering from "ill health" for "sixteen years past,"⁶⁷ dating his troubles as early as 1767 when Wright was only twenty three.

Unmentioned then, but a very plausible reason for Wright's move to Bath, are the middle-aged artist's hopes of finding relief from his "ill health" in the curative baths of the city. Even as the city grew in fame as a society destination, its baths remained one of its major draws and one of the social centers of the city. Wright would not have been the first artist to attempt to profit from his talents while also seeking the healing powers of Bath—Gainsborough did the same in 1758.⁶⁸ Unfortunately Wright never addresses the issue directly, even though it remains almost certain that Bath's baths played a role in his move.

Not only was the Bath experience unable to help Wright's already-declining health, it apparently contributed to his further decline. Melancholy, characterized

⁶⁵ William Hayley, *The Life of George Romney, Esq.* (Chichester, 1809), 55, quoted in Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 8, note 1.

⁶⁶ Wright to sister Nancy Wright, May 22 1774, Derby, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885), 32.

⁶⁷ Wright to William Hayley, August 31, 1783, in *Wright of Derby*, by Judy Egerton, 12.

⁶⁸ Sloman, *Gainsborough in Bath*, 36.

today as depression, afflicted many artists of Wright's time. George Romney⁶⁹ famously suffered from melancholy, as did Gilbert Stuart,⁷⁰ and Wright was well-versed in the various attributes and stories of melancholy that were part of the contemporary artist's oeuvre. Melancholy, however, was not a wholly negative state of mind for an artist. Lawrence Babb has called it "the scholar's occupational disease,"⁷¹ and it was often taken as a sign of superior intellect or creative genius.⁷² Melancholy seems like a likely diagnosis for Wright, accounting particularly for the periods of unexplained lethargy like the one he related to J. Leigh Philips in 1795: "I have now been five months without exercising my pencil, and without a hope that I shall ever resume it."⁷³ As with his physical ailments, it is impossible to pin down the moment when Wright's melancholic spirit developed. His *A Philosopher by Lamp Light* suggests a date no later than the 1760s, when the artist was in his mid-30s and well before his move to Bath. One of Wright's last-exhibited paintings before departing for Italy, *A Philosopher by Lamp Light*, was also referred to by the artist as Democritus,⁷⁴ the famously-alooof Greek philosopher who was described by Robert Burton as the original melancholic spirit. Burton published his treatise *The Anatomy*

⁶⁹ David A. Cross, *A Striking Likeness: The Life of George Romney* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000), 3.

⁷⁰ William Pressly, "Gilbert Stuart's *The Skater*: An Essay in Romantic Malady," *American Art Journal* 18 (1986): 43-51.

⁷¹ Lawrence Babb, "Melancholy and the Elizabethan Man of Letter," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (1941): 252.

⁷² Diane Karp, "Madness, Mania, Melancholy: The Artist as Observer," *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 80, no. 342 (Spring, 1984): 5-6.

⁷³ Wright to John Leigh Philips, May 20, 1795, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885), 95.

⁷⁴ According to Cummings in "Folly and Mutability in Two Romantic Paintings: *The Alchemist* and *Democritus* by Joseph Wright," *Art Quarterly* 33 no. 3 (1973): 262, "the composition was engraved by William Pether in 1786 as *Democritus Found Studying Anatomy*, indicating the intended subject.

of *Melancholy*⁷⁵ in 1621 under the pseudonym ‘Democritus Junior,’ and its frontispiece featured an image of Democritus that quoted Albrecht Dürer’s *Melancholia I* and was directly quoted by Salvatore Rosa, whose image inspired Wright’s composition.⁷⁶ Later, in 1781, Wright’s portrait of Sir Brooke Boothby served as a study in eighteenth-century melancholy, and Frederick Cummings has demonstrated how the theme of melancholy resonates through many of Wright’s post-Bath paintings (although he does not classify them in relation to the artist’s Bath period).⁷⁷

Wright made no overt statements about melancholy while in Bath, and in the next two chapters we see the difficulty of trying to read any hint of melancholy in his works from the Bath period. Nevertheless, it is certain that whatever melancholic feelings enchaind Wright before Bath were greatly exacerbated by his experience there. Whereas Wright had suffered minor setbacks during his artistic career, his stay in Bath was the most crushingly negative experience of his life, and the first of two episode which encapsulated his lifelong inability to break out of the perceived mode of provincial Midlands painters (the second being his feud with the Royal Academy that began with his defeat in the 1783 election for Academicianship). Even if Wright were unable to express his frustration in his paintings executed while in Bath, considering how few opportunities he had, the lasting effect of his “dismal Bath episode” was to hasten his later depression. Far from curing his existing ills, Bath provided him with new ones. A similar move fifteen years before, to Liverpool, was

⁷⁵ The full original title was *The Anatomy of Melancholy, What it is: With all the Kinds, Causes, Symptomes, Prognostickes, and Several Cures of it. In Three Maine Partitions with their several Sections, Members, and Subsections. Philosophically, Historicaly, Opened and Cut up.*

⁷⁶ Cummings traces the chain of quotations and inspiration in “Folly and Mutability,” 262, 267-269.

⁷⁷ Cummings, “Boothby, Rousseau, and the Romantic Malady,” 659-667.

met with enthusiasm and unbridled success.⁷⁸ Wright's Grand Tour was specifically intended to enhance his reputation as an artist,⁷⁹ not inspire any drastic stylistic changes in the forty-year-old artist "who was already too firmly set in a mould to be permanently shaken out of it by what he found [in Italy]."⁸⁰ When his entry to Bath was met by unexpected disappointment, then, the damage to Wright's psyche must have been drastic.

⁷⁸ See Elizabeth E. Barker, "Swallowing up all the Business," in *Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool*, 41-83.

⁷⁹ As Alex Kidson wrote in his biography of George Romney, since the middle of the eighteenth century "it had become axiomatic—among patrons as much as among artists themselves—that a trip to Italy was a necessary part of an artistic education, a kind of finishing school." In Alex Kidson, *George Romney, 1734-1802* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 19.

⁸⁰ Benedict Nicolson, "Joseph Wright's Early Subject Pictures," *The Burlington Magazine* 96 (1954): 80.

