

Joseph Wright and the Final Farewell

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By

Stephen Leach

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For Kirsten

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Of course, any remaining errors are mine alone.

INTRODUCTION

I could not help but overhear the question from a visitor to Derby Art Gallery, “what was Joseph Wright like?”

“Put it this way,” was the steward’s confident reply, “if you would have met him, you would have liked him.”

I am not so sure. You might have liked him, but perhaps not immediately. Wright was a very private person. He was prone to melancholy, sentimental, periodically confident of his own worth and yet in continual need of reassurance.

On the one hand, Wright took his motto from the seventeenth century French writer and artist Charles Alphonse du Fresnoy, advising the artist to study nature:

’Tis a great means of profiting yourself to copy diligently those excellent pieces, and those beautiful Designs; but Nature which is present before your Eyes, is yet a better mistress. For She augments the force and vigour of the Genius and She it is from whom Art derives her ultimate perfection by means of experience.

On the other hand, he was also interested in the art theories of Alexander Cozens which emphasised the idea of looking within oneself to find the truth.

But would he have liked *you*? Well, in order to gain his trust, it would first be necessary to compliment his abilities. Should you venture a note of criticism, it was important to be tactful, for he was quick to take offence if he felt his talents had been slighted. Yet, throughout his life, he was repeatedly asking his friends for their advice and reassurance. He seems to have been influenced in equal measure *both* by a melancholy desire for oblivion *and* by a need for acclaim.

His best friends – including Peter Perez Burdett, William Hayley, Thomas Gisborne, and John Leigh Philips – each, in their turn, exerted a considerable influence upon his work. He had a talent for collaboration. With his readiness to take advice, Wright does not fit the stereotype of a romantic, artistic genius. However, he was quite taken with the role of outsider – living far from the London art world and above the fickle whims of fashion.

But, although he turned his back on London in later life, Wright could not escape fashion altogether; and from our perspective he can be seen as much ‘of his time’ as any of his rivals. In particular, as Matthew Craske has persuasively suggested, it is illuminating to place him against the background of ‘moonlight and melancholy’ of the then-fashionable graveyard school of poetry of which he was so fond.

Indeed, in this book I shall argue that Wright himself even tried his hand at a poem of this genre, ‘The Final Farewell, a poem written on retiring from London.’

CHAPTER 1

SATIN AND LACE

Wright was born on 3 September 1734 at 28 Irongate, Derby, into a “solidly-established middle-class professional family” (Egerton 1990, 9). His childhood home no longer stands but there is a picture of it, reproduced below.



Fig. 1.1 Wright's Childhood Home.
From *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A.* (1885) by William Bemrose.

Wright's elder brothers attended Repton School in south Derbyshire. In 1745, when Bonnie Prince Charlie reached Derby (the furthest south he reached in his abortive invasion), the entire family evacuated to Repton. Wright's niece, Hannah Wright, has the following anecdote concerning the invasion and her uncle Joe's "taste for mechanics" as a young boy.

When the Scotch rebels came to Derby in December 1745, his Father took his Wife, two Daughters and Joe [aged eleven] to Repton, thinking the rebels could not cross the Trent, there not being a bridge at that time; his eldest Sons John and Richard had been placed at School there [. . .] Three officers and forty men were quartered in the house; they found a small gun, with which they were so much struck as to make enquiries respecting it. Upon being told it was made by Master Joseph, they said, they wished they could see the little gentleman, they would take him with them, for they were sure he must be an ingenious boy to make that gun. (Barker 2009, 158).

She tells us that there still exists (in 1850), "a small white marble mortar and pestle turned by him, likewise a small spinning wheel with fliers and spoles, upon which his sister spun half a pound of flax; he made a small clock case, the dial and a key to wind it up, but could not succeed in forming the works." (Barker 2009, 158).

According to family legend, it was the family's stay at Repton in 1745 that set Wright upon the path to becoming an artist. "At Repton Wright saw a Christmas piece [a Nativity scene] which belonged to one of the boys; he could think of nothing but this piece, and dwelt upon it till he determined to try to draw. Thus at eleven years of age he took to drawing, when he nearly, if not entirely left off making different things." (Barker 2009, 158-9).

However, sensing that his family would disapprove his new interest, he initially pursued it in secret.

