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## **Abstract**

The present thesis examines the idea of aesthetic education of three eminent Victorians: John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin. By focusing on the essence of what they meant with ‘the cultivation of the beautiful’ and, more importantly, the way their ideas of beauty informed their criticism of society, my study aims to contribute to our understanding of the idea of aesthetic education in the Victorian context and, further, to participate in a recent debate about the nature of beauty and aesthetic education.

Chapter One focuses on John Stuart Mill’s concept of ‘feeling’ in a series of essays. I will demonstrate how Mill’s idea of ‘aesthetic education’ was an ‘education of feelings,’ and moreover, how this idea was integrated into his literary criticism, his later critique of democratisation, his description of an ideal liberal society and even his own style of writing. Chapter Two contains a comparative study of Matthew Arnold and Friedrich Schiller. Through a rereading of Arnold, I will argue that his idea of aesthetic education is essentially Schillerian and that their resemblance consists primarily in their stress on the importance of aesthetic unity for modern life, which was becoming increasingly fragmentary and multitudinous. Chapter Three examines John Ruskin’s idea of aesthetic education and concentrates particularly on the cultivation of perception. Perception, as I shall show, was pivotal in Ruskin’s idea of aesthetic education. Just as what happened in Mill and Arnold, the emphasis on the education of seeing continued from his early writings well into his art and social criticisms. It not only differentiated him from his fellow art critics; the conviction that people should perceive with a pure heart also enabled him to link observation of artistic details with moral criticism of contemporary society and, thereby, to turn the cultivation of the beautiful into a moral-aesthetic experience.

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**Beauty for the Present: Mill, Arnold, Ruskin and Aesthetic  
Education**

Chun Huang

A dissertation submitted to the Department of English Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

in Durham University

2012

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## Introduction

The present thesis contains thematic portraits of three Victorian figures: John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin; the theme is ‘aesthetic education.’ The association between ‘Victorian’ and ‘aesthetic’ as such is not innovative. After all, aestheticism is a nineteenth-century phenomenon which had a large impact upon Victorian Britain. One can easily think of, for example, Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance*, or William Morris’ immensely popular floral designs, or even that green carnation in Oscar Wilde’s buttonhole. Compared with these distinct images from Victorian aesthetes, however, the earlier part of the nineteenth century appears surprisingly blurred when it comes to the word ‘aesthetic.’

In some cases, the picture is blurred either because there are too few touches on the subject or because the focus of study has been too narrow. When Colin Heydt completed his *Rethinking Mill's Ethics: Character and Aesthetic Education* in 2006, he mentioned in the preface that Mill’s aesthetic ideas were ‘surprisingly understudied.’<sup>1</sup> This remark was very true then, and, regrettably, it still is. Critics have got so much used to Mill the Benthamite rational thinker that they have almost forgotten the fact that the man had developed his interest in the cultivation of beauty at a very early stage of his career, and that he eventually became a determined promoter of aesthetic education. When Mill announced in his St. Andrews speech that a well-devised education should involve not only the cultivation of the intellectual and the moral but must also include that of the aesthetic, he was actually making a succinct summary of one of his own life-long pursuits. However, many critics of Mill have overlooked this point. After Heydt’s book came out, studies in this field still remain scarce. In fact, even Heydt’s book does not offer a complete picture. Restricted to the discipline of moral philosophy, the book does not pay much attention to other aspects such as Mill’s literary achievements, which, I believe, is never to be ignored in any study of Mill’s aesthetic ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> Colin Heydt, *Rethinking Mill's Ethics: Character and Aesthetic Education* (London: Continuum, 2006) 2.

A similar problem exists in the study of Arnold and Ruskin's aesthetic ideas, even though these two thinkers are not exactly understudied. There are quite a few works in this area, but very often the subject is approached through a narrow focus. Thus it is common to see Arnold being portrayed as a devotee to the artistic and the literary, as if 'aesthetic' means nothing more than poetry and art. In this respect, one could refer to Matthew Potolsky's article 'Hardy, Shaftesbury, and Aesthetic Education' and Ralph A. Smith's section on Arnold in *Culture and the Arts in Education: Critical Essays on Shaping Human Experience*. The former describes Arnold's 'theory of aesthetic education' as cultivation through 'beauty of art and literature,'<sup>2</sup> and the latter alleges that he has found in Arnold's writings much concern for aesthetic education, that is, 'a conviction of the importance of excellence in art education.'<sup>3</sup> In George Landow's *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, which is indisputably a landmark study of Ruskin's aesthetic ideas, the author, too, focuses mainly on the artistic. Beginning with *ut pictura poesis* and concluding with Ruskin's opinions of Turner, the book is in fact a study of Ruskin's art theory. All of the critics mentioned here can probably be excused on the ground that they are talking about 'aesthetic' as it is most likely to be understood in our present context, where art and literature are usually perceived to be the most crucial vessels of beauty. But in my view, this approach does not do full justice to the original ideas. Beauty for Arnold and Ruskin, as I shall demonstrate, refers not only to artistic merit; rather, it is a powerful antidote against industrialisation, a principle to be observed in daily life and, ultimately, an ideal for human society. Considering the complexity of the concept of 'beauty,' therefore, another rethinking of their ideas of aesthetic education is still necessary.

Such rethinking is also necessary for another reason. Heydt's chief goal, as he himself acknowledged, was to examine Mill's 'aesthetic education' as a 'notion,' and, therefore, his study very often centred on what this notion was.<sup>4</sup> So it was the same

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Potolsky, 'Hardy, Shaftesbury, and Aesthetic Education,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 46.4 (2006) 863-78, at 864.

<sup>3</sup> Ralph A. Smith, *Culture and the Arts in Education: Critical Essays on Shaping Human Experience* (New York: Teachers College P, 2006) xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Heydt 8.

with studies by Potolsky and Smith. The questions they have brought forward include, for instance, what is the ‘primary desideratum’ of their aesthetic education, what are the ‘important mechanisms’ for that education and what is the ‘intellectual milieu’ that motivated this idea. My study, however, is informed by a slightly different concern. Apart from examining what these ideas are, I am also interested, first, in the way that these ideas have been communicated and, secondly, the way they have been developed. When I look at Mill, Arnold and Ruskin as aesthetic educators, I see them not as specialists in the theory of aesthetic education (which is how they are portrayed by Heydt and others) but as people who constantly provided the public with instructions on the value of beauty and the means to obtain beauty. For sure, their relationship with their readers cannot be simplified as one between teacher and pupils. Nevertheless, the media they adopted – newspapers, lectures and pamphlets – remind us of how much effort they had made to influence and shape the mind of their audience. Moreover, I shall also pay particular attention to the way that these ideas had been developed. This is based on the observation that these thinkers addressed the issue of beauty at different stages of their life and, in each stage, presented different ideas to their audiences. Sometimes they changed their mind completely and had to revise what was formerly said, while in other cases, they came up with new topics and found it necessary to adapt their principles to new concerns. As a result, within decades, their understanding of beauty was constantly modified and enriched. Thus, while trying to answer what these notions are, I think it is equally important to reflect on the formation of those notions by giving special consideration to their diversity and ‘progressiveness.’

But the present thesis is not just about methodology. While demonstrating a different approach to the idea of aesthetic education in the Victorian age, my study also responds to a popular critical opinion concerning the nature of ‘aesthetic education.’ Some critics now insist that the cultivation of beauty is nothing but a disguise of the desire to dominate, and very often they would draw on theories developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, which was first published in 1979. This

work features a fieldwork study of the correlation between aesthetic preferences and class. Examining the taste of people from various social backgrounds in 1960s France, Bourdieu draws the conclusion that aesthetics is in fact a product of a whole range of social assets. He terms these assets ‘capital,’ and the three most important forms of capital, according to him, are the cultural, the social and the economic. In other words, it is factors such as upbringing, education and financial status that decide an individual’s idea of what beauty is. Since difference in taste is largely an index to class ‘distinction,’ the very notion of ‘aesthetics’ – which, as Bourdieu argues, designates a taste pure and superior – expresses merely ‘the ethos of the dominated fraction of the dominant class.’<sup>5</sup> The attempt to disseminate the idea of beauty, consequently, signifies the attempt of the bourgeois to dominate over the labouring classes:

The denial of the lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural – enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasure forever closed to the profane. <sup>6</sup>

Bourdieu thereby concludes, ‘that is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social difference.’<sup>7</sup>

*Distinction* is a monumental work in the theory of aesthetics, and its influence goes far beyond the field of sociology. Many students in Victorian studies have adopted the theoretical framework provided by Bourdieu. In the essay ‘The Education of the Innocent Eye,’ Kazys Varnelis analyses John Ruskin’s aesthetic ideals in ‘the innocent eye’ and concludes, citing Bourdieu’s theory, that

the belief in pure aesthetic perception – of which the innocent eye is a manifestation – is founded on class distinction. To perceive a work of art,

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<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 7.

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction* 7.

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction* 7.

Bourdieu explains, is ‘an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code.’ [...] The cultural competency needed to perform this act of deciphering is the result of our upbringing and functions as an indirect marker of class.<sup>8</sup>

Pam Morris, in a similar vein, applies Bourdieu’s theory to a reading of Charles Dickens’ *Our Mutual Friend*. Morris’ study focuses particularly on the ‘split’ in British society in the 1860s: the dramatic increase of commercial wealth on the one hand and, on the other hand, the middle classes’ discomfort at the working classes’ growing demands for equality. Highlighting such social phenomena, Morris rereads Dickens’ depiction of the aesthetic choices of different characters as a representation of the grim power relationships in Victorian culture.<sup>9</sup> Yet, Dickens is not the sole target. The thesis of Morris’ essay extends further as she moves from the criticism of the novel to the criticism of ‘the ideology of cultural capitalism,’ which, according to her, is embodied in the Victorian discourse of aesthetics:

Clearly, for any writer who believes that literature should contribute to cultural elevation, there is seductive power in the ideology of cultural capitalism, stylized as disinterestedness, inborn taste, ‘sweetness and light,’ as Arnold terms it. However, recognizing that this opposition of styles and tastes is the symbolic ground of struggle for dominance within the dominant class itself suggests that there are strict limits to the transformative potential of [...] social disaffection.<sup>10</sup>

So, discussions of beauty are not just useless; the transformative power of aesthetic perception, as these critics have tried to point out, is a sham, while people who led the discussions – Arnold, Ruskin and Dickens, among others – were all hopelessly naive or even malicious. By preaching ‘sweetness and light’ and the principle of the ‘innocent eye,’ the Victorians, in the view of these critics, acted as perpetrators of an ideology of capitalism and became, in this way, exercisers of ‘seductive powers.’ Consequently, all the social disaffections avowed in the

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<sup>8</sup> Kazys Varnelis, ‘The Education of the Innocent Eye,’ *Journal of Architectural Education* 51.4 (1998) 212-23, at 219.

<sup>9</sup> Pam Morris, ‘A Taste for Change in *Our Mutual Friend*: Cultivation or Education?’ *Rethinking Victorian Culture* ed. Juliet John and Alice Jenkins (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000) 179-93, at 189.

<sup>10</sup> Morris 190.

discussions of beauty also amount to nothing but an egoistic middle-class wish for control. With this, we have once again, arrived at the conclusion of Bourdieu's social studies: the whole issue of aesthetic education is but a myth, a disguise for the appetite for dominance.

Such an argument does not go unchallenged. Linda Dowling, for instance, is among those who have raised disagreements with Bourdieu. In her work *The Vulgarization of Art: the Victorian and Aesthetic Democracy*, Dowling notes a recent change in the way that people look at Victorian 'talks about beauty.' The critics nowadays, Dowling observes, are not willing to take seriously the 'grand objects' of Victorian discussions of beauty; moreover, 'there is a certain tendency in contemporary criticism to regard the very idea of the aesthetic as a mystification.'<sup>11</sup> According to Dowling, Bourdieu's *Distinction* plays a significant role in this mystification, and it is therefore time to call on a different judgment. '[T]aking history seriously,' she says, 'means taking with equal seriousness the power of social redemption that writers like Ruskin and Morris were ready to attribute to the aesthetic.'<sup>12</sup> In the present thesis, I stand with Dowling, and my study shall challenge Bourdieu's idea of aesthetics by highlighting Victorian aesthetic education as a means towards social redemption. But since the main body of my work will be focusing on the ideas of three Victorian individuals rather than present-day criticism, I think it is necessary to identify here some fallacies in contemporary criticisms or, to be more specific, to discuss, however briefly, why Bourdieu's theory is not entirely applicable to the Victorian context.

The weakness, I think, lies first of all in Bourdieu's own theory. It overemphasises the importance of power relationships and, as a result, negates the possibility of change and self-reflection. According to Bourdieu, there is a practice-generating formula for people in any given social and cultural context: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice. By habitus, he means

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<sup>11</sup> Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: the Victorian and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1996) x.

<sup>12</sup> Dowling x.

a system of durable, transposable, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structure, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends of an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.<sup>13</sup>

Speaking of capital, Bourdieu includes a whole range of resources supplied to social actors in specific contexts, such as economic capital, education capital, social capital and cultural capital. Unlike habitus, which is the term of the general setting, ‘capitals’ refer to qualities which, attached to each individual, affect their ‘outcomes’ at a micro level. The concept of ‘field,’ however, indicates a factor different from both. As Jonathan Eastwood explains, the word is not used by Bourdieu to denote realms such as medicine and law; neither does it refer to any ‘ground’ that groups and classifies individuals; rather, it is specifically a ground of battle or, to borrow a metaphor from physics, a field of power. A given field, in this sense, represents ‘the forces of polarity that exert pressures on the agents that move within it.’<sup>14</sup> Thus to examine the ideas and behaviour of any individual within a given society, it is imperative to take note of three factors: first, the general social settings; second, the resources of the individual – economic status, position within the class stratification, education background and cultural origin, etc.; third, the tension between agents with different types of capital – in other words, between the dominant and the dominated.

To understand the relationship between social agents exclusively as a power relationship is excessive reductionism by itself. Comparing Bourdieu’s theory of culture with that of the Frankfurt School, David Gartman maintains that a ‘fundamental flaw’ of Bourdieu is ‘a structuralist conception of culture that reduces cultural choices to passive reproductions of structural necessities.’<sup>15</sup> Here, I will not go further into a comparative study of Bourdieu, the Frankfurt School and Structuralism in order to testify Gartman’s assertion, but I insist that it grasps at least

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<sup>13</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990) 53.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Eastwood, ‘Bourdieu, Flaubert and the Sociology of Literature,’ *Sociological Theory* 25.2 (2007) 149-69, at 152.

<sup>15</sup> David Gartman, ‘Culture as Class Symbolization or Mass Reification? A Critique of Bourdieu’s *Distinction*,’ *American Journal of Sociology* 97. 2 (1991) 421-47, at 422.

one fallacy of Bourdieu's theory, that is, the 'passiveness' of the social actors. Defining cultural practices as generated by the field of power, Bourdieu has in effect deprived all social actors of their capability to have any impact on their own 'field of power.' According to his theory, once the actors are born into a certain social or cultural status, they become instant products of that status to such a degree that their actions, regardless of their intention, are simply attempts to sustain the values and structures that they have already acquired. The flaw becomes even more serious when we think about the implications for education. If the practice of each and every social actor is but a practice to preserve and reproduce the structures he or she is born into, education becomes nothing but an accomplice that helps to fortify existing power relationships. The value of culture, in this sense, is inescapably connected to the material reality. As Rob Moore has recently summarised, 'once the social base has been revealed and the interest it serves and the standpoint it reflects exposed, there is no more to say – nothing in terms of truth or beauty in its own right.'<sup>16</sup>

This is clearly the mentality that is reflected in the above-quoted comments on the Victorians. The 'truth' that Varnelis and Morris try to convey is that aesthetic education is too concerned with practical self-interest to be of any value, that 'there is seductive power in the ideology of cultural capitalism' and 'strict limits to the transformative potential.'<sup>17</sup> Describing the idea of 'education of the innocent eye' as well as 'cultural elevation' as seductive, as something not worthy for 'any writer' to invest faith in, those critics repeat precisely Bourdieu's negation of the value of education and, for that matter, negate the possibility that social actors could conduct self-reflection on their own culture. Thus, when they argue that aesthetic education is questionable, they are no longer questioning aesthetic education as such, but education at large; and, worse still, they find education questionable because they examine it only according to their own theory that people are the production of capital and power. In this way, to disparage Victorian aesthetic choices which, like 'sweetness

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<sup>16</sup> Rob Moore, 'Hierarchical Knowledge Structures and the Canon: a Preference for Judgments,' *Language, Knowledge and Pedagogy: Functional Linguistic and Sociological Perspectives* eds., Frances Christie and J. R. Martin (London: Continuum, 2009) 197.

<sup>17</sup> Morris 190.



and light,' had a distinctive intention to contribute to the edification of society, becomes in the end a trick in logic. It is based on some preordained conviction, which threatens from the beginning to nullify the value of the very subject it proposes to analyse.

Another flaw in the interpretations of Morris and Varnelis is that they confuse aesthetics with the issue of taste, by equating aesthetics with artistic preferences. Bourdieu's theory of aesthetics is derived from his sociological analyses of French society in the 1960s. He conducted his study by doing questionnaires among people with different social backgrounds, and most of his questions regarding aesthetics fall into the category of artistic preference. The first illustration in the book, for instance, is a table detailing 'class preferences for singers and music.' Elsewhere, he also uses predilections for 'Impressionists' or Renoir or Goya to demonstrate class differences in aesthetic judgment.<sup>18</sup> With examples of this kind, Bourdieu establishes the premise that the question 'what is beauty' is the same as 'what is my favourite artwork' or 'who is my favourite artist.' Aesthetic education, as he states, is merely a 'formal refinement' that 'always announces the sacred character, separate and separating, of high culture,' which is professed in 'the icy solemnity of the great museums, the grandiose luxury of the opera-houses and major theatres, the decor and decorum of concert-halls.'<sup>19</sup> Similar to the idea of power relationships, the equation of the aesthetic with the artistic also provides one of the premises of Morris' and Varnelis' critique of Victorian talk of beauty. Hence, Matthew Arnold's 'sweetness and light' signifies an 'inborn taste' representing 'the ideology of cultural capitalism,' and John Ruskin's emphasis on the competency of eyes is all about 'how to perceive a work of art.'

Both critics, however, ignore the fact that 'aesthetic' was used by those Victorians in a very different sense. While it is true that most of the Victorian discussions of 'beauty' involved art and literature, aesthetic education was by no means synonymous with art or literary education. In John Stuart Mill's definition, for instance, it was in

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<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction* 20.

<sup>19</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction* 34.

every sense an education of the beautiful.<sup>20</sup> For him, beauty consisted in feeling. The aesthetic cultivation that he envisioned was, therefore, a cultivation of feelings and, furthermore, an attempt to achieve a delicate equipoise between feelings and the intellect. Only with a refined inner world of this kind could a person be regarded as having received a proper aesthetic culture. For Arnold, beauty was to be found in the ‘completest and most harmonious development’ of human nature. Aesthetic education enabled an individual to transcend from his ‘local and casual’ self in order to become an ‘aesthetic man,’ and helped society to progress from anarchy to an ‘aesthetic state.’<sup>21</sup> Among all Victorian aesthetic educators, Ruskin was perhaps one most closely associated with art, since he wrote books on fine art, gave lectures on architecture and was well known for his loyalty to Turner. But even for him, the cultivation of aesthetic sensitivity was not just an instruction on how to perceive artworks. It was, first and foremost, an education of sense and imagination. Aesthetic cultivation, as he explained in *Modern Painters*, began with the polishing of human powers, ‘powers, namely, of observation and intelligence, which by cultivation may be brought to a high degree of perfection and acuteness.’ And from there, Ruskin proceeded to give further stress on the importance of observational skills:

[U]ntil this cultivation has been bestowed, and until the instrument thereby perfected has been employed in a consistent series of careful observations, it is as absurd as it is audacious to pretend to form any judgment whatsoever respecting the truth of art.<sup>22</sup>

Yet it was not only the power of the eyes that received emphasis. Ruskin also devoted much of his work to an explication of the nature of ‘imagination,’ which was first categorised into three orders – penetrative, associative and contemplative – and then approached, one after the other, with substantial analysis.<sup>23</sup> Art, on the other hand, was downplayed in Ruskin’s argument. In fact, as he continued to highlight the

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<sup>20</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews, The Collective Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 21 eds. J. M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1984) 254.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Arnold, ‘On the Modern Element in Literature,’ *On the Classical Tradition* ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1960) 18-37, at 28.

<sup>22</sup> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters, The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 3 ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen) 140. Hereafter referred to as *Works*.

<sup>23</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters, Works*, 3 62.

value of perception and imagination, his reading of artworks eventually turned into a reading of signs. For him, art was valuable only because it embodied some deeper significance concerning religion and morality, and as far as the role of signifier was concerned, artworks were no different from any common object that people encountered in their daily life. This, I believe, is why Ruskin's aesthetic education was still carried on even when he turned from art criticism to the field of social criticism, where beauty remained a central topic but artworks were no longer the primary concern.

In Chapter One, by investigating John Stuart Mill's concept of 'feeling' in a series of essays including 'What is Poetry,' 'The Two Kinds of Poetry,' 'Civilisation,' 'Bentham,' 'Coleridge' and the address at St. Andrews, I will demonstrate how the idea of 'aesthetic education' holds indeed a central position in Mill's thinking. The 'education of feelings' was the very object of his early literary criticism, and it was also the conviction that underlined his later critique of democratisation and his description of an ideal liberal society. The concept of 'feeling' underwent several significant changes in a span of thirty years of Mill's career, but his faith in 'feelings' never wavered; he remained a devoted aesthetic educator, who, as we can see from his essays on Bentham and Coleridge, not only preached the importance of feelings but even attempted to address the feelings of his audience directly through his skilful handling of literary images.

Chapter Two contains a comparative study of Matthew Arnold and Friedrich Schiller. Through a rereading of Arnold's 'The Scholar-Gipsy,' his literary criticism in 1853 *Preface* and his social criticism in 'Democracy,' I will argue that Arnold's idea of aesthetic education is essentially Schillerian. Their resemblance consists primarily in their stress on aesthetic unity. While Schiller regarded 'unity' as an antidote against the social turmoil that he experienced in the eighteenth-century Germany, Arnold discovered in the same ideal a remedy for his society in the nineteenth-century Britain, where, according to his observations, various new trends – industrial, economic and conceptual – rendered life increasingly fragmentary and multitudinous.

Chapter Three examines John Ruskin's idea of aesthetic education and

concentrates particularly on the cultivation of perception. Perception, as I shall demonstrate, was pivotal in Ruskin's idea of aesthetic education. The emphasis on the education of seeing continued from his early writings well into his art and social criticisms in major works including *Modern Painters*, *The Stones of Venice* and *Sesame and Lilies*. It not only differentiated him from his fellow art critics such as Edward Villiers Ripplingille and William Hazlitt; the conviction that people should perceive with a pure heart also enabled him to link observation of artistic details with moral criticism of contemporary society and, thereby, to turn the cultivation of the beautiful into a moral-aesthetic experience.

As the following three chapters contain more details about Mill, Arnold and Ruskin's ideas of aesthetic education, there is no need to go much further here. The name of Bourdieu and the opinions of the critics that are previously mentioned will not make frequent appearances in the part that follows; nevertheless, it is my intention to point out, however briefly, that they are the counterforce that helps to shape my argument and the central questions that I bear in mind when reading those Victorian works. By examining the idea of aesthetic education in those three individuals, the present thesis shall reflect on the nature of aesthetic education, illustrate the complexity of the term 'aesthetic' and investigate the social role of aesthetic education in the Victorian context. Hopefully, I shall come up with a very different answer than the one Bourdieu has provided.

# Chapter 1 ‘The Education of the Feelings’: John Stuart Mill and Aesthetic Education

## Mill and Aesthetic Education

In 1867, John Stuart Mill gave a Rectoral Address at the University of St. Andrews, offering to his audience ‘a few thoughts on the subjects which most nearly concern a seat of liberal education.’<sup>24</sup> A well-devised educational project, according to him, should highlight at least three ingredients of human culture. Besides intellectual and moral aspects, which meant ‘knowledge and the training of the knowing faculty, conscience and that of the moral faculty,’ there was also

a third division, which, if subordinate, and owing allegiance to the two others, is barely inferior to them, and not less needful to the completeness of the human being; I mean the aesthetic branch; the culture which comes through poetry and art, and may be described as the education of the feelings, and the cultivation of the beautiful.<sup>25</sup>

In 2006, Colin Heydt published *Rethinking Mill’s Ethics: Character and Aesthetic Education*, which attempted to secure a central position for aesthetic education in Mill’s theory of ethics.<sup>26</sup> It is important to do so, according to Heydt, because this topic has been so ‘surprisingly understudied’ that ‘[r]eferences to, let alone treatment of, aesthetic education are rare.’<sup>27</sup> This observation is very true. Even if the concept was clearly defined by Mill himself – as we can see from the quotation above – the ‘aesthetic’ has always been a missing part in the scholarship on Mill. Also in 2006, for example, John Skorupski published *Why Read Mill Today*, a book that catered to academic as well as general readers’ needs. As a widely acknowledged expert on Mill, Skorupski reflected on the thinker’s ‘steadfastly generous and liberal vision of human

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<sup>24</sup> John Stuart Mill, ‘Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews,’ *Essays on Equality, Law and Education, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 21, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1984) 217.

<sup>25</sup> Mill, ‘Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews’ 51.

<sup>26</sup> Colin Heydt 2.

<sup>27</sup> Colin Heydt 2.

beings' but barely mentioned the word aesthetic. Mill's argument for the aesthetic aspect of human nature and the importance of aesthetic cultivation was, as a result, left almost completely unexplored.<sup>28</sup> In other cases, where critics have noted Mill's interest in the aesthetic, they nevertheless decided that this was purely accidental for such a Utilitarian as Mill. Hence, John Robson, another influential expert, insists that since the element of the aesthetic only exists in the 'three-fold distinction' of aesthetic, morality, and intellect, which Mill employed to 'broaden the utilitarian account of values,' the notion does not deserve to be treated independently.<sup>29</sup>

My thesis seeks to invalidate these conclusions. Through a rereading of Mill, this chapter will demonstrate aesthetic education as one of his fundamental concerns by showing its relevance to his thinking on literature, politics and philosophy. But before moving on to the main argument, it is helpful, I think, to have a brief survey on Mill's own references to this idea. Though by no means comprehensive, the following examples will give us some ideas on the 'essentiality' as well as the complexity of aesthetic education in Mill's thinking. To begin with, there is the keyword 'aesthetic.' Although the St. Andrews address was the first occasion for Mill to use the phrase 'aesthetic education,' the 'aesthetic' was never a strange notion in his writings. For instance, we could find the following statement from his essay on Bentham:

Every human action has three aspects: its moral aspect, or that of its right and wrong; its aesthetic aspect, or that of its beauty; its sympathetic aspect, or that of its loveableness. The first addresses itself to our reason and conscience; the second to our imagination; the third to our human fellow-feeling.<sup>30</sup>

The chief error of Bentham, as Mill proceeded, was the overestimation of the value of morality and the underestimation of the significance of the aesthetic and the sympathetic. This mistake rendered Bentham's knowledge of human nature inadequate, and it also seriously compromised the soundness of his utilitarian

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<sup>28</sup> John Skorupski, *Why Read Mill Today* (London: Routledge, 2006) iii.

<sup>29</sup> John Robson, 'Civilisation and Culture as Moral Concepts,' *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, ed. John Skorupski (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 338-71, at 348 and 349.

<sup>30</sup> Mill, 'Bentham,' *Dissertations and Discussions* vol.1 (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1875) 387.

philosophy. This judgment would be repeated in Mill's book *Utilitarianism*. But different from the essay, the book challenged an entire school of thought instead of an individual. One of the most insightful objections against Utilitarianism, Mill admitted, was that 'many Utilitarians look on the morality of action, as measured by the utilitarian standard, with too exclusive a regard, and do not lay sufficient stress upon the other beauties of character which go towards making a human being loveable or admirable.'<sup>31</sup> And he went on to specify the qualities essential for beauty of character, which consisted mainly in 'sympathies' and 'artistic perceptions.'<sup>32</sup> A cultivation that only stressed moral feeling but ignored the aesthetic component, Mill insisted, could only be a 'mistake.'<sup>33</sup>

The aesthetic also featured in Mill's idea of the improvement of humanity. Talking about liberty, he observed that

Such are the differences among human beings in their sources of pleasure, their susceptibility of pain, and the operation on them of different physical and moral agencies, that unless there is a corresponding diversity in their modes of life, they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral and aesthetic stature of which their nature is capable.<sup>34</sup>

The argument here is quite straightforward: education should allow different modes of life and thinking among different individuals. Meanwhile, it is interesting to observe the way in which Mill analysed human nature. The ultimate end of a liberal education, as he said, was to make human nature achieve its fullest growth in various aspects – the mental, the moral and the aesthetic. The aesthetic, as with the moral and the mental, formed an indispensable part of humanity, and human beings could not be regarded as well cultivated if that part was neglected. This point becomes clearer if we realise that several pages earlier, in the same book, Mill quoted Wilhelm von Humboldt in saying that the end of man was 'the highest and most harmonious

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<sup>31</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism, Essays on Ethics, Religion and Society, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 10, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1969) 221.

<sup>32</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism* 221.

<sup>33</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism* 221.

<sup>34</sup> Mill, *On Liberty, Essays on Politics and Society, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 18, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1977) 270.

development of his powers to a completest and consistent whole.’<sup>35</sup> So liberty according to Mill’s definition, meant more than the right to be individualistic; it denoted a condition which was achieved only when a human being managed to preserve his individuality *by* cultivating his mental, moral and aesthetic powers to a ‘completest and consistent whole.’ In this sense, the cultivation of the aesthetic nature of human beings is a critical step towards the realisation of genuine freedom. To make a thorough exploration of Mill’s liberal belief, it is therefore necessary to inquire into his idea of human development, which in turn requires some research into the idea of aesthetic cultivation as such.

Aesthetic education, as Mill defined it in the St. Andrews address, was a cultivation of the beautiful, an instruction in poetry and art yet, more importantly, an ‘education of the feelings.’ Similar to ‘aesthetic,’ ‘feeling’ is also a high-frequency term in Mill’s writings. But unlike ‘aesthetic,’ which invariably won approval from Mill, ‘feeling’ was more ambiguous for him. However, not every scholar on Mill would agree with my observation. F. A. Cavenagh, among others, argues that for Mill, feeling was always cherished, and that Mill’s consistent triumph of feeling over intellect demonstrates his rebellion against his utilitarian heritage.<sup>36</sup> Cavenagh’s argument is probably based on Mill’s autobiographical account, which is never short of enthusiastic defences of the ‘natural feelings of mankind’ and even ‘passionate emotions of all sorts.’<sup>37</sup> Looking back on his old lessons, for example, Mill observed that the Benthamites were generally noted for their ‘neglect both in theory and practice of the cultivation of feelings.’<sup>38</sup> Moreover, in an early draft of the *Autobiography*, right after the discussion of the utilitarian disdain for feeling, Mill even went on to declare that his own progress came from the attempt to ‘[outgrow] the narrowness of [these] *taught* opinions.’<sup>39</sup> This bold declaration was removed in the final version, probably because Mill himself was disturbed by its irreverent tone;

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<sup>35</sup> *On Liberty* 261. The original words came from Humboldt’s *The Sphere and Duties of Government*, trans. Joseph Coulthard (London: John Chapman, 1855) 11.

<sup>36</sup> F. A. Cavenagh, introduction, *James and John Stuart Mill on Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1931) x.

<sup>37</sup> Mill, *Autobiography, Autobiography and Literary Essays, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 1, eds. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981) 5, 51 and 115.

<sup>38</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 113.

<sup>39</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 1 and 114.



nonetheless, the contrast between the narrowness of utilitarian teachings and his own recognition of the value of feelings was evident. ‘Feeling,’ as Cavenagh interprets it, seemed to embrace anything that was exiled from the cold utilitarian heart.

So it is surprising to find, in the very same work, that Mill should disparage feeling in a tone not dissimilar to that of his fellow Utilitarians. Explaining his intention with his *System of Logic* in the autobiography, Mill alleged that he was targeting the intuitive school and, in particular, William Whewell, who defended *a priori* view of human experience that could be independent of rationality. If Whewell’s doctrine was accepted, Mill warned his audience, it would lead to the result that ‘every inveterate belief and every intense feeling, of which the origin is not remembered, is enabled to dispense with the obligation of justifying itself by reason, and is erected into its all-sufficient voucher and justification.’<sup>40</sup> How, one cannot help but wonder, did Mill reconcile the call for ‘justification by reason’ with his previous tribute to ‘passionate emotions of all sorts’? Moreover, this potential conflict also poses a series of questions concerning the meaning of the ‘education of feelings’ – what kind of feelings should be cultivated and to what degree should reason and rationality be upheld. When Mill called on his audience to educate their feelings, did he mean that cultivation should set free sentiments in general, or was he saying that a certain type of feelings should be cultivated to its fullest while the others must be censored and disciplined?

This issue becomes even more complex when we come to a diary entry from February 24, 1854. There, Mill gloomily complained that

Three-fourths of all the so-called philosophy, as well as all the poetry, spoken or written about Men, Nature and Universe is merely the writer’s or speaker’s subjective feelings (and feelings very often extremely unsuitable and misplaced) thrown into objective language.<sup>41</sup>

Again, the claim is strangely reminiscent of some remarks made by Bentham and

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<sup>40</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 233.

<sup>41</sup> Mill, *Diary, Journals and Debating Speeches, Collective Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 27, eds. John. M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1988) 656.

Mill's father. The former once made the famous comment that 'the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure, it is more valuable than either.'<sup>42</sup> Mill's father, being a close ally of Bentham, was never reported to be a fan of poetry. According to the recollection of Harriet Grote, a family friend of the Mills, the father was 'a propagandist of a higher order,' who always sought to lead others 'to regard the cultivation of individual affections and sympathies as destructive of lofty aims, and indubitably hurtful to the mental character.'<sup>43</sup> For sure, Mill had not become as hostile towards poetry and feelings. Nevertheless, 'three-fourths' is not a tiny proportion, and the way he referred to the 'so-called' philosophy and poetry is highly expressive of distrust, while the negative descriptions of the 'unsuitable and misplaced' feelings clearly suggest reservations on this subject. Thus, similar to his criticism of the intuitive school, this piece of complaint also reveals Mill to be a critic rather than a eulogist of poetry and feelings. The fact that he disparaged 'subjective feelings' cautions us against any sweeping generalisations concerning Mill's opinions in this respect; but, meanwhile, like all the quotes above, it also invites us to make further inquiries into his ideas of poetry, feelings and, ultimately, aesthetic education.

So much for the brief illustration of Mill's references to aesthetic education. For now, it is mainly my intention to offer a glimpse into the significance of this topic by raising some relevant questions, while a more in-depth study will be conducted in the remaining part of the chapter. Admittedly, it does not always seem natural to associate the feelings and the beautiful with such a thinker as Mill, whose popular image was and still is as a logician, who possessed superior intelligence with little accomplishment in the aesthetic. Nonetheless, as the above examples remind us, he did show a great interest in aesthetic culture; and precisely because of the seemingly impossible association between the logician and the aesthetic, between Utilitarianism and the beautiful, his exploration of beauty, with all the enthusiasm and discretions displayed, stands out as a particularly fascinating subject. In order to give a full

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<sup>42</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Rationale of Reward* (London: John and H. L. Hunt, 1825) 206.

<sup>43</sup> Harriet Grote, *The Personal Life of George Grote* (London: John Murray, 1873) 23.

illustration of its fascination, this chapter will focus on Mill's early essays from the 1830s: his literary study of poetry and the poet, his political examination in 'Civilisation' and his two articles on Bentham and Coleridge.

My choice of materials is not random. The essays that I shall discuss were all republished when Mill compiled his *Dissertations and Discussions* in 1859. They were selected, the preface informs us, because the author considered them 'desirable to preserve.'<sup>44</sup> If that self assessment could be trusted, those essays certainly carry specific weight in the study of Mill. Meanwhile, it is also worth noting that in spite of their appearance in the same collection, these essays are rarely grouped together. This is quite understandable, since at the surface level, they all deal with different subjects: the concerns in the poetry essays are obviously literary; that of 'Civilisation' is always regarded as political; and the articles of Bentham and Coleridge are meant to be assessments of two individual minds. But, as I shall argue later, despite the variety in topics, all of these essays are informed by a common interest in the 'education of feelings.' In this sense, they not only offer insights into Mill's understanding of aesthetic education, but also serve as good examples of how aesthetic education functions as a crux, joining together Mill's thinking across a whole range of disciplines. Moreover, those essays, however crude they may be, have their own special values compared with Mill's later (and therefore more mature) works, such as *Utilitarianism* and *On Liberty*. Composed in a comparatively early stage of his career, they signify a critical period in the formation of Mill's mind. While the literary essays could be regarded as his first expedition into the realm of aesthetics, 'Civilisation' registered, on the other hand, his first attempts to carry this interest into an examination of the political and the social. For these reasons, the essays offer us a convenient opportunity to trace the origin as well as the progress of Mill's idea of aesthetic education, and to see how various factors, both public and private, had contributed to the shaping of his argument, in both what he said and the way he said it. Thus, through a close reading of Mill's essays from the 1830s, this chapter will chart the formation of the idea of aesthetic education, with special attention to its progress,

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<sup>44</sup> Mill, preface, *Dissertations and Discussions* vol. 1 iii.

modification and, in particular, Mill's intellectual interaction with his predecessors and contemporaries.

# **The Evolution of Feelings: Aesthetic Education in Mill's Essays on Poetry**

## **'Loneliness and Intensity': Feeling in 'What is Poetry'**

'[B]ut poetry was hardly looked upon in any serious light, or as having much value except as an amusement or excitement, the superiority of which over others principally consisted in being that of a more refined order of minds.' Mill thus spoke to his audience at the University of St. Andrews in 1867, lamenting the lack of poetic spirit of the 'average Englishman.' To criticise the 'average' is always a dangerous move, since the speaker himself, being an Englishman, might soon be revealed to be no better than his own people; thus shooting himself in the foot, so to speak. But Mill was quite safe. As far as the poetic spirit was concerned, he could certainly congratulate himself on being one of the more refined minds, for his study of poetry had begun more than thirty years ago. As both his contemporary and later critics have testified, the study was conducted with much ingenuity.

In January 1833, Mill's essay 'What is Poetry' was published in *The Monthly Repository*, a Unitarian periodical edited by William Johnson Fox. The essay began with an attempt to define poetry by identifying its intrinsic qualities, the most crucial of which, according to Mill, was 'feeling':

The object of poetry is confessedly to act upon the emotions; and therein is poetry sufficiently distinguished from what Wordsworth affirms to be its logical opposite, namely, not prose, but matter of fact or science. The one addresses itself to the belief, the other to the feelings. The one does its work by convincing or persuading, the other by moving. The one acts by presenting a proposition to the understanding, the other by offering interesting objects of contemplation to the sensibilities.<sup>45</sup>

Looking back on poetic theories of the nineteenth century, some recent studies group

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<sup>45</sup> Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties,' *Autobiography and Literary Essays* 346.

this article by Mill with studies of poetry by people such as John Henry Newman and John Keble. They belong to the same category, as one critic insists, because they were all ‘Victorian equivalents to the great Romantic manifestos.’<sup>46</sup> However, I think this notion is too simple and generalised to be true. For one thing – which will be discussed in more detail later – Mill’s idea of poetry would undergo enormous modification; and, furthermore, ‘Romantic’ is not always a proper description of his views. Secondly, to define poetry against science rather than prose was by no means a standard practice at the time; in fact, it set Mill apart from many of his contemporary poetic theorists. Taking John Henry Newman, the author of *Poetry, with Reference to Aristotle’s Poetics*, as an example, Newman’s theory was, as the title suggests, in many ways a response to Aristotle’s definition of Greek tragedy, which gave priority to the issue of plot and form. Although Newman challenged Aristotle with his own emphasis on the power of imagination and creativity, he still attached much importance to the formal aspect of poetry. As a result, his explication of the ‘imaginative’ and the ‘creative’ eventually led to his conclusion that these qualities were best brought out only in a verse form. ‘A metrical garb,’ Newman maintained,

has, in all languages, been best appropriated to poetry – it is but the outward development of the music and harmony within. The verse, far from being a restraint on the true poet, is the suitable index of his sense, and is adopted by his free and deliberate choice.<sup>47</sup>

This is an important premise in Newman’s theory. Even though he tried hard to romanticise Aristotle’s poetics by calling attention to feelings and imagination, Newman nevertheless made it clear that he was addressing a specific genre. For a writer to be qualified as a good ‘poet,’ according to him, he must possess abundant sensitivity and creativity and also demonstrate great skills with the metrical form.

Mill, however, was more ‘avant-garde’ than Newman. As the previous quotation from ‘What is Poetry’ indicates, he emphasised feeling and emotions to such an extent

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<sup>46</sup> Joanne Shattock, ‘Reviewing,’ *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, eds. Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman and Antony H. Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 382.

<sup>47</sup> John Henry Newman, *Poetry, with Reference to Aristotle Poetics* (Boston: Ginn, 1891) 25.

that he no longer considered 'form' a paramount issue. Instead of being opposed to prose, his 'poetry' was understood as the antonym of fact and science; hence, any brilliant work that offers 'interesting objects of contemplation to the sensibilities,' according to Mill's criteria, should be appropriately classified as poetry. Ultimately, the term designated to him not a genre but a quality, which existed in both metrical works and non-metrical ones. And this definition of poetry did not only feature in this essay; as a matter of fact, it could be safely said that Mill never cared about literary forms, except when he found them irritating. On one occasion, for instance, he upbraided Tennyson for his surrender to the 'tyranny of rhyme,' an error that he regretted in a poet who was otherwise 'pre-eminent' for his capability 'to summon up the state of feeling itself.'<sup>48</sup>

Feeling, in this way, stood as a core ingredient of Mill's literary criticism. Once the premise was established, the essay proceeded towards a closer investigation of the subject. Through a series of comparisons and contrasts, in which poetry was put side by side with narrative and eloquence, Mill arrived at the conclusion that poetic feelings comprised of various kinds, ranging from joy, affection, admiration and reverence to pity, hatred, grief and terror; all of them were poetic if they were genuine products of the heart of the poet. The only condition to be added, in his view, was that the poet had to be somehow all alone by himself; hence Mill's often quoted description of poetry:

Poetry is *overheard* [;] the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener [...] Poetry is feeling, confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols, which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind.<sup>49</sup>

This statement has convinced many critics that Mill was a great fan of lyric poems. Indeed, he is now often portrayed as a literary theorist infatuated with lyric poetry and

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<sup>48</sup> Mill, 'Tennyson's Poems,' *Autobiography and Literary Essays* 401, 399.

<sup>49</sup> Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties' 348.

the personal lyric self by those who take interest in his literary criticism.<sup>50</sup> But once again, I think what really distinguishes this passage is not Mill's preference for any poetic form but his focus on the content of poetry or, to be more specific, the kind of feeling that poetry should address. Poetry, in his view, should be overheard only in the sense that the poet, instead of offering an objective depiction of the world outside, must relate a private aesthetic experience by exploring his own inner world and, thereby, offer faithful representations of the emotions and sentiments deep within himself. So far as the feelings are genuinely individual, it does not matter what form or occasion the poetry is subjected to. Even when published, as Mill insisted, poetry is still a depiction of personal emotions, 'a soliloquy in full dress, and on the stage.'<sup>51</sup> This is also why he took care to stress, at one point, that the feeling relevant to poetry was the 'feeling of their [the poets'] own' rather than 'feelings of others.'<sup>52</sup>

With such a combined emphasis on feeling and individuality, the essay certainly suggests Mill's strong affiliation to Romantic thinking. The portrayal of the poet echoed John Keats' 'Ode to Nightingale,' in which the narrator, also a poet, expressed the wish 'That I might drink, and leave the world unseen, / And with thee fade away into the forest dim.'<sup>53</sup> And it also reminds readers of the famous statement in 'A Defence of Poetry' by Shelley, in which he insisted that 'A poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds.'<sup>54</sup> There is little wonder, therefore, that M. H. Abrams should categorise Mill's poetic theory as 'expressive' and place him firmly in the romantic tradition. '[W]hatever Mill's empirical pretensions,' Abrams adds, 'his initial assumption of the essential nature of poetry [as expressions of the feelings of the poet] remains continuously though silently effective in selecting, interpreting, and ordering the facts to be explained.'<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Pauline Yu, 'Alienation Effects: Comparative Literature and the Chinese Tradition,' *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice*, eds. Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 167.

<sup>51</sup> Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties' 349.

<sup>52</sup> Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties' 349.

<sup>53</sup> John Keats, 'Ode to A Nightingale,' *The Complete Works of John Keats*, vol. 2, ed. H. Buxton Forman (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell, 1818) 100.

<sup>54</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry,' *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002) 486.

<sup>55</sup> M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford UP 1953) 23.



This is a very insightful comment. It not only points out Mill's secret attachment to Romanticism but also identifies an inherent conflict for Mill the Romanticist, that is, the discrepancy between his 'empirical pretensions' as a devoted Utilitarian and the Romantic 'assumptions' he presented in the essay. The conflict was recorded in Mill's *Autobiography*, which recorded in detail his conversion to the Romantic view of life. His professed interest in the issue of feelings, as Mill explained in the autobiography, was largely generated by his reflections on his own utilitarian upbringing.

The utilitarian view of human nature, according to Mill, is based on the conviction that men adjust their behaviours as a response to changes in the external world. Because of this conviction, Utilitarians tended to deem a carefully constructed system of punishment and rewards as both essential and effective in shaping the character of individuals. They considered the exterior reality the most decisive factor in moral life, and intellect the most important faculty. Mill was brought up with such a conviction, and a considerable proportion of his youthful years was spent in studying and advocating these utilitarian principles. However, a mental crisis that started in 1826 gave him a bitter lesson. 'Suppose that all your objects in life were realised, that all the change in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant; would this be a great joy and happiness to you?' Mill asked himself these questions when his battle against the 'dull state of nerves' reached its climax. The only answer that he could come at was an irrepressible 'No!' <sup>56</sup> It was only after a painful self-examination that Mill was finally brought home to the importance of the inner world. He came to realise that to think like a machine, following only the logic prescribed by human reason, could not offer him full satisfaction. 'The habit of analysis,' he told his readers, 'has a tendency to wear away the feelings;' and, as his own education 'had failed to create these feelings in sufficient strength to resist the dissolving influence of analysis,' it therefore rendered him indifferent towards the pursuit of happiness.<sup>57</sup> In view of this autobiographical account, 'What is Poetry' could be appropriately read as a product of this self

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<sup>56</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 139.

<sup>57</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 141 and 143.

reflection. The Romantic point of view testified to Mill's rebellion against his early education in utilitarianism.

But there are also other factors that helped to shape his argument, factors which were often eclipsed by that famous story of mental crisis. His intellectual background, along with the intellectual activities that Mill participated in at that time, I argue, also directed his interest towards the inner world. It should be noted in the first place that, in identifying 'feelings' and the cultivation of the inner world as a powerful weapon against the coldness of reason, Mill shared the mentality as well as the interest of many of his contemporaries. The binary opposition between head and heart, as Barbara Hardy observes, is a popular theme in Victorian literature. In her study of the 'forms of feeling' in Victorian fiction, Hardy gives a broad survey of the representation of feeling by Victorian authors such as Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontës and George Eliot. All of them, she maintains, borrowing D. H. Lawrence's words, were highly concerned with the 'unreasonable' interior life of individuals, 'the cries in our own forests of dark veins.'<sup>58</sup> Mill was certainly one of them, as he also adopted the binary opposition, with a particular interest in personal sensibilities. As a matter of fact, his name appeared in the introduction of this book by Barbara Hardy, who considers him in some ways an ally of Lawrence, the only difference being that Mill proposed poetry as the means of the cultivation of feeling whereas Lawrence was more interested in fiction.

Meanwhile, there is also strong evidence suggesting an influence from his acquaintances. The story of how Harriet Taylor, a Romantic herself, turned Mill's world upside down has been told so many times that it is not worth repeating. But there are also other individuals who had a similar impact on Mill. Mill's literary essays, as we should remember, were first published in *The Monthly Repository*, which was then under the editorship of William Johnson Fox. Fox was a Unitarian clergyman, but he was also known for his interest in literature as well as his capability as a literary critic. The 'influence of literature,' as he asserted in one of his sermons,

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<sup>58</sup> Barbara Hardy, *Forms of Feeling in Victorian Fiction* (London: Owen, 1985) 11.

was a great power that ‘bear[s] upon the formation of character in human beings.’<sup>59</sup> And this was not mere lip service, for Fox was indeed a central figure in a quite eminent literary circle, which included, for instance, Robert Browning, who regarded Fox as his literary godfather.<sup>60</sup> In April 1832, several months before ‘What is Poetry’ came out, Mill wrote to Fox, saying that ‘I was even thinking at the very time when your note reached me, of writing something which might possibly suit the design of the Repository.’<sup>61</sup> It is reasonable to assume, then, that Mill’s literary essay had much to do with Fox’s encouragement, if not inspiration.

However, there is yet a particular factor that I want to draw attention to. This is Mill’s personal experience in the London Debating Society, which has received little attention from those who study his literary ideas, but which, in my view, offers immense help for us to explain his embrace of Romantic ideas. Since 1827, Mill had been an active member of the society, and the intellectual exercise soon became a major activity in his daily life. In this society, he socialised with a group of young intellectuals, with whom he debated on a varied range of topics. Literature was a popular choice; the titles and topics they debated included, for instance, ‘On the Present State of Literature’ (1827), ‘Perfectibility’ (1828) and the comparative merits of Wordsworth and Byron.<sup>62</sup> Some of the literary topics that Mill engaged with there were to find their way into his later writings, of which ‘What is Poetry’ was just one example. Moreover, the society itself was a rather interesting mixture in terms of intellectual schools. Among other members, Mill maintained a close friendship with John Arthur Roebuck, John Sterling and F. D. Maurice. The first belonged to the group of ‘Philosophical Radicals’ who were avowed disciples of Bentham, whereas the latter two, both following the example of Coleridge, were anything but Benthamites. Mill was quick to notice the difference. He once commented that his friends Sterling and Maurice ‘made their appearance in the Society as a second

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<sup>59</sup> William Johnson Fox, *On the Religious Ideas* (London: Charles Fox, 1849) 212.

<sup>60</sup> Boyd Litzinger and Donald Smalley eds., *Robert Browning: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1968)

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<sup>61</sup> Mill, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill: 1812–1837. Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 12, ed. Francis E. Mineka (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1963) 98.

<sup>62</sup> See Mill’s *Autobiography* (153) and Nicholas Capaldi’s *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 74.

Liberal and even Radical party, on totally different grounds from Benthamism and vehemently opposed to it.’<sup>63</sup> Because of the contrasting intellectual tendencies of their members, the society itself vividly illustrated to Mill the conflict between Utilitarianism and Romanticism. As his friendship with the Coleridgians developed, the Romantic side grew stronger and, one could assume, was incorporated into Mill’s own writings. In this sense, Mill’s essay on poetry also bore the influence that he had gained through intellectual interactions in the debating society.