Chapter 3: Wright's Bath Portraits

Joseph Wright's great talent as an artist did not extend to his bookkeeping. His account book is disorganized and entries appear to be transcribed on random pages.⁸¹ It can be used to search for confirmation of facts or additional details about known information (the price charged for a known portrait, for example), but as a source of new information, like a comprehensive list of Wright's sitters in Bath, the account book is woefully inadequate. Our knowledge of Bath's sitters comes almost entirely from Wright's correspondence with his family during his first season in Bath, published by Bemrose and Nicolson. He wrote home frequently and, as he bemoaned his lack of business, also mentioned the few sitters he did have. Based on Wright's correspondence, exhibition records, and inscriptions on existing works, we can identify eight portraits he executed in Bath—seven in 1776 (six of which were painted in his first season, between the middle of January and May, and one in his second season between October and December) and one in early 1777. Furthermore, and more importantly, based on existing evidence we can confidently state that the eight known portraits are likely the only portraits executed by Wright while in Bath. Only three extant portraits are definitively from his Bath period—with one other extant work potentially executed in that period—and only one of these portraits has been correctly identified or published before 1985.

I. Wright's First Commission: The Duchess of Cumberland

Wright's first sitter was a powerful one—Ann Horton, the Duchess of Cumberland. In his first letter home, on January 15, 1776, to his sister, Wright

⁸¹ "Account book used by Joseph Wright," in Barker and Kidson, ed., *Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool*, 138, no. 14.

expresses both incredulousness at his lack of work to date, and then a postscript excitement having procured a titled sitter for his first portrait (including several players in the Bath social world in the process):

You'll scare believe I have not had one Portrait bespoke, they one & all say it is a pity I should paint Portraits. Should they continue in that way of thinking, they will either pity me, or starve me to death.

Notwithstanding my Candle light Pictures are so much admired here I have not sold one. I believe I am come to the wrong place...⁸²

[Post Script] Since I wrote the within, Lady Ferrers has brought the Duchess of Cumberland to see my pictures, w^{ch} her Highness approves of. Thro' Lady Ferrers' recommendation of her Highness will sit to me for a full length; a good beginning this, tho' a late one, and I hope will prove successful. I am glad the conclusion of my letter is better than the beginning.⁸³

Wright's cautious optimism in his January 15th letter was soon tempered by heartbreaking disappointment in his second letter home, dated February 9th, 1776, to an unknown recipient, in which he describes the end result of his meeting with the Duchess:

The Duchess of Cumberland is the only sitter I have had, and her order for a full length dwindled to a head only, which has cost me so much anxiety, that I had rather have been without it; the great people are so

⁸² Wright to his sister, January 15, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885), 44.

⁸³ Wright to his sister, January 15, 1776, in *Joseph Wright of Derby, Painter of Light*, vol. 1, by Benedict Nicolson (London: Routledge, 1968), 13.

fanatical and whining, they create a world of trouble, tho' I have but the same fate as Sr Jos. Reynolds, who has painted two pictures of her Highness, and neither please.⁸⁴

No extant portrait of the Duchess of Cumberland by Wright is known, and so the artist's words are all we have concerning the commission. His words corroborate the difficulty in dealing with haughty Bath sitters, as presumed by Nicolson and others. Wright's early thoughts about leaving Bath, evident already in the January 15th letter, no doubt also contributed to the "world of trouble" he described.

If Joshua Reynolds, a renowned portraitist, was twice unable to satisfy the Duchess, what chance did Wright have? In the late 1760's and early 1770's Reynolds and Wright represented two sides of a debate that raged in the London art world over the status and character of contemporary art. Reynolds was the first president of the Royal Academy, a body created in 1768 as a training ground for young artists in an academic style. Reynolds's grand manner valued improvement through idealization: "instead of endeavoring to amuse mankind with the minute neatness of his imitations, [the genuine painter] must to improve them by the grandeur of his ideas..."⁸⁵ While Reynolds advocated a style that was consciously idealistic, Wright's preference for a truthful depiction of his subjects and recognition of the beauty to be found in individuality factored into his decision to remain a member of the Society of Artists,

⁸⁴ Wright to unknown recipient, Derby, February 9, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885) 44-45.

⁸⁵ Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses*, Discourse III, ed. Robert Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 42.

allowing the Derby artist to paint in his preferred style without the difficult task of reconciling with oppositional academic thought.⁸⁶

II. Dr. Wilson and Three Other Portraits

The next letter sent by Wright, on April 15, 1776, provides an update to his activities since completing the bust-length (or “head”) portrait of the Duchess. Writing to “My dear Brother,” Wright mentions: “I have only painted 4 heads yet; the prejudice still runs high against me. I am now painting a half-length of Dr. Wilson & his adopted daughter; Miss Macauley; this is for reputation only, but you must not say so.”⁸⁷ Based on Wright’s previous letters to different recipients we know one of the four heads he speaks of is the portrait of the Duchess of Cumberland; the identity of the other three sitters is unknown. In an addendum to his monograph, Nicolson identified an additional bust-length portrait currently in a private collection (fig. 7). Nicolson was struck by how much the unknown sitter resembles Mrs. Mary Coltman (see fig. 9), but the sitter for the *Portrait of a lady in a light blue dress* is noticeably older than Mrs. Coltman would have been in the mid-1770s, when he dates the portrait.⁸⁸ It is possible this unknown sitter is one of the three mentioned by Wright in his letter, as her hair style is indicative of late 1770s fashion and her dress also resembles that of another Bath sitter, Mrs. Edward Witts (fig. 18), but absent of any further information, such speculation is ultimately unfounded. A possible assumption is that the sitters were not individuals of note that Wright’s brother would have

⁸⁶ David Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in the Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 272-3.

⁸⁷ Wright to his brother, Derby, April 15, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called “Wright of Derby,”* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885), 45.

⁸⁸ Benedict Nicolson, “Wright of Derby: Addenda and Corrigenda,” *The Burlington Magazine* 130 (Oct., 1988): 750.

recognized, but the fact that Wright groups the Duchess along with the others argues against that conclusion. Unfortunately, the content and context of Wright's letter makes it impossible to garner any additional information about his three unknown sitters other than the simple fact that they exist.

Wright's portrait of Dr. Wilson, on the other hand, has long been known through the artist's letters but the actual painting has only recently come to light in Susan Sloman's 2002 overview of eighteenth-century artists in Bath, *Pickpocketing the Rich*. The painting, *Dr Thomas Wilson with his adopted daughter Catherine Sophia Macaulay* (fig. 8), had actually been exhibited previously, in 1906 at the Victoria Art Gallery in Bath, as a work attributed to Gainsborough.⁸⁹ At some point after that exhibition the painting entered private hands and currently resides in a private collection.

