THE ENGLISH CRITICAL REACTION TO CONTEMPORARY PAINTING 1878 - 1910

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During the period 1878-1910 new criteria for the serious discussion of modern painting were established in England. The first chapter examines some of the differences between the criticism of painting and of literature, looks at the social function of art criticism, and outlines the terms of the crucial debate of these years, between the New Critics and the old guard, characterised by their enthusiasm for form and for content respectively. The second chapter discusses the development of art criticism in England since the first public exhibitions of the eighteenth century; the third examines publications containing such writing, and some of its individual practitioners, during 1878-1910. The task of the critic is then considered, in terms of the conditions of work and the demands which were explicitly placed on him or her. The following two chapters deal with the relationship between art and narration, and between art

and morality. Particular attention is paid to the way in which the vocabulary of moral judgment applied to Victorian society in general is transferred to the work of art. Chapter seven discusses the reception of innovatory painting, notably by the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, and the terms and arguments used by sympathetic critics to render this painting intelligible and acceptable to the general public. In conclusion, it is maintained that throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the relationship between the written word and the painted canvas has always been a close one. However, from being primarily descriptive in character, developments in painting, with emphasis shifting from content to form, made criticism far more technical in its concerns. As the use of the written word becomes increasingly essential to an understanding of the visual, so the authority of the critic to prescribe, as well as describe, increased.

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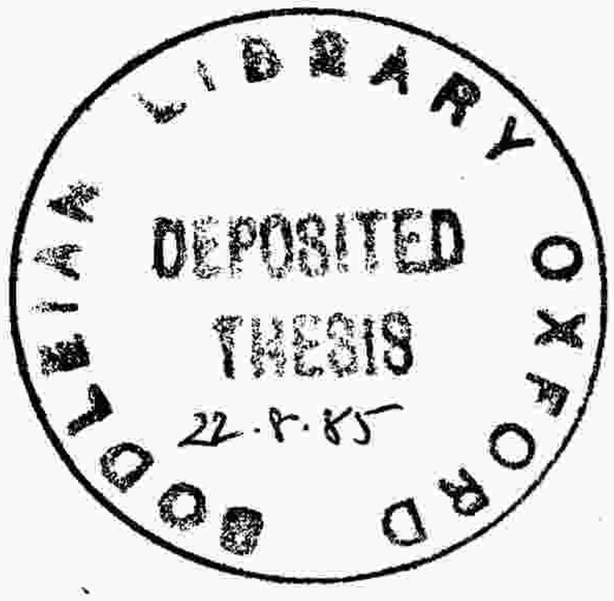

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PREFACE

1878-1910 were crucial years in the development of English art criticism. The period opens with Whistler suing Ruskin for the remarks which he had made about his painting: a controversy which sparked off a protracted debate about the function of the art critic, and which also raised the question of how far the terms of the old school of critics were useful in discussing innovatory artistic developments. By 1910, the year of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition, new forms of criticism had been established, if not widely read or accepted. The ground had been laid for Roger Fry and Clive Bell to develop their formalistic concerns: a development which, while supporting avant-garde art, simultaneously entailed dropping, in many instances, the earlier, Ruskinian emphasis on the connections between art and society.

The theories of Fry and Bell have been comprehensively discusses, as, of course, have those of Ruskin. During the years covered by this thesis, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and others were expounding their aesthetic beliefs. But, despite their influence on twentieth century criticism, they do not fall within the scope of this thesis, since their writing could only indirectly be said to touch on contemporary art. Rather, I have chosen to concentrate on those writers whose task it was

to present, in verbal terms, modern painting to the public, whether in the general or the specialised press. I have shown both sides of the argument: reactionary and progressive, applied to art both conservative and experimental. No full study of the art criticism of this period exists. This is a gap which needs to be filled, particularly when it comes to the writings of D.S. MacColl and R.A.M. Stevenson, who did so much to make Impressionist art accepted in this country, and who, despite their personal reservations to Post-Impressionist techniques. created the conditions whereby it could be discussed seriously in the general press.

Because no comprehensive history of English art criticism exists, not just for this period, but for the whole of the nineteenth century, I found it necessary, in Chapter II, to trace the development of the reception of contemporary painting in this country, in terms of the newspapers and periodicals which covered it. Similarly, I have given a detailed breakdown of the vehicles for such criticism during the period 1878-1910 in Chapter III: a chapter which includes biographical information on the major critics of these years: information not readily available elsewhere.

My first, and deepest thanks go to the three people who have supervised this thesis: Professor Francis Haskell, for providing initial encouragement, Bernard Richards, and, especially, Christopher Butler. I am most grateful to him for

stimulating discussions and comments. I am indebted to Alan Bowness for suggesting to me that Victorian art periodicals deserved researching: the starting point for this study.

Various friends and colleagues have read and commented on parts of this manuscript, or have helped in other valuable ways. In particular, I am very grateful to Barrie Bullen, John Burrow, Hugh Collins, Paddy Hillyard, Alastair and Florence Minnis, and John Ormrod.

I would also like to thank the staff of the following libraries for their helpfulness: the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; the Bodleian Library, Oxford; Bristol City Library; Bristol University Library; the British Library; the Courtauld Institute, University of London; New York Public Library; the Victoria and Albert Museum; the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, and the Library of Congress, Washington.

My very best thanks are due to my typist, Jan Tarling, for her great dedication and patience.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Art criticism is a mode of writing which raises certain specific problems. Like literary criticism, it comprises commentary, analysis and judgement in respect of certain chosen works. Yet it is distinguished as a form since, like writing on music, or architecture, or dance, its practice means translating the implications of one medium of expression into another. Art criticism operates through transforming visually perceived arrangements into communications systems dependent on the placing, and status, of verbal components.

The readers of criticism of visual and of literary artifacts maintain different relationships with the objects of these discourses, and to these objects' mode of production. Whereas the mechanical reproduction of writing allowed the possibility of relatively widespread personal possession of literary texts reviewed, the notion of ownership differs in respect of works of art. This ownership is dependent, in the case of paintings, on the acquisition of the original:

> Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.[1]

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1. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', (1936), Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt, 1970, p.222.

The material value of a painting, according to Benjamin, lies in this uniqueness, this authenticity:

> The essence of all that is transmissable from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.[2]

It is far harder to establish direct relationships between criticism and the sales of paintings than it is to correlate favourable book reviews with the evidence provided by the record of booksellers' and circulating libraries' orders to the publisher and by numbers of reprintings. Undoubtedly influential nineteenth century critics could build up or demolish an artist's reputation, but those people with the purchasing power to acquire a work by a popular painter - by, say Millais, or Alma-Tadema, or even Manet - remained a privileged minority. Moreover, many of the paintings by the best-known artists had been commissioned before they were ever hung on an exhibition wall. Hence, the opinions of a critic had the power to influence future commissions, but not to effect the sale of the particular work under scrutiny.

Whilst cheaper printing processes facilitated the possession of literature in its material forms, no such democratisation of access to original paintings could take place. Reading and assimilating art criticism meant, as with literary criticism, the acquisition of knowledge. But whereas, in the case of verbal texts, this gained knowledge, whether of fact or opinion, might often lead to their purchase, the consumption of art tended to remain at what I shall designate a secondary rather than a primary level, with the possession of knowledge or opinion taking the place of the acquisition of the work itself. The existence of exhibitions provided a modified form of primary

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2. Illuminations, p.223.

consumption, characterised by its temporary and generally public nature, its duration the time bought by an exhibition entrance ticket.[3] This type of primary consumption, founded upon collective participation in a ritual occasion, served, then as now, much the same function as theatre or concert attendance, fostering social and ideological cohesion within a group.[4] Knowledge or opinions concerning exhibited works of art, whether obtained through first-hand observation, the reading of criticism, or a combination of the two, also fulfilled a social function. They acted, to use Pierre Bourdieu's term, as 'cultural capital', and, necessarily, 'the apprehension and possession of cultural goods as symbolic goods ... are possible only for those who hold the code making it possible to decipher them'.[5] The critic, as Chapter IV makes clear, was aware not only of his or her responsibility in moulding the success or failure of individual artists, but also of his or her responsibility towards the education of the bourgeois public - the principal consumers of the vehicles of art criticism - who became more and more vocal in their demands for artistic direction. The demonstration of one's ability to articulate

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3. The nearest analogy in the sphere of literature would be borrowing from a subscription library.

4. Paul DiMaggio and Michael Unseem, 'Social Class and Arts Consumption,' Theory and Society, V, 1978, p.152.
See also W. Weber, Music and the Middle Class, 1975.

5. Pierre Bourdieu, 'Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction', Knowledge, Education and Cultural Change, ed. Richard Brown, 1973, p.73

information and opinion on artistic matters was increasingly an indication of one's achieved status, or an aid to upwards social mobility. Hamerton, a prominent critic, voiced this sense of responsibility slightly caustically:

> Every day thousands of new human beings come into the world whose future social position will require them to pretend to appreciate pictures. Is this pretension to be a hollow make-belief, degrading to manliness, destructive to honesty, and thus vitally injurious to character? or is it to be the simple assertion of a well-founded right to a real opinion?[6]

Yet despite the expansion of cultural consumption heralded in this remark, it must be remembered that art criticism's audience was in reality very small. The editorial writer of the Artist inquired in 1893:

> Do our readers ever realise ... the ordinary effect of numbers in a country such as this? About 30 per cent. of the professional painters whose names are given in the "Year's Art," take the "ARTIST", but if all of them read it the ratio to the total population would still be 8,000 to one. Our illustrated contemporaries, with the larger circulation which the pictures secure, influence about one person in five thousand, the high class weeklies rather less than more of that proportion. Art and literature are the delight of aristocracies and of minorities, the judgment of the masses concerning them is an impression entirely from the outside. If Socialists can give the masses leisure, they may also give them Literature and Art, but not otherwise. The tired workman does not want either Art or Literature, and when we speak of the tired workman we mean the bulk of the middle class no less than the artificer or the ploughman.[7]

A further question is raised by the status of art criticism as discourse at the end of the nineteenth century. It shares

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6. Philip G. Hamerton, 'Art Criticism', Thoughts About Art, 1873, p.154. This article is a reprint, with postscript, of Hamerton's contribution to the Cornhill Magazine, 8, September 1863, pp.334-343

7. Unsigned editorial, 'From Month to Month', Artist, XIV

a triangular space with the criticism of printed texts, circumscribed on one side by "literary" writing - aware of its own individualising stylistic characteristics and aspiring to durability; on another by the far more immediate demands of opinion-directing journalism, and on a third, by the purely functional discourse of catalogues, and the plot/content/ author/artist summaries provided by some newspaper reportage. Yet art criticism is distinguished from the criticism of written work by the perennial factor of translating from one mode of communication to another, from the visual to the verbal. This factor emphasises its ontological insecurity still further, making the nature of art criticism a frequent topic of debate among its practitioners. An unchallenged assumption that the written form functions as an adequate substitute for the work in question, recreating its material constituents, conveying its prevailing "atmosphere" or interpreting what are seen to be its most significant features, lies behind much nineteenth and early twentieth century art criticism. The tone of such criticism, however, was far from consistent, the beliefs and values it embodied swerving between blatant, strident assertion on the one hand and concealment - often behind the guise of an unstated appeal to an assumed "reasonable" consensus of opinion - on the other. Its operation could, of course, be modified by the actual presence of a work in a gallery so that the spectator confronted a painting with criticism either in hand or in the memory. Or it could be modified by accompanying the criticism with a visual gloss in the form of a line sketch, engraving or photograph - in itself, in some way, a modification of the

original, since even the most sharply focussed and carefully printed photographs of paintings shortened perpectives, flattened textures and, of course, eliminated colour. They thus served rather as tools of reference rather than as aesthetic objects in their own right.[8]

These general observations, it would seem, hold true for the art criticism of any period from the mid eighteenth century onwards. What, then, makes the criticism of the late nineteenth century and the pre-war years of the twentieth particularly important? Why should its function and operation be so frequently discussed in the press of the time? And what has been its importance to the development of art criticism?

Patently, this was a time of rapid change and development in painting, a time during which innovatory artists became increasingly pre-occupied with formal, even scientific issues - with the role of light in determining and altering colour; with the presence of an object in space, and with the problem of representing such concerns on a flat canvas surface. In particular, the painting of Whistler, the work of the Impressionists and so-called Post Impressionists, the productions of such artists as Sickert and Steer who were closely connected

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8. A partial exception should be made, perhaps, in the case of photographs issued in series such as The Royal Academy Album (1875-1877) or The Art Portfolio of National Art Treasures (1899-1900) - forerunners of coffee table art books. Colour, however, still went unreproduced.

with the New English Art Club and, at the end of the period, the works of the Cubists and Futurists placed great demands on their critics. The interest in theory for its own sake, frequently treating as irrelevant both the identity of the object represented and its significance in the non-painted world, prepared the way for twentieth century abstract art, a form of expression that is largely self-referential. Although writing on art had always stressed aesthetic considerations, especially with relation to form, proportion and colour, the emphasis on content had never previously been so minimal.

Essentially, two alternatives lay open to the critics. Either they could stick in their hooves and denounce the innovations on a variety of counts, or they could attempt to develop a vocabulary, and a style of argument, which would render these artistic developments comprehensible, and interesting, to their readership. The fact that there were sides to be taken is emphasised by the perhaps surprising fact that, apart from short-lived magazines, there were relatively few publications in which the artistic attitude was consistently conservative or consistently progressive. Individual critics, rather than individual journals, tended to become identified with a particular point of view. This phenomenon also highlights the fact that knowledge of what constituted controversial cultural issues could itself form a component of cultural capital.

The great divide in nineteenth century art criticism is

between those conservatives who maintained the primacy of content to a work of art, and those advocates of the so-called New Criticism who saw techniques, whilst being inescapably linked to subject matter, as being of far greater importance. The former allied themselves with the type of painting shown at the Royal Academy exhibitions; the latter with the more innovatory movements. It is these progressive critics who laid the foundations for contemporary art criticism, in which works of art are highly dependent on the elucidation and evaluation provided by the written word.

The older-style critics - the "Philistines", as they became typified through the pseudonym of one of their most vituperative and prolific writers, J.A. Spender - managed to treat of technique only when the execution of a work carried moral connotations - from much of their writing, it would seem that they saw themselves as moral policemen, if not legislators, upholding the values of the dominant ideology. Thus, in their crudest treatment of technique, they praise value for money, as it reinforces the widely held Victorian view of work as being that activity which enabled a man to fulfil his economic function in society, develop his natural talents and simultaneously advance towards human perfection with 'the blessed glow of Labour in him.'[9] Ruskin, from whom derives the conservative critics' central moral tenet that the value of pictures depends ultimately on the greatness and the justice of the ideas they contain and convey, firmly upheld, in addition, the materialistic

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9. Thomas Carlyle, The Works of Thomas Carlyle (Centenary Edition), 1896-99, vol. 10, Past and Present [1843], p. 196

view:

> In flourishing periods, whether of trade or art, the dignity, whether of operatives or artists, was held to consist in their giving, in every sense, good value for money and a fair day's work for a fair day's wages. The nineteenth century may perhaps economically pride itself on the adulteration of its products and the slackness of its industries. But it ought at least to instruct the pupils of its schools of Art, in the ancient code of the Artist's honour, that no piece of work should leave his hands, which his diligence could further complete, or his reflection further improve.[10]

The public expected the visual evidence of expended labour apparent in an abundance of detail or a meticulously sharp, photographic finish. The more progressive critics came to oppose this criterion. Whibley, speaking of the works of Burne-Jones shown at the New Gallery in 1893, comments that:

> Finish creates the money value of a work of art, teste Mr. Jones, and no wonder Mr. Malcolm Bell[11] records that he has fetched the highest prices ever reached by a living painter ... But the artist pays the penalty, for in order to give his patrons their money's worth, he so confuses and bedevils his works with 'finish' that you can mark no other quality. Of a consistent ensemble he has no ambition ... Whatever effect the conception and arrangement might have produced is destroyed in that loving conscientiousness, which would lavish upon the humble shoe-strap the self-same patient care which niggles the style out of the human form divine.[12]

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10. John Ruskin, 'Whistler v. Ruskin', The Works of John Ruskin, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 1903-12, vol. XXIX, p. 587

11. The author of a recent biography, Edward Burne-Jones, 1892, which Whibley describes in the same review as 'a triumph of gush, ... the type of the greenery-yallery gentleman that flourished before the flood.'

12. Unsigned review, 'The New Gallery', National Observer, IX, 7 January 1893, p.180

The famous Whistler versus Ruskin trial of 1878 pivoted around the question of such value for money. Ruskin had accused the painter of the 'Nocturnes' and 'Arrangements' of being a coxcomb with the gross impudence to ask 'two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face', claiming that this came close to assuming the 'aspect of wilful imposture'. His views were echoed in the dismissive vocabulary of the Attorney-General. ' "Can you tell me how long it took you to knock off that Nocturne?" "Two days." "The labour of two days, then, is that for which you ask two hundred guineas?"[13] Whistler's view, that a:

> picture is finished when all trace of the means used to bring about the end has disappeared,[14]

that industry in art is a necessity, not a virtue, and that any evidence of the same in the production is a blemish, not a quality, was unacceptable. It placed far too demanding an onus on the spectator's visual flexibility, on a spontaneity of response admittedly idealised by Whistler, instead of relying on what the art establishment believed to be firmly fixed values:

> The masterpiece should appear as a flower to the painter, - perfect in its bud as in its bloom, - with no reason to explain its presence, - no mission to fulfil, - a joy to the artist, - a delusion to the philanthropist, - a puzzle to the botanist, - an accident of sentiment and alliteration to the literary man.[15]

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13. J.A.McN.Whistler, The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, 2nd (enlarged) edition, 1892, pp.2-19; Ruskin, Works, vol. xxix, introduction, pp.xxii-xxv; manuscript material in the Pennell Collection, National Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

14. J.A.McN.Whistler, 'Propositions - No.2', The Gentle Art, p.115

15. The Gentle Art, p.116.

After value for money, another central tenet of the "Philistines" was comprehensibility. By describing the already perceivable content of a work, critics fulfilled the function of confirming a spectator's own powers of vision. The long lists of paintings which appeared in the daily press, in particular, summarising the contents of each canvas, represented safe, well-defined ground for both reviewer and reader. Their compilers relied upon total recognition and acceptance of both subject matter and treatment - treatment which required no comment other than a few chosen adjectives of unspecific commendation. The more progressive art critics complained continually that:

> The English public only like pictures of familiar subjects, and only understand painters who see such subjects with the same vulgar unthinking eyes as they themselves are accustomed to contemplate common objects.[16]

Such depictions of common objects provided in themselves the temptation for scathing critics to list the offending items and expect their own discerning readers to react against the itemization with little need for further explanatory comment. Thus the "Picture Gallery Boy" in the Bat condemns The Monster by a recognised master of kids and kittens, Burton Barber:

> ...the canvas contains a pug dog, a kitten, a tiger's skin, a baby, a box of bricks, a spelling-book, and a cane arm chair. I expect to see this reproduced in a Christmas number, and copies purchased by thousands of simple-minded boobies who delight in the mock sentiment of mismanaged nurseries.[17]

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16. The Picture Gallery Boy, 'At Whistler's', Bat, II, 4 May 1886, p.123.