Mill’s experience in the debating society also helped to shape his views on poetry and poets in another way, which was perhaps less pleasant but equally profound. The poet as a lonely creature, I maintain, was more than a typical Romantic image. It was also a self-portrayal of Mill, who, for a period of time, was seriously troubled by a lack of adequate means of communication. Two years after he joined the debating society, Mill resigned. The event was but lightly touched in his *Autobiography*. ‘In 1829,’ he wrote, ‘I withdrew from attendance on the Debating Society. I had had enough of speech-making, and was glad to carry on my private studies and meditations without any immediate call for outward assertion of their results.’<sup>64</sup> The reason offered – ‘I had had enough of speech-making’ – was a grand example of Mill’s habitual use of understatement, if we compare it with his fellow member’s comments on the same issue. Sterling, for example, once complained in a letter to another friend about the unwholesome fierceness in the debating activities, which, as he believed, could seriously distort the opinions of the participants. ‘I have been present in body at several of the debates of the London Debating Society,’ said Sterling, despite his cordial friendship with the fellow members, ‘I have spoken once or twice, but it won’t do [...] I was going to be stoned with stones at Cambridge for being an enemy to religion, and now I am ground to powder by a Mill in London for excessive piety.’<sup>65</sup> Consequently, he quit in the same year as Mill. Regarding this anecdote, Tod E. Jones in his study of the Broad Church liberal movement in the nineteenth century, observes that ‘[d]ebates might sharpen the wits, but it also

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<sup>63</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 133.

<sup>64</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 163.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Frances M. Brookfield, *The Cambridge ‘Apostles’* (New York: Scribner’s, 1906) 286.

divorced ideas from the feelings and observations with which those ideas are always associated in individual persons [...] Thus, organized debates not only had an essentially unreal quality about it, but it was also inimical to sympathetic communication.’<sup>66</sup>

In all probability, Mill would consent to this judgment, and this is clearly indicated in one of his letters. On April 15, 1829, he wrote to his good friend Sterling a highly affectionate letter about his ‘loneliness’ in the society, something that he insisted that Sterling should know before the latter left the society for good. ‘Among the very various states of mind,’ confided Mill, ‘some of them extremely painful ones, through which I have passed during the last three years, something distantly approximating to misanthropy was one.’<sup>67</sup> Curiously, the confession contradicts Mill’s later account. Those ‘three years’ he mentioned in the letter had always been described in his *Autobiography* (and for that matter, being widely accepted by his critics) as a void of feelings. Here, however, the word ‘misanthropy’ seems to suggest otherwise: it appears that the young man did have feelings, only they were too intensive and negative to be pronounced. Indeed, one has every reason to believe that the earlier account is closer to truth. If ‘misanthropy’ was the true state of mind, it was only natural that Mill should feel that he ‘had had enough of speech-making’ and therefore had to seek privacy and seclusion. In fact, no matter how hard he tried to suppress it, Mill never quite got over the uneasiness that he had picked up from the debating experience. Hence the previously quoted comment on his resignation from the society: that he was finally able to live as a young scholar, contently lost in ‘private studies and meditations’ without feeling compelled to make ‘outward assertions’; much in the same way, I would add, as the secluded poet in ‘What is Poetry.’ Therefore, the image of a soliloquising poet, while serving as an antagonist to the utilitarian logician, was also highly confessional; it registered more immediately Mill’s experience of failure in his early attempt to communicate and the difficulties he had encountered when exercising his intellectual power on people around him.

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<sup>66</sup> Tod E. Jones, *The Broad Church: A Biography of a Movement* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003) 140.

<sup>67</sup> Mill, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848* 29.

Nevertheless, although Mill made the declaration that he enjoyed ‘private studies and meditations,’ he did not follow the way of life that he had prescribed for the poet. His misgivings were first of all reflected in a letter to Carlyle on December 27, 1832, when he had just finished ‘What is Poetry.’ The essay, Mill described, attempted at something high and intrinsically valuable, but

it is not nearly so good of its kind, because I am not so well versed in the subject. It embodies some loose thoughts, which had long been floating in my mind, about Poetry and Art, but the result is not satisfactory to me and will probably be far less so to you – but you will tell me to what extent you think me wrong, or shallow.<sup>68</sup>

Mill was somewhat bewildered, but the self-evaluation here contained a kernel of truth. The judgment that the whole essay was an embodiment of loose ‘floating’ thoughts was quite to the point. His principle of ‘feelings of one’s own’ captured an important aspect of poetry, but it was still far from a well-rounded view. The defect was obvious. While feeling was recognised as an indispensable ingredient of poetry, to portray the poet as a soliloquist in a confined self, with exclusive emphasis on subjectivity, would result in a view that was as equally narrow as the utilitarian teaching that he tried to challenge.

Regarding this point, James Martineau, a friend of Mill, made some very useful suggestions. ‘Mr. Mill’s poet,’ Martineau contested in a review of the article, ‘must be all loneliness and intensity – a kind of spiritual firework going off by itself in infinite night,’ while on the other hand, a genuine poet should ‘more than any [go] forth out of himself, and [mingle] his very being with the nature and humanity around him.’<sup>69</sup> As a matter of fact, to mingle with humanity around him was exactly what the young Mill longed for. While he confessed to Sterling about his tendency toward ‘misanthropy,’ Mill also spoke about his distaste for loneliness and the desire for intellectual company.

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<sup>68</sup> Mill, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill: 1812-1848* 133.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in John Woolford, ‘Periodicals and the Practice of Literary Criticism, 1855-64.’ *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Sounding*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Toronto: U of Toronto P 1982) 118-19.

By loneliness I mean the absence of that feeling which has accompanied me through the greater part of my life, that which one fellow-traveller, or one fellow soldier has towards another – the feeling of being engaged in the pursuit of a common object, and of mutually cheering one another on, and helping one another in an arduous undertaking.<sup>70</sup>

The fellow feeling, Mill admitted, was for him ‘suspended.’ His problem, as he further explained, was that ‘[t]here [was] no human being (with whom I can associate on terms of equality) who acknowledge[d] a common object with me, or with whom I [could] cooperate even in any practical undertaking.’<sup>71</sup> So he felt himself to be travelling all alone in a strange land and, even worse, fighting all alone for an object towards which, for all the world, no one apart from himself would show any interest, let alone offer assistance. It was not that he was in want of intellectual companions. As mentioned before, for Utilitarianism, he had Bentham, his father and the entire circle of Philosophical Radicals; and for his newly discovered interest in Romanticism, he had, among others, Sterling and Maurice. The only trouble was that at this point of his life, he could not become fully immersed with either group. The teachings of Bentham and his father, who hardly ever communicated with him on terms of equality, were now found to be problematic; whereas his interactions with Romanticists, though fruitful, were affected by the failure in cooperation, which was symbolised by the breaking up of the London Debating Society. Thus viewed, ‘What is Poetry’ is at once a self-portrayal and a self-diagnosis. The loneliness of the poet and the single-minded emphasis on subjective feelings mirrored Mill’s condition at that time; meanwhile, it also revealed the areas where he must press on. Though he had already discovered immense value in the subject of ‘feeling,’ he still needed to have a firmer grip on the subject, as well as a more plausible view of the role of the poet. In this sense, the discussion of poetry in his essay signified the beginning of Mill’s study of aesthetic education. A long way it might be, but the quest had already begun, and the progress was well under way. Improvements in those respects were soon to be reflected in another essay in which both ‘feeling’ and the role of the poet were

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<sup>70</sup> Mill, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848* 29.

<sup>71</sup> Mill, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848* 29.

carefully redefined.

### **Cultivated Feeling: ‘The Two Kinds of Poetry’**

Ten months after the publication of ‘What is Poetry,’ Mill’s second essay ‘The Two Kinds of Poetry’ came out, again, in *The Monthly Repository*. Through a comparison between Wordsworth and Shelley, the essay provided a second draft of what Mill thought to be the ideal poet and poetry. Much of what had been previously stated in the first article was repeated and reinforced. Once again Mill made it explicit that he regarded ‘intense feelings,’ rather than form, as the most crucial feature of the ‘poetic.’ Thus, shortly after the opening paragraphs, Mill stated:

One may write genuine poetry, and not be a poet; for whosoever writes out truly any human feeling, writes poetry. All persons, even the most unimaginative, in moments of strong emotion, speak poetry [...] What is poetry, but the thoughts and words in which emotion spontaneously embodies itself? As there are few who are not, at least for some moments and in some situations, capable of some strong feeling, poetry is natural to most persons at some periods of their lives.<sup>72</sup>

The use of rhetorical question and double negatives (‘few who are not’) added a significant amount of persuasiveness and, at the same time, gave rise to a somehow egalitarian view concerning poetry writing: everyone was a potential poet, and every form of speech and thinking, as long as they contained ‘strong feelings,’ would be counted as good poetry. In fact, Mill had even gone so far as to make ‘feelings’ and ‘poetry’ interchangeable: to be poetic was to show strong feelings, and vice versa. And it is necessary to add that such a view was not at all unique in Mill’s writings. We can find the same argument, for example, in his *Autobiography*, where he frequently used ‘poetic culture’ to designate various aesthetic experiences that exercised a strong impact upon the inner world. From 1814 to 1817, Mill, a teenager at that time, visited Ford Abbey, which was then Bentham’s summer house. The sojourn there, according

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<sup>72</sup> Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties,’ *Autobiography and Literary Essays* 356.



to Mill, provided a ‘poetic cultivation,’ as the grandeur of the architecture nourished ‘the elevation of sentiments.’<sup>73</sup> Similarly, his childhood readings also comprised a ‘poetic culture of the most valuable kind,’ because those stories excited in him sympathy as well as ‘reverential admiration for the lives and characters of heroic persons’ to whom he would always return ‘when needing to be carried up into the more elevated regions of feeling and thought.’<sup>74</sup> Even the romantic attachment to Harriet Taylor was a ‘poetic culture,’ which, as Mill explained, had little to do with the composition of metrical works but was essentially an experience that enabled his faculties to ‘[become] more and more attuned to the beautiful and elevated, in all kinds, and especially in human feeling and character and more capable for vibrating in unison with it.’<sup>75</sup>

This sustained enthusiasm for feeling has convinced many critics that the second essay is just a further development of his first one, since they expressed essentially the same idea. Alan Ryan, for instance, maintains that the second article follows the same logic as the first one, since it answers the questions that the latter has brought forward. The topic of the first essay, Ryan says, ‘leads naturally to Mill’s essay on the “Two Kinds of Poetry,”’ for there he raises the question of the poet’s subject-matter and its transformation into poetry.<sup>76</sup> F. Parvin Sharpless, in a similar vein, also argues that, after the completion of the first essay, which ‘describes poetry as resulting from the poet’s observation of his emotions in solitude,’ the second is all too necessary as there needs to be a further explanation of ‘what sort of consciousness is involved.’<sup>77</sup>

Contrary to all these opinions, I argue that the second essay is not so much a furthering of the thesis of ‘What is Poetry’ than a revision of it. The most distinctive modification consisted in the way that Mill described the role of the poet. Instead of soliloquising all by himself, the poet had now come to be depicted as a communicator who maintained close relationship with the world around him. This idea was first of all illustrated by Mill’s assessment of Wordsworth and Shelley. Although Wordsworth

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<sup>73</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 57.

<sup>74</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 114.

<sup>75</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 623.

<sup>76</sup> Alan Ryan, *J. S. Mill* (London: Routledge, 1974) 51.

<sup>77</sup> F. Parvin Sharpless, *The Literary Criticism of John Stuart Mill* (Paris: Mouton, 1967) 79.

was labelled as ‘the poet of culture,’ who was somehow inferior to Shelley ‘the poet of nature’ in terms of poetic gift, the former type had his own incomparable advantage, because

he has exercised, and continues to exercise, a powerful, and mostly a highly beneficial influence over the formation and growth of not a few of the most cultivated and vigorous of the youthful minds of our time, over whose heads poetry of the opposite description would have flown, for want of an original organisation, physical or mental, in sympathy with it.<sup>78</sup>

It seems, as it were, that the picture of the poet was suddenly zoomed out. While previously in the first essay, we saw only an individual murmuring to himself, now in this one, Mill reminded us – as well as himself – that there was still something else in the picture, that the poet was actually surrounded by other individuals. While he insisted in the first essay that the poet must be ‘overheard’ rather than being ‘heard’; here Mill told his audience that a good poet must find a way to reach his audience and make himself understood. If written with this purpose, the poetry would leave a ‘powerful’ and ‘beneficial’ impact. But if it was not, the natural gift of the poet would come to nothing – ‘would have flown,’ as Mill described it, over the heads of the people like anything airily high-minded. The comparison between Wordsworth and Shelley, therefore, had in effect overthrown Mill’s previous judgment in ‘What is Poetry.’ This revised version of the poet, following the example of Wordsworth, might have included less spontaneous feeling, but it was decidedly more effective in delivering poetic messages. In fact, he was a wise teacher, who, instead of producing soliloquy that expressed nothing but his own sentiments, had now set forth to communicate with other minds through ‘sympathy’ and cultivated them accordingly. Just as James Martineau had wished, this ideal poet went forth out of himself and mingled with humanity around. Thus, several paragraphs later, we find Mill emphasising again the necessity to ‘[find] responses in other hearts.’<sup>79</sup>

And it was not only communication that mattered. The emphasis on sympathy

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<sup>78</sup> Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties’ 358.

<sup>79</sup> Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties’ 361.

also led Mill to revise his ideas concerning ‘feeling.’ When ‘What is Poetry’ was reprinted in 1859, Mill added at one point that, apart from getting in touch with his own feeling, an ideal poet should also contemplate something other than himself. He should, therefore, express feelings ‘as he [knew] that others [felt] them in similar circumstances of solitude.’<sup>80</sup> Considering the fact that most of the revisions in the 1859 edition were relatively trivial – mainly grammatical alterations and removal of italicisation – this substantial change demands particular attention. Although ‘solitude’ was still upheld, the addition of ‘others’ suggested the possibility as well as the necessity of ‘going outward,’ of connecting the inner subjective world with the world outside.

While Mill replaced self-regarding feeling with sympathy, he also adjusted the relationship between feeling and intellect. Still holding feeling as a precious antidote for an arid mind, he was now convinced that the single-headed extolment of feeling should be tempered by a well-cultivated intellect. ‘Overflowing feeling,’ as Mill now saw it, was the weakness of Shelley, who ‘had not [...] reached sufficiently far in that intellectual progression of which he was capable,’ and, therefore, fell short of being ‘the most perfect’ poet.<sup>81</sup> This judgment appeared again in the conclusion. Comparing two poetic natures – one of philosopher-poets that united feelings ‘with logical and scientific culture’ – and the other which was impressive merely for the intensity of feelings, Mill stated,

Whether the superiority will naturally be on the side of the philosopher-poet or of the mere poet – whether the writings of the one ought, as a whole, to be truer, and their influence more beneficent, than those of the other – is too obvious in principle to need statement: it would be absurd to doubt whether two endowments are better than one; whether truth is more certainly arrived at by two processes, verifying and correcting each other, than by one alone.<sup>82</sup>

That ‘two endowments are better than one’ was not just a numerical fact; what Mill really desired was a reconciliation between the two tendencies. His previous

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<sup>80</sup> Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties’ 349.

<sup>81</sup> Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties’ 359.

<sup>82</sup> Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties’ 364.

single-headed championing for the Romantic heart being the choice of feeling, now Mill came to the realisation that feeling and intellect – Romanticism and Utilitarianism, head and heart – could and should correct each other; the best poetry could only come from the cooperation of the two.

In the second essay, Mill also developed a theory of ‘emotional association,’ which also illustrated his opinion about feeling and intellect. What was special about poets, according to Mill, was the way they processed ideas. Poets were poetic, because they were so constituted that ‘emotions are the links of association by which their ideas, both sensuous and spiritual, are connected together.’<sup>83</sup> The notion of ‘association’ was obviously based on Mill’s early education. Both Bentham and his father – and even Mill himself – were spokesmen for the school of ‘associationism,’ the doctrine of which was first theorised by David Hartley in his *Observations on Man*, published in 1749. In his works, Hartley postulated the theory that virtually all human mental activities could be explained in terms of association, through which impressions that had been derived from past interactions with external realities were added together according to the law of congruity, similarity and causality and, in this way, gave rise to new ideas. Bentham and other Utilitarians adopted this theory, making it the fundamental principle of Utilitarianism. However, they also pushed Hartley’s argument toward the extreme by putting too much emphasis on the fact that humans were subjective to external influences. The stress on the subjectivity of humanity practically turned the doctrine into a theory of ‘mental physics,’ which treated human minds as entities both ‘passive’ and ‘mechanistic,’ as many scholars would point out.<sup>84</sup>

Mill took over the theory of association from his predecessors; yet, he did not do this without contributing his own insight. Unlike many other utilitarians, he identified some new ‘links’ that formed trains of thought, that is, ‘emotions.’ He argued that a mind could also work according to laws different from congruity, similarity or causality; that feelings could help a mind to acquire new knowledge. This, according

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<sup>83</sup> Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties’ 356.

<sup>84</sup> B. R. Hergenhahn, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2005) 154.

to Mill, registered the difference between a poetic mind and a purely rational one. Thus, instead of being a passive imprint of external experiences, poetry presented to people something ‘foreign to the habitual course of their every-day lives and character.’<sup>85</sup> To put it simpler, it created new experiences through association, but this kind of association was poetic rather than logical, dependent on imagination instead of reason. The Romantic idea of poetic creativity was therefore recast in a utilitarian framework, and this turned out to be a happy union. In this way, Mill gave the Romantic conviction new theoretical support and also mended the ‘mental physics’ of Utilitarianism to such an extent that Bentham’s doctrine was turned, as Mill would later describe, from ‘mental physics’ to ‘mental chemistry.’<sup>86</sup> Ultimately, the cultivation of spontaneous emotion proved not incompatible with the utilitarian stress on rationality: one culture complemented the other, and both should be valued.

These modifications supplied an ethical undertone that is almost nonexistent in the previous essay. And herein lies the third major revision. The interaction between feeling and intellect, as we read in the quotation immediately above, was a process indispensable for arriving at the ‘truth.’ Elsewhere in the same essay, Mill also argued that among all the benefits of feelings, the most important one was the ‘motives’ it provided,

the motives, consequently, which led human beings to the pursuit of truth. The greater the individual’s capability of happiness and of misery, the stronger interest has that individual in arriving at truth: and when once that interest is felt, an impassioned nature is sure to pursue this, as to pursue any other object, with great ardour.<sup>87</sup>

The significance of this assertion is twofold if it is read in relation to Mill’s other works. It reinforced, first of all, Mill’s faith in progress. The idea that truth must be pursued echoed Mill’s statement that the ideal poet shaped the ‘formation and growth’ of different minds: feelings should be developed, and it was through the cultivation of

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<sup>85</sup> Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties’ 356.

<sup>86</sup> Mill, *A System of Logic Ratiocinative and Inductive, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 8, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1974) 854.

<sup>87</sup> Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties’ 363.

feelings that human beings make progress in their journey through life. The ‘education of feelings’ that Mill was to promote in his St. Andrews address was now clearly in embryo. Secondly, the passage also foreshadows Mill’s later argument about individuality. The inclusion of the inner world as a new aspect of human progress, along with a recognition of the diversity of aesthetic experience, was to become a firm base for his maintenance of individual liberty. It is very likely that Mill still had in mind his earlier assertions from the literary essays when he claimed in *On Liberty* that ‘[h]uman nature is not a machine to be built after a model [...] but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing.’<sup>88</sup> Hence, Walter E. Houghton is surely right when he summarises that the education of feelings is a ‘moral-aesthetic development of sentiments’ that constitutes Mill’s ‘fine plea for individuality.’<sup>89</sup>

Yet in the second essay (or in the first one, too), not everything is as lucidly explained as it should be. One cannot help but wonder, for instance, what Mill meant by ‘truth.’ It might refer to ‘intellectual truth,’ the knowledge of nature and the essence of things; but it could also be a ‘moral truth,’ that is, wisdom that assists individuals to form a moral character. The latter seems particularly palpable if we think about the heavy influence that Mill received from Romanticism, which exhibited strong faith in the trio of beauty, goodness and truth or, as Wordsworth had so famously put it, ‘truth in moral knowledge and delight, / that fails not in the external universe.’<sup>90</sup> Indeed, the most vital moral knowledge that Mill imparted through the investigation of poetry was a call for altruism; that ‘those only are happy [...] who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness.’<sup>91</sup> Again, this was not a unique vision of life. As Stefan Collini has noted, the nineteenth-century cultural milieu, in which Mill was immersed, was distinguished for a ‘primacy of morality’; and among all different types of moral qualities, altruism always received special attention.<sup>92</sup> But this observation should not lead us to think

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<sup>88</sup> Mill, *On Liberty* 263.

<sup>89</sup> Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957) 289.

<sup>90</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Five-Book Prelude*. ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell 1997) 138.

<sup>91</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 145.

<sup>92</sup> Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford:

that Mill was just one among many, for altruism did pose a unique problem in his case. How could the preservation of the common good be attained by different individuals who followed different ‘tendencies of the inward forces’? And to what extent could the affirmation of individuality be reconcilable with the antipathy towards selfishness? These questions were only hinted at in his literary essays; however, as Mill’s exploration of feeling continued from poetry into the realm of politics and social theory, the issue of individuality emerged again under a new light. It posed a more complex question, and it was by investigating the very complexity, as I shall show in the part to follow, that we realise the importance of the ‘education of feelings’ in Mill’s liberalism.

## Feelings and Democracy: Aesthetic Education in ‘Civilisation’

### ‘Pleasures in Cooperation’: Civilisation Redefined

In 1835, two years after the publication of ‘What is Poetry’ and ‘The Two Kinds of Poetry,’ Mill contributed an article to the *London Review*, again on literary topics. It was a favourable review of a young poet named Alfred Tennyson.<sup>93</sup> Mill wrote his review chiefly for the purpose of defending the reputation of the young man against *Blackwood’s Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*, both of which had produced very unfavourable comments on Tennyson’s work; their disparagements, as critics have later pointed out, had in fact more to do with Tennyson’s radical political posture than with his poetic capacity.<sup>94</sup> Mill, however, focused on the literary when he gallantly defended Tennyson. To some extent, this review could be regarded as a continuation of the previous literary essays, for it nicely recapitulated the key points concerning the cultivation of the inner world:

Where the poetic temperament exists in its greatest degree, while the systematic culture of the intellect has been neglected, we may expect to find [...] vivid representations of states of passive and dreamy emotion, fitted to give extreme pleasure to persons of similar organization to the poet, but not likely to be *sympathized* in, because not *understood*, by any other persons; and scarcely conducing at all to the *noblest* end of poetry [...] of acting upon the desires and characters of mankind through their *emotions*, to raise them towards the perfection of their nature.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Most critics regard this essay as Mill’s earliest published review of Tennyson. But Nicholas Capaldi, in his recent biography of Mill, mentions another review of Tennyson by Mill, published in the November issue of *The Monthly Repository* in 1833 (see Capaldi’s *John Stuart Mill: A Biography*, 105). Capaldi does not include a reference there, and according to the facsimiles provided by the Nineteenth-Century Series Edition, the November issue of *The Monthly Repository* in 1833 did not contain any review of Tennyson. So there might be a minor mistake in the biography. Yet, what I want to add is that in the January issue – the same issue where Mill published ‘What is Poetry’ – there was a quite favourable review of Tennyson by William Johnson Fox. This detail is not immediately relevant to my argument here, but I think it is worth pointing out because it reminds us, once again, of the heavy influence that Mill received from his associates, especially concerning literary issues. For the authorship of the review of Tennyson in the January issue of *The Monthly Repository* in 1833, please refer to the *Memorial Edition of Collected Works of W. J. Fox* vol. 6 (London: Charles Fox, 1867) 204-12.

<sup>94</sup> Laurence W. Mazzeno, *Alfred Tennyson: The Critical Legacy* (New York: Camden House, 2004) 13.

<sup>95</sup> Mill, ‘Tennyson’s Poems’ 413-14, italics added.



The arguments previously made in ‘Two Kinds of Poetry’ and ‘What is Poetry’ were now gathered and reiterated with so much lucidity that it was impossible to miss the message. Cultivation of the inner world was conceived as an indispensable component in the whole scheme of the cultivation of mankind. But feeling, if it was to be of any value, must be accompanied by ‘the systematic culture of the intellect,’ must appeal to sympathy and, above all, must be morally edifying, not only strengthening sensibilities and intellect but also ‘acting upon the desires and characters of mankind.’

It so happened – although on reflection it could be argued that this was not accidental at all – that the issue which published the review of Tennyson also contained his review of Samuel Bailey’s *Rationale of Political Representation*, which received equally warm praise. In Mill’s opinion, Bailey’s work had not only ‘excelled most of his contemporaries’ but even stood ‘not inferior to the best of his former productions.’<sup>96</sup> Yet, there is a more significant similarity between the review of Tennyson and that of Bailey. Both ended with a stress on cultivation. The poet, as Mill argued, should be thoroughly educated in intellect and sentiments in order to cultivate mankind, and so it was the same with political representatives, who were responsible for educating their community both intellectually and emotionally. It was necessary, Mill insisted, that the community should display a certain ‘state of civilisation,’ while the body of representatives should consist of people ‘highly cultivated,’ that is to say cultivated so that they could remain ‘free from narrow or partial views, and from any peculiar bias,’ and, in this way, extend sympathy and understanding towards the interests of all.<sup>97</sup>

So it seems, at some point, that Mill blurred the difference between a literary review and a political one. Through the dramatic turn from ‘What is Poetry’ to ‘Two Kinds of Poetry,’ we have already seen in Mill a moralist who laboured hard in order to find in poetic beauty some valuable guidance for the formation of individual character. But it would be a gross misunderstanding if we, upon seeing the connection between his literary criticism and his concept of aesthetic education, instantly

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<sup>96</sup> Mill, ‘Rationale of Representation,’ *Essays on Politics and Society* 17.

<sup>97</sup> Mill, ‘Rationale of Representation’ 45.

concluded that Mill's call for aesthetic cultivation came solely from literary inspirations. The conclusion of the review of Bailey, however brief it was, warns us against a simplification of that kind. Moreover, it provides us with a glimpse into the complexity of Mill's idea of aesthetic culture by calling attention to its political concerns. The complexity would be more comprehensively demonstrated in Mill's article 'Civilisation' which came out in the *London and Westminster Review* in April, 1836.

Just as its title suggests, the essay announced at the beginning a rather theoretical ambition, that is to define 'civilisation.' 'The word Civilisation,' Mill wrote, 'like many other terms of the philosophy of human nature, is a word of double meaning. It sometimes stands for human improvement in general, and sometimes for certain kinds of improvement in particular.'<sup>98</sup> The two 'improvements' differed from each other in that in the former case 'civilisation' denoted simply a social condition, the customs and cultural norms of a people, whereas in the latter, civilisation, being a 'particular improvement,' referred specifically to the progress that a certain human society had achieved. It was the second type that Mill wished to explore. Since in that sense, civilisation designated a superior quality that led to achievements and progress, the concept, as he believed, could not be appropriately defined without comparing and contrasting what was superior with that which was not. The following part of his essay was consequently devoted to a meticulous study of the difference between 'civilisation' and 'rudeness or barbarism.'

This topic was by no means novel, nor was the strategy for exploring it. When conditions of society had not become desolate enough to give rise to that pessimistic view of 'an advanced state of rotteness,' the contrast between civilisation and the less advanced had often been taken for granted, eliciting interest from many thinkers.<sup>99</sup> In what aspects, many had asked, did civilisation distinguish itself from barbarism? And what was the most crucial feature that characterised a civilized society? Answers to these questions not only reflected people's understanding of their

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<sup>98</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation,' *Dissertations and Discussions* vol.1 160.

<sup>99</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 230.

own position in human history; they also reflected their understandings of their own position against that of other nations in the world, thus giving this inquiry a temporal dimension as well as a spatial one. Victor de Riquetti, an eighteenth-century French political economist, was said to be the first to use the word ‘civilisation’ in writing. He was also reported to have found the principal source of civilisation in religion, seeing it as ‘undeniably the first and most useful brake on humanity.’<sup>100</sup> Riquetti’s contemporary and acquaintance Montesquieu, on the other hand, had famously attributed the unequal advancement of human society in different areas to the unequal development of the spirit of law, which was in turn attributed to the diversity in climate. The reason for the backwardness of some peoples, Montesquieu insisted, was the hot climate, where the heat ‘may be so excessive as to deprive the body of all vigour and strength. The faintness is therefore communicated to the mind; there is no curiosity, no noble enterprise, no generosity of sentiment’ and, naturally, no prosperity of civilisation.<sup>101</sup>

Many other thinkers defined civilisation in terms of population and economic achievement. In the *History of Civilisation in England*, a series of ambitious works first published in 1857, the Victorian historian Henry Thomas Buckle listed various key points to European progress. Through a comparison with India and Egypt, for instance, Buckle argued that European cultures were able to supersede, both because they excelled not only in ‘the accumulation of wealth’ by making good use of natural resources, but also in the preservation of ‘the energy of man’ that fuelled economic growth.<sup>102</sup> This was why ‘formerly the richest countries were those in which nature was most bountiful,’ whereas ‘now the richest countries are those in which man is most active,’ with minds ‘more powerful, more numerous, and more able to grapple with the difficulties of the external world.’<sup>103</sup> This was indeed the obvious answer, considering the social reality that Buckle was living in – was not Victorian Britain the most powerful economic entity in the nineteenth-century world? Yet, to some extent

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<sup>100</sup> Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilisation: the Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009) 27.

<sup>101</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* [1748] (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 234.

<sup>102</sup> Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilisation in England* vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton. 1866) 37.

<sup>103</sup> Buckle 112.

the answer is very superficial, too, in that it focused exclusively on the status of men as *homo economicus*, and overlooked other aspects of human nature.

Elsewhere, the gentleness of character and the development of social institutions were also taken into account. Thus, in the article ‘Barbarism and Civilisation,’ published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in America in January 1861, the author argued, as if recalling Riquetti and Montesquieu in particular, that the loftiness of civilisation consisted neither in ‘religion’ nor in ‘climate,’ but chiefly in the power of control.

We can only say that there is an inexplicable step in progress, which we call civilization; it is the development of mankind into a sufficient maturity of strength to keep the peace and organize institutions; it is the arrival of literature and art; it is the lion and the lamb beginning to lie down together, without having, as someone has said, the lamb inside the lion.<sup>104</sup>

What truly mattered in civilisation, according to the author, is not its material conditions but the performance of the mind of human beings. Speaking thus out of an immediate modern context, in which industrial expansion and the accumulation of wealth demanded improvements to institutions both political and cultural, the writer was firmly convinced that civilisation should aim to provide an efficient organisation for society, and for each individual a perfect combination of courage and civility.

John Stuart Mill was well acquainted with French culture and politics in the eighteenth century, and he was speaking from a social context more or less similar to that of Buckle and the *Atlantic* article. But these similarities only serve to set off the contrast. The point that Mill focused on in his ‘Civilisation’ was somehow different from all those discussed above. Contrasting civilised society with ‘savage life,’ Mill noted a series of distinctions, and the first one of these was in the way of living. While ‘a savage tribe consists of a handful of individuals, wandering or thinly scattered over a vast tract of country,’ civilised society must be ‘a dense population [...] dwelling in fixed habitations, and largely collected together in towns and villages.’<sup>105</sup> The layout of the population decided the pattern of daily life; thus a civilised country was

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<sup>104</sup> Anonymous, ‘Barbarism and Civilisation,’ *Atlantic Monthly* Jan. 1861: 52.

<sup>105</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 161-62.

distinguished for its advancement in ‘agriculture, commerce, and manufacture,’ whereas in savage life all these activities were either nonexistent or ‘next to none.’<sup>106</sup> Had Mill stopped at this point, his argument would sound more or less the same as Buckle’s criterion of the ‘accumulation of wealth,’ which measured the degree of the advancement of human society according to its economic performance. But that is not how the story ended for Mill. As a matter of fact, he attempted here to capture a different aspect of human nature. After discussing the ways of life in civilised and savage societies, Mill proceeded to argue that this difference resulted not from economic activities but from the degree of cooperation. Hence the following observation:

In savage communities each person shifts for himself; except in war (and even then very imperfectly), we seldom see any joint operations carried on by the union of many; nor do savages, in general, find much pleasure in each other’s society. Wherever, therefore, we find human beings acting together for common purposes in large bodies, and enjoying the pleasure of social intercourse, we term them civilised.<sup>107</sup>

The emphasis on ‘community’ and ‘joint operations’ echoed Mill’s previous observation that savage populations were usually thinly scattered, whereas in civilised communities, people tend to spend more time in each other’s company. Yet he was not merely repeating himself here. What made the passage above particularly innovative was the stress on emotional involvement. Mill regarded the savage life crude not merely because of a lack of cooperation; there was little cooperation because the tribes’ members were unable to find ‘pleasure’ in each other’s company. The civilised ones, by contrast, prospered not merely due to cooperation; it was because their members, as Mill emphatically pointed out, were actually ‘enjoying the pleasure of social intercourse.’

The concern for ‘cooperation’ even made the essay ‘Civilisation’ slightly anachronistic. To support his argument, Mill chose examples irrespective of their

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<sup>106</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 162.

<sup>107</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 162.

chronological order. Thus civilisation belonged to such ancient people as the Romans, who produced the most distinguished enterprise – the Roman Empire – out of ‘voluntary co-operation of many persons independent of one another.’<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, savageness could be found in the contemporary world. Why, for example, did Spain fail to withstand Napoleon? The chief cause, in Mill’s opinion, was Spain’s inability to cooperate. Among virtually all the Spanish military and political leaders, ‘no one would sacrifice one iota of his consequence, his authority, or his opinion, to the most obvious demands of the common cause’ and thereby failed spectacularly to form ‘an alliance.’<sup>109</sup> In other words, civilisation was a state of culture, and people could only be termed civilised when they embraced the principles of cooperation.

This shift in focus, therefore, distinguished Mill’s definition from that of others. Previously, as Montesquieu and Buckle’s argument illustrated, in order to evaluate the advancement of civilised society, it was necessary to observe first of all how successfully human beings interacted with their external reality – a whole range of material existences, from natural climates to social institutions. For Mill, however, civilisation had more to do with the culture of the world within. A civilised society was the product of successful cooperation, which in turn was the fruit of fellow feeling and mutual understanding. Again, instead of material accomplishments, Mill was making a case for the cultivation of humanity. This emphasis was highly reminiscent of the revision that Mill had previously made in his literary essays, where he replaced the lonely genius with the sympathetic Wordsworthian example that took pleasure in communicating with other people. Sympathy thus became the core ingredient for both a good society and good poetry.

In fact, ‘sympathy’ also underlined Mill’s utilitarian theory and even his ideas in political economy. The present thesis will not dwell too much on this point, considering the bulk of those works, but I think several examples, however brief they are, will suffice. In *Utilitarianism*, the ultimate sanction of the principle of utility and the ultimate source of conscience were both identified to be a ‘subjective feeling.’

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<sup>108</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 167.

<sup>109</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 167.

People performed their moral duties out of ‘conscience.’ But for Mill, conscience was not as simple as a pure idea of duty. It was derived, instead, from many different kinds of personal feelings that included sympathy, love, self-esteem, and even religious feelings. Likewise, it was also mutual feelings that bounded people together in society. Regarding utilitarian morality, Mill asserted that both the foundation and the strength of that morality consisted in the recognition of the ‘powerful natural sentiment,’ which he interpreted as

a social feeling of mankind – a desire to be in unity with our fellow creature, which is already a powerful principle in human nature, and happily one of those which tend to become stronger, [...] from the influence of advancing civilisation.<sup>110</sup>

The defence of Utilitarianism was thus tied in with the views expressed in the essay ‘Civilisation.’ ‘Feeling’ was their shared cornerstone. Mill’s ideas of political economy also revealed a similar mindset. He claimed, for instance, that the prosperity of modern economic life was dependent not on how advanced its technologies or institutions were but on how successfully its members conducted ‘deliberations on questions of common interest’ – in other words, how successfully they were cultivated to embrace the spirit of common interest as an inward principle.<sup>111</sup> Having noticed the similar premises in Mill’s utilitarian ethics and political economy, David O. Brink argues that ‘Mill’s assumptions about the social components of human happiness reflect well-considered evaluative views’ that rest ‘on his views of human nature.’<sup>112</sup> Although this observation is quite insightful with regard to the present topic, I think it is also necessary to point out that Mill’s view of human nature was, in turn, informed by an inherent belief that the inner world was highly cultivable and should be cultivated. In sum, for Mill, it was from an enlightened inner world that social progress and human civilisation stemmed.

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<sup>110</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism* 231.

<sup>111</sup> Mill, *Principles of Political Economy, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 3, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1965) 763.

<sup>112</sup> David O. Brink, ‘Mill’s Deliberative Utilitarianism,’ *Mill’s Utilitarianism: Critical Essays*, ed. David Lyons (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997) 175.

## **‘The Rising of the Masses’: Critique of Democracy**

Mill’s concern in ‘Civilisation,’ however, was not entirely theoretical. The essay contained an insightful interpretation of human progress as well as an innovative definition of civilisation. But both were actually part of a criticism of contemporary life, although later critics often disagree with each other as to how ‘proper’ Mill’s criticism was.<sup>113</sup> The exploration of civilisation in the first part, which highlighted the importance of the cultivation of feelings, paved the way for Mill’s later assessment of his own era, to the evils of which Mill prescribed the education of feelings as the most powerful solution. Concerning the features of his own society, one of the most powerful civilisations at that time, Mill observed:

The most remarkable of those consequences of advancing civilisation, which the state of the world is now forcing upon the attention of thinking minds, is this: that power passes more and more from individuals, and small knots of individuals, to masses: that the importance of the masses becomes constantly greater, that of individuals less.<sup>114</sup>

By ‘the rise of the masses,’ Mill referred to three specific facts, namely ‘the gradual rise of the trading and manufacturing classes,’ ‘the gradual emancipation of the agricultural [workers]’ and ‘the growth of a middle class.’ All of them, Mill maintained, were leaving more and more of an impact on social affairs. In the old feudal system, only prestigious individuals with hereditary status could have access to power and wealth; by the early nineteenth century, however, the rise of the masses had reached such an extent that the redistribution of power and resources was inevitable. Thus, together, all of those new social forces had brought an unprecedented change to

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<sup>113</sup> Alexander Bain, for instance, claimed that, as a reader, he ‘never felt quite satisfied with the article.’ He found the article defective in two aspects: firstly, ‘[t]he definition given at the outset seem[ed] inadequate’; and secondly, the rest of the article seemed to be led astray from the main topic as Mill became occupied with ‘one of his many attacks on the vicious tendencies of the time’ whereas, in Bain’s view, all those topics ‘should have been detached from any theory of Civilisation’ (Bain 48). Critics of later generations tend to be more sympathetic. Alexander Brady, who wrote the introduction to the politics section of Mill’s *Collected Works*, believes that the approach is perfectly justifiable. While allowing for Bain’s complaint, he nevertheless vindicates that ‘Civilisation’ ‘in no way hampered Mill in discussing that in which he was principally interested – certain aspects of contemporary Britain on which he had strong opinions’ (see Alexander Brady, introduction, *Essays on Politics and Society*, xxv).

<sup>114</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 163.



British society, causing ‘bouleversements’ to the old social structure.<sup>115</sup>

That the power – or to be more specific, the control over laws and social institutions – was being passed from individuals to masses was a widely acknowledged phenomenon which found representations virtually everywhere in and throughout the Victorian era. It was symbolised by the Reform Bill in 1832, which illustrated the democratic spirit in the constitutional reforms. It is also found in Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1853), in the battle between Sir Leicester Dedlock, the aristocrat who is respectable but feeble, and Mr. Lawrence Boythorn the new bourgeois who is energetic and thriving. And it was also reflected in the Hyde Park riot in 1866, which would induce Matthew Arnold to write *Culture and Anarchy*. Mill himself was to come back to this topic some fifteen years later in *On Liberty*, which, again, described his age as ‘the modern *régime* of public opinion.’<sup>116</sup> His observation in ‘Civilisation’ that ‘the importance of the masses becomes constantly greater,’ was therefore part of, and to some extent a prologue to, a whole range of discussions in a society that was undergoing a dramatic transformation from an aristocratic system towards modern democracy.

One of the most important minds that Mill drew on in ‘Civilisation’ was Tocqueville, and it is quite easy to see why.<sup>117</sup> Both took a lively interest in ‘the question of democracy’ as well as its implications for modern society. Tocqueville’s writings on civilisation and American democracy became influential almost immediately following its publication. Just one year before completing his ‘Civilisation,’ Mill reviewed Tocqueville’s newly published *Democracy in America*, on which he was to comment again in 1840 when he acquired the second volume. Although Mill criticised Tocqueville on some points, they still had much in common.

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<sup>115</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 163.

<sup>116</sup> Mill, *On Liberty* 274.

<sup>117</sup> It should be noted, however, that Tocqueville exerting an intellectual impact on Mill is not a consensus among critics. Some are, in fact, still debating on whether or not Tocqueville influenced Mill; or if he did, how large this influence was. Joseph Hamburger, for instance, argued that Mill and Tocqueville were actually antagonists, rather than comrades, in questions regarding liberty and democracy, for example. See Joseph Hamburger, ‘Mill and Tocqueville on Liberty,’ in John M. Robson and Michael Laine (eds.) *James and John Stuart Mill: Papers of the Centenary Conference* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1976) 119-24. For many other critics, however, Tocqueville definitely influenced Mill’s thinking on democracy, only the degree should be carefully assessed. There is a short but quite comprehensive account of such critical views in Alan S. Khan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 6. I think the influence cannot be denied, especially, as I try to show in the thesis, regarding the cultivation of feelings.

When Mill quoted the French thinker's observation that 'the movement towards democracy [dated] from the dawn of modern civilisation, and [had] continued steadily advancing from that time,' it was quite difficult to tell whether he was giving an account of Tocqueville's views or whether he was speaking for himself.<sup>118</sup> But there was one similarity that came on top of all: like Tocqueville, Mill was also convinced that, as society became increasingly democratic, there was a growing demand for a cultivation of the inner world.

To begin with, Tocqueville was not satisfied with every aspect of American society. He advocated democracy but, on the other hand, he was also quick enough to notice some of its lamentable outcomes. Among all the defects of a modern society, Tocqueville was particularly attentive to the issue of taste as well as the problem of alienation among individuals – both social and psychological. Democracy, as Tocqueville explained, encouraged equality in social status and fast accumulation of wealth, which in turn gave rise to a passion for luxury and efficiency. When luxury was desired by consumers and efficiency by craftsmen, it was inevitable that the artworks thus produced were no longer able to retain a high quality; hence the increase of fake jewels and cheap substitutes. As the number of artistic products increased, 'the merit of each production [was] diminished' because the artists 'frequently withdraw them from the delineation of the soul to fix them exclusively on that of the body, and [...] substitute the representation of motion and sensation for that of sentiment and thought; in a word, they put the real in the place of the ideal.'<sup>119</sup> The same aesthetic choices generated problems even in the realm of science. As love for the real overtook the love for the ideal, the love for sublime truth tended to be replaced by a 'trading taste,' which directed minds towards 'the tangible and the real'; and, as a result, led to a flourishing of practical technologies and the decline of theoretical science. This created a huge dilemma for modern society, as people were now perplexed by the need to make a choice between either the few but great artworks and sublime truths produced in an aristocratic age, or the many but mediocre

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<sup>118</sup> Mill, 'De Tocqueville on Democracy in America,' *Essays on Politics and Society* 49.

<sup>119</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2. trans. Henry Reeves (London: Sounders and Otley, 1840) 37.

works from a democratic society.

Another potential problem in the democratic age, in Tocqueville's opinion, was closely associated with the symptom of 'individualism.' Although he made a differentiation between individualism and egoism, noting that the latter was nothing but a black instinct and that the former tended to be more mature, Tocqueville was never impressed by the call of individualism in a democratic society.

As social conditions become more equal, the number of persons increases who, although they are neither rich nor powerful enough to exercise any great influence over their fellows, have nevertheless acquired or retained sufficient education and fortune to satisfy their own wants.<sup>120</sup>

Yet he was worried that even such a mature feeling as this might in the long run destroy all the social intimacy developed by the previous social order. If every individual adopted the belief that '[t]hey owe nothing to any man, they expect nothing from any man; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone,' it was very likely they would 'imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hand.' When all relationships between human beings were thus severed, each individual would become nothing but a capital 'I' with rationalised selfishness, caring for nothing but his own interest and confined 'entirely within the solitude of his own heart.'<sup>121</sup>

Mill shared Tocqueville's judgments on both points, even though his samples were gathered from the other side of the Atlantic. While Tocqueville focused on the disproportion between the quality and the amount of artworks in America, Mill believed that his own country demonstrated exactly the same problem regarding literature.

When books were few, to get through one was a work of time and labour; what was written with thought was read with thought, and with a desire to extract from it as much of the materials of knowledge as possible. But when

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<sup>120</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 3 52.

<sup>121</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 3 52.

almost every person who can spell, can and will write, what is to be done?<sup>122</sup>

The apparent solution, as Mill suggested, would be ‘reading everything’, though he was obviously being ironical, for few people could possibly adapt their own speed of reading to the speed of a printing machine. What happened to the British reading public at that time, according to Mill, was similar to what Tocqueville had discovered in art: books became more and more ephemeral; those of solidity and wisdom were pushed aside, and serious enjoyment of literature was giving way to the ‘swallowing’ of inferior texts, causing an aesthetic depravity of the entire public.

Again similar to Tocqueville, Mill was convinced that the intensely self-regarding individuals raised in a democratic society were in need of proper cultivation. Even though Mill was generally known as an advocate of freedom and *laissez faire*, he did not carry forward this doctrine without reservation. In many cases, his concern for ‘feeling’ seems to have been the pivotal element that prevented him from being extreme. This is first illustrated in his critique of the economy. To influence each other was becoming more and more difficult, as the demand for equality led to ‘the constantly increasing number of those who are vying with one another to attract public attention.’<sup>123</sup> Such competition, Mill argued, not only generated hostility and alienation among people; it also gave rise to selfish behaviour and therefore caused the deterioration of private virtue, public morality and the living conditions of those who were socially disadvantaged. It was very likely, Mill feared, that this deterioration was already on its way, as it had become a common feature that the ‘intensity of competition [drove] the trading public more and more to play high for success, to throw for all or nothing’ until mutual trust was abandoned, and the socially inferior were left completely on their own.

To counteract such a dangerous tendency, Mill insisted that something should be done about the ‘opulent classes of modern civilised communities.’ According to Mill, the progress of civilisation brought wealth and culture. But as their comfort increased, the better-off classes also displayed a proportional decrease in courage and aspiration.

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<sup>122</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 190.

<sup>123</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 171.

Being concerned only with their own interests, many of them knew nothing about the condition of people who were not immediately within their own social circles. They did not know how much the disadvantaged were suffering; the only pain they were familiar with was based on their own personal sorrows. Thus, very often, people who enjoyed the benefit of economic and social progress abandoned their ambition for further advancement, simply out of fear of their own suffering. Indeed, Mill's critique of the 'opulent classes' was so severe that at some point, he almost struck a note of socialism; for instance, when he argued that the call for progress was halted because 'the very idea, of pain, [was] kept more and more out the sight of those classes who enjoy[ed] in their fullness the benefits of civilisation.'<sup>124</sup> With his unabated attention to the cultivation of feelings, Mill believed that the only solution was the cultivation of the aesthetics of heroism, which he explained as follows: 'The heroic essentially consists in being ready, for a worthy object, to do and to suffer, but especially to do, what is painful or disagreeable: and whoever does not early learn to be capable of this, will never be a great character.'<sup>125</sup> Mill's repeated stress on 'sympathy' and 'love' easily leads many critics to assume that his aesthetics were essentially idyllic. Indeed, such an impression is suggested by a critical exposition of Mill's interest in the 'picturesque', as well as by the suspicion that his aesthetics might not accommodate the tragic.<sup>126</sup> The call for heroic sentiments here, however, offered a different view. A community which excelled in the education of feelings, as Mill envisaged, was not just a world of sympathy and tenderness; to ensure the continuous perfection of their society, its members were also required to adopt a heroic aesthetic: to confront hardihood, to brave evil, and to make self-sacrifices when necessary.<sup>127</sup>

The essay 'Civilisation' is now generally categorised as part of Mill's political writing for the simple reason that it addressed the issue of how to administer modern society. But reading it more closely, I believe that it was actually more concerned with the administration of humanity or, in other words, the cultivation of the inner world.

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<sup>124</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation' 179.

<sup>125</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation' 180.

<sup>126</sup> See Anna J. Mill's 'John Stuart Mill and the Picturesque,' *Victorian Studies* 14.2 (1970) 151-63 and Stefan Collini's introduction, *Essays on Equality, Law and Education* at lvi.

<sup>127</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation' 181.

Both his definition of civilisation and his critique of democracy highlighted ‘feeling’ as one of the most important ingredients for the progress of human society. Thus, once again, we see how Mill revisited the old theme that he himself had developed in earlier writings on literature. Self-centeredness would not produce excellent poets; similarly, it would fail to produce qualified social members for a modern civilisation. For self-regarding individuals and excessive individualism, the cultivation of feelings was always the best cure.

## **The Question of Authority: Mill as an Aesthetic Educator**

### **Elitist or Liberal: Aesthetic Education and the ‘Cultivated Few’**

There is one point on which Mill strongly disagreed with Tocqueville, namely how to understand the diminishing of mutual influence in democratic society. For Tocqueville, the diminishing of mutual influence was a sign that people had come to embrace equality. As conditions of life became more equal, he noted, people would naturally become ‘neither rich nor powerful enough to exercise any great influence over their fellows.’ As the emphasis on ‘rich’ and ‘powerful’ indicates, Tocqueville associated ‘influence’ primarily with economic and social status. So, ‘influence,’ as he understood it, was a synonym for ‘oppression’ or ‘manipulation’; it referred to the inequality that existed in a pre-democratic society, where wealth and power qualified some social members to preside over others.<sup>128</sup> Mill’s interpretation of ‘influence,’ however, was more intellectual and, consequently, he was far less optimistic about this new trend in democratic society. Whenever the social phenomenon of the ‘weakening of influence’ was addressed, Mill always spoke with much more uneasiness; at one point, he even went as far as questioning the value of democracy:

Are the decay of individual energy, the weakening of the influence of superior minds over the multitude, the growth of charlatanerie, and the diminished efficacy of public opinion as a restraining power, – are these the price we necessarily pay for the benefits of civilisation?<sup>129</sup>

Mill therefore proposed that the ‘superior minds’ should take up their responsibility as educators in order to resume their authority over ‘the multitude.’ And this was precisely what Mill expected for the education of feelings. Since the multitude need guidance, he argued, there must be a group that is comprised of the leading intellects of the age, ‘whereby works of first-rate merit, of whatever class, and of whatever

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<sup>128</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 3 52.