As his Father was very averse to his drawing, thinking it would never be of any use to him, and might take his attention from more necessary pursuits, he used to draw unknown to his Friends in an attic, and having nothing to study, he copied half the signs in the town, which at that time exhibited more pictures than at present. When he had completed the sign of Robin Hood and Little John near his residence, as likewise with the Buck in the Park, the Town Arms.

Thus, the careful observation of Derby pub signs may have comprised his first self-taught lesson in distinguishing between good and bad in art.

His method was to look earnestly at a sign, go home and do as much as he could remember; when at a loss, he went and examined the sign again, then

ran back as fast as possible, that he might not lose the impression, and so on till he had finished it. His Mother noticed his conduct and wishing to know the reason of his being so much in that room, went into it and discovered his employment; he earnestly begged she would not tell his Father, which she did not at first; at length his Father finding his very decided turn for painting, determined upon placing him with the most eminent Artist of the time; after enquiring of his Friends in London, he placed him with Hudson the Portrait Painter in 1751, when he was 17 years of age, where he remained two years. (Barker 2009, 159).

In successfully persuading his father of his risky career choice, it may have played to Wright's advantage that he was the youngest son. Traditionally, parents were sometimes more willing to indulge the riskier professional choices of a younger son – especially when, as in his case, his elder brothers were already set on paths that were more secure. Wright's eldest brother John (1729–1798) became an attorney, following in the footsteps of his father, John 'Equity' Wright (1697–1767), and of his grandfather. His other brother, Richard (1730–1814), became a surgeon. A nephew, also named Richard, was a fellow of the Royal Society and a physician at St. George's hospital in London.

Already from boyhood, Wright followed a different path from his brothers, in that he was sent not to Repton but to Derby Grammar School, very close to the family home in Irongate. Not being sent to boarding school, he remained emotionally close to his two younger sisters, Hannah (named after her mother Hannah, née Brookes) and Anne Elizabeth ('Nancy'), who died unmarried in 1815. He was particularly close to Nancy. Of his two brothers, he was closest to Richard.

It is the memoir of Richard's daughter Hannah (1775–1867) that is our principal source for the stories about Wright that survived in family tradition. However, Hannah knew her uncle only when he was old (at least in her eyes), and in 1850 she was writing a long time after Wright's death (in 1797). It is worth bearing in mind that the young Joseph Wright lived in a more openly licentious age than his Victorian niece, and much of his correspondence had been lost or destroyed by the time she wrote her memoir.

Wright's earliest surviving artwork predates his time in London. Unfortunately, none of his copies of pub signs remain, but there are two copies of prints after Giovanni Piazetti (1682–1754).¹ Copying Piazetti's engravings was a common form of artistic training at this period. He also

¹ See plates 2 and 3 in (Nicolson 1968). The hand in Plate 2 was copied from life. An inscription records that it is that of John Rotherham (1717–71), a lead merchant and High Sheriff of Derby.

copied an engraving of a painting by Allan Ramsay by the Dutch artist John Faber junior (1684–1754), of a boy with a plumed hat and a greyhound, and another engraving by Faber, of Thomas Hudson's portrait of the Archbishop of Canterbury.² Thus, before he went to London, he already had some knowledge of Hudson's work.

The engravings that Wright copied may have been in the possession of the artist Thomas Smith of Derby (c.1720–1767). Smith specialised in landscapes, but Wright was uninterested in landscape in his youth. He showed no ambition to be anything other than a portrait painter. Commercially this made sense – the greatest demand was for portraits – and, for an aspiring portrait painter Hudson was a good and safe choice of teacher. He had previously taught Joshua Reynolds.

Wright probably began his first period of training in the autumn of 1751, as Hudson was away touring Italy from July to October. He would have studied at Hudson's studio at 61 Great Queen Street in the heart of Covent Garden. Covent Garden was an area devoted to entertainment of every sort. As Montmartre was to Paris at the end of the nineteenth century, so Covent Garden was to London in the eighteenth. It was *the* area for artists, both established and aspiring.