17. The Picture Gallery Boy, 'At McLean's-Tooth's-The French Gallery', Bat, II, 30 March 1886, p.12.

The New Critics ridiculed the taste of suburban mothers and Manchester cotton mongers for using art as they might use cheap tea or tobacco, as a conventional stimulus - 'even so', lamented MacColl, 'does the cheap Baby or Bishop or Poodle act as a symbol, pull strings of association in the heads of those for whom the visible world does not exist except as a gaudily ticketed catalogue of sentiments.'[18] The taste for bouncing babies - 'bigger, chubbier, and better dressed' when painted by the Academicians themselves, according to Quilter[19] - and for comfortable grannies in rocking chairs, viewable at the Academy and subsequently available for mass purchase in the form of engravings issued with seasonal numbers of magazines, was a simplification of the belief that a picture could not be visually enjoyable without also being morally pleasing.

This emphasis on the inter-relation between a work of art and morality - again, a heavily Ruskinian concept - was the third major tenet of conservative art criticism. It covered both content and form, supported teaching through the examples of the tales told, and the setting up of values of beauty and decency to counteract the ugliness of modern life. Such an attitude rested on the theory that each spectator brought a specific set of moral and social conventions to a picture: it

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18. D.S.M., 'The Royal Academy - I', Spectator, 68, 7 May 1892, p.642.

19. Harry Quilter, Sententiae Artis, 1886, p.23.

was necessarily based on a belief in judgment by consensus. It was one of the critic's tasks to draw attention to the acceptable and to point a horrified finger against that content which transgressed such norms of social behaviour - such as the 'repulsive subject', 'two rather sodden people drinking in a cafe,'[20] presented by Degas's L'Absinthe. This type of moral criticism was, moreover, based on the assumption that art should not only be at the disposal of everyone, but that it should - and could - be easily comprehended by the mass.

A central belief of the adherents of the New Art Criticism, on the other hand, was the conviction that not everyone had the ability to recognise the formal qualities inherent in "good" works of art: that sight, like hearing, was indeed common to all, but that artistic appreciation depended on the possession of a faculty analogous to a musical "ear". The Philistine, in contrast:

> ...speaks as one of the 'populace', and resents the idea that a picture should be painted which is not addressed to the level of popular understanding ... The plain and wholesome truth, of course, is that fine painting, like any other fine art, music or literature or drama, is only to be appreciated by a special endowment, assiduously cultivated; an endowment, of course, which has nothing to do with social rank, a cultivation which is not the same as general education. Every one outside of this natural aristocracy belongs to the populace so far as painting is concerned, whether he be a duke, a professor of art, or a costermonger.[21]

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20. D.S.M.,'The Grafton Gallery', Spectator, 70, 25 February 1893, p.256. MacColl is mocking the terms of the old criticism.

21. D.S.M. 'The Standard of the Philistine', Spectator, 70, 18 March 1893, p.357. Such argument is clearly related to the belief of Social Darwinists and the eugenics movement that each nation contained a fixed proportion of bright and dull people. c.f. F. Galton, Classification of Men according to their natural gifts, 1877

MacColl appeared slightly uncomfortable about the undemocratic implications which could be read into this assertion, but considered that nothing is gained by concealing the truth. He consoled himself, and the reader, with the thought that once visually responsive outsiders have got over the strangeness and novelty of an unfamiliar style of art, they will then be prepared to enjoy their own sensations before one painter as they did before another: 'Troyon will do almost as well to suggest "Cow" to him after a time as Mr. Sidney Cooper.'[22] Yet to suppose that they admire the Troyon through a recognition of its superiority as art would be an illusion. MacColl failed to see clearly that by proposing a critical method which depended on an ability for attentive effort he was, ultimately, broadening the possibilities for the democratic appreciation of art. No longer - in theory - was response necessarily to be limited by demands for adherence to a socially-formed standard of "good taste" or moral correctness. On the other hand, he concerned himself but little with the question of how it might be possible to extend access to the forms of artistic expression which had become established as high culture, or, indeed, with the implications of maintaining such a concept of cultural ranking.

Whereas the Philistine critics could rely on, at least, a common response to the subject matter according to widely

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22. D.S.M., 'Subject and Technique', Spectator, 70, 25 March 1893, p.389.

accepted moral standards, such an appeal was, for the New Critics, irrelevant to the true comprehension of a work of art. For them, as Oscar Wilde's Gilbert was to put it in The Critic as Artist, the :

> ...first condition of criticism is that the critic should be able to recognize that the sphere of Art and the sphere of Ethics are absolutely distinct and separate.[23]

They considered themselves to be concerned with what they believed to be timeless values, not believing that values were inevitably linked to the condition of society around them. Assuming themselves able to take on the role of a dispassionate arbiter able to disregard the demands placed upon them by specific historic circumstance, they attempted, said MacColl, to :

> ...apply to current art the same standards which we apply to ancient art, to disengage from the enormous stream of picture-producers the one or two contemporary masters who are worthy to be named beside the ancients, the one or two promising talents that may some day deserve the same praise.[24]

It is clear that these New Critics used an appeal to a sense of historic continuity, of artistic tradition, as one of their weapons, shying away from any praise of innovation for its own sake.

The New Art critics of the 1890s foreshadowed in many of

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23. Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', Intentions, 1891, in The Artist as Critic, ed. Richard Ellmann, 1970, p.393
24. Spectator, 18 March 1893, p.357.

their assumptions the literary New Criticism of this century. MacColl in particular pleaded for the recognition of his style of criticism as a separate branch of analytic, scientific thought, based not on the possession of 'taste', nor on subjective response. He was concerned with, as it were, the text itself of the painting, postulating its material existence as the starting point of criticism. By appealing for us to apply the same standards to contemporary art which we apply to the art of the past, he was not making a Reynoldsian plea for a return to the classical as a norm, but was stressing that one's response to a work should in all circumstances be independent of time and place. He exercised judgement with reference to the standard of the beauty he found in the formal presentation of the subject. He contrasted this universally applicable principle with, on the one hand, the Philistine's dual standards:

> ...popular fancy, or fashion, which in the last resort declares itself by votes, by a popular plebiscite[25]

and, on the other, the impulse of an individual's sentiment. In both cases, the emphasis is always on subject matter - 'as if it was subject and not predicate that stamped its value on a sentence.'[26] MacColl resorts continuallly to the language of the formal textual analysis of his time; thus in his terms

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25. Spectator, 18 March 1893, p.357.

26. Spectator, 18 March 1893, p.358.

of linguistic reference, he goes far beyond the narrative literary analysis placed upon works by the critics he attacks.

Changing his field of comparison slightly to encompass spoken language, MacColl asserted that no-one would deny that a sense of refinement - or lack of it - is conveyed in the form and texture of speech, whatever its subject, and that, because conversation is of prime necessity and universally practised, large numbers of people are sensitive to the effects of verbal communication. Art speaks a language by no means so generally known, nor so easily acquired. 'The result is', he explains:

> ...that all the art of it, the means by which, as in language, the feeling of the painter towards his subject is determined and conveyed - the intonation, the accent, the expression - all this goes for nothing, and the spectator is left contemplating a bare subject.[27]

The New Critics were not content to let this inadequately known language speak for itself to those who already had a sympathetically enough attuned ear to listen. They considered themselves in the role of interpreters. As I show in Chapter IV, they had an initial, commercially motivated goal of helping outsiders to become used to an unfamiliar style of art, guiding them into an informed position from which they are

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27. Spectator, 25 March 1893, p.388.

able to enjoy their own shock of recognition before any picture. 'The important moment for the appearance of criticism,' stated T.S. Eliot in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, 'seems to be the time when poetry ceases to be the expression of the mind of a whole people.'[28] Hence he implies that the need for a mediator is created. It is precisely this role which the New Art Critics adopted in order to interpret for the public the developments which were taking place in art by the end of the nineteenth century. The art critic became a textual explicator.

The New Critics seem to have been deliberately contentious in some of their phraseology, in order to pick squabbles in the press with the long-established critics. Not only did such controversies give them a chance to state their theoretical views: they served to publicize the artists themselves. 'The critical business' became, indeed, 'a field of battle.'[29] Several notable skirmishes gave rise to considerable discussion in the Press about the purpose and function of criticism, as well, of course, as debating the desirable criteria for artistic productions. The first of these, the Whistler v. Ruskin libel case, has already been alluded to. The second concerned the exhibition of Degas's L'Absinthe, at the inaugural show of the Grafton Galleries in 1893. This provided a focus

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28. T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, 1933, p.22.

29. Spectator, 7 May 1892, p.642.

for the increasingly polarised conflict between Philistinian and New Art Criticism: a conflict which had first appeared openly in the press during the spring of the previous year. A leader in the Pall Mall Gazette had protested against the New Critics, and the artists they supported, challenging them to prove their assertion that treatment is everything, subject nothing, by giving the British public the images it wants, of 'dogs and babies', of 'Granny's chairs' and 'mother's darlings', of 'moving tales by flood and field',[30] instead of music hall performers and other sordid scenes. By this means, 'new and impressionistic art'[31] might rise to great heights of popularity. Sickert attempted a sniping reply, drawing an analogy between the deserved renown sought by discriminating painters and those littérateurs who provided "the higher criticism", and those who sought to please the general public, whether by sending their paintings to the Academy or writing for a popular newspaper.[32] The true reply, however, was given by MacColl in his review of that year's R.A. exhibition in the Spectator, a reply in which he first outlines his belief, expanded on during the L'Absinthe controversy, in the inseparability of form from content. He laments the inability of the public to divorce its expectations of the treatment of a given subject from the actual mode of execution:

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30. Unsigned article, 'Painter and Public', Pall Mall Gazette, 29 April 1892, p.1

31. Pall Mall Gazette, 29 April 1892, p.1.

32. Walter Sickert, letter, 'Painters and the Public', Pall Mall Gazette, 30 April 1892, p.3.

> If it were possible to disentangle from a popular painting what you call its "subject", and treat it artistically, the popularity would be found to have vanished.[33]

A bishop, with great 'gravity of character and office poised on an accident of dress so coquettish', as he sits, beaming ruddily, in his crimson robes and hood, 'might indeed be a tempting subject for a member of the New English Art Club, but the finished painting would no longer be such as would act as a symbol to the public's sentiment.'[34]

The sporadic sparring between the New Critic and Philistine developed into a far more extensive conflict when it was provided with a central text on which to focus:

> A more typical work than L'Absinthe for the new and the old schools to fight over could not have been found,

commented the Studio.

> Subject - A man and a woman, middle-aged, sodden, dulling themselves with absinthe outside a third-rate Parisian cafe. "It sets a standard," cries the New Critic; to which the Philistine replies: "When a work like this is set up as a standard of beauty, I think I discover the cause of the vulgarities and flippancies which are spoiling so many young painters.[35]

The painting had first been shown in England in Brighton in 1876: Henry Hill, the first European collector of Degas's

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33. Spectator, 7 May 1892, p.642.

34. Spectator, 7 May 1892, p.642.

35. 'Laodicean', 'Studio Gossip', Studio, I, April 1893, p.36. For a full discussion of the reception of L'Absinthe in England, see Ronald Pickvance, 'L'Absinthe in England', Apollo, 77, May 1963, pp.395-8.

work, had lent it to an exhibition of modern pictures. The critic of the Brighton Gazette, in remarking that:

> ... the very disgusting novelty of the subject arrests attention. What there is to admire in it is the skill of the artist, not the subject itself,[36]

gave a prophetic indication of the arena for the forthcoming critical debate. The painting was subsequently bought by a Glasgow dealer, Alexander Reid, in a London saleroom in 1892 - where it was hissed on its appearance on the auctioneer's easel - and sold a few weeks later to Arthur Kay, the lender of the work to the Grafton Gallery. It appeared alongside works by other mildly avant-garde painters, both British and Continental - Whistler, Carrière, Segantini and Liebermann, for example - and the breadth and careful compilation of the gallery's first show were widely praised in the press. The Sketch commented that:

> It would be difficult to find a more representative exhibition among exhibitions that have any title to modernity than the collection of pictures now gathered together at the Grafton Galleries.[37]

Considerably more heat was raised by the diverging critical principles which emerged during the discussion of the work than by the exhibition of the painting itself.

L'Absinthe initially met with a relatively favourable

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36. Unsigned review, 'The Brighton Annual Exhibition of Paintings. The Oil Colours (continued)', Brighton Gazette, 9 September 1876, p.7. The painting was shown under the title 'A Sketch at a French Cafe'.

37. Unsigned article, 'Art Notes', Sketch, I, March 1 1893, p.274.

response : the Pall Mall Gazette, the Glasgow Herald, the Star and even the generally conservative Art Journal all praised its execution and economy of story telling, even if they simultaneously suppressed a shudder at the subject matter. The Times, reviewing this 'interesting show', which was indeed to prove 'full of rocks for the Philistine to stumble over', went so far as to suggest that the shocking content of Degas's work had lost its power of impact upon critics by now accustomed to such work:

> It is not half a lifetime since M. Degas was denounced as a monstrosity by half the art world, and now his "L'Absinthe" - here exhibited - appears as though, in conception, design, and execution, it were the permanent and inevitable type of how a pair of topers in a cabaret must be painted.[38]

Impressionist art was, after all, no longer a novelty in London. Monet and Pissarro were the first of the French to exhibit there, at Durand-Ruel's gallery in December 1870. Degas was first represented (by A False Start and Robert le Diable) at Durand-Ruel's summer exhibition of 1872, and his work appeared regularly in subsequent shows. No fewer than six of his paintings, and one pastel, were to be seen at the exhibition organised by Durand-Ruel at Dowdeswell's Galleries in April-July 1883, one of these works - Courses de Gentlemen - carrying the equal-highest price tag of £400.[39]

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38. The Times, 20 February 1893, p.8.

39. This price was shared with Manet's Le Pont de L'Europe, Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings and Pastels by members of 'La Société des Impressionistes', 1883. 65 works in all were on show.

Yet the subject matter of L'Absinthe inevitably invited moral comment. George Moore gave a precise formal description of the picture's composition, comparing, with typical flamboyancy, its 'beautiful, dissonant rhythm' to 'a page of Wagner - the figures crushed into the right of the canvas, the left filled up with a fragment of marble table running in sharp perspective into the foreground.'[40] But he fell into the trap of writing an exemplary story around the girl who sits by the side of his friend, the engraver Desboutin:

> The woman that sits beside the artist was at the Elysée Montmartre until two in the morning, then she went to the ratmort and had a soupe aux choux ... she did not get up till half-past eleven; then she tied a few soiled petticoats round her, slipped on that peignoir, thrust her feet into those loose morning shoes, and came down to the café to have an absinthe before breakfast. Heavens! What a slut! A life of idleness and low vice is upon her face; we read there her whole life. The tale is not a pleasant one, but it is a lesson.[41]

The ferocity of the battle which developed around the reception of the picture necessitated, however, the taking of sides. As Degas was the French artist most widely praised by the New Critics, the Philistine and his associates hoped to blacken the reputation of their journalistic rivals by associating their entire critical ethos with what the Westminster Gazette stressed was the most depraved subject

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40. George Moore, Modern Painting, 1893, p.233. The review first appeared in the Speaker, 25 February 1893
41. Modern Painting, pp.232-3. Moore's italics.

matter. A week after he wrote this, Moore, remembering where his critical allegiances lay, vehemently protested that a work of art cannot possibly lay claims to being more than a work of art and to having any ethical significance: he had mistakenly 'admitted as a truth the ridiculous contention that a work of art may influence a man's moral conduct.'[42]

Philistine anger had been aroused by MacColl's heretical suggestion that the picture did indeed provide a lesson - not a lesson of morality, but an exemplification of an artistic ideal. This ideal was the artist's achievement of dignity through the beauty of his presentation and had nothing to do with the admittedly sordid subject matter:

> L'Absinthe, by Degas, is the inexhaustible picture, the one that draws you back, and back again. It sets a standard by which many of the would-be "decorative" inventions of the exhibition are cruelly judged ... M. Degas understands his people absolutely; there is no false note of an imposed and blundering sentiment, but exactly as a man with a just eye and comprehending mind and power of speech could set up that scene for us in the fit words, whose mysterious relations of idea and sound should affect us as beauty, so does this master of character, of form, of colour, watch till the café table tops and the mirror, and the water-bottle and the drinks and the features yield up to him their mysterious affecting note.[43]

As the Philistine pointed out in his reply to MacColl's

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42. Modern Painting, p.267. This review first appeared in the Speaker, 4 March 1893
43. Spectator, 25 February 1893, p.256.

review, this late C19th quarrel was not between one style of painting and another - between, for example, impressionism and realism - but "it touches the whole question of artistic ideals."[44] Spender characteristically simplified, to the point of total falsification, the issues involved. He attempted to alarm his readers into sympathising with his own predilection for Academy art by proclaiming that there was in existence:

> ...a band of critics teaching with great unanimity a theory of art which either denies that art is concerned with the beautiful or asserts that what a natural instinct calls 'repulsive' is in reality a standard of beauty.

He maintains, however, that:

> ...if you have been brought up in another way,

you will believe that:

> ...dignity of subject and the endeavour to portray a thing of beauty are of the essence of art.[45]

The controversy continued in the press for nearly six weeks, with other critics and artists joining in. These included W.H. Richmond and Walter Crane - the latter suggesting as a criterion by which to judge a picture whether one would

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44. A Philistine, 'The New Art Criticism. A Philistine's Remonstrance', Westminster Gazette, 9 March 1893, p.2.

45. Westminster Gazette, 9 March 1893, p.2.

choose to live with it or not.