<sup>129</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 187.

tendency in point of opinion, might come forth with [...] the approval of those whose names would carry authority.’<sup>130</sup> A member from this small group, he believed, should not only exert his efforts in cultivating the lower classes for the advancement of civilisation. He was also expected to guide the ‘opulent and lettered classes,’ who had acquired wealth and power but were still in need of aesthetic instruction.<sup>131</sup> In sum, the cultivated few must contribute to ‘the instruction of the understanding and the elevation of the characters of all classes’, by making improvements ‘in the general understanding’ and ‘the feelings.’<sup>132</sup>

This proposal resembles the opinions of Thomas Carlyle. In 1829, Carlyle published in the *Edinburgh Review* an article entitled ‘Signs of the Times.’ Through a survey of contemporary British culture, Carlyle found its most outstanding feature to be ‘Mechanical.’ It was mechanical, he maintained, because people were too much absorbed by material gains, and little attention was paid to the inner world. In former times, ‘the wise men, the enlightened lovers of their kind,’ were preoccupied with the ‘Dynamical,’ which sought to ‘to regulate, increase and purify the inward primary powers of man.’<sup>133</sup> Now, by contrast, it was always the ‘Mechanical Province’ that dominated people’s interest, leading everyone to be concerned with the reformation of the world outside instead of the cultivation of the world within. Meanwhile, the ‘mechanical’ was also an antithesis to the ‘heroical.’ According to Carlyle, with society functioning as a complex machine and every member being a part of it, individual powers had diminished so much that ‘[n]o individual now hopes to accomplish the poorest enterprise single-handed.’<sup>134</sup> Consequently, it was an age with no Newton, no Raphael, no Mozart; all past ingenious endeavours were now replaced by the mediocre effort that could not possibly rival the old masters. These ideas were to be reinforced in Carlyle’s later works, such as *On Heroes and Hero-worship*, and the call for leadership won a hearty approval from Mill. In a letter to Sterling from 1831, Mill mentioned that he had recently made an acquaintance with a ‘Mr. Carlyle.’

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<sup>130</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 192.

<sup>131</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 174.

<sup>132</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 174 and 182.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas Carlyle, ‘Signs of the Times,’ *Edinburgh Review* 49 (1829) 449.

<sup>134</sup> Carlyle 443.



In spite of an initial aversion to his style, Mill conceded that he had ‘long had a very keen relish for [Carlyle’s] articles in *Edinburgh & Foreign Review*,’ among which ‘*Signs of the Times*’ stood out as a representative.<sup>135</sup> This is perhaps why Mill would portray his ideal poets as those who had ‘exercised, and continue[d] to exercise, a powerful, and mostly highly beneficial influence over the formation and growth’ of the minds around him.<sup>136</sup> Several years later, Mill was to pay homage to this acquaintance in his ‘*Civilisation*,’ which echoed Carlyle’s ‘*Signs of the Times*’ not only in the attempt to identify the defects of the age, but, more explicitly, in its justification of the education of the inner world by the cultivated few.

Besides personal acquaintances, historical events also helped to shape Mill’s mind. In August 1830, Mill arrived in Paris to witness the progress of the French Revolution that took place in July. He was quite enthusiastic at the beginning, telling his father on August 13<sup>th</sup> that ‘as there has been an excellent revolution without leaders, leaders will not be required in order to establish a good government.’<sup>137</sup> But soon that hope dwindled away. Just a week later, on August 21<sup>st</sup>, scenes of hunger, riot and the crowd being ‘careless of public interest’ made Mill realise that in such ‘turbulent times,’ it was necessary to have people who were ‘capable of taking a leading part.’<sup>138</sup> He also felt that the majority of the French people were not fit for that role. The workmen of Paris, ‘[h]aving effected their glorious object, [...] calmly retired to their homes and resumed their accustomed avocations,’ thus leaving the duty of management to the middle and the upper classes. The latter, however, did not prove themselves to be worthy of that duty; hence Mill’s indignant report that, concerning the class of ‘the educated and the rich,’

it seems the universal opinion, that both in ability and intention it is unfit for its situation – that it is no fair representation of the French nation – that it is calculated seriously to retard improvement, and in great measure for the present moment to nullify, in a beneficial sense, the effects of the present

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<sup>135</sup> Mill, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848* 85.

<sup>136</sup> Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties’ 358.

<sup>137</sup> Mill, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848* 54.

<sup>138</sup> Mill, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848* 60.

revolution.<sup>139</sup>

So here is the lesson that Mill learnt from France: first, that an advancing society needed leaders and, second, that leaders were representatives of the nation not because of their social or economic advantages, but because they were so cultivated that they could provide a real benefit. This lesson was to have a lasting impact on Mill.<sup>140</sup> In the ideal poets portrayed in Mill's literary essays and the strong faith in the 'superior minds' articulated in 'Civilisation,' we can see clearly how the French July Revolution had stimulated Mill's intellectual growth.

Mill's championing of the cultivated few, along with his appreciation for people like Carlyle, has convinced many critics that he was, to say the least, temporarily led away from his original liberal ideal. Don A. Habibi, in his study of Mill's 'ethics of human growth,' discusses at length Mill's 'elitism.' By 'elitism,' Habibi refers to Mill's emphasis on 'influence' and 'leadership,' and argues that his political doctrine was based on the conviction that 'it was the elite that would promote the growth of knowledge and uplift the masses.'<sup>141</sup> Other critics might not use the term 'elitism,' but they all agree that Mill's ideal society relies heavily on the cultivated few. Ben Knights, for instance, places Mill's proposal in the philosophical tradition of Coleridge and calls it 'an idea of clerisy.' Alan S. Kahan, putting more emphasis on the social and historical indications, refers to Mill's values as 'aristocratic liberalism.'<sup>142</sup> This conviction has led other critics to raise further questions concerning Mill's cultural and even political stance. Thus, Gertrude Himmelfarb,

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<sup>139</sup> Mill, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848* 60.

<sup>140</sup> Just as Francis E. Mineka has pointed out in the article 'John Stuart Mill: Letters on the French Revolution of 1830,' the French Revolution of July 1830 had a profound impact upon Mill; it inspired him on politics and offered materials that would find their way into his writings for the next five years. See Francis E. Mineka ed., 'John Stuart Mill: Letters on the French Revolution of 1830,' *Victorian Studies* 1.2 (1957) 136-54, at 136. Several other critics have also addressed this topic. For example, Iris Mueller has pointed out in her study *John Stuart Mill and French Thought*, that French society in the 1830s proved to be a total disillusionment for Mill. Instead of introducing a whole new era, the revolution turned out to be just an ordinary change in regime. Those who had ruled were disposed of, but the middle classes that rose to power brought little change to either the social structure or the living condition of the people. The bitter lessons abroad taught Mill about the reactionary nature of the middle classes and, in this way, prompted him to look to elitism as a remedy. Bruce Mazlish, in his *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century*, also presented a similar argument. For reference, see Iris Mueller, *John Stuart Mill and French Thought* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1956) 46-47 and Bruce Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Basic Books 1975) 238.

<sup>141</sup> Don Asher Habibi, *John Stuart Mill and the Ethic of Human Growth* (Boston: Kluwer 2001) 233.

<sup>142</sup> See Ben Knights, *The Idea of the Clerisy in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978) and Alan S. Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992).

having observed Mill's passion for the cultivated few, tried to differentiate the 'conservative' Mill from the 'liberal' Mill.'<sup>143</sup> Nicholas Capaldi, in a recent biography of Mill, also expresses a similar idea, describing his intellectual engagements during the first half of the decade of the 1830s as in part a 'flirtation with conservatism.'<sup>144</sup> With an appropriate definition – and in some cases a redefinition – of terms such as 'aristocratic' and 'conservatism,' Mill's education of feelings could certainly be categorised as such. Indeed, those labels are valuable for their insight into the complexity of Mill's ideas. However, I would argue that in spite of his ostensible support for the few superior minds, the liberal Mill and the conservative Mill are not separable. What he intended to achieve was in fact a synthesis that reconciled the so-called elitism with his liberal belief, and this point is best illustrated in his discussion of universities.

The last part of 'Civilisation' was devoted to an examination of the role of English universities. Following his previous argument about the importance of aesthetic cultivation, Mill insisted that a proper university education should cultivate 'manly character' with instruction in philosophy, politics and, in particular, 'poetry and art.'<sup>145</sup> But the goal was not to produce minds as great as that of the instructor. Although Mill still described the aim of education as 'love of truth' in the singular form, he also maintained that the aim must be achieved 'without a particle of regard to the results to which the exercise of that power may lead, *even though it should conduct the pupil to opinions diametrically opposite to those of his teachers.*'<sup>146</sup> The education of the inner world, as he made it clear, was a cultivation guided by the 'cultivated few' under the liberal principle. People were taught to love, to sympathise, and to step forward heroically, but they should never be taught to aspire to the same ideals that their superiors loved, or to defend the same doctrines that their superiors chose to believe. This principle was reiterated at the end of the essay. While 'subjects of systematic instruction' must be explored 'under the most eminent professors who

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<sup>143</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, introduction, *Essays on Politics and Culture* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962) ix.

<sup>144</sup> Capaldi 117-21.

<sup>145</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation' 204.

<sup>146</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation' 201, italics added.

could be found,' the professors must be chosen 'not for the particular doctrines they might happen to profess, but as being those who were most likely to send forth pupils qualified in point of disposition and attainments to choose doctrines for themselves.'<sup>147</sup> Only then, Mill summarised, could education become truly favourable to the 'freedom of thought and the progress of the human mind.' Later, the same conviction would emerge again with equal emphasis in a private letter to Alexander Bain, where Mill explained his purpose of writing *On Liberty*:

The 'Liberty' has produced an effect on you which it was never intended to produce, if it has made you think that we ought not to attempt to convert the world. I meant nothing of the kind, and hope that we ought to convert all we can. We must be satisfied with keeping alive the sacred fire in a few minds when we are unable to do more – but the notion of an intellectual aristocracy of lumieres while the rest of the world remains in darkness fulfils none of my aspirations – and the effort I aim at by the book is, on the contrary, to make the many more accessible to all truth by making them more open-minded.<sup>148</sup>

His refusal to be regarded as perpetuating 'the notion of an intellectual aristocracy' is telling enough. Adhering to the principle of being 'open-minded,' the project, as Mill envisioned, did not pose any threat to his liberal beliefs but became an inherent part of it. The refinement of the mind was the aim, but in which direction the mind would be led was left to the free will of the individual. Individuality and liberal culture, therefore, were still Mill's motto.

However, the synthesis of liberalism and elitism in 'Civilisation' was not entirely without fallacy. First of all, Mill did not explain how to avoid the danger of stifling individuality in the course of 'conversion.' Just as Lauren M. E. Goodlad has observed in her post-Foucauldian study of Victorian liberalism, Mill's elitism illustrated the tension between the 'emancipatory project' of promoting individuality on the one hand and, on the other hand, the 'perverse effect' that intensified a 'pastoral authority' over the individuals. For Mill, as for Foucault, pastorship – the means by which to build individuality without homogenizing individuals – 'is the

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<sup>147</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation' 201.

<sup>148</sup> Mill, *On Liberty* 631.

central problematic of a modern liberal society.<sup>149</sup> While the equilibrium that Mill tried to maintain between individuality and elitism appeared very fragile, the means of cultivation that he proposed was, to say the least, dreamy. At one point in the essay, he described the cultivation of feelings as follows:

for so rousing the slumbering energy of the opulent and lettered classes, so storing the youth of those classes with the profoundest and most valuable knowledge, so calling forth whatever of individual greatness exists or can be raised up in the country, as to create a power which might partially rival the mere power of the masses, and might exercise the most salutary influence over them for their own good.<sup>150</sup>

Here is one of those rare moments in which Mill adopted a highly metaphorical language, one that is almost poetical. Yet the poetic elements did not help much with his elucidation. Rather, it instilled a feeling of dreaminess that seriously compromised the effectiveness of Mill's argument. How exactly, for instance, should the cultivated few 'rouse' the slumbering classes and 'call forth' everyone's potential without actually resorting to magic? A phrase as general as 'using all means' was not helpful at all, and readers were left to their own to speculate about the mechanism of this grand project. While Mill believed that 'co-operation among the leading intellects of the age' would bring to the masses works of 'first-rate merit' that obtained 'the approval of those whose names would carry authority,' he never spelt out what he meant by 'leading intellects,' and what kinds of works could be judged as having 'first-rate merit.'<sup>151</sup> Moreover, where did the 'authority' come from, and how was it justified? There were too many open questions in these simple prescriptions; yet none of them was adequately answered. In effect, the criteria of Mill's elites remained obscure.

Mill also overlooked the fact that there might be a disagreement among elitists themselves. At one point, he proposed that, for the present age, only 'two modes were left in which an individual mind can hope to produce much direct effect upon the

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<sup>149</sup> Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003) 30.

<sup>150</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation' 174.

<sup>151</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation' 192.

minds and destinies of his countrymen generally,' and which referred to either 'a member of parliament' or 'an editor of a London newspaper.'<sup>152</sup> But in reality – as Mill should know quite well, since he was an editor once and later became a Member of Parliament in 1865 – in both modes, individuals had to be involved in endless quarrels. Do these professions ensure authority? And how to make sure that members of parliament or editors of newspapers perform 'co-operation'? The difficulty in maintaining cooperation could render the whole project even more self-defeating. People do have different opinions, and those with different opinions often fight with each other. Hence there is no telling how a group of leading intellects, as Mill recommended, would work hand in hand to contribute to the perfection of human character and human society. They might cooperate, but it is equally possible that different principles would make them end up 'vying with one another to attract public attention,' creating the very democratic chaos that Mill had always been trying to avoid in his educational plan. In fact, Mill himself was not altogether unaware of this possibility. Talking about the role of the press, he was worried about the prospect that 'the importance of the newspaper press in the aggregate, considered as the voice of public opinion, will be increased,' and that 'the influence of any one writer in helping to form that opinion necessarily diminished.'<sup>153</sup> Even within the press, cooperation might be replaced by competition, and the voice of the few might be drowned by the roar of the many.

For some critics of Mill, the idea of communication is also an issue. This is the question that Don A. Habibi raises in his study: 'Even when elites are willing to be helpful,' Habibi maintains, 'they may be unable. [...] It is not unusual for members of an elite class to have problems communicating with the rest of society. It is one thing to achieve a high level of knowledge and wisdom; but, it is another to impart it successfully to others.'<sup>154</sup> Indeed, to communicate with his audience appeared to be quite a challenge for Mill, who, as so many recollections have testified, had a public image that featured precociousness as well as unorthodoxy. He never received formal

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<sup>152</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation' 187.

<sup>153</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation' 187.

<sup>154</sup> Habibi 236.

education; he was a political radical; he spoke for the rights of women; and worse still, he did not have any religious beliefs, being at some point even rather hostile to religion. While many looked on him as a reasoning machine, bearing the trademark of Utilitarianism, his homage to the 'education of feelings' also threatened to alienate him from Utilitarians.<sup>155</sup> So how did Mill perform when he himself took up the responsibility of an elitist educator who tried to impart to the audience the importance of feeling? While I agree with Habibi that Mill did not offer a detailed guideline concerning the means of communication, I would also suggest that he did not do so primarily because he himself had already set an example. As a matter of fact, communication was not a real problem for Mill the aesthetic educator. Through an analysis of his language and style in essays such as 'Bentham' and 'Coleridge,' I will show that Mill, as one of the 'elite class,' was in fact quite skilful in imparting his ideas.

### **A Logician Poet: Mill in 'Bentham' and 'Coleridge'**

In his recent biography, Nicholas Capaldi attempts to portray Mill in a way that is very different from the image of an established intellectual icon. Through a meticulous study of Mill's relationship with the Romantic movement, Capaldi argues that Romanticism was a crucial constituent in Mill's thinking, so crucial that it could be said that one of the major tasks throughout Mill's career was to reconcile 'his father's practical program of liberal reform' with 'nineteenth-century Romantic philosophical ideas that his father did not really understand.'<sup>156</sup> Mill, as Capaldi attempts to show, was an ardent Romanticist who 'constructed a life that strove to be a Romantic work of art.'<sup>157</sup> I agree with Capaldi that the Romantic tendency deserves much closer attention than it had hitherto received in the study of Mill. Indeed, I have borrowed heavily from Capaldi's portrayal in my own study of Mill as an aesthetic

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<sup>155</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London: Hogarth, 1958) 50.

<sup>156</sup> Capaldi xvii.

<sup>157</sup> Capaldi xvii.

educator. The reason is obvious: the whole idea of ‘aesthetic education’ would never have come into being if Mill had not developed an active interest in the ideas of people like Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge and Carlyle. In this sense, to study Mill’s idea of ‘aesthetic education’ is to study his Romantic inclination.

On the other hand, in spite of all the deep affection for Romanticism, the mentality that Mill demonstrated as an aesthetic educator was also genuinely rational. It is true that he attempted to reconcile his father’s ideas with Romantic philosophy, but the very attempt at reconciliation also suggests a logician at work. The combination of Romanticism and logic was indicated both in what he said and the way he said it – successfully incorporating the intellectual and the poetical into his own discourse.

The year 1838 brought two blows to Utilitarians: both Bentham and James Mill passed away. Mill’s essay ‘Bentham’ appeared in the *London and Westminster Review* in August of the same year, commemorating the achievement of this great thinker. The essay on Coleridge appeared later in March 1840, also in the *London and Westminster Review*. In spite of the two-year gap, his readers could without difficulty detect the connection between them – indeed, one who read the 1838 essay would naturally expect a sequel on Coleridge, since at the very beginning of the Bentham essay, Mill had already stated that Bentham and Coleridge were ‘two great seminal minds of England in their age.’<sup>158</sup> Though both were ‘closet-students,’ he proceeded, these men were ‘dissimilar in almost all else.’<sup>159</sup> This idea received even more emphasis when he introduced Coleridge. ‘It would be difficult,’ according to Mill,

to find two persons of philosophic eminence more exactly the contrary of one another. Compare their modes of treatment of any subject, and you might fancy them inhabitants of different worlds. They seem to have scarcely a principle or a premise in common. Each of them sees scarcely anything but what the other does not see.<sup>160</sup>

The two essays, therefore, are parts of one piece, and such a clear-cut contrast of both

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<sup>158</sup> Mill, ‘Bentham’ 330.

<sup>159</sup> Mill, ‘Bentham’ 330.

<sup>160</sup> Mill, ‘Coleridge,’ *Discussion and Dissertations*, vol. 1 395.



thinkers seems to suggest that Mill was making ‘a synthesis of Bentham and Coleridge’s profound half-truths,’ as some critics have said.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, synthesis was one of Mill’s favourite strategies, as we have seen from his literary essays and ‘Civilisation.’ He synthesised feeling with intellect in order to safeguard the doctrine of inner culture from being misunderstood as a justification of excessive subjectivity. He synthesised feeling also with morality, turning aesthetic education into a cultivation of aesthetic-moral sentiments. With regard to the political significance of aesthetic education, he tried to synthesise liberalism and elitism, making his educational project an embodiment of both the liberal ideal and the cultivated few. Curiously, this expectation of synthesis was not readily fulfilled in these two essays, at least not as straightforwardly as Mill had done elsewhere. As F. E. L. Priestley rightly points out in his comment on the Coleridge essay, those who read the essay closely might in the end be caught by surprise by ‘the relative scarcity of specific references to Bentham and his ideas.’<sup>162</sup> In fact, the same observation also applies to the essay on Bentham: in the assessment of the specific views of Bentham, the name ‘Coleridge’ did not make much appearance either. If there was any synthesis of these two completely different minds, as Mill had promised, it was never spelt out and was therefore left to be constructed by the readers themselves.

But ‘education of feelings’ remained as a vital component of Mill’s argument. Admittedly, the issue of feeling did not feature as prominently as it did in the essays previously discussed. Aiming for a thorough evaluation of the ideas of the above-mentioned thinkers, Mill was now compelled to cover a field as broad as possible, showing their specific contributions in diverse realms that ranged from law and philosophy to politics and religion. Still, the ‘education of feelings’ played an important role. Not only did this notion help Mill assess these thinkers respectively; it also provided one of those rare occasions in which the two seminal minds could, finally, be brought together as specimens of half-truths. The most distinguished component in Coleridge’s thinking, Mill argued, was the principle of ‘sympathy’ and

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<sup>161</sup> Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999) 142.

<sup>162</sup> F. E. L. Priestley, introduction, *Essays on Ethics, Religion and Society* xxx.

his poetic justification of imagination. Both were rejected by Bentham, whose philosophy, in the opinion of Mill, showed nothing but contempt for the ‘most natural and strongest feelings of human nature.’<sup>163</sup> On the other hand, as far as the means of education was concerned, Bentham’s conviction was also a potential corrective of Coleridge’s ideas. The latter was an unrealistic ‘zealot for an aristocratic government’ to conduct aesthetic education, whereas the former supplied the other portion of truth by pointing out that the only possible remedy was liberalism instead of aristocracy.<sup>164</sup> In short, while Coleridge’s affirmation of the value of inner culture rectified Bentham’s overly rationalistic views of human nature, Bentham also complemented the former with his emphasis on the importance of preserving individuality. In this way, Mill personified the controversies about aesthetic education in these two eminent thinkers.

Apart from the contrast between Bentham and Coleridge, Mill also used antithesis to portray each mind. Bentham was set in opposition to his contemporaries and predecessors who took for granted the British Constitution and the English Law; and Coleridge was contrasted specifically with eighteenth-century philosophers. Such a neat structure was very effective in showing readers what Mill wanted to highlight in each man’s thinking. Taking one example from his analysis of Coleridge and the eighteenth century, Mill concluded in his brief survey of eighteenth-century philosophy that the ‘Germano-Coleridgian doctrine’ was the result of a reaction to the eighteenth-century rationalism and, therefore, was simply everything that the past century was not. Referring to Coleridge’s idea as ‘it’ and that of the eighteenth century as ‘that,’ Mill produced a succinct list of their differences: ‘It is ontological, because that was experimental; conservative, because that was innovative; religious, because so much of that was infidel; concrete and historical, because that was abstract and metaphysical; poetical, because that was matter-of-fact and prosaic.’<sup>165</sup> The contrast was later repeated in Mill’s *Autobiography*, when he tried to illustrate his tactic of processing ‘half-truths’:

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<sup>163</sup> Mill, ‘Bentham’ 353.

<sup>164</sup> Mill, ‘Coleridge’ 401-02.

<sup>165</sup> Mill, ‘Coleridge’ 403.

The fight between the nineteenth century and the eighteenth always reminded me of the battle about the shield, one side of which was white and the other black. I marvelled at the blind rage with which the combatants rushed against one another. I applied to them, and to Coleridge himself, many of Coleridge's sayings about half truths; and Goethe's device, 'many-sidedness,' was one which I would most willingly, at this period, have taken for mine.<sup>166</sup>

Though Mill was convinced that he had 'as firm hold of one side of the truth as [...] of the other,' some later critics did not think so. The problem with his strategy is quite obvious: the contrasts are simply too tidy to be true. Do those structures of antitheses, one might ask, involve any sacrifice of details and complications? This is the very question that led Raymond Williams to repudiate the underlying principle of these essays. In Williams' view, Mill's 'comparison and contrast' here is 'completely intellectualist,' and it is doubtful whether 'those abstract opinions of opposed thinkers might profitably complement each other' in order to 'make what is called a 'correct' doctrine.'<sup>167</sup> But Williams is not just concerned with the outcome of this procedure. Be the result 'correct' or not, his further objection was raised against Mill's reductive understanding of complex ideas. 'We have to ask,' Williams proceeded, 'whether such a procedure would, even in itself, be useful, considering its tendency to isolate the 'doctrines' from those attachments, those particular valuations, those living situations, in which alone the 'doctrines' can be said to be active.'<sup>168</sup>

This critique rightly points out a potential fallacy in Mill's treatment of received ideas, and I agree that the construction of synthesis and antithesis reveals a mind that is deeply intellectualistic. On the other hand, I think William's criticism that Mill was being negligent towards the living situations of the ideas is not entirely justified, because he overlooks the sense of urgency in Mill's argument. In spite of his interest in the past, Mill was not conducting a thorough research into the history of ideas. As a contributor to periodical literature, his priority – as he had explained in 'Civilisation,' for instance, – was to influence the minds of his contemporaries. The purpose was rendered even more explicit if we think of Mill's uttermost attentiveness to the 'living

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<sup>166</sup> Mill, *Autobiography* 171.

<sup>167</sup> Williams 50.

<sup>168</sup> Williams 50.

situations' of his own age. He might be culpable for not showing a sufficiently historical vision when he analysed the philosophical ideas of the past, but the conclusion he had reached through that intellectualistic synthesis was loaded with the spirit of his time. For instance, his attempt at bringing his liberal beliefs together with the elitism modelled after Coleridgian clerisy, as we have noticed, was based on nothing else but the features and the need of his age. Without the insight into the dubious consequences of democracy, there would not be so much expectation of the leading intellects. To think of Mill as a newspaper contributor who addressed contemporary social issues, is to see him not as a philosopher but, first of all, as a moralist deeply concerned with the values and living situations of contemporary society.

On the other hand, synthesis and antithesis also contributed to Mill's eloquence as a moralist, by enhancing his skills in demonstration and persuasion. A modern critic with considerable subtlety would probably sneer at those clear-cut contraries, but Mill's contemporaries were less likely to do so. *A Grammar of Rhetoric*, published in 1826, had a whole chapter devoted to the discussion of the use of antithesis. According to the author, this intellectual device made 'the most brilliant appearance in the delineation of characters, particularly in history' and, when appropriately used, the 'beauty' of it was 'considerable.'<sup>169</sup> There is little surprise, then, that Mill, having read the works of the ancient Greek writers who were famous for their mastery of rhetoric skills, had come to acquire the same intellectual eloquence. Moreover, Mill's adversaries also confirmed the effectiveness of his eloquence. Two days after Mill's death, Abraham Hayward published in the *Times* an obituary which assessed his personality as well as intellectual achievement. Hayward's opinion of Mill was extremely unfavourable, declaring that 'many of his opinions on society and government have been generally and justly condemned' and that, 'in his more appropriate domain of mental and moral philosophy, he was engaged in unceasing

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<sup>169</sup> Alexander Jamieson, *A Grammar of Rhetoric and Polite Literature* (New Haven: A. H. Maltby, 1826) 184 and 185.

feuds.’<sup>170</sup> Despite all these deprecations, however, Hayward could not bring himself to dismiss Mill’s persuasiveness. Citing the views expressed in another article, Hayward observed that the man, as a ‘trained logician’ with ‘most wit,’ debated well in the parliament, where he ‘seldom failed to command attention’ in order to teach.<sup>171</sup> To impress and to teach – this was also what Mill did in his writings, in which the carefully constructed antithesis revealed a logician with a full command of intellectual eloquence.

Mill himself should therefore not be understood as an ‘antithesis’ to his ideal of aesthetic educator. An ideal educator, as he argued in his literary essays, was a philosopher-poet or ‘logician-poet’ who communicated to the largest body of minds through feelings and intellect, in order to bring home to them the importance of inner culture. Mill himself had tried to put the ideal into practice. The eloquence illustrated above shows his ability of making use of the treasure of logicians when he communicated with his audience; but that is only half of the picture, for Mill was not insufficient in poetic eloquence either. Although the name ‘John Stuart Mill’ never appears with the title of a ‘poet’ and probably will never do, there are moments in the essays on Bentham and Coleridge when he became almost as poetical as the perfect aesthetic educator he envisioned, especially in the use of imagery.

Mill regarded the skilful use of images as a requisite for a philosopher-poet. In his review of Tennyson, for instance, he argued that imagery was essential to good poetry because it had ‘the power of creating scenery’ with an embodied symbol; yet, more than that, it was also capable to stimulate ‘some state of human feelings’ and ‘to summon up the state of feeling itself, with a force not to be surpassed by anything but reality.’<sup>172</sup> In order to be effective, the images must show ‘precision and distinctness’ and must retain these qualities throughout the entire work, so that the feelings excited would contribute to the poetic unity. These principles led Mill to praise Tennyson’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’ with no reservation. He even refused to take extracts from the long poem but reprinted the whole work in the review, as he said, precisely because

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<sup>170</sup> Abraham Hayward, ‘John Stuart Mill,’ *Times* 10 May 1873 5, col. D.

<sup>171</sup> Hayward 5, col. D.

<sup>172</sup> Mill, ‘Tennyson’s Poems’ 399.

the sustained 'statuesqueness' of the images rendered the poetic expression of imaginations and feelings unbreakable.<sup>173</sup>

In the essays on Bentham and Coleridge, imagery also played a vital part. It not only complemented the logician's eloquence in foregrounding the contrast between those minds; integrated within a subtle moral judgment, they highlighted the personality of each thinker and, eventually, overthrew the balance that Mill appeared to maintain with that delicate structure of synthesis and antithesis. Although Coleridge's idea about cultivation was found to be a 'half-truth' because of its unrealistic support of an aristocratic agency, he was in many ways identified to be a genial teacher-saviour-prophet. As a poet, for instance, Coleridge was noted for being 'instrumental in diffusing' the 'healthier taste [...] and more intelligent canons of poetic criticism.' As a philosopher, he, too, 'promulgated' his views to the public.<sup>174</sup> But he was not just an instructor, for his cause was perceived to have a more heroic end. In religious philosophy, as Mill described, Coleridge should be honoured for having 'rescued [the principle of an endowed class] from the discredit in which the corruptions of the English Church had involved everything connected with it.'<sup>175</sup> As a saviour, Coleridge made constant defences and challenges, but far from a ruthless fighter, he was always shown to be a prophet-like saviour with a heart swelling with emotions. Thus, he 'pleaded most earnestly' for 'the liberty of criticism with respect to the Scriptures,' 'threw up his hands in dismay' when he felt dissatisfied with the progress of contemporary scholarship, and 'bewail[ed]' the pervading error of Protestant divinity.

When Mill moved from a detailed portrayal to a general summary of Coleridge, he declared: 'It is known that he did live to write down these meditations, and speculations so important will one day, it is devoutly to be hoped, be given to the world.'<sup>176</sup> This deliberately constructed historical distance – with some exaggeration, since Coleridge was actually considered a contemporary to the readers of this essay –

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<sup>173</sup> Mill, 'Tennyson's Poems' 399.

<sup>174</sup> Mill, 'Coleridge' 398.

<sup>175</sup> Mill, 'Coleridge' 444-45.

<sup>176</sup> Mill, 'Coleridge' 463-64.

conferred a legendary status to the protagonist. The farther he was removed from the audience, the more resemblance he seemed to share with those ancient prophets, while at the same time, the tone of reverence ('devoutly to be hoped' and 'given to the world') reasserted his intellectual authority. Moreover, the way the narrative was constructed also suggested the role of Coleridge as a teacher-saviour-prophet. The essay began with a brief outline of Coleridge's distinctions; shortly after that, it moved on to a lengthy discussion of eighteenth-century philosophy both on the Continent and in England. The historical narrative continued steadily until a sweeping generalisation was made concerning the problems of the past age:

There were few poets, and none of a high order; and philosophy fell mostly into the hands of men of a dry prosaic nature, who had not enough of the materials of human feeling in them to be able to imagine any of its more complex and mysterious manifestations; all of which they either left out of their theories, or introduced them with such explanations as no one who had experienced the feelings could receive as adequate.<sup>177</sup>

Hence came the final judgment: this age, according to Mill, was an age 'without earnestness' and 'smitten with an incapacity of producing deep or strong feelings, such as at least could ally itself with meditative habits.'<sup>178</sup> This was Mill's conclusion for the survey of eighteenth-century philosophy, but it was also the advent of the evaluation of Coleridge. The repeated negatives ('none of a high order,' 'dry prosaic nature,' 'not enough,' 'left out of') created an extensive metaphor which presented the philosophical landscape of the past century as a landscape of utter aridity. As the emphasis on aridity arrived at its peak, the expectation for something contrary also, naturally enough, reached a climax. Thus, Coleridge, the poet and philosopher, with his strong feelings, earnestness and the recognition of the value of imagination, was introduced as the curer of the 'dry prosaic nature,' the inability to 'imagine,' and the void of 'feelings.' He was, therefore, the ultimate saviour. No introduction could be more dramatic, and no contrast could be constructed so effectively to the advantage of

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<sup>177</sup> Mill, 'Coleridge' 430.

<sup>178</sup> Mill, 'Coleridge' 430.

the man being discussed.

Mill also painted Bentham in words, but with a completely opposite effect. Despite his claim that Bentham held at least half of the truths, the images employed betrayed his true view. The persona that Mill designed for Bentham was that of a warrior-child. The warrior role first became distinct when he described Bentham's place in intellectual history. The fame of this great thinker, Mill said, was earned by 'carrying the war of criticism and refutation, the conflict with falsehood and absurdity, into the field of practical evils [...] without intermission.'<sup>179</sup> The subsequent descriptions of Bentham's relationship with his contemporaries reinforced his warrior identity: 'It was that they were purely negative thinkers, he was positive: they only assailed error, he made it a point of conscience not to do so until he thought he could plant instead the corresponding truth.' This pinpoint contrasting between 'he' and 'they' thus went on for half a page. The antithesis constructed resembled that between Coleridge and eighteenth-century philosophers, but the effect produced was very different. In the case of Coleridge, the contrast was set between the thinker and his predecessors. As the previous analysis shows, the historical vision highlighted Coleridge as a mind more advanced than that of his predecessors and, for that matter, corrective of their faults. In the case of Bentham, however, the contrast was mostly between him and his contemporaries. Thus, the difference between 'he' and 'they' became a difference in terms of perspective rather than a divergence resulting from progress. Even the syntax gave the same impression. Mill used short brisk sentences to illustrate the disagreement between Bentham and his contemporaries. Although the explicit purpose of the illustration was to show Bentham as the superior, the contrast between 'he' and 'they,' along with the rapid syntactic shifts from one side to the other, vividly simulates a debating scenario which invited readers, however implicitly, to attach the same amount of truth to both sides. As a result, Bentham was cast primarily as a fighter instead of a teacher.

As the essay goes on, the warrior quality of Bentham becomes ever more distinct. Commenting on his utilitarian method, Mill maintained that there was little wonder

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<sup>179</sup> Mill, 'Bentham' 337.



that the man should have accomplished so much, being '[a]rmed with such a potent instrument, and wielding it with such singleness of aim,' then added that Bentham was the 'hadiest assertor' of his own view and the 'keenest detector' of the errors of others.<sup>180</sup> If sometimes Bentham could be said to be teaching, he taught in this manner: 'Principle after principle of those propounded by him is moreover making its way by infiltration into the understandings most shut against his influence, and driving nonsense and prejudice from one corner of them to another.'<sup>181</sup> Unlike Coleridge's tactic of promulgating and diffusing knowledge as a prophet of feelings, Bentham's instruction embodied a military spirit. The public mind was in general his enemy, whose territories forbade his entrance. The only choice for him to transmit his own views, therefore, was to invade their mind by making 'infiltrations' through stealthy moves and, afterwards, to declare wars by 'driving' away the nonsense of the enemies around. While Coleridge convinced the public by appealing to their intellect as well as their emotions, Bentham simply sought to conquer them.

Paradoxically, however, Bentham the war hero was also sometimes depicted in the persona of a child. Mill agreed that the thinker had achieved much, but he also pointed out the achievement was still 'far short of what his sanguine and almost boyish fancy made him flatter himself that he had accomplished.'<sup>182</sup> In a similar vein, Mill also commented that with 'neither internal experience nor external,' Bentham 'lived from childhood to the age of eighty-five in boyish health. He knew no dejection, no heaviness of heart. He never felt life a sore and a weary burthen. He was a boy to the last.'<sup>183</sup> The indication of the boy persona was clearly deprecating. At the surface level, the image seems to contradict that of the warrior, since the former was careless and boyish, while the latter was unmistakably masculine. But in my view, the contradiction could be easily resolved on the grounds of both personas being essentially egoistic. The warrior Bentham, as Mill described him, was keen to make others adopt his ideas; but rather than appealing to their sympathy and understanding,

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<sup>180</sup> Mill, 'Bentham' 347.

<sup>181</sup> Mill, 'Bentham' 347.

<sup>182</sup> Mill, 'Bentham' 347.

<sup>183</sup> Mill, 'Bentham' 354-55.

he indoctrinated them in an almost aggressive manner, positioning himself as an antagonist to his audience. The boyish Bentham had ‘neither internal experience nor external.’ But inasmuch as he did not conduct self-scrutiny or extend sympathy to other people, but only sought to make his self-will prevail, the boy was no different from the warrior. Both images revealed Bentham as an emotional invalid and, as a result, reduced the half truths held by Bentham to being ‘fractional’ truths and thus broke the balance that Mill had tried to maintain in his outward claim. Bentham, as a result, was shown to be much inferior as a teacher of public minds than his counterpart Coleridge.

The effectiveness of the images is best reflected in the audience’s response. W. L. Courtney recorded in his recollection of Mill that among all the different articles he contributed to the periodicals at that time, ‘[i]t was the Bentham article which seem[ed] to have given offence, for it revealed an attitude toward the oracle which was rather that of the critic than of the disciple.’<sup>184</sup> According to Alexander Bain, the two articles on Bentham and Coleridge made ‘a temporary alienation between Mill and his old associates, and planted in their minds a painful misgiving as to his adhering to their principles.’<sup>185</sup> Nevertheless, Bain also conceded that Mill did have the power to ‘address the feelings.’ His best speeches, as Bain said with much admiration, ‘leave nothing unsaid that could enlist the strongest feelings of the readers’ and ‘work by the force of sympathy.’<sup>186</sup> Thus, both the misgivings and the enthusiasm of his audience testified to the effectiveness of those poetic images and the power of his rhetoric. Later critics who pay attention to Mill’s rhetorical skills also tend to draw the same conclusion. In a more recent study of the essay on Bentham, for instance, Eugene R. August, examining Mill’s techniques against John Holloway’s studies of the ‘Victorian Sage,’ argues that the voice of the essay is that of a typical sage, who ‘persuade[s] his readers emotionally’ through writings that had both ‘a logical surface’ and ‘an emotional subsurface.’<sup>187</sup> For my part, I would argue that

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<sup>184</sup> W. L. Courtney, *Life of John Stuart Mill* (London, Walter Scott, 1889) 60.

<sup>185</sup> Bain 56.

<sup>186</sup> Bain 184.

<sup>187</sup> Eugene R. August, ‘Mill as Sage: The Essay on Bentham,’ *PMLA* 89 (1974) 142-53, at 142.

apart from being a sage, the voice in those two articles on Bentham and Coleridge is essentially the voice of an aesthetic educator. Through a skilful use of imagery on the one hand, and the synthesis / antithesis on the other, Mill managed to achieve the very goal that he had formerly prescribed for the philosopher-poet: to communicate through intellect and 'to summon up the state of feeling itself.' While the previous essays on poetry and civilisation presented to us a Mill who was an ardent supporter of the cause of the education of feelings, these essays, with their emotional sub-surface and logical surface, reveal Mill as the epitome of the philosopher-poet, the ideal aesthetic educator according to his own standard.

## Conclusion

By 1867, Mill had become a public moralist of established reputation, but the reception of his St. Andrews address was seriously divided. Alexander Bain, a professor at the University of Aberdeen and also a lifelong friend of Mill, criticised the speech as ‘a very lengthened performance,’ ‘a mistake’ and ‘a failure.’ According to Bain, the three-hour speech not only exhausted the patience of the audience; with too many subjects being named as compulsory, Mill’s plan for higher education showed ‘no conception of the limits of a University curriculum’ and, therefore, was bound to fail.<sup>188</sup> ‘If he had consulted me on this occasion,’ Bain regretted, ‘I should have endeavoured to impress upon him the limits of our possible curriculum [...] so as to make the very most of our time and means.’<sup>189</sup> Matthew Arnold, however, held a different opinion, even though he was often considered to be Mill’s lifelong adversary. In his *Higher Schools and Universities in Germany*, first published in 1868, Arnold drew on Mill’s authority and mentioned in particular the St. Andrews address. The speech, according to him, contained many sound principles for education and was especially laudable for its attempt to vindicate the value of classics for the cultivation of ‘high spirit.’ The whole idea, as Arnold warmly concluded, should be recognised as among ‘the best educational opinion of the country.’<sup>190</sup>

The comments by Bain and Arnold, though somehow polarising, have since formed the ‘standard answer’ in the criticism of Mill’s St. Andrews address. There seems to be a consensus among modern scholars that, since the address is allegedly concerned with the principle of education, that is exactly how it should be approached. But Mill is not remembered primarily as an educationalist; hence, many critics who analyse his ‘educational theories’ find little material to draw upon, apart from the speech itself and bits of paragraphs taken at random from his other works and, for that matter, often out of context. As a result, such criticisms give the impression that the

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<sup>188</sup> Alexander Bain, *John Stuart Mill: A Criticism with Personal Recollections* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1882) 127.

<sup>189</sup> Bain 127.

<sup>190</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Higher Schools and Universities in Germany*. (London: Macmillan and co., 1874) 186.

speech is a unique piece in Mill's career, embodying a concern that receives little systematic treatment elsewhere. Moreover, these conclusions also reflect a simple synthesis of Bain and Arnold's judgment: that Mill's project provides a cause worth fighting for (that Mill 'displays several of his chief intellectual virtues to good effect'), yet, in practice, the final aim could not possibly be achieved (because it is 'unrealistically high').<sup>191</sup> However, I contend that this standard approach to the address, though offering a general view of Mill's so-called theory for education, still leaves at least half of its intellectual significance unexplored. The speech is, in fact, a milestone in Mill's exploration of aesthetic education. So much of what he had thought and said in the past decades had now been weaved together, that the statements in the speech are in themselves succinct summaries of the essays previously analysed. A brief return to this address, therefore, shall conclude the present chapter.

Having defined aesthetic education as 'the cultivation of the beautiful' and 'the education of feelings,' Mill proceeded to call attention to the value of poetry, which, according to him, was 'the queen of arts.'<sup>192</sup> Many looked on poetry as 'an amusement or excitement, the superiority of which over others principally consisted in being that of a more refined order of minds.'<sup>193</sup> In the opinion of Mill, however, poetic works were a great 'instrument for acting on the human mind,' with a 'permanent influence on the higher region of human character.'<sup>194</sup> One could easily recognise here the voice of Mill the literary critic from a good thirty years ago. Back at that time, he had already developed the conviction that an ideal poet 'has exercised, and continues to exercise, a powerful, and mostly a highly beneficial influence over the formation and growth of not a few of the most cultivated and vigorous of the youthful minds of our time.'<sup>195</sup> His portrait of a poet changed from that of a

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<sup>191</sup> There are many works demonstrating a similar judgment. For some typical examples, one might consult Stefan Collini's introduction in *Essays on Equality, Law and Education, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 21, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1984) lvi, and Randall R. Curren, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Education* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) 85-93.

<sup>192</sup> Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews' 252.

<sup>193</sup> Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews' 252.

<sup>194</sup> Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews' 252.

<sup>195</sup> Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties' 358.

soliloquist to that of an educator and, as we can tell from his St. Andrews address, he continued to regard poetry and poets as essentially instructive.

Because of the reappearance of the subject of poetry in the address, critics often use these passages to illustrate how Mill held steadfastly to his literary interest.<sup>196</sup> But in fact, Mill's proposal for aesthetic education in the address was based on many other considerations as well. Poetry exercised a beneficial influence on human character, he argued, by exciting our feelings. It brings 'loftiness' and calms the soul but, most importantly, it 'brings home to us all those aspects of life which take hold of our nature on its unselfish side, and lead us to identify our joy and grief with the good or ill of the system of which we form a part.'<sup>197</sup> And this benefit was particularly needed by people in the present, for

[o]ne of the commonest types of character among us is that of a man all whose ambition is self-regarding, who has no higher purpose in life than to enrich or raise in the world himself and his family, who never dreams of making the good of his fellow-creatures or of his country an habitual object.<sup>198</sup>

The criticism of the 'self-regarding' ambition echoed Mill's definition of 'civilisation.' Civilised people act 'together for common purposes in large bodies' and enjoy 'the pleasure of social intercourse'; they, too, have the ambition to improve their lot, yet that ambition was anything but self-regarding.<sup>199</sup> If sympathy was once identified to be the core ingredient for the improvement of society, there is little wonder, therefore, that Mill should single out this quality again in his educational plan. Similar to what he did in the essay 'Civilisation,' Mill pointed out in the address that unselfish feeling was especially needed by an average middle / higher class Englishman. Conscience – or rather the desire to stay away from evil – made an Englishman care for his family, give 'certain sums in charity' and restrain from crime. But in Mill's judgment, this was far from enough. A man like that, he insisted, must also acquire a 'higher feeling'

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<sup>196</sup> Eugene R. August, *John Stuart Mill: A Mind at Large* (London: Vision Press, 1976) 200.

<sup>197</sup> Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews' 254.

<sup>198</sup> Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews' 253.

<sup>199</sup> Mill, 'Civilisation' 162.

that helped him look beyond his immediate circle in order to see ‘the miserable smallness of mere self in the face of this great universe, of the collective mass of our fellow creatures, in the face of past history and of the indefinite future.’<sup>200</sup> In other words, as he had expressed in ‘Civilisation,’ it is high time to equip people with courage and aspiration and to make them embrace the aesthetic of heroism.<sup>201</sup>

The speech even preserved Mill’s call for the ‘cultivated few.’ ‘You and your like,’ Mill addressed the students directly when he concluded, ‘are the hope and resource of your country in the coming generation.’ Once outside the campus, ‘[y]ou are to be a part of the public who are to welcome, encourage, and help forward the future intellectual benefactors of humanity; and you are, if possible, to furnish your contingent to the number of those benefactors.’<sup>202</sup> These words clearly echoed what Mill had said in the 1830s, when he described the ‘leading intellects’ of the day. To be sure, there was a slight difference. While before, he was convinced that such a group were only to be found in parliament and the press; here, he hoped that universities could take their share of responsibility. Nevertheless, he still had the same concern as he did thirty years ago; he was still worried about the ‘diminishing influence’ of educators in democratic society and still earnestly desired that a group of leading intellects could contribute to the advancement of civilisation. Having made this observation, one wonders if this widely recognised mistake of the speech – that Mill ignored the possible limits of curricula, as Bain had put it – was to some extent pardonable. He listed too many subjects, I think, because he had very high expectations of the audience. When he urged them to note the importance of ‘the education of feelings’ and ‘the cultivation of the beautiful’, he was actually envisaging himself as an aesthetic educator who addressed a group of future aesthetic educators that would, in time, exercise great influence on the advancement of literature, politics and, ultimately, civilisation.

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<sup>200</sup> Mill, ‘Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews’ 254.

<sup>201</sup> Mill, ‘Civilisation’ 180.

<sup>202</sup> Mill, ‘Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews’ 257.

## Chapter 2 ‘A Majestic Unity’: Matthew Arnold’s Schillerian

### Aesthetic Education

#### ‘Cromwell’ and ‘Cassandra’: Arnold and Schiller

The 1843 Newdigate Prize, an award for excellent verse composed by Oxford students, went to the author of ‘Cromwell,’ a young man named Matthew Arnold. Being a prize-poem as well as one of his earliest publications, this work marked the beginning of Arnold’s poetic career, and its success seemed to promise him a brilliant prospect. Yet, it is now no longer considered to be one of Arnold’s major works, because it has failed to impress critics who have witnessed his later achievements. For instance, Herbert W. Paul, speaking in 1902, thought ‘Cromwell’ was ‘less remarkable than ‘Alaric at Rome,’” another prize-winning poem of Arnold; George Saintsbury was also convinced that although the work was better than that of his competitors, ‘a prudent taster would perhaps have abstained [...] from predicting [in ‘Cromwell’] a real poet in the author.’<sup>203</sup> As a result, today ‘Cromwell’ hardly ever features in studies of Matthew Arnold’s poetry or poetics. The present chapter shall nonetheless begin with this somehow insignificant poem – or to be more precise, its German epitaph, which has received even less attention:

Schrecklich ist es, deiner Wahrheit  
Sterbliches Gefäß zu seyn.<sup>204</sup>

Literally translated, these lines mean ‘It is awful to be the mortal vessel of thy truth.’ The epitaph was taken from Friedrich Schiller’s poem ‘Kassandra.’ The poem depicted the Trojan priestess Cassandra calling out to Apollo, lamenting her cruel destiny of being able to foretell everything in the future, yet unable to convince other

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<sup>203</sup> Herbert W. Paul, *Matthew Arnold* (London: MacMillan, 1907) 13; and George Saintsbury, *Matthew Arnold* (New York, 1899) 42.

<sup>204</sup> Kenneth Allott, ed., *The Poems of Matthew Arnold* (London: Longmans, 1965) 13.



people. Thus when her countrymen were celebrating the wedding of Achilles and Polyxena, Cassandra, with her vision of the imminent destruction of the city, had no choice but to bear her woes alone.

So one of the most obvious questions here to be raised is why Arnold chose this passage as the epitaph of his own work, and this question becomes especially interesting when we realise that the two protagonists of the poems have in fact not much in common. The sense of helplessness seems to be the most immediate link. Whereas Cassandra is tortured by her gift of prophecy, Cromwell, however heroic his life has been, is in the end seized by death. But that is about the only similarity; while, on the other hand, the difference between these two characters is even more obvious. Although both were mortals, Cassandra's pain of being the vessel of the truth of destiny finds little echo in Cromwell. The priestess is in utter despair because she knows something that no one else could possibly imagine or even trust, while the hero in Arnold's poem, characterised by his 'dauntless will' and 'bold actions,' wins support from many. The only cruel destiny for him is death, but that is an experience he shares with all human beings. Cassandra's awful 'truth,' the truth that she is a lonely prophetess amidst a distrustful crowd, is simply not a theme in the poetic biography of Cromwell. No wonder, therefore, that Andrew Hickman, in a study of Arnold's poems, should describe the epitaph of 'Cromwell' as 'presumptuous,' suggesting the potential discrepancy between the two characters.<sup>205</sup>

I agree that Cassandra's lines might not be an appropriate summary for the life of Cromwell; nevertheless, I think the epitaph provides us with an occasion to think about the intellectual link, not between the two characters, but between the two authors. Although the epitaph from Schiller has often been ignored by critics of Arnold's poetry, the intellectual connection between this German philosopher and the Victorian poet does not go unheeded. As early as 1967, William Madden was already arguing that Schiller, as an important figure in the constellation of the 'German and English Romantics,' was a possible source of the aesthetic principles of Arnold and

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<sup>205</sup> Andrew Hickman, 'A New Direction for 'The Strayed Reveller', *Victorian Poetry* 21.2 (1983) 133-45, at 142.

his age.<sup>206</sup> Later in 1985, David Lloyd also paralleled Arnold with Schiller in ‘the politics of aesthetics’ and surmised that the latter anticipated the aesthetic theories of the former.<sup>207</sup> In a similar vein, Linda Dowling, in her study of Victorian aesthetics and liberalism, put Arnold firmly in the aesthetic tradition developed by Shaftesbury, Winckelmann, Goethe and Schiller. Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* brought a revolutionary understanding of aesthetics: it provided ‘the first moment at which the aesthetic sense is presumed to possess a power of agency in the world, not simply to register beauty in a passive way but to suggest a vital means of altering social reality.’ And this, according to Dowling, was the belief that Arnold and his fellow Victorians had adopted.<sup>208</sup> These observations inspired me in my study of Arnold’s idea of aesthetic cultivation, and I intend to make further explorations along this line. Although possible intellectual connections between Arnold and Schiller have been identified, as is shown in the examples above, none of the critics bothered to go into detail. Madden and Dowling mentioned Schiller briefly as part of a whole school that exerted an influence on the Victorians, among which Arnold was but one example. Lloyd paid more attention to the similarity between Arnold and Schiller, but he obviously hesitated to substantiate the intellectual link when he chose to maintain that Arnold was ‘anticipated’ by Schiller, instead of being ‘influenced’ by him. In fact, even if Arnold was ‘anticipated,’ this link would still appear rather feeble since his article, due to its short length, focused only on Arnold’s idea of Irish politics.