Hannah's memoir tells us that, on his return to Derby in 1753, he painted “[p]ortraits of his Father & Mother, his two Sisters, his Brother and himself [. . .] likewise the Portraits of many Friends” (Barker 2009, 159). Two preparatory drawings for the portraits of his parents have survived, and a portrait of his brother Richard (Burgess 1982). His first paying clients were the friends and clients of his father and eldest brother.³

It is from this period that his first known painted self-portrait dates (Plate 1). Nicolson dated this painting to 1758, but it is now thought to date from about 1753–54, when Wright was about twenty. It was by far his best work to date. Here is someone whom we can easily imagine once lived; he is self-absorbed, watchful, even wary, but also self-confident. In Wright, self-doubt and self-belief were always battling for supremacy, and both can be seen in this self-portrait.

He wears not the costume of his time but a costume derived from the portraits of Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641).⁴ This was an established convention in eighteenth century portraiture. It was a costume that carried

² The engraving of the Archbishop was identified by John Ingamells.

³ For example, the portrait of Anne Bateman (later Mrs John Gisborne), for which he was paid 3 guineas—Anne Bateman was the daughter of a friend of Wright's father (Egerton 1990, 35).

⁴ Wright's portrait of the Nathaniel Curzon (1755–56) was also in van Dyke costume.

connotations of nobility of mind, scholarship and connoisseurship. Wright is portraying himself as an essentially serious and studious young man.

Hannah records that: “not being satisfied with himself, he went again to Hudson in 1756, and remained with him fifteen months, after lamenting he could not obtain better instruction, there being no one of eminence at that time in England at that time” (Barker 2009, 159). He may have also simply missed London. After his experience of life in Covent Garden, Derby may have seemed quieter than he remembered. In later years, Wright became known for his retirement from London in order to pursue his career in his home town, a highly unusual move to make at that period. However, the process of retiring from London was rather protracted. Evidently, London did hold *some* attractions for him. Perhaps it was not just further training that lured Wright back to London in 1756.

One of London’s attractions was the theatre – which would come to influence Wright’s later work. Another attraction was music. Wright was a life-long admirer of Handel (1685–1759), and he would have been familiar Thomas Hudson’s 1756 portrait of Handel in which the already blind composer is sitting before the score of the Messiah.

Upon his return to London in 1756, Wright found that Hudson had taken on a new pupil, “that incorrigibly reckless, libertine outsider” (Craske 2020, 128), John Hamilton Mortimer (1740–1779). Like Mortimer, according to his niece: “Young Wright was fond of a frolic and a joke” (Barker 2009, 159). She relates a story of Wright’s time as a pupil of Hudson that illustrates both his mischievousness and sensitivity:

The layman [trolley] at Mr. Hudson’s was upon low wheels. He tied a string to it which he conveyed under the door. The next morning whilst the servant was cleaning the grate, he stationed himself at the door, which was a little open, to amuse himself with her surprise at the moving of the layman. He gently pulled the string, and when the girl turned to look, he stopped. She took no notice of it and went on with her work; he drew it then more decidedly, and continued doing so whilst she earnestly watched its progress. At last being convinced it was moving, she threw down her brush, rushed out of the room, and would have precipitated herself over the rails of the stairs, if he had not caught her. He was so much alarmed when he saw how great she was agitated, and thought what would have been the consequences of such a fall, if he had not prevented her, that he determined never to play such tricks; it made such an impression upon his mind, that he could not hear with patience of attempts to frighten people, as there was no knowing to what dreadful consequences they might lead. (Barker 2009, 159).

Of the two apprentices, it was Mortimer who was the wild one. Wright was always too worried about his health to be a great hedonist.

As can be seen in the following sketch of a conversation, according to Mortimer, this concern for his health was a feature of Wright's character already in his student days.

"Upon my word, a delicate little hen turkey, what a Christmas present already?"

"This turkey is from my old fellow 'prentice, Joe Wright," said Mortimer, "who never forgets us at Christmas. Poor Joe, the valetudinarian! I'd be sworn he procured one of the least in all Derby, out of sheer compassion to our evil habits. He knows we always dress his Christmas turkey for supper; and he has generally a hint by way of postscript to his letters, touching the prevalence of apoplexy. Now, Master Joe was one of your water-gruel disciples when we were youngsters together at Hudson's; and I would wager ten pounds to a crown piece he is just now sitting, Peter Grievous, over that wishy-washy, tasteless, humdrum, drivelling dish, and calling to old Nan Watkins – "Nanny, have you any nice live coals? Do, pray let me have my bed warmed. Are you a supper eater, Mister [Edward] Gibbon?"