Although the contributions of those other than MacColl and Spender were frequently mere verbal quibbles which served to indicate where the writer's allegiance lay, the prominence of the discussion resulted in MacColl's firm, spokesman-like statements of the New Criticism's central tenets, and his clarification of a subject matter's subsidiary, though not negligible, relation to a painting's formal qualities.

The sustained discussion about critical beliefs to which the exhibition of L'Absinthe gave rise made it impossible for critics writing after 1893 not to be aware of their function as upholders of one artistic ideal or another. They had to decide whether they believed in the importance of the syntax, or merely of the accidence of painting; whether to close their Ruskins for ever, as the Studio's critic put it, or whether to bear upon their shoulders the weight of a waggon-load of Ruskinian and other theories.[46] So intense was the debate at this time, both in the matter of artistic standards and concerning the nature and purpose of art criticism, that Elizabeth Pennell could

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46. Studio, April 1893, p.36.

look back as early as 1904 at the late 1880s and the early 90s as a period during which art criticism was at its most flourishing:

> Everybody thought a new era in art criticism had dawned. But it did not last - it could not, I suppose ... Then "R.A.M.S."[47] died - Press view was never quite the same after that. Others grew gradually conventional in their own prejudices, or went back to their own work for which they had been trained. Now only a few remain faithful, and the state of British art criticism is seven times worse than it was before. Press view is a sad function; notices of shows are not readable; honest, intelligent art criticism has all but vanished, and the contrast is so strongly marked that the public, if it had but a shadow of concern in the matter, would not stand the new-old state of affairs.[48]

What Pennell does not take into account, however, is the relative lull in the innovatory art on show in this country around 1904. The foundations for formalist-based criticism had undoubtedly been laid, and the questions around which the whole critical debate focussed was to reassume public prominence on the occasion of two further controversial exhibitions during the period before the First World War: Manet and the Post-Impressionists, held at the Grafton Gallery in 1910, and the exhibition of Futurist Art which took place at the Sackville Gallery, London, in the spring of 1912.

The assumptions of the New Art Critics and their descendants meant a reconsideration: not of whom art criticism

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47. R.A.M. Stevenson, one of the most progressive of English art critics. See Chapter III.

48. A.B. (identified as Elizabeth Pennell in Pennell Collection, Library of Congress, Washington), 'AM and Artists', Star, 27 December 1904, p.1.

supported - that remained the artist - but to whom it was addressed. Partly, such criticism must be regarded as a campaign. Like his predecessors: Hamerton, insisting that a critic must utter unpopular truths; and Quilter, believing that critics should encourage an established artist to make new departures, leaving proven formulae of representation free for those attempting to catch the public's eye and thus make their reputation,[49] MacColl considered that one of the critic's tasks was to break through the purchasing man's innate conservatism:

> One can understand the hesitation of the sheep-like public, of the buyer who is not certain of a speedy return; one understands all too well how the wheels of reward are worked; but surely if critics, who have no money to lose, and the best reason for whose existence is a generous readiness to champion unrecognised talent, fall in with this neglect, they are either ill-equipped for their office, distracted by considerations that ought to have nothing to do with their judgment, or superfluously timid.[50]

Yet the New Critical method demanded an audience willing to learn, for whatever motives, and not one simply waiting for its existing beliefs to be reinforced. Considering the art at which they were being invited to look, this would, in any case, be an improbably passive attitude to adopt towards the paintings of the Impressionists and their successors.

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49. Harry Quilter, Opinions on Men, Women and Things, 1909, p.288.
50. D.S. MacColl, Life, Work and Setting of Philip Wilson Steer, 1945, p.47.

The public were faced with works in which the intentions of those who executed them were not immediately apparent. The subject matter perhaps required definition - at the most simple level, the definition which could be verbally provided by the appendage of a title. Quite possibly, the content, in terms of its suitability according to the traditions of artistic treatment, also demanded defence. In addition, such works frequently claimed to represent contemporary life, yet obviously did not provide the spectator with a photographically accurate mirror image which corresponded to his or her understanding of the commonly invoked standard of truth to nature. The public thus demanded an explanation of the aesthetic theory which lay behind such artistic production. This explanation could most readily be given in a language which, even if the ideas it raised were disquieting, retained a relatively familiar and hence reassuring choice of vocabulary, and upheld the convention of sequential argument. The New Critics, by drawing continual attention to the autonomous language of art, and its need for translators like themselves, were the first critics to prepare the way in England, some fifty years in advance, for what Tom Wolfe, in The Painted Word, calls:

> an art more truly literary than anything ever roared against in the wildest angers of the Fauvists and the Cubists[51]

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51. Tom Wolfe, The Painted Word, New York, 1975, p.39.

- an art not literary because it tells a story, or illustrates a poem, like those pictures which crowded the walls of Burlington House, but literary because it exists to illustrate the text provided for it by the critic.

CHAPTER II: THE GROWTH OF ART CRITICISM IN ENGLAND 1760-1878[1]

During the eighteenth century leisure became, for the first time, a substantial, expanding industry.[2] The coupling of increased leisure time with growing, if limited affluence among the rapidly swelling numbers of the middle classes, helped to create a market for the public dissemination of much of that which aristocratic culture had, in the fields of literature, music and painting, previously acquired privately. Linked closely to the accumulation of cultural knowledge - with the consequent acquisition of implied social status - was a belief in moral earnestness, in the idea that a taste for the arts led to improvement and refinement, which infused much of the C18th's cultural activity.

The rapid growth of magazines during Queen Anne's reign showed, despite their failure to establish themselves, a developing commercial possibility in fostering interests in

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1. The full history of art criticism during this period remains to be written. A useful summary of some of the developments during the earlier years can be found in P. Vainker, Art Criticism and Art Reviewing in England 1760-1830, Courtauld Institute, University of London, unpublished M.A. Report, 1977. John Charles Olmsted, Victorian Painting Essays and Reviews, I, 1832-1848, New York and London, 1980, collects together much useful primary source material from such periodicals as the Athenaeum, Westminster Review, Blackwood's Edinburgh Review, Fraser's Magazine, British and Foreign Review, New Monthly Magazine, Art Union, Ainsworth's Magazine, and Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine. The ten page introduction is, however, of little scholarly value.

2. See: J.H. Plumb, 'The Public, Literature and the Arts', in Paul Fritz and David Williams, The Triumph of Culture, Eighteenth Century Perspectives, Toronto 1972. J.H. Plumb, The Commercialisation of Leisure in Eighteenth Century England. The Stenton Lecture, Reading 1973.

aspects of life outside the fields of politics and religion which had previously dominated the press. The Review, Medley and Tatler, followed in 1711 by the establishment of Steele and Addison's Spectator, indicated an audience for essays on social morality and self improvement. The Daily Courant, the first daily newspaper, had been started in 1702: newspaper circulation grew steadily, if not dramatically, throughout the first half of the century and, by the 1760s, the whole country was covered by a network of press distribution, which fed not only individual purchasers but, in particular, coffee houses, newspaper lending rooms and taverns which kept racks of papers for their customers. At the time when artists were beginning to operate within an open market rather than within a closed circle of private patronage, the close relationship between the criticism of relatively accessible works - productions which could be seen in exhibitions, or which were more widely available through engravings - and the expanding market for cultural objects and opinions, towards which this criticism was directed, was thus emphasised by the public circumstances in which news and articles were most frequently read and discussed. The criticism of contemporary art, whether concerned with general principles, information, particular views or ephemeral gossip, was only in demand - or, indeed, possible - when the viewing and assessment of modern works became public activities, and when consumers could develop a relationship not just with the artifacts themselves, but with information or opinions

surrounding their production.

The first English art exhibition, held by the Society of Arts in 1760, was not, in spite of its novelty and relative popularity, greatly noticed by the press. Similarly, when the Royal Academy held its first exhibition in 1769, it was, although under the direct patronage of the king, almost disregarded, despite the fact that spasmodic art criticism, sometimes inviting readers to write in with their own views, had been appearing in journals during the decade. 'We remember a time', reminisced the Magazine of the Fine Arts, once criticism of contemporary art had become commonplace:

> ... when scarcely one of the daily or weekly papers, or even monthly magazines, noticed exhibitions or any works of art, and the editors very candidly avowed that the subject did not attract a sufficient share of public attention to justify a notice in their columns.[3]

Not until 1773 - when Parson Bate, largely through reasons of personal friendship, began reviewing the Academy exhibitions in the Morning Post - did press coverage become at all systematic. Bate, with his fierce championship of Gainsborough at the expense of Reynolds's draughtsmanship, was the first critic to challenge the senior artist's supremacy, axiomatic in the criticism of the previous ten years.[4] Through establishing an atmosphere of rivalry, he

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3. Unsigned article, 'Remarks on Contemporary Criticism', Magazine of the Fine Arts, I, 1820, p.166.

4. See W.T. Whitley, Artists and their Friends in England 1700-1799, 2 vols, 1928, especially Vol.I. pp.166-7, 211; Vol.II, pp.271-272.

initiated the transformation of artistic controversy into the newsworthy material: he provoked response from writers in other papers. Yet only the writing of a few critics, such as Bate, and Anthony Pasquin,[5] with his constant attempts to expose the foolishness and petty prejudices of the Academicians, was recognisable not only by signature but by style. The majority of critics, largely anonymous or pseudonymous, seemed to attempt solely to identify themselves with the norms of taste held, or to be learned, by their audience. Thus a writer in the Public Advertiser sheltered behind the signature "Strawberry Hill" at a time when Horace Walpole was generally considered an infallible arbiter of taste.[6]

Art reviews - usually, because of the great shortage of space in the closely printed newspapers, restricted to five or six lines on each painting - materialised erratically over several weeks whilst an exhibition was in progress: a practice continued by many C19th papers and periodicals in their attempt to give comprehensive coverage.

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5. The pseudonym of John Williams, an unpopular, largely satirical dramatic and art critic who wrote for both the Morning Post (1795-7) and Morning Herald (1809-11); he also issued several pamphlets criticising the petty-minded nature of the Royal Academicians. See: P. Vainker, Art Criticism and Art Reviewing; J. Taylor, Records of My Life, 1812, 2 vols, vol.I. pp.276-81.

6. Whitley, Artists and their Friends, vol. II. p.272.

With only a couple of sides of broadsheet available, more important news inevitably crowded out the reporting of exhibitions. Thus, during the Napoleonic wars, art reviews slackened off, and were slow to resume: a trend clearly visible in The Times which noticed only two Academy exhibitions between 1805 and 1823, despite the British Institution shows, for some reason, faring more favourably. Although lesser papers, such as the Morning Post and Morning Herald, lacking the facilities and staff to compete in the fields of political reporting, looked to alternative journalistic attractions, such as art reviewing, to boost their circulation, the pressure on space in the press caused the temporary transference, towards the end of the C18th, of the bulk of art criticism from the newspaper to the more specialised periodical.

The overall intention of such journals in England and abroad seemed, until the early decades of the C19th, to reflect the growing interest in the theory of aesthetics. They subjected to intensive analysis the laws governing the nature of art, with the aim of discovering where lay the formulae for its excellences. The very first art periodicals, which appeared in Germany, starting with the Augsburg Academy's Die reisende und correspondirende Pallas oder Kunstzeitung (1755-56), centred around artistic and learned societies in German cities and had a basis of local news; but the earliest English art magazine, the Artist's Repository and Drawing Magazine (1785-95), followed the pattern of the

new type of German journals run by the prolific historiographer Meusel. In his Miscellaneen artistischen Inhalts (1779-87) and other productions, the gathering of news and obituaries took second place to substantial articles on art history, art topography, aesthetics and artists' biographies - the staple content, coupled with a strong emphasis in Italian publications on the excavation of antiquities, of early art magazines throughout Europe.[7]

Charles Taylor's Artist's Repository established a standard pattern which was adopted by the majority of English art journals until the 1830s. Strongly patriotic in its overtones - intending to cultivate, 'as much as possible, our national taste for the arts',[8] it was aimed at those both actively and passively concerned with the arts, calculated:

> ...for two purposes, one to initiate and instruct young persons of both sexes, whose genius prompts them to these studies; the other to gratify the taste of gentlemen, whose judgment is mature.[9]

Thus it contains notes on materials for drawing and the methods for employing Indian ink, white, red and black chalk and variously surfaced, textured and coloured papers; it

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7. See E.H. Lehmann, Die Anfänge der Kunstzeitschrift in Deutschland, Leipzig, 1932.

8. Artist's Repository and Drawing Magazine, 1785, I, p.i.

9. Artist's Repository..., 1785, I, p.i.

includes diagrams of facial and bodily forms, including comparative measurements of Apollo and Venus drawn from classical statuary, and outline and shaded character studies of heads and expressions. On the other hand, it provides, for the layman, a concise history of art - paying much attention to classical examples and to the recent discoveries in Egypt - and continuing through to the eighteenth century, praising Hogarth, in particular, for his power to make his pencil subservient to the purposes of morality and instruction. This approved pictorial manner reflected the educative combination favoured by this and other magazines:

> ... upon the whole, it is hoped the Artist's Repository will unite both instruction and entertainment, in a compendious system of elegant amusement.[10]

Though its reviews were sparse and non-committal, Taylor's magazine claims attention as the first English periodical in which criticism of contemporary art is not only put alongside the presentation and elucidation of established objects of taste but assumes increased importance through being isolated in a publication with them.

The twin strands of entertainment and instruction were taken up separately by various short-lived magazines around the turn of the century. The more prolific were those publications designed solely to entertain - the Temple of

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10. Artist's Repository..., 1785, I, p.ii.

Taste (1791), the Virtuosi Museum (1778) or the Elegant Repository (1791) were generally no more than excuses to issue composite volumes of engravings, with accompanying texts of a suitably reflective or informative nature: thus the last mentioned includes commentaries on subject matter ranging from the Arch of Constantine to the allegorical representations of Fidelity, Mildness and Moderation. They were slightly more sober forerunners of the German influenced annuals of the 1820s and later, such as Ackermann's Forget Me Not, and the Amulet and the Keepsake, which, through their high quality steel engravings, introduced many to the works of such contemporary artists as Turner, West, Wilkie and John Martin.[11] The fashionable magazines of the period - such as the Ladies Monthly Magazine (1798-1828) or La Belle Assemblée (1st series, 1806-1810) similarly encouraged a taste for anecdotal and sentimental art, both in their reproductions and in the bias of their exhibition reviews.

Criticism of contemporary art attained far greater importance within both specialised and general publications after the founding of the British Institution in 1805. This effectively doubled the quantity of criticism by providing another exhibition to review, and, more importantly, helped define attitudes and disagreements towards the Royal Academy, reviving, though not immediately, the journalistic possibilities of feelings generated by rivalry. The British

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11. See Anne Renier, Friendship's Offering, 1964.

Institution came, with its heavy emphasis on history painting, to stand for long established criteria: it forbade the exhibition of portraits in its galleries, considering them to be responsible for the malaise in contemporary art. Two art periodicals of 1807 were inaugurated with the specific intention of promoting the policy of the British Institution: the short lived Director, which, though edited by the self-congratulatory bibliophile, Thomas Frognall Dibdin, was financed by Thomas Bernard, a founder and leading member of the Institution;[12] and the Artist, (1807-9), edited by Prince Hoare. Hoare - considered also for the editorship of the Director - was Secretary for foreign correspondence to the Royal Academy - an indication that the two organisations were not at this stage regarded as incompatible. Believing that:

> ...there is nothing more effectual, than an enlarged communication of sentiments and ideas, to prevent the growth of contracted habits in art,[13]

he gathered together fiercely patriotic essays 'relative to Painting, Poetry, Sculpture, Architecture, The Drama, Discoveries of Science, and various other subjects'[14] - the

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12. The Director started promisingly, with contributions from Sir George Beaumont, Sir Richard Colt Hoare and other prominent members of the British Institution, but ran for only 24 issues, collapsing under the strain of finding sufficient material and coping with inefficient management. The reviews in earlier numbers tended to judge an artistic work by its likeness to nature; the later numbers were almost entirely filled by Dibdin's own long articles, 'Bibliographiana', and by reports of his own lectures.

13. Prince Hoare, Extracts from a Correspondence with the academies of Vienna and St. Petersburg, 1802, p.v.

14. Title page to Artist, I, 10 September 1807.

full gamut of liberal arts being included not through any theoretical belief in the Unity of the Arts, but because he feared that the circle to which an active concern for painting and sculpture was confined was a very limited one.[15] Hoare was an important inaugurator in two respects. The first person to complain strongly in the press that not nearly enough criticism was written by practical artists - 'from those who necessarily best understood' their subject,[16] he touched on a demand which was re-iterated continually throughout the C19th: the dilettante, he asserted, might contribute greatly to a reader's amusement, but adds little to his or her information. In addition, preceding the London Review's controversial step two years later, he abolished the practice of anonymity previously observed by:

> ... all preceding publications of a similar form, by immediately affixing either the full, or initial signature of the writer to each essay, and thus rendering him responsible for the sentiments delivered by him.[17]

The common defences put forward for the retention of anonymity - that it offered protection to contributors setting forward unpopular viewpoints; that it lent reviewers

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15. Unsigned, untitled introductory note to Artist, I, 10 September 1807, p.vi.

16. Introductory note, Artist, I, p.v.

17. Introductory note, Artist, I, p.vi.

'oracular authority';[18] that the small size of the literary world and its consequent close personal connections made objectivity impossible unless critics' names were concealed - were often joined by the supposition that reviewing was an ungentlemanly occupation, and consequently that no critic would wish his identity to be commonly recognised. Hoare's stress on the importance of an artist bringing his working, professional status to his writing emphasises his belief that art criticism was itself a professional activity, rather than the prerogative of a leisured layman. His dropping of anonymity would seem to underline what was to him an essential link between two modes of informed expression: a form of connection which, if not consciously realised, perhaps lies behind the fact that articles and criticism surveying artistic matters seem, until the practice became more general in the 1860s, far more readily signed than those dealing with literary matters, whether in the specialised press or even in the rarely identifiable pieces in the monthlies and quarterlies. It would seem that the recognised professional qualities of the practitioner in the visual field would help raise the standing of the relatively new area of criticism. For:

> It is universally agreed that nothing is more advantageous to the progress of any branch of general knowledge, particularly in the early stage of its establishment, than that all the information respecting it should be derived to the public from authentic sources.[19]

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18. John O. Hayden, The Romantic Reviewers, 1802-1824, 1969, p. 12.