What I shall do in this chapter, therefore, is to validate the above hypotheses in a more concrete way, by showing how Arnold’s idea of aesthetic education embodied many Schillerian elements. But before embarking on my project, it is helpful to take a brief look at the reception of Schiller in Victorian English culture. From the 1820s to the mid-nineteenth century, England witnessed a steadily growing interest in Schiller.<sup>209</sup> Many nineteenth-century English newspapers, as Frederic Ewen notes in

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<sup>206</sup> William A. Madden, *Matthew Arnold: A Study of the Aesthetic Temperament in Victorian England* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1967) 205.

<sup>207</sup> David Lloyd, ‘Arnold, Ferguson and Schiller: Aesthetic Culture and the Politics of Aesthetics,’ *Culture Critique* 2 (1986) 137-69, at 138.

<sup>208</sup> Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: the Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 1996) 19.

<sup>209</sup> In his *Matthew Arnold: A Study of Aesthetic Temperament in Victorian England*, Madden offers a brief

his study, exalted Schiller to 'sainthood,' while, according to an anthology of Schiller's poems and plays, published in 1889, most of the English translations of Schiller's works had appeared by the 1840s.<sup>210</sup> The reputation of the German 'saint' rested not only on his poetry and drama, which became almost immediately popular once they were translated; English readers also showed great interest in his aesthetic philosophy. Though much more difficult to digest than his poetic and fictional works, Schiller's aesthetic ideas received much attention. For instance, *The Athenaeum*, a magazine of solid literary reputation at the time, published reviews of Schiller's works and ideas in almost every issue from 1844 to 1852; and among all the works, it introduced with special care Schiller's correspondence with Korner and his philosophical ideal expressed in the discussion of art.

The finest appraisal of Schiller's aesthetic ideas came from two individuals: Thomas Carlyle and Edward Bulwer Lytton. The former began to publish the first English biography of Schiller in 1823; the latter, in the 1840s, devoted considerable time and effort to translating Schiller's poems. Carlyle, in *The Life of Friedrich Schiller*, noted that Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (hereafter referred to as Aesthetic Letters), which, charting the 'progress to the pinnacles of true human grandeur,' well served his end to redeem modern men who were 'isolated on this fragment of the universe.' Schiller was also right, according to Carlyle, to point out that the source for grandeur lay in the internal world of human beings, and that aesthetic cultivation should address the 'inmost nature' of men by calling upon them 'to rise into a calm cloudless height of internal activity and peace.'<sup>211</sup> But Carlyle did not just paraphrase Schiller. Being a spokesman of his time, he was eager to show the

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summary of Schiller's influence on British intelligentsia in the mid-nineteenth century, with special attention to Carlyle and Bulwer Lytton, whom he identifies as the possible major sources of Arnold's knowledge of Schiller. Madden's survey is of great help. The only problem, in my view, is that, by focusing exclusively on these two figures, his depiction somehow ignores the general intellectual environment. In addition, Madden made a mistake when he claimed that, up to the year 1967 'there is no adequate study of Schiller's reception in England' (210, n20). In fact, such a work was already in existence. In *The Prestige of Schiller in England: 1788-1859*, published in 1932, Frederic Ewen conducted a more comprehensive, though less pointed, study of Schiller's influence in England.

<sup>210</sup> Frederic Ewen, *The Prestige of Schiller in England, 1788-1859* (New York: Columbia UP, 1932) 207. For a translation of Schiller's plays and poems, see Henry Morley, ed., *Schiller's Poems and Plays* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1889).

<sup>211</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *The Life of Friedrich Schiller: Comprehending an Examination of His Works* (New York: AMS, 1969) 114.

ways in which Schiller's aesthetic theory could benefit English culture in the nineteenth century. The whole scheme of Schiller, Carlyle maintained, 'soar[ed] into a brighter region, very far beyond the ken of our 'Utilities' and 'Reflex-sense'.'<sup>212</sup> The capitalised 'Utilities' was an obvious reference to Utilitarianism, which was notorious for its slighting of art and literature; the 'Reflex-sense,' on the other hand, was a key concept in nineteenth-century neurology, which explained the function of the inner world from a thoroughly scientific perspective.<sup>213</sup> Schiller's aesthetic ideas, Carlyle believed, by soaring 'into a brighter region,' provided an alternative and, for that matter, a superior interpretation of humanity; for this reason, they should be cherished by readers.

Bulwer's evaluation attached even more significance to Schiller's idea of aesthetic education. When his translation of the *Poems and Ballads of Schiller* came out, Bulwer prefaced it with a biographical sketch of the author. Part of this sketch was conducted as a comparative study between Schiller and his contemporary Johann Gottfried von Herder, who had also developed a theory of aesthetics. In Bulwer's views, both Schiller's and Herder's theory of aesthetics were built upon the experience that they had gained from real life, but they approached these through very different means. Whereas Herder sought common interests in humanity in various 'broad and popular topics,' Schiller concentrated on aesthetic cultivation, 'that development of ideal beauty' which was 'regarded as the flower and apex of human accomplishment.'<sup>214</sup> In fact, Bulwer would go so far as to argue that aesthetic cultivation was a theme that dominated Schiller's entire intellectual pursuit. Thus at the end of his short biography, Bulwer concluded that the career of Schiller could be viewed as an attempt 'to ennoble'; as both his poetry and his philosophy, as well as his letters on aesthetic education, were designed to impart knowledge of the beautiful, 'to make the great and pure popular; to educate the populace up to purity and greatness.'<sup>215</sup> Bulwer's comments on Schiller won approval from the public. A

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<sup>212</sup> Carlyle 114.

<sup>213</sup> Carlyle 114.

<sup>214</sup> Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1868) 468.

<sup>215</sup> Bulwer Lytton 487.

review of his translation in the *North British Review*, for instance, also sang high praise of Schiller's 'deep philosophy' of aesthetic cultivation.<sup>216</sup>

Arnold knew Schiller's works very well. The epitaph in 'Cromwell' was but one example of how he borrowed from Schiller. His 1853 *Preface*, as I shall discuss at length in the following part, also quoted Schiller's comment on the function of art and, along with this, the emphasis on the ideal man as a complete aesthetic being. Another Schillerian quotation, 'Im engen Kreis verengert sich der Sinn' (in a narrow sphere, the mind becomes narrowed', from Schiller's play *Wallenstein*), which appeared several times in Arnold's notebooks, also signified Arnold's attempt to invoke Schiller in his own condemnation of English sectarian narrowness.<sup>217</sup> Even in works which made no explicit reference to Schiller, the influence could still be detected. Thus, 'The Forsaken Merman,' argues Park Honan, is 'a perfect illustration of Schiller's essay on the naive [*On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*].'<sup>218</sup>

Among all Schillerian ideas that Arnold borrowed, aesthetic teaching always appeared with special emphasis. In 1868, some twenty years after the first publication of his translation of Schiller's works, Bulwer reprinted the biography of Schiller in the collected *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, and sent one copy to Arnold. Upon receiving it, Arnold wrote back to express his gratitude. He told Bulwer that, although some essays in the volume were published in the *Quarterly* anonymously and were therefore missed by him, others were already familiar, reminding him of his readings of Schiller back in the Oxford days. In particular, Arnold recalled the 'transcending effect' that the biography had produced in his mind. 'The *Life of Schiller*,' he recalled, 'came into my hands just at the moment I wanted something of the kind. I shall never forget what they then gave to me – the sense of a wider horizon, the anticipation of Germany, the opening into the great world.'<sup>219</sup> For those who had read Schiller's aesthetic philosophy, the descriptions of 'transcending,' 'wider horizon' and 'great world' were

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<sup>216</sup> Anonymous, 'Review of *Poems and Ballads of Schiller*,' *North British Review* 3 (1845) 154-64, at 162.

<sup>217</sup> See Arnold's *Preface* vii, and Howard Foster Lowry, Karl Young and Waldo Hilary Dunn eds., *The Notebooks of Matthew Arnold* (London: Oxford UP, 1952) 374, 392, 415, 426 and 435.

<sup>218</sup> Park Honan, *Matthew Arnold: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981) 93.

<sup>219</sup> Victor Alexander Lytton, *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson* vol. ii (London: Macmillan, 1913) 446.

telling enough. What Arnold experienced through his contact with Schiller's work was exactly what Schiller intended to achieve through aesthetic education: to exalt human beings from confined individuals to free spirits and to transform the fragments of reality to greatness and nobility. This was also what Arnold himself would deliver to his Victorian English audience. He was keen to share the aesthetic teachings that he had received from Schiller. In a letter dated January 1865, he told his friend Constance de Rothschild: 'Tell your sister not to poison her mind with too much light literature, but to go back to the Aesthetic Letters.'<sup>220</sup> In this sense, the brief comment on Bulwer's essay was a testimony to both what Arnold had received and what he wanted to pass on. Schiller's ideal of human nature and his view of humanity offered a philosophical anchor; or, to borrow Arnold's own words, 'a point of view,' a view, as we shall see, that helped him to assess the cultural and social milieu of his own time.

In the following part of the thesis, I shall begin with a brief analysis of Schiller's idea of aesthetic education, and then investigate Arnold's 'aesthetic education' with regard to three aspects: his poetry, his literary criticism and his criticism of Victorian society. While still identifying Schiller as the originator of a tradition that shaped the thinking of many Victorians including Arnold, I shall argue for a more prominent influence that Schiller held specifically over Arnold, in particular his aesthetics. Taking up Dowling's exposition of Schiller's belief that aesthetics was a transforming power in society, I shall demonstrate that Arnold followed Schiller not only in his belief in aesthetics as a social agency; he was also truly Schillerian in the sense that his proposal for aesthetic education embraced the very concepts that Schiller developed and demonstrated their shared anxieties. To recognise this link, I believe, would benefit our understanding of both men. With regard to Schiller, a study of this kind offers a more concrete illustration of his impact on Victorian thinking; whereas, in the case of Arnold, it highlights an intellectual source which has been pointed out before, but has so far been treated only discursively.

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<sup>220</sup> Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold: 1829-1859*, vol. 2, ed. Cecil Y. Lang (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1996) 369.

Above all, a study of this kind will also help us to better understand Arnold as an aesthetic educator. What kind of aesthetic education did he advocate? Literature and art are the subjects that come most immediately to those who try to answer this question. Matthew Potolsky, for example, describes Arnold's 'theory of aesthetic education' as cultivation through 'beauty of art and literature'<sup>221</sup> Ralph A. Smith also alleges that he has found in Arnold's writings much concern for aesthetic education, that is 'a conviction of the importance of excellence in art education.'<sup>222</sup> In both cases, Arnold the aesthetic educator is portrayed as a devotee to the artistic and the literary, as if an aesthetic educator does nothing more than give instructions on how to read poetry or how to interpret art. Such a characterisation demonstrates a rather superficial understanding of Arnold's thinking. If we make further inquiries, some questions are bound to arise: for instance, did Arnold speak for all kinds of art and literature? If not, what was his favourite? Why did he take so much trouble to convince his audience of the value of those works? Therefore, to summarise Arnold's view of aesthetic education simply as cultivation through literary means is to ignore the complexity of his thinking. Also ignored is the role of Arnold himself, who, in his writings, spoke both as a poet and as a critic. If we only focus on his literary criticism, 'Arnold's idea of aesthetic education' would become relevant only to Arnold the critic, while the poet and his poetry are generally dismissed as if they have nothing to contribute. The answer I offer, and which I shall elaborate later in this chapter, is that Arnold is essentially a Schillerian aesthetic educator: he not only incorporated Schiller's concepts of 'aesthetic man' and 'aesthetic state' in his poetry, literary criticism and social criticism; also like Schiller, he propounded an aesthetic education that treated beauty as a power of agency which had the potential to transform society.

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<sup>221</sup> Matthew Potolsky, 'Hardy, Shaftesbury, and Aesthetic Education,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 46.4 (2006) 864.

<sup>222</sup> Ralph A. Smith, *Culture and the Arts in Education: Critical Essays on Shaping Human Experience* (New York: Teachers College P, 2006) xvii.

## **‘One Aim, One Business, One Desire’: Aesthetic Education in ‘The Scholar-Gipsy’**

### **‘The Unity of the Ideal’: Schiller’s Aesthetic Education**

Friedrich Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, first published in 1795, was largely a response to the aesthetic philosophy developed by Baumgarten and Kant. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten coined the term ‘aesthetics.’ which appeared first in his voluminous *Aesthetica*, beginning in 1790. Arguing against the pure rationalistic intellectualism represented by Descartes and Leibniz, Baumgarten defined aesthetics as ‘scientia cognitionis sensitivae’ (‘a science of sensuous knowledge’ or ‘a science of sensitive cognition’). It had been a long-held notion that to know an object through rational cognition was different from knowing it through aesthetic sensibility. But unlike the pure rationalists who saw nothing useful in sense perceptions, Baumgarten insisted that aesthetic sensibility played an important role in our cognition of the world, and that it was simply irreplaceable by conceptual knowledge. Thus, through coining the word ‘aesthetics,’ Baumgarten had in effect justified the autonomy of sensuous knowledge. Aesthetics, as far as it dealt with sensuous knowledge, he maintained, must also be regarded as an autonomous power in our perception and understanding of objects.

Although Baumgarten’s philosophy signified a departure from rationalism, his aesthetic was still understood in terms of rational principles: a ‘science’ that contributed to our cognition of the world. This point was seized upon by Immanuel Kant, who declared it a major deficiency. In a note in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argued that Baumgarten’s aesthetics was problematic in that ‘he hoped to bring our critical judging of the beautiful under rational principles, and to raise the rules for such judging to the level of a lawful science.’ The effort, Kant believed, was



‘futile.’<sup>223</sup> To judge something as beautiful, in Kant’s opinion, was not to give an account of the attributes of that object; rather, the judgment should be referred to ourselves, that is, our inner feeling as well as the condition of our consciousness. According to this principle, aesthetics dealt with our subjective self rather than with the objective reality.

‘[I]t is Kantian principles,’ said Schiller, at the beginning of his *Aesthetic Letters*, ‘upon which the propositions that follow will for the most part be based.’<sup>224</sup> But there is in fact a considerable difference between them. Both Baumgarten and Kant were occupied with the autonomous status of aesthetics as a subject. By the time Schiller put forward his philosophy, however, the status of aesthetics had already been firmly established. Hence his chief purpose was to examine the function or, in his own words, the ‘spiritual service’ that aesthetics could provide for human beings. Because of his concern for educative influence, the word ‘aesthetic’ in Schiller’s discourse acquired a different connotation. It no longer described a special process of cognition, as Baumgarten had indicated; nor did it refer to the Kantian idea of the judgment of taste and beauty. Rather, it designated a condition of humanity, in which man, through a cultivation of beauty, achieves a harmony between the rational self and the sensuous self.<sup>225</sup> Thus Schiller’s analysis of beauty, as the title of his work suggests, put equal emphasis on ‘aesthetic’ and ‘education.’ Beauty, as he understood it, was essentially a spiritual synthesis, the most important quality of the ideal humanity; and, for that reason, it was the aim after which the cultivation of man should always strive.<sup>226</sup>

However, philosophical inquiries into the past were not the only source of inspiration. Schiller’s aesthetic philosophy also contained another type of response, namely a response to the social and cultural conditions in eighteenth-century Europe. While his predecessors had opened up a new field by making the study of aesthetic education possible, the social realities made that study all too necessary. In the second letter, Schiller declared that ‘I should not care to be living in another century, or to

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<sup>223</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996) Section 1, A21 / B35.

<sup>224</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 24.

<sup>225</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 86.

<sup>226</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 99.

have worked for another,' and that he firmly believed that man should 'submit his decision to the needs and the taste of his century.'<sup>227</sup> But he also conceded that the decisions made by his contemporaries were perhaps not too brilliant. Thus the age, lamented Schiller, was an age of 'Necessity' and 'Utility,' which 'bend[ed] a degraded humanity beneath its tyrannous yoke' and to which 'all powers must do service and all talents swear allegiance.'<sup>228</sup>

By the age of 'utility,' Schiller referred to the sweeping influence of the Enlightenment, which had begun in the seventeenth century and flourished in the eighteenth. As one of the major intellectual and cultural movements in human history, the Enlightenment is particularly known for its passion for natural laws. Knowledge of the natural world accumulated at an unprecedented rate, producing ground-breaking discoveries by scientists such as Newton, Kepler and Galileo. Indeed, the success of natural science was so impressive that many people at the time were determined to apply the laws of nature to the study of various other fields. The assertion by the French mathematician and philosopher Jean Lerond d'Alembert in 1759 illustrated well the mindset of the day. Knowledge of natural laws, he rejoiced, had not only led to 'the discovery and application of a new method of philosophising' but had brought about a revolution in almost all aspects of intellectual life:

[T]he kind of enthusiasm which accompanies discoveries, a certain exaltation of ideas which the spectacle of the universe produces in us – all these causes have brought about a lively fermentation of minds, spreading through nature in all directions like a river which has burst its dams.<sup>229</sup>

D'Alembert was enthused by the vision that discoveries in nature would change the mind as well as the world 'in all directions.' But his simile created an unintended irony. Would the river that 'has burst its dams' cause disaster? Would knowledge of nature that spread 'in all directions' bring irredeemable loss to other fields? The mathematician was perhaps too intoxicated to notice it, but some people believed that

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<sup>227</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 25.

<sup>228</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 26.

<sup>229</sup> Thomas L. Hankins, *Science and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP) 1.

the damage was real, particularly in the realm of art and literature. As the historian Thomas L. Hankins explained in his exploration of the Enlightenment age, the study of natural science was considered superior to the study of art and literature because science ‘progressed.’ While poets and artists struggled in the swamp of archaic expressions and principles by ancient masters, natural philosophers always managed to find something new.<sup>230</sup> Although in eighteenth-century Europe, scientists and natural philosophers were still regarded, and regarded themselves, as ‘men of letters,’ as the Enlightenment progressed, they came to enjoy a much higher reputation than those who excelled in artistic and literary subjects. Thus as a study shows, a common – and often quite successful – career path at that time was to first establish a reputation in the realm of science and then proceed to political and social areas.<sup>231</sup> Even people who were generally considered literary took an active interest in science and, for that matter, accepted the status quo. Voltaire, for example, performed scientific experiments, propagated a Newtonian system and deemed the decline of art and literature as a ‘regrettable necessity.’<sup>232</sup> This was the cultural context in which Schiller spoke; yet, he obviously held a very different notion than the mainstream. His condemnation of the age of ‘necessity’ made it clear that he might have retorted to Voltaire by arguing that decline was regrettable, but by no means necessary.

Meanwhile, people’s attention was also drawn increasingly away from art and literature by the political turmoil of the day. The French Revolution, beginning in 1789, shook the entire continent. Initially, the bold strive for freedom by the French people won much support from German intelligentsia. Many regarded their actions as the beginning of a new era, the commencement of a ‘new dawn.’<sup>233</sup> As the revolution continued, however, anxiety gradually replaced applause. The execution of Louis XVI, the Reign of Terror, and the disorder everywhere seemed to have turned the promising new dawn into a terrifying nightmare. The change of attitude was well reflected in Schiller. He had been tracking the progress in France through newspapers; but in the

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<sup>230</sup> Hankins 9.

<sup>231</sup> William E. Burns, *Science in the Enlightenment: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2003) 94.

<sup>232</sup> Burns 94.

<sup>233</sup> Ehrhard Bahr and Thomas P. Saine, *The Internalized Revolution: German Reactions to the French Revolution, 1789-1989* (New York: Garland, 1992) 123.

year 1793, about a month after Louis XVI was put to death, he told his friend in a private letter that ‘I’m so revolted by these butchers that I haven’t been able to read a French newspaper for the last fortnight.’<sup>234</sup> His Aesthetic Letters also alluded to the event. In the second letter, he noticed that ‘[t]he eyes of the philosophers are fixed as expectantly as those of the worldling upon the political arena where at present, so it is believed, the high destiny of mankind is being decided.’<sup>235</sup> And from this he went on to explain that the letters were motivated by the recognition that every individual was ‘an interest party both as human being and as citizen of the world.’ For this reason, before they devoted themselves to politics, revolutions and even killing, they must first of all, have ‘a heart [...] dedicated with a fine enthusiasm to the welfare of humanity.’<sup>236</sup> The Aesthetic Letters, therefore, embodied Schiller’s attempt to solve the problem that the French Revolution – and the Enlightenment as well – had somehow failed to solve: to produce qualified citizens of the world through adequate cultivation of the ‘laws of beauty’ and, thereby, to promote the welfare of humanity.

In the fifth letter, we find Schiller’s fiercest criticism of ‘the present age’ and of ‘contemporary humanity,’ the most distinctive feature of which was found to be the loss of order and the overgrowth of individualism:

It is true that deference to authority has declined, that its lawlessness is unmasked, and, although still armed with power, sneaks no dignity any more; men have awoken from their long lethargy and self-deception, and by an impressive majority they are demanding the restitution of their inalienable rights.<sup>237</sup>

Schiller took no interest in going back to the old days in order to have authority fully restored. As he recognised, the lawlessness, however alarming it was, nevertheless provided ‘a *physical* possibility’ of ‘making true freedom the basis of political association.’<sup>238</sup> The real problem was the lack of ‘*moral* possibility.’ In other words, in order to acquire dignity and inalienable rights, people should not only challenge the

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<sup>234</sup> Quoted from H. B. Garland, *Schiller* (London: George G. Harrap, 1949) 153.

<sup>235</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 26.

<sup>236</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 27.

<sup>237</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 34.

<sup>238</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 35.

old ‘rotten foundations’ but, more importantly, they must be morally cultivated so that a new foundation would be possible. However, in Schiller’s view, this task was extremely demanding, for neither the lower nor the higher orders of society demonstrated any competency. While the former was ‘hastening with ungovernable fury to their brutal satisfaction,’ the latter became victims of their own intellectual refinement and material comfort. As a result, ‘selfishness’ was deeply embedded everywhere, and ‘we experience all the contagions and all the calamities of community without the accompaniment of a communal spirit.’<sup>239</sup>

And it was not just the community that was being torn apart; the cultivation was also defective to such an extent that it violated ‘the whole of humanity.’ Thus in the sixth letter, by contrasting modern humanity with that of ancient Greece, Schiller described the devastating consequence of ‘enlarged experience and more precise speculation.’ Instead of each individual possessing the whole of humanity like the ancient Greeks, at present,

the image of the race is scattered on an amplified scale among individuals [...] in a fragmentary way, not in different combinations, so that you have to go the rounds from individual to individual in order to gather the totality of the race.<sup>240</sup>

Hence the consequence would be twofold. It produced in every member of society a ‘narrow heart,’ through which each one suffered from the ‘dismemberment of their being.’<sup>241</sup> In the meanwhile, it also gave rise to ‘a ruinous conflict’ that ‘set [human nature’s] harmonious powers at variance.’<sup>242</sup> In this way, the lack of wholeness produced both conflicts between individuals and conflicts within them. Hence people with a business turn of mind, being restricted by their own sense of practicality, would estimate ‘all experience whatsoever by a particular fragment of experience,’ while those who were dominated by the speculative spirit would, on the contrary, strive after ‘imperishable possessions in the realm of ideas’ and eventually lose themselves in

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<sup>239</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 36.

<sup>240</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 38.

<sup>241</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 43.

<sup>242</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 39.

utter subjectivity.<sup>243</sup> The best treatment for both, Schiller insisted, was to be found in a cultivation that encouraged people to ‘submit the multiplicity in him [the individual] to the unity of the ideal’ so that they could transcend the limits that the external practicalities had enforced on them and, ultimately, become an ‘aesthetic man.’<sup>244</sup>

It is the same concern with unity that informs Schiller’s idea of the ‘aesthetic state,’ an idea that I shall further analyse in the last section of this chapter. The condition of the state, though apparently a political concept, is in Schiller’s view closely associated with the condition of human nature. Thus instead of discussing practical mechanisms such as institutions and legislations, his *Aesthetic Letters* explored the political entity with particular attention to its relationship with man, especially his internal world. Every individual man, Schiller observed, ‘carries in disposition and determination a pure ideal man within himself,’ and it was natural for this ideal to find its correspondent form in the state. Thus, ‘[t]his pure human being, who may be recognized more or less distinctly in every person, is represented by the State, the objective and, so to say, canonical form in which the diversity of persons endeavors to unite itself.’<sup>245</sup> This stress on unity and the disparagement of multiplicity appeared several times throughout the *Aesthetic Letters*. As later critics, such as H. B. Garland, have rightly noted, the unity that worked against multiplicity is the main theme in Schiller’s *Aesthetic Letters* and, for that matter, a key point in his principle of aesthetic education, which aims at the ‘idealistic and objective,’ ‘ignores incidental and transitory details and concerns itself with essentials.’<sup>246</sup> This was the main principle for Schiller; yet, as we shall see in the following part, it was also the very principle on which Matthew Arnold constructed his own aesthetic ideal.

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<sup>243</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 42.

<sup>244</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 46.

<sup>245</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 31.

<sup>246</sup> Garland 166.

## The Binding Effect of Imagination: the Aesthetic of ‘The Scholar-Gipsy’

One of Arnold’s earliest portrayals of the Schillerian ‘aesthetic man’ is found in ‘The Scholar-Gipsy,’ a poem published in 1853. Before we try to make any connection with Schiller, however, I will first demonstrate in this section how the poem as a whole constitutes an ‘aesthetic education’; and in order to do so, I will give a brief analysis of Joseph Glanvill’s *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661), which Arnold purchased in 1844 and which then appeared in his reading list in October 1845.<sup>247</sup> To turn to Glanvill, here it should be noted, is not to diverge from the thesis of the present chapter; as the following analysis suggests, knowledge of Arnold’s adaptation of Glanvill actually testifies to the Victorian poet’s interest in the education of the internal world and, in that way, reveals him – and even Glanvill, for that matter – to be a fellow explorer of Schiller. The book by Glanvill recorded the anecdote of ‘a Lad in the University of Oxford,’ who was forced by poverty to leave his studies and then found company among ‘Vagabond Gypsies.’<sup>248</sup> Having spent some time with the gypsies, the young man met some old acquaintances, to whom he explained that ‘the people he went with were not such *impostures* as they were taken for, but that they had a traditional kind of *learning* and could do wonders by the power of *imagination*.’<sup>249</sup> His audience was of course suspicious, so the young man gave them a demonstration of the special gipsy art. He left them to talk with each other, then returned and gave a full account of their conversation. When asked for an explanation for this wonder, the young man said that ‘what he did was by the power of *Imagination*, his *Phancy* binding theirs [...] and that when he had compass’d the whole *secret*, some parts of which he said he was yet ignorant of, he intended to leave their company, and give the world an account of what he had learned.’<sup>250</sup>

Many critics, fascinated by Arnold’s poem and Glanvill’s story, have been trying

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<sup>247</sup> Kenneth Allott, ‘Matthew Arnold’s Reading-Lists in Three Early Diaries,’ *Victorian Studies* 2.3 (1959) 254-66 at 257.

<sup>248</sup> Joseph Glanvill, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* 196.

<sup>249</sup> Glanvill 197.

<sup>250</sup> Glanvill 198.

to identify the exact influence the story held on Arnold. Alan Grob finds in Arnold and Glanvill a shared interest in ‘the hypnotic wonders,’ and therefore concludes that the poem signifies Arnold’s affinity with Romantic poetic traditions.<sup>251</sup> Anthony H. Harrison, on the other hand, believes that the poem is in essence highly topical. With a brief survey of ‘the gypsy problem’ in mid-Victorian England, Harrison argues that Glanvill’s story elicits Arnold’s interest in the ‘ongoing controversy over English gypsies’ in his own days.<sup>252</sup> Both interpretations hold ground. But here I would like to draw attention to a passage from Glanvill’s work which, in my opinion, shall offer a better clue on what Arnold tried to convey through the character of the Scholar-Gipsy. In his preface to *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, Glanvill asserted that ‘[t]he knowledge I teach, is *ignorance*, and methinks the Theory of our own natures, should be enough to learn it us.’<sup>253</sup> Although different kinds of theoretical accounts of life existed at the time, Glanvill observed that, regarding human life, there were still many mysteries that remained unsolved:

We see, we hear, and outward objects affect our other senses; we understand, we will, we imagine, and remember; and yet know no more of the immediate reasons of most of these common functions. [...] We love, we hate, we joy, we grieve; passions annoy us, and our minds are disturb’d by those corporeal estuations. Nor yet can we tell how these should reach our *unbodied selves*, or how the Soul should be affected by these heterogeneous agitations.<sup>254</sup>

The ‘ignorance’ that Glanvill tried to teach, therefore, was the ignorance of sensuous perceptions and the inner world. His work aimed to explain the working of sensuous perceptions by first of all highlighting their complexities and the need to understand those complexities.

Glanvill’s story of the Scholar-Gipsy served the same purpose. The account of the mysterious character was followed by an exploration of the ‘mechanism’ of imagination, which Glanvill described as a process in which the brain received impressions through sensuous contact with external objects and then passed the

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<sup>251</sup> Alan Grob, *A Longing like Despair* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2002) 200.

<sup>252</sup> Antony H. Harrison, *The Cultural Production of Matthew Arnold* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2009) 117-18.

<sup>253</sup> Glanvill, preface.

<sup>254</sup> Glanvill, preface.



knowledge on to other minds, just ‘as it is in *Musical Strings* tuned *Unisons*.’<sup>255</sup> This declaration has led some critics to regard Glanvill as a pioneer in modern psychology.<sup>256</sup> But the fact that he put so much emphasis on the primacy of sensuous perceptions, the ‘*unbodyed* selves’ and, above all, on the workings of imagination, easily reminds us of the aesthetic philosophy that was going to be developed by Kant, Shaftesbury and Schiller, whose major works all started from the same affirmation of the value of aesthetic experience. In this sense, it is also justifiable to say that Glanvill’s work pioneered the study of aesthetics, with the anecdote of the Scholar-Gipsy being a seventeenth-century exploration of the aesthetic experience of human life.

When Arnold adopted the character of the Scholar-Gipsy from Glanvill, he also took over his exploration into the binding effects of imagination. The poem begins in the world of the poet, who lies on the grassland, looking at the ‘Oxford towers’ on ‘a summer’s day’ (ll. 20 and 30). The specification of time and location, along with the detailed description of the environment – the ‘scarlet poppies,’ the ‘yellowing stalks,’ the ‘perfumed showers,’ the ‘bleating of the folded flocks,’ the ‘distant cries of reapers in the corn,’ and Glanvill’s book that lies on the grass nearby – gives a vivid sense of the poet’s world in the present. From the fourth stanza on, however, as the poet begins to wonder about the mysterious Scholar-Gipsy, he becomes gradually removed from the scene of the summer’s day. There is first of all a brief summary of Glanvill’s story:

[...] that the gipsy-crew,  
His mates, had arts to rule as they desired  
The workings of men’s brains,  
And they can bind them to what thoughts they will. (ll. 44-47)

And from there, the poet falls into a daydream. While in the previous stanzas he is firmly situated in his own reality, now his thoughts start to wander, and the world he experiences is no longer the summer’s day at present, but the reality of the

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<sup>255</sup> Glanvill 201.

<sup>256</sup> H. Stanely Redgrove and I. M. L. Redgrove, *Joseph Glanvill and Psychological Research in the 17th Century*, 1921. (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2003) 30.

Scholar-Gipsy or, to be more precise, the Scholar-Gipsy's world as the poet envisions it.

But this transition is gradual. In the seventh stanza, the poet only begins to sense an intimacy with the Scholar-Gipsy. Feeling that 'I myself seem half to know thy looks,' he is still unsure where to find the curious figure. So he asks the shepherds 'if thou hast passed their quiet place' and wonders on his own 'if thou haunt'st their shy retreats' (ll. 65 and 70). But soon the uncertainty is replaced by convictions, as if a vision, freshly developed yet blurred, is now gaining more and more clarity as it is gradually brought into focus. Thus, instead of 'ifs' and 'wonder,' the poet exclaims, with much excitement:

For most, I know, thou lov'st retired ground!  
Thee at the ferry Oxford riders blithe,  
    Returning home on summer-nights, have met  
Crossing the stripling Thames at Bab-lock-hithe,  
    Trailing in the cool stream they fingers wet,  
        As the punt's rope chops round;  
And leaning backward in a pensive dream,  
    And fostering in thy lap a heap of flowers  
    Plucked in shy fields and distant Wychwood bowers,  
And thine eyes resting on the moonlit stream. (ll. 71-80)

The four stanzas that follow all adopt the same structure and style, each one giving a detailed description of how the Scholar-Gipsy roams across the land in a different season. So now the poet has become fully immersed into the reality of the Scholar-Gipsy. He not only confirms the factuality of his vision through positive statements ('I know, thou lov'st retired ground!'); the sense of realness is also intensified by details. And they are not just details from the external world, for the poet is now also able to penetrate the inner world of the Scholar-Gipsy and, thereby, to see what he sees ('thine eyes resting on the moonlit stream'), to sense what he senses ('cool stream,' 'fingers wet') and even to reach his psychological depth, learning his 'pensive dream.' Hence following Glanvill's example, Arnold's poem provides an equally substantial illustration of the binding effects of imagination as

well as an illustration of how it is possible to know and feel what others know and feel; only this time it is not the Scholar-Gipsy who gets access to others' minds, but the poetic speaker who, through the quest for the Scholar-Gipsy, becomes increasingly identified with the mysterious character.

Nevertheless, the poem is not a simple repetition of Glanvill's anecdote, for Arnold does give it new significance. According to the original plot, the Oxford lad continues his gipsy life after chatting with his old acquaintances, and no one is to meet him again. But the poem is an account from the perspective of a nineteenth-century speaker. Therefore, even after the story of the Scholar-Gipsy comes to an end, the story of the speaker still carries on. Hence the speaker's exclamation in the fourteenth stanza: 'But what – I dream!' (l. 131) Now the poet suddenly realises that the wandering Scholar-Gipsy, however vivid he seems, is actually a person who lived 'two hundred years ago' (l. 131). This revelation gives rise to a twist in the theme of the poem. Many critics believe that Arnold has overthrown Glanvill's conclusion. For example, Kenneth Allott, the editor of Arnold's poems, notes that the exclamation, echoing Keats' question 'Was it a vision, or a waking dream' in 'Ode to a Nightingale,' features a Romantic convention and therefore suggests the fragility of the bonds of imagination.<sup>257</sup> But I think Allott misses one important point, that is, Keats' question appears at the very end of his poem, while in Arnold's work, it is raised in the middle. Keats asks the question without supplying the answer, so the elaborate delineation of the nightingale is turned into a vision which is mysterious yet fragile. In Arnold's poem, however, the revelation both concludes the vision previously described *and* signifies the poet's entrance (or re-entrance) into his own world. Thus the poem continues in the next stanza:

-- No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours!  
For what wears out the life of mortal men?  
'Tis that from change to change their being rolls;  
'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,

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<sup>257</sup> Kenneth Allott, ed, *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, 338, footnote 50.

Exhaust the energy of strongest souls  
And numb the elastic powers. (ll. 140-45)

Now that the poet has returned to his own world, his feeling about it is completely changed. Previously, he was intoxicated by the pastoral scene, but now, the quest awakes him to the bleakness of his own world and, in particular, the contrast between the fate of modern men and the life of the Scholar-Gipsy. Dream or not, as he comes to believe, the two-hundred-years' gap does not prevent the Scholar-Gipsy from acting as an antidote for the 'worn-out life' of the present. In this way, the poem does not overthrow Glanvill's conclusion but, instead, moves on from an illustration of the binding effects of imagination to a criticism of the present. It now seeks to confront the reality of the nineteenth century by demonstrating the Scholar-Gipsy's value for the modern world; and this is the point where an even closer analogy between Arnold and Schiller begins.

### **Against Multitudinousness: the Scholar-Gipsy as a Schillerian Aesthetic Ideal**

The fact that the poet discovers important messages for his own age by imaginatively binding himself to the Scholar-Gipsy is a fine illustration of what Schiller described about imagination. 'On the wings of imagination,' he said in *Aesthetic Letters*,

Man leaves the narrow bounds of the present, in which mere animality is enclosed, in order to strive forward to an unbounded future; but while the infinite rises before his dazed imagination, his heart has not yet ceased to live in the particular and to wait upon the instant.<sup>258</sup>

Glanvill's story showed how the binding effect could eliminate spatial distance between an individual and his fellow beings. For Schiller, however, even the temporal

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<sup>258</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 146.

distance could be eliminated. When properly cultivated, as he explained, imagination enabled an individual to get beyond ‘the present’ and strive for ‘an unbounded future’ yet, at the same time, ‘wait upon the instant.’ In other words, he stays in the present but is not trapped by contemporaneity. His existence in the present is not narrow when the infinite is constantly kept in front of him, and the vision of the past and the future is meaningful only when its infinity finds relevance in the present. Such a dialectic understanding of human existence is precisely what Arnold’s poem aimed to convey through the juxtaposition of two realities – the dreamy world of the Scholar-Gipsy on the one hand, and the speaker’s own reality on the other. The Scholar-Gipsy’s world, being a vision of the ideal that ‘hast not felt the lapse of hours,’ is both the past and the ‘unbounded future’ that the poet aspires to; while, on the other hand, the awakening from the dream and the consequent focus on ‘our’ life – ‘the life of the mortal men’ that ‘exhaust[s] the energy of strongest souls’ with repeated shocks’ – registers ‘the bounds of the present’ (ll. 140-41, 143-44).

More importantly, Arnold also held the Schillerian conviction that the contrast between the ideal and the present was the contrast between unity and the many. For those who estimated ‘all experience whatsoever by a particular fragment of experience’ or lost themselves in the ‘imperishable possessions in the realm of ideas,’ Schiller proposed that a modern individual should ‘submit the multiplicity in him to the unity of the ideal’ (‘die Mannigfaltigkeit in ihm der Einheit des Ideals unterwerfen’).<sup>259</sup> Similarly, Arnold found in his Scholar-Gipsy an embodiment of unity, purity and constancy. All of them, in his views, were qualities that men of the present age desperately needed. The ‘strange disease of modern life,’ as Arnold described it, consisted in ‘its sick hurry’ and ‘divided aims.’ The unfortunate ‘we,’ tormented by ‘sick fatigue’ and ‘languid doubt,’

[...] fluctuate idly without term or scope,  
 Of whom each strives, nor knows for what he strives,  
 And each half-lives a hundred different lives; (ll. 167-69)

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<sup>259</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 46.

That man of two hundred years ago, by contrast, enjoys life as a whole:

For early didst thou leave the world, with powers  
Fresh, undiverted to the world without,  
Firm to their mark, not spent on other things; (ll. 161-63)

The most crucial quality of the Scholar-Gipsy is that he ‘hadst *one* aim, *one* business, *one* desire.’ (l. 152). The word ‘one’ is repeated and italicised; in fact, it is the only word that is italicised in this long poem. The indication of this ‘one’ is manifold. It is the ‘undiverted’ power that stands against the ‘divided aims’ of modern men; it is the wholehearted devotion to the truth as opposed to ‘casual creeds’ by ‘[I]ight half believers’; it is the ‘immortal lot’ that withstands the traumatic shocks and changes of modern life; and it is, ultimately, the individual Scholar-Gipsy who, with the unity in aim, business and desire, distinguishes himself from the modern ‘hundred different lives’ that ‘hesitate and falter life away, / And lose to-morrow the ground won to-day’ (ll. 178-79).

Notes should be made, however, that it was not the first time that Arnold made such a diagnosis of his age; nor was it the first time that he tried to incorporate this diagnosis into poetry. The ultimate parallel between Arnold and Schiller is found in the ways that they judge their society. Eighteenth-century Germany was in many ways different from nineteenth-century England, but both critics came to decide that unity was the most needed quality for their own society. While Schiller disliked its ‘multiplicity’ (Mannigfaltigkeit), Arnold was also convinced that his era was afflicted by ‘multitudinousness.’ One of the earliest examples of his condemnation can be found in his poetic response to the theory of Joseph Butler in 1844. When Arnold was in Oxford, Butler was a name revered by many, and his ethical philosophy was particularly influential.<sup>260</sup> Refuting Hobbes’ ethical egoism, which maintained that humans ought to do whatever was in their self-interest, Butler insisted that virtue was an essential part of human nature. In order to support this position, Butler also brought

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<sup>260</sup> Oxford students, as Arnold observed, read Butler’s *Sermons* with the same absolute faith as they read works by Aristotle. See Arnold, ‘Bishop Butler and the Zeit-Geist,’ *Essays Religious and Mixed*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1972) 11-63, at 11.

forward his own theory of human nature. Humanity, according to him, consisted of different ‘natural principles’ at different levels, such as benevolence, affections and reflections. Actions that appealed to the superior natural principles were suitable and appropriate, whilst those that did not were unsuitable and should therefore be avoided.<sup>261</sup> However, with too much emphasis on the hierarchical order of natural principles, Butler was unable to explain how these principles cooperated and communicated with each other and, as a result, he made human nature appear less as an organic entity but more like a bag of assorted principles. Arnold disagreed with Butler. In the poem ‘Written in Butler’s Sermons’ (1849), he challenged this theory by first of all exposing its absurdity. ‘So men,’ the poet summarised Butler’s idea, ‘unraveling God’s harmonious whole, / Rend in a thousand threads this life of ours.’ (ll. 3-4) But then, the satirical tone becomes solemn, and the poet describes his own vision of the ideal human nature:

[...] Deep and broad, where none may see,  
Spring the foundations of that shadowy throne  
Where man’s one nature, queen-like, sits alone,  
Centred in a majestic unity. (ll.5-8)

The contrast that Arnold would later construct in ‘The Scholar-Gipsy’ was already in the making: below ‘a thousand threads,’ he perceived the ‘one nature.’ While Butler regarded a human being as a compound of various principles, Arnold represented him as featured by its beautiful and ‘majestic unity.’ In this sense, it could be said that his preference for unity was an aesthetic choice provoked by resistance to an overly rationalistic understanding of human nature.

This preference was also provoked by what Arnold perceived as the dilemma of modern poets, a topic that he repeatedly discussed with his best friend Arthur Hugh Clough. It seems that in the year 1848, the time between his purchase of Glanvill’s book and the composition of ‘The Scholar-Gipsy,’ Arnold was particularly concerned with the issue of ‘multitudinousness.’ Thus in one of the letters of 1848, he compared

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<sup>261</sup> Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (London, 1726) 162.

modern poets with masters such as Shakespeare and Milton, and drew the conclusion that the latter were superior because they had much less to say:

[H]ad Shakespeare and Milton lived in the atmosphere of modern feeling, had they had the multitude of new thoughts and feelings to deal with a modern has, I think it likely the style of each would have been far less curious and exquisite. [...] In the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was a smaller harvest than now, and sooner to be reaped: and therefore to its reaper was left time to stow it more finely and curiously. Still more was this the case in the ancient world. The poet's matter being the hitherto experience of the world, and his own, increases with every century.<sup>262</sup>

Indeed, he might as well have quoted from Wordsworth, who had made a similar observation a good forty years ago: 'The world is too much with us.' But Arnold's solution was not to go back to nature, as Wordsworth had suggested. According to him, a successful defence of poetry against 'the multitude of new thoughts and feelings' was possible only when the poets found a sure ground for themselves. Thus in another letter, also dated 1848, Arnold boldly challenged Keats and Browning:

As Browning is a man with a moderate gift passionately desiring movement and fullness, and obtaining but a confused multitudinousness, so Keats with a very high gift, is yet also consumed by this desire; and cannot produce the truly living and moving, as his conscience keeps telling him. They will not be patient – neither understand that they must begin with an Idea of the world in order not to be prevailed over by the world's multitudinousness.<sup>263</sup>

So in order to make poetry effective, poets should first of all define themselves; and this could only be achieved if they managed to distinguish their beings from the 'movement and fullness' and 'confused multitudinousness' of modern experiences. Capitalised and singular, the 'Idea' once again demonstrates Arnold's aesthetic of unity. It was precisely what he would later find so admirable in his Scholar-Gipsy, who had nothing else but '*one aim, one business, one desire.*' Moreover, as a response to those who argue for the similarity between 'The Scholar Gipsy' and 'Ode to a

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<sup>262</sup> Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. H. F. Lowry (London: Oxford UP 1932) 65.

<sup>263</sup> Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold: 1829-1859*, vol. 1, ed. Cecil Y. Lang (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia 1996) 128.



Nightingale,' one could even surmise that this letter suggests in fact Arnold's 'twist' on Romantic convention: the poet was awakened at the middle of the poem instead of the end, so that he could grasp an 'Idea' that helped to turn the fragile Romantic vision into a powerful antidote for his own world.

Yet in introducing this ideal to his own world, Arnold was not just targeting society at large. As his correspondence with Clough continued, it also became clear that his exaltation of unity had a personal cause: the lack of unity was a problem that he had identified in his closest friend. In 1853, having been accused by Clough of being cold and distant, Arnold fought back and, in an almost blunt way, expressed what he thought was really problematic in their friendship. In Arnold's opinion, Clough was 'too content to *fluctuate*,' always striving after an infinite variety of knowledge and possibilities of life that he was in danger of losing himself to multiplicity. 'You ask me in what I think or have thought you going wrong,' Arnold said to Clough,

in this: that you would never take your assiette as something determined final and unchangeable for you and proceed to work away on the basis of that: but were always poking and patching and cobbling at the assiette itself – could never finally, as it seemed – 'resolve to be thyself.'<sup>264</sup>

This was why, Arnold explained, 'I feel it is necessary to stiffen myself – and hold fast my rudder.'<sup>265</sup> In his detest for Clough's 'poking and patching and cobbling,' Arnold again recalled Schiller, who had insisted that individuals should submit the multiplicity within them to the unity of the ideal.<sup>266</sup>

The final lines of 'The Scholar-Gipsy' well reflected Arnold's resolve. Instead of welcoming the protagonist from two hundred years ago as the saviour of modern men afflicted by 'sick hurry' and 'divided aims,' the poet urges him to shun the world and to 'flee' to 'solitude.' The poet even employs two similes, one brief and the other extensive, to reinstate the necessity of staying away. The Scholar-Gipsy is first of all

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<sup>264</sup> Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold: 1829-1859*, vol. 1, 254.

<sup>265</sup> Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold: 1829-1859*, vol. 1, 282.

<sup>266</sup> Schiller 42.

compared to Dido the queen:

Still fly, plunge deeper in the bowing wood!  
Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern  
From her false friend's approach in Hades turn,  
Wave us away, and keep thy solitude! (ll. 207-10)

And after that, he is also compared to 'some Tyrian trader,' who, averse to join the 'light-hearted' Greeks, decides to travel alone:

Descried at sunrise an emerging prow  
Lifting the cool-haired creepers stealthily,  
The fringes of a southward-facing brow  
Among the Aegean isles;  
And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,  
Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian wine,  
Green, bursting figs, and tunnies steeped in brine –  
And knew the intruders on his ancient home,  
The young light-hearted masters of the waves –  
And snatched his rudder, and shook out more sail; (ll.233-42)

The poem ends therefore with the image of the trader undoing 'his corded bales' at the shore of the Iberian. These final lines have elicited much discussion and debate. George Saintsbury once claimed that 'no ingenuity could work out the parallel between the 'uncloudedly joyous' scholar [...] and 'the grave Tyrian who was indignant at the competition of the merry Greek, and shook out more sail to seek fresh markets.'<sup>267</sup> Many other critics disagree with Saintsbury; but then, the interpretations they produced are also diametrically different. E. K. Brown, for instance, argues that 'both flights express a desire for calm, a desire for aloofness.'<sup>268</sup> G. Wilson Knight, on the other hand, believes that the poem signifies not an escape but a return. He sees Rome and Greece as equivalents to nineteenth-century Britain which represented the 'Western, or European tradition,' while the Iberian world, the destination of the Tyrian trader, represents the oriental influence that helped Arnold to reevaluate his own

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<sup>267</sup> George Saintsbury, *Matthew Arnold* (New York, 1899) 42.

<sup>268</sup> Quoted from C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry, *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold* (London: Oxford UP, 1940) 212-13.

cultural tradition.<sup>269</sup> This interpretation has won many supporters, and some have even identified the oriental source specifically as the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a Hindu scripture that Arnold was familiar with. So, does the poet desire aloofness, or does he want to be actively engaged with the reformation of his own cultural traditions?

My answer is both. Having read the previous part of the poem as an affirmation of unity, I read the final stanzas as the self-portrayal of Arnold, the aesthetic educator. The similes of Dido and Tyrian trader certainly create ingenious parallels, but the parallel, I maintain, consists first of all in the characters' determination to be themselves. The stories of Dido, of the Tyrian trader, and even of the Scholar-Gipsy are all about the confrontation of an individual with a people. The Scholar-Gipsy as a being of aesthetic unity is everything the modern world is not. Dido tries, though unsuccessfully, to compete for Aeneas' love with a future empire, whereas the Tyrian trader, unsatisfied with the Greeks who are intoxicated by luxury, 'snatched his rudder' – in the same way, we might add by recalling those words to Clough, as Arnold would 'hold fast' to his. The determination of Dido and the Tyrian trader, therefore, reflects the determination of Arnold himself, who felt it necessary to keep aloof from the sickness of the modern world and the minds he found problematic. The aesthetic unity he propounded here was precisely an 'Idea' of the world he would begin with in order not to be prevailed over by the world itself.

But to resolve to be oneself was not the ultimate aim. No matter how anxiously the poet urges the Scholar-Gipsy to flee, he has nevertheless gained an insight into the beauty of unity and, in this way, becomes gradually identified with him. Although the character from two hundred years ago stays safe from the contamination of the modern world, the poet, being an individual from that modern world, has to step forward and fight. When describing the mission of those who propounded aesthetic ideals, Schiller once remarked:

Let some beneficent deity snatch the infant betimes from his mother's breast,  
let it nourish him with the milk of a better age and suffer him to grow up to

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<sup>269</sup> G. Wilson Knight, 'The Scholar-Gipsy: An Interpretation,' *Review of English Studies* 6 (1955) 53-62.

full maturity beneath the distant skies of Greece. Then when he has become a man, let him return to his century as an alien figure; but not in order to gladden it by his appearance, rather, terrible like Agamemnon's son, to cleanse it.<sup>270</sup>

In a similar manner, in the final line of Arnold's poem, the Tyrian trader 'on the beach undid his corded bales.' So, after all, he did not travel with free hands; the action of undoing bales on the beach would be entailed by exchange, and his cargo would find its way to the world again. In this sense, the destiny of the Tyrian trader – and that of Arnold the aesthetic educator, too – was at once an escape *and* a return. The strong faith would persuade both to seek aloofness; but, meanwhile, it would lead both back to reform the spirit of their worlds. Thus read, 'The Scholar-Gipsy,' as a poetic treaty on aesthetic education, not only demonstrates convictions that Arnold would continue to propound, but also defines the posture that he would take in fulfilling that mission.

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<sup>270</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 51.