"No, Mister Mortimer; I am a single man, and a bit of a valetudinarian, like your friend Mister Wright." – "And a water-gruel eater I presume?" said Mortimer. "Yes, indeed," said Gibbon, smiling; though in truth I do not know that I am at all better for these scrupulosities in diet." –

"Devil a bit, my learned Sir, rely upon it," said Mortimer. "Your water-gruellists have no nerve, no stamina like your true English supper-men. I am no egoist, so I'll say little of myself. But there's [Joshua] Reynolds–Gods, Sir, he'll see out half a score of such careful wights as my old friend Joe." (Hardcastle, 1823, II, 253-4).⁵

Hannah Wright came to her uncle's defence: "Mortimer did not do justice to his Friend, who tho' temperate in his habits, was not the poor creature he described; the water-gruel was only when he was ill, and anything stimulating being improper." (Barker 2009, 165).

Mortimer was of course exaggerating; but Wright did indeed worry about his health. However, he confounded Mortimer's prediction by outliving both him and Reynolds.

Mortimer very soon grew restless under Hudson's tuition and took extra lessons from Robert Edge Pine (1730–1788), but there is no evidence that Wright followed his example. Although Hannah Wright tells us that, "Wright was much dissatisfied with the subjects Hudson gave him to copy," (Barker 2009, 159), in the 1750s there was no indication that he had anything like Mortimer's ambition. When he finally left London, for some while he

⁵ The author Ephraim Hardcastle (William Henry Pryne) was just a boy when this conversation is alleged to have occurred.

was content to earn a modest living painting portraits using the stock poses he had learned in Hudson's studio.

However, it should not be overlooked that, at a technical level, Wright learned a great deal at Hudson's studio. A line in his account book from about 1755, 'Mr Phelps's way of making a pallet,' indicates that, at a technical level, Wright was influenced by an earlier pupil of Hudson's, Richard Phelps (c.1710–1785) (Egerton 1990, 155). The methods followed by Phelps were those laid out in *The Practice of Painting and Perspective Made Easy* by Thomas Bardwell. Bardwell was living in Covent Garden when this book was published in 1756.

He also learned from Hudson's specialist drapery painter Alexander van Aken (1701–1757).⁶ Van Aken had come to London from Antwerp with his brother Joseph. The two brothers enjoyed the highest reputation for painting every kind of fabric. Hudson was their principal employer but they also worked for many other artists, including Allan Ramsay. The elder brother Joseph had died already in 1749; Alexander died in 1757. In his final years, Alexander seems to have passed all his skill at painting fabrics on to Wright.

Thus, although Wright's early sitters tend to look slightly wooden, their clothes, especially their satin and lace, are invariably well-painted. It was a skill that would stand Wright in good stead for the rest of his career. Even when he was not interested in the character of his sitters, he was always interested in what they were wearing. From his apprentice days, Wright relished his skill at painting clothes, and with some of his early female sitters he had the opportunity to show off, decorating them with barely-there wraps and sequinned diaphanous capelets. He seems less confident with regard to their faces, and less confident yet of necks, shoulders, and bosoms.

It is worth recalling that when we look at Wright's first painted self-portrait (Plate 1) – now in Derby art gallery – we see him very much as his early sitters saw him: possibly more interested in himself than in them. That was to change when he became friends with Peter Perez Burdett.

⁶ Like Hudson, Alexander van Aken was also a collector of prints.

CHAPTER 2

CANDLELIGHT

Confidence and Doubt

Wright's account book indicates that, in the spring of 1760, he undertook a portrait-painting tour of Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, and Yorkshire, taking in Boston, Lincoln, Newark, Southwell, Retford, Doncaster, and Thorne. The ladies who sat for him were all arranged in poses which he had learned in Hudson's studio.

Hudson himself was particularly impressed by one of Rubens' portraits of his second wife Helena Fourment, and he passed this influence on to his pupils. Thus, for example, Wright depicts Mrs Elizabeth Pigot (c.1726–1766) in the same pose as Helena Fourment. Slowly Wright's sitters were becoming more life-like – that is to say, from 1760 it becomes easier to imagine them as once living people. Nicolson is impressed by his portrait of the prosperous mercer, William Brooke of Doncaster (the father of Elizabeth Pigot). He suggests that Wright did his best work in this portrait, because: “Wright saw Brooke for what he was, a plain man who deserved a plain record” (Nicolson 1968, I, 27).¹ Nicolson points out that Wright, ever sincere, always produced his best portraits in response to sitters who were without need of flattery.