Dr. Wilson was Wright's first portrait executed in Bath larger than a simple head-and-shoulders likeness, and his only double portrait from that period. Wright's mention of the work in his letter dated April 15 is the only time he refers to the painting in writing. As the artist states, unlike the Duchess of Cumberland's portrait, *Dr Thomas Wilson and his adopted daughter Catherine Sophia Macaulay* was not commissioned. Instead, in executing the work "for reputation only," the artist created a piece he could then display in his showroom on Brock Street. Dr. Wilson was, as Wright notes, a "very popular man," and the hope of any artist displaying a portrait of a local celebrity was that other potential patrons would take note of the artist's skill in capturing a likeness and commission portraits of their own.⁹⁰ Wright chose wisely, as

⁸⁹ Sloman, *Pickpocketing the Rich*, 20, n52.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15-17.

1776 was the height of Dr. Wilson's short-lived stint as favorite subject of social gossip in Bath. At that time the doctor was smitten with a Mrs. Macauley, a well-known republican author and a widow.⁹¹ His increasingly excessive public displays of love and admiration for Mrs. Macauley were legendary in Bath,⁹² as was her public rejection in 1778 when she married a Dr. Graham. Wright expresses gratitude for the doctor's intervention, although he regrets the late date at which he made Dr. Wilson's acquaintance, noting, "he could have been of use to me before now," but the artist evidently does not recognize the use toward which the doctor was putting Wright. While Wilson's fame drew visitors to Wright's showroom, the touching portrait of the doctor instructing Miss Macauley (whether the 'adoption' was legal or informal is not known) was undoubtedly viewed by the doctor as yet another means to ingratiate himself with the object of his affection. Wright hoped a successful portrait of Wilson and his adopted daughter would begin a long and profitable (for Wright) patronage of Wright by Wilson,⁹³ similar to the way he had hoped his portrait of the Duchess of Cumberland would launch his studio practice.

The portrait itself pales in comparison to some of Wright's lively earlier double portraits, particularly *Mr. and Mrs. Coltman* (fig. 9) and *Peter Perez Burdett and his first wife Hannah* (fig 10). Both double portraits were executed before Wright's trip to Italy, and the male sitters were close friends with Wright. Burdett was a multi-talented member of the Derby-based Lunar Society who encouraged

⁹¹ Nicolson, in a list of revisions to his 1968 monograph published posthumously as "Wright of Derby: Addenda and Corrigenda" in *The Burlington Magazine* 130 (Oct., 1988): 745-758, states that "I am informed by Jerry D. Meyer that Wright's phrase 'adopted daughter' to describe Miss Macauley was a euphemism for 'lover.'" Presumably neither Meyer nor Nicolson had ever seen the canvas in question, for it is impossible that the young woman painted next to Dr. Wilson could be Miss Macauley, who was in her mid-40s at the time the painting was executed.

⁹² Gadd, *Georgian Summer*, 160-162.

⁹³ Sloman, *Pickpocketing the Rich*, 22.

Wright's move to Liverpool in 1768 and who appears in several of the artist's famous industrial candle-lights of the mid-1760s.⁹⁴ Thomas Coltman was a member of the landed gentry—his family owned an estate in Hagnaby Prior in Lincolnshire, east of Derby—and in the 1760s while still at a very young age⁹⁵ he formed a strong friendship with the elder Wright while the two were still bachelors. Burdett and Coltman each possessed outsized personalities, which is apparent in their double portraits. Coltman was an avid huntsman, once writing to a friend “I propose to go out with the Hounds in the Morning w^{ch}. I can do more easily than write a letter,”⁹⁶ and he is completely at ease in the countryside estate he inhabits in Wright's portrait. He ignores of the painter's presence, dividing his attention between his wife on horseback and the sight in the distance to which he directs her with a pointed finger. In contrast, Peter Perez Burdett glances at the artist, with more interest than he pays his wife (the two are divided by the broken posts of the fence on which Burdett sits, and she strikes an aggressive pose in his direction), and there is no doubt that he is extremely comfortable at the subject of attention. Casually dressed in much the same manner as Coltman, Burdett is in his element preparing for the hunt. Hannah's elaborate death seems anachronistic for the setting, but her intense gaze directed at

⁹⁴ Most notably, Burdett is the central figure in *Three Persons Viewing the Gladiator by Candle-light*, exhibited 1765 (Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, p. 61-63, no. 22), and the standing figure taking notes to the left in *A Philosopher giving that lecture on the Orrery, in which a lamp is put in place of the Sun*, exhibited 1776 (Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, p. 54-55. No. 18). Also see Fraser, “Joseph Wright of Derby and the Lunar Society,” in *Wright of Derby*, 16-17 for more on Burdett's role in the Lunar Society.

⁹⁵ Thomas Coltman was born in 1747, Wright more than a decade earlier in 1734. Thomas and Mary Coltman were married in 1771, when both were 24 years old.

⁹⁶ Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 107.

her husband reinforces the magnetic personality possessed by the brilliant and scheming man.⁹⁷

By comparison, Dr. Wilson is stiff and unconfident. He attempts to direct Catherine Macauley's gaze to an open book on the table in front of them, but his gesture is uncertain and his interest is directed outside the composition, like an actor looking off-stage for his next cue. Catherine Macauley's gaze, while more definitive, nonetheless expresses a desire to be elsewhere than under the tutelage of Dr. Wilson. She wears a visage of meditation, bordering on melancholy, reflecting internally rather than looking at her older counterpart. Wright recognized that melancholic potential, and he would borrow Catherine's face a year later for his painting *Edwin, from Dr. Beattie's Minstrel* (fig. 11), which he exhibited at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1778 and subsequently sold to John Milnes that year. Nicolson proved that Wright had sketched several boys while in Rome that would inform the body and gesture of Edwin,⁹⁸ but there is no doubt that the face of protagonist of *The Minstrel; Or, The Progress of Genius* as conceived by Wright is that of Catherine Macauley. Edwin was a youthful shepherd prone to moments of quiet contemplation of beauty and nature—in other words, the sort of positive melancholic hero celebrated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and later epitomized by Brooke Boothby (fig. 15).

III. Success in Cultivating a Patron: John Milnes

The trail of sitters left by Wright in his letters leads next to his fifth, and apparently last, portrait from his first season in Bath, a full-length of John Milnes (fig.

⁹⁷ In an interesting postscript to the story of Peter and Hannah Burdett, the husband fled England in 1774 after accruing significant debt to avoid his creditors. He brought the portrait of him and Hannah, which is why it is now in the National Gallery of the Czech Republic in Prague, but he neglected to bring Hannah herself.

⁹⁸ Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 62-64, figs. 79-81.