## The Unified and Animating Action: Aesthetic Education in Arnold's Literary Criticism

### What is 'Action'? Arnold's Debate with his Critics

When his first volume *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* came out in 1849, Arnold was initially quite confident about its popularity. He reported to his sister with much satisfaction that the poems were warmly received: 'I hear from Fellows that it is selling well; and from a good many quarters I hear interest expressed about it, though everyone likes something different (except that everyone likes the Merman) and most people would have this and would have that which they do not find.'<sup>271</sup> But that optimism did not last long. Soon Arnold found himself besieged by stern critics. Instead of 'everyone likes something different,' each critic seems to have found something different to deplore, ranging from the problematic rhythm and excessive interest in 'Hindoo-Greek philosophy' to the 'indolent, selfish quietism.'<sup>272</sup> As a result, Arnold felt compelled to confront these critical attacks; and thus came the 1853 *Poems*, his third volume of poetry. This collection was noted not only for new poems, such as 'The Scholar-Gipsy'; it was also known for its brilliant and controversial *Preface*, through which Arnold responded to various unfavourable criticisms of his work. The *Preface* dealt particularly with the issue of the subject of poetry. It began with a brief explication of the absence of *Empedocles on Etna*, the title piece of his second volume published in the previous year. The poem was now excluded, Arnold explained, because it depicted a 'continuous state of mental distress' with little 'action' involved and, therefore, offered little poetic enjoyment. From there Arnold continued, turning his apology into an active assault:

And why it may be asked, have I entered into this explanation respecting a

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<sup>271</sup> Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold: 1829-1859*, vol. 1, 141.

<sup>272</sup> Charles Kingsley, 'Unsigned Review,' *Fraser's Magazine* 29 (1849) 575-80 at 578. W. E. Aytoun, 'Unsigned Review,' *Blackwood's Magazine* 66 (1849) 340-46 at 341. G. D. Boyle, 'Unsigned Review,' *North British Review* 9 (1853) 209-18 at 210. A. H. Clough, 'Recent English Poetry,' *North American Review* 77 (1853) 1-31 at 18, 23.

matter so unimportant as the admission of the Poem in question? I have done so, because I was anxious to avow that the sole reason for its exclusion was that which has been stated above; and that it has not been excluded in deference to the opinion which many critics of the present day appear to entertain against subjects chosen from distant times and countries; against the choice, in short, of any subjects but modern ones.<sup>273</sup>

To rise against anything ‘from distant times and countries,’ Arnold claimed, was ‘a fair sample’ of the critical dicta of the present day.<sup>274</sup> He was strongly against this principle, and this disagreement between him and his critics, as I shall show, reflects once again the Schillerian aesthetic that he had already incorporated into his early works.

The so-called ‘critical dicta’ was taken from a review in the *Spectator* in 1853; and here are the words that Arnold quoted in his *Preface*: ‘The poet who would really fix the public attention must leave the exhausted past, and draw his subjects from matters of present import and therefore both of interest and novelty.’<sup>275</sup> Arnold faithfully recorded what the reviewer had said, but he was not entirely fair to conclude that the reviewer would rise against ‘the choice [...] of any subjects but modern ones.’ The quotation was originally taken from the *Spectator*’s review of Sir Edwin Arnold, whose *Poems Narrative and Lyrical* displayed a distinctive – indeed, almost obsessive – Romantic attachment to subjects such as ‘The Egyptian Princess,’ ‘The Alchemists’ and ‘The Fairy’s Promise.’ By ‘past,’ the reviewer was referring to a mysterious past that was too far removed from reality. In other words, to describe the past was not a mistake; what was truly problematic was the indifference towards the present. When the *Spectator* eventually came to Matthew Arnold’s works, the same position was reiterated. It found fault not with Arnold’s ancient subjects but with the author’s attitude toward contemporary society. Suitable subjects for poetry, the reviewer was firmly convinced, were ‘to be found in modern times more easily and more abundantly than in ancient times; not that the question is at all one of dates, but of changes of thought, feeling and manners.’ He then proceeded to accuse Arnold of

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<sup>273</sup> Arnold, *Preface, Poems* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1853) ix.

<sup>274</sup> Arnold, *Preface* ix.

<sup>275</sup> Arnold, *Preface* ix.

neglecting the need of contemporary society, which, according to the reviewer,

needs more than any other its interpreter, who shall declare its sickness and point out its cure; and that, specially fitted or not to supply poetical subjects, it is here, in the midst of this age, that his Maker has planted him, for the especial purposes, if he really possess poetical faculties, of showing how man conquers circumstances, and is in his own spirit the fountain of beauty and strength and all that makes the elements of poetry. What a mean and cowardly mood it is, this scorn and dislike of one's own time!<sup>276</sup>

What was again being questioned here was not just Arnold's choice of subjects, but also, more importantly, his qualification as an 'interpreter' of his own age. The reviewer was unimpressed by Arnold's poetry primarily because he did not think that the poems successfully described the sickness of society, or provided any solutions to its problems.

Many other reviewers concurred on this point. Diverse as the criticisms appeared, they were surprisingly unanimous in one aspect. No matter what they regarded as the major fault, all agreed that Arnold's relationship to contemporary society presented a problem. W. E. Aytoun took offence at the poet's purposefully kept distance from the public. He condemned Arnold's attitude throughout the volume as 'affected misanthropy' and criticised his refusal to take part in the concerns of everyday existence. Similarly, G. D. Boyle demanded that the poet demonstrate 'greater sympathy with the wants of the present generation.' Commenting on 'Resignation,' Charles Kingsley also deplored the poem's 'hungry abstraction' of life. The vision of human life as 'a placid and continuous whole,' in Kingsley's view, was characteristic of a poet who posed as a nonchalant spectator and therefore failed to appreciate the diversity of life and its concrete details: 'Life unrolling *before* him! as if it could unroll to purpose any where but *in* him; as if the poet, or any one else, could know aught of life except *by living it*, and that in bitter, painful earnest.'<sup>277</sup> In this respect, Arnold's close friend Clough was perhaps the most outspoken of all. In order to

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<sup>276</sup> Quoted from J. D. Jump, 'Matthew Arnold and the Spectator,' *Review of English Studies* 25.97 (1949) 61-64, at 63.

<sup>277</sup> Kingsley 579.

perform its function properly, Clough insisted, poetry must ‘deal more [...] with general wants, ordinary feelings, the obvious rather than the rare facts of human nature’; in other words, ‘the actual, palpable things with which our everyday life is concerned.’<sup>278</sup> Instead of ‘turning and twisting his eyes’ in the hope of seeing things as the Greek masters saw them, Clough counselled Arnold to focus on these things ‘by seeing them, by accepting them as he sees them, and faithfully depicting accordingly.’<sup>279</sup> In fact, even later critics, who hold much more favourable opinions of Arnold’s poetry, sometimes feel it hard to reconcile his poetic achievements with ‘his refusal to regard poetry as a medium through which to address the age.’<sup>280</sup>

However, I shall defend Arnold against those questionings, both old and new. In my opinion, he was not an escapist who contentedly lost himself in the dreams of an age long gone, but a genuine interpreter who provided a needed service for his age by – just as that *Spectator* reviewer demanded – ‘identifying its sickness’ and ‘pointing out its cure.’ The disagreement between Arnold and his critics, in my opinion, consisted primarily in their different assessments of their age and different views about the aim of cultivation. While Arnold thought it necessary to safeguard poetry against the multitudinousness of the world, his critics preferred an ‘everyday realism’ in poetic creation that acknowledged the diversity of life.<sup>281</sup> While he complained about the world being too much for poets, they believed that in order to serve the needs of society, a competent poet should give concrete illustrations paralleling modern experience. To highlight these differences, I shall focus on the concept of ‘action’ in the *Preface*. Arnold’s definition of ‘action,’ as I shall try to demonstrate, is a fine illustration of how he adopted the aesthetic principles in his criticism of modern ailments.

Arnold excluded the long poem *Empedocles on Etna* because it failed to represent an ‘action.’ This stress on action echoed the views of many of Arnold’s critics. Boyle, for instance, strongly recommended to the poet:

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<sup>278</sup> Clough 3.

<sup>279</sup> Clough 18.

<sup>280</sup> Sidney Coulling, *Matthew Arnold and his Critics: A Study of Arnold’s Controversies* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1974)

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<sup>281</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Scrutinies: Reviews of Poetry, 1830-1870* (London: Athlone, 1972) 43.



Less of aversion to action in all its forms, – greater sympathy with the wants of the present generations, will endear him to many who would now turn away contemptuously from the self-complacent reverie, and refined indolence, which too often disfigures his pages.<sup>282</sup>

The concept of proper ‘action,’ as Boyle suggested, was clearly modern: it was not only based on a close study of modern life, but was also the very means through which the poet secured the interest of his readers. Thus one of the most important criteria of good poetry, according to Boyle, was the distance between the action and the contemporary scene: the closer these two things were, the better the poem. Moreover, it was also in this contemporaneity that the success of the poet consisted. An excellent poet, as Boyle maintained, dealt with the problems of the present time. His success consisted in finding actions ‘nearest’ to his audience and *not* necessarily in his adaptability ‘for all ages and for all times.’<sup>283</sup>

Aytoun even more vividly expressed the belief that a first-rate poet should always minimise the distance between his subjects and the hustle-bustle of modern life. Following the pronouncement that Arnold was a misanthropist, he proposed a cure:

If he is a Tory, can’t he find work enough in denouncing and exposing the lies of the League, and in taking up the cudgels for native industry? If he is a Whig, can’t he be great upon sewerage, and the scheme of planting colonies in Connaught [...] If he is Chartist, can’t he say so, and stand up manfully with Julian Harney for ‘the points,’ whatever may be their latest number?<sup>284</sup>

Aytoun was highly conscious of himself as a Victorian or, to be more precise, a Victorian with a distinctive political identity. For him, the success of contemporary poets resided in how actively they could participate in the political life of the day and, for that matter, how well they could live up to their identity, which was in turn defined chiefly by the political party they belonged to. Indeed, it might be said to be a pity that in his later criticism of Victorian society, Arnold did not return to this particular

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<sup>282</sup> Boyle 213-14.

<sup>283</sup> Boyle 209.

<sup>284</sup> Aytoun 346.

comment. It could otherwise furnish a good example of the sectarianism he so ardently condemned.

When Arnold, in the opening of his *Preface*, expressed his regret that the poem *Empedocles on Etna* depicted situations ‘in which the suffering finds no vent in action; [...] in which there is everything to be endured’ but ‘nothing to be done,’ he seemed to have complied with the orders of his critics; only in fact he did not.<sup>285</sup> For him, action did not simply equal activities of all kinds. To qualify as a proper subject matter, it must be an action that appealed to ‘the great *primary* human affections’ and ‘those *elementary* feelings.’<sup>286</sup> By thus redefining ‘action’ as a generator of ‘elementary feelings,’ Arnold modified the views of his critics to such a degree that ‘action’ came to bear almost opposite connotations. As Arnold expressed it, although a modern action had the advantage of being closer to the audience, it was not necessarily the best subject for poetry. Instead of being contemporary, actions should be universal and therefore accessible to people of ‘all ages’ and ‘all times’; instead of dealing with external reality, they must first and foremost be directed toward the ‘inward man.’<sup>287</sup> With the concept of ‘inward man,’ Arnold was referring to the spiritual experience shared by human beings in general, the feelings which ‘subsist permanently in the race, and [...] independent of time.’<sup>288</sup> In this sense, the main criterion for poets and poetry no longer consisted in their intimacy with modern life. They succeeded in so far as they could capture what was permanent and elementary in human nature or, as Arnold put in a more succinct way, to deal with the ‘essentials.’<sup>289</sup>

An emphasis on essentials as opposed to flux registered a fundamental divergence between Arnold and his critics with regard to the mission of a poet. When his critics directed the poet’s attention towards contemporary life, they regarded poets, and people in general, as beings whose identities were determined by specific temporal, spatial and social circumstances, and who should therefore apply their efforts directly to an improvement of their realities. But in Arnold’s view, before returning to examine

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<sup>285</sup> Arnold *Preface* viii.

<sup>286</sup> Arnold *Preface* x, emphasis added.

<sup>287</sup> Arnold *Preface* xii.

<sup>288</sup> Arnold *Preface* x.

<sup>289</sup> Arnold *Preface* xii.

their own specific temporal, spatial and social existence, poets should first of all transcend their realities in order to get in touch with the primary, the essential and the constant. Once again, we can see this conviction well reflected in another debate between Clough and Arnold. Whereas Clough argued that poetry should imitate modern novels by depicting binding circumstances and the true sphere of individual beings – ‘the indispensable latest addenda’ which ‘if we forget on Sunday, we must remember on Monday.’<sup>290</sup> Arnold, unimpressed by novels and their realistic depiction of the ‘latest addenda’, retorted that the most important quality for poets consisted not in the way they were confined by their circumstances, but in their ‘passion as men’, which contained ‘nothing local and casual.’<sup>291</sup>

### **‘Unified’ and ‘Animating’: ‘Action’ as a Schillerian Concept**

Apart from being essential, Arnold’s concept of ‘action’ was also characterised by its special emphasis on unity. In this respect, Arnold challenged not only his critics but his fellow poets as well. Also in 1853, shortly before Arnold’s *Poems* was published, another volume of *Poems* appeared, slightly slimmer than Arnold’s work. This was a collection by Alexander Smith, a representative of the Spasmodic School which was noted for its depiction of intense passion and psychological drama. Although his family’s poverty impeded his education, Smith, with the help of critics such as George Gilfillan, managed to publish poems intermittently. His poetical gift impressed many, and his 1853 collection proved a large success. As his biographer later recalled, double the usual number of copies sold in just a few months, and the poet’s name appeared in reviews not only in Europe but also across the Atlantic, with thousands of copies sold in America.<sup>292</sup> But Arnold held a different view. He told Clough in a personal letter that he believed Smith’s poems would never go very far, and explained the reason for this in the 1853 *Preface*. The poems, Arnold felt, ‘exist[ed] merely for

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<sup>290</sup> Clough, 3.

<sup>291</sup> Arnold *Preface* xiii.

<sup>292</sup> Thomas Brisbane, *The Early Years of Alexander Smith: Poet and Essayist* (London: Hodder and Stoughton: 1869) 175.

the sake of single lines and passages,' gratifying readers with 'a shower of isolated thoughts and images' instead of a 'total impression.'<sup>293</sup> Yet, curiously enough, Arnold's judgment did not completely conflict with that of Smith's admirers. Before his successful *Poems* came out, Smith had published a poem which was entitled, quite characteristically, 'Life Fragment.' According to a commentator from *The Eclectic Review*, a periodical noted for its devotion to literature, the 'power and beauty' of Smith's works consisted 'in the exquisite thoughts and images which [were] scattered [...] over its pages.'<sup>294</sup> So this reviewer saw exactly the same qualities as Arnold, only the former applauded it while the latter chose to be critical. Just like what happened in Arnold's debate with his critics concerning the proper subject of poetry, the contrast here illustrated not different judgments on any particular work, but different poetic principles.

The preference for 'total impressions' over 'isolated thoughts and images' also informed Arnold's distinction between 'action' and 'expression' in his *Preface*. According to him, action must be unified, illustrating an essential human nature, while expression referred to those 'separate thoughts and images which occur in the treatment of an action.'<sup>295</sup> Modern poetics prescribed false aims and practices, Arnold believed, because it distorted their relationship: instead of putting actions above anything else, it gave priority to elements that were individual, accidental, and passing. True poetry, therefore, was possible only when the poet managed to construct a poetic unity divested of any personal irregularities; and Arnold illustrated the impression thus:

It [the story] stood [...] as a group of statuary, faintly seen, at the end of a long and dark vista: then came the poet, embodying outlines, developing situations, not a word wasted, not a sentiment capriciously thrown in: stroke upon stroke, the drama proceeded: the light deepened upon the group; more and more it revealed itself to the riveted gaze of the spectator: until at last, when the final words were spoken, it stood before him in broad sunlight, a

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<sup>293</sup> Arnold *Preface* xvii.

<sup>294</sup> Anonymous. *The Eclectic Review*, Oct. 1851, 459.

<sup>295</sup> Arnold *Preface*, xiii.

model of immortal beauty.<sup>296</sup>

This passage contains an extended metaphor of poetry as well as a metaphor of the experience of writing poetry, and unity is still the feature of both. A poem, as Arnold described, was like a statue, in which all the strokes, words and sentiments worked together to contribute to a sense of wholeness, and none should distinguish itself with any peculiarity. Consequently, in order to create that ‘total impression,’ poets must first of all determine ‘outlines,’ then develop various ‘situations’ and, most important of all, they should always remember not to let extra words or sentiment violate the poetic unity. Thus the ‘model of immortal beauty’ remained highly consistent with the ‘majestic unity’ which Arnold had so elegantly depicted in the poems ‘Written in Butler’s Sermons’ and ‘The Scholar-Gipsy.’ While in the poems, human nature was portrayed as a statue-like unity emerging out of conflicting parts, here, in the *Preface*, Arnold described ideal poetry as an aesthetic unity where action predominated over expressions. The repetitive use of the statue metaphor confirms just how central the unified form was in Arnold’s aesthetic principles.

An action that was both essential and unified, as Arnold maintained, enabled poetry to transcend the local and the casual, much in the same way as the ‘*one aim, one business, one desire*’ of the Scholar-Gipsy could, potentially, combat the disease of contemporary society. Viewed in this way, it is very appropriate that the *Preface* should appear in a collection where ‘The Scholar-Gipsy’ is one of the major works. Though one was in prose and one in verse, the preface and the poem echoed each other, exemplifying the aesthetic ideal that Arnold was determined to implement in his own society. Still, it would be wrong to assume that the *Preface* was but a prose version of the poem. In spite of their common appeal to the aesthetic form, the *Preface* reflected a change of mind. In November 1853, the same month in which the *Poems* and the *Preface* came out, Arnold wrote to Clough about what he now thought of ‘The Scholar-Gipsy’:

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<sup>296</sup> Arnold *Preface* xv.

I am glad you like the Gipsy Scholar – but what does it *do* for you? Homer *animates* – Shakespeare *animates* – in its poor way I think Sohrab and Rustum *animates* – the Gipsy Scholar at best awakens a pleasing melancholy. But this is not what we want.

*The complaining millions of men  
Darken and labour in pain –*

What they want is something to animate and ennoble them – not merely to add zest to their melancholy or grace to their dreams. – I believe a feeling of this kind is the basis of my nature – and of my poetics.<sup>297</sup>

As a poet, Arnold was known – and for that matter, always criticised – for his melancholy.<sup>298</sup> Indeed, a ‘pleasing melancholy’ precisely described the poem, especially its ending part, in which the Tyrian trader, in order to preserve aesthetic integrity against the ‘divided aims’ of the Greeks, travelled alone across the sea. But to ‘flee’ was no longer considered to be the best choice. Now, as Arnold made plain in the letter, the most important mission of the poet was to ‘animate’; and this was the new conviction that the *Preface* expressed. ‘It is demanded,’ Arnold said here of the poetic representation of actions, ‘not only that it [poetry] shall interest, but also that it shall inspirit and rejoice the reader: that it shall convey a charm, and infuse delight.’<sup>299</sup>

According to Arnold, it was Schiller who provided the rationale, whom he subsequently quoted: “‘All art,” says Schiller, “is dedicated to Joy, and there is no higher and no more serious problem, than how to make men happy. The right Art is that alone, which creates the highest enjoyment.””<sup>300</sup> This quotation came from Schiller’s ‘On the Use of the Chorus in Tragedy’ (1803), the preface to the play *The Bride of Messina*. In this preface, Schiller addressed in particular the effect of poetry upon the audience, and here is the passage in English that Arnold quoted from:

But if the theatre be made instrumental towards higher objects, the pleasure of the spectator will not be increased, but ennobled. It will be a diversion, but a poetical one. All Art is dedicated to pleasure; and there can be no higher and worthier end than to make men happy. The true Art is that which

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<sup>297</sup> Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold: 1829-1859*, vol. 1, 282.

<sup>298</sup> Aytoun 341.

<sup>299</sup> Arnold *Preface*, vii.

<sup>300</sup> Arnold *Preface*, vii.

provides the highest degree of pleasure; and this consists in the abandonment of the spirit to the free play of all its faculties.<sup>301</sup>

In its original German version, the word for ‘diversion’ was ‘Spiel,’ which, as a verb, also means ‘to play.’ It is a key concept first presented in Schiller’s philosophy of aesthetic education. In the fifteenth letter of his *Aesthetic Letters*, Schiller argued that ‘in every condition of humanity it is precisely play, and play alone, that makes man complete and displays at once his twofold nature.’<sup>302</sup> The ‘twofold nature’ referred to the ‘sensuous impulse’ and the ‘formal impulse,’ respectively. The former asserted the physical being of man and, when acting exclusively, turned man into nothing ‘but a unit of magnitude, an occupied moment of time’; the latter, on the contrary, asserted the law of rationality, highlighting man’s ‘rational nature.’<sup>303</sup> According to Schiller, neither impulse should be allowed to predominate in man and must be harmonised before each played its own role. The aesthetic play impulse (‘Spieltrieb’) was the key. By setting free body and mind, it brought harmony to those two aspects of human nature, reorganised the conflicting impulses into alliance, forged ‘the unity of these two necessities’ and, thereby, made man a being that enjoyed both beauty and happiness.

## **Hellenism for the Present Time: Arnold and Schiller’s Classicism**

In his *Preface*, Arnold did not dwell much on philosophical reasoning. Nevertheless, he borrowed directly from Schiller’s conclusion that art should yield joy, and even used the same example as Schiller to illustrate the ideal. For both of them, the best embodiment of their aesthetic principles – the essential, the unified and the joyous – was the art of ancient Greece. According to Schiller, Greek art, ‘[c]ombining fullness of form with fullness of content,’ ‘[united] the youthfulness of fantasy with

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<sup>301</sup> Schiller, ‘On the Use of the Chorus in Tragedy,’ trans. Adam Lodge, *Schiller’s Poems and Plays*, ed. Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1889) 760.

<sup>302</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 79.

<sup>303</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 65-66.

the manliness of reason in a splendid humanity.<sup>304</sup> In Arnold's view, too, Greek poetry provided a model in multiple ways. It was superior first because of its subject: the *Iliad*, the *Oresteia* and the story of Dido delineated actions that displayed the essentials of human nature. But more than that, in Greek poetry, Arnold also found a most balanced treatment of humanity because in it the parts were always subordinated to the whole. Therefore, he called out to his fellow poets, advising them to study Greek poetry more closely and to appreciate the happiness it rendered, its 'noble simplicity' and, in particular, the 'unity and profoundness of moral impression.'<sup>305</sup>

Arnold's passion for antiquity attracted fierce criticism from his contemporaries and later critics. Many have attacked his 'pseudo' classicism. In his review of the 1853 *Preface*, G. H. Lewes protested that the 'Greek,' as advocated by Arnold, was not Greek in its real appearance and that Arnold's opinions concerning Greek and Latin literary works were largely misrepresented and 'very far removed from the truth.'<sup>306</sup> Many later critics supported this opinion. For instance, Warren Anderson, in his illuminating examination of classical references in Arnold's works, observes that the 'Greek' in Arnold's discourse does not correspond with the actual 'Greek,' and thus concludes that in much of what Arnold said about the classical world, 'the portrait that he gives us misleads more than it misinforms.'<sup>307</sup> Despite its 'vividness and charm,' Anderson says, ancient Greece as represented by Arnold 'cannot seem adequate to the average cultured reader today, let alone the specialist.'<sup>308</sup>

But before making a final judgment like that, I think it is necessary to ask: were those references to Hellenism intended for specialists? Or – to modify the question in order to include a response to the critics who challenged Arnold's fascination with the past – what was his intention with all his praise of the beauty of ancient poetry? It is all very well to point out his misrepresentation in order to show how much our knowledge of the ancient world and of ancient literature grows, but to dismiss Arnold as a 'pseudo' classicist does not contribute much to our understanding of his ideas. In

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<sup>304</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 38.

<sup>305</sup> Arnold, *Preface* xxvi.

<sup>306</sup> Quoted from Carl Dawson, *Matthew Arnold, the Poetry: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1973) 80.

<sup>307</sup> Warren D. Anderson, *Matthew Arnold and the Classical Tradition* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1965) 188.

<sup>308</sup> Anderson 188.



fact, Arnold, as we should remember, recommended the study of ancient Greek poetry not to any ‘specialist.’ He was addressing a group of poetry readers, as well as writers, from all walks of life. He believed that they, like those moderns in ‘The Scholar-Gipsy,’ and probably like he himself, were constantly confused by the palpable life of the everyday world, and exhausted, both spiritually and physically, by ‘its sick hurry’ and ‘divided aims.’ A study of poetry from ancient Greece was therefore necessary since ‘we,’ unlike those ancients, lived in a time when ‘confusion’ was ‘great’ and ‘the multitude of voices counselling different things bewildering.’<sup>309</sup> Arnold later repeated this idea in his inaugural address for the Poetry Chair at Oxford in 1857. Similar to the 1853 *Preface*, the address was characterised by a complete devotion to the Hellenistic spirit, which he identified as ‘grace,’ ‘light’ and the practice of ‘[seeing] life steadily, and [seeing] it whole.’<sup>310</sup> In the meanwhile, the address also bore the same purpose of serving the present. It was entitled ‘On the Modern Element in Literature,’ and the achievement of ancient Greece was taken as the model, as Arnold explained, because the beauty the Greeks had aspired to had ‘successfully solved for *their* ages the problem which occupies ours.’<sup>311</sup>

Both his description of the Hellenic spirit and the contrast between ancient Greece and ‘our’ problems are highly reminiscent of Schiller’s Aesthetic Letters, which argued – as I have quoted previously – that the ancient Greeks possessed ‘the whole of humanity’ whereas modern individuals had nothing but fragments and ‘narrow hearts.’<sup>312</sup> Schiller’s interest in Greek art and poetry, therefore, was largely based on his contemplation of ‘the present age’ and ‘contemporary humanity.’ Just as Philip J. Kain has contended, the ancient Greek world in Schiller’s argument should not be understood as ‘the actual Greek *polis*’; rather, it was ‘the model after which the modern world was to be remade.’<sup>313</sup> The same thing might as well be said about Arnold, who constantly found examples from the past in order to illustrate what he

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<sup>309</sup> Arnold, *Preface* xix.

<sup>310</sup> Arnold, *On the Modern Element in Literature, On the Classic Tradition*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1960) 18-37 at 28.

<sup>311</sup> Arnold, *On the Modern Element in Literature* 21.

<sup>312</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 38.

<sup>313</sup> Philip J. Kain, *Schiller, Hegel, and Marx: State, Society, and the Aesthetic Ideal of Ancient Greece* (Kingston: McGill-Queen UP, 1982) 14 and 34.

desired in his own society. Viewed in this light, those who criticised Arnold's 'pseudo' classicism or his indifference to the needs of contemporary society had done him great wrong. His call for aesthetic culture was not a reverie of the past but firmly grasped the nineteenth-century British context; the ancient Greek culture that he endeavoured to convey to the audience might not be entirely authentic, but that was because he intended it to be an aesthetic ideal, a model, to borrow Kain's words, 'after which the modern world was to be remade.'

To some extent, aesthetic culture was also something that Arnold himself aspired to. When he published his poems and delivered speeches on poetics, he was not making a living as a poet. That youthful vision of being a glorious poet was fast fading; by the time his third volume of *Poems* and the *Preface* came out, he had been working as a school inspector for two years, a job that brought endless travels and 'drudgery.' It constantly threatened to stifle his literary aspirations but provided him with adequate means to support his family. The condemnation of 'sick hurry' and 'divided aims,' of 'confusion' and bewilderment, one might suspect, were thus not just derived from his observation of general social trends, but could also be based on the experience he had gained as an ordinary breadwinner. In a letter to his friend Wyndham Slade, dated October 1852, Arnold wrote from a Derby hotel, where the whole family had to stay because of his inspection tour:

I write this very late at night, with Smith, a young Derby banker, *tres sport*, completing an orgy in the next room. When that good young man is calm these lodgings are pleasant enough. You are to come and see me fighting the battle of life as an Inspector of Schools some day.<sup>314</sup>

Did not those aesthetic principles, we might ask, also provide the ammunition that Arnold needed in that battle, which was perhaps less intellectual but equally important?

At any rate, Arnold regarded the ideal of beauty as necessary in the battle of life in general. The accusation that he posed as a nonchalant spectator, or that he did not

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<sup>314</sup> Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold: 1829-1859*, vol. 1 244.

take part in the concerns of existence, or even that he preached pseudo classicism, are all rendered invalid if we approach his comments on literature as an attempt to implement aesthetic culture in order to tackle the problem of his own age. As Arnold himself stated, the ultimate aim was ‘to educe and cultivate what is best and noblest in themselves.’<sup>315</sup> If there appears to be an insufficient engagement with reality in his poems and literary criticism – compared with some of his fellow poets who addressed political, moral and religious issues of the day more directly – that is only because Arnold was occupied by a different reality, one which, in his view, could alleviate the damage in the present one. In this respect, J. D. Jump has made a very insightful observation. Although Jump is here talking about Arnold’s poetics, I think the same description applies well to his idea of aesthetic education:

Arnold was not protected by private income, personal gift, sinecure, or legacy from the obligation of working for a living in the ordinary Philistine sense of the phrase. Because he knew it in his own life, Arnold presents in his verse the dilemma of many who in the modern world are compelled to live their lives in circumstances which fail to satisfy their natures, which distract them indeed from learning what those natures are, and which they must for their own well-being periodically elude. If Arnold’s landscapes are commonly those of a week-ender [...] at least he also knew and gave utterance to that unease which drives the week-ender to the countryside.<sup>316</sup>

The aesthetic principles, presented by Schiller and embodied by ancient Greek poetry, were part of Arnold’s countryside. There he gathered various types of ingredients and extracted the material he thought could be useful for life in the modern world. Nevertheless, to dress this lesson up in ancient forms and bid the audience to study these relics was not always very effective. Indeed, as we have seen, the sheer amount of the charges made by his contemporary critics had shown how easily a practice like that could be misunderstood. It was high time, therefore, that Arnold, the aesthetic educator, should become more assertive, addressing himself more directly to the modern world.

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<sup>315</sup> Arnold *Preface* xxvii.

<sup>316</sup> Quoted from Leon Gottfried, *Matthew Arnold and the Romantics* (London: Routledge, 1963) 67.

## **‘Grand Style’ and ‘Aesthetic State’: Aesthetic Education in Arnold’s Social Criticism**

### **‘Grand Style’: Aesthetic Education for the Middle Classes**

In 1859, the school inspector Matthew Arnold was sent on a tour to France by the Newcastle Commission on Elementary Education. Two years later, he produced a parliamentary report, entitled *Popular Education in France*. Later, the preface to the report was republished as an independent essay under the title ‘Democracy,’ which is today generally read as an important text illustrating Arnold’s social and political thought. But, as some critics have observed, despite its avowedly political interest, the essay focused not on political institutions, but upon ‘the question of cultural values and intellectual and aesthetic standards.’<sup>317</sup> In this chapter, I will take up this notion and investigate how Arnold’s social and political criticism formed another vital component in his idea of aesthetic education.

‘Undoubtedly,’ concluded the essay ‘Democracy,’ ‘we are drawing on towards great changes; and for every nation the thing most needful is to discern clearly its own condition, in order to know in what particular way it may best meet them.’<sup>318</sup> This portrayal of the age was accurate, because democratisation was the very change that English society was then undergoing. During the time when Arnold was busily engaged in various pursuits, the democratic spirit had begun to find its way into many aspects of social life. In politics, it was made evident by the decline of aristocracy and the rise of the middle classes; in academia, it was represented by a celebration of the independent and critical mind; in political economy, it was embodied in the doctrine of *laissez-faire*; whereas culturally, it was best illustrated by the middle class liberalist ardour for self-improvement. Changes of these kinds entailed a reflection on the role

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<sup>317</sup> Stefan Collini, *Matthew Arnold: A Critical Portrait* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 71.

<sup>318</sup> Arnold, ‘Democracy,’ *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 1-25 at 25.

of authority, especially the authority of the state. Since an increase of the prominence of the individual became inevitable, many people began to be concerned about how the power of the state should adapt itself to this enormous change. There is little wonder, then, that a Victorian bestseller, entitled *Self-Help* and published in the same year as Arnold set out for France, should begin with the chapter ‘National and Individual.’ According to its author Samuel Smiles, the chief function of a central state should be ‘negative and restrictive’; it should represent ‘an aggregate of individual conditions,’ and protect people’s life, liberty and property; but that was about all it was supposed to do. The cultivation of each individual was largely a personal issue, and civilisation a ‘personal improvement.’<sup>319</sup> Even the best institutions, Smiles insisted, could ‘give man no active aid’ other than ‘leav[ing] him free to develop himself and improve his individual condition.’<sup>320</sup> Any central authority which called on people to follow certain models that were not immediately individual was therefore classed as ‘despotism [...] in its worst forms.’<sup>321</sup> The celebration of individual freedom as opposed to the authority of the central state made the author of *Self-Help* a spokesman for the liberalism of the day; its status as an immediate bestseller after publication proved the popularity of that doctrine.

But this enthusiasm for democracy and liberalism was not shared by everyone. The Reform Bill of 1832, as we should remember, did not pass smoothly, and the prospect of the power of the masses deeply agitated some minds. It was through his criticism of democracy, for instance, that Carlyle proposed his famous doctrine of hero-worship, which, as one critic has perceptively pointed out, could be interpreted as a reaction against the dominion of the masses by ‘restoring the aristocracy to power.’<sup>322</sup> Arnold, on the other hand, was neither interested in heroes nor in aristocracy, at least not at the surface level. When he alleged in ‘Democracy,’ with his habitual strategy of creating dialogues within monologues, that ‘I know what a chorus of objectors will be ready. One will say: Rather repair and restore the influence of

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<sup>319</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, ed. Peter W. Sinnema (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 2.

<sup>320</sup> Smiles, 1.

<sup>321</sup> Smiles, 4.

<sup>322</sup> Walter Houghton 328.

aristocracy,' it is very likely that he had Carlyle's words in mind.<sup>323</sup> For Arnold, democracy was not in itself objectionable; yet, nor was it a blessing. But he believed that the change was destined to come. With a dialectic historical vision, he argued that democratisation was initiated 'by natural and inevitable causes' because human beings by instinct desired 'expansion and fuller life.'<sup>324</sup> The old aristocratic system failed to cater for that need and, consequently, was bound to be superseded and replaced. Yet, he was also concerned about the problems this entailed. Who would be able to replace the aristocrats? The middle classes, whose power and virtue were celebrated at the time, seemed to be the only suitable choice; but, in Arnold's view, this group was not yet ready to assume the leading role. According to his standard, they still lacked the 'grand style' which was 'that elevation of character, that noble way of thinking and behaving.'<sup>325</sup>

The reference to 'grand style' also registers another difference between Arnold's and Carlyle's discussion of democracy, namely the ideal of the cultivation of humanity. Carlyle believed that salvation of the era depended on heroes, by which he meant individuals 'great enough [...] wise enough and good enough.'<sup>326</sup> Echoing Aristotle's 'Magnanimous Man' and anticipating Nietzsche's 'Superman,' his 'hero' appeared very often as an individual that encompassed the potential of all human beings. Thus when he set out to define poets as heroes, Carlyle argued that the poet should demonstrate 'an *infinitude*.'<sup>327</sup> True poetry was therefore '[a] kind of inarticulate unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the Infinite, and lets us for moment gaze into that.'<sup>328</sup> Concerning this point, Arnold held a very different view. If led to the edge of the 'Infinite,' he would declare that he saw nothing but chaos and anarchy. This distrust for the infinite was already indicated by his aversion to multitudinousness in poetry; and now as a critic who preached the 'grand style,' it became even more obvious. The term 'grand style,' Arnold reminded his audience,

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<sup>323</sup> Arnold, 'Democracy' 13. Also see David J. DeLaura, 'Arnold and Carlyle' *PMLA* 70 (1964) 104-29, at 109.

<sup>324</sup> Arnold, 'Democracy' 8.

<sup>325</sup> Arnold, 'Democracy' 3.

<sup>326</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall) 16.

<sup>327</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History* 98.

<sup>328</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History* 99.

had also appeared in his *On Translating Homer*, the series of lectures given in 1860 and published in 1861. There he had defined ‘grand style’ as the style which arose when ‘a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject.’<sup>329</sup> The idea of ‘gifted’ and ‘noble’ seemed to draw Arnold’s poet close to the Carlylean hero, but the emphasis on ‘simplicity’ set them apart. ‘Abundance of poetical gift’ and ‘abundance of noble natures,’ according to Arnold, was never in shortage. What was truly rare was the combination of poetical gift and noble nature in ‘a continuous style.’<sup>330</sup> In Arnold’s opinion, most of the poets in the present age were either those who ‘had the gifts of nature and faculty in *unequal fullness* [...] without the circumstances and training which make this sustained perfection of style possible,’ or those who ‘caught this perfect strain now and then, *in short pieces or single lines*, but have not been able to maintain it through considerable works’; few could meet the requirement of the ideal.<sup>331</sup> Once again, the appeal to aesthetic unity as opposed to fragmentary flashes of genius was clear: grandeur denoted not only ‘wise enough’ and ‘good enough.’ but excellence as a whole.

While being an antidote against the multitudinousness of the world, the notion of ‘grand style’ also contained Arnold’s repudiation of the excessive individualism of the middle classes. In fact, the Homer essay was not the first place in which Arnold had talked about the ‘grand style.’ The term had already appeared in his 1853 *Preface*, where poets from ancient Greece were regarded as the best specimens of ‘unapproachable masters of the *grand style*.’<sup>332</sup> According to Arnold, the grandness of their works consisted first of all in the fact that they, instead of fixing attention ‘on the value of separate thoughts and images,’ regarded the work as a whole.<sup>333</sup> This was achieved, as Arnold went on to explain, because those Greek poets made ‘actions’ predominate over ‘expressions,’ keeping the latter simple and subordinated.<sup>334</sup> Whereas action suggested a unity that dealt with the essential human nature,

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<sup>329</sup> Arnold, *On Translating Homer, On the Classic Tradition*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1960) 88.

<sup>330</sup> Arnold, *On Translating Homer* 89.

<sup>331</sup> Arnold, *On Translating Homer* 89, italics added.

<sup>332</sup> Arnold, *Preface* xiii.

<sup>333</sup> Arnold, *Preface* xiii.

<sup>334</sup> Arnold, *Preface* xiii.

expression, with its diversity, was highly individualistic. What Arnold wanted to achieve with ‘grand style’ was an aesthetic unity purged of excessive individual taste: grandness in literature was the effect created when poetry gave prominence to what was essential in human nature as opposed to personal preferences; and grandness in culture, similarly, was achieved when the cultivation of humanity focused on the permanent and the enduring, rather than the temporary. Thus it could be said that while the Carlylean hero was an ideal against mediocrity, Arnold’s was against irregularities. By calling for the middle classes to cultivate grand style, he was in fact bidding them to temper their excessive individualism – ‘doing as one likes’, as he would later describe it in *Culture and Anarchy*.

Arnold has constantly been accused of being too vague with his terms and concepts, and ‘grand style’ was often cited as one example.<sup>335</sup> Arnold himself had foreseen this challenge. Talking about the grand style in *On Translating Homer*, he warned his audience that the term was ‘the last matter in the world for verbal definition to deal with adequately.’ The only proper way to understand it, therefore, was ‘to feel it.’<sup>336</sup> It was doubtful whether such a spiritualistic tone could convince his audience; some certainly refused to buy it, hence the comment from *The North British Review* that Arnold not only made his terms inaccessible but also provided an explanation ‘worse than affected.’<sup>337</sup> But I would argue that the term ‘grand style’ is general rather than vague, and it is necessarily general. As Arnold’s aesthetic model, it embodies a variety of concerns: the idea underlies both Arnold’s literary criticism and his social criticism, signifying both the poetic principle that held simple actions above elaborate verbal decorations *and* the criticism of individualism in an increasingly democratised society. Understood in this way, the vagueness of the term becomes the source of flexibility, the very power that enabled Arnold to maneuver between different spheres of criticism and, as if following his own dictation, enabled him to unify his literary principles with political aspirations into an aesthetic ideal.

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<sup>335</sup> Fraser Neiman, ‘The Zeitgeist of Matthew Arnold,’ *PMLA* 72 (1957) 977-96, at 978. Also Coulling’s *Matthew Arnold and His Critics*, 96.

<sup>336</sup> Arnold, *On Translating Homer*, 92.

<sup>337</sup> Anonymous, ‘Recent Homeric Critics and Translators.’ *North British Review*, 36 (1862) 345-80, at 360.



## **‘Aesthetic State’: the Social End of Aesthetic Education**

If ‘grand style’ conveys Arnold’s criticism of his society, ‘state’ is the one that contains the remedy he proposed. The only way to replace the old aristocracy without going back, Arnold insisted, was to look toward the ‘State.’ He borrowed from Burke’s definition that the state was ‘the nation in its collective and corporate character,’ yet also suffixed it with his own interpretations. Thus the ‘State,’ according to his definition, was also

an ideal of high reason and right feeling, representing its best self, commanding general respect, and forming a rallying-point for the intelligence and for the worthiest instincts of the community, which will herein find a true bond of union.<sup>338</sup>

There is an interesting parallel between the ‘State’ and the character of the Scholar-Gipsy. Both, as Arnold saw it, were embodiments of the harmoniously developed reason and feeling; and both, when properly established, would represent to the public ‘the worthiest instincts’ that helped form a true bond, a union, out of chaos and multitudinousness. The parallel also holds true for the reason that Arnold, in the essay ‘Democracy,’ seems to have been somewhat negligent of the function of the state as a political and social machine. In spite of his interest in politics as an individual, in the essay, he did not touch on the issue of institutions, displayed little concern for political parties and deliberately avoided the idea that the state could become a coercive power that caused pain to its subjects, which, as he explained, posed no serious problem for English people in the nineteenth century. When all these concerns were removed, the ‘State’ became less a political entity and more of a cultivated individual, who, just as the Scholar-Gipsy, won ‘respect’ from the world by demonstrating his ‘best self.’

Such a state, humanised and impersonalised, was highly reminiscent of Schiller’s concept of ‘aesthetic State’ in his *Aesthetic Letters*. It should be pointed out, however,

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<sup>338</sup> Arnold, *Democracy* 15.

that in the English version, Schiller's 'aesthetic State' appears sometimes quite confusing, because some translators used the same word 'state' for two different German words, 'Zustand' and 'Staat.'<sup>339</sup> When translated more precisely, the first means condition, the state of being, while the latter refers to the political state, the actual body of the nation. It was in the aesthetic condition, as Schiller argued, that humanity found its unity: 'we feel ourselves snatched outside time, and our humanity expresses itself with a purity and integrity as though it had not yet experienced any detriment from the influence of external forces.'<sup>340</sup> The latter, on the other hand, stood for the most advanced level that human society could achieve. To illustrate this point, Schiller compared the 'aesthetic state' with two other types of state, dynamic and ethical. The dynamic, driving man into social bonds, made society possible, while the ethical state 'implanted social principles' and subjected the individual will to the general will. But the aesthetic state distinguished itself from both. Although it was also a collective of individuals, the relationship between society and individuals was maintained neither by power nor by discipline, but by beauty and harmony. Thus it was in the aesthetic state that '[b]eauty alone can confer on him [the individual] a *social character*,' and '[t]aste alone brings harmony into society, because it establishes harmony in the individual.'<sup>341</sup> Only in this way, Schiller maintained, could the aesthetic state become a state of dignity and freedom, one that best represented the collective interest.

However, it is understandable that some English translators did not make a sufficient distinction between these two types of 'aesthetic state.' The two concepts are so intrinsically connected that sometimes, they do seem to be interchangeable. Although the aesthetic state in the political sense emphasised the relationship between individuals, while the aesthetic condition stressed the world within each one, harmony was the feature of both. And as far as harmony was concerned, the aesthetic state was an external reflection of the aesthetic condition or, to borrow Schiller's own words, it was the 'social character' of purity and integrity that was derived from individuals

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<sup>339</sup> Leslie Sharpe, *Friedrich Schiller: Drama, Thought and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 351 n. 25.

<sup>340</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 103.

<sup>341</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 138.

who possessed exactly the same qualities. In his analysis of aesthetic ‘Staat,’ David Pugh comments that Schiller presented a ‘depoliticized picture’ in which ‘political goals are subordinated to the needs of human development and culture.’<sup>342</sup> This observation grasps the core of the concept, and I would add that much of the depoliticising came from the fact that the state, in Schiller’s mind, was primarily a condition of culture. Ultimately, both the aesthetic condition and the aesthetic state were regarded as an ideal that the cultivation of humanity should strive for.

The interconnection between state and condition in Schiller’s aesthetic education provides the key to understand the concept of state in Arnold’s ‘Democracy,’ where, as has been repeatedly noted, the image was equally depoliticised. Because of his explicit support for state action in solving problems in an increasingly democratised Victorian England, scholars who study Victorian education usually categorise Arnold as a pro-state figure amidst the Victorian debate of state versus private. As a result, he is not only accredited for Victorian educational reforms but also identified as a typical antagonist to John Stuart Mill in social theory and practice.<sup>343</sup> I have no quarrel with these long-established portrayals of Arnold, and I agree that the contrast between these two eminent figures was plain enough. However, following my argument that both were avid aesthetic educators, I wish to point out that the disagreement between them was not just one about social theory and practice. Rather, it reflected a deeper divergence, namely, their different understandings of humanity and, for that matter, the ideals of human cultivation.

Where Arnold conceived the state as a representative of the essential part of human nature, Mill, with the mentality of a typical liberal, was highly distrustful of the effort of the nation. ‘A general state of education,’ Mill contended,

is a mere contrivance for modeling people to be exactly like one another; and

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<sup>342</sup> David Pugh, ‘Schiller and Classical Antiquity,’ *A Companion to the Works of Friedrich Schiller*, ed. Steven D. Martinson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2005) 47-66, at 59.

<sup>343</sup> Books on these topics are many; here, I will just mention several recent publications that illustrate these views: Joseph James Chambliss, *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 1996); Paul Thomas and David Lloyd, *Culture and the State* (London: Routledge, 1996); W. F. Connell, *The Educational Thought and Influence of Matthew Arnold: International Library of Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2003); Joy Palmer, Liora Bresler and David Edward Cooper, *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education: From Confucius to Dewey* (London: Routledge, 2001).

as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy or the majority of the existing generation, in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body.<sup>344</sup>

For Mill, state intervention should be excluded because it cultivated uniformity among individuals and, thereby, made people all alike. The best education, in his view, should bring forward an ‘intellectual diversity,’

that multiform development of human nature, those manifold unlikenesses, that diversity of tastes and talents, and variety of intellectual points of view, which not only form a great part of the interest of human life, but by bringing intellects into stimulating collision, and by presenting to each innumerable notions that he would not have conceived of himself, are the mainspring of mental and moral progression.<sup>345</sup>

With Mill’s characteristic emphasis on ‘multiform’ and ‘manifold,’ the passage offers us a clear idea of what he considered to be the best cultivation: it should, by all possible means, promote intellectual expansion, independent thinking as well as individual judgments. Following this logic, a state education, which imposed central authority, was certainly not to be recommended.

Arnold also valued the expansion of humanity. The Greek ideal, as he had so famously put it, represented human nature ‘in its completest and most harmonious development,’ and Hellenism aimed at ‘perfecting all [parts of men], leaving none to take their chance.’ But all these stresses on completion and expansion had one important premise, namely that human beings should learn to look inward and find the essential elements shared by all. Expansion in itself was not to be cherished, because chaos, fragments and excessive subjectivism were also among its products. A proper education must therefore make sure that its final aim was not expansion of the eccentricity of the individual, but promulgation of the best self. Viewed in this way, the disagreement between Arnold and Mill concerning state education was not

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<sup>344</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Essays on Politics and Society*, ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1977) 217-310, at 302.

<sup>345</sup> Mill, *On Liberty* 209.

immediately political but was based largely on their conflicting views of what human cultivation should achieve.

When Arnold proposed the state as a solution, however, he was not only speaking against the liberal cause championed by Mill. The aesthetic ideal of a central state based on the best self of human nature also had another target in reality, that is, the issue of sectarianism in education. The Victorian age saw heated debates over the role of the state in schooling. The churches had always been considered to be the most capable providers of education, in which the government took little part. Denominational schools and the variety of religious organisations involved, such as the National Society, testified to the power of the church in classrooms.<sup>346</sup> But this practice caused difficulties in some respects. Since it was various religious groups that provided education, classrooms sometimes were turned into a battleground of different sects. And it was not just different religious sects that were at conflict with each other; disagreement between the church and the dissenters was also a common issue.<sup>347</sup> Things became even more complicated as the economy developed. The rapid growth of industry and the subsequent emergence of a large working population demanded mass education, which could never be realised in the current sectarian system.<sup>348</sup> Efforts along this line would eventually give birth to the Forster's Education Act of 1870, which announced the beginning of the modern national system of education in this country. This was the very act that Arnold had been looking for when he wrote 'Democracy' a decade ago.

But in Arnold's opinion, the most serious impediment was not the trouble caused to public administration; rather, it lay in the fact that sectarianism in education encouraged sectarianism in human nature. This problem was particularly evident in the middle classes, who were then the most active power in the management of social affairs. The only antidote, according to Arnold, was to subject one's self interest to state power, which alone could supply the middle classes (and other classes as well)

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<sup>346</sup> Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-1875* (London: Fontana, 1992) 173.

<sup>347</sup> Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1949) 182-84.

<sup>348</sup> L. C. B. Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History 1837-1901* (London: Routledge, 1973) 196.

with a national character, ‘a greatness and a noble spirit’ that would replace their ‘condition of real inferiority.’<sup>349</sup> This was also the central idea that Arnold developed in another essay on education, *A French Eton*, and, eventually, in his famous *Culture and Anarchy*. In *A French Eton*, he disparaged the provincialism of the middle classes, insisting that this group ‘only tries to affirm its actual self’ and ‘to impose its actual self.’<sup>350</sup> In *Culture and Anarchy*, similarly, he made the ‘best self’ the very aim of culture: ‘by our *best self* we are united, impersonal, at harmony’; hence the claim: ‘we want an authority, and [...] culture suggests the idea of the State. We find no basis for a firm State-power in our ordinary selves; culture suggests one to us in our *best self*.’<sup>351</sup> That ‘culture suggests the idea of the State’ is a very interesting notion, because in ‘Democracy,’ where the central state was looked at as the best agent for the cultivation of humanity, the central idea might also be summarised as ‘the State suggests the idea of culture.’ Just like Schiller’s aesthetic condition and aesthetic state, Arnold’s ‘State’ and ‘culture’ were also concepts that, in a way, could be understood as synonyms.

Because of Arnold’s constant mentioning of ‘state-power,’ his criticism of liberalism and, above all, his explicit quest for ‘authority,’ critics are often haunted by the idea that Arnold was in his heart an authoritarian. Herbert F. Tucker, for instance, talks about Arnold’s ‘authoritarian edict,’<sup>352</sup> and Leon Albert Gottfried also criticises his ‘authoritarian bias’ in the attempt to modify the teaching of Romanticism.<sup>353</sup> Peter Keating, though trying to defend Arnold’s ‘great achievement,’ nevertheless admits that his educational ideas and criticism of the middle classes betray indeed ‘some authoritarian element’ through his desire for a ‘stringent power of repression.’<sup>354</sup> But in my view, not all these characterisations are well grounded; whether or not they are sound, largely depends on what critics mean by the word ‘authoritarian.’ If by

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<sup>349</sup> Arnold, ‘Democracy’ 19, 24.

<sup>350</sup> Arnold, *A French Eton* 318.

<sup>351</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 99.

<sup>352</sup> Herbert F. Tucker ‘Arnold and the Authorization of Criticism,’ *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Suzy Anger (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001) 100-20, at 118.

<sup>353</sup> Gottfried 3.