19. P.H., untitled introductory piece, Artist, I, 14 March 1807, p.4.

Knowledge should come before taste: the excitements of the latter may easily lead us forward without rule or compass, taking us to the wrong turning which loses us in a labyrinth.[20] The dilettante - and it is constantly emphasised that though Pope's race of dabblers may be dead, their ground does not remain unoccupied - the dilettante has no business to advise the ignorant, nor the polecat-like critic to use his amateur's ability with words to kill his prey through sucking out his brains.[21]

Hoare's contributors were well enough known to lend stature not only to art criticism in general, but to his own publication. Flaxman wrote on modern art - especially sculpture - in England prior to the establishment of the Royal Academy; the literary-fashionable Mrs Inchbald contributed an article on novel-writing; Hoppner reviewed Stothard's picture of Chaucer's pilgrims. Yet it would still seem that there was not sufficient a public to support such a venture, despite the large sums of money which were sunk into it, as into similar schemes, even at a time when the art market itself was rapidly expanding. Even Landseer's Review of the Publications of Art (1808), which might hope to reach a potentially larger audience than Hoare's journal, since it was aimed at the print-buying

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20. P.H., untitled article on Taste, Artist, I, 4 April, p.2.
21. Richard Cumberland, 'To the Artist', Artist, I, 16 May 1807, p.5.

public, and reviewed illustrated books and engravings rather than paintings, folded after only four quarterly numbers.

The first successful art periodical, in terms of a sustained run of publication, was the Annals of the Fine Arts (1817-20). A decade after the founding of the British Institution, its partisanship was clear: it set out to praise 'the Directors of the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom'[22] and to attempt to reform the Royal Academy, accusing it of having failed in its duty of encouraging the highest form of painting, historical painting. The editor, Elmes, was incensed into launching the magazine by various events which appeared as calculated affronts on the part of the Academy towards the Institution.[23] A tirade of abuse was released onto the Academy and its members:

> We conceive the Royal Academy to be a perverted institution, and that the members make use of the powers instituted to them, to the destruction, instead of the assistance of that style of art, for which that power was created.[24]

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22. Dedication, Annals of the Fine Arts, II, 1818, no page number.
23. The three major events were the publication of the Catalogue Raisonné of the Pictures now exhibiting at Pall Mall, which insinuated that the patronage exercised through the Institution encouraged bad artists and thus corroded British Art; the removal by the Academy of Raphael's Cartoon of Ananias, which, having been used in the Institution's school of painting was locked away for the summer, out of the public's sight; and the Academy's request that no pictures from the Dulwich collection - a collection very thoroughly toured in the later numbers of the Annals - should be lent to the Institution.
24. Unsigned preface, Annals of the Fine Arts, III, 1819, p. vii.

Though the magazine announced itself - in a manner common almost without exception to art periodicals in the first half of the C19th - as filling a long-awaited need, there is no doubt that its singlemindedness in attacking the Academy and promoting historical painting, in particular that of Haydon, was its primary function. Its appearance was greeted, in the first issue, with rapturous enthusiasm by one whose identity, signing himself 'H', is not hard to uncover - indeed Haydon supplied a great deal of copy for the whole magazine, including, writing under the disguises of 'Somniator' and 'Somnabulus', much fulsome praise of his own work. This praise reaches two crescendoes. In volume III, he emerges from a hellish landscape, gothic imagination blended with John Martin, where arsenic-hued apocalyptic flames have revealed, under blood-dripping clouds, 'headless trunks, murdered infants, sheeted ghosts, spectred warriors' to hear a 'roar of congratulation'[25] as he is welcomed into heaven by Fuseli. In volume V, in a 'Vision of Futurity', 'Somniator's' grandson 'Somnabulus' bows 'involuntarily' in front of a statue of Haydon in St. Paul's.[26]

'It is superfluous to remark', writes 'H', that such a journal as Elmes has described in the preliminary advertisement:

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25. Somniator, 'The Other Vision', Annals of the Fine Arts, III, 1819, pp.21-22.

26. Somnabulus, 'Old St. Paul's: a Vision of Futurity', Annals of the Fine Arts, V, 1820, p.334.

> ... has long been a desideratum; for although many excellent critiques on various productions of the Arts have occasionally appeared in newspapers and magazines, they are scattered not only through a number of volumes, but through so many different publications, as to be expensive to obtain, and not very convenient to consult: and it may well be said of them that they are "Rari nantes in gurgite vasto". Almost every other pursuit has long since had its appropriate journal, in which both professionalists and amateurs can impart the result of their studies, suggest useful hints and solicit information, with equal readiness and freedom.[27]

Like the Artist, the Annals prided itself on the number of informed practitioners of the fine arts it had writing for it; even if the frequency of Haydon's name both within and after articles, and the frequency with which he was praised as an artist, necessitated an apology from Elmes.[28] Experts better known outside artistic fields were also called on to provide material: thus Sir Humphry Davy contributed an Essay on 'Some Experiments and observations on the colours used in Painting by the Ancients' - the subject matter of this article according well with the constant stress, which informed the Annals' fervid promotion of historical painting, of the supremacy of classical and Renaissance art. In particular, alongside the reviewing of exhibitions and engravings and the reporting of work in progress, they repeatedly campaigned for the authenticity and merit of the Elgin marbles, whose arrival in England destroyed many of the preconceptions about classical

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27. H, 'On the Neglect of Architectural Works by the Reviewers of the Fine Arts', Annals of the Fine Arts, I, 1817, pp.43-44.

28. J.E., 'Review of the Public Exhibitions, New Works &c', Annals of the Fine Arts, V, 1820, p.128.

art which had provided the basis for C18th aesthetics.

Despite its consciousness of fulfilling a need in the artistic world, through supplying news, opinion and aesthetic and historical discussion, the Annals, like all the art journals of the early decades of the C19th, failed to find a large enough audience to support its existence. It retained a certain amount of dignity in its closure; proudly announcing its self awareness as a temporary phenomenon, designed to fill a specific and realisable purpose, the reformation of the faults of the dedicatees of the final volume, the Royal Academy. Although the miraculous transformation is not elucidated in any detail, the magazine claims that the Academy has shown recent symptoms of improvement, and closes with self-congratulatory pride:

> We now bid our readers farewell for the present; and shall not make our appearance again, perhaps, in the hemisphere of art, unless another malignant planet, in the shape of a Catalogue Raisonné, rises in an opposite quarter.[29]

The persistent attacking of the Royal Academy certainly had produced a violent reaction. The quarterly appearance of the Annals, wrote Haydon in his Autobiography :

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29. J.E., 'Preface to the Fifth Volume', Annals of the Fine Arts, V, 1820, p.ii.

> ...was watched for with the same sort of anxiety, as a shell in the air during a siege. 'Here it comes; now for it' ... Every weapon of attack was resorted to - ridicule, sarcasm, allegory and insinuation - with such success that a member said: "By and by a man will be afraid to become an Academician". Once when Wilkie was with me, and an Academician came in, Wilkie seeing the Annals on the table said, in absolute horror, 'Just take away that publication'.[30]

The nature of the attacks on the Academy was so strong that they were hardly likely, in fact, to act as a catalyst to reform: the magazine was bought by the public more out of a desire to be entertained than to be educated. Elmes himself, a man:

> ...extremely thoughtless, full of imagination, always scheming and very likely to bring himself and his friends into scrapes,[31]

was not calculated by his contemporaries to have the common sense which would turn a venture based on largely personal preferences and antagonisms into a commercial success, nor was it an economic necessity for himself to do so.

A deeper, and more generally applicable reason for the short life of this and other contemporary art periodicals than that of a short-term purpose can perhaps be found in Hazlitt's 'Inquiry' - in the final number - 'whether the Fine Arts are

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30. B.R. Haydon, The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Robert Haydon, 1786-1848, 2 vols., 1926, Vol.1. p.249. Haydon, in his pride at the Annals, never appeared to realise that their extreme unpopularity in Academy circles was a strong contributory factor to his own troubles.

31. Haydon, Autobiography, vol. I, p.115.

promoted by Academies and Public Institutions', with his remarks that 'The principle of universal suffrage, however applicable to matters of government, which concern the common feeling and common interests of society, is by no means applicable to matters of taste, which can only be decided upon by the most refined understandings'.[32] The notion of the existence of an exclusive and finite number who are capable of true taste is common to early C19th artistic publications, and, whilst the view that 'The highest efforts of genius, in every walk of art, can never be properly understood by the generality of mankind'[33] was no doubt flattering to a captive readership, it does not indicate an editorial policy aware of the possibilities of capturing the interests of an expanding market. Such an attitude remained the province of the fashionable journals and, in particular, the growing number of literary periodicals and general magazines.

The specialised art publications of the eighteen years following the Annal's demise met with little greater success than their predecessors. The Magazine of the Fine Arts (1821) closely followed the format and sentiments of the Annals, whilst warning against a dangerous tendency in modern criticism to profess "the most unbounded admiration of the works of

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32. W.H., 'An Inquiry, whether the Fine Arts are prompted by Academies and Public Institutions?', Annals of the Fine Arts, V, 1820, pp.293-4.

33. W.H., 'Inquiry', Annals, V, 1820, p.297.

antiquity".[34] Comprehensive in the range of exhibitions and works within them which its reviews covered, the criticism itself consisted of little more than a list of subjects. The more overtly patriotic a painting, the more comment it gave rise to: a work such as Leslie's May Morning in the time of Queen Elizabeth is treated by a lengthy delineation of the sports and customs - the hobby horse, mummers' dragon, maypole and so on - which it contains.[35] This uncontroversial style of reviewing through, as it were, composing a catalogue entry is mirrored in the criticism of fiction in the early C19th: Blackwood's, for example, still apparently uncertain whether or not the novel was a serious literary form, usually restricted itself to a summary of the story - with long extracts - prefaced by a few general introductory remarks which parallel the way in which a painting was situated within a particular year's exhibition.

More entertaining was the gossip-orientated Somerset House Gazette (1823-24), in which, however, exhibition reviews, presumably because of reasons of space, appear to take second place to the general humorous essays. They were printed in a small type face along with correspondence and oddments of information. The Gazette betrayed a slight

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34. Unsigned article, 'Remarks on Contemporary Criticism', Magazine of the Fine Arts, I, 1821, p.10.

35. Unsigned review, 'The Exhibition of the Royal Academy', Magazine of the Fine Arts, I, 1821, p.57.

apprehension at reviewing contemporary art at all, holding that painting, like wine, improved with keeping. This belief was supported by an analysis of the ageing properties of oil paint as well as with arguments which asserted the necessity of the establishment of canons of taste through time, and the natural charm of antiquity. The conservatism implicit in this preference for works of the past extended to many of the criteria by which modern art was judged: thus the reviewer of John Martin's Pan and Syrinx, though praising his 'extraordinary instances of invention', regretted that his grand and romantic powers are not regulated by the accepted rules of art.[36] Yet, perhaps surprisingly, Constable was commended, in his Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows, for not addressing his pencil with timid skill to the reigning fashion of taste, but for daring to be original:[37] he had not strayed as far as Martin into the representation of the improbable in nature. Standards of judgement were becoming less rigidly based in the classical, as was apparent by the time Lo Studio (1835) was founded: it attacked strongly the critic of the Observer for discouraging contemporary talent and constantly invoking the spirits of Michael Angelo and Raphael to descend and enlighten the modern painter.[38] By this time,

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36. Unsigned review, 'British Gallery. How to Judge Modern Pictures', Somerset House Gazette, i, 1823, p.274.

37. Unsigned review, 'Exhibition. - British Gallery', Somerset House Gazette, i, 1823, p.311.

38. Unsigned article, 'Newspaper Critics', Lo Studio, I, 26 June 1833, p.33.

too, attitudes towards the Royal Academy no longer necessitated the violent adoption of sides. It was possible to admire its existence as an institution, as did many critics, whilst attacking the system of arrangement of pictures at the exhibitions, the attendant partiality that occurred, and the exclusive privilege wielded by the members, who were able to add finishing touches to their paintings once hung.[39]

Despite the attempt of the anonymous editor of the Studio to enliven his pages with a theatrical column and reviews of popular songs, he was no more successful in attracting a lasting readership than the contemporaneous Library of the Fine Arts[40] (1831-34) - although this soon abandoned its early stress on the visual arts to include articles on literature, science and politics in an attempt to improve its circulation. Yet the new literary and general magazines, seeking a public whose knowledge of the fine arts was certainly less specialised than those journals which appeared to be aimed at a semi-professional market at least, carried their criticisms comfortably. The Monthly (1796-1826) and rival New Monthly (1814-36) magazines; Blackwoods (1817-to date) and the London

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39. See Helene E. Roberts, 'Art Reviewing in the Early Nineteenth-Century Art Periodicals', Victorian Periodicals Newsletter, 6, March 1973, especially pp.10-12.

40. The magazine was shortly to add the publisher's name of Arnold as a prefix.

Magazine (1820-24, 1829) all contained full reports on art exhibitions, the last-mentioned specialising in discussions of the merits of the English, French, German and Italian schools with the inevitable patriotic conclusion. In addition, many of the weekly reviews or Sunday papers, containing approximately the same amount of print as these monthlies, introduced artistic coverage among their reporting of dramatic, poetical and literary events. Two weeklies which were to provide extensive criticism of the arts during the C19th, the Athenaeum and the Spectator, were founded in 1828. Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country (1830-1882) contained some lively art criticism, despite the fact that its main emphasis fell on politics, religion, and social conditions. W.H. Leeds and C.M. Westmacott, with his personal, chatty style, were its first critics, followed, from June 1838 to June 1845, by W.M. Thackeray. Later, William Michael Rossetti and William Bell Scott wrote on the Pre-Raphaelites. Initially, though, the new periodicals, as well as the established quasi-radical (1808-1881) despite their calculated appeal to topicality and their reliance upon the readership's desire to keep up with the world, often reviewed art with less daring than when writing on subjects more traditionally established as fields for controversy - politics, the philosophical essay, religious discussions: the Examiner, though preaching parliamentary reform and liberality of opinion on virtually all matters, had an art column edited by the youngest of the Hunt brothers which - perhaps because the ubiquitous Haydon was a family friend - promoted nothing but mind-elevating historical subjects.

When added to the increasing coverage of the arts in the daily press, the criticism in these general publications, largely dependent on the subjective opinions of relatively unspecialised writers, became, by the 1830s, the most substantial supplier of the artistic convictions of the middle classes. The more aesthetically esoteric publications - none, since the introduction of the Stamp Tax in 1819, costing less than 6d., and thus, to many, poor value when compared to counterparts which promised a far wider selection of subject matter - were beyond the pockets of most of those who wished to be informed, knowledgeably but entertainingly, about artistic matters. Despite their having acted as a catalyst during the early part of the print-occupying Napoleonic wars, the democratisation of art criticism, both in terms of the writers and its ever-growing number of readers, took place almost completely outside the specialised art publications.

This situation changed to some extent, especially in the field of the applied arts, with the emergence of the first English art magazine to establish itself securely. The Art Union (1839-1912), which changed its name to the Art Journal in 1849, provided, throughout the C19th, a comprehensive and conservative coverage of all branches of the fine and applied arts. It was probably the most read of all the century's art publications. It grew out of a dinner held by the publisher, Hodgson, in December 1838 and attended by the editorially experienced Samuel Carter Hall:

> Several Royal Academicians were present; one of whom, Charles Landseer ... expressed regret that there was no periodical publication to represent the Arts, and referred to me as an author capable of remedying the difficulty. Hodgson said that if I would edit such a work, he would supply capital.[41]

Though on this occasion Hall, reading hard for the Bar, declined the invitation, he accepted it when repeated, and the first number, consisting of 16 pages with one woodcut, appeared on February 15th 1839, priced 8d. Seven hundred and fifty numbers of this part were printed,[42] and Hall claimed that the monthly circulation rose, through reprints, to average nearly 3,000 by the end of its first year.[43]

Punch's identification of Samuel Carter Hall with Pecksniff and its habit of referring to the magazine as "The Pecksniffery" does not seem without foundation:[44] even his obituary notices have, in their refutation of the accusations continually levelled against him, a condemnatory knell:

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41. Samuel Carter Hall, Retrospect of a Long Life: from 1815 to 1883, 2 vols, 1883, vol.I. p.339.

42. Retrospect, I, p.340.

43. Art Union, 1839, preface to I, p.iii. These figures are born out by the stamps issued for the Art Union, which averaged 2,463 per-month during the summer months. See Kelly's Post Office London Directory for 1840, p.557.

44. Charles C. Osborne, "Mr. Pecksniff and his Prototype", Independent Review, x, September 1906, p.332.

> The writers seem to have combined to laud the poor man in the clumsiest way, instituting a negative style of praise by asserting that he was not a humbug, not a charlatan, not anything but exactly what he ought to have been; that he did not get literary help from his wife, that he did not send round the hat, that his house was not adorned with contributions from advertisers. ...[45]

His Pecksniffian trait which pervades his autobiographical writing, presenting himself as the most generous of disengenuous benefactors - "a moral man; a grave man; a man of noble sentiments'[46] - led him to exaggerate somewhat the philistinism of the public and the barrenness of the fields of artistic production and writing at the time he launched his publication:

> Nothing could have been less encouraging than its prospects at starting: there were few or no writers on Art, while the condition of British art was not only discouraging but disheartening.[47]

But Hall had some justification in priding himself on the degree to which he was instrumental in creating a public for contemporary art: a public which would buy the works of modern painters rather than fraudulent copies of Old Masters. The Art Union pursued various nefarious traders in these forged and baked commodities, warning through their pages of their "possession of a multitude of facts" against these dealers, and exposing the various deceptions performed by smoking,

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45. Mrs. W.P. Byrne, Gossip of the Century, 2 vols. 1892, 1898, vol.i. p.167.

46. Charles Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit, (1843-4), New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1951, p.12.