12). Writing again to his brother, on May 8th 1776, Wright is optimistic about the prospect of leaving Bath shortly:

The season is almost over here, and there is but little company in town, therefore have but little reason to expect any more sitters. Have in hand a small full-length of Mr. Miles, brother to Capt. Miles I painted at Derby some time ago. He is now in Town, but will be here, I expect, in a day or two to have his picture finished; a day will compleat it, and if I have nothing more to do, shall leave Bath in a fortnight or thereabout.⁹⁹

Wright spells the family surname incorrectly, but his subject was in fact John Milnes, a businessman whose brother, Captain Robert Shore Milnes (fig. 13), was painted by Wright in 1772. In Milnes, Wright finally found the reliable and wealthy patronage her previously sought from the Duchess of Cumberland and Dr. Thomas Wilson, though, from the tone of his May 8th letter, Wright apparently did not yet consider that a possibility. Milnes's patronage began immediately, when he purchased the two Italian landscapes (discussed in Chapter 4) executed by Wright while in Bath and exhibited in the Society of Artists exhibition in mid-1776.¹⁰⁰ Milnes also purchased *Edwin, from Dr. Beattie's Minstrel* in 1777, and numerous other landscapes through the remainder of Wright's life.

In the portrait Milnes is well-dressed, standing in the countryside with a walking stick but looking out of place, gesturing into the distance at a ship on the water, which Egerton suggests may be shipping cotton (his family's source of

⁹⁹ Wright to "Dr. Brother," Derby, May 8, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885), 46.

¹⁰⁰ Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, 68-69, cat. 27.

fortune).¹⁰¹ Milnes looks very much like the prototypical “Bath Beau” *ton* mocked most famously in Thomas Rowlandson’s *Bath Beau and Country Beau* (fig. 14)—skinny, pale, wearing fancy clothes and a wig. Though both of Rowlandson’s characters are ‘beaus’, a sometimes-pejorative term for the wealthy young (and old) men whose interest lay solely in their appearance and social popularity, the country beau on the left has an amiable, jocund manner while the Bath beau on the right is sickly-thin and completely engrossed in himself. Bath was the last region of the country that favored such foppish manner. While popular among other members of the British elite, the haughty Bath style displayed in Rowlandson’s print had fallen out of favor in the Georgian era to the ‘man of feeling’ who is comfortable with himself and his surroundings, the type of person personified in Wright’s 1781 portrait of Brooke Boothby (fig. 15). Milnes’s portrait is highly finished, and the tree that provides a backdrop for the subject is detailed and textured in the “finished” style for which Wright charged a premium to his patrons,¹⁰² but unlike the artist’s successful portraits from before Italy, *John Milnes* tells the viewer very little about the character of the subject. The sitter wears the ‘uniform’ of the Bath beau,¹⁰³ which really tells the viewer everything they need to know about the personality of the individual, but there is little sense of the individual in the same way as Sarah Clayton seven years prior, or Richard Arkwright five years hence. Milnes is one of a type, rather than one in a million, but one must imagine that is how he wanted to be seen. Alex Kidson’s identification of the man as John Milnes is based on his familial resemblance to Capt.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰² Barker, “Swallowing up all the Business: Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool,” in *Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool*, 73.

¹⁰³ Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 49.

Milnes as painted by Wright as well as a portrait of Milnes by Romney of fifteen years later.¹⁰⁴ There is nothing in his dress or surrounding landscape that provides a sense of the subject; his familial resemblance to his brother Robert notwithstanding, John Milnes is a cipher upon which any possible identity could be mapped.¹⁰⁵

IV. Wright's Second Season in Bath

Wright's letter to his brother on May 8th, 1776 was the artist's last correspondence from his first season in Bath published in Bemrose. He returned to Derby at some point at the end of May or beginning of June, continuing to execute portraits and preparing to return to Bath again in the fall. An earlier letter to his brother, from the end of April, reveals Wright's plan for the summer of 1776:

From the month of June till the latter end of September there is no company in Bath. I intend to follow the fashion this year and go to Derby, & it will give me an opportunity (if the old room is disengaged) of painting the sea-piece, or some blacksmith's shop which will bring company to my rooms next season...¹⁰⁶

Wright knew that, if he was destined to be seen as a painter of landscapes and candlelight pictures, he needed to return to Bath with new show pieces to entertain visitors to his studio. He also executed portraits in Derby and the surrounding areas. Three portraits executed in the fall of 1776, two in Derby and one after his return to

¹⁰⁴ Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, 68

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 59. When the portrait of John Milnes resurfaced in the late nineteenth century in the collection of the family of the Duke of St. Albans, it was identified as a portrait of George III by Johann Zoffany. That identification was later contested and the work was simply known as *Portrait of an Unknown Man* by 1984 when it was sold at auction and entered the collection of the Louvre.

¹⁰⁶ Wright to "Mr. Wright, Surgeon," Derby, April 30, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885) 45-46.

Bath, epitomize the difference in the expectations of sitters in Derby and Bath, and Wright's ease with the former and discontent with the latter.

Shortly before leaving for his second season in Bath, Wright painted the portraits of the brother of Erasmus Darwin, *William Alvey Darwin* (fig. 16), and his wife Jane and son William (fig. 17). Each of the paintings bears an inscription on the stretcher that lists the name and an auspicious date in the life of each sitter¹⁰⁷ followed by the line "Painted by Mr. Wright of Bath (formerly of Derby) in September 1776."¹⁰⁸ The two portraits, particularly *Jane Darwin and her son William Brown Darwin*, exude a liveliness and sense of personality absent in the portraits of Dr. Wilson and Sophia Macauley and John Milnes, and in the first portrait Wright would execute upon his return to Bath, *Mrs. Edward Witts* (fig. 19).

Wright's portrait of Mrs. Witts is the only Bath portrait definitively identified by Nicolson. On the stretcher is a contemporary inscription "WRIGHT/pinx^t./1776" in a hand other than Wright's.¹⁰⁹ The work is in the private collection of the Witts family, so like the double portrait of Dr. Wilson and Sophia Macauley, analysis of the work must be done primarily with black and white reproductions. Fortunately, Nicolson describes the color and handling of *Mrs. Edward Witts* in some detail, noting the sitter's light blue dress and pink sofa and Wright's smooth painterly

¹⁰⁷ The first part of the inscription on William Alvey Darwin reads: "William Alvey Darwin aged 50. 14th October 1776.", the date being Darwin's fiftieth birthday. The first half of the inscription on the portrait of Jane Darwin and her son reads: "Jane Darwin (wife of William Alvey Darwin) aged 30. 10th October 1776, and William Brown Darwin aged two years and a half. 12th August 1776." Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 193, 195.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 193, 195.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 227. Nicolson identifies the inscription as eighteenth-century because the handwriting matches that of an inscription of a portrait of Mr. Edward Witts from 1779 by Romney, which is confirmed by an entry in Romney's book of sitters.