<sup>354</sup> Keating, Peter, ‘Arnold’s Social and Political Thought.’ *Writers and their Background: Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott (London: G. Bell, 1975) 207-35, at 234.

‘authoritarian’ they refer simply to Arnold’s somewhat rigid adherence to the form of central authority, this is all very true. From Greek poetry to state power, Arnold had always been looking for some embodiments of his ideal of aesthetic education. Because he was speaking of the aim of human cultivation, and because his ideal was an aesthetic unity based on the essential nature of human beings, it was necessary to establish an example above common humanity; a vision of the centre, therefore, was inevitable.

Nevertheless, it would be a downright misunderstanding if we take this example as an external authority established at the expense of human freedom. The authority of the state, for Arnold, consisted in its ability to represent the essential elements of human beings, but so it was with the ‘ideal man,’ who, by following grand examples, was able to differentiate the permanent elementary part of nature from his individualistic trait in order to make the best prevail. Similar to Schiller, whose ‘aesthetic state’ is but an external equivalence to ideal humanity, Arnold also sought true authority from within human beings. Even more significantly, for both of them, establishing an aesthetic state was the way not to contain but to achieve freedom. The ability to ‘rise out of the narrow circle of natural ends’ of ourselves, Schiller believed, brought us ‘freedom that belongs to spiritual nature.’<sup>355</sup> In the same vein, Arnold argued in *Culture and Anarchy* that our freedom resides in our elevation ‘to the idea of a perfected humanity’ by subordinating ‘all the multitudinous, turbulent, and blind impulses of our ordinary selves.’<sup>356</sup> Freedom, Schiller and Arnold agreed, was the ultimate aim of aesthetic education; only, it consisted not in doing what man wanted to do according to their ordinary selves, their impulses or circumstances; instead, it should be the free play of an ennobled soul. Hence it was natural that, after a lengthy discussion of various social problems in the Victorian age, Arnold’s ‘Democracy’ should conclude with a reflection on humanity. ‘Human thought,’ he said, ‘which made all institutions, inevitably saps them, resting only in that which is absolute and

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<sup>355</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 110.

<sup>356</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 166-67.

eternal.<sup>357</sup> None of the institutions, or external agencies in any form, could ensure the perfection of human beings; ultimately, it was men's knowledge of themselves – the absolute and the essential – that led them toward perfection.

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<sup>357</sup> Arnold, 'Democracy' 25.



## Conclusion

*Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold's best-known work, was first published in book form in 1869. Similar to Mill's inaugural address, it contained many ideas about aesthetic education that Arnold had already discussed in his previous writings. Thus in *Culture and Anarchy*, the scathing criticism of English society very often led to, or culminated in, the description of perfect human nature. And it is interesting to observe that in Arnold's view, ideal humanity always had some distinct 'formal' qualities. Human cultivation, he argued, led to the perfection of character, which was in essence a 'general' as well as 'a *harmonious* expansion of human nature.'<sup>358</sup> Mere expansion did not suffice; as the use of italics indicated, Arnold also insisted that the final product of this expansion must have an orderly and unified structure. In other words, perfection was accomplished not simply by cultivating every human faculty to its utmost, but also – and more importantly – by making every faculty work in accordance with each other as a whole. Ignore this principle, and cultivation would only result in 'strong individualism,' 'hatred of all limits to the unrestrained swing of the individual's personality' and 'intense energetic absorption in the particular pursuit' that each one felt compelled to take – in sum, qualities that made civilisation 'mechanical and external.'<sup>359</sup> Harmony and unity were what Arnold found in his Greek examples which, once again, were recommended as the ideal of human perfection. The essence of Hellenism, according to him, consisted in 'the impulse to the development of the whole man, to connecting and harmonising all parts of him, perfecting all, leaving none to take their chance.'<sup>360</sup>

But Arnold did not prescribe antiquity as the only antidote. He also tried to convince his audience to embrace a new understanding of the 'State.' The English antipathy toward this concept, he maintained, was derived from the definition of the state as 'the class in occupation of the executive government' and the conviction that

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<sup>358</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 63.

<sup>359</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 63.

<sup>360</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 145.

people 'are only safe from one another's tyranny when no one has any power.'<sup>361</sup> This, in turn, was based on the observation that individuals 'are separate, personal' and, consequently, 'at war.' While these convictions could ward off the danger of tyranny, they could also lead people into the trap of anarchy. The best solution, therefore, was to alter the concept of self from 'separate, personal, at war' into 'united, impersonal, at harmony,' and meanwhile to modify the state in such a way that instead of representing class interests, it would become a representation of the best self.<sup>362</sup> All of these arguments – the stress on harmony and unity, the passion for the civilisation of ancient Greece, and the depoliticised 'State' as an ideal of human cultivation – would never sound strange for readers who have been familiar with those aesthetic principles underlying Arnold's poetics and criticism at a much earlier stage. Moreover, these arguments also compel us once again to think about Arnold's principles for aesthetic education. His aesthetic education, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, is not as simple as 'a conviction of the importance of the excellence in art and literature'; nor is Arnold the aesthetic educator a simple devotee to art and literature. Rather, he was in many ways a Schillerian aesthetic educator. His affinity with Schiller was not only evidenced in the quotes incorporated into his criticism. Deep down they shared the same aspiration towards unity and harmony as the ideal of aesthetic cultivation, and they both regarded beauty as a 'power of agency' in the progress of society.

As in the case of Mill, Arnold's aesthetic aspiration also affected his own manner of presentation. Analysing Arnold's rhetorical style, James A. Berlin notes that its main feature is the use of synthesis and analysis. Berlin looks particularly at *Culture and Anarchy*, the structure of which, he argues, as 'a whole as well as each section [...] proceeds along the lines of successive stages of synthesis and analysis.' According to Berlin, the categories of 'Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace' and the polarisation of 'Hellenism and Hebraism' are both examples of how Arnold combined 'dialectical

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<sup>361</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 99.

<sup>362</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 99.

parts' in order to arrive at truth.<sup>363</sup> In my view, however, to describe Arnold's rhetoric as 'synthesis' is quite misleading, especially if by synthesis, it is suggested that Arnold was combining separate elements to form a coherent whole.

This point might become clearer if we compare Arnold again with Mill. Mill used synthesis extensively in his argument. He synthesised feeling and intellect, feeling and morality, liberalism and elitism and, eventually, Bentham and Coleridge. Syntheses of those polarised parts were needed, as he explained, because each component within every set contained 'half-truth'; hence his final conclusions were always based on the observation that each part, however defective, had its own merit that must be incorporated if one wanted to achieve a balanced view. Arnold, by contrast, saw in Barbarians, Philistines or Populace little quality that was worth recommending, and he clearly preferred Hellenism to Hebraism. He criticised each group in the first set for not being sufficiently close to the ideal humanity, and praised Hellenism for offering the best example of a sound conception of human nature. 'We see, then,' he called out to his audience at the end of chapter three in *Culture and Anarchy*, where he had exposed the unsatisfactory side of every class of English society, 'how indispensable to that human perfection which we seek is, in the opinion of good judges, some public recognition and establishment of our best self, or right reason.' Immediately following that, he declared: 'We see how our habits and practice oppose themselves to such a recognition, and the many inconveniences which we therefore suffer.'<sup>364</sup> This is a fine illustration of how Arnold constructed his argument. Rather than starting from various elements that opposed each other, he started from the idea of perfection that he considered indispensable; only after that would he come down to those elements, revealing their defects and 'inconveniences' by examining them against the ideal.

Arnold borrowed aesthetic ideals from Schiller; yet, by seeking the ideal above contemporary reality, he also suffered the same pain that Schiller had described. Now let us take another look on the epitaph of his 'Cromwell' that was quoted at the very

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<sup>363</sup> James A. Berlin 'Matthew Arnold's Rhetoric: The Method of an Elegant Jeremiah,' *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 13.1 (1983) 29-40, at 35-36.

<sup>364</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 125.

beginning of this chapter: “it is awful to be the mortal vessel of thy truth.’ After rereading Arnold as a Schillerian aesthetic educator, it seems to me that Schiller’s Cassandra was less a parallel of Cromwell than a parallel of Arnold himself. In 1818, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* introduced Schiller’s ‘Kassandra’ by quoting from Madame de Staël’s *Germany*:

We see in this Ode what a misfortune it would be to a human being could he possess the prescience of a divinity. Is not the sorrow of the prophetess experienced by all persons of strong passions and supreme minds? Schiller has given us a fine moral idea under a very poetical form, namely, that true genius, that of sentiment, even if it escape suffering from its commerce with the world, is frequently the victim of its own feelings.<sup>365</sup>

There is no evidence whether Arnold had ever read this comment. It is possible that he had, given the popularity of Madame de Staël’s book, Arnold’s familiarity with her works and, above all, his lifelong interest in German culture. At any rate, the similarity between what Schiller endeavoured to convey and what Arnold would confront is startling. With the same ‘strong passions’ and ‘supreme minds’ – whether these were genuine or self-conferred – Arnold was to echo exactly the ‘sorrow of the prophetess.’ The Cassandra anxiety that the precious truth would be ignored by her fellow countrymen appeared again and again in Arnold’s writings. When talking about the function of criticism, he gloomily admitted that the era for true literature had long gone, and that in spite of his single-minded emphasis, ‘[t]hat promised land it will not be ours to enter.’<sup>366</sup> Illustrating the ideal education for the middle classes, he concluded his observation with the voice of a prophet by calling out to ‘[c]hildren of the future, whose day has not yet dawned.’<sup>367</sup> In both cases, he was haunted by the possibility that his vision would not make any impact on his contemporaries. For all his life, Arnold was to prophesise about the value of criticism, to propound sweetness and light, and to tell every order of society that they must begin with ‘an Idea of the

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<sup>365</sup> Quoted from ‘Cassandra,’ *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 3.3 (1818) 153.

<sup>366</sup> Arnold, ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,’ *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 26-51, at 51.

<sup>367</sup> Arnold, *A French Eton, Democratic Education*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1962) 262-325, at 325.

world' in order not to be prevailed over by the world's multitudinousness. In this sense, those lines from Schiller were, symbolically, an epitaph of the life of Arnold. Throughout his career as an aesthetic educator, he was precisely a 'mortal vessel' of the truth he had gained from his own observations of literature and life; and the conception of human nature in its unified and essential form was the very 'Idea' he brought to his world.

## **Chapter 3 Behold and Be Good: John Ruskin's Aesthetic Education as an Education of the Eyes**

### ***The King of the Golden River: Ruskin's Aesthetics of Seeing***

This chapter focuses on John Ruskin, whose 'aesthetics' has never been a subject understudied. Landmark works in this area include, among others, George P. Landow's *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (1971) and Elizabeth K. Helsinger's *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder* (1982). The former contains comprehensive research on Ruskin's art theories, and the latter offers much insight into his Romantic tendencies. In spite of their different perspectives, however, both authors portrayed Ruskin essentially as an art critic. My study of Ruskin's idea of 'aesthetic education' in the present chapter is much indebted to those works, but what I intend to achieve here is different from both. I do not aim to provide a comprehensive account of Ruskin's 'theories,' but shall concentrate instead on his idea of perception and the moral significance of seeing. I also do not analyse his works in the context of art history, but shall put him firmly within the context of nineteenth-century England. Most important of all, I do not see Ruskin as primarily an art critic. In fact, one of the central arguments that I shall make in this chapter is that Ruskin the aesthetic educator played an active role in a variety of fields other than art, and that to study his aesthetic education requires a close examination of his works that addressed a variety of concerns other than artistic issues. In order to illustrate this point, I shall begin with a work that was hardly ever mentioned in the study of Ruskin's aesthetic ideas, namely, *The King of the Golden River*, a short story written in 1841.

Discussing Ruskin's *The King of the Golden River*, Northrop Frye argues that 'Ruskin's treatment of wealth in his economic works [is] essentially a commentary on

this fairy tale.<sup>368</sup> But not everyone agrees with Frye. Cliver Wilmer, for instance, insists that even if the story contains some ideas that were later expounded in *Unto This Last*, to give it a central importance is a downright exaggeration because it is, after all, a fairy tale written by a young man.<sup>369</sup> The present chapter on Ruskin will focus on aesthetic cultivation instead of economics; hence there is not much to say about the debate between Frye and Wilmer. Nevertheless, as far as the significance of *The King of the Golden River* is concerned, my judgment is the same as Frye's. In my view, with its heavy emphasis on perception and the moral significance of seeing, the story contains the most important essence of Ruskin's idea of aesthetic cultivation.

The plot of *The King of the Golden River* is quite simple. Three brothers, Hans, Schwartz and Gluck, live in a bountiful valley. One day they are visited by Mr. South-West Wind, who has disguised himself as a strange old man begging for shelter and food. Gluck treats the guest kindly, but Hans and Schwartz turn him away. A disaster thus follows. The climate changes all of a sudden and the whole valley becomes a desert. The only way to save it, they are told, is to cast three drops of holy water into the Golden River up in the mountains. Hans and Schwartz set off on the expedition one after the other, but both fail to pass the test and, consequently, are turned into black stones. Only Gluck succeeds. Eventually, the valley becomes a garden again. In terms of structure and characterisation, the story resembles both those of the brothers Grimm and *The Arabian Nights*.<sup>370</sup> Indeed, Ruskin followed a conventional plot when he described the punishment of the greedy selfish brothers. Yet in one respect his story is unique: the narrative makes it clear that the two brothers deserve their misery because they not only fail the test on morality but also the test on perception. They are blind, both to nature and to the suffering of other creatures.

When Hans is on his way to the river, he meets a poor thirsty dog which, in his

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<sup>368</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957) 198.

<sup>369</sup> Clive Wilmer, commentary, *Unto this Last and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1997) 47.

<sup>370</sup> Ruskin described the story as 'a fairly good imitation of Grimm and Dickens, mixed with a little true Alpine feeling of my own' (*Praeterita*, ii. ch. iv. 64). Later critics often rely on this comment in their analysis of the story. But it is necessary to add that some of the most important elements in the story, such as the black stones and the golden river, closely resemble the three sisters' story in *The Arabian Nights*, a book that Ruskin once described as "glorious" and which he recommended to his friend "for standard places" on shelves, along with works by Shakespeare, Bacon and Bunyan (*Works*, 12, 378; *Works*, 36, 124). Further knowledge about Ruskin's appropriation of *Arabian Nights* might also help us to examine the story; for instance, its oriental impact.

eyes, is simply ‘an object’ that ‘moved.’ When he refuses to save the dog, his fate is first foreshadowed in the form of visible signs: ‘He [...] spurned the animal with his foot, and passed on. And he did not know how it was, but he thought that a strange shadow had suddenly come across the sky.’<sup>371</sup> But this is only a feeling, as Hans’ eyes are ‘fixed’ on the Golden River alone. He could not perceive the natural message clearly or decipher its meaning, let alone respond to the message properly. Later, when he meets a thirsty child, the same thing happens again. He refuses to save the child who, as he sees it, is but ‘something’ that ‘moved in the path above him.’<sup>372</sup> After that, ‘a dark grey cloud came over the sun, and long, snake-like shadows crept up along the mountain sides.’ This, however, was not what Hans has perceived. Again, he simply ignored the signs and ‘struggled on.’<sup>373</sup> When Hans refuses to offer help for the third time, the ominous signs from nature are becoming even more distinct. The waves of the Golden River ‘were filled with the red glory of sunset: they shook their crests like tongues of fire, and flashes of bloody light gleamed along their foam.’<sup>374</sup> Hans, still unable to understand the meaning embodied in these signs, hurls his flask of water into the river with enthusiasm. Instead of having his prosperity restored, he is punished for his unkindness and is turned into a black stone.

After that Schwartz sets off. Like Hans, he never gives any help to the creatures he meets. To his selfishness, nature also gives warnings:

Then again the light seemed to fade before his eyes, and he looked up, and, behold, a mist, of the colour of blood, had come over the sun; and the bank of black cloud had risen very high, and its edges were tossing and tumbling like the waves of the angry sea. And they cast long shadows, which flickered over Schwartz’s path.<sup>375</sup>

To some extent, Schwartz is more perceptive than Hans. While the latter only fixes all his attention on the Golden River, turning a blind eye to everything else, Schwartz can

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<sup>371</sup> Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River, Unto this Last and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer (London: Penguin Books, 1997) 49-71, at 64.

<sup>372</sup> Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River* 64.

<sup>373</sup> Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River* 65.

<sup>374</sup> Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River* 65.

<sup>375</sup> Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River* 67.



‘behold’ the changes around him. On one occasion, when he passes another dying creature without doing anything, Schwartz even ‘thought he saw a strange expression of mockery about its lips.’<sup>376</sup> But seeing is different from understanding. In Schwartz’s case, perception remains perception only; those signs do not motivate him to behave in any different way. No matter how clearly he sees, he draws no connection between the signs and their moral indications and, consequently, is also turned into a black stone.

Gluck, by contrast, has very perceptive eyes, and he is also quick in understanding. When the first creature, an old man, approaches him, Gluck instantly grasps every detail, seeing that it is ‘an old man coming down the path above him, looking very feeble, and leaning on a staff.’<sup>377</sup> Clear perception helps him to make the right decisions. When the old man asks for water, Gluck ‘looked at him, and when he saw that he was pale and weary, he gave him the water.’<sup>378</sup> When this is done, happy little changes happens in the mountain: ‘there were all kinds of sweet flowers growing on the rocks, bright green moss, with pale pink starry flowers, and soft belled gentians, more blue than the sky at its deepest, and pure white transparent lilies.’<sup>379</sup> Having noticed these little changes, Gluck feels that he ‘had never felt so happy in his life.’<sup>380</sup> When the third creature, a dog, begs for water, Gluck, having little left for himself, almost refuses. But his heart is touched by what he has seen: ‘he looked *closer* and *closer* at it, and its eye turned on him so mournfully, that he could not stand it.’<sup>381</sup> Compelled by what he sees, Gluck gives all the water left to the dog and, in this way, passes the test.

Thus unlike conventional moral stories where the evil witch always *does* bad things and ends up with a painful death, and where the brave knight always *does* good things and wins a glorious wedding, Ruskin’s story has its own moral to tell. It shows how kind actions are rewarded, but it also gives moral lessons on the importance of

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<sup>376</sup> Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River* 67.

<sup>377</sup> Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River* 68.

<sup>378</sup> Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River* 68.

<sup>379</sup> Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River* 69.

<sup>380</sup> Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River* 69.

<sup>381</sup> Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River* 69, emphasis added.

being perceptive. Virtue in *The King of the Golden River* has therefore multiple connotations. To be a virtuous person means to do good things, as well as to have a clear vision. Indeed, at some point ‘seeing’ appears even more crucial since it is sensitiveness that makes Gluck sympathetic towards fellow creatures and responsive towards natural signs. In this sense, the success of Gluck and the happy ending of the bountiful valley are both ultimately due to a perceptive eye.

In his later works, Ruskin continued to expound the importance of perception, in both art criticism and criticism of society. No subject better illustrates his enthusiasm for ‘seeing’ than his aesthetic principles, and this shall be the subject of the present chapter. In his *John Ruskin: the Argument of the Eye* (1976), Robert Hewison also addressed Ruskin’s aesthetic of the eye across a variety of works, and the present thesis is much indebted to his insights. But there is a significant difference between my argument and his. While Hewison tried to demonstrate that there is a consistently ‘visual dimension’ in Ruskin’s thinking, my thesis has a much smaller scope.<sup>382</sup> I am more interested in Ruskin’s consistent emphasis on the necessity to cultivate perception. Thus instead of following Hewison on ‘the argument of the eye,’ I shall analyse in depth ‘the education of the eye.’ My study in this respect consists of three parts. The first part shall focus on the first two volumes of *Modern Painters*. These works are generally recognised as cornerstones in Ruskin’s career, as they introduced the anonymous Oxford Graduate to the public and helped him to claim his own authority in art criticism. Through a comparison between Ruskin and critics such as Rippingille, Hazlitt and Reynolds, my study will demonstrate how Ruskin distinguished himself from his fellow art critics with his untiring emphasis on the ‘perception of nature.’ The aesthetic cultivation in the *Modern Painters* series, as I shall show, begins with an instruction to see: beauty, as Ruskin maintained, could be reached only through a close observation of nature, which was ‘authoritative and

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<sup>382</sup> Robert Hewison, *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976) 7. Hewison’s exploration of Ruskin’s ‘consistency’ is very helpful, but in the meanwhile, it is also the weakness of Hewison’s study. Just as David Sonstroem points out, Hewison’s judgment ‘is coloured by his search for consistency and,’ consequently, ‘limited by his not reading each work in closer detail’ (288). See David Sonstroem, Review of *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye*, *Victorian Studies* 21.2 (1978) 287-88. Therefore, my study shall try to steer away from the same problem with a relatively narrower focus and a closer reading of Ruskin’s works.

inviolable.’

The investigation of Ruskin’s idea of perception in the artistic realm shall be carried on in the second part, but with a different focus. While in his fine description of Venetian architecture Ruskin continued to urge his audience to pay attention to physical details, ‘seeing’ in this discourse was no longer a purely physical activity. My reading of passages from *The Stones of Venice* and related works shall therefore concentrate on Ruskin’s visual-moral explications. For Ruskin, as I shall argue, to see properly was also to see ‘with a Pure Heart’; thus the cultivations he offered to the audience became at once aesthetical and moral. The third part of this chapter shall turn to Ruskin’s social criticism and, in particular, his criticism of industrialisation in ‘Of Queens’ Gardens.’ Although in this work, Ruskin did not address the issue of ‘seeing’ in such an explicit manner as he had done in the criticisms of paintings and architecture, the idea of ‘perception,’ in my view, still dominated his argument. While in his previous writings, Ruskin attached much consequence to a close examination of natural as well as moral truths, here, he created an ideal female, visualising the ‘beauty’ that he had all along been extolling. This icon facilitated his criticism of industrialisation, but the inherent conflict between different identities of that ideal female also made his views about the role of aesthetic education highly ambiguous. In this section, I shall explore the complications in this visual embodiment and will also explore how, for that matter, the audience of Ruskin’s social criticism failed to ‘perceive’ what he had intended them to see.

## **‘The Authority of the Beautiful and the True’: *Modern Painters* and the Idea of Perception**

Shortly after Ruskin’s first volume of *Modern Painters* came out in 1843, a reviewer from *The Britannia* congratulated him for having opened a new epoch. ‘This is the bold title of a bold work,’ the reviewer said, ‘a general challenge to the whole body of cognoscenti, dilettanti, and all haranguers, essayists, and critics on the art of Italy, Flanders, and England, for the last hundred years.’<sup>383</sup> This is a generous compliment indeed; and in the years to come, the same judgment about Ruskin’s talent would be echoed thousands of times. But I find this remark interesting for another reason. The courageous author of *Modern Painters* might have opened a new epoch; but, as the reviewer reminds us, he did not necessarily create a brand new realm. Instead, he worked along an old path that had been well trodden, a subject upon which many had given their opinions. The book was a ‘general challenge’ precisely because the author had too many rivals to defeat and too many misconceptions to correct.

The reviewer did not specify what he meant with labels such as cognoscenti and dilettanti, and, perhaps out of caution, he did not mention any names that would fit into those categories. But it is almost certain that he had in mind people such as Edward Villiers Ripplingille and William Hazlitt. Both tried to educate the public in matters of taste and, in their own ways, the former fitted well into the group of ‘cognoscenti,’ and the latter was well known for his ‘essayist’ style. Ruskin’s works also contained explicit references to both of them and, just as the reviewer said, he disagreed with both, criticising Hazlitt’s amateurish description and judging Ripplingille ‘all wrong.’ Both the reviewer’s comments and Ruskin’s own words extend much critical interest to those two figures, because Ruskin’s disagreement with them would eventually help to shape his own mind and, thereby, bring forward the most crucial message that he would offer to the audience. Considering this, the

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<sup>383</sup> Quoted from J. L. Bradley ed., *John Ruskin: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1984) 5. The review was anonymous, but Bradley identified the author as George Croly, a family friend of the Ruskins.

present section shall begin by first of all examining the ideas of Ruskin's rivals. This, I think, will provide much insight into how Ruskin took up the subject as a 'challenge' and, more importantly, how he invested his effort into the same project but did so in a very different manner.

## **A Professional Campaign: Ripplingille's Aesthetic Education**

In November 1843, John Ruskin, who had just published the first volume of *Modern Painters*, experienced deep anxiety about his future career. The cause of his anxiety was a series of essays from *The Artist and Amateur Magazine* by Edward Villiers Ripplingille. Ripplingille was once an exhibition artist at the Royal Academy and was then trying his hand as an art critic. His art criticism is now almost forgotten, but at the time, it impressed many, including Ruskin. On November 30<sup>th</sup>, Ruskin confessed in his diary, in a somewhat annoyed tone and even with a slight touch of jealousy, that he was worried that the artist was to utter exactly the same words on the subject that he was long pondering. 'In the *Artist and Amateur* I see a series of essays on beauty commenced,' said Ruskin, 'which seem as if they would anticipate me altogether.'<sup>384</sup> But his anxiety did not last long. After a month's reading, Ruskin felt much relieved. It appeared that, even though Ripplingille shared his interest, their opinions were drastically different. Thus, in the entry on December 30<sup>th</sup>, Ruskin declared with regained confidence: 'Find Ripplingille all wrong in his essay on beauty: shall have the field open.'<sup>385</sup>

For a writer like Ruskin, who constantly sought to impress readers with boldness and originality, to admit himself to be anticipated – even if almost – was no small issue. Considering the fact that he had then just published the first volume of *Modern Painters* and was thinking about the second, one would naturally expect to read more comments on Ripplingille. But further reference to that name in his writings is scarce.

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<sup>384</sup> Ruskin, *The Diaries of John Ruskin, 1835-1847*, eds. Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) 252.

<sup>385</sup> Ruskin, *The Diaries of John Ruskin* 256.

Consequently, Ripplingille is hardly mentioned in Ruskin scholarship today, and few would care about the above little anecdote any more. Yet, there are still many questions unsolved, and the answers to them are potentially enlightening. Why, for example, did Ruskin worry so much about being anticipated? Why did he become less uneasy later? Did he make any attempt to correct his rival in order to actually ‘have the field open’? If yes, can we see that in his works? With these questions in mind, I think a brief return to Ripplingille at this point is all too necessary, as it promises a context which shall be helpful to identify Ruskin’s own concern with his voluminous writings on beauty and aesthetics.

‘[M]y grand object in bringing forward this work,’ said Ripplingille in his preface in *The Artist and Amateur Magazine*, ‘is to open a source of information on the subject of arts of design, and to attempt the cultivation and refinement of the public taste.’ The latter part received special emphasis as he went on, addressing his readers directly:

You will ask, perhaps, Are there no such sources of information open to the public? Alas! if I am obliged to reply in the spirit in which it is asserted this work will be conducted, I must honestly confess I do not believe there is a single one to be found. Nothing that is offered in the way of instruction or comment is derived from men whose knowledge is of learned and practical character combined. The only efficient information which can be offered or obtained must come from the painter.<sup>386</sup>

Ripplingille’s intentions were twofold. While trying to convince his readers of the originality of the essays, he also aimed to convince them of the competence of the author, not as an exhibition artist but more as a guide for public taste. Ripplingille certainly knew his own disadvantage in the latter role. As a painter, he was generally known for his skill on canvas, rather than his skill with the so-called ‘public.’ Thus, by stressing that the guides should be of ‘learned and practical character combined,’ he was in effect justifying his calibre as a tutor. His eagerness for teaching is also evident in the way that he transformed the preface from a personal account into an interlocution between ‘you’ and ‘I’ – with amateur-readers on the one hand and the

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<sup>386</sup> E. V. Ripplingille, *Preface, The Artist and Amateur Magazine: A Work Devoted to the Interests of the Arts and Design and the Cultivation of Taste* (London: Longman, 1843) 4.

artist-author on the other. But the most telling evidence is found several lines later, where Ripplingille stated explicitly that he wished to ‘teach what is desirable’ in order to prepare the public for the reception of beauty ‘by an appropriate education’ in this realm.<sup>387</sup>

Ripplingille did not use the term ‘aesthetic education,’ but that was exactly what he wanted to convey with his magazine. Little wonder, then, that his examination of beauty would finally lead to a discussion of the means of cultivation. Beauty consists in variety, Ripplingille argued, and the ‘*beau ideal*’ was the form which combined all pieces of beauty together. In order to perceive beauty in its fullest sense, ‘there was a method at hand of obtaining the knowledge required; and this was to pursue the study upon the principles adopted by the creation of the thing, or in the mode of the artists. Indeed, common sense points out there can be no other.’<sup>388</sup> Good taste, as he maintained, belonged only to those who ‘learn[ed] to see, think and feel in the manner of artists.’<sup>389</sup> In other words, those who wished to enjoy beauty must first of all familiarise themselves with the rules of artistic creation and, even more preferable, become artists themselves.

The essays that followed show even more clearly how much Ripplingille was attached to his own profession. The entire body of essays is but an elaboration of the central argument in the preface: that artists, or painters, to be more specific, were the ultimate authorities in the judgment of art. In fact, the same conviction informed many of Ripplingille’s other works. In 1824, he was invited to deliver lectures on the techniques of painting in Bristol. But half way through the lecture, Ripplingille digressed towards the issue of the responsibility of painters. Thus according to a report in the *Bristol Mercury*, the major theme of the lecture became the importance of formal arts and ‘the little which Artists themselves have done to make the public acquainted with the principles of Art, especially considering the obvious good that must result, and the real and universally admitted want of general knowledge in it.’<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Ripplingille 4-5.

<sup>388</sup> Ripplingille 275.

<sup>389</sup> Ripplingille 275.

<sup>390</sup> Anonymous, ‘Mr. Ripplingille's Introductory Lecture.’ *Bristol Mercury* 16 Aug. 1824, issue 1783.

More than a decade later, the audience of that lecture could still recall how the artist-critic struck them with ‘the belief that he possess[ed] a scientific knowledge of his profession’ and the deepest veneration for it.<sup>391</sup>

It would require considerable exaggeration to reduce Rippingille’s aesthetic education program into an advertisement for a painting course; nonetheless, he clearly believed that painters like himself should have the final say on how to appreciate beauty. In the early nineteenth century, it was not at all uncommon to see proposals for aesthetic cultivation of the public intermixed with a professional campaign. In his Royal Academy lectures delivered in 1807, John Opie, a renowned English painter, also expressed a similar conviction. Why did English art and taste suffer so much from mediocrity? In Opie’s view, it was simply because painters did not take up their share of responsibility and too often subjected their will and talent to the ‘wretched prejudices of every ignorant and tasteless individual’ who commissioned and collected their works.<sup>392</sup> In order to revive art and refine taste, Opie urged his fellow artists to come forward boldly:

Keeping the true end of art in view, he must rise superior to the prejudices, disregard the applause, and condemn the judgment of corrupt and incompetent judges; far from aiming at being fashionable, it must be his object to reform and not to flatter; to teach and not to please.<sup>393</sup>

‘To teach and not to please,’ to this proposal Rippingille would surely agree with all his heart.

But Ruskin had a different opinion. As he had promised in his diary, he had detected Rippingille’s error and would fight back. The result was an essay contributed to *The Artist and Amateur’s Magazine* in January 1844. There Ruskin said that he could not agree more with Rippingille that the public should trust an ‘accomplished artist’ rather than ‘the common newsmonger’ in matters of taste. Nevertheless, there

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<sup>391</sup> Alaric A. Watts ed., *The Literary Souvenir, and the Cabinet of Modern Art* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1835) 173.

<sup>392</sup> Quoted from Bernard Denvir ed., *The Early Nineteenth Century: Art, Design and Society, 1789-1852* (London: Longman, 1984) 119.

<sup>393</sup> Denvir 120.



was always a misgiving, he added, ‘whether that can really be *great* Art which has no influence whatsoever on the multitude and which is appreciable only by the initiated few.’<sup>394</sup> What troubled Ruskin was Rippingille’s unreasonable demand on the public. In his view, an interest in paintings did not only belong to those who knew how to paint, and aesthetic sensitivity was never exclusive to people who excelled in pictorial arts. Knowledge of technique was helpful, but those who knew how to interpret art and beauty well did not have to be well informed with techniques of drawing. To carry out aesthetic education with the effect of turning every pupil into a painter was, therefore, not only a mission impossible, but also signified a narrow interpretation of aesthetic cultivation. If Rippingille achieved his goal, the multitude would break into two parts: a small group of people who acquired paintings skills and were *therefore* able to appreciate beauty; and a large group of those who could not excel in painting and *therefore* were deprived of the enjoyment of art. Even then, the issue of taste remained unsettled since, as Ruskin continued, ‘it is easy to prove that such and such a critic is wrong; but not so, to prove that what everybody dislikes is right.’<sup>395</sup>

Later, Ruskin, as the most determined supporter of Turner, was actually trying to prove that what many people disliked was right; but this little irony did not invalidate his entire argument in this particular article. His criticism of Rippingille, at this point, gives us much to anticipate, for he presented a different view regarding aesthetic education and the role of the art critic. His view was more democratised than that of Rippingille, and he envisioned the critic not as one who congratulated himself on being one of ‘the initiated few,’ but as one who mediated between artists and the audience, a role that he tried hard to fulfil in his *Modern Painters* series and other art criticisms. Now, due to a lack of materials, there is no way to know for sure how contemporaries responded to the debate between Ruskin and Rippingille, though obviously, the latter’s professional bias did not win him much support. Perhaps this is why Rippingille, for all his effort in the ‘cultivation and refinement of the public taste,’ was never formally acknowledged as an aesthetic educator, not even as an art

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<sup>394</sup> Ruskin, ‘To the Editor of *The Artist and Amateur’s Magazine*,’ *Works*, 3 648.

<sup>395</sup> Ruskin, ‘To the Editor of *The Artist and Amateur’s Magazine*,’ *Works*, 3 648.

critic. If the remark of a reviewer in *The Leader* could be trusted, by the 1850s, he was still remembered as an artist, yet ‘better known a quarter of a century since than of late years.’<sup>396</sup>

## **A Devotion to Classics: Hazlitt as an Aesthetic Educator**

Another problem with Rippingille’s statement is relatively minor. It is likely to be rhetorical, but he certainly exaggerated when he claimed that there was to the public not a single source of information about art. The truth is, just as the previously mentioned *Britannica* reviewer had said, there was a ‘whole body’ of people working in this area. In the early nineteenth century, English readers interested in this subject were usually quite familiar with the name of William Hazlitt. Like Rippingille, Hazlitt was also Ruskin’s rival and target of criticism; only, he would be criticised for a very different reason.

Though Hazlitt was also well-trained as a painter and knew much – to borrow Rippingille’s words – about how to see and think and feel as an artist, he never highlighted his own skills in his art criticism. Instead, he always portrayed himself as an enthusiastic devotee. Nothing could be more illustrative of that identity than the first paragraph of his ‘Mr. Angerstein’s Collection of Pictures,’ an article published in *The London Magazine* in December 1822. There Hazlitt claimed, quoting Shakespeare

Oh! Art, lovely Art! ‘Balm of hurt minds, chief nourisher in life’s feast, great Nature’s second course!’ Time’s treasurer, the unsullied mirror of the mind of man! Thee we invoke, and not in vain, for we find thee here retired in thy plentitude and thy power!<sup>397</sup>

The ode-like quality and the generous use of exclamation marks characterised every essay within that collection. Short introductions to specific paintings were invariably followed by long paragraphs that celebrated the beauty of art.

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<sup>396</sup> Anonymous, ‘Literary Notes.’ *Leader* [London] 14 May 1859.

<sup>397</sup> William Hazlitt, ‘Mr. Angerstein’s Collection of Pictures,’ *London Magazine* 6.36 (1822) 489-94, at 489.

Rippingille, for sure, was also enthusiastic about art, but there is still a considerable difference in terms of the identity of these two people. While Rippingille held dialogues with his audience in order to emphasise his own authority, Hazlitt, by invoking the editorial plural ‘we,’ constantly identified himself as part of the general audience. The pronoun was of course a formality, since most of his articles first appeared in newspapers; but it also helped his audience to visualise the speaking voice as one of ‘us.’ It seemed as if he, like his readers, approached paintings with equal wonder and admiration: ‘for these alone we may count upon as friends for life [...] As long as we have a wish for pleasure, we may find it here; for it depends only on our love for them, and not on theirs for us.’<sup>398</sup> If Rippingille gave the impression of being an austere master, readers of Hazlitt, hearing the voice addressing them as ‘our,’ ‘we’ and ‘us’ would easily think of him as an amiable fellow visitor, only perhaps more knowledgeable. Thus, Hazlitt’s authority did not rest on any professional training, but simply on the fact that he, like his audience, loved art, respected artists, and was always amazed by beauty.

In his evaluation of paintings, Hazlitt was also reluctant to be seen as a professional. Unlike Rippingille, he refused to indoctrinate his readers with artistic skills, but tried to find a common language that focused on artistic sensibilities. Thus talking about specific artworks, Hazlitt’s speaker invariably steered away from theoretical or technical aspects, concentrating chiefly instead on impressions received. Consequently, his accounts of paintings often serve as good illustrations of ‘synesthesia.’ For example, one painting was described as having ‘drawing-room air,’ another sent forth ‘delicious breath’ comparable to violets, and yet another had the effect ‘like the down on an unripe nectarine.’<sup>399</sup> In 1845, *Punch*, ridiculing the trend in art criticism, gave the following instructions to art critics:

Never use the word *picture*; say *canvas*; it looks technical. Never speak of a picture being *painted*, say rather *studied* or *handled*. The following terms are indispensable, and may be used pretty much at random; *chiaroscuro*, *texture*,

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<sup>398</sup> Hazlitt, *Sketches of Some of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1824) 53.

<sup>399</sup> Hazlitt, *Sketches of Some of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England* 38, 29, 30.

*pearly greys, foxy browns, cool greens, breadth, handling, medium, vehicle.*<sup>400</sup>

These jargons hardly appeared in Hazlitt's discourse. His descriptions and criticisms of paintings only required that the audience made use their senses as best as they could. If he appeared as a knowledgeable 'teacher,' he was surely a teacher who cared more for the cultivation of the love of art than the cultivation of technical skill.

Hazlitt had his own considerations when he adopted this style. One possible reason was the scarcity of public art galleries at the time. During the Napoleonic Wars, a French critic once observed that Britain as a nation had 'no centralised, dominant collection, despite all the acquisitions made by its private citizens who [had] naturally retained them for their private enjoyment.'<sup>401</sup> In spite of its mocking tone, the comment contained much truth. Most of the galleries that Hazlitt and his contemporary art critics visited were private. As a standard practice, these galleries had very limited access; usually their possessors only distributed tickets among friends and acquaintances, creating therefore a 'favourite lounge of the nobility and the gentry.'<sup>402</sup> The National Gallery, which materialised the nation's determination to promote artistic sensibility, did not come into being until 1824, exactly the same year when Hazlitt's *Sketches* came out. Thus it was only too natural that art critics like Hazlitt – or art lovers, as he called himself – would devote themselves to an educational cause by first of all cultivating a general interest in paintings.

Hazlitt's understanding of art also had a clear impact upon his writings. Curiously enough, his passion for art was actually based on his pessimistic view about its future. In an article published in *The Morning Chronicle* on January 11, 1814, Hazlitt asked 'why the arts are not progressive,' and then provided an answer. According to him, art was not progressive because it was already so by nature. Unlike science, which always pressed forward, art could never keep pace with the advancement of civilisation. A specific art form reached its summit immediately after it was created and then, inevitably, suffered from stagnation and mediocrity. As a result,

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<sup>400</sup> Quoted in Denvir 87.

<sup>401</sup> Quoted in Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Vintage, 2009) 177.

<sup>402</sup> J. Farington, *Times* 1 Apr., 1809 3.

The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painter, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the birth of these arts [...] These arts, which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power, have always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have in general declined ever after.<sup>403</sup>

Hazlitt believed that nothing could alter this tendency. He remembered well how, as a young painter, he had closely examined great works, completely dazzled, ‘with wondering and with longing eyes,’ feeling that ‘a new heaven and a new earth stood before me.’<sup>404</sup> His comments on contemporary painters reflected the same cult of genius. When praising Turner (though not without some reservations about his ‘morbid strength’) in 1814, he expressed the wish that ‘this gentleman would always work in the trammels of Claude or N. Poussin.’<sup>405</sup> Later in his career, Hazlitt continued to appear dazzled; hence the style of his *Sketches*. In this sense, he appeared less as an art critic but more as a fellow visitor, because he wished to introduce to his audience that ‘meridian height,’ and to convey the gratification he himself had received from those ingenious works.

The style of a fellow visitor, however, did not win universal approval. For one thing, the emphasis on emotional reactions prevented the author from developing a theoretical framework. As Claire Wildsmith has suggested in her recent study, this was a weakness that Hazlitt shared with many of his fellow art critics.<sup>406</sup> But more serious charges came from Hazlitt’s contemporaries, who, as early as the 1820s, had questioned his competency. A reviewer in the 1823 issue of *The Gentleman’s Magazine* believed that his *Sketches* did not meet the high expectation of the audience:

On opening this volume we anticipated much information. But how great was our surprise on its perusal, to find that instead of containing some rich stores

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<sup>403</sup> Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, vol. 18, ed. P. P. Howe (London: Dent, 1931) 6.

<sup>404</sup> Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, vol. 8 14.

<sup>405</sup> Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, vol. 18 19.

<sup>406</sup> Claire Wildsmith, ‘“Candid and Earnest”: the Rise of the Art Critic in the Early Nineteenth Century.’ *Ruskin’s Artist: Studies in the Victorian Visual Economy*, ed. Robert Hewison. (Hants: Ashgate, 2000). 15-30, at 27.

of information, it abounded with reflections, the generality of which have not the least reference to the subject. We imagined that in this volume we should find a useful guide to the places noticed; but [...] it furnishes but few descriptions; and even these are overloaded with the spirit of Essay writing.<sup>407</sup>

Of course, it is not entirely fair to say that Hazlitt's *Sketches* had 'not the least reference to the subject,' since he wrote extensively about some precious collections. Besides, when the reviewer asked for 'a useful guide to the places noticed,' he seemed to have mistaken Hazlitt for a guide in the most literal sense of the word – a guide that knows every practical thing about places of interest, and never forgets to mention useful tips, such as the opening and closing times of galleries. In spite of all these possible misrepresentations, however, the reviewer did make his point when he complained about Hazlitt's 'reflections,' 'generality' and, above all, 'the spirit of Essay writing' – a genre that had been noted for being personal and digressive ever since its creation by Montaigne. Too concentrated on impressions and enthusiasm, Hazlitt's writings did not attempt an objective description or assessment of artworks. Upon finishing his book, one would not know, for instance, what a painting looks like or even what it is about. Twenty years later, if we recall the quotation mentioned above, the same opinion of Hazlitt as an 'essayist' would appear again in a review of Ruskin. Many modern critics also find it hard to dismiss this judgment. Hence Graham Hough's comment that 'Hazlitt's art criticisms are genial and sympathetic, but generate more warmth than light; painting was to him a region of happy day-dreams, and his writing about it is an attempt to recreate this "sober certainty of waking bliss."' <sup>408</sup>

Apart from this, Hazlitt's accuracy was also called into question. In the first volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin criticised Hazlitt for making that comparison between skilfully painted trees to 'the down on an unripe nectarine,' which, according to Ruskin, was a very careless observation. Concerning Hazlitt's reputation, an episode from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* might also be of some interest. The heroine

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<sup>407</sup> Anonymous, 'Review of *Sketches of Some of the Principal Picture Galleries in England.*' *Gentleman's Magazine* 1823: 616-17, at 616.

<sup>408</sup> Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (London: Methuen, 1961) 2.

Dorothea Brooke is kind, graceful and knowledgeable. But the lack of aesthetic education in her upbringings prevents her from deciphering artworks properly: she regards great paintings with awe but finds them lifeless; when travelling alone in Rome, she even feels that the city of visible history oppresses her with ‘stupendous fragmentariness.’<sup>409</sup> The real fault, according to the narrator – who is to some extent identifiable with George Eliot herself - is not to be found with Dorothea, but with the entire cultural environment. Looking back to the 1830s, the narrator regrets the English public’s general lack of knowledge in art. In order to demonstrate the seriousness of this ignorance, she singles out a ‘most brilliant English critic of the day,’ who once ‘mistook the flower-flushed tomb of the ascended virgin for an ornamental vase.’<sup>410</sup> This critic, it turns out, is Hazlitt. A blunder like that, as Eliot suggests with this example from Christian art, not only contributes to the poor knowledge of art among the English public; worse still, it is also morally devastating since ignorance in art could make people superficial believers, who memorise doctrines but remain blind to the most obvious symbols.

## **‘Authoritative and Inviolable’: Perception, Nature and Ruskin’s Aesthetic Education**

From the very beginning of his career, Ruskin emerged as an aesthetic educator who would devote all his energy to the cause of ‘correction.’ In the preface to the first edition of the first volume of *Modern Painters*, he asserted that ‘the work now laid before the public’ shall function as a corrective power:

When *public* taste seems plunging deeper and deeper into degradation day by day, and when the press universally exerts such power as it possesses to direct the feeling of the nation more completely to all that is theatrical, affected and false in art; [...] it becomes the imperative duty of all who have any perception of knowledge in art, and any desire for its advancement in

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<sup>409</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin, 1994) 190.

<sup>410</sup> Eliot 188.

England, to come fearlessly forward [...] to declare and demonstrate, wherever they exist, the essence and the authority of the Beautiful and the True.<sup>411</sup>

This is a very interesting assertion – in both what it expresses and the way it is expressed. To some extent, Ruskin saw himself as a comrade of Ripplingille and Hazlitt, since they were all concerned with cultivating public taste. But he seemed to have more confidence with the task than either one of them. The opening summary of the present ‘universal degradation’ and phrases such as ‘imperative duty’ and ‘come fearlessly forward’ closely imitated the tone of a declaration of war; and to declare a war was exactly what the author of *Modern Painters* intended to do. He was not a Hazlittian guide, who went around galleries and pointed out lovely things with much enthusiasm. The Ruskinian guide was, by contrast, a combatant repelled by the ‘degradation’ of taste. With all sternness and courage, he approached the subject in order to instruct the public and to lead them, yet not necessarily to befriend them. When talking about particular paintings, the preface also tends to highlight the seriousness of intention and the endeavour at ‘consistency,’ thus drawing a clear line between *Modern Painters* and Hazlitt’s essayist style.<sup>412</sup>

On the other hand, Ruskin also differed from the professional ideal of Ripplingille. Putting himself against both the ‘public’ and the ‘press,’ Ruskin distanced himself from both the general audience and professional artists, who, like Ripplingille, contributed articles to newspapers and journals in order to make their voices heard. The only quality the speaker possessed, then, was a ‘perception of knowledge in art,’ a quality which, like the anonymous ‘Graduate of Oxford,’ suggested the author’s competency and, yet, was by no means exclusive to professionals. It is also worth noting that, although the speaker referred to himself as an anonymous combatant among all who had some knowledge in art, he did not regard himself as in any way inferior to the professionals who were then dominating the area. Conferring ‘authority’ to abstract ideas of ‘beauty’ and ‘truth’ rather than to any individual, he in

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<sup>411</sup> Ruskin *Works*, 3 4.

<sup>412</sup> Ruskin *Works*, 3 3.



effect showed himself to be on equal terms with anyone who claimed to work for the cause of aesthetic cultivation: nature and beauty became by themselves the lawgivers, and anyone who discussed art was simply explaining the law and testifying to its power.

Out of a passion for his ideal beauty, Ruskin waged wars against the ‘theatrical, affected and false,’ and many have surmised about the origin of this aesthetic preference. As some critics have pointed out, this had much to do with Turner.<sup>413</sup> Many people at the time disliked Turner’s lack of form and finish. His *Snow Storm*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1842, for example, was once described as ‘a mass of soapsuds and whitewash.’<sup>414</sup> Later, Ruskin quoted this comment with much indignation, because he believed, as Turner himself believed, that the painting was a truthful record of nature. Here, in *Modern Painters*, which was formerly entitled *Turner and the Ancients*, Ruskin’s disparagement of the theatrical, the affected and the false appeared very likely to be another gallant defence of his favourite painter.

Meanwhile, I would also like to suggest that a personal letter by Ruskin from 1841 provides further insights into the origin of his aesthetic principles. Writing to his Oxford friend Edward Clayton, Ruskin described a revelation he had received during his drawing practice. When he first learnt to draw, he said,

I used to think a picturesque or beautiful tree was hardly to be met with once a month; I cared for nothing but oaks a thousand years old, split by lightning or shattered by wind, or made up for my worship’s edification in some particular and distinguished way.

Now, however, that conviction was completely overturned. By contrast,

there is not a twig in the closest-clipt hedge that grows, that I cannot admire, and wonder at, and take pleasure in, and learn from. I think one tree very nearly as good as another, and all a thousand times more beautiful than I once did my picked ones, but I admire those more than I could then, tenfold.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Hewison 65.

<sup>414</sup> Ruskin *Works*, 13 162.

<sup>415</sup> Ruskin, ‘A Letter from Naples,’ *Works*, 1 471.

This is an ardent celebration of ordinary details of nature and the power of perception. Beauty, as Ruskin explained, was to be acquired neither through professional skills, as Rippingille argued, nor through studies of antiquity, as Hazlitt recommended. As a matter of fact, the above passage might even lead us to question the quite popular impression of a ‘Romantic Ruskin.’ For instance, John D. Rosenberg once remarked that Ruskin in *Modern Painters*, writing of nature through imaginative interpretations, was ‘very much a Romantic.’<sup>416</sup> Here, however, the purposefully kept distance from ‘oaks a thousand years old,’ the ‘lightning’ and the ‘wind’ serves as reminder that, even if Ruskin could be termed a ‘Romantic,’ he was nonetheless a very different Romantic from, say, Hazlitt. While the latter spent pages and pages in describing the passions aroused by great art, Ruskin was deeply fascinated by realistic details of life. It is true that he also sang high praise of imagination (a point which I shall discuss later in this chapter), but imagination for him could never be detached from a close observation of objective reality. Thus in spite of its picturesqueness and beauty, a tree of a thousand years old was not in any way superior to an ordinary twig; and to strive after dramatic forms, in Ruskin’s opinion, would not lead one towards a comprehensive understanding of genuine beauty. Only a clear perception of the most ordinary details of nature revealed the truly beautiful. Understood in this way, the letter offers some important hints about what Ruskin meant by the ‘theatrical, affected, and false’ and, once again, it highlights the importance of perception in his aesthetic teachings.