47. Carter Hall, Retrospect, I, p.340.

varnishing, or simple false attribution. Confidentially supplied by a friend of Hall's employed as Comptroller of the Customs, the Union printed, month after month, the Custom-house returns of imported pictures, showing:

> ... that a larger number of Titians, Raphaels, and Rubenses paid duty in a year than those masters had produced during their lives.[48]

Hall appealed to the commercial instincts of the wealthy merchants and manufacturers who were the primary purchasers of these forgeries, making clear that:

> ... the policy of buying only such pictures as could be readily identified - certified by the artists who were living; urging the probability that they would increase and not decrease in value, while it was almost certain that so-called "old masters" would ultimately be worth little more than the value of the panels and frames.[49]

He finally obtained maximum publicity for himself and his paper when a prominent practitioner, Hart, brought a widely-reported libel action against the journal in March 1855, and:

> ... the natural result followed: merchants and manufacturers who were bent on adorning their mansions with paintings, thus warned, would purchase no more Raphaels and Titians; they bought modern pictures instead. The trial was well worth what it cost. I had not then, and have not had since, the slightest doubt that to the case Hart v. Hall may be traced a commencement of the career of prosperity that has since awaited the productions of "British artists".[50]

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48. Retrospect, I, p.343.

49. Retrospect, I, pp.343-4.

50. Retrospect, I, p.352.

Hall's aim of creating a public for contemporary art through the pages of his magazine depended on the publication itself finding a market. Aimed both at professionals, providing 'early and authentic' information for them as they labour in their comparative seclusion,[51] and also at giving the public 'the means of justly ascertaining and estimating the progress of Art both at Home and Abroad',[52] it attempted to appeal to as broad a base as possible, avoiding confusing and cumbersome technicalities in its expression. It blamed the ignorance of all classes in matters relating to the Fine Arts on the sapping effects of the Napoleonic wars on England's national energy (the Journal at all times maintained a fierce patriotic pride, believing that healthy art could only flourish within a healthy country); on the fact that too little attention was paid to training young people to respond to good design; and on 'the ignorant censure or injudicious praise bestowed upon works of art by the public press', which 'has completely mixed up in one obscure jumble, artists good, bad, and indifferent'.[53] In an attempt to break down this ignorance, Hall provided notices and reviews of exhibitions,

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51. Unsigned, 'Introduction', Art Union, i, February 1839, p.i.

52. 'Introduction', p.i.

53. Unsigned article, 'On the Present State of the Fine Arts in Great Britain', Art Union, i, August, 1839.

granting individual works the space denied them by the daily and weekly press. He included considerable notes on art in the provinces, from Cork to Leamington, from Liverpool to Plymouth, thus breaking through the strong London-orientation of his predecessors: news from abroad, whether the execution of Marchese's Goethe statue in Milan or the completion of the Kremlin, also appeared. General articles - on the architecture of London streets, or monumental crosses, or studies of individual active or deceased artists helped to provide the background of knowledge from which, Hall believed, one should approach contemporary artistic production. He showed his modernity by including, during the first three years of publication, not only a technical description of the means by which the Daguerreotype works but articles on photographic portraits and etchings by electricity. This belief in the value and interest of change and innovation, however, was far from being reflected in the criticism of paintings. Whilst an artist's tour to Egypt, the opening of a new governmental school of design or the Paris Exposition of Art Industry of 1844 represented encouraging signs of the enterprise and advance of C19th society, Turner's works, for example, are sorrowed over as showing 'power misapplied and time mispent',[54] the implication being that they waste these two primary forces behind contemporary progress.

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54. Unsigned review, 'The Royal Academy. The Exhibition - 1840', Art Union, ii, May 1840, p.73.

Despite the variety of entertaining and educational material presented, the Art Union was slow to show a profit. In 1842 the number of pages was raised to 24 instead of 16, the price raised from 8d to 1s - a type of optimistic expansion which ruined many of its potential competitors - but it was not until 1848 that the journal - no doubt due to the 'activity and liberality' of its publisher, George Virtue[55] - paid its way. By this time, it was far more attractively presented than the almost unillustrated triple columns of close small print which tired the eye in early numbers: line engravings were used abundantly. When the new series was commenced in 1849, though the cost of each part was raised to 2s6d, over 800 engravings on wood can be found in the year's 380 pages: in addition, the volume contained 25 engravings on steel from pictures and 12 from productions of British sculptors. Many of these - the permission for their reproduction perhaps granted through questionable motivation[56] - came from the Vernon collection, and Hall himself considered that the prosperity of the Journal dated from the reproduction of these plates.

Other circumstances aided the growth of the magazine:

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55. Anon. , The Art Journal: A Short History, 1906, p.22.

56. Art Journal: A Short History, p.12. J.C. Horsley had written of Vernon that 'his apparent interest in Art was really used simply as a meant of lifting him out of obscurity into some sort of locus standi in the world'. Recollections of a Royal Academician, 1903, p.60.

> First, the growing wealth and intelligence of British merchants and manufacturers. Next, the influence of some of the picture-dealers in the manufacturing districts, who created a desire, if not a taste (that was the gradual result of persevering zeal), in prosperous Manchester and its rich locality. Next, by the always admirable working of the Art Union of London[57] ... Next, the great increase of provincial Schools of Art in association with the Department of Science and Art, of which in 1840 there were three; in 1880 there were one hundred and fifty, hardly a provincial town of note being without this valued auxiliary to Art knowledge, Art study, and Art practice.[58]

Most of this practice was, however, in the field of applied arts, and this underlines the fact that the character of the publication had changed during the 1840s away from an appeal to a passive general readership which the early numbers seem to demand. Now its audience was sought not so much among the manufacturers who might be expected to patronise contemporary painting, but among those who were responsible for the design and purchase of those goods whose sale provided the capital required for large-scale artistic expenditure. Thus the engravings provide both a craftsman's sourcebook and a buyer's catalogue. In 1883, Hall wrote that 'there is, perhaps, not a single manufacturer of note in these Kingdoms who has not ... thus been represented in the columns of the Art Journal '.[59] He toured the country himself, visiting

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57. An Association formed for the purchase of works of art, and copied all over the country.

58. Hall, Retrospect, I, p.357.

59. Retrospect, I, p.365.

manufacturies, selecting favoured objects for reproduction, and attacking the crudity of improbable design with the literalness of a Gradgrind -accompanying school inspector: 'the carpets of Kidderminster were disfigured by roses in size a foot square, temples, rock-work, and so forth'.[60] New ideas were introduced in particular through the supplementary numbers which accompanied exhibitions of industrial art:[61] ornate, foliated, gilt and rococo designs can be found among its pages in 1848 for such objects, central to the middle-class Victorian home, as marmalade pots, muffineers, gas brackets, hyacinth glasses, and iron balustrades, without the self-awareness of one of its apparently friendly rivals at the time of the Great Exhibition, the Art Circular (1850-51) which in introducing a pug-dog letter weight and a gilt metal cockatoo inkstand, commented on the latter 'pretty drawing room ornament' that it was :

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60. Retrospect, I, p.370. Carter Hall worked relatively closely to Henry Cole, one of the prime movers behind the government's Department of Practical Art. For further information on this department - and on the identification of Cole with the school inspector - see K.J. Fielding, 'Dickens and the Department of Practical Art', Modern Language Review, 48, July 1953, pp.270-77. See also: Gillian Naylor, The Arts and Crafts Movement, 1971, esp. pp.18-21.

61. For example: In 1844 Hall published two supplementary numbers of the Art Union describing the Paris Exposition of Art Industry, containing not only over 200 engravings but also his first emphatic suggestion that Britain should herself hold such an exhibition.

    A twenty-page article, with about sixty engravings, was produced the next year to illustrate the British Art Industry Bazaar held at Covent Garden.

    A supplementary number was issued to coincide with the 1846 Exhibition of Art and Art Industry at Manchester.

> ...one of those things that can hardly be criticised, as it sets all the rules of art at defiance. Every one falls in love with it at "first sight", except the stern critic, for whom it certainly was never intended.[62]

In the same edition of the Art Circular, the Art Journal took out a whole page advertisement in which it announced the special, profusely illustrated supplementary parts which it was issuing for the Great Exhibition and which would ultimately become:

> ...a Catalogue of its most beautiful and valuable contents - a permanent Record of the Exhibition, and a Key to the most meritorious manufactures of all parts of the world.[63]

The advertisement stated that the circulation of the Journal had, during 1850, approached 18,000 monthly. The costly and comprehensive coverage of the 1851 exhibition - an exhibition which Hall had been extremely vocal in proposing - finally established it firmly as the primary Victorian middle class art publication, both in terms of circulation and authority.[64]

Yet Hall's publication had been criticised from the outset as superficial, as calculated to induce a taste for artificiality

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62. Unsigned article, 'New Art-Manufactures', Art Circular, ii, 23 January 1851, p.12.

63. 'New Art-Manufactures', p.15

64. For the double numbers of the journal which were issued between May and December 1851, price 5s, the public paid over £72,000 - a sum which nevertheless did not cover the enormous expenses involved and which thus necessitated Hall selling his shares in the publication to his co-proprietors and accepting the salaried - though still authoritarian - position of editor.

and as attempting to convert 'the moral arts of intellectual refinement into mere courtly toys'.[65] The Probe (1839-1840) immediately established itself as a rival to this 'artful literary lolly-pop',[66] and attacked the Art Union in the most vicious terms for its reduction of art to a plaything of society:

> The first number of a work consisting of a dandy-like farrago of flattery - announcing a settled intention to pry behind the scenes of this drama of human life, in quest of opportunities to flatter, and to simper, and to make it fashionable, forsooth, to convert the studios of painters - places of meditation - into theatres of idle, time-wasting gossip - and perpetual, profitless, and irritating hindrance to the artists - has recently made its appearance.[67]

The Probe itself, apart from soberly presenting items of art news and informative articles, followed the quarterlies' habit of reviewing books at length, as did its editor, John Landseer's, earlier and even shorter-lived Review of Publications of Art (1808): it thus contained writing based round, for example, Goethe's Theory of Colours and Flaxman's Lectures on Sculpture. More noticeably, it was anti-prescriptive in its criticism of exhibitions. Unlike the Art Journal, with its belief in total verisimilitude, accurate finish and innoffensive subject matter, it was prepared to admit that there was no standard which should

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65. Unsigned article, 'The Art Union', Probe, 15 March 1839, p.7.

66. 'Art Union', Probe, p.8.

67. 'Art Union', Probe, p.7.

be automatically looked for, especially in landscape painting. At the 1840 Royal Academy exhibition were exhibited a number of paintings by both Stanfield - including Citara in the Gulph of Salerno - and Turner. Such works as the latter's Bacchus and Ariadne and Slavers throwing overboard the Dead and Dying were continually laughed at in the general press. The Examiner sneered that:

> Such mad trowelling, such unmeaning splashing, was surely never raised to the dignity or pretension of art before,[68]

whereas Stanfield's work was universally praised for its contrasting accessibility:

> In his pictures you have nothing to extenuate, nothing to learn to like. They come home to every body.[69]

This opposition of the two artists seemed, as the Probe demonstrates, to run through all the press reviews of the exhibition: yet this publication maintained that it is mistaken to lay down generalisations concerning the degree of literal detail, and the degree of vividness of colour which one should find in a picture. The problem of reconciling, or at least accepting the existence of differing values which the juxtaposition of works raised had, it was noticed prophetically:

> ...given rise to questions which cannot be dismissed in a moment, and perhaps may not be dismissed in a century.[70]

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68. Examiner, quoted in Probe, ii, 1 June 1840, p.55.

69. Unsigned review, 'The Seventy Second Exhibition of the Royal Academy', Probe, ii, 1 June 1840, p.54.

70. 'Seventy Second Exhibition', Probe, p.56.

But the Probe, like its serious-minded predecessors in the early part of the century, had no lifetime in which to examine the issues. Despite its hopeful belief that the Art Union, the offspring of "self-pleasing folly" would soon disunite and crumble, the philistinian rival long outstayed its antagonist.

Hall's other rivals were equally ephemeral. Until the 1870s he could boast with some fairness that "I had little to fear from opposition".[71] The Fine Arts Journal (1846-47) temptingly proclaims that it offers something new - 'TRUTH!'[72] in its criticism of contemporary art. Announcing its impartiality, its lack of personal connections, whether with artists or publishers, it declares 'exterminating warfare against conventionality'.[73] It scorns the Art Journal for appealing to the mentality of bell-hangers, and would encourage one to believe that it itself exists with the sole purpose of raising the standard of the superficial specious misinformation that passes for current reviewing.[74]

Yet its own criticism rarely showed more depth than a few staccato phrases or lines, which at their most trenchant - as

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71. Hall, Retrospect, i, p.356.

72. Unsigned editorial, 'To Our Readers', Fine Arts Journal, i, 7 November 1846, p.1.

73. 'To Our Readers', Fine Arts Journal, p.1.

74. Unsigned article, 'The Art-Union Journal and H.B. Chalon', Fine Arts Journal, i, 7 November 1846, p.15, and H.C.M., 'Criticism on Art', Fine Arts Journal, ii, 8 May 1847, p.418.

when discarding the merit accorded to the mediocre Millais on grounds of his now outgrown supposed precocity[75]- restricted themselves to attacking technical imperfections. The highly patriotic Artist (Jan - March 1855), yet again hoping to keep the public informed through 'free, calm, and earnest enquiry',[76] recognised the essential relation of criticism to the art-viewing public - 'without Criticism ... Exhibitions of Art would most likely not exist at all'.[77] But it continually attempted a heavily Germanic-influenced examination of the aesthetic ideas of Supreme Beauty, and the conveyance of the embodiment of Ideas by means of Image, rather than any closer treatment of contemporary art. Its enthusiasm for Schadow and Schiller appeared to bring it few readers.

Closer to the Art Journal were a handful of magazines - such as the People's Illustrated Journal (1852) and the Illustrated Magazine of Art (1853), which quickly followed the Great Exhibition and attempted to repeat the Art Journal's successful combination of copious illustration and informative writings on the Arts, Manufactures and Practical Science.

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75. Unsigned review, 'Free Exhibition , Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly', Fine Arts Journal, ii, p.457.

76. Unsigned 'Address', Artist, [i], 27 January 1855, p.3.

77. M.S., 'The Mutual Relation of Art and Criticism', Artist, [i], 10 February 1855, p.32.

Their original coverage of contemporary painting was negligible, the former going so far as to borrow a long paragraph from the Illustrated London News with which to review the Royal Academy Exhibition. Both periodicals attempted to reproduce the formulae of illustrated topographical features and antiquarian articles with which the Art Journal entertained those of its readers who were least concerned with the applied arts. The interest in these historical aspects of art was taken up by the Fine Arts Quarterly Review (1863-1867). This was edited by Bernard Woodward, who had been horrified on becoming Keeper of the Art Collections in the Royal Library of Windsor Castle to find that not only was there an almost entire absence of records relating to them; there was - in this country where, unlike France, Germany or Belgium, only one art periodical flourished - no means of communicating and asking for information and critical methods relating to the historical study of art. The magazine - well printed and clearly laid out - included illustrated articles on various periods, schools and artists, with critical descriptions of, for example, the Prince Consort's 'Raphael Collection' and the drawings of Nicolas Poussin to be found at Windsor Castle. In addition, some of the best known and forward looking of contemporary art critics reviewed for it: Hamerton wrote on the Salon of 1863 and contributed an article on 'Modern Etching in France', the accompanying plates prefiguring the quality of illustration in Hamerton's own periodical, the Portfolio. W.M. Rossetti, an early Whistler enthusiast, covered the London art news and exhibitions, as he had done

since the 1850s for a variety of publications including Fraser's Magazine, the Spectator and the Saturday Review. Rossetti was a firm believer in the criticism of art by its practitioners - not merely because 'they alone are qualified to pronounce upon technicalities', but because 'this knowledge of technicalities is a powerful sedative to the whole range of opinion upon art'.[78] Failing this, the most useful and effective critic will be, like Ruskin, one who has some particular vividness of personal perception, fervour of mind, or discursiveness of illustrative power. Rossetti himself, in the reviews he did for the Fine Arts Quarterly Review, seemed rather lacking in these qualities, continually falling back onto a recitation of pictures exhibited and prizes awarded. His writing showed far more of his desired characteristics of 'perception, fervour and eloquence'[79] when he, writing for weekly magazines, apparently felt far less compulsion to be comprehensive.

Rossetti had previously been editor of the four-numbered Pre-Raphaelite magazine of Art and Poetry, Germ: this magazine was the forerunner of the many privately-printed aesthetic periodicals of the 1880s and 90s. The only official published

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78. W.M. Rossetti, 'Francis Turner Palgrave, "Essays on Art" ', Fine Arts Quarterly Review, I, 1866, p.304.

79. 'Palgrave', Fine Arts Quarterly Review, p.305.

apologia of Pre-Raphaelitism, its forty-eight closely printed pages were, unlike the promotional efforts of Ruskin, far from polemic in tone. It addressed itself to those who were already more or less sympathetic: such a small number that none of the four copies came at all close to paying for themselves. The debts incurred by the first two numbers ran to £33: the expenses of the other two were borne by the printer, Tupper.[80] The public failed to show any interest, despite an attempt to advertise the publication through parading posters in front of the Royal Academy; the laudatory notices in, among others, the Dispatch, Guardian, Morning Chronicle and John Bull; and the 'pat on the back, with a very lukewarm hand'[81] which was bestowed by the Art Journal, had little effect.

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80. Tupper changed the title of the second two numbers to Art and Poetry - thus giving a clear indication of the publisher's contents, but removing all the intended suggestions of a small seed falling in potentially fertile ground. James Ashcroft Noble, 'A Pre-Raphaelite Magazine', Fraser's Magazine, n.s. XXV, May 1882, pp. 568-580

81. The Germ, edited with introduction by W.M. Rossetti, 1901, p.11.
See also: unsigned review article, 'Pre-Raphaelitism in Art and Literature', British Quarterly Review, 16, August 1852, pp.197- 220.
C.F. Keary, 'The Germ', Macmillan's Magazine, 34, September 1876, pp.439-447.
Walter Hamilton, The Aesthetic Movement in England, 1882, passim.
Ernest Radford, 'The Life and Death of The Germ', Idler, 13 March 1898, pp.226-233.

With the exception of the etchings reproduced as frontispieces, and Tupper's two-part article, 'The Subject in Art', supporting contemporaneity of subject matter in modern painting, little of the magazine, with its heavy poetical predominance, had much direct bearing on current art. As with such successors as the Century Guild Hobby Horse, it envisaged its role primarily as a literary parallel to an artistic movement. It suffered heavily from its esoteric specialisation:

> It was too good - that is to say, too refined and of too lofty a class, both in its art and its poetry to be sufficiently popular to pay even the printer's bill.[82]

The only critical publication beside the Art Journal which, in this period, was both popular and profitable was Ruskin's Academy Notes (1855-9).[83] He stated in the preface to the 1855 edition that he had often been asked by his friends to mark for them the pictures which were the most interesting - either through their merits or failures- at the exhibitions, and explained that:

> I have determined, at last, to place the circular letter which, on such occasions I am obliged to write, within reach of the general public.[84]

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82. Critic, 1 June 1850, quoted by W.M. Rossetti, Germ, p.11.