treatment.¹¹⁰ Mrs. Witts gazes off in the distance and her sentiment is fairly disaffected and unhappy (a state of mind Nicolson refers to as *de haut en bas*) owing first to her lack of interest in sitting for a portrait, and secondly to sitting for a portrait by a “provincial painter.” As Nicolson points out, Wright’s greatest success in his portrait of Mrs. Witts is his ephemeral treatment of her lace veil and pearls adorning her head and the kerchief flowing over her left shoulder across her torso, and extremely difficult exercise in texture and transparency.¹¹¹ Wright captures the glint of the light as it shimmers across her accessories, a holdover from his earlier experimentation with the effects of light on surfaces from his many candlelight pictures. Mrs. Witts wears her hair in a style unseen in Wright’s portraits (other than the undated *Portrait of a lady in a light blue dress*) but quite uncommon in the grand manner portraits executed by Reynolds, Romney and others between roughly 1774 and 1781 (see fig. 20).¹¹² She holds a book in her right hand, spine down so that the viewer has no idea if it is a novel, journal, or treatise. Perhaps Wright is making a pun based on her last name, for the unidentified book is not meant to demonstrate any personal interest or philosophical alliance, like Brooke Boothby, but rather to provide a generic indication of Mrs. Witts’ status as a member of the educated elite.

By comparison, though the portrait of Jane Darwin and her son features some of the same interest in light, in the pearls again adorning the mother’s hair, the sitters’ personalities come through as a curious toddler and loving mother. The gesture of the

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

¹¹¹ Ribiero, *The Art of Dress*, 64.

¹¹² A cursory glance through David Manning’s catalogue raisonné for Reynolds, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) reveals a stream of women with their hair piled up in curls, many wearing similar dresses with diaphanous and reflective elements. Reynolds’ portrait of *Diana, Viscountess Crosbie* (née Sackville), figure 20, is one famous example of this late-1770s fashion.

son toward his mother's chin and the mother grasping her son's back, not to mention the gaze shared between the two, create a sense of internal cohesion very different from Mrs. Edward Witts, whose distant gaze and flattened form discourage the viewer from spending much time considering the sitter. While Wright drew from contemporary fashion and style in executing Mrs. Edward Witts, he looked back to his recent Italian tour for the timeless inspiration for Jane Darwin. Her hair style is similar to Mrs. Witts', but her shawl and blouse, her son's tunic, and the chair she sits on are quoted directly (and largely unchanged) from Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia* (fig. 18).¹¹³ The connection reinforces Jane Darwin's motherly role; the relaxed, pleasant, smiling woman is very different in character to the proper but distant Mrs. Witts. Meanwhile, the contemporarily-dressed William Alvey Darwin looks beyond the frame of the canvas with a wry grin and focused eyes that indicate a connection with someone or something outside the frame—perhaps the portrait of his wife and son on the wall next to him? Both Mr. and Mrs. Darwin wear simple attire, in stark contrast to the textured and complete dress of Mrs. Witts.

Mrs. Edward Witts is the only surviving portrait from Wright's second season in Bath, and had been thought to be the only surviving portrait from his entire period in Bath. We can date *Mrs. Edward Witts* so close to the Darwins because of its inscription in 1776 and from Wright's letters. His letters clearly note his sitters through his first season in Bath, and they record either actual names or unnamed head portraits, whereas *Mrs. Edward Witts* is a half length. Wright returned to Bath in October 1776 and so, if the inscription on the work is correct, this portrait must date

¹¹³ I am indebted to Dr. William Pressly, who brought this association to my attention while reviewing a late draft of this paper.

between October and December of that year. Basing the identification as a Bath portrait this way is certainly less secure than if Wright had mentioned Mrs. Witts by name in a letter, but the portrait itself also serves as evidence of the sitting having taken place in Bath. Mrs. Witts's comportment and interest are visibly different than that of the Darwins. She desires a fashionable portrait to demonstrate her class and standing—the type of self-aggrandizing portrait popular among the society types in Bath—while the Darwins commission portraits that express their personalities.

While an overview of Wright's first season in Bath can be pieced together through his correspondence and exhibition record, his second season is a complete enigma. His letter-writing output, at least as reproduced by Bemrose, consists of only one letter written to his brother in March. In it Wright writes about a problem with a courier service before mentioning, as an aside: "...I have a sitter, the first this year, but thank heavens, I have other employment w^{ch} I will tell you of in my next."¹¹⁴ His next letter, if it was sent, is unrecorded. Therefore, the identity of his other sitter, as well as the planned source of his future income, remains only a tantalizing mystery. The identification of Mrs. Witts as a portrait from Wright's second season in Bath is based on the absence of a description of the portrait in Wright's first-season letters, which encompass his entire stay in the city, combined with the stretcher inscription dating the painting to 1776. Wright's statement in his March 9th, 1777 letter to his brother that "I have a sitter, the first this year," refers to the calendar year of 1777, rather than the season. Wright could have had other sitters after the one he mentions in the letter, but the tone of his relief at finding another source of employment, as well

¹¹⁴ Wright to "Dear Brother," Derby, March 9, 1777, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* by William Bemrose, Jr. (London: Bemrose, 1885), 48.

as the fact that it took him over two months to find just one sitter, hints that his first
sitter in 1777 in Bath was also his last.

Chapter 4: Wright's Landscapes in Bath

While Wright's move to Bath was to establish a portrait practice to allow him to escape the stereotype that he was merely a painter of landscapes and candle lights, the surplus of time created by his lack of success in securing portrait commissions allowed the painter to execute those same landscapes and night scenes. Predictably, Wright turned to his recent Grand Tour of Italy for subject material, particularly the sublime grandeur of Mount Vesuvius, which the artist visited while exploring the Neapolitan countryside that would come to dominate his oeuvre for the remainder of his life.¹¹⁵

Wright's work on scenes of Vesuvius began almost immediately after his visit to the Bay of Naples region between October and December 1774. Unfortunately for Wright his excursion to Mount Vesuvius came during a period of restrained activity for the volcano, which had last erupted in 1766 and 1767 prior to his visit and would again in 1779. Vesuvius remained active, however, constantly smoking and producing lava flows. In the words of Nicolson, "it was not the infliction of the wound itself but its refusal to heal that Wright witnessed" at Vesuvius. British interest in Vesuvius, Pompeii, Herculaneum and the greater Bay of Naples region was encouraged by the generally supportive King of Naples—compared to the often-frosty relations with Papal Rome—and Sir William Hamilton, the British envoy to Naples. Rome remained the primary destination for Wright, Romney and other artists on the Grand Tour in the late eighteenth century, but the Vesuvian villas were a necessary field trip.