Ruskin’s emphasis on perception also registers his disagreement with another distinguished art critic, namely, Sir Joshua Reynolds. Though a man of the eighteenth century, Reynolds was still an object of reverence in the Victorian era. Not only did sales of his paintings cause sensations in newspapers; his ideas of beauty and art were also widely discussed and, for that matter, elicited much admiration. In 1843, the same year as Rippingille published his essays on beauty and Ruskin started his critical enterprise, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* published a series of articles

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<sup>416</sup> John D. Rosenberg ed., *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from his Writings* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1998) 19.

commemorating Reynolds' *Discourses*. In his conclusion, the author asked, rhetorically, what benefits Reynolds had given to the world with his works, and the answer was 'great.' The most valuable part, according to the author, was his recognition of art as a source of intellectual pleasure, a habitat for 'men of wit and wisdom.' Thus the essence of Reynolds' argument, as the author interpreted it, was the significance of art for the development of mental power.<sup>417</sup>

This intellectualistic view of art led Reynolds to prefer general ideas to details. In the Ninth Discourse, he argued that

The art which we profess has beauty for its object; this it is our business to discover and to express; but the beauty of which we are in quest is general and intellectual: it is an idea that subsists only in the mind; the sight never beheld it, nor has the hand expressed it; it is an idea residing in the breast of the artists, which he is always labouring to impart [...] which he is yet so far able to communicate, as to raise the thoughts, and to extend the view of the spectator.<sup>418</sup>

The idea that art embodies beauty 'general and intellectual' suggests Reynolds' indebtedness to Enlightenment thinkers, for whom rationality and the ideal form constituted the supreme laws not only of art but, more importantly, of human life. Reynolds then continued to bring forward his concept of 'grand style.' 'Grand style,' as he explained, referred to 'ideal beauty [...] superior to what [was] to be found in individual nature' and, thereby, stood in clear contrast to 'minute neatness' of abundance and variety.<sup>419</sup>

Ruskin was quite familiar with the ideas of Reynolds, whom he always referred to as a great painter and leader in the School of Art in England.<sup>420</sup> But his high regard did not prevent him from articulating his disagreement. In the first volume of *Modern Painters*, we find the following words:

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<sup>417</sup> John Eagles, 'Reynolds' Discourses: Conclusion.' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 53 (1843) 589-602, at 591.

<sup>418</sup> Joshua Reynolds, *The Complete Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, vol. 2 (London: Thomas Mclean, 1824) 6.

<sup>419</sup> Joshua Reynolds, *The Complete Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, vol. 1 43.

<sup>420</sup> As Collingwood noted in his biographical sketch, Ruskin was brought up in a family that was visited by Reynolds' pupils, and he enjoyed reading the *Rambler* and the *Idler*, to both of which Reynolds was an important contributor. See W. G. Collingwood, *The Art Teaching of John Ruskin* (London: Methuen, 1891) 12. For Ruskin's compliments to Reynolds, see John Ruskin, *The Two Paths* (London: Smith Elder, 1859) 81.

[I]t is carelessly and falsely said that general ideas are more important than particular ones; carelessly and falsely, I say, because the so-called general idea is important, not because it is common to all the individuals of that species, but it separates that species from everything else. It is the distinctiveness, not the universality of the truth, which renders it important.<sup>421</sup>

Concerning Ruskin's quarrel with Reynolds, critics have provided various interpretations. John D. Rosenberg, for instance, reads the conflict as one between the Classicists' celebration of ideal and the Romantics' submission to experience, and blames Ruskin for showing a bias against classicism.<sup>422</sup> Claire Wildsmith, on the other hand, maintains that the quarrel reveals in fact how 'the ideals of civic humanism' are challenged by the discourse of modern political economy that puts increasing emphasis on free trade and individuality.<sup>423</sup> I interpret the conflict in a different way. Implicit in his audacious criticism of Reynolds is, I think, Ruskin's conviction about the importance of seeing. While Reynolds believed that a resourceful mind produced great art, Ruskin insisted that only those with quick perceptions could grasp beauty: it is the distinctiveness, not universality, that constitutes the most essential element of aesthetic quality. In other words, to have a genuine aesthetic experience was first of all to perceive the finest details in nature. Several years later, his belief in seeing would culminate in this memorable quotation: 'The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world,' Ruskin said in the third volume of *Modern Painters*, 'is to see something and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion, all in one.'<sup>424</sup>

Nevertheless, it would be a complete misunderstanding if we thus conclude that Ruskin was simply a devotee to that realistic nature. Throughout the first volume of *Modern Painters*, he appeared as an individual that towered over everyone that surrounded him, amateurs and artists alike. Sometimes he even towered over nature

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<sup>421</sup> Ruskin *Works*, 3 152.

<sup>422</sup> John D Rosenberg, *The Darkening Glass: A Portrait of Ruskin's Genius*. (London: Routledge, 1963) 16.

<sup>423</sup> Claire Wildsmith 17.

<sup>424</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 5 333.

itself. Talking about paintings of foliage, Ruskin compared other painters with J. D. Harding, and found the latter much superior. But according to him, the superiority of Harding did not consist in his skilful representation. Instead of showing how wonderful Harding's artistic execution was, Ruskin introduced him with a command: 'Let us refresh ourselves for a moment, by looking at the truth.'<sup>425</sup> Following a brief description of how a truthful representation of foliage looked like, the whole paragraph concluded: 'this is nature, and beauty, too.'<sup>426</sup> A curious effect arose from this claim. Had Ruskin uttered the same words in a gallery in front of the actual painting, few people would fail to associate beauty and truth with the genius of the painter and the wonder of nature. But here, with only the book, the audience had neither the picture nor natural scenery to consult. Although they could always resort to their memory and imagination, it was still Ruskin's language that provided an immediate representation of beauty and truth – not the painter, and not even nature itself. When he asserted that 'this is nature, and beauty, too,' he could have been referring to Harding's work or to the actual trees; but in effect, he was calling attention to his own descriptions. As a result, the verbal reproduction of painting and nature had the potential of becoming their substitute; and, thus, Ruskin the speaker rivalled both painter and nature as a conveyor of truth.

Elsewhere, after giving a detailed analysis of the 'whole mass and multitude' of foliage, Ruskin also commanded his audience in a similar manner: 'Now, with thus much of nature in your mind, go to Gaspar Poussin's view near Albano, in the National Gallery.'<sup>427</sup> Helsinger reads this as an expression of Ruskin's wish to have his paragraph hung up as a painting next to Poussin's in order to have a competition. But I think Ruskin was more ambitious than that. Once again, that 'much of nature' did not come from nature itself but, more immediately, from his own words. Thus when he asserted that the 'laws of the organisation of the earth are distinct and fixed as those of the animal frame, simpler and broader, but equally *authoritative and inviolable*,' he emphasised the inviolability of both natural principles and, perhaps

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<sup>425</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 3 578.

<sup>426</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 3 578.

<sup>427</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 3 590.

more so, his own authority as an aesthetic educator.<sup>428</sup> Confident that he had the truth of nature in his hand, Ruskin asked the audience to remember his words as laws and, when they were standing in front the painting in the National Gallery, to compare it closely with his words in order to see which parts were duly observed and which, to the detriment of the painter, were ignored. While previously in the case of Harding, Ruskin the speaker appeared to be a potential conveyor of truth; here, he stood out more boldly as a formidable interpreter of the beauty of nature. This confidence reached its summit when Ruskin praised Turner:

Turner – glorious in conception – unfathomable in knowledge – solitary in power – with the elements waiting upon his will, and the night and the morning obedient to his call, sent as a prophet of God to reveal to men the mysteries of His universe, standing, like the great angel of the Apocalypse, clothed with a cloud, and with a rainbow upon his head, and with the sun and stars given into this hand.<sup>429</sup>

There is little surprise, indeed, that a description like this would be accused by John Eagles in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* as ‘blaspheming Divine attributes.’<sup>430</sup> Upon a second glance, however, one cannot help but wonder whether or not the figure standing in the centre of this blasphemous canvas was actually Ruskin himself. After all, Turner was only an inspiration and he never actually spoke in *Modern Painters*. All along, it was Ruskin the aesthetic educator, who, talking passionately about the mysteries of universe and the laws of nature, impressed the audience with conceptions which were glorious and elevating, with knowledge which was wide and unfathomable, as well as a power which was astonishingly ‘authoritative and inviolable.’

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<sup>428</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 3 458, emphasis added.

<sup>429</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 3 254.

<sup>430</sup> John Eagles, ‘Modern Painters.’ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 54 (1843) 485-503, at 492.

## Perceiving ‘with a Pure Heart’: Imagination and Morality in Ruskin’s Aesthetic Education

### *Modern Painters II: From ‘Perception’ to ‘Imagination’*

According to many Ruskin scholars, the first volume of *Modern Painters* was a success upon its publication. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, the editors of the Library Edition of *The Complete Works of Ruskin*, quote extensively from publications such as *The Weekly Chronicle*, *The Gentleman’s Magazine* and even Ripplingill’s *The Artist and Amateur’s Magazine*, all of which lauded the efforts of the Oxford Graduate.<sup>431</sup> Ruskin’s biographer Tim Hilton also mentions favourable comments by literary celebrities, such as William Wordsworth, George Eliot, Elizabeth Browning and Charlotte Brontë<sup>432</sup> But I find the materials that Hilton quotes are somewhat dubious. Wordsworth asked a friend to borrow the book because he thought it too expensive and, therefore, not worthwhile to purchase a copy for himself. He never mentioned the book afterwards. Eliot and Brontë both spoke warmly of *Modern Painters*; however, their comments are dated 1858 and 1848 respectively, by which time Ruskin had published other volumes. So it is very likely that Eliot and Brontë referred not specifically to the first volume of *Modern Painters*. Apart from this, Hilton is also seriously mistaken when he says that ‘[n]either the *Athenaeum* nor *Blackwood’s* seemed to be aware of its publication.’<sup>433</sup> Both, in fact, produced immediate responses. The review in the former was written by George Darley in January 1844, and the author of *Blackwood’s* review, which came out in October 1843, was John Eagles.<sup>434</sup> Interestingly, both reviewers were highly critical. Eagles, whose quotation appears at the end of the previous chapter, absolutely

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<sup>431</sup> For a collection of contemporary reviews of the first volume, see the introduction to the Library Edition of *The Complete Works of Ruskin*, vol. 3 (London: George Allen, 1903) xxxv-vii.

<sup>432</sup> Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Early Years 1819-1859* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 73-75.

<sup>433</sup> Hilton 74.

<sup>434</sup> John Eagles 503 and George Darley *Athenaeum* (3 and 10, 1844). Both are reprinted in Bradley 34-76.

disliked Ruskin's praise of Turner, which he found 'fulsome' and 'nonsensical.'<sup>435</sup> Darley ridiculed Ruskin's defence of Turner, too, but focused particularly on the author's youthful yet immature 'mental power.' According to him, the author of the first volume of *Modern Painters* wrote with sensations only, demonstrating too little real power of logic and no 'higher qualities of reasoning.'<sup>436</sup>

Considering the prominence of these two publications, Ruskin could not have missed these comments. He probably did not enjoy them. But, as is always the case, criticism made a more significant impact than praise. In a letter from October 1844, Ruskin told his friend Henry Liddell about his own opinion of the first volume. His tone was exaggeratedly self-deprecating and, in some ways, echoed the criticism he had received: 'There is a nasty, snappish, impatient, half-familiar, half-claptrap web of young-mannishness everywhere. This was, perhaps, to be expected from the haste in which I wrote.' From there he continued: 'I'm going to try for better things; for a serious, quiet, earnest and simple manner.'<sup>437</sup> Then, about one year later, he finished the second volume, which was clearly intended to be not only a sequel but also an improvement to the previous one.

The second volume distinguished itself from the first one in two aspects. First, it attempted at theorisation, and, secondly, it incorporated a stronger ethical undertone. While the first volume highlighted 'perception,' especially the perception of natural objects, the second volume featured metaphysical thinking about perception, along with an emphasis on the moral consequences. In the first volume, Ruskin was mainly concerned with educating the senses. To have the organ of perception, he maintained, was not the same as to perceive things. Anyone who had eyes and ears could receive impressions from nature, but those without properly educated senses received nothing but forms and sounds. Only those who had properly cultivated senses could fully comprehend beauty. Thus Ruskin warned his audience: '[U]ntil the cultivation has been bestowed, and until the instrument thereby perfected has been employed in a consistent series of careful observations, it is as absurd as it is audacious to pretend to

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<sup>435</sup> Eagles 503

<sup>436</sup> Bradley 64.

<sup>437</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 3 670.



form any judgment whatsoever respecting the truth of art.<sup>438</sup>

Later, Ruskin continued to regard sharp senses as a most important prerequisite in aesthetic experience, but his view about qualification underwent some significant changes. Over time, he would adopt the belief that competent judges of art were not only those who possessed highly developed senses; they must also have a sound metaphysical ground, a 'principle' of their own. This conviction had already been expressed in the 1844 preface to the second edition of the first volume of *Modern Painters*. There Ruskin addressed a question partly to the audience and partly to himself: '[W]hat respect,' he asked, 'could be due to a writer who pretended to criticise and classify the works of great painters of landscape, without developing, or even alluding to, one single principle of the beautiful or sublime?'<sup>439</sup> To develop a metaphysical principle of beauty was precisely what Ruskin intended to do in the second volume. In the same letter to Liddell, Ruskin earnestly sought advice after his self disparagement:

can you tell me of any works which it is necessary I should read on a subject which has given me great trouble – the essence and operation of the imagination as it is concerned with art? Who is the best metaphysician who has treated the subject generally, and do you recollect any passages into Plato or other of the Greeks particularly bearing upon it?<sup>440</sup>

So, Ruskin, at this stage, began to think about another type of perception: imagination. The result of his inquiry was to be found in the second volume, where he explained the truthfulness of art:

It is the habit of most observers to regard art as representative of matter, and to look only for the entireness of representation; and it was to this view of art that I limited the arguments of the former sections of the present work, wherein, having to oppose the conclusions of a criticism entirely based upon the realistic system, I was compelled to meet that criticism on its own grounds. But the greater parts of works of art, more especially those devoted to the expression of ideas of beauty, are the results of the agency of the

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<sup>438</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 3 140.

<sup>439</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 3 8.

<sup>440</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 3 670.

imagination.<sup>441</sup>

The criticism, ‘entirely based upon the realistic system,’ was a clear reference to those unfavourable comments on Turner. Ruskin’s single-minded defence of Turner as a painter of nature – his eagerness to ‘meet that criticism on its own grounds,’ as he said – offered him little chance to address the issue in the first volume. Indeed, one who reads that volume on its own might gain the impression that Ruskin was only interested in seeing the world, literally, as it is. But here, as the letter and the second volume demonstrate, he also had in mind a different order of perception as well as a different order of truth.

But this should not lead to the assumption that imagination, for Ruskin, was completely separated from seeing. As a reply to the question in the letter, Liddell, being an expert on Greek, recommended Aristotle. The advice was brilliant, for Aristotle was among the first philosophers who drew connections between imagination and visual powers. According to Aristotle, the ancient Greek word ‘imagination’ (*phantasia*) originally meant ‘light’ (*phaos*), because ‘without light it is impossible to see.’<sup>442</sup> The etymological connection between imagining and seeing might explain why Ruskin could so readily embrace Aristotle’s argument and incorporate the concept of imagination into his own theory of perception. Moreover, the emphasis on seeing is also inherent in Ruskin’s theory of imagination. Instead of offering a rounded definition, Ruskin approached the concept of imagination by first of all classifying it into different orders. The imaginative faculty, as he explained, consisted of three orders: penetrative, associative and contemplative, each interacting with one another. Associative imagination combined materials in order to create new forms, the contemplative regarded and treated the newly created form in ‘peculiar ways,’ while the penetrative helped to reveal truths which were otherwise invisible.<sup>443</sup> All of these functions, according to Ruskin, were meant to be an enhancement of visual perceptions. ‘The virtue of Imagination,’ he concluded, ‘is its reaching, by

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<sup>441</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 4 165.

<sup>442</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima* 429a.

<sup>443</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 4 228.

intuition and intensity of gaze (not by reasoning, but by its authoritative opening and revealing power), a more essential truth than is seen at the surface of things.’<sup>444</sup> Thus even for those who are less interested in the metaphysical aspect of *Modern Painters*, it is hard to ignore the author’s attempt to elaborate the concept of ‘perception’ and his striving after a theoretical framework that could compensate for the looseness of his previous treatment of art.

### **‘The Pure in Heart’: Morality and Aesthetic Experience**

With ‘imagination,’ Ruskin did not only construct his own metaphysical principles of perception. The concept also embodied an ethical concern, which is another subject downplayed in the first volume of *Modern Painters*. ‘There is a reciprocal action between the intensity of moral feeling and the power of imagination,’ Ruskin asserted in the second volume, for ‘those who have keenest sympathy are those who look closest and pierce deepest, and hold securest; and on the other, those who have so pierced and seen the melancholy deeps of things are filled with the most intense passion and gentleness of sympathy.’<sup>445</sup> The best illustration of this ‘reciprocal’ relationship came from Ruskin himself, in fact three years before he wrote down the above words: *The King and the Golden River*, as we should remember, presented essentially the same argument. The youngest brother manages to save the village and the family, precisely because he possesses both the ‘gentleness of sympathy’ and the ability to ‘look closest.’ If the dictum that perception revealed truth still held ground, that truth, as Ruskin insisted, must be physical as well as moral. Likewise, to grasp truth meant more than an accurate observation of external reality; it also implied that people should cultivate a ‘keenest sympathy’ in order to penetrate the truth of the inner world.

In order to better describe the reciprocity between perception and morality, Ruskin in the second volume of *Modern Painters* introduced the word ‘theoria.’

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<sup>444</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 4 228.

<sup>445</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 4 257.

Etymologically, the word means perception; and yet, more literally, it also means ‘looking at.’ Ruskin put the word side by side with ‘aesthesis’ and provided his own redefinition of the two. Both words, according to him, denoted sensual perceptions, but the perceptions they referred to were of different orders. Whereas *theoria* referred to sensual gratification offered by spiritual experience, *aesthesis* was the gratification of animal pleasure.

For we do indeed see constantly that men having naturally acute perceptions of the beautiful, yet not receiving it with a pure heart, nor into their hearts at all, never comprehend, yet not receive good from it, but make it a mere minister to their desires, and accompaniment and seasoning of lower sensual pleasures, until all their emotions take the same earthly stamp, and the sense of beauty sinks into the servant of lust.<sup>446</sup>

Here lies another major modification of Ruskin’s previous argument. In the first volume, he was concerned only with emphasising the importance of ‘acuteness.’ The sharper the senses were, the better people comprehend the beauty of nature and art. Here, however, acuteness was no longer the sole criteria. Rather than talking about the importance of senses in general, Ruskin now differentiated between various orders of sensual pleasures. While previously, there was only a contrast between bluntness and acuteness; now, as Ruskin emphasised, it was also important to aspire to higher sensual pleasures – in fact, it was more important, since acuteness did not guarantee higher sensual pleasure. If the senses were simply employed for the gratification of lower pleasures, aesthetic enjoyment, as Ruskin reminded his readers, was bound to turn into lust.

In fact, as his argument continued, ‘the pure heart’ overtook ‘acuteness’ as the more crucial criterion. Immediately after the definition of ‘*theoria*,’ Ruskin turned to contemporary life in order to show how horrible the world would become – to some extent, had already become – if a desire for beauty was not accompanied by a pure heart. A ‘heartless’ civilisation, Ruskin alleged, gave rise to corruption only, where “men build palaces, plant groves, and gather luxuries, that they and their devices may

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<sup>446</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 4 49.

hang in the corners of the world like fine-spun cobwebs, with greedy, puffed-up, spider-like lusts in the middle.<sup>447</sup> At a later stage of his career, Ruskin frequently addressed the corruption of contemporary society, and this shall be the topic of the next section of this chapter. For now, it is my main intention to point out how intrinsically Ruskin's concern with morality was intermixed with his principles of beauty. The cultivation of taste, as he envisioned, involved both an aesthetic cultivation and a moral one; and, most importantly, these two goals were not separable.

It is also necessary to add that the 'heart' was deeply Christian. As George P. Landow has noted, the development of Ruskin's aesthetics was representative of the development of his thought and writings about religion.<sup>448</sup> His Evangelical upbringing had a lifelong impact on his writings. According to many scholars, his faith dwindled as time moved on until finally, in 1858, the experience of 'un-conversion' announced his loss of faith.<sup>449</sup> Yet in the early 1840s, when Ruskin wrote the first two volumes of *Modern Painters*, his Evangelical faith was clearly still robust. In the first volume, we read the following words on the use of colour: 'The hue,' Ruskin says,

is a beautiful auxiliary in working out the great impression to be conveyed, but is not the source nor the essence of that impression; it is little more than a visible melody, given to raise and assist the mind in the reception of nobler ideas – as sacred passages of sweet sound, to prepare the feelings for the reading of the mysteries of God.<sup>450</sup>

So, colours are no longer tools which assist individual painters to demonstrate their

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<sup>447</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 4 49.

<sup>448</sup> George P. Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1971) 243.

<sup>449</sup> However, some critics have different opinions. Michael Wheeler, for instance, argues in *Ruskin's God* that the loss of faith was a self-invented myth. Wheeler sees in Ruskin's un-conversion a familiar pattern in Victorian intellectual life, and maintains that, like many other Victorians, such as George Eliot and John Henry Newman, Ruskin in his later life was still subjective to the heavy influence of Evangelicalism. See Michael Wheeler, *Ruskin's God* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), which also contains a comprehensive review of literature on Ruskin's religious life. Because of its limited scope, the present chapter does not seek to address Ruskin's religious life extensively. But, personally, I tend to join Wheeler in questioning the real significance of his Turin experience. His aesthetic teachings in the 1860s and his criticism of industrialization, as I shall show in the next section, still professed an Evangelical conviction, especially in the passion for social improvement and the emphasis on the 'depravity' of the modern world.

<sup>450</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 3 301.

ingenuity and communicate their personal impressions. They become, instead, an ‘auxiliary’ for divine wisdom. A truly perceptive eye sees through different colours and shades a divine meaning; conversely, to perceive colours properly, one must also be ready for ‘the reception of nobler ideas’ by elevating one’s concern from visible facts to moral laws.

The same argument appeared again in the second volume. There, Ruskin identified the conflict between lower sensual pleasure and the pleasure of ‘theoria’ as one between the Heathen and the Christian. The Heathen writers, in Ruskin’s view, always leant towards a sensual pleasure in external nature. They loved the pleasant feel of ‘violet couch’ and ‘ringing streamlet,’ but could never comprehend the beauty of ‘bare mountains’ and ‘ghostly glen.’ The Christians, by contrast, derived aesthetic pleasure from all that was created by God; for them, to have aesthetic experience is ‘with clear and unoffended sight *beholding* Him for ever.’<sup>451</sup> The whole chapter ended with a quotation from the Gospel of Matthew: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8). This biblical quotation appears to have been quite popular in nineteenth-century sermons. Indeed, if we read Ruskin’s argument backwards, that is to say, start from the quotation and then proceed to the analysis of beauty, *theoria* and imagination, it is difficult to miss the sermon-like style.

Nevertheless, Ruskin’s interpretation of this quotation was somehow different from that of many other preachers. To take some examples: Purity of heart, as one preacher proclaimed, meant purity in conduct; it made people acceptable to God and, in that way, enabled them to see Him and to embrace His teachings.<sup>452</sup> For another, pure heart, as an essential quality of Christians, denoted mercifulness, while to see God was the ‘blessed privilege’ awarded to the true disciples.<sup>453</sup> Ruskin, however, was concerned not only with morality but also with aesthetics. While the Evangelical part of him preached more or less the same doctrine as other preachers, the artistic part of him continued to be occupied not with good deeds but with the pleasures of seeing. Later, in *Praeterita*, he recalled how he began his early Bible reading under

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<sup>451</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 4 50, emphasis added.

<sup>452</sup> Samuel Wix, *Practical Sermons on the Lord's Prayer* (London, 1829) 192.

<sup>453</sup> John Farr, *Sermons on the Mission and Character of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1804) 329.

his mother's supervision and, in particular, how the 'evangelical faith [...] placed me, as soon as I could conceive or think, in the presence of an unseen world.'<sup>454</sup> This comment, perhaps unintentionally, reflected Ruskin's twofold mentalities. For the rest of his career, Ruskin engaged himself with the job of making that 'unseen' world visible to all, looking for divine wisdom in every detail in nature, in art as well as in the human heart. The reciprocity of Evangelical doctrines and aesthetic principles adds an aesthetic dimension to Ruskin's religious ideas; yet, in the present context of reading his *Modern Painters* as aesthetic education, it also sheds light on the ethical concerns in Ruskin's thinking about beauty.

### ***The Stones of Venice: Allegorical Readings and Morality***

After the second volume of *Modern Painters* was published, Ruskin travelled to the Continent in 1845 and again in 1846. This was not the first time he had travelled abroad. His first extensive trip to the Continent dates back to 1833. As a boy of fourteen, he had travelled to France, Switzerland and Italy with his parents, following the route inspired by Samuel Prout's sketches. What the parents prepared for Ruskin was something close to the Grand Tour, a tradition that originated in the seventeenth century as a form of education, with much emphasis on the cultivation of not only the intellect but also aesthetic sensibilities. Thus young men from aristocratic families spent months, even years, on a preset itinerary across the Continent, roaming in galleries and museums, observing foreign cultures, and socialising with the learned and the noble. In the nineteenth century, as the middle classes prospered and the means of transportation improved, the Grand Tour became no longer the privilege of aristocrats. The trips of the Ruskins, in this sense, were much in accordance with the trend of the age.

However, the fact that Samuel Prout inspired the trip reveals something peculiar about this family of tourists, especially the young Ruskin. Ruskin admired Prout, of

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<sup>454</sup> Ruskin, *Praeterita and Dilecta, Works*, 35 128.

whom he said later: ‘of all our modern school of landscape painters, next to Turner, and before the rise of the Pre-Raphaelites, the man whose works are on the whole most valuable, and show the highest intellect, is Samuel Prout.’<sup>455</sup> But Prout was not just a landscape painter of foliage, clouds and water. He specialised in the so-called ‘manmade landscape,’ that is paintings of architecture. This also happened to be of interest to Ruskin, one of whose earliest publications was a series of essays called *The Poetry of Architecture*. Hence there was little wonder that Prout’s sketches, which consisted of drawings of market buildings and monuments, could ignite young Ruskin’s desire to travel. When Ruskin visited the Continent again in 1845 and 1846, architecture continued to be the theme of his tour. His exploration crystallised into the three-volume *The Stones of Venice*, published during 1851 and 1853. The book is a brilliant account of Venetian architecture; yet, it is also, as I shall show in the following discussion, a fine specimen of Ruskin’s moral-aesthetic teachings.

Like *Modern Painters*, *The Stones of Venice* also highlighted the importance of accurate perception. To recognise that emphasis, one does not even have to delve into the main body of the book, for the chapter titles are already telling enough. A great part of the first volume is devoted to the study of ‘walls,’ with each chapter focusing on a specific aspect of that subject. Thus Chapter Four, for instance, is about ‘the wall base,’ which is then followed by chapters on ‘the wall veil,’ ‘the wall cornice,’ ‘the pier base,’ ‘the shaft’ and so on. So instead of talking about walls in general, Ruskin divided the subject as close as possible. His descriptions are to some extent comparable to a magnifying glass, which helps readers to see details with high precision. Although he alleged in the preface to the first edition of *The Stones of Venice* that ‘it is not easy to be accurate in account of anything,’ accuracy was nevertheless the very quality he strived for – both for himself and for his readers.

The stress on accuracy is also reflected in Ruskin’s illustrations. The quantity alone is impressive enough. In 1846, when he was busy with the preparation of materials on Venetian architectures, his father wrote to W. H. Harrison, a family friend, that the son would not have time for poetry or painting because he spent all his time

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<sup>455</sup> Ruskin, ‘The Harbour of England,’ *Works*, 13 40.



on something else:

He is cultivating Art at present searching for real knowledge but to you and me this knowledge is at present a Sealed Book. It will neither take the shape of picture or poetry. It is gathered in scraps hardly wrought for he is drawing perpetually but no drawing such as in former days you and I might compliment in the usual way by saying it deserved a frame – but fragments of everything from a Cupola to a Cartwheel but in such bits that it is to the common eye a mass of Hieroglyphics – all true – truth itself but Truth in mosaic.<sup>456</sup>

The father, who had always enjoyed Ruskin's poetry and paintings and secretly wished that he would become a poet, was now perplexed by the son's new engagement. He knew Ruskin was gathering knowledge about art, but scraps of drawings of Cupola and Cartwheel certainly made no sense to him. Yet his letter serves as a witness to the progress of Ruskin's study of Venetian architecture. The huge amount of 'hieroglyphics' would eventually become 'six hundred quarto pages of notes.'<sup>457</sup> Many of them would find their way into the final publication. We see, for example, as many as 72 figures in the exposition on 'the wall' alone. They are drawings of various subjects: some are lines and dots illustrating basic structures; some are shapes of architectural details; some are patterns of decorations, and others are full-scaled sketches of entire buildings. While Ruskin's description of cornices, shafts and bases provide readers with a magnifying glass, these drawings certainly offer more diverse views. But the emphasis on accuracy was sustained. In a way, the observation of Ruskin's father was prophetic: however 'mosaic' they were, all illustrations were meant to provide the 'Truth' which, in Ruskin's context, was only to be acquired through perception.

Also like *Modern Painters*, *The Stones of Venice* did not dwell on the perception of physical details only, for Ruskin continued to propound his doctrine of perceiving with a 'pure heart.' This doctrine underlined, among others, the account of the tomb of the Doge Andrea Vendramin in Saints Giovanni and Paolo. The passage began with a

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<sup>456</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 8 xxiii.

<sup>457</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 9 xxv.

description of the sculpture on the tomb, which, according to Ruskin, was a failure. Apparently, the sculptor had been convinced that visitors would only see the work from below and, therefore, to perfect every single detail was not necessary. Consequently, he only finished those parts that the visitors would see and left all the ‘unnecessary’ parts undone. The product was very odd indeed. A careful visitor would discover, as Ruskin described, that ‘the wretched effigy had only one hand, and was a mere block on the inner side. [...] On one side the forehead is wrinkled elaborately, the other left smooth; one side only of the doge’s cap is chased; one cheek only is finished, the other blocked out and distorted besides.’<sup>458</sup>

The unfinished sculpture infuriated Ruskin. However, he did not criticise the sculptor’s laziness or carelessness, nor did he view the sculpture primarily as a violation of aesthetic principles. Instead, he saw the ‘wretched effigy’ as a product of moral corruption, of ‘dishonesty’ and ‘coldness of feeling.’ He also believed that moral corruption was a crime committed against both the dead and the visitors, and was, for that matter, a violation of human laws. Hence Ruskin went out to address himself directly to the audience, with the manner of a lawyer who stood in front of a jury. While urging them to look more closely at the sculpture, he also pleaded with them to think about the heartlessness of the suspect:

Who, with a heart in his breast, could have stayed his hand as he drew the dim lines of the old man’s countenance – unmajestic once, indeed, but at least, sanctified by the solemnities of death – could have stayed his hand, as he reached the bend of the grey forehead, and measured out the last veins of it at so much the zecchin?<sup>459</sup>

The distorted representation, as Ruskin maintained, revealed ‘moral degradation’ on the part of the sculptor, for he failed to pay respect to the deceased, his work being a proof of his lack of fellow feeling. But more than that, the mention of ‘zecchin,’ the coin of Venice, also reminded readers of another serious offence. Though he had been a commissioned artist, with an unfinished sculpture as that, he had certainly not

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<sup>458</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice. Works*, 9 51.

<sup>459</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice. Works*, 9 52.

fulfilled the task. Thus he had ignored not only the moral obligation but also the laws that governed the exchange between labour and payment. The half-done sculpture, in this way, testified to the sculptor's two-fold crime against both the laws of humanity and the laws of economy.

Ruskin's condemnation drew on further evidence when the account reached its climatic end:

But now, readers, comes the very gist and point of the whole matter. This lying monument to a dishonoured doge, this culminating pride of the Renaissance art of Venice, is at least veracious, if in nothing else, in its testimony to the character of its sculptor. He was banished from Venice for forgery in 1487.<sup>460</sup>

The lawyer had now become a judge. While formerly Ruskin had spoken as if he were waiting for the judgment of the jury, here he sounded more like the decision maker. The previous criticism of the sculptor, as he informed his readers, was not unfounded, for soon after the completion of the tomb, the sculptor was banished for forgery – a crime not at all unexpected, as Ruskin indicated, from someone who produced a half-done sculpture for the dead. At this stage, the 'gist and point of the whole matter' became quite straightforward: violation against human laws could never escape punishment.

Ruskin's account also contained a lesson about perception and morality. The sculptor dared to produce an artwork like this because he was confident that no one would view the sculpture from a position different than he was supposed to take. If no one bothered to study the sculpture closely and carefully, the moral offence would never be discovered. Ruskin, however, did not want his audience to be cheated. For this reason, he not only demanded that his readers should observe the physical quality closely, but also asked them to pay attention to its ethical indications. The logic was quite clear: careful observation enabled a visitor to discover the fault of the artwork; but to detect the moral corruption, a visitor must also see beyond the physical qualities, regarding the work as a 'testimony to the character of its sculptor.' In other

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<sup>460</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice. Works*, 9 52.

words, he should not just see but also see with his heart. Previously in *Modern Painters*, beauty symbolised the wisdom of the divine; and here, similarly, Ruskin regarded artistic flaws as a sign of weakness in human character. By thus holding aesthetic quality first as a sign of divinity and then as a testimony to morality, Ruskin further incorporated moral cultivation into his aesthetic teachings, reinforcing the message from *The King and the Golden River*: behold and be good.

Ruskin's approach has elicited much critical interest since the nineteenth century. Most of his critics have recognised the combination of aesthetic and morality in his art criticism, but they assess this approach in different ways. In 1883, Vernon Lee characterised Ruskin's teaching as having a 'conflicting ethical and aesthetical nature,' no matter how 'highly-developed' this nature was.<sup>461</sup> As she went on to explain, the conflict revealed that Ruskin had been unable to decide whether he should lean more towards moral teaching or aesthetic analysis. Today, more than a century later, there are still some echoes of Lee. Nicholas Shrimpton's recent study of Ruskin, for instance, draws a similar conclusion, though in a much more dramatic manner. Following the example of Browning's poem *The Ring and the Book*, Shrimpton tells the story of Ruskin and the aesthetes four times, each time offering a different portrait of Ruskin: either as a ferocious enemy fighting against aestheticism on moral grounds or as a sensualist that shares the views of those aesthetes. Since these differences could not be properly explained by timelines, Shrimpton suggests, the stories, combined, should better be read as an illustration of various facets of a 'troubled' mind.<sup>462</sup> Other critics are more positive about Ruskin's approach. According to Landow, for example, Ruskin's integration of aesthetics and morality was a fine choice, for it enabled him to 'place essentially equal emphasis upon both signifier and signified' by maintaining 'a balance between the formal elements of a painting, its aesthetic surface, and its complex significances.' In other words, it enabled him to emphasise both the formal elements of the beautiful and the deeper

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<sup>461</sup> Vernon Lee, 'On Ruskin, from Belcaro.' *John Ruskin: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J. L. Bradley (London: Routledge, 1984) 377-85, at 378.

<sup>462</sup> Nicholas Shrimpton, 'Ruskin and Aesthetes,' *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern*, ed. Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 131-52, at 151.

significance, be it theological or moral.<sup>463</sup>

Seconding Landow, I believe that Ruskin's approach arose neither from a troubled mind nor from an unavoidable conflict, but is rather carefully chosen. The benefit of this approach is obvious. On the one hand, as Landow has pointed out, it helped Ruskin to maintain a balance between moral teaching and aesthetic cultivation. To some extent, morality serves as an end in Ruskin's art criticism, while sensual perception is a means. Both, as Ruskin's art criticism has shown, are indispensable. Without a moral anchorage, a discussion of beauty would have little sense of direction; without the aesthetic media, moral teaching would lose all its cognitive substance. Once again, Ruskin aimed to instruct his audience not only on how to see properly, but also on how to make sense of what they saw. On the other hand, this integration is as much to the benefit of Ruskin himself as a propagator. While those wondrous passages on leaves, rocks and clouds convinced Ruskin's audience that the person they were listening to was an expert with amazing capabilities of perception, his moral teachings also struck them with the fact that the speaker, despite his genius, was never quite outside their society. He shared the same ethical assumptions with his contemporaries, and he was to be admired for his quick perception not only of art but also of human character.

Moreover, the approach of connecting art with moral discussion also renders Ruskin's words more accessible than other art criticism. For art lovers who receive little training in painting, his works are obviously easier to digest than an analysis of pure techniques; meanwhile, they are more 'substantial' than impressionistic accounts – in which respect a comparison between Ruskin and Hazlitt is telling enough. Furthermore, a quick glance at contemporary comments also confirms the effectiveness of Ruskin's approach. A reviewer in *The English Gentleman* in 1846 admired Ruskin's 'high and lofty tone, the deep enthusiasm' and, in particular, 'the association of religion with art on principles intelligible to this age,' which he believed, made *Modern Painters* 'the most original and remarkable production of

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<sup>463</sup> Landow 351.

what, till the author's views prevail, must still be called aesthetic criticism.<sup>464</sup> A reviewer of *The Stones of Venice* also announced, with much gratification, that the book not only provided precious teaching on architectural beauty, but that it would also 'elevate taste and intellect, raise the tone of moral feeling, kindle benevolence towards men, and increase the love and fear of God.'<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 4 xlii.

<sup>465</sup> Anonymous, 'Ruskin's "Stones of Venice" vol. III; The Fall,' *Times*, 12 Nov. 1853 7.

## **Beauty and Industry: Woman and Aesthetics in ‘Of Queens’ Gardens’**

### **‘The Stars Only May Be Over Her Head’: Woman as an Aesthetic Ideal**

In 1912, Austin Harrison, who edited *The English Review* from 1909 till 1923, recalled a childhood encounter with John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies*:

When I was a small boy it was my good fortune to sit at the feet of a beautiful lady, gowned, festooned one ought perhaps to say, in a sumptuous Walter Crane design, the exact colour of the cushions and the wall-paper. She sat, like the pictures of Circe I always thought, and spun miracles; at any rate, for an hour every third day in the week after luncheon she read to me ‘Sesame and Lilies,’ and descanted upon its teaching.<sup>466</sup>

According to Harrison, Ruskin’s words gave him an ‘aesthetic speculation.’ I find this paragraph a perfect introduction to the present section on Ruskin’s aesthetic education, and it is so for two reasons. The description testifies, first of all, to Ruskin’s efforts at aesthetic cultivation in the post-*Modern-Painters* era. When Ruskin completed his *Modern Painters* series and the works on architecture, it seems that his mission as an aesthetic educator also came to a halt. By the mid 1860s, the art critic had become an active participant in various social activities and, consequently, turned more and more to the world of social criticism. At the surface level, *Sesame and Lilies* is such a product. It came out in book form in 1865, but actually consists of two separate lectures delivered in the city of Manchester in 1864. The first one, titled ‘Of Kings’ Treasuries,’ was about ‘what and how to read.’ It was delivered with the express purpose of raising funds for a public library, as we can gather from a report from *The Morning Post*.<sup>467</sup> The second one, ‘Of Queens’ Gardens,’ was about the education of

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<sup>466</sup> Austin Harrison, ‘The New Sesame and Lilies,’ *English Review* 10 (1912) 486-96, at 486.

<sup>467</sup> ‘Mr. J. Ruskin on ‘what and how to read’,’ *Morning Post* [London] Dec. 09, 1864 2.

girls, and it was also delivered with the purpose of raising money for schools in slums. Because these works do not deal immediately with the concept of beauty, or rather, because they have more ostensible social commitments, it is not uncommon that critics often deem them as expressing an entirely different focus from *Modern Painters*.<sup>468</sup> Harrison's comment, however, reminds us that in spite of all the social missions embodied, *Sesame and Lilies* is still aesthetically significant.

In fact, Harrison's judgment finds much textual support, for *Sesame and Lilies* contains plenty of messages that Ruskin had expounded in his previous works, such as *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*. Once again, there is, for example, the emphasis on feelings and 'the fitness and fullness of sensation, beyond reason.' 'The ennobling difference between one man and another,' Ruskin says, when talking about the proper education of boys, 'is precisely in this, that one feels more than another' – just in the same way, we might add, as competent viewers of art differ from those whose hearts are as dead as stones.<sup>469</sup> The recommendation of close reading in literature also echoes his previous insistence on close observation, the kernel of Ruskin's aesthetics. Hence in *Sesame and Lilies*, Ruskin confidently announces to his audience: 'I tell you earnestly and authoritatively (I *know* I am right in this), you must get into the habit of looking intensely at words, and assuring yourself of their meaning, syllable by syllable – nay, letter by letter.'<sup>470</sup> Such an instruction would not have been unfamiliar to those who had read *Modern Painters*, where 'looking intensely' at pictorial details is regarded as absolutely essential in the interpretation of any artwork. But the most telling evidence is found in the preface to the second edition of *Sesame and Lilies*. There Ruskin told readers of a 'crime' that he had witnessed during his visit in the Alps: a group of 'English and German lads,' in their excitement, destroyed a bed of budding Alpine roses. Horrified by the deeds of the youths, Ruskin contemplated – and urged his audience to join him in this contemplation – on the defects of the education of youths. This education, Ruskin lamented, failed to

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<sup>468</sup> See Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin, The Later Years* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 87-91.

<sup>469</sup> John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, ed. Deborah Epstein (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002) 45-46.

<sup>470</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 75.



cultivate ‘the deep and sacred sensations of natural scenery.’<sup>471</sup> Viewed in this way, *Sesame and Lilies* does not necessarily illustrate Ruskin’s new focus; instead, the work is more like a record of his unabated passion for beauty as well as aesthetic cultivation.

Yet differently from his previous works, *Sesame and Lilies* did not instruct readers on how to see beauty in paintings or architecture. This time, Ruskin tried to make them see ‘beauty’ itself. While in works such as *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice* he had visualised paintings and morality respectively so as to teach his readers about the beauty of nature and the beauty of a pure heart; now, in the lectures, he visualised beauty itself, finding the best aesthetic example in human form, or to be more specific, a perfect female. Harrison’s recollection of having an aesthetic speculation under the guidance of ‘a beautiful lady’ might be a realistic depiction of the way that he read Ruskin; but it is also possible that he was reproducing the message from *Sesame and Lilies*. In the first part, ‘Of Kings’ Treasuries,’ a female ideal was already in formation. Here Ruskin described ‘the pure woman [...] above all creatures’ as an embodiment of feeling, compassion and beauty. In the second part, ‘Of Queens’ Gardens,’ which dealt specifically with the education of women, the ideal female received even more emphasis. Characterised by her emotional richness and the ability to ‘feel,’ woman is identified as an aesthetic ideal, the natural source of sympathy, tenderness and beauty. What follows is how Ruskin visualised this ideal:

The stars only may be over her head; the glowworm in the night-cold grass may be the only fire at her foot; but home is yet wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her, better than ceiled with cedar, or painted with vermilion, shedding its quiet light far, for those who else were homeless.<sup>472</sup>

The image might strike readers with its shining beauty, but its significance is far more than that. In the second volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin offers a complex theory about what beauty is. Among all attributes of beauty, Ruskin found the following

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<sup>471</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 75.

<sup>472</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 78.

elements the most crucial. The beautiful, he said, must be orderly: ‘Orderly balance and arrangement are essential to the perfect operation of the more earnest and solemn qualities of the Beautiful, as being heavenly in their nature, and contrary to the violence and disorganisation of sin.’<sup>473</sup> For there to be an orderly arrangement, beauty must also demonstrate an element of ‘repose.’ By ‘repose’ Ruskin referred to the ‘simple appearance of permanence and quietness.’ But he also added that this attribute should not be mistaken as lifeless, for a genuinely beautiful repose always contained ‘Divine vitality,’ expressing ‘self-command and self-possession, the persistent dignity or the uncalculating love.’<sup>474</sup> In other words, true beauty did not only consist in beautiful forms but also in its vitality – the ‘felicitous fulfilment of function.’<sup>475</sup>

In *Modern Painters*, Ruskin, being an ardent traveller, illustrated this concept of beauty with mountainous scenes from the Alps. By the time he wrote the lectures, it seems that he had found yet another suitable embodiment. The female ideal, with her delicate form, her tranquillity and, above all, her ability to extend warm shelters for the homeless, stood exactly for Ruskin’s idea of beauty. This feminine guardian is also in every way a clear contrast to the ‘blasphemous’ image of the masculine Turner in *Modern Painters*, even though both figures serve ideals in Ruskin’s aesthetic cultivation. The masculine Turner appears as a prophet of God that is ‘clothed with a cloud, and with rainbow upon his head, and with the sun and stars given into his hand.’ He creates beauty by acting as a dauntless messenger, much in the same way as Ruskin himself, who always entreated the audience to make the best of their perception in order to discover what beauty was.<sup>476</sup> The goddess-like image here, on the other hand, distinguishes herself for her feminine virtues. Thus considered, Harrison’s recollection of his reading experience was indeed a very sympathetic response to Ruskin’s aesthetic teachings. Had Ruskin known about this account, he would probably have congratulated himself on having such a perceptive reader.

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<sup>473</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 4 126-27.

<sup>474</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 4 116-17.

<sup>475</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 4 64.

<sup>476</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 3 254.

## The Identity of the Queen: a Paradoxical Female Ideal

Yet it is sometime quite hard to tell what Ruskin intended to convey with such an ideal, and the fault, I think, is not always on the readers' part. According to Robert Hewison, who is also interested in Ruskin's use of visual imagery, 'a visual reading is the only way we can trace the line of argument' in *Sesame and Lilies*.<sup>477</sup> My reading, however, will lead to a slightly different conclusion. In fact, I find that a visual reading does not offer much help in 'tracing the line of argument' but actually reveals Ruskin's self-contradiction, and this is exactly what happens in that beautiful ideal female in 'Of Queens' Gardens.' There has been much speculation about why Ruskin chose this female ideal. The image is obviously based on cultural tradition, where the association between woman and beauty can be traced as far back as ancient religion and mythologies, in figures such as Saint Mary and Aphrodite. It is also based on the purpose of the second lecture, which, as Ruskin himself made it explicit, was to address the issue of the education of girls.<sup>478</sup> Indeed, the fact that *Sesame and Lilies* became a bestseller, a common gift for girls and even a fixture in middle-class homes, all confirmed the soundness of Ruskin's choice.<sup>479</sup> Meanwhile, those who are interested in Ruskin's private life could also identify in this image the impact of his romantic relationship with Rose La Touche, who was for him an angelic presence and, for that matter, could be reasonably inferred as the most important reader he intended to communicate to through these lectures.<sup>480</sup>

But I would add that the image of the ideal woman has also a typical Victorian context. As Linda Colley has noted in her study of British culture in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, since the eighteenth century, there had been a 'remarkable prominence of the female component of the British Royal family.' Queens and princesses elicited unprecedented attention and admiration. According to

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<sup>477</sup> Hewison 194.

<sup>478</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 18 liv.

<sup>479</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, xiv.

<sup>480</sup> Apart from the angelic qualities of Rose and the same qualities of the ideal female, there is a more immediate reference that confirms Rose's presence in the lecture. At some point, Ruskin lamented the harm of religious fervour. Theology, according to Ruskin, was a 'dangerous science for women,' since they would 'plunge headlong' into a religious fervour and make the entire household suffer. This has been an explicit complaint of Rose, who, as Ruskin's letters and biographers' account have shown, was to some extent a religious fanatic.

Colley, this phenomenon could be attributed to the fact that the Royal family had produced several female personalities; yet, more significantly, it also reflects a psychological demand of the British public. The prominence, as Colley argues, which ‘coincided with a gradual decline in church attendance, can be seen in part as a kind of substitute religion, a strictly Protestant version of the cult of the Virgin.’<sup>481</sup> Throughout the Victorian era, when the centre of the Royal family was actually a woman, it was only too natural that this ‘substitute religion’ would find its way to the wider public. Colley also quotes a poem written by an anonymous woman in 1817, which, I think, is helpful to be repeated here:

T’was hers with calm and condescending grace,  
To rule in woman’s chiefest empire, Home; --  
T’was hers to keep the sabbath in its place,  
Mid the meek worship of the village dome.<sup>482</sup>

The image of the calm, graceful, home-bound female well anticipated that in ‘Of Queens’ Gardens.’ It is likely, therefore, that Ruskin reproduced this image because the ideal female was by then a widely recognised idol; for this reason, it provided the most convenient personification for beauty, which, in his view, was also to be worshipped.

Just as Colley has noted, the cult of female royals produced consequences at once ‘limiting and liberating’: liberating, because it called attention to the importance of the role of the female in social life; limiting, because that role of the female was very often confined to domesticity.<sup>483</sup> Likewise, Ruskin’s argument in ‘Of Queens’ Gardens’ also contains a paradox – a paradox, I would argue, that first makes his female ideal confusing and then obfuscates the ultimate end of his aesthetic education. This complication consists first of all in the identity of the feminine symbol of beauty that Ruskin had created. The lecture, as Ruskin himself made clear at the beginning, was a sequel to ‘Of Kings’ Treasuries.’ Its chief topic, he explained, is the order and

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<sup>481</sup> Colley 278.

<sup>482</sup> Quoted in Colley; it originally appeared in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* 87 (1817) 610.

<sup>483</sup> Colley 279.

beauty of ‘queenly power,’ as opposed to the ‘kingly power’ of the previous one; or, in other words, ‘the ‘mission’ and ‘rights’ of Woman’ as opposed to ‘the mission and rights of Man.’<sup>484</sup> Because of the binary opposition of ‘queen’ and ‘king,’ the female image in the first part of the lecture is especially distinguished by its ‘wifely quality.’ In order to buttress this point, Ruskin quoted extensively from literature. *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, was interpreted as a story of how ‘the wise and brave stratagem of the wife was brought to ruinous issue by the reckless impatience of her husband.’<sup>485</sup> Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, too, demonstrated to Ruskin women’s heavenly assistance to men in the midst of crisis. Ruskin also drew on Greek poems, which, as he paraphrased, shared the same theme: the ‘wife’s heart of Andromache,’ ‘the housewifely calm of that of Penelope’ and, above all, the good Alcetis who volunteered to save the life of her husband through the sacrifice of her own. From all these literary concepts of pure women, Ruskin constructed his own ideal female. She was, again, defined in relation to the characteristics of the male.

The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the women’s power is for rule, not for battle, – and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision.<sup>486</sup>

Despite this elaborate comparison, the idea that Ruskin expressed was actually quite simple: men maintained a family through working and conquest; and their wives, as ‘pure angels,’ made sure that this tiny piece of land was beautified into a cosy home. Her reign was within the threshold, while the rest of the world was ready for further adventures and discoveries by men. It is also with this assumption that Ruskin presented his proposal for the education of girls. To make their girls the ideal women, Ruskin advised his readers that they should not only provide their daughters with the same education as the boys, so that the future woman could ‘sympathise in her

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<sup>484</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 69.

<sup>485</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 71.

<sup>486</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 77.

husband's pleasures and in those of his best friends.'<sup>487</sup> In terms of subjects to be studied, they should also pay particular attention to literature, art, and fair nature, since all of them were indispensable in the cultivation of the sense of beauty.

However, as the praise of the ideal woman went on, Ruskin seemed more and more unable to contain his passion to relocate the ideal image from private houses to the public arena. The idea of 'ruling' and 'decision making' gained gradual ascendancy, the sphere for women was broadened, and the way he visualised the ideal woman also underwent an enormous change. When Ruskin finally addressed 'ye women of England' directly, it became apparent that females had come to bear the chief responsibility for the proper maintenance of the whole world, much like Queen Victoria herself:

There is no suffering, no injustice, no misery, in the earth, but the guilt of it lies with you. Men can bear the sight of it, but you should not be able to bear it. Men may tread it down without sympathy in their own struggle; but men are feeble in sympathy, and contracted in hope; it is you only who can feel the depths of pain, and conceive the way of its healing. Instead of trying to do this, you turn away from it; you shut yourselves within your park walls and garden gates; and you are content to know that there is beyond them a whole world of wilderness – a world of secrets which you dare not penetrate; and of suffering which you dare not conceive.<sup>488</sup>

Compare the passage above with the previous one, and the duty of women becomes a complicated issue. The contrast between man and woman was preserved: one was still characterised by an active, belligerent nature, while the other was still distinguished for her feeling, sympathy and tenderness. But the relationship between them was somehow altered. Instead of cooperating with their husbands by taking care of the private sphere, now women's task was to supervise and to redress as rulers of the public world. They were now held as culprits for the degradation outside, and that was only because Ruskin regarded them as the primary power to change the world. While previously, the two sexes, with different natures, were presented as complimentary,

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<sup>487</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 82.