83. The publication did not confine itself to reviewing the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition: it also treated the Old and New Societies of Painters in Water Colours, the Society of British Artists and the French Exhibition.

84. Ruskin, 'Academy Notes, 1855', Works, vol.XIV, p.5.

He aimed to make his readers understand, rather than merely accept, the judgment he passed on paintings. One finds in his comparatively lengthy reviews of carefully selected individual works the reiteration of many of the principles in Modern Painters : his constant reminder that 'art is evermore of another and mightier race than the art of materialism'[85]; his belief at this time - without approaching too closely to the danger of passing character judgements on his contemporaries - that the success of a work of art was closely linked to the moral condition under which it was produced; and his opinion that, however much he might esteem the truth of feeling and quality of thought which comes across in a work of art, this alone is worthless without technical excellence; for:

> ... a painter's business is first to paint. No one could sympathize more than I with the general feeling displayed in the "Light of the World"; but unless it had been accompanied with perfectly good nettle painting, and ivy painting, and jewel painting, I should never have praised it.[86]

He continually stresses the personal nature of his response - in his writing, personal pronouns are perpetually present in a way which distinguishes him from the critics of the dailies and the periodicals. Especially in the first year of the work's appearance, Ruskin was criticized for his lack of

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85. Ruskin, 'Academy Notes, 1859', Works, vol. XIV, p. 244.
86. Ruskin, 'Academy Notes, ', Works, vol. XIV, p. 65.

compassion: more significantly, reviews of the publication tended to censure Ruskin's critical language as being too strongly personal and powerful, expressing 'singularities of thought and diction" which 'prevent his being an authority'.[87] Such an individual style not only meant that Ruskin failed, unlike the majority of critics, to reflect a norm of response which he shared with the general public: it laid him open to accusations of cultural disruption, since he showed:

> ...the perverted imagination of a man who is most mischievous, because he has brilliancy enough to dazzle the unwary.[88]

The liveliness of his choice of rhythm and vocabulary can be seen when Ruskin's reviews are placed against those in the rival Royal Academy Review (1858-60), produced by the proudly anonymous Council of Four. They had the intention of presenting collaboratively composed criticism, which, they hoped, would thus be less potentially volatile than that which:

> ...contains so many confessions on the Author's part of personal anxiety and weakness as an art critic, that the value of the production, as an independent Review, is entirely destroyed.[89]

Thus when the Four examine Brett's Val d'Aosta, they attempt

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87. Unsigned notes, 'Minor Topics of the Month', Art Journal, new series, I, July 1855, p.219.

88. L, 'Some Suggestions for the Royal Academy's Future Home', Building News, 5, 27 May 1859, p. 484

89. 'The Council of Four', The Royal Academy Review, 1858, p.iv.

a faintly amusing, damning criticism of its rather deadening factual accuracy: the flatness of their choice of vocabulary could have been borrowed from the class of work they chose for comparison:

> The first impression this work conveys, is, that it is intended to be prefixed to a house agent's advertising bill for the sake of the chalets and adjacent lands shown in the scene.[90]

Ruskin, on the other hand, whilst far from comfortable about the lack of feeling which he also senses, conveys his enthusiasm for the picture through a description which derives its energy both from the work itself and from its power to remind Ruskin of the effect of Swiss scenery upon him. He invites the reader to look, both in front of the picture and through the natural images stored in his memory, above the fertile, jewelled Piedmontese valley, above the untamed cold stream flowing down from the Courmayeur glaciers to :

> ...where, above, there is rest, where the sunshine streams into iridescence through branches of pine, and turns the pastures into strange golden clouds, half grass, half dew; for the shadows of the great hills have kept the dew there since morning.[91]

Whether the Art Journal approved or not, Ruskin's Notes :

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90. Royal Academy Review, 1858, p.39.
91. Ruskin, 'Academy Notes, 1859', Works, Vol.XIV, p.235.

> ...attained a degree of popularity that renders their verdicts of extreme practical importance to all exhibitors. They are in almost as universal use as the catalogues, and to many must serve as sole guide to the excellencies of the yearly exhibitions.[92]

'Great was the fluttering caused in artistic dovecotes by the appearance of these "Notes":'[93] their effect upon the productions of the following year illustrates the authority Ruskin shared with no other critic of the time. Thus in 1858 he remarked with surprise:

> How strange that among all this painting of delicate detail there is not a true one of English spring! - that no pre-Raphaelite has painted a cherry-tree in blossom, dark-white against the twilight of April; not an almond-tree rosy on the blue sky; nor the flush of the apple-blossom .[94]

In the next Academy show, as the Economist notes, 'three distinguished artists' - Millais, Horsley and Hughes - 'had set themselves the task in consequence'.[95]

Ruskin tells us that he abandoned his publication

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92. Unsigned review, 'Notes on Some of the Principal Pictures Exhibited in the Rooms of the Royal Academy and the Society of Painters in Water Colours, &c. By John Ruskin, M.A.', Economist, XV, 13 June 1857, p.647.

93. H.S. Marks, Pen and Pencil Sketches, 1894, 2 vols. ii, p.163.

94. Ruskin, 'Academy Notes, 1858', Works, Vol. XIV, p.154.

95. Unsigned review, '"Notes on Some of the Principal Pictures Exhibited in the Rooms of the Royal Academy, the Old and New Societies of Painters in Water Colours, the Society of British Artists, and the French Exhibition" No.V. 1859 by John Ruskin, M.A.', Economist, XVII, 28 May 1859, p.593.
The pictures in question were Millais, Spring (298), Horsley, Blossom Time (414) and Hughes, The King's Orchard (609).

disheartened, because artists and public were so lacking in any 'abstract conception of justice' that they would hold any criticism dishonourable unless it was falsely full of praise.[96] This bitterness was possibly largely due to his own expansion of interests: at the end of the 1850s, these had swung rapidly away from art in isolation towards a fuller consideration of the society which produced it. The popularity of his works no doubt suggested such subsequent annual publications as Blackburn's Academy Notes (1875-1907), which no self-respecting exhibition visitor would have been without. It also indicates the existence of a new exhibition-visiting public with no long-established standards of its own, desiring and enjoying the provision of ready-made opinions.

This expanding public[97] was being fed by a rapidly growing - and, in price, more accessible - number of newspapers and periodicals, whose artistic judgment could be safely trusted. In 1890 Sidney Cooper could look back nostalgically fifty years

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96. Ruskin, 'Academy Notes, 1875', Works, Vol. XIV, p.261.

97. References to the rapid growth of the exhibition visiting public are prevalent in the mid nineteenth century periodical literature, but precise figures - for example, of visitors to the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition - are hard to establish. The Annual Report from The Council of the Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians records increases in the number of visitors without, usually, being specific. However, in addition to free admissions, the paying visitors in 1874 were 332,365, in 1875 333,641, and in 1879 391,195. In this last year, 2878 season tickets were also issued. I am grateful to the Royal Academy for letting me consult their records, albeit with little positive result.

to a time when, he maintained, quality, rather than overwhelming quantity, informed the press. Such critics as Leigh Hunt in the Morning Post, Jourdan in the Herald, Williams in the Observer and Dallas - one of Tom Taylor's predecessors on the Times - were to be relied upon, he claimed, for their judgements based on knowledge and love of art.[98] Taylor himself came to hold a virtual monopoly on art criticism in The Times from 1857 to his death in 1880. The appointment was made at a time when the paper wielded 'almost undisputed supremacy ... in the world of journalism'.[99] Taylor's criticism was instrumental in creating the safe standards followed by the middle classes, by 'the class enriched by manufacturer and commerce which is now doing for art in England what the same class' had done throughout Italy and the Low Countries.[100] By 1878, he could be called upon as a universally-respected authority by the defendant in the Whistler v. Ruskin trial.[101]

The growth of the press which provided the middle classes with their opinions was greatly aided by the abolition of what

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98. T. Sidney Cooper, My Life, 2 vols, 1890, Vol.II, p.238.

99. Edward Dicey, 'Journalism New and Old', Fortnightly Review, LXXVII, May 1905, p.904.

100. Tom Taylor, in Leslie, Charles R., Autobiographical Recollections, edited, with a prefatory essay on Leslie as an artist, and selections from his correspondence, by Tom Taylor, 2 vols, 1860, vol. i, p. xviii.

101. See: Winton Tolles, Tom Taylor and the Victorian Drama, New York, 1940, passim.

the Liberals had christened 'Taxes upon Knowledge'. The 1819 Stamp Act, though directed specifically against the radical papers, had placed a barrier on the growth of a cheap press through imposing a due of 31/5d net on each paper: though reduced to 1d in 1833, its effect lasted until its final removal in 1855. A further restriction had been the Advertisement tax, fixed at 3s6d per advertisement in 1815, lowered to 18d in 1833 but not abolished until 1853. Another tax was levied until 1861 on all paper produced: a process which machinery had expanded by nearly 900% in the sixty years of the century, thus helping to create a significant reduction in the cost of the commodity.[102]

By the mid 50s, the 1d daily paper was in existence. The speed of growth encouraged the development of a paper's self-consciousness: readers came to know, within limits, what to expect not only of the political bias of its new reporting, but of the personalities and enthusiasim of its critics. In addition, there were a fast-increasing number

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102. See especially H.A. Innis, 'The English Press in the Nineteenth Century: An Economic Approach', University of Toronto Quarterly, XV, October 1945, pp.37-53.
Railways and telegraphy increased the speed and quantity of news which came to the offices of the growing number of newspapers: papers which were started to meet the demands created by England's increasing commercial strength for news of financial and manufacturing developments, of shipping movements and market prices. The use of steam power in printing processes dramatically increased the number of copies of any widely-circulated publication which could be produced.

of monthly, and, especially, weekly publications. Wilkie Collins, writing in Household Words in 1858, spoke of 'this age of periodicals',[103] and, like Bagehot in his article on the first Edinburgh reviewers, attempted to drawn an analogy between the speed of contemporary society and the suitability of short articles in such a crowded, changing and rather fragmentary world. The image of the periodical reader as railway traveller - "People take their literature in morsels, as they take sandwiches on a journey";[104] of the periodical itself as a train which has to be filled with

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103. Wilkie Collins, 'The Unknown Public', Household Words, 18, 21 August 1858, p.222.

There is a substantial literature on the growth of the periodicals in the C19th: to reproduce this information would be to cover well-trodden ground. Among the most helpful works are:

R.D. Altick, The English Common Reader, Chicago, 1957.
G. Carnall, 'The Monthly Magazine', Review of English Studies, 1954, 5, pp.158-64.
R.G. Cox, 'The Great Reviews', Scrutiny, 6, 1937, pp. 2-20.
R.G. Cox, 'The Reviews and Magazines', From Dickens to Hardy, ed. Boris Ford, 1958, pp.188-204.
Alvar Ellegård, 'The Readership of the Periodical Press in Mid-Victorian England', Göteborgs Universitets Arsskrift, Göteborg, 1957.
Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals, New York, 1930.
M. Houghton, 'British Periodicals of the Victorian Age: Bibliographies and Indexes', Library Trends, 7, April 1959, pp.554-565.
George Saintsbury, History of Nineteenth Century Literature, 1780-1895, 1896.
J. Shattock and M. Wolff (eds.), The Victorian Periodicals Press: samplings and soundings, Leicester, 1982.

104. Walter Bagehot, 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers', National Review, I, October 1855, pp. 253-284, reprinted in The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot, edited by Norman St. John-Stevas, 2 vols., 1965, vol. 1, pp. 309-341.

suitable, if disparate passengers[105] runs through the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the phenomenon of the contemporary periodical came under observation. The prevalence of the short article catered for an age self-consciously aware of change by producing an illusion of stability - the sense that even a rapidly expanding subject can be summarised with 'a slight pretension to systematic completeness'[106] and kept within the manageable bounds of a small number of pages - an illusion quickly broken by the rapidity with which the reader passed to the following article.

By 1870, the many comprehensive art reviews in the press tended to reflect the uneasy balance of change and security inherent within the publications in which they appeared. The writers of criticism - a genre favoured, at least so far as the Royal Academy and the Salon were concerned, by the majority of these new art periodicals - could create a sense of modernity, of progress, which co-existed with the perceivable increase in commercial prosperity: a sense which could be satisfied with the presentation of new paintings, of work in progress, and of artists' movements as urgent and essential news. On the other hand, the broad

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105. Henry James, 'The Science of Criticism', New Review, 4, May 1891, p.398.

106. Bagehot, 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers', Collected Works, vol. 1, p.310

criteria for judging a work of art which they set up - comprehensibility, fidelity to nature and accomplished, finished execution - rested firmly on the spectators' visual and emotional experience and subsequent expectations. With the exception of Ruskin, neither the critics, nor the art which the vast majority of them praised in the 1860s did much to challenge the spectator's vision of his or her surrounding world. During the next thirty years, however, the growing market for specialist art periodicals as well as for the general press, an increasing awareness of continental developments in art and, above all, the discussion of the question of a work's formal qualities as well as of its subject matter destroyed the relative homogeneity of criticism - broken only by violent personal preferences or by cries of outrage at such an obvious and isolated convention-flaunter as the late Turner - which had prevailed throughout the previous one hundred years.

CHAPTER III: PRESS AND CRITICS: 1878-1910[1]

> Art, at the present day, is being steadily and rapidly vulgarised (we do not here mean in the invidious sense); it appears to greater numbers of the people than formerly, and the gate of communication has had to be widened. Exhibited
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> Henry James, 'On Some Pictures Lately', Galaxy, XX, July 1875, p.89.

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1. This and the following chapter were written before the appearance of a useful article by Helene E. Roberts, 'Exhibition and review: the periodical press and the Victorian art exhibition system', pp.79-107, Victorian Periodical Press, ed. Shattock and Wo lf. Roberts does not substantially alter my argument in any way: indeed, she cites many of the same examples and draws similar conclusions. Her attention is above all focussed on what the critics themselves thought of their own role within the exhibition system, and their comments throughout the C19th on the British Institution, Society of British Artists, the National Institution of the Fine Arts, the Old and the New Societies of Painters in Water Colour and, of course, the Royal Academy. Her account closes with the opening of the Grafton Gallery in 1893, the moment when 'the commercial galleries had at last challenged the monopoly of the Royal Academy', (p.104). It thus does not overlap with that part of my thesis which is concerned with the innovatory developments in painting and criticism during the period.

A further relevant book which has appeared since I wrote these chapters: Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts 1820-1979, ed. Claire Richter Sherman with Adele M. Holcomb, Westport and London, 1981, especially Chapter 1,'Precursors and Pioneers' (Sherman with Holcomb), and Chapter 6,'Lady Dilke (1840-1904): The Six Lives of an Art Historian', (Colin Eisler). Women as Interpreters is, however, primarily concerned with women as art historians rather than as critics of contemporary art. Moreover, it tends towards potted biography rather than historical or literary analysis. It is, however, useful in indicating the breadth of interests held by the women working in this field, whether in England or America.

During the years that provide the central framework for discussion in this thesis, criticism of contemporary painting appeared in a huge variety of publications - daily newspapers, specialised and non-specialised periodicals, small circulation aesthetic magazines and professional journals. These drew their readership largely from the leisured and middle classes, the most habitual consumers of works of art, whether at a primary or secondary level of consumption.

In an attempt to bring some order to this apparent chaos of criticism's outlets and attitudes, I have divided this chapter into two sections. The first considers the different types of publication - both specialist and non-specialist - in which art criticism was most frequently found. As in chapter 2, an exhaustive survey of all newspapers and journals carrying such writing is not intended. Rather - in the non-specialist subdivision in particular - I mean to give an outline of the widely varying types of publication concerned, with some indication of their projected readerships, and an idea of the type of critical approach which they embodied.

The second section examines in more detail the backgrounds and views of those critics who individually carried the greatest weight in the Victorian and Edwardian press. This isolation of individuals is no hagiographic exercise (nor an excursion into demonology): for many readers during this period, criticism was reducible to the views of particular personalities. A

critic's name could, apparently, help sell a publication. 'It can scarcely be credited', wrote Alfred Thornton in the 1930s, reminiscing about art life in the 1890s:

> ...that on the scare-lines at street corners used to appear 'D.S.M. /D.S. MacColl/ on this or that'. But then there were no European complications to disturb us in 1893; all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds and we could cultivate aesthetics.[2]

I have subdivided these critics into two broad categories: those who can be classified as traditionalists, and those who, under the terms of Chapter 1, I designate the New Critics and their successors. This section does not attempt to deal with those aesthetic theorists whose writings undoubtedly formed an important contribution to the development of the art criticism of the time, and whose views are briefly referred to in later chapters, if they seldom or never contributed to the discussion of contemporary art in the press. Among these can be included Whistler (though, as the collected correspondence in The Gentle Art of Making Enemies reveals, he was a prolific contributor to letter columns on the subject of his own art); Leighton (especially influential in his lectures when President of the Royal Academy) and, more general in his impact on criticism, Walter Pater (who very seldom referred, even in private letters, to modern painting).

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2. Alfred Thornton, The Diary of An Art Student of the Nineties, 1938, p.31.

A. PRESS

i. Non-specialised Publications

The most striking feature of the daily press in the period 1870-1910 was the sheer number of newspapers on the market. Mays (later Willings) Press Directory tots up the figures annually until 1890: 1711 in 1875; 1986 in 1880; 2414 in 1885, and 2611 in 1890. The figures for periodical production in the corresponding years also show a rapid rise: 690 in 1875 (of which 535 were London based); 911 in 1880 (London, 660); 1090 in 1885 (London, 722) and 1346 in 1890 (no separate London figure given). Obviously, not all these newspapers and periodicals carried art criticism: many of the latter, in particular, were of far too specific a professional, trade or sectarian nature. However, the majority of national and major regional daily newspapers employed their own art critics, either on the permanent staff or working on a free lance basis.