¹¹⁵ Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, 172, cat. 104.

Herculaneum was first excavated in earnest in 1738,¹¹⁶ Pompeii a decade later. Excavations under Charles V, King of Naples and Sicily (later King Charles III of Spain), were slow and closely guarded, but the information (both sanctioned and unsanctioned) that did trickle north was tantalizing to the European audience. The first volume of *Le Antichità di Ercolano Eposte* was printed in 1755 and distributed to various royal courts and other members of the European aristocracy, while unofficial sketches by Italian, French and British visitors were more easily accessible sources of information about the Neapolitan excavations.¹¹⁷

Countless artists were inspired by the sublime terror of Vesuvius, supplemented by the many artifacts coming out of the Neapolitan countryside into England (both legally and illegally) and the catalogues and guidebooks that brought ancient Pompeii and Herculaneum to life in both an emotional and empirical way. Artists like Philip de Louthembourg and later J.M.W. Turner executed evocative paintings and watercolors of the volcano's destructive power, but none seized on the power of Vesuvius and successfully linked the visual and emotional experiences at the mountain as much as Joseph Wright. His early depiction of and constant return to the subject of Vesuvius was born out of both the identification of profitable subject matter and a desire to escape, by any means necessary, his depressing experience in Bath.

¹¹⁶ The site was originally discovered in modern times in 1709 during excavation for the Prince d'Elbeuf's villa. Tunnels were dug into what is now known as the Theater of Herculaneum, and some artifacts were extricated, but the site was abandoned several years later by d'Elbeuf, who was more interested in securing building materials than uncovering history. See William H. Stiebing, Jr., *Uncovering the Past: A History of Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 147.

¹¹⁷ Alden R. Gordon, "Subverting the Secret of Herculaneum: Archaeological Espionage in the Kingdom of Naples," in *Antiquity Recovered: The Legacy of Pompeii and Herculaneum*, ed. Victoria C. Gardner Coates and Jon L. Seydl (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty, 2007), 37-58..

I. Untraced(?) Landscapes from the First Season in Bath

For Wright, landscapes quickly transformed from a means to introduce his name to potential portrait commissions to an escape from the drudgery of Bath. In two letters to his brother written in April 1776 Wright expresses his desire to return to Derby to work on landscapes. First he mentions his “intention of coming to Derby, with your leave, to paint the sea engagement at the time when Bath is deserted by almost all, but will say more of this in my next.”¹¹⁸ He does discuss the idea again in his next letter, describing the exodus out of Bath during the summer before adding, “I intend to follow the fashion this year and go to Derby, & it will give me an opportunity (if the old room is disengaged) of painting the sea-piece, or some blacksmith’s shop which will bring company to my rooms next season.”¹¹⁹ Despite his plans, Wright did not finish a painting of a blacksmith’s shop over the summer of 1776 (or if he did, no record of it exists), and would not revisit the subject again in his career. His voyage to Italy saw landscapes and dramatic sublime effects replace interiors and figural scenes as the dominant mode of Wright’s candle-lights. Klingender has argued that Wright’s Vesuvius and Girandola paintings should be read as wholly-positive images celebrating science and industry much in the same way as those blacksmith’s shops, removing human intercessors and celebrating the primal forces of nature which man had only recently tamed.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Wright to “My dear Brother,” Derby, April 15, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called “Wright of Derby,”* by William Bemrose, Jr., (London: Bemrose, 1885), 45.

¹¹⁹ Wright to “Mr. Wright, Surgeon,” Derby, April 30, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called “Wright of Derby,”* by William Bemrose, Jr., (London: Bemrose, 1885), 45-46.

¹²⁰ F.D. Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, rev. ed. Arthur Elton (New York: Schocken, 1970), 58-61.

Wright's lack of success as a portraitist in Bath, and the resulting surplus of free time it created, afforded the artist extended opportunities in which to execute uncommissioned history paintings and landscapes to hang in his showroom or exhibit in London during the summer. Wright recognized that his name was primarily associated with "Candle Light Pictures," a generic term referring to any landscape or genre scene demonstrating a dramatic interplay of light and darkness. This association he largely attributed to the conspiracy of his rival artists: "I am confident I have some enemies in this place, who propagate a report that I paint fire-pieces admirably, but they never heard of my painting portraits."¹²¹ Even if he was unable to secure commissions, Wright correctly guessed that the presence of outstanding examples of candle-light works in his showroom would attract curious visitors willing to pay an entry fee and possibly purchase the works on display.

While Wright's January 15th, 1776 letter to his sister has already been discussed in terms of the artist's nascent pessimistic outlook about his Bath experience, it also contains excited words about the positive reception of his landscapes. Nicolson quotes Wright as writing: "As to the picture of Vesuvius the Town [Bath] rings with commendation of it." The artist mentions one potential buyer for the work, and continues:

Another Gent^{mn}. from Salisbury, M^r. Pen Wyndham is also very desirous of having it, & will wait for the event of the Exhibition & if not sold then will give me an [sic] 100 guineas for it. I have just now finished a companion to it. The Exhibition of a great Fire work from

¹²¹ Wright to unknown recipient, Derby, February 9, 1776, in *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby,"* by William Bemrose, Jr., (London: Bemrose, 1885), 44-45.

the Castle of St. Angelo in Rome, the one is the greatest effect of Nature the other of Art that I suppose can be. This last picture I have painted to keep me from Idleness.¹²²

Wright exhibited both works in London at the 1776 exhibition of the Incorporated Society of Artists of Great Britain (or simply the Society of Artists) under the titles *An Eruption of Mount Vesuvius* and *The Annual Girandola, at the Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome*. Despite the intentions of Mr. Wyndham, both landscapes were purchased by John Milnes,¹²³ who had commissioned Wright's sole full-length portrait in Bath earlier in the year. The Society of Artists Vesuvius was the first of seven views of the volcano Wright would exhibit between 1776 and 1794, out of the estimated thirty-plus he would execute during his career. The Girandola canvas was the first of four Wright would execute of the scene, which Egerton suggests is the totally if his output of that subject.¹²⁴

A 1780 letter from Wright to Daniel Daulby reveals that the two landscapes exhibited in the 1776 Society of Artists exhibition were not the first works Milnes intended to purchase:

It has just occur'd to me that I shall soon have in my possession a picture of Mount Vesuvius, very different from that of Mr. Tates, it is a near View of y^e. Mountain w^{ch}. shews the Lava to great advantage, & the distance is made up of the Bay of Naples, the islands of Procida

¹²² Wright to his sister, Derby, January 15, 1776, in *Joseph Wright of Derby: Painter of Light*, vol. 1, by Benedict Nicolson, (London: Routledge, 1968), 279, n2.