¹ Egerton suggests that it may have been influenced by Hudson's portrait of Handel. (Egerton 1990, 36)



Fig. 2.1. Elizabeth Pigot. c.1760. Danum Gallery, Doncaster.



Fig. 2.2. William Brooke. c.1760. Danum Gallery, Doncaster.

However, as of yet, there is nothing to suggest that Wright would produce wholly original masterpieces over the next few years. A transformation occurred after he became friends with Peter Perez Burdett. In later years Wright could not recall whether he had first met Burdett in 1760 or 1761 (Barker 2009, letter 19). Either way, it is known that by 1761 Burdett had a base in Derby.² It was probably Wright's near-neighbour, the geologist and instrument maker John Whitehurst, who introduced them. Together, Whitehurst and Burdett had assisted Earl Ferrers of Staunton Harold in Leicestershire to record the transit of Venus in the early morning of 6 June 1761.³

In 1762, from his house in Full Street, just a couple of minutes' walk from Whitehurst and Wright in Irongate, Burdett set about making a new map of Derbyshire.⁴ His aim was to win a prize of £100 offered by the Society of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce for an accurate new map of any county in England. It was not so much the money that attracted Burdett but the chance to put his name on the map, both literally and metaphorically.

Burdett was ambitious; and he gave his friend Wright just the push of encouragement that he needed. Burdett was the first to play that role. After his emigration to Germany in 1774 others would take his place, but no one ever played the role quite as effectively. Although Wright had a core of self-belief, he often lacked self-confidence in his interactions with the world. Fortunately, Burdett had more than enough for both of them.

Moreover, he was not short of ideas about what a good painting should look like. However, regardless of what part of the composition sprang from Burdett and what part sprang from Wright – and in many cases we will never know exactly – it was Wright who had to see the painting in his mind's eye and to bring it into existence.

It is not hard to see why Wright was attracted to Burdett. He was not much older than Wright but he was certainly more worldly and socially confident. He saw himself as an arbiter of taste and seemed to have an opinion on every artistic question that could possibly arise. More importantly, he was not a bluffer; he could back his opinions with knowledge derived from long periods spent abroad (he was fluent in both French and Italian.) He was a scientific instrument maker by training.

The Perez in his name came from his mother's family, who traced their descent from Anton Perez, the one-time right-hand man of Philip I of Spain

² A book that had once belonged to Burdett's wife (Toussaint's *Mouers*) is inscribed 'H. Burdett, Derby, 1761'. It is now in the Nostitz Palace library in Prague.

³ Burdett is recorded as having married his wife Hannah in Leicester on 28 January 1761.

⁴ His first appeal for subscribers is dated 17 May 1762.

who defected to the court of Elizabeth I. Via the Perez family, Burdett also claimed a distant cousinship with Montezuma, the last Emperor of the Aztecs. This is not quite far-fetched as it might seem, as Montezuma's sisters married members of the Spanish nobility. On his father's side, he traced his descent to Theophilus Burdett of Leicestershire, the son-in-law of the Reverend Anthony Grey, ninth Earl of Kent (1557–1643). He also claimed a remote cousinship with Earl Ferrers' neighbour, Francis Burdett of Foremark Hall.

Burdett seems to have been someone who lived most of his life beyond his means. One of the testimonials of the friendship between Wright and Burdett is the bond that Burdett arranged in 1764, by which he and Earl Ferrers borrowed £160 (£80 each) from Wright, with Burdett and Ferrers standing surety for each other.⁵ It might be thought strange that an Earl should have needed a loan. However, at this date Ferrers' estates had only recently been released from forfeiture – that is to say, his finances had been legally frozen. Ferrers was a naval officer, rising to the rank of Vice Admiral