The best-known, most influential newspaper critics worked, unsurprisingly, for the London daily papers, the section of the press in closest contact with the centre of national art production and consumption. The London morning papers of the period 1878-1910 comprise the following: names of their art critics, where ascertainable, are in the right hand column.

paper	date founded	critic
Morning Post	1772	
Times	1788	Tom Taylor Humphry Ward
Daily News	1846	Andrew Lang Mr. Woodrodde Miss Dyer often acted as a second string critic - 'Mr. Lang was frequently away, engaged in his multifarious literary work, and of late he only undertook the charge of the two principal exhibitions'.[3]
Daily Chronicle	1855	
Daily Telegraph	1855	i George Augustus Sala ii Phipps Jackson iii Claude Phillips (1897-1911)
Standard	1857	Frederick Wedmore
Citizen	1876	
Daily Graphic	1890	Joseph Ashby Sterry - 'an artist himself of no mean proficiency'.[4]
Morning	1892	
Morning Leader	1892	A.J. Finberg
Morning Herald	1892	

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3. 'Aliquis', 'Art Critics of To-day', Art Journal, XX, July 1892, p.193.

4. 'Art Critics of Today', p.194.

Daily Mail	1896
Morning Argus	1896
Daily Express	1900
Daily Report	1901
Daily Mirror	1903

The principle evening papers for the corresponding years consisted of the

Globe	1803	J.L. Baldry
Evening Standard	1827 - 1980	
Pall Mall Gazette	1865	R.A.M. Stevenson
Echo	1868	
St. James's Gazette	1880	
Evening News	1881-1980	
Star	1888	Bernard Shaw Joseph Pennell
Westminster Gazette	1893	J.A. Spender

Additionally, most major British cities - Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Belfast, for example - had, by the 1880s, two or more penny daily papers, many of which carried notices of at least local artistic concern. The successful papers had circulations of around 40,000 or 50,000: even those with a circulation around 20,000 could be considered profitable. The proliferation, from the 1870s onwards, of provincial halfpenny evening papers, concentrating, as they did, on telegraphic news, much

of which was concerned with sport or gambling, carried far less in the way of cultural coverage. Among these provincial papers, the Manchester Guardian, widely available and read outside Manchester itself, should be noted for its art criticism, written by Walter Armstrong and then, after Armstrong's appointment to the directorship of the National Gallery in Ireland in 1892, by Claude Phillips. Armstrong, a prolific critic, also had written for the Pall Mall Gazette, St. James's Gazette, and Newcastle Examiner.

It would be a mistake to think that the London papers listed above constituted a 'national' press in the modern sense of the word, at least until the end of the century. The repeal of Newspaper Stamp Duty, and the associated increase in the cost of sending large newspapers through the post, had helped to maintain this capital-centricity. Hence the criticism which appeared in these papers was primarily aimed at, and read by, those who had the opportunity to see the works described at first hand.

In some ways, the diversity suggested by the number of newspapers on the market is misleading. Alan Lee has made a rough calculation that in London in 1910, over a third of the morning circulation was controlled by three companies (Northcliffe, Cadbury and Pearson); that four-fifth of the evening circulation was controlled by the same three companies; and that over four-fifths of Sunday circulation was controlled

by four companies (J.H. Dalziel, Riddell, Lloyd and Northcliffe).[5] Although no reviewing was duplicated in the London papers, the proprietorial connections between provincial papers, especially those run by companies, were no doubt responsible for the fact that on occasion, identical criticism of exhibitions appeared in papers in different parts of the country.

Largely as a direct result of the speed at which reviews of exhibitions had to be composed, there is an over-riding tendency for reviews to degenerate into mere listings: a picture's artist, title, and 'a few lines of description, couched in non-critical language; a concise enumeration of the "points" of the greater works; some key to the painter's intention',[6] frequently sufficed. D.S. MacColl, writing in 1945, confirms how 'any preferences were effectively submerged in tepid lists of the mentioned', and comments that readers of the 1940s could imagine the state of affairs:

> ...by inverting the present manner of criticism, in which what are thought to be 'advanced' artists meet with the indiscriminate deference once awarded to Academicians.[7]

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5. Alan Lee, 'The Structure, Ownership and Control of the Press, 1855-1914', Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day, ed. George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate, 1978, p.127. Also see Lee, The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855-1914, 1976, passim.

6. Unsigned editorial, Artist, I, October 1880, p.305.

7. D.S. MacColl, Life, Work and Setting of Philip Wilson Steer, 1945, p.43.

This tendency to listing during the period under discussion was not, however, restricted to Academy shows; nor, by the end of the period, were the names of the old guard of Academicians the only ones which, when mentioned, called forth an automatic nod of approval. MacColl himself noted, in 1900, how in the last ten years, not only did preference in the hierarchy of lines allocated tend to be granted to those who had 'come over' from the New English Art Club (such as Sargent, Clausen, La Thangue and Edward Stott) rather than to the long-established Academicians, but he finds that the old method is applied to the New English itself, and 'we have scrupulous lists of all and sundry' among their exhibitors.[8]

Those critics on the London dailies whose opinions or style lift them above annotated cataloguing are examined in 3 (b). It is worth noting, though, that throughout the period, the criticism in The Times was popularly considered to be the most authoritative. Unsurprisingly, there appears to be a direct correlation between a paper's political outlook and its orientation, whether conservative or progressive, on artistic matters:/ One exception of this editorial correlation, however, was during the period 1897-1911, when Claude Phillips acted as art critic for the Daily Telegraph. Perhaps the apparent ideological discrepancy in this appointment is

a phenomenon which was not reproduced to such an extent in the more general magazines.

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8. D.S.M., 'New English Art, 1900', Saturday Review, XC, 24 November 1900, p.646.

explicable by a kinship factor: Phillips was first cousin to Lord Burnham, the paper's proprietor. The Telegraph's previous tendency to list gave way to a style sympathetic, to a certain degree, towards avant-garde developments.

On the whole, those few dailies which featured an art column at irregular intervals, rather than equating art with urgent news and concocting a notice to coincide with the opening of a particular exhibition, carried more informed writing. The Star, for example, printed a fortnightly column on artistic events, written for a brief period in 1888 by Joseph Pennell, Whistler's close friend, and then continued for some two decades by his wife Elizabeth - a task which she combined with writing criticism for the Daily Chronicle. The Morning Leader, which, like the Star, was aimed in general at a popular level, also periodically carried a regular column of serious art criticism.

Among the Sunday papers, the Observer and Sunday Times were the most consistent in their reporting of artistic events. The Sunday Times, during the period that Frank Rutter wrote for it, was a most enthusiastic supporter of progressive art movements.

Circulation figures for newspapers and for non-specialist periodicals are, of course, no direct evidence for the numbers of people who actually read the art criticism contained within.

Not that many of these figures are readily come by: 'We can only guess at the circulations of most of them during the period of secrecy between the 1850s and the 1930s. Then all but a few papers jealously guarded the volume of their sales; it was usually much less than was commonly supposed.'[9] Most of their business books have long since been discarded. Wadsworth does remind us, however, that in 1850, no daily newspaper had a circulation of more than 50,000; in 1905, none of over three quarters of a million.[10]

There seems, indeed, to be some evidence that art criticism was far from being among the more frequently enjoyed genres of journalism. Bernard Shaw reputedly called the art pages the least often read in a newspaper. Wedmore, in 1906 remarked that 'the general reader, here in England ... does not care greatly for the writing that he calls "Art Criticism".'[11]

The established monthly and quarterly publications already discussed in Chapter II continued to carry articles of general artistic interest at regular intervals. As Walter

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9. A.P. Wadsworth, 'Newspaper Circulations, 1800-1954', Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society, 1955, p.1.

10. 'Newspaper Circulations', p.3.

11. Frederick Wedmore, Whistler and Others, 1906, p.ix.

Besant indicated in 'Literature in the Magazines' (1892), such journals as the Quarterly, the Edinburgh, Contemporary, Nineteenth Century, and Macmillans, carried a certain weight among a small but 'very important class of readers' - a section of the population whose numbers can be estimated as being something below 100,000:

> Many of them are the journalists of the better class, the more cultivated of the professions, professors, lecturers, and schoolmasters, a sprinkling of the clergy, and the critics, historians, poets and novelists themselves. The influence of these people stretches out in all directions.[12]

Yet the future of such publications - especially the quarterly - was regarded as shaky. An anonymous writer for the Spectator remarked in 1895:

> It is more than ninety years since the Edinburgh and the Quarterly were started, and the chance of either of them reaching the century of life is generally declared to be remote ... No person of the day will willingly open periodicals published at such long intervals of time, or study articles so lengthy and sure to be so belated. They have been superseded, it is alleged, for all purposes of controversy or criticism by a swarm of monthly reviews, and even these latter, it is contended, are becoming too slow for the taste of an age which likes its criticism, like its muffins, to be brought up hot.[13]

Among the weeklies, the Spectator, Speaker, Saturday Review and Athenaeum allowed criticism of painting a prominent

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12. Unsigned article [Walter Besant], 'Literature in the Magazines', Author, 2, May 1892, p.406.

13. Unsigned article, 'The Future of the Quarterlies', Spectator, 75, 26 October 1895, p.551.

place. The Athenaeum was dominated from 1861-1901 by F.G. Stephens: Roger Fry subsequently took over. The Spectator employed, after W.M. Rossetti, Harry Quilter, D.S. MacColl and F. Taylor. R.A.M. Stevenson joined the staff of the Saturday Review in 1885, during the editorship of Walter Pollock.[14] George Moore was the best known of the Speaker's critics.

A different type of weekly publication, aimed at a less highly educated audience, was the illustrated newspaper, such as the Illustrated London News (1843 - to date) and the Graphic (1869 - 1932). The former, in particular, carried dutiful, conservatively informative notices of the major London exhibitions.

Monthly magazines aimed at general entertainment, such as Cassell's Family Magazine, also contained coverage of artistic matters. In its articles and reproduction, Cassell's favoured, as might be anticipated, the narrative/sentimental formula of much Royal Academy work. Although their critic[15] at times felt a need to defend the subject matter of the painting he wrote about, the 'doll and pinafore' type of art, for example, 'sneered at by the advanced critic of

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14. Unsigned obituary, 'Death of Mr. R.A.M. Stevenson', Pall Mall Gazette, 19 April 1900, p.3. Sidney Colvin, in the Dictionary of National Biography, 1901 Supplement, III, p. 356, maintains that Stevenson was writing for the Saturday Review from 1882, but the tone of many of the pieces from these earlier years makes it unlikely that this was on a regular basis.

15. Arthur Fish signed many of the art pieces in Cassell's, and nothing in the style or the opinions voiced in the remainder of the magazine's articles on art provides evidence for

to-day',[16] he perennially did so on the grounds that it is popular with the general public. Such works as the magazine reproduces - for example the cloyingly sentimental My Crown and Sceptre (T.C. Gotch) or A.J. Elsley's A Dead Heat and Good-Bye, 'command the attention of the majority of the Exhibition'.[17] The criterion of 'success', the ability to 'draw general attention' is continually invoked in relation to artistic matters. So is patriotism. Thus Cassell's welcomes the productions of the Newlyn School as representing one of the most distinctive movements in English art since the Pre-Raphaelites, and as being :

> ...one which will be more enduring, more popular, in the best sense of that word, and decidedly more national.[18]

Another, weekly, publication from the same proprietors was Cassell's Saturday Journal (1883-1921), also intended for family consumption. Primarily, it consisted of short joky paragraphs containing snippets of personalised news, short stories, and 'human interest' features: only the most popular artists appeared in the series 'A Chat With ...' These pieces demystify their cultural subjects, sometimes at more than one remove: Herkomer, for example, tells chatty stories about his sitters, from Tennyson to Wagner, recounting

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16. Unsigned article, 'Pictures of English Child Life', Cassell's Family Magazine, 92, May 1896, p.463.

17. 'English Child Life', p.463.

18. Unsigned article, 'Pictures of Sailors and the Sea', Cassell's Family Magazine, 92, March 1896, p.275.

how he plays the phonograph to his posers. Implicitly, all are thus pulled into the comfortable sphere of familial activity, and are thus rendered potential members of the reader's own homely evenings.[19] As emphatically as the Family Magazine, the art reproduced seems designed to reinforce the consumer's perception of the ideological status quo, either by means of society or royalty portraits or through Burton Barberesque animals and children.

In addition to the popularity and consequent commercial viability of these weekly magazines of general interest, sporadic attempts were made to launch new monthly publications aimed specifically at leisured and professional members of society with literary and artistic interests. All, however, failed to find a firm market.

One of these short lived monthly reviews, the Albemarle (January - September 1892) showed itself exceptionally sympathetic to modern art movements. Edited jointly by Hubert Crackanthorpe and H.W. Wilkins, its subject matter ranged from politics and social questions, through education, travel, literature and art. Proclaiming its intention to

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19. Unsigned article, 'A Chat with Herkomer', Cassell's Saturday Journal, XIII, 10 October 1894, p.62. Herkomer and H. Stacy Marks (8 May 1894) were the only artists appearing in this regular series during 1894.

encourage independence of thought, not limiting itself by subject or line to any particular group of readers, it frequently juxtaposed opposing viewpoints (for example, two articles on the Primrose League, one favouring the involvement of women in politics, one scathingly denouncing such a development.) Thus one of the most prominent English reactionary critics, W.B. Richmond, contributed as well as D.S. MacColl. But this open policy did little to conceal the Albemarle's evident preference for change in both political and cultural life. In discussing art, it showed a considerable bias towards developments in France, reflected particularly in articles by L. Bayard Klein and Charles Furse on 'Modern French Art and its Critics'. Financial difficulties, however, forced it to close down after only nine issues, preventing it from establishing a lasting progressive influence.

Another publication with a brief life span, the Whirlwind (1890), run by the Hon. Stuart Erskine and Herbert Vivian, and dubbing itself 'A lively and eccentric Newspaper', pursued a policy of art criticism which illustrates how progressive artistic attitudes might exist in complete opposition to social and political attitudes: an extraction of the 'new' for the sake of fashionable, often exclusive, novelty. The Whirlwind denounced Socialism as 'the imminent national danger of the day ... a vermin, that must be

relentlessly pursued and knocked on the head'.[20] It made a dismissive attack on the concept of universal suffrage: 'it would be as disastrous for the country for women to obtain the suffrage, as for it to be conferred upon children or dogs'.[21] It could, certainly, be argued that by 1890, Impressionism was not the most avant-garde of art forms, but within English cultural circles, there was still something daring, innovatory in the editorial announcement that 'In art we shall adhere to the Impressionist school'[22] proclaiming with self-boosting cynicism that 'ART CRITICISM is to-day fallen into contempt',[23] that it is practised either by the head of a firm of picture-dealers, who may be supposed to know everything, or by a lady-friend of the editor, who may be trusted to know nothing, and who relies on the annotated list supplied to her by her superior:

> We are of the opinion that the public would far prefer to this perpetual log-rolling and bolstering-up of decayed reputations, to hear and judge of, the responsible views of a representative of the workers, who are writing on canvas the history of what is vital in the art of today.[24]

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20. Unsigned, 'Introductory', Whirlwind, I, 28 June 1890, p.2.

21. 'Introductory', Whirlwind, p.2.

22. 'Introductory', Whirlwind, p.1.

23. 'Introductory', Whirlwind, p.2.

24. 'Introductory', Whirlwind, p.2.

The spokesman introduced in this faintly parodic revolutionary register was Walter Sickert. Sickert also contributed cartoon portraits of eminent figures with each number.

Like the Whirlwind, the Bat (1885-1888) seems to have been aimed at a politically conservative, leisured audience. Its articles (on, for example, racing and the stock market), its advertisements (for restaurants, book makers, variety shows and money lenders) and what Richard Hoggart (in the context of twentieth century popular Sunday papers) calls a 'pseudo-moral Janus glance',[25] condemning 'dirty French books' which present 'filth in various degrees of foulness' (coupled with the names of publishers who can safely be assumed to produce works 'of a filthy nature')[26] would suggest a target of the would-be young-blood-about-town. An interest in modern French art is, in a manner analogous to the Whirlwind's policy, assumed to go hand in hand with such tastes. During its short life, the Bat, indeed, was among the periodicals most likely to notice and record the avant-garde. In May 1886, its correspondent (possibly George Moore, despite Moore's retrospective vision of himself jeering at

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25. Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, 1957, p.176.

26. Unsigned review, 'Half-a-Dozen Enthusiasts', Bat, II, 25 May 1886, p.580.

this exhibition)[27] not only praised the Impressionist exhibitors, but also Seurat's controversial Dimanche à la Grande Jatte, describing it as resembling 'a modernised version of ancient Egypt'.[28] Moore was a regular contributor to this periodical, in addition to his brother Augustus's Hawk (1888-1893), a publication apparently designed for a similar readership, since it entitled itself, in self-explanatory manner, 'a smart journal for young men about town'.

The early twentieth century witnessed the founding of several new weekly magazines aimed at a much wider market: the Nation (1907-1921), New Statesman (1913 - to date) and, particularly important to art criticism, the New Age (1894-1938). The New Age, founded in 1907 by Bernard Shaw, Holbrook Jackson and A.R. Orage,[29] was edited for its first year by the two latter men and subsequently by Orage alone. It was notable for the enthusiasm it showed for modern, experimental art and literature. Although associated especially with the development of Imagism, it never became the mouthpiece for any one coterie: rather, it provided a

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27. In Confessions of a Young Man, Moore describes how he went with his friend 'Marshall' (the painter Lewis Welden Hawkins) to the exhibition of paintings being held in the rue Lafitte 'to jeer at a group of enthusiasts that willingly forfeit all delights of the world in the hope of realising a new aestheticism'. (Confessions, 1888, p.49). But Moore's presentation of his attitudes in this work is notoriously unreliable.

28. Bat, 25 May 1886, p.186.

29. See Philip Mairet, A.R. Orage: a memoir, New York 1966 (1st edition 1936); Wallace Martin, The New Age under Orage, Manchester and New York, 1967).

format for aesthetic discussion. Thus, in artistic matters, whilst articles in the years before the first World War reproduced and discussed the works of Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, Wyndham Lewis and Picasso, the magazine's resident art critic from 1910, Walter Sickert, spoke out with measured conviction against moves towards abstractionism, against the :

> ...impudent theories of Matisse and Picasso, who, talented themselves, have invented an academic formula which is the salvation of all <u>arrivistes</u> without talent.[30]

The increasing number of periodicals in which cultural criticism appeared generated a proportionately large number of discussions in the press about its quality. In an article entitled 'The Decay of Criticism' (1882), Grant Allen initially exonerated art criticism along with scholarly, theatrical and religious criticism from his strictures. But then he launched into an attack on the ignorance and fallibility of many current writers: a breed imbued with :

> ...glib superficiality and imposing confidence about every conceivable object, from a play or a picture to a sermon or a metaphysical essay.[31]

They combine utter indifference to subject matter 'with the vulgar unscrupulousness of pretentious ignorance'.[32] The

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30. Walter Sickert, 'Mesopotamia-Cézanne', New Age, 5 March 1914, p.569, reprinted in <u>A Free House!</u>, 1947.