<sup>488</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 90.

here Ruskin's emphasis leaned so much to the power of 'ordering,' 'comforting' and 'the beautiful adornment' that the nature of men appeared indeed feeble, if not defective. In this way, the wifely figure evolved into a motherly one, who, with all her affections and love for beauty, single-handedly guarded the world; the 'queen,' in consequence, became more like the supreme monarch than the spouse of the king.

Moreover, this dual identity of the ideal female image gave rise to paradoxical interpretations of women's social roles. In 1983, an anthology on Victorian 'woman questions' republished Ruskin's 'Of Queens' Gardens.' In the complementary note, the editor explained that the argument for the extension of women's sphere 'was neither new nor controversial by the 1860s,' and therefore indicated that Ruskin's views in the lectures were readily accepted by the public.<sup>489</sup> The first part of this comment is perhaps true, but the latter part is decidedly not. Responses from contemporaries well reflected the inherent paradox in the female image that Ruskin created: readers were far from unanimous concerning Ruskin's position. Supporters of women's rights claimed that they drew inspiration from 'Of Queens' Gardens'; many were determined to spread the Ruskinian teaching to fellow women throughout society. For instance, Flora Lucy Freeman, a Victorian activist who committed herself to the improvement of the condition of working-class girls, once gave an account of how she recommended the lecture to girls around her and, as she believed, to their benefit.<sup>490</sup> But George Gissing's *The Odd Women* showed a different understanding. In his story, a husband explains to his wife that

[w]omen's sphere is the home [...] Unfortunately, girls are often obliged to go out to earn their living, but this is unnatural, a necessity which advanced civilisation will altogether abolish. You shall read John Ruskin; every word he says about women is good and precious.<sup>491</sup>

The husband is referring to 'Of Queens' Gardens,' but for him those words bore a

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<sup>489</sup> Elizabeth K. Helsinger, Robin Lauterbach Sheets, and William R. Veeder, eds., 'John Ruskin and "Of Queens' Gardens"', *The Woman Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America, 1837-1883* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1983) 77-102, at 96.

<sup>490</sup> Flora Lucy Freeman, *Religious and Social Work amongst Girls* (London: Skeffinton, 1901) 69.

<sup>491</sup> George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, ed. Arlene Young (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 1998) 168.

totally different indication from what Miss Freeman believed. In his view, an ideal woman should be in the first category as Ruskin had described her: one who maintained order, created beauty and, in this way, assisted men in their adventure of modern enterprises. Both understandings are to some extent true to Ruskin's argument, for the paradox rises inevitably from his two different ways of visualising the ideal female and, for that matter, the role of beauty. In fact, one might even doubt whether that was part of the reason why, upon its publication, the lecture 'Of Queens' Gardens' sold so well: the dubiousness of the image was so open to different explanations that every reader, whatever their position, could always find what he or she wished to find.

## **Beauty in the Age of Industrialisation: The Dilemma of Aesthetic Education**

Since the ideal female also symbolises ideal beauty, which is the grand object of Ruskin's aesthetic education, the inherent paradox in that image – the tension between wife and mother, between partner and ruler – also reveals the dilemma of aesthetic education within an increasingly industrialised Victorian society. In the previously mentioned report from *The Morning Post* about Ruskin's lectures, it was recorded that Ruskin said at the beginning that 'he always came to Manchester somewhat nervously, feeling that he came to address an audience in the most powerful city on earth in its probable future and influence on the destiny of mankind.'<sup>492</sup> The reporter put down these words with a touch of pride, but he might not have fully grasped Ruskin's insinuation. When Ruskin courteously referred to Manchester as the 'most powerful city' that influenced 'the destiny of mankind,' he did not specify whether the influence would be auspicious or not. What made him nervous could have been the grandness of the city, but it could also have been the ominous power of industry. The latter seems more probable if we also recall how Elizabeth Gaskell, a novelist based in Manchester, felt compelled to portray the city's 'unhappy state of things' in her works,

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<sup>492</sup> 'Mr. J. Ruskin on 'what and how to read'' 2.



such as *Mary Barton*.<sup>493</sup>

Ruskin's attitude towards industrialisation also made the latter choice more likely. He had always been quite outspoken about the evil of the modern industrial world. The preface to the second edition of *Sesame of Lilies* is full of protest against 'the modern lust of wealth' and 'its practical intelligence.' Because of the rapid development of industry, Ruskin mourned,

Of the ancient architecture and most expressive beauty of their country there is now little vestige left; and it is one of the few reasons which console me for the advance of life, that I am old enough to remember the time when the sweet waves of the Reuss and Limmat (now foul with refuse of manufacture) were as crystalline as the heaven above them; when her pictured bridges and embattled towers ran unbroken round Lucerne; when the Rhone flowed in deep-green, softly dividing currents round the wooden ramparts of Geneva; and when from the marble roof of the western vault of Milan, I could watch the Rose of Italy flush in the first morning light, before a human foot had sullied its summit, or the reddening dawn on its rocks taken shadow of sadness from the crimson which, long ago, stained the ripples of Otterburn.<sup>494</sup>

Nevertheless, this lovely landscape of the 'good old days' was rapidly changing, and these changes were inevitable. The flourishing manufacturing industry altered the country permanently, rural and urban alike. In some respects, the changes were not very favourable. Old buildings were ruthlessly torn down, while chimneys were erected, producing large puffs of sooty smoke and that famous London fog, which found expression in a variety of Victorian literary works. The fast growth of the urban population made the countryside desolate, while, on the other hand, it also gave rise to numerous unhealthy lodgings and slums. Thus as Charles Kingsley's novel *Alton Locke* depicts, instead of those 'sweet waves of the Reuss and Limmat,' streets in the poor area were surrounded by '[b]lood and sewer water,' which 'crawled from under doors and out of spouts, and reeked down gutters among offal, animal and vegetable, in every stage of putrefaction.'<sup>495</sup> The living conditions in some parts of the industrial cities had become so appalling that scenes from there struck many as 'the most

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<sup>493</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, Preface, *Mary Barton* vol. 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848) vi.

<sup>494</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 8.

<sup>495</sup> Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1862) 68.

deplorable manifestations of human wretchedness and depravity.<sup>496</sup> This was the fate of London and Manchester; yet other European cities such as Milan and Venice also suffered the same: hence Ruskin's lament over the 'pain from the sight of restorations or ruins' when he worked in Venice in 1849.<sup>497</sup> So it requires little difficulty to imagine how the travels in the 1840s and 1850s had brought home to him the dark side of material progress. In 'Of Queens' Gardens,' Ruskin also expressed his anxiety over the industrialised landscape and challenged his audience in an almost blunt manner:

Yet this is what you are doing with all England. The whole country is but a little garden, not more than enough for your children to run the lawns of, if you would let them all run there. And this garden you will turn into furnace ground, and fill with heaps of cinders, if you can, and those children of yours, not you, will suffer for it.<sup>498</sup>

In his view, the blind expansion of modern industry destroyed the beauty of the British landscape and, for that matter, jeopardised the living condition of British people. The reconstruction of the landscape was therefore an aesthetic project. In order to undo all the wrongs, 'furnace' and 'heaps of cinders' must be removed, so that the country would become once again a queen's garden, modelled after the symbol of beauty that Ruskin ascribed to the ideal womanhood.

To be sure, Ruskin was not alone in his call for beauty. Beauty cures the ugliness of modern cities, and this was a conviction shared by many. By the mid-nineteenth century, many Victorian urban dwellers had found the advancement of industry and the corruption of the landscape utterly horrendous. Talk about aesthetic cultivation, at this point, appeared frequently in daily newspapers. When the English translation of *The History of Ancient Art* was published in 1850, a reviewer from *The Morning Chronicle* praised ardently the achievement of Winckelmann the author, as well as the 'genial climate of Greece,' which, in his view, facilitated an 'aesthetic love of art and

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<sup>496</sup> Charles Dickens ed., 'The Devil's Acre,' *Household Words: A Weekly Journal* 1.13 (1850) 297.

<sup>497</sup> Ruskin, *Reflections of a Friendship: John Ruskin's Letters to Pauline Trevelyan 1848-1866*, ed. Virginia Surtees (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969) 27.

<sup>498</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 86.

beauty.’ After that, however, readers’ attention was reverted from ancient Greece to contemporary England, and eulogy was turned into disparagement:

In England, from the brutalising influences of gin, and dirt, and filthy living, our want of a good public school of art, and the utter absence of all encourage to excel, it were vain to hope for any enduring monument of beauty, for neither its spirit, nor any encouragement to create that spirit, exists among us.<sup>499</sup>

The contemporary world was far behind ancient Greece in its aesthetic sensitivity. But this was not the fault of artists. Rather, according to the judgment of the writer, it was symptomatic of a degenerated social life. A passage from the 1869 issue of *The Pall Mall Gazette* expressed a similar judgment, though from a different perspective. There was a critical need for the cultivation of aesthetic principles, according to the writer, because even if people had the financial means to maintain a decent household, they had no idea how to decorate the place properly in order to avoid vulgarity. As a result,

in what an atmosphere of ugliness do we live and move and have our own being! Take, by way of example, the so-called well-appointed house of an English family in comfortable circumstances. The drawing room will differ in no essential degree from thousands of drawing-rooms; the upholstery will be unexceptionable as far as costliness goes, the decorations will be of a piece with all the other houses in the same street.<sup>500</sup>

Attributing ‘ugliness’ as a feature to the general ‘atmosphere’ and ordinary English families, this passage also identified the lack of aesthetic sensibility as a social phenomenon and, for that matter, the cause of a corrupted modern taste. But neither commentator discussed how the aspiration towards beauty shall alter the landscape, or how cities would look like once the aesthetic cultivation of its dwellers had been accomplished. If people could get rid of ‘filthy living,’ would they also dispose of chimneys and factories altogether? If everyone were to choose handmade decorations according to their cultivated taste, would it still be necessary to maintain mass

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<sup>499</sup> Anonymous, ‘Greek Art,’ *Morning Chronicle* 13 June 1850.

<sup>500</sup> Anonymous, ‘The Aesthetics of Common Life,’ *Pall Mall Gazette* 11 Sept. 1869.

production and manufacturing industries?

In this respect, Ruskin, too, remained highly ambivalent. When he warned his audience against the danger caused by rising industry, he told them, as we read from the previous quotes, that it was the queenly power of ‘ordering’ and adornment alone that could save the landscape from being destroyed by the power of the male, that is, ‘the Power to destroy.’<sup>501</sup> Meanwhile, he also acknowledged that the destructive power which made men ‘prone to fight’ and which threatened the wellbeing of the modern landscape was also the progressive power that fuelled ‘invention’ and ‘adventure.’ Their power paralleled closely the power of industrialisation: it produced hideous cities yet, at the same time, produced huge amounts of goods, capitals and, above all, a powerful country.<sup>502</sup> In this sense, the nature and duty of men and women became – perhaps even unintentionally for Ruskin – allegorical; the gender relationship reflected in fact the relationship between aesthetic culture and the power of industry. How, therefore, should feeling, imagination and sensibility for beauty work against such a trend of progress, which both benefited and damaged society and which was absolutely irreversible? Should it complement industrialisation with patch-ups here and there, or should it overtake the trend? When Ruskin portrayed his heroine as an ‘angel at home,’ he seemed to anticipate a happy cooperation. But when the bleakness of the modern land compelled him to demand that females ought not to shut themselves within ‘park walls and garden gates,’ he certainly expressed a much radical view concerning the aesthetic ideal – that beauty must become the supreme power in order to eliminate the wrongs of industry.<sup>503</sup>

Because of his indecisiveness about where beauty stood against social reality, Ruskin did not pin down a practical solution. Thus the final picture he offered to his audience was intensely poetic. In the concluding part of the lecture, aesthetic power once again took the shape of an ideal woman, and the problem of the world, as he described, was to be solved in a most airy manner: ‘The path of good woman is indeed strewn with flowers; but they rise behind her steps, not before them.’ He cited

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<sup>501</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 86.

<sup>502</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 86.

<sup>503</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 90.

here from the lines of Tennyson: ‘Her feet have touched the meadows, and left the daisies rosy.’<sup>504</sup> We do not know how the piles of cinder is to be removed, or how the furnace ground will be turned back into gardens; all we know is that the cultivation of beauty would finally lead to a garden of meadows and blossoms, a Neverland of eternal spring.

Ruskin was aware of the impracticality of his project. In fact, he was haunted by this awareness. Hence, when the aesthetic educator rose to defend himself, he could not help but become slightly hysterical. After the poetical description of the triumph of beauty, Ruskin addressed his audience directly:

You think that only a lover’s fancy; – false and vain! How if it could be true? [...] it is little to say of a woman, that she only does not destroy where she passes. She should revive; the harebells should bloom, not stoop, as she passes. You think I am rushing into wide hyperbole! Pardon me, not a whit – I mean what I say in calm English, spoken in resolute truth.<sup>505</sup>

But he did not sound calm at all, and the tone he used for self-justification disturbed many readers. In spite of the popularity of the book, reviewers were not always kind. One reviewer from *The Contemporary Review*, for example, described *Sesame and Lilies* as lectures ‘written in scream’ and concluded with a warning that ‘to lose temper or betray over-excitement is of all things the most fatal to him who would influence Englishmen.’<sup>506</sup> Even in the early twentieth century, Mrs. Amabel Williams-Ellis, who had not been among Ruskin’s Victorian audience, still felt that the lectures must have been composed with a ‘shriek,’ and were therefore ‘unreadable in their entirety.’ In them, Mrs. Ellis complained, ‘we are being “spoken to” in the most odious sense of that idiom.’<sup>507</sup>

Some critics regard this hysteria as an early sign of Ruskin’s mental instability.<sup>508</sup> Yet I would argue that this was a normal reaction from a desperate public speaker. In a

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<sup>504</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 91.

<sup>505</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* 91-92.

<sup>506</sup> Anonymous, ‘Notices of Books,’ *Contemporary Review*, vol.1 (1866) 169-84, at 176, 178.

<sup>507</sup> Amabel Williams-Ellis, *The Tragedy of Ruskin* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928) 263.

<sup>508</sup> Martin A. Danahay, *A Community of One: Masculine Autobiography and Autonomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New York: State U of New York P, 1993) 121.

private letter to his friend Coventry Patmore, dated June 1865, Ruskin mentioned his new lectures, which he described as ‘pearly,’ but also added that they were ‘written for a couple of schoolgirls in reality and were only delivered to amuse them, not in the least expecting them to be of any use to the public.’<sup>509</sup> The somewhat paradoxical description of the lecture – that it was both ‘pearly’ and ‘useless’ – is a possible explanation of Ruskin’s ‘screaming’ and ‘shrieking.’ While he was convinced of the soundness of his ‘pearly’ ‘resolute truth,’ he did not know for sure if the ideal he visualised could be effectively conveyed to the public. Would the public ‘see’ the idea of ‘beauty’ with the same ease as they saw the beauty of Claude and the moral indications of Venetian sculpture? Ruskin surely did not have enough confidence in the effectiveness of his aesthetic ideal and the audience’s power of perception.

This is a problem that Ruskin did not encounter in his art criticism. As an art critic, he was for the most part a conveyor of truth. He acted as the eye of his audience, helping them to perceive the minutest detail and, in this way, to appreciate the wisdom of God, the talent of Turner and the moral significance of architectures. His authority, then, was primarily the authority of an interpreter. As John D. Rosenberg has pointed out, *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice* impress readers not just with ‘their word-painting,’ but, more importantly, with their ‘sustained energy of elaboration.’<sup>510</sup> Ruskin’s lectures about beauty, however, continued to do word painting but did not retain the same energy of elaboration. Determined to hammer that ultimate end into the head of his audience, he no longer acted as a conveyor or an interpreter. As a result, the lecture was filled up with visual symbols: both the ideal female and the beautiful garden, for instance, appear many times throughout the lecture. But such repetitiveness did not help to clarify his point. On the contrary, as we can see in the conflicting interpretations of women’s roles and the complaints about his tone, the visual signs ground on the nerves of some of his readers. At this point, it seems that Ruskin the aesthetic educator had evolved into an impatient headmaster, who dictated and tyrannised with that vision of ideal beauty, but had somehow forgotten that his

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<sup>509</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 18 liv.

<sup>510</sup> Rosenberg 138.

most primary task as an aesthetic educator – a task that he had in fact performed quite well – was to educate the eyes so that they could perceive beauty and truth in the most ordinary details of the world.

## Conclusion

Ruskin's aesthetic education could be properly summarised as an education of 'eyes.' The emphasis on seeing continued from his early fairy tale well into his art and social criticism. Gluck wins a happy life, according to Ruskin, not only because he has a kind heart but, more importantly, because of his quick perception, which makes him sensitive to both human sufferings and heavenly signs. The moral of the fairy tale was repeated again and again in Ruskin's later career. From *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice* to 'Of Queens' Gardens,' he made it crystal clear to his audience that he wanted them to become neither professional artists nor disciples of great masters; he wanted them, instead, to make the best use of their eyes in order to discover more about the beauty of nature and the human heart and, in that way, to rebuild their own world according to the ideal of beauty.

In his art criticism, the emphasis on artistic details which were otherwise neglected by common viewers convinced many people of his authority; the exploration of moral significance, of 'seeing with a pure heart,' also translated Ruskin's art criticism into a meaningful criticism of life. As an art critic, he offered professional instructions in various artistic subjects; yet, he also transcended the limitation of professionalism by infusing art talks with ethics. His audience was quick to understand this message, and was in general very sympathetic to his effort. In a letter from July 31, 1848, Brontë described how exhilarated she was while reading Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. 'Hitherto,' said Brontë, 'I have only had instinct to guide me in judging of art; I feel more as if I had been walking blindfold – this book seems to give me eyes. I *do* wish I had pictures within reach by which to test my new sense.'<sup>511</sup> In the obituary of Ruskin, published in *The Times*, the commentator also stated, with even more admiration that 'Artistic criticism was unknown in England [...] Ruskin created it.'<sup>512</sup> This well-expressed enthusiasm tells us how readily his

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<sup>511</sup> Charlotte Brontë *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë* vol. 2, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) 94.

<sup>512</sup> Simon Grimble, ed. *Lives of Victorian Literary Figures: John Ruskin* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005) 335.



audience embraced Ruskin's aesthetic teachings in the realm of art.

In his direct engagement with various social issues, however, Ruskin fared less well. He was still quite popular, to be sure, but his teachings and manners were both found to be controversial. Speaking with the desire to improve the country both morally and aesthetically, he continued to make high demands on his readers' capability of perceiving. This practice, as was seen in the previous section, gave birth to some complex – and even paradoxical – imagery in his writings. Because of his obsession with images, his neglecting of explanation and, ultimately, the lack of confidence in his audience's capability to 'see,' Ruskin's endeavour to restore beauty to an increasingly industrialised society became more like an illusion based on a personal whim. Not every one could appreciate the visual effects in the same manner as Ruskin expected. As a result, people did not only criticise this overexcited aesthetic educator for screaming and shrieking; they were also disappointed of how empty Ruskin's teachings were. Anthony Trollope, for instance, deeply regretted the fact that Ruskin had given up his old trade of art criticism:

But the fiddler was thus powerful because he understood the art of fiddling. Had he dropped his bow, and got into a pulpit that he might preach, we may doubt whether by his preaching he would have held the crowds whom his music had collected. [...] Mr Ruskin [...] will leave talking to us of the beauties of art and nature, of the stones of Venice and the wild flowers of Switzerland, and will preach to us out of a high pulpit on political economy and the degradation of men and the duties of women!<sup>513</sup>

In spite of those beautiful words and images, Trollope concluded in another review of Ruskin, that readers of his social criticism were bound to realise that 'no human being can learn anything from such teaching, indeed that there is no lesson taught whatsoever, that the words are words and words only.'<sup>514</sup> Trollope's judgment that 'there is no lesson taught whatsoever' could be an exaggeration; nonetheless, their impressions were quite to the point, especially when we recall how repeatedly the

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<sup>513</sup> Anthony Trollope, 'Review of *Sesame and Lilies*,' *Fortnightly Review* 1.15 (1865) 633-35, at 633.

<sup>514</sup> Trollope, 'Review of *The Crown of Wild Olive*,' *Fortnightly Review* 5.15 (1865) 381-84, at 381. Both are reprinted in Bradley.

icon of ideal beauty appeared in Ruskin's 'Of Queens' Gardens' yet how confusing and elusive it had become towards the end.

At some point, Ruskin himself also realised that the beautiful forms which he recommended did not improve Victorian landscapes aesthetically but, instead, aggravated their condition. Thus in a letter to *The Pall Mall Gazette* from 1872, he observed, with a tone of self-mockery, that his endeavour to make the audience perceive the beauty of Venetian architecture brought some hideous consequences:

I have had indirect influence on nearly every cheap villa-builder between this [Denmark Hill] and Bromley; and there is scarcely a public house near the Crystal Palace but sells its gins and bitters under pseudo-Venetian capitals copied from the Church of the Madonna of Health or of Miracles. And one of my principal notions for leaving my present home is that it is surrounded everywhere by the accursed Frankenstein monster of, indirectly, my own making.<sup>515</sup>

Some of the originators of those 'pseudo-Venetian' buildings had perhaps read Ruskin, but it is likely that many more simply picked the style out of manuals as an icon of fashion. At any rate, they followed the instruction of the master – either closely or erroneously – to such an extent that they disgusted the master himself, driving him away from his home. Ruskin, on his part, had every reason to complain. To find that his aesthetic ideals had now deteriorated into a disfigured product was certainly no pleasant news for such a devoted aesthetic educator; and it was almost a deadly blow to find that he was unable to benefit the 'actual and insistent' and that he himself was even culpable for the destructive effect on the very landscape that he desired to make beautiful.

The stark contrast between his success as an art critic and his failure as a social critic, however, should not lead us to assume that Ruskin's social criticism was different from his criticism of art. As I have been trying to show in this chapter, as far as the 'education of eyes' is concerned, his social criticism, no matter how impractical it might appear, is built on essentially the same principle as his art criticism, and both

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<sup>515</sup> Ruskin, *Works*, 10 458-59.

convey the same message. In fact, there is not even much difference, I argue, between Ruskin the social critic and Ruskin the art critic. Throughout his life he was devoted, as he had promised in the first volume of *Modern Painters*, to revealing to the public the ‘degradation’ of the world and disseminating ‘the essence and the authority of the Beautiful and the True.’<sup>516</sup> This was what he did when he guided his audience from one painting to another, showing them the splendour of nature and criticising the popular taste which preferred the affected and false in art. With the same aim, he directed his readers’ attention to Venetian architectures and sculptures, reminding them of the beauty of a pure heart and condemning the conduct of dishonesty. When he finally came to address his audience on issues in everyday life, he was still fulfilling the same task: he constructed an ideal of beauty for his audience so that they would be alerted to the negative impacts of industrialisation. The thorough devotion to the education of eyes was the cause of his success as well as his failure: it animated his analysis of paintings and architectures, yet, being too preoccupied with the ‘vision’ of the beautiful, his disparagement of modern society disturbed some readers with an anxious tone but did not demonstrate attention to practical solutions: hence the criticism about its ‘shrieking’ and ‘emptiness.’ Thus Ruskin was, from beginning to end, an avid aesthetic educator; he once spoke of laws of the organisation of the earth’ as being ‘authoritative and inviolable,’ yet what was the truly ‘authoritative and inviolable’ for him was nothing but the need to perceive ‘the Beautiful and the True.’

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<sup>516</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters, Works*, 3 4.

## **Conclusion**

### **News for the Present: Aesthetic Education as a Critique of Social Order**

So much for the group portrayal of three Victorian aesthetic educators – John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin. Once again, my work does not aim to provide a full view of everything related to the cultivation of the beautiful. Rather, it highlights some crucial elements in their idea of aesthetic education and focuses particularly on how these ideas were formed, modified and communicated. While for all of them, the faith in beauty continued unabated throughout their life, the three educators had nevertheless very different understandings of what beauty was and how it should serve society. This difference was partly based on their individual genius, and partly on their diverse experience within that era. In this way, I hope that my work – paying particular attention to personal and social factors – has provided some insight into the ‘intellectual history’ of the idea of aesthetic education in the Victorian age. Before my thesis comes to an end, however, I would like to quote another comment about ‘portrait,’ that is, George Bernard Shaw’s description of several portraits of Ruskin which, quite curiously, seems very compatible with my argument.

George Bernard Shaw introduced these portraits in his study of Ruskin’s politics. He had noticed four portraits of Ruskin in an exhibition. The first one was a bronze dish featuring his youthful profile, the second one was done by Herkomer in 1879, the third one was a photograph taken in the Lake District in Ruskin’s later years, and the fourth one was a portrait made by Arthur Severn in 1897, just three years before Ruskin’s death. The four images, Shaw observed, were not just illustrations of the different phases of a famous individual; they also depicted the progress of Ruskin’s career. The first one, according to Shaw, showed an interesting resemblance to the profile of Mozart, demonstrating the same ‘vivacity’ peculiar to great artists. In the second and the third ones, respectively, Shaw found the same seriousness as people

studying economics, sociology and science and, therefore, noted a likeness to John Stuart Mill and Grant Allen, a determined supporter of Darwin's theory of evolution. The last one was done when Ruskin was old and weak and, as is generally believed, mentally ill. But this was not the message that Shaw grasped. In his view, Ruskin in this picture was 'hardly a human being', but more like a 'God as depicted in Blake's *Book of Job*.' Thus, altogether, the four portraits completed the 'evolution' of Ruskin; and here is Shaw's conclusion:

He begins as a painter, a lover of music, a poet and rhetorician, and presently becomes an economist and sociologist, finally developing sociology and economics into a religion, as all economics and sociology that are worth anything do finally develop. You follow him from Mozart to Mill, picking up on the way the man of science, Grant Allen, also a little in the sociological line, but very much interested in science and material things, and material forms and shapes, just as Ruskin is in *Modern Painters*.<sup>517</sup>

This path of 'evolution' is in my view also true for Ruskin the aesthetic educator. Ruskin initially developed his idea of beauty as an expert on art. When he told his audience that a close observation of nature was the only way to understand what beauty was, he was actually making a case for 'modern painters' such as Turner. It is in the first volume of *Modern Painters*, which is generally regarded as a fine work on art criticism, that Ruskin launched his project of aesthetic education. His indictment of Victorian taste, at this stage, contained the best illustration of what he believed to be the 'truth' of aesthetic pursuits: one of the greatest of all human actions, he said, was 'to see.'

However, although Ruskin established the principle of 'seeing' as a cornerstone of his aesthetic education first as an art critic, he never regarded aesthetic education as merely an artistic issue. It is important to observe closely, as we can learn from Ruskin's study of Venetian architecture, because clear vision helps one to make proper moral decisions and to better appreciate (or condemn) the character of the artist and, for that matter, the moral implication of an artwork. It is also important to

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<sup>517</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *Ruskin's Politics* (The Ruskin Centenary Council, 1921) 5.

see with imagination, as he tried to tell his audience in his later lectures, because the vision of beauty is to be the only thing we can rely on in order to save ourselves from the pollutions – both literally and figuratively – of modern industrial civilisation. Thus, step by step, Ruskin introduced his principle of ‘seeing’ to a much wider audience than gallery visitors. Meanwhile, the ‘aesthetic education’ that he intended for the Victorian public also became more and more complex: this education was not just about how to decide which painting looked better; it was the cultivation of moral character and, even more importantly, it was concerned with the welfare of the entire human society. In this way, Ruskin’s aesthetic education covers a whole range of topics in its evolutionary process. It joins his personal taste with his social concerns and because of this, we should always keep in mind how multifaceted his idea of ‘aesthetic education’ was.

An evolution of this kind, according to Shaw, was unique. ‘There have been very few men,’ he said, ‘in whom our manifold nature has been more marked than in Ruskin.’<sup>518</sup> I agree that Ruskin’s nature was remarkably ‘manifold,’ but I doubt if that ‘manifold’ nature was truly idiosyncratic. John Stuart Mill, whom Shaw flatly classified as an ‘economist and sociologist,’ also exhibited the same interest in art and beauty. As the present thesis has been trying to show, there is a similar ‘evolution’ in Mill’s idea of aesthetic education, which, just like that of Ruskin, originated from the study of literature and then found its way into the realm of sociology and politics. While Mill remained consistent in his emphasis that the cultivation of ‘feeling’ was the most essential component of aesthetic education, his definition of feeling had undergone enormous changes; and it was through those changes in ideas that we perceive significant changes in Mill himself. When Mill corrected his former statement that feeling was the intense emotion acquired from solitude, he rejected the position of a radical Romantic. Later, when his definition of feeling shifted from sentiments aroused by literature to ‘pleasures in cooperation,’ the change marked in fact the beginning of his contemplation on the social consequence of beauty. Thus, with each turn of mind, Mill adopted a different image, until that passionate lover of

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<sup>518</sup> Shaw, *Ruskin’s Politics* 5.

art grew into a conscientious philosopher. As an aesthetic educator, he had a nature as manifold as that of Ruskin.

It is the same with Matthew Arnold. When Ian Hamilton wrote about Arnold's 'poetic life' in 1999, he, quite characteristically, stopped at the year 1869, the year when Arnold's two-volume *Poems* came out. According to Hamilton, Arnold's post-1869 career was a 'poetryless' stage and therefore a 'second life.'<sup>519</sup> For my part, I am not entirely sure of the validity of such a label as 'second life.' Somehow, it indicates that the life of Arnold followed two completely different directions; and this, in my view, is an exaggeration. Nevertheless, Arnold did experience several changes of mind, even though the inherent direction remained largely unchanged. This is particularly true regarding his idea of aesthetic education. As an aesthetic educator, Arnold was surprisingly tenacious with his emphasis on the importance of the aesthetic 'unity' of life; but, meanwhile, his understanding of that unity also demonstrated a surprising variety. He found this unity first of all in an idealised Scholar-Gipsy, who warded off the multitudinousness of daily life by focusing only on that '*one aim, one business, one desire*' (l. 152). As a poet, Arnold also identified unity as a desirable quality in poetry: only through the description of actions that were unified and essential, as he once said, could poetic works capture the essence of human life. Ultimately, he wanted unity to be the characteristic not only of individuals but also of the 'state.' This, according to works such as *Culture and Anarchy*, was to be the most effective cure for Victorian sectarianism. The faith in aesthetic unity or, rather, the conviction that such a unity must be cultivated for the present age, thus became for Arnold an 'idea of the world,' which prompted him to join debates on a whole range of subjects, undergoing the same evolution as Mill and Ruskin.

Such an evolution from artist to economist and even politician, I argue, is inevitable. Initially, the three aesthetic educators were all drawn to art and literature in order to search for the ideal beauty. But at some point in their life, they all realised that artworks could not illustrate beauty if the people that produced them were spiritually or morally deformed. The revelation was well articulated by Ruskin in his

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<sup>519</sup> Ian Hamilton, *A Gift Imprisoned: the Poetic Life of Matthew Arnold* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999) 217.

study of Gothic architecture. According to him, Gothic stones were able to express true beauty because their creator worked both manually and intellectually. His hands followed his own heart. Only by doing so did he manage to turn those stones into subjects ‘of the most noble human intelligence.’<sup>520</sup> Modern craftsmanship, by contrast, separated the intellectual from the manual. Thus a common workman no longer followed his heart; he followed principles that were established by others. In order to produce a ‘perfect’ artwork, all he needed to do was to obey the rules and to make ‘right’ shapes. As a result, the work produced, however refined it appeared, was “the slave’s work’ which, according to Ruskin, was merely a mindless copy that contained neither thought nor beauty. Thus, the problem of modern art turned out to be a symptom of modern society, in which the division of labour and gross inequality stifled the spirit of invention and, consequently, the spirit of beauty.<sup>521</sup> This was one of the primary drives that led Ruskin from art to political economy: in order to restore that noble beauty to art, one must think of a solution to the condition of modern workmen.

In his 1853 *Preface*, Arnold expressed a similar conviction. He insisted that in the present age, poets should return to the past – ancient Greece, for example – for materials, because the present age could not nourish great poetry. When asked to write poetry by drawing subjects from the present age, poets (with whom Arnold identified himself) would reply

that with all this they can do nothing; that the elements they need for the exercise of their art are great actions, calculated powerfully and delightfully to affect what is permanent in the human soul; that so far as the present age can supply such actions, they will gladly make use of them; but that an age wanting in moral grandeur can with difficulty supply such, and an age of spiritual discomfort with difficulty be powerfully and delightfully affected by them.<sup>522</sup>

This, Arnold added, was not just the best way to produce great poetry in the present

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<sup>520</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice, Works*, 10 198.

<sup>521</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* 196.

<sup>522</sup> Arnold, *Preface, Poems* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1853) vi-xxi, at xxviii.



age; it was also the best way for contemporary poets to serve their own age, which, because of ‘industrial development’ and ‘spiritual discomfort,’ had become very ‘unpoetic.’<sup>523</sup> Eventually, in ‘The Study of Poetry’ (1888), Arnold would equal poetry to criticism: poetry, he said, was in essence ‘a criticism of life.’<sup>524</sup> Many critics read this remark as a declaration on the importance of poetry; yet, in my view, it also gives us a good clue as to why Arnold felt so compelled to have a ‘second life’ as a social and cultural critic. Once again, I would like to quote Shaw, who, on another occasion, made an equally perceptive – though slightly sarcastic – comment on Ruskin. People like him, Shaw said, had ‘enormous social appetites and very fastidious personal ones’:

They are not content with handsome houses: they want handsome cities. They are not content with bediamonded wives and blooming daughters: they complain because the charwoman is badly dressed, because the laundress smells of gin, because the sempstress is anemic [...]. They turn up their noses at their neighbour's drains, and are made ill by the architecture of their neighbor's houses. Trade patterns made to suit vulgar people do not please them (and they can get nothing else): they cannot sleep nor sit at ease upon ‘slaughtered’ cabinet makers' furniture. The very air is not good enough for them: there is too much factory smoke in it. They even demand abstract conditions: justice, honor, a noble moral atmosphere, a mystic nexus to replace the cash nexus.<sup>525</sup>

This comment applies to all the aesthetic educators mentioned in the present thesis. All of them, through a life-long search for ideal beauty, developed the conviction that beauty could not exist where the cultural milieu remained sick, and if one wanted to have a genuine aesthetic experience, one must always set off to fix society first.

In this sense, Victorian aesthetic educators were invariably social critics. Indeed, it has been my purpose in this thesis to highlight the social concerns behind their inquiries into beauty and art. And I emphasise in particular their role as ‘critics,’ so that my portraits would set a clear contrast against those of Bourdieu (whose ideas

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<sup>523</sup> Arnold, *Preface* xxviii.

<sup>524</sup> Arnold, ‘The Study of Poetry,’ *English Literature and Irish Politics*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1973) 161-88, at 163.

<sup>525</sup> Shaw, *Preface, Major Barbara* (New York: Bretano's, 1917) 5-48, at 17.

have been briefly discussed in the introduction), who regards these people as ‘agents’ that carry out social amelioration. Contrary to Bourdieu’s argument, I argue that the primary task of those social critics was not to disseminate middle-class ideologies but, quite the contrary, to challenge them. Bourdieu’s theory identifies aesthetic choices as a demonstration of class conflict. He does so, I think, because he looks at the bourgeoisie exclusively as the disseminator of ‘cultural capital,’ and regards the lower class exclusively as the receiver of that capital. As he said himself:

Lacking the internalized cultural capital which is the pre-condition for correct appropriation (according to the legitimate definition) of the cultural capital objectified in technical objects, ordinary workers are dominated by the machines and instruments which they serve rather than use, and by those possess the legitimate, i.e. theoretical, means of dominating them.<sup>526</sup>

Hence, in the realm of education, ‘which teaches respect for useless, disinterested knowledge’ such as what beauty is, ‘workers encounter legitimate culture as a principle of order which does not need to demonstrate its practical utility in order to be justified.’<sup>527</sup> So, in Bourdieu’s understanding, the middle class transmits to the lower class the knowledge of aesthetics, which, being an abstract embodiment of ‘a principle of order,’ is by itself a cultural classifier and a tool of domination. In the examples that I cited in the introduction, scholars, such as Morris, clearly adopt Bourdieu’s critique when they sneer at Victorian aesthetic education as something ‘stylized as disinterestedness’ and informed by ‘cultural capitalism.’ Varnelis’ criticism of Ruskin suggests a similar mentality when it introduces his teaching as the teaching of ‘an eternal truth outside of context or history’ and argues that, far from contextless or ahistorical, it is actually ‘founded on class distinction.’<sup>528</sup>

However, if we take more seriously the intention of the Victorian aesthetic educators, it becomes evident that the most urgent task as they perceived it was not the domination of the lower class but the education of the people who were socially and economically influential in their society. First of all, it was precisely the so-called

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<sup>526</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction* 387.

<sup>527</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction* 387.

<sup>528</sup> Varnelis, 212.

‘middle classes’ that constituted the main body of the intended audience of many of their works. This has already been pointed out by T. W. Heyck in his study of intellectuals in the Victorian period. The published writings of those men of letters, as Heyck observes, exercised great influence upon the governing body of society, because the population of the electorate, similar to that of the reading public, had an ‘essentially middle-class composition.’<sup>529</sup> In fact, to focus on the middle class as the target audience helped the speakers to ensure the effectiveness of their writings; thus, ‘through their newspapers, periodicals and books, the men of letters wrote directly for all the people who counted in decision-making.’<sup>530</sup> Heyck’s judgment is testified by many Victorians and their works. One could immediately think of, for example, Ruskin and his 1864 lectures (later published under the title of *Sesame and Lilies*) which were meant to be a treaty on aesthetic education but which also had the more practical purpose of raising funds from the audience for the foundation of a library.

On the other hand, the middle classes also attracted special attention because of their unsatisfactory performance. While it is true that Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*, which propounded the aesthetic unity of human nature against chaos and sectarianism, was written after he witnessed the mob riot in Hyde Park in 1866, the voice in the book never sets out to teach the working class on the issue of beauty; rather, it was the middle class philistines that received the most severe attack. As he had stated elsewhere: ‘The great work to be done in this country and at this hour, is not with the lower class, but with the middle; the work of raising its whole level of civilisation,’ and aesthetic cultivation, one could add, is exactly a vital part in Arnold’s civilisation-raising plan for the middle classes.<sup>531</sup> Yet again, this decision was based on the consideration that the middle class had ‘risen into such preponderating importance of late years, and now returns to the House of Commons, dictates the policy of Ministers, makes the newspapers speak with its voice, and in short governs the country.’<sup>532</sup> Poorly educated yet immensely influential in social values, the

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<sup>529</sup> T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (Chicago: Lyceum, 1982) 36.

<sup>530</sup> Heyck, 37.

<sup>531</sup> Arnold, ‘Irish Catholicism and British Liberalism,’ *Essays Religious and Mixed*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1972) 346.

<sup>532</sup> Arnold, ‘My Countrymen,’ *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Dent, 1910) 141.

middle classes were identified by Arnold to be the chief target of aesthetic education, because to educate them was to bring refinement to a great part of society.

Thus viewed, the aesthetic education proposed by Victorians aimed not to disseminate cultural capital but to modify it. If the relationship between the middle classes and the lower classes should still be described as one between teacher and student, then Mill, Arnold and Ruskin's indoctrination of that disinterested knowledge of beauty is in fact an education of the educators or, to be more precise, a kind of self-education, since they themselves were middle-class Victorians. In this sense, the aesthetic education that they envisaged is in essence a self-reflection and self-critique. The ideal beauty that they aspired to is the very thing that they found themselves – collectively – having failed to produce.

This recognition, I think, also explains the idealistic tendency in their argument. Commenting on the appeal of idealism in the nineteenth century, Ben Knights has provided an interesting account from the perspective of collective psychology. Idealism, he argues, embodying a tendency towards 'monism' and 'nostalgia for system,' 'has been likely to find adherence in periods of rapid and perplexing symbolic change.'<sup>533</sup> Here, Knights is talking about a general intellectual tendency in the Victorian period; yet, I think his conclusion is equally true for Victorian aesthetic educators, who sought to impose form over chaos, to use culture to combat anarchy, to regain beauty and harmony in a fast-changing society and, in sum, to recover what the Victorian society seemed to be losing hold of. This was well suggested in Arnold's superlative statement that an ideal 'state' would provide aesthetic education that brought out 'the best self' as well as 'the most completest and most harmonious development' in human nature. It was also illustrated by Mill's characterisation of art as 'the endeavour after perfection,' his own unremitting effort at achieving the perfect equipoise by reconciling two extremes – romantic and utilitarian, aesthetic and intellectual – and, above all, his controversial model of 'elitist' civilisation in which the love of beauty is spread to all.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>533</sup> Ben Knights, *The Idea of the Clerisy in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978) 218.

<sup>534</sup> Mill, *Inaugural Address* 256.

In the case of Ruskin, who had a more artistic temperament than the other two, this idealism informs not only his romantic description of the imagery of an aesthetic garden, a Neverland where the path was ‘strewn with flowers’,<sup>535</sup> it also consists in his memorable description of a ‘perfect country’. ‘That country is the richest,’ said Ruskin in 1860,

which nourishes the greatest numbers of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest, who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.<sup>536</sup>

This idea partly materialised when Ruskin founded the Guild of St. George, a charitable fund, in 1870. The fund was, as many critics have noted, a utopian project. For this reason, its political and economic arrangements have attracted much interest. But I want to point out that Ruskin’s utopia is also highly aesthetic. While defining the guild’s general layout, he took extra care to specify principles in dress, architecture and all types of decorations. For instance, workers in the guild must be dressed in a plain manner, according to Ruskin, but it was also necessary to maintain ‘various splendour.’ As for the adornment of women, they should be ‘golden ornaments of the finest workmanship’ and ‘jewellery of uncut gems’ such as ‘agates.’<sup>537</sup> So Ruskin was, by all means, ‘obsessed’ with aesthetic details, and this would appear to many politicians or economists as curiously irrelevant: what is the connection, one might ask, between an agate and a perfect community? However, when we read Ruskin from the perspective of aesthetic education – in fact, if we have been tracing those three people’s turns of mind regarding the cultivation of the beautiful – this ‘obsession’ becomes perfectly reasonable. The Utopia was based on the aesthetic education that Ruskin had devised; yet, more significantly, it was the product of frustration that Ruskin and many other aesthetic educators had experienced within their own middle-class community. Being disappointed with what they had

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<sup>535</sup> Ruskin, ‘Of Queen’s Gardens,’ *Sesame and Lilies* 91.

<sup>536</sup> Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, *Works*, 17 105.

<sup>537</sup> Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera: Works*, 28 434.

encountered in daily life, where violations of aesthetic principles seemed everywhere, they were compelled to build a place in which ideal beauty and ideal society merged together, a place nowhere to be found in the Victorian world. In this sense, I think Terry Eagleton's understanding of 'aesthetics' is more appropriate in the Victorian context than the theory of Bourdieu. 'Aesthetics,' Eagleton maintains,

are not only incipiently materialist; they also provide, at the very heart of the Enlightenment, the most powerful available critique of bourgeois possessive individualism and appetitive egoism. [...] The aesthetic may be the language of political hegemony and an imaginary consolation for a bourgeois bereft of a home but it is also, in however idealist a vein, the discourse of utopian critique of the bourgeois social order.<sup>538</sup>

A 'utopian critique' of social order, in my view, is exactly what the Victorian aesthetic educators provided. Thus, despite their disagreements and even occasional animosity against each other, Mill, Arnold and Ruskin were all working on the same project. And this project was to be carried on. In 1891, William Morris, an aesthete who also had a typical middle-class background, published a utopian fiction, titled *News from Nowhere*. In the story, the Victorian protagonist awakes to find himself transported to a future England. The new society strikes him with its amazing social structures and perfection everywhere. But, first of all, it dazzles him with its exquisite beauty: the Thames is still there, but instead of the foul black water that has disturbed the Victorians for many years, the protagonist, under the guidance of a 'manly refined young gentleman,' sees a river from which

[t]he soap-works with their smoke-vomiting chimneys were gone; the engineer's works gone; the lead-works gone; and no sound of riveting and hammering came down the west wind from Thorneycroft's. Then the bridge! I had perhaps dreamed of such a bridge, but never seen such an one out of an illuminated manuscript; for not even the Ponte Vecchio at Florence came anywhere near it. It was of stone arches, splendidly solid, and as graceful as they were strong; high enough also to let ordinary river traffic through easily. Over the parapet showed quaint and fanciful little buildings, which I

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<sup>538</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'The Ideology of the Aesthetics,' *Poetics Today* 9.2 *The Rhetoric of Interpretation and the Interpretation of Rhetoric* (1988) 327-38, at 337.

supposed to be booths or shops, beset with painted and gilded vanes and spirelets. The stone was a little weathered, but showed no marks of the grimy sootiness which I was used to on every London building more than a year old. In short, to me a wonder of a bridge.<sup>539</sup>

So it is a river from which all traces of acquisitive industrialism have been removed, a bridge where beauty is fully restored and, above all, a society in which aesthetic cultivation has been successfully implemented. Once again, it is interesting to note how the author depicted the beauty of the river and the bridge by emphasising what they were not. This was a riverbank with no ‘chimneys,’ no ‘engineer’s work,’ no ‘lead-works’ and ‘no sound of riveting and hammering.’ And the bridge was made of stones that showed ‘no marks of the grimy sootiness’ on every London building. The passage offers the reader a charming picture of an aesthetic Utopia; but, meanwhile, the narratives and descriptions also keep reminding them that this ‘picture’ was painted by a Victorian who was familiar with and detested the chimneys, the lead-works and the sootiness everywhere.

Here we might compare Morris’ picture of river in future England with the report of another riverside scene in 1884 from *In the Slums* by D. Rice-Jones, a clergyman who once worked and lived in Central London. On a cold rainy winter morning, the author happens to be walking over Vauxhall Bridge and sees from there ‘a huge unsightly pile of buildings used as a coal depot in connection with the adjoining gasworks’ and around it numerous ‘black barges’ and ‘iron buckets.’<sup>540</sup> Yet there is something more disturbing than the coal-heaving; for there the author also notices that

the shore was swarming with children, -- boys and girls of all ages from six or seven up to fourteen or fifteen, some of them knee-deep in the water, and others knee-deep in the mud. There were from fifty to a hundred of them there in all, and most of them were busily engaged as if in search of something. Most of them also had a basket, although in some cases there were two children to one basket, or small hamper.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, ed. David Leopold (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003) 58.

<sup>540</sup> D. Rice-Jones, *In the Slums* (London: James Nisbet, 1884) 171.

<sup>541</sup> Rice-Jones 171.

Later he realises that the children are in fact working with several adults, similarly poor, to search for ‘a bit of fuel to warm their desolate hearths.’<sup>542</sup> And this, we should add, is what a riverside scene truly was when Morris painted his Utopia. In this sense, Morris’ future England is a parable; it is an aesthetic ideal that aims to explore all kinds of inadequacy within the nineteenth-century society. As an imagined world, it is indeed ‘news from nowhere,’ but as a utopian critique of the existent social reality, the future England – just as Mill’s ‘civilisation,’ Arnold’s ‘state’ and Ruskin’s ‘guild’ – is, in fact, an importance piece of news for the present.

It is news for the ‘present’ also in the sense that the utopian picture provides insight into ‘our’ present. Perhaps few people could deny that the world we are currently living in is a place where economic interests play a significant – if not paramount – part in virtually every aspect of daily life. Bourdieu’s theory is but one example of how that reality affects our understanding of the value of art and beauty. Later scholars could be even more explicit about the so-called ‘aesthetic economy.’ In 1995 Marc Shell, professor of comparative literature at Harvard University, published a book entitled ‘Art and Money.’ The opening sentence of its introduction is as straightforward as its title: ‘In recent years, the price of artworks has skyrocketed.’<sup>543</sup> Shell then proceeds to specify his intentions and, in doing so, he mentions the traditional study of the ‘external political economy of art.’ According to Shell, this is the tradition established by John Ruskin and his *Political Economy of Art* (1857), a tradition where critics

study such problems as the place of art as commodity in national economy, the general disappearance from public sphere of costly artworks, the business of investing in painting, the role of patrons and dealers, the motives for private collecting, the politics of mass distribution, the commercial effects of museums, the influence of advertisement, and the scholarly appeal of artists’ account books.<sup>544</sup>

One could not be entirely sure if this is a proper summary of Ruskin’s idea of art. For

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<sup>542</sup> Rice-Jones 171.

<sup>543</sup> Marc Shell, *Art and Money* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 3.

<sup>544</sup> Shell 3.



my part, I would say it is not, since Ruskin had been such a devoted champion of moral-aesthetic education, as we witness from his works previously discussed. Nevertheless, *Art and Money* won many positive reviews upon its publication. In *Art Journal*, for instance, the reviewer Hannah Feldman puts this book side by side with Martha Woodmansee's *The Author, Art and the Market*, a work that also argues about the 'professional and economic interests' of artists and, for that matter, the 'dark' truth of aesthetic.<sup>545</sup> Moreover, Feldman also identifies these works as a powerful response against the supposition 'born first in Kant's writings on aesthetics and later revitalized through the doctrine of high modernism – that true artistic practice remains immune to economic concerns' and praises in particular Shell's insight that 'art, as a representational practice, is always already like money.'<sup>546</sup>

There is indeed nothing wrong in exposing the economic concerns within the issue of aesthetic, but in doing so, it is important to remember that the story always has the other side. Thus, while asserting that art resembles money, one must also be aware that art, beauty and aesthetic has many more facets than the 'external political economic' one. When agreeing with Feldman's argument that true artistic practice is never immune to economic concerns, it is also necessary to add that economic concerns do not therefore become primary in artistic practice or, for that matter, in the way we look at art and beauty.<sup>547</sup> After all, we should recall that art and beauty, even in the 'tradition' that Shell describes, are not merely entities of political economic significance but have strong moral implications. Beauty, in Mill's idea, consists partly in the cordial fellow feelings and therefore functions as the key ingredient for modern community and cooperation. For Arnold, beauty is in essence a harmonious development of human nature, the ideal that human development seeks after. In the views of Ruskin, the author of *Political Economy of Art*, the beauty of artworks could only be fully appreciated by a nature morally upright. In this way, the utopian vision that their works provide reminds us – people in the twenty-first-century context – that

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<sup>545</sup> Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 8.

<sup>546</sup> Hannah Feldman, 'The Bottom Line,' *Art Journal* 55.2 (1996) 107.

<sup>547</sup> Feldman 107.

aesthetic cultivation is meant to be a cultivation of ideal humanity and that art, in spite of its skyrocketing price, has yet an educational role to play: this particular type of culture assists human beings to explore their intellectual and moral potentials, to benefit their community, and not to lose themselves in investing, collecting and price tagging. So long as it stands as the ideal of human development, aesthetic cultivation as discussed by those Victorian minds does not conceal any truth; rather, with its emphasis on the cultivation of humanity, the message that they passed on illuminates our understanding of the function of art and beauty in our own time.

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