⁵ “Know all men by these presents That we the Right Honourable Washington Earl of Ferrers Peter Pery Burdett of Staunton Harold in the County of Leicester Gentlemen are held and firmly bound to Joseph Wright of the Town of Derby Painter in the sum of one hundred and sixty pounds of good & lawful money of Great Britain. To be paid to the said Joseph Wright or his certain attorney Executors administrators or assigns for which payment to be well and faithfully made. We bind ourselves and each of us by himself our & each of our Heirs Executors & administrators firmly by these presents Sealed with our seal. Dated this Eleventh day of July in the third year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Third by the grace of God of Great Britain France and Ireland King Defender of the Faith & so forth and in the year of our Lord One thousand and seven hundred and sixty-three. The condition of this obligation is such That of the above Bounden Earl Ferrers & Peter Pery Burdett or either of them their or either of their Heirs Executors or Administrators do and shall and do well & truly pay or cause to be paid unto the above named Joseph Wright or his certain attorney Exors. Administrators or assigns the full sums of Eighty Pounds of Good and lawful Money of Great Britain with lawful interest for the same on the eleventh day of July which will be in the year of our Lord one Thousand seven hundred and sixty-four. Then their obligation to be void or else to remain in full force.

Sealed & delivered being first duly stamped

Ferrers

in the presence of W. WOTY

PP Burdett”

The original document has disappeared but is reproduced in Bemrose. Bemrose notes that on the back of the bond there is a note in Wright's handwriting: “August the 23, 1776. Memo. This day the Earl Ferrers accepted a bill drawn by me for Eighty Pounds, which when paid will be in full for the principal of this Bond.” (Bemrose 1885, 78).

in 1776, and had only inherited the title of Earl unexpectedly, in May 1760, after his elder brother was hanged for the drunken murder of his steward.

Further loans to Burdett followed: £10 on 10 September 1764, £12 on 12 November 1765 and £50 on 21 December 1771. It used to be thought that these loans sufficed to sustain Burdett during the years in which he was surveying Derbyshire. However, as Burdett was employing three assistants and his map was not published until 1767, these loans alone would not have been enough. Surviving correspondence in Dessau indicates that he not only maintained lodgings in Full Street but that he also had a pied-a-terre in Threadneedle Street in the City. His real base of operations, however, was Sam's Coffee House in 'Change Alley. It was through trading in Sam's Coffee House that Burdett earned his living. He also seems to have had some involvement in the trade in gemstones, possibly including uncut diamonds. In this connection, he was in Paris in 1751 and 1759. The sums he borrowed from Wright would probably have seemed comparatively small to Burdett – but not to Wright.

Burdett's other life in the city sheds a light on Wright's portrait of Mr and Mrs Chase (c.1762), and of Mrs Sarah Lindegren (c.1762) (spelled variously Lindegton, Lindinton, and Lindegten in Wright's account book as he tried in vain to get to grips with the unfamiliar Swedish name). William Chase was a banker in Derby, but his wife's family were bankers and steel-makers with extensive contacts with the Swedish iron industry, which would explain how it was that Sarah Lindegren's husband Charles came to witness the marriage of Mr and Mrs Chase in St. Andrews, Holborn, on 29 July 1760. Since Charles Lindegren also traded on the stock exchange (the 'Change), it is most likely that it was Burdett who was the go-between who arranging these commissions.⁶ Another lady portrayed by Wright at about the same time, in a dress of just the same shade of blue, was the Honourable Mrs Boyle-Walsingham (blue was her favourite colour).⁷

⁶ There may also be a Ferrers connection, for the Lindegrens were involved in supplying the Royal Navy (Barnes and Leach 2017). Furthermore, Captain Boyle-Walsingham was in the navy, and a music lover.

⁷ The roses and lily of the valley in her cleavage may have been kept fresh by a tin funnel filled with water (Barnes and Leach 2019).



Fig. 2.3. Mr and Mrs Chase. c.1762. Private collection.

The portrait of Mr and Mrs Chase is what is technically known as ‘a conversation piece’ – the sitters, usually members of the same family, are doing something more than simply sitting for their portraits. Although the figures seem overly stiff, there is nonetheless a ‘snap shot’ quality to the work, albeit in a loose sense. The curtain at the left-hand side of the painting is a convention inherited from Thomas Hudson, but otherwise Wright is setting off in a new direction, no longer reliant upon his old templates. It might even be argued that this is the first of Wright’s works in which he makes reference to the source of his sitters’ wealth, which would become a recurring feature in his later portraits. In the portrait of Mr and Mrs Chase, the motif seems to be air: the open window, flapping curtain, the feathered headdress, the parrot and the flute are all united by this motif. In the eighteenth century, following Daniel Defoe, bankers were commonly said to earn their living from ‘air money’.