¹²³ Nicolson does not indicate whether the first potential buyer is Milnes or not, but considering he had already identified Milnes earlier in the monograph, all indications are that Wright either did not identify the first potential buyer or the individual does not factor elsewhere in Wright's life or in the British art world and Nicolson did not see fit to burden the reader with an otherwise-extraneous name.

¹²⁴ Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, 172.

Ischia Caprea etc. etc. the necks of land breaking into the sea wth. the reflection of ye. Moon, playing between them has a pleasing effect, you shall have it for 30 g^{ns}. w^{ch}. Is 10 less than I would paint for one of that size, it being I believe somewhere about 2 feet 10 by 2 ft. 5 In. It is highly finish'd. The reason of it being returned to me is. After Mr. Milnes had purchased the picture above mention'd & a companion of Mount Etna, he saw in the Exhibition [the 1776 Society of Artists exhibition] a pair of large ones of Vesuvius & the Girandola, w^{ch}. he purchased therefore thinks it unnecessary to have two pictures of the same subject, & now [note in margin: 'Mr. Milnes has been a great friend to me, having laid out wth. me 7 or £800'] wishes to exchange this picture of Vesuvius for a picture of Neptune's Grotto w^{ch}. I exhibited last year [in the 1779 Royal Academy exhibition], & allow me the difference, also make an abatement of 10 Gns [note in margin: 'he gave me 40 gns'] w^{ch}. will make the picture come cheap indeed to you. The picture, if you wish it, shall be sent for your inspection.¹²⁵

Nicolson presumes that the *Mount Etna is View of Catania with Mount Etna in the Distance* (fig. 26), which was purchased by the Tate in 1970 and whose dimensions match exactly those listed for an Etna that was auctioned in March 1780 along with a matching Vesuvius to Lord Palmerston.¹²⁶ The canvas is one of two known paintings by Wright of Etna, an active volcano on Sicily which the artist probably never

¹²⁵ Wright to Daniel Daulby, January 11, 1780, in *Joseph Wright of Derby: Painter of Light*, vol. 1, by Benedict Nicolson. (London: Routledge, 1968), 282, n16.

¹²⁶ Nicolson, "Addenda and Corrigenda," 753.

visited.¹²⁷ It is remarkable for how unlike it is from Wright's other works of volcanoes and fire, which are generally night scenes with the volcano or other sublime effect in the middle ground illuminating the remainder of the canvas. Wright relied on the work of another artist (or artists) for his views, which explains some topographical inconsistencies in the positioning of buildings.

Unfortunately, the provenance of most works purchased by Milnes, one of Wright's most important late patrons, is extremely problematic. Milnes purchased many landscapes and history paintings in addition to his commissioned portrait (fig. 11) between 1776 and 1790, but his finances took a turn for the worse in the 1790s and his estate was auctioned off piecemeal until his house and its contents, including his painting collection, were sold in 1808. The contents and transaction details of the auction are unknown, and therefore many of the Wrights he owned are still untraced or have either only recently come to light or been correctly attributed to Wright.¹²⁸

An Eruption of Mount Vesuvius is one of the many works owned by Milnes that has yet to be positively identified. There is a possibility it is one of several works of Vesuvius by Wright that have appeared since the mid nineteenth century, but the lack of textual description of his first exhibited Vesuvius means any identification must hinge solely on comparative evidence from other works of secure provenance. Neither Nicolson or Egerton believed any extant Vesuvius canvases were potentially identifiable as *An Eruption of Mount Vesuvius*. Part of this may be the ease of locating the earliest canvases of unknown provenance in Rome shortly after Wright

¹²⁷ The skyline of Catania and the relationship of the topography between the city and the volcano in the painting are slightly inconsistent with reality, indicating Wright used sketches from other artists to help craft his composition. See Nicolson, "Addenda and Corrigenda," 753.

¹²⁸ Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, 69.

returned from his excursion to Naples, and later ones to Derby after he settled there for good. Wright's Bath period is rarely considered in the greater context of his life, so presumably there is a bias toward locating works outside the otherwise-ignorable period if at all possible. Nicolson does identify several finished paintings as dating from the artist's stay in Rome, and allows that one (fig. 23), which he calls *Vesuvius in Eruption*, "must fit into the series at this stage, either late on the Italian trip or soon after his return."¹²⁹ Egerton disagrees and dates the painting as definitively after Wright's return from Italy, though her proposed date range allows for the possible beginning of the work in Bath (which she does not address), and provides a specific identification for it as a work sold in 1780, possibly to Frederic Hervy, the Early of Bristol and Bishop of Derry.¹³⁰

In addition to *An Eruption of Mount Vesuvius*, Milnes purchased *The Annual Girandola at the Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome* (fig. 21) from the 1776 Society of Artists exhibition. The exhibited work was the second of four known Girandolas painted by Wright: he painted one earlier, between 1774 and 1775, which he sold without exhibiting, and two later works submitted to the 1778 and 1779 Royal Academy exhibitions. Three *Girandolas* are extant, two of certain provenance and a third that is almost certainly the 1776 Society of Artists *Girandola* executed while Wright was in Bath. The 1779 RA *Girandola* was sold, along with another view of Vesuvius, to Empress Catherine II of Russia, and the unexhibited *Girandola* now in the collection of the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery in Birmingham, England. Nicolson assumed that the 1776 *Girandola* would have been based on the Birmingham

¹²⁹ Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 77.

¹³⁰ Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, 170.

Girandola, and that the work now in the Walker Art Museum in Liverpool must be another work. Egerton suggests the Liverpool *Girandola* is the 1776 Milnes painting, based in large part on compositional similarities to a probable source drawing (fig. 22) dated “Rome June 4th 1774.”¹³¹ She reasons that Wright would most likely have relied heavily on his preparatory work for an early view of the girandole, namely the 1776 version rather than the still-unknown 1778 view. The hundred-year lapse in provenance between Wright’s sale of his 1776 *Girandola* to John Milnes and the donation of the Liverpool *Girandola* in 1880 to the Walker Art Museum by a Mr. Robert Neilson makes it nearly impossible to determine for certain whether the two are the same work without any additional information. The possibility that the Liverpool *Girandola* could be an additional view as yet unknown or unpublished still remains.¹³²

Despite the different subject, *The Annual Girandola* appears very much like a Wright Vesuvius or any other volcanic eruption. The central blast of the fireworks appears as one solid plume of fire obscuring much of the surrounding landscape. The yellow-orange color Wright used for the fire is just a bit lighter, if not exactly the same, as the colors he uses for volcanic eruptions, and the smoke from the fireworks creates the same circular framing around the orange light as in many of his Vesuvius scenes (see figs. 23-25). He takes a vantage point almost due east of the castle, across the Tiber River, so that St. Peter’s Basilica is visible in the light of the explosion. The

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹³² One thing we can be certain about is that the Liverpool *Girandola* is not the one exhibited at the 1778 Royal Academy Exhibition. That *Girandola* was eventually sold to Daniel Daulby and was listed in Wright’s account book with the dimensions 48 x 38 inches, considerably smaller than the Liverpool *Girandola* which is 54 1/8 x 68 1/8 inches. See Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, 172 for more.

distant view also gives a plausible reason for the presence of the Claude Lorrain-like tree which frames the right side of the composition.

II. Wright's Dormant Second Season

As Wright mentioned several times in letters, he took advantage of his lack of portrait commissions in the winter of 1775-1776 to execute the works he intended to exhibit at the upcoming summer's Society of Artists exhibition. A reasonable assumption would be that he did the same the next winter, but that was not the case. Wright exhibited no paintings in 1777, the first time he did not exhibit a painting in London since 1765, when he first began exhibiting in the capital. From that first exhibited painting, *Three Persons Viewing the Gladiator by Candle-light*, through the *Vesuvius* and *Girandola* he exhibited in 1776, Wright submitted his works solely to the Society of Artists of Great Britain (generally referred to simply as the Society of Artists), and organization that was founded in 1761 and received a royal charter in 1765.

As the primary fine arts organization in England, the Society of Artists was soon surpassed in 1768 by the Royal Academy of Arts. A dispute between James Paine and William Chambers about the continuity of leadership in the Society of Artists led to a fracture among its members, with those supporting Chambers (whose number included Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Benjamin West) forming an opposing academy, leveraging King George III's existing relationships with Chambers and West to secure royal patronage.¹³³ Membership in other artists' societies was forbidden by the charter of the Royal Academy. Joseph Wright was one of the few major artists, along with George Romney and George Stubbs, who did not

¹³³ Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, 21-25.

immediately switch their allegiance to the Royal Academy.¹³⁴ During his two-year stay in Bath, however, something changed for Wright. In 1778 he submitted six paintings to the Royal Academy exhibition, and exhibited with the Royal Academy exclusively through 1782, and then on and off through 1784, his last year of exhibition. Wright exhibited once more at the Society of Artists in 1791, and occasionally in other venues,¹³⁵ but his shift from the Society of Artists to the Royal Academy, and his quiet interim year of 1777, holds the most intrigue.

Surprisingly—or perhaps not surprisingly, considering his lack of interest in this period of Wright’s life—Nicolson neglected to analyze Wright’s reasons for switching exhibition allegiances,¹³⁶ and no successive writer has probed the situation. This has been the one great lapse in the otherwise incredible growth of our understanding of Joseph Wright in the past four decades. Though the artist makes no statements in his letters about the change, and his previous biographers explain away his move from the Society of Artists to the Royal Academy as recognition of the flagging fortunes of the former, the chronological proximity of Wright’s change in exhibition location to his failure to make a name for himself in Bath must be inextricably linked.

¹³⁴ Romney famously refused to join the Royal Academy his entire life, never applying for membership and never having been nominated, even though (and in large part because) he was by far the most famous artist working in England during his life not to be a member. See Alex Kidson’s catalogue for *George Romney, 1734-1802*, 22-23.

¹³⁵ See Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, Appendix A, 273-278 for a complete list of Wright’s exhibited works and venues.

¹³⁶ Nicolson does mention the switch in *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 3, but offers no reasons and draws no conclusions.

Chapter 5: The Aftermath of Bath...What is Next?

Wright's period in Bath, previously ignored, takes on a much larger role in the second half of the artist's life as the site of cultivation for many of his subsequent subjects and themes of his art, as well as his later sicknesses. The Bath period is directly related to his break with the Society of Artists and subsequent submissions to the Royal Academy—an organization with which he would later have an extremely volatile relationship¹³⁷—a subject that has also been sorely underrepresented in scholarship to date. This post-Bath decision to exhibit with the Royal Academy, rather than the Society of Artists, is one of several noticeable changes in Wright's life, along with shifts in subject matter and mental comportment, for which the catalysts can be traced to his experience in Bath. In examining Wright's life in Bath, more questions have been raised than answers provided. The first step to understanding the role of Bath over the remainder of Wright's life is to understand what Wright was doing in Bath. Now that this paper has accomplished that, we can ask more probing questions.

In regards to his subject matter, prior to his Grand Tour Wright's famous candle lights often took the form of genre scenes or contemporary subjects. Italy introduced Vesuvius to his vocabulary, and post-Italian Wright favored landscapes for his dramatic dark compositions with internal light sources. He began experimenting with *Vesuvius* and *Girandola* compositions while still in Rome, and Bath afforded him the opportunity to more fully develop the themes for exhibition. What caused Wright to move from scenes dominated by figures in interior settings to

¹³⁷ See Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, vol. 1, 14-16 for more on the feud.

vast, largely-unpopulated exteriors? Is this shift, as Klingender and others have argued, a reflection of Wright's growing interest in the Sublime and the nascent Industrial Revolution, or do these fiery landscapes reflect something more basic about the artist's inner turmoil? Furthermore, what role do the various artists organizations play in Wright's post-Bath life? His decision to abandon the Society of Artists, an organization of which he was one of the star members, to exhibit with but not join the Royal Academy appears to be the choice of a man reluctantly accepting his status as a second-tier artist after his dismal failure in Bath.

Having for the first time a true understanding of Wright's time in Bath, direct relationships become visible between his experiences there and the depression which had afflicted him for years but became debilitating in the decades after his final return to Derby—another subject that has been given relatively little attention in critical scholarship regarding Wright. The forthcoming comprehensive publication of Wright's correspondence¹³⁸ will hopefully fill in the chronological gaps at the beginning of Wright's first season in Bath and his entire second season, as well as shed light on less introspective issues like his relationships with his few Bath patrons.

All these questions provide new avenues for research, but perhaps the most important result from this study of Wright in Bath is not a new question but an expansion of old questions. If future inquiries into Wright engage his Bath period, when in the past they may not have given those two even a cursory look, then this study will have succeeded in redirecting scholarly attention to a neglected but crucial period of the artist's life.

¹³⁸ Collected and edited by Elizabeth E. Barker, to be published in *The Journal of the Walpole Society* 71 (2009) as "Documents related to Joseph Wright 'of Derby' (1734-97)."

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