31. Grant Allen, 'The Decay of Criticism', <u>Fortnightly Review</u>, xxxvii, March 1882, p.345.

32. 'Decay of Criticism', p.345.

public themselves are as culpable: Philistines, their interest lies in business and pleasure, not in literature or in any other form of cultural consumption which demands effort. Whilst Allen does not seem to draw any distinction between 'criticism' and 'reviewing' - a distinction which, as we shall see, became as important in artistic as literary circles - he does here call our attention to one notable factor: the unwillingness of the general public to put themselves out to understand more complicated forms of criticism, just as many were notably averse to having their visual expectations challenged. As the formal content of painting developed during the later years of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth centuries, so this tendency became more pronounced, leading to a widening gap between the readers of the new and more demanding criticism and those who preferred to leave it, and the painting which it spoke for, well alone. Increasingly, as Chapter VIII indicates, that art criticism which concentrated on technique was to be found in specialist periodicals.

ii. Specialised Publications

An examination of Willing's Press Directory for the last quarter of the nineteenth century reveals a substantial growth in the number of periodicals specifically related to leisure and recreation: periodicals dealing specifically with artistic matters form no exception to this trend.

The most comprehensive guide to Victorian art periodicals is Helene Roberts' short article and check list which appeared in the July 1970 number of the Victorian Periodicals Newsletter.[33] It indicates many short lived publications which seem to have folded rapidly due to lack of capital, advertisers and sales. On the other hand, the market appeared large enough to support widely-circulating rivals to the Art Journal. Doubtless, this was largely due to the growth in wealth and purchasing power of the middle classes: a class which, as contemporary critics frequently pointed out, was replacing the aristocracy as patrons of art. Formerly, commented the Fortnightly, art was 'indulged in as a luxury or whim, by a select and exclusive caste'. Now it is 'the province of the prosperous middle class'.[34]

The Art Journal continued until 1912, Marcus Bourne Huish succeeding Carter Hall as editor in 1879. Retaining this position until late 1892, Huish was credited with doing wonders

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33. Helene E. Roberts, 'British Art Periodicals of the Eighteent and Nineteenth Centuries', Victorian Periodicals Newsletter, No.9, July 1970, pp.2-10, with an unpaginated checklist. I have found very few omissions in her listings.

34. Ferdinand Rothschild, 'The Expansion of Art', Fortnightly Review, XLI, January 1885, p.66.

    See also:

    Unsigned article (? W.H. Leeds), 'Our Royal-Academical Lounge', Fraser's Magazine, V, July 1832, p.709.

    Unsigned review, 'Royal Academy', Athenaeum, no.1124, 12 May 1849, p.474.

for the publication:

> He not only made it a tolerably sound and reliable authority on art matters, but he enlisted the services of many of the best writers of the day, and he gave the magazine a more popular character and a far wider circulation than it formerly possessed.35

He introduced the Art Annual (1884-1915), which appeared as the Christmas number of the Art Journal. A similar venture, the Easter Art Annual, was instituted between 1896-1903. According to Lewis Hind, however, at the time sub-editor of the Art Journal, around 1888 the proprietors of the magazine had decided that it was 'stodgy'; that, in addition to Huish, a Consulting Editor should be chosen. For £100 p.a., W.E. Henley took on the post, attending the Tuesday committee meetings, and writing most of the last four pages of each issue, which dealt with current artistic events. The specific appointment, Hind claims, was a result of Henley's previous editorship of the Magazine of Art, and:

> ...because, being a friend of R.L. Stevenson and of his cousin, R.A.M. Stevenson, who was trying to be a painter in France, Henley was well informed on French painting, which was then beginning to inspire the younger British artists and to distress the elder Royal Academicians.36

The format - a combination of articles on historical and topical matters, some scholarly, some chatty - remained broadly

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35. Unsigned, 'From Month to Month', Artist, XIII, December 1892, p.370.

36. C. Lewis Hind, Naphtali, 1926, p.51.

the same throughout its publication. Yet despite its conservative appearance, it was relatively liberal in its approach to modern art. Even before Henley's appointment, it remained uncensorious towards the Impressionists, for example, publishing a laudatory obituary article on Manet in 1884, as well as other far from condemnatory passing references.

The Magazine of Art (1878-1904) was, throughout its existence, the Art Journal's undoubted rival. Initially, it seemed aimed at a somewhat more intellectual readership. The introduction to the Magazine's inaugural issue emphasises the high seriousness of its subject matter. It defined art as that which provides 'recreation and enjoyment for the mind',[37] but emphasises that its importance lies not just in its potential to create pleasure, but in the fact that it is itself 'the embodiment of a conception of the mind',[38] and that, therefore, it raises questions worthy of philosophical study. The need for the careful theoretical analysis of art, it claimed, had in the past been too frequently overlooked:

> The great works of great masters, though simple, are not easy to understand ... Many men of great attainments in other respects, not giving themselves ... necessary trouble, judge of art with the minds of children; often drawn by what is homely, soft, or sweet, and offended by the refinement and severity of proved excellence.[39]

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37. Unsigned, 'Introduction', Magazine of Art, I, May 1878, p.2.

38. 'Introduction', Magazine of Art, I, p.3.

39. 'Introduction', Magazine of Art, I, p.4.

But the articles which appeared under the first two editorships, of Arthur Trendell (1878-80) and Eric Robertson (1880-1) were pitched not at this promised level of aesthetic elucidation, but rather seemed intended to entertain and to inform - on a purely factual level - as wide a public as possible: in other words, to capture the Art Journal's readership. The formula incorporated articles on 'Our Living Artists' - featuring such Academy regulars as Lord Leighton, Vicat Cole, P.H. Calderon and G.F. Watts - and guided tours of popular sketching grounds, such as Cornwall, Prague, Raglan Castle and the Wye. The note of leisure is stressed when :

> ...we wend our way to the artistic quarters, where the artists, a kindly race, permit us to spend a pleasant half-hour in their society.[40]

Other general interest topics covered in the early issues include wood engraving, Italian monumental sculpture, and the colours of precious stones. Although some reviews of the larger exhibitions appeared, coverage of contemporary art was severely restricted by the early press date demanded by the large number of engravings which the Magazine contained: a difficulty which disappeared, with a consequent widening of contemporary coverage, when the last two decades of the nineteenth century brought an increase in the number of

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40. Unsigned feature, 'Half Hours in the Studios', Magazine of Art, I, May 1878, pp. 23-28

photographs reproduced. But in the early years of the Magazine, its greatest enthusiasm was reserved for the works shown at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, a show which the anonymous reviewer(s) were determined to see as yearly improving in quality.

The character of the Magazine changed somewhat under the editorship of Henley (1881-1886), becoming far more sympathetic to modern French movements in art, and Impressionism in particular. Whistler, also, came in for support. It reverted to a policy of caution, however, under Sidney Gilpin (1886) and M.H. Spielmann (1887-1904).

Pitched at a less popular level than these two magazines was the Portfolio (1870-1893). Launched in 1870, it was, throughout its existence, edited by P.G. Hamerton. The English administration of the periodical was delegated to Seeley, with Hamerton making annual visits from his French home. Its innovatory qualities were demonstrated in its mode of illustration. Whilst other contemporary magazines confined their graphic material to line engravings and woodcuts, the Portfolio not only published drawings by means of autotype photography but included etched plates, in accordance with Hamerton's desire to make this art form widely recognised in England. The first volume, in addition to the etchings on India paper mounted in the text to accompany Hamerton's series The Unknown River, included etchings by Legros,

Cucinotta and Grenaud.

Such production methods, coupled with the employment of bold type, thick fine surfaced paper, and wide margins, meant that the magazine cost an expensive 2/6d, and hence was necessarily aimed at a small, already appreciative audience. In its second year, the lengthy autotype process was replaced by using the Woodbury method. Subsequently, various methods of photo-engraving were employed as they were perfected, replacing these carbon processes of photography. The Portfolio was one of the first English periodicals to introduce reproductions of pen drawings. Graphic work reproduced in these first two years included work by Watts, Poynter, Burne-Jones, Calderon, H.S. Marks and Millais - thus indicating that the periodical's market was to be found among upholders of the artistic establishment.

Yet the Portfolio was not just intended for the passive consumer of art, but for the practising artist as well. It emphasised the importance of technical knowledge. The magazine's initial aim and intended audience was stated in its Advertisement: to present:

> Works of Art of various kinds, but always such as are likely to interest a cultivated public; and to accompany them with literature by writers of proved ability, superior to mere letter press, and more readable than pure criticism or cataloguing.[41]

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41. Advertisement for the Portfolio, Bookseller, 4 January 1870, p.35.

The format of lengthy, informed articles, the stress on graphic design, and the balance of interest between the practitioner and the connoisseur continued until 1893, when both Seeley and the Portfolio's publisher, Macmillan, decided that change was necessary in order to distinguish it from other art periodicals which had been launched since its inception. They took into consideration the prejudice which

> ...had set in against big books, and decided to reduce its size and to increase the letter press considerably, devoting each number to one subject, written by the same author, and hence complete in itself.[42]

The modification was evidently financially successful, since Mrs. Hamerton reported that its sale increased greatly.[43] But now subtitled Monographs on Artistic Subjects, the Portfolio can no longer be considered a major vehicle for the criticism of contemporary art. Its long standing bias towards the art of the past was reflected in the annual choice of subject. Hamerton contributed the first, on The Etchings of Rembrandt; further numbers included monographs on Malta, Josiah Wedgwood, Bastien Lepage and Rossetti.

But two periodicals, the Artist and the Studio, placed a far greater stress on modern art than did the publications already mentioned. Both were aimed at the practising artist,

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42. Philip Gilbert Hamerton, Philip Gilbert Hamerton: an autobiography 1834-1858, and a memoir by his wife, 1858-1894, 1897, p.611. (E. Hamerton),

43. Autobiography, p.613.

as well as at the general reader.

The alternative titles by which the Artist (1880-1902) was known (Artist and Journal of Home Culture; Artist, Photographer and Decorator) emphasise its potential bias towards such practitioners. Its partial emphasis on design, and art in industry, led to its being authorised as the official organ of the Art Schools of England from 1897-1902. The magazine's editorial staff themselves considered it 'an essentially technical organ for the true artist - not a popular magazine for the soi-disant "artistic" million'.[44] It was intended to fill a gap in the market. Those

> ... who paint, engrave, draw, etch, design, and model, whether it be for gain or for amusement, or who teach these things, or are being taught them, or who make or supply the apparatus for these pursuits [are] a large and increasing class; and there can be little doubt, we think, that it calls for a representation in the London press.[45]

As the introductory editorial went on to point out, other professional bodies - clergy, medical men, lawyers, architects, musicians, engineers, even mechanics - already had their own particular journals.

During the Artist's early life, under the editorship of

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44. Unsigned editorial, 'To Our Readers', Artist, XV, May 1894, p.129.

45. Unsigned editorial, Artist, I, January 1880, p.17.

Charles Kains Jackson, considerable coverage was given to new modes of painting, particularly in France. Perhaps the fact that it considered itself to be a journal for practising artists aided its support for the Impressionists (especially in the writings of E.M. Rashdall), making it less hesitant in praising styles in the case of which an understanding of the technicalities and theories involved was a great aid to their comprehension and appreciation.

In the 1880s, the magazine's chief interest in British painting was situated not in the Royal Academy summer Exhibition, but in the activities of Whistler, the Society of British Artists and the New English Art Club. This last preference was emphasised by the serialisation of the major testimony of the New English artists, Francis Bate's The Naturalistic School of Painting, between March - October 1886. The paper discarded the crowded narrative content of many mid-Victorian works. The reviewer of the Manchester Art Exhibition of 1887, for example, exclaimed in sorrow :

> "Ramsgate Sands" and the "Derby Day"? Alas, alas! Is it true that these were once thought among the important achievements of English art?[46]

But when Viscount Mountmorres took over the paper in May 1894, it became noticeably more conservative and insular in outlook. The Summer Exhibition re-assumed an outmoded

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46. Unsigned review, 'The Manchester Art Exhibition', Artist, VIII, 1 June 1887, p.189.

importance. This change was perhaps in contra-distinction to the Studio, whose format the Artist now certainly appeared to be rivalling through an enlargement from thirty two to forty eight pages, higher quality paper and printing techniques, and the greatly increased incorporation of photographs, particularly in the area of applied art. Like the Studio, it introduced graphic art as well as photographs, including reproductions of drawings by such artists as Beardsley and Arthur J. Gaskin. That the magazine had felt under threat from the newcomer is evident in the sniping comments made about the quality of the Studio's early numbers:

> The June number of the Studio is before us and the illustrations are so good and so numerous that we are left in the vulgar attitude of wonder at the financial side of the matter. How is it done for fourpence halfpenny? [The Artist retailed at 6d] For among other marvels our contemporary manages to sell at cheap discount terms. The only explanation seems to be a saving on the literary side. The Bates and the Ellises, [notwithstanding the support the Artist had given to the former seven years previously] the Pennells and the Sickerts, earnest persons of their hour and suburb, and the little masters of the day before yesterday, abound in the Studio columns and presumably they are cheaper - as they are certainly less nice - than the Stevensons and the Henleys, the Longs and the Wedmores whom if we judged the paper from the high level of its illustrations we should expect to find imparting to it its literary taste.47

C. Lewis Hind, for five years sub-editor of the Art Journal, and a regular contributor of a weekly article for the

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47. Unsigned review, 'Etching and Engraving', Artist, XIV, 1 July 1893, p.221.

Globe, 'Art and Artists', felt, by 1893, the need to found 'a new, more up-to-date journal of the Arts'.[48] Mentioning the project to a friend, John Lane, he was introduced to Charles Holme, a man not just with a similar project in mind, but with the financial assets to support it. Hind characterised Holme as a practical man, well aware of the need for a provocative launching article. The stimulus for this came with the introduction to Hind of Aubrey Beardsley. Looking through the proferred portfolio of his drawings, Hind :

> ...said to myself, 'Either I'm crazy, or this is genius'.
>
> Here was the "sensational send-off" that we wanted. What better than the discovery of a new genius by a new journal? I suggested that Joseph Pennell should write the article on Aubrey Beardsley, and that Beardsley should design the cover for The Studio, which he did. When No.1 appeared in April, 1893, it was the talk of the town in art circles.[49]

Hind, however, instead of assuming the Studio's editorship, took on what he considered to be the more challenging charge of the newly-launched Pall Mall Budget, and Holme gave the

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48. Hind, Naphtali, p.59.

49. Naphtali, p.62.

post to his friend Gleeson White.[50]

Apart from its subtitle, 'An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art', the Studio carried no statement of policy. The contents of its first number, apart from the

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50. C. Lewis Hind, who had begun his career as a free-lance journalist, writing for the Daily News, Titbits and Belgravia, among other publications, whilst simultaneously following a business career in lace, later moved from the Pall Mall Budget to become editor of the Academy.

    Charles Holme, like Hind, came from a background in trade (his father specialising in silk, whilst he himself moved to Bradford in 1872 to concentrate on wool). His import/export connections with Turkestan, India, China and Japan led him to visiting Japan in 1892, a trip which consolidated his interest in Far Eastern Art, something which the pages of the Studio reflect.

    Biographical material on Gleeson White is scanty. He is best remembered for his authoritative work English Illustration in the Sixties: 1855-1870. A practising artist himself, especially in the field of book-cover and book-plate design, he appears also to have run a bookseller's business, or stationers shop with an attached circulating library, from his home in Christchurch, Hants. His graphic preoccupations, like Holme's, are strongly evident in the Studio.

publicity-provoking Beardsley article, ranged from R.A.M. Stevenson on 'The Growth of Recent Art'; a piece on Leighton as a modeller in clay; Frank Brangwyn on the suitability of Spain for sketching; Gleeson White on designing book plates; 'The Newlyn Point of View, by a Newlyn Painter'; C.W. Furse summarising the current exhibition at the Grafton Gallery and, in addition, a variety of notes on the Applied Arts, Studio Gossip, news from Paris and notices of recent publications. The nearest the magazine comes to an editorial is the unsigned, regular feature entitled 'The Lay Figure Speaks'. This page is continually represented as being written by a non-practising observer with a strong interest in modern art, its development and reception: an exploder of silliness and falseness yet one who has little respect for traditional authority wielded for its own sake. In other words, the range of type of article was extremely similar to that found in the Art Journal and Magazine of Art, intending to appeal simultaneously to the professional and amateur practising artist, and to the passive consumer. Its difference lies in the stress on new directions in the pure and applied arts, both in England and on the Continent, and in the lavish use it made of reproductions illustrating these tendencies. The magazine's involvement with artistic execution was emphasised by its monthly prize competitions, their chief object being:

> . . . to encourage students to reduce their theories of ornament to practice, and to do so within certain limits which correspond to those ruling in the various industries that employ design in their finished products.[51]

Divided into three sections - A. Industrial Design, B. drawings suitable for process reproduction and C. home/amateur art, under which heading came such areas as needle-work, wood-carving and photography - these competitions were aimed at encouraging students in public and private art schools, as well as bona-fide amateurs. Professional artists and designers were only able to compete when entered for a different class than that on which they were professionally engaged. These competitions fulfilled a commercial function for the artists concerned: many of the prize designs found purchasers, and commissions were frequently offered by firms to prize winners. Such potential publicity greatly aided the sale of the magazine.

The Studio, combining enthusiasm for the modern with considerable attention to visual presentation, formed a model which was consciously followed by several continental successors. In January 1896, George Hirsh, in Munich, launched Die Jugend, which the Studio itself commended for

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51. Unsigned, 'The Editor's Room. The Studio Prize Competitions', Studio, 3, April 1894, p.I.

its variety of content and illustration.[52] Also in Germany Pan followed the Studio's example, as did the Austrian Ver Sacrum, the French Art et Decoration, and the Italian Emporium.

Small circulation aesthetic magazines, linking artistic and literary matters, frequently reproducing works of contemporary art as well as writing about them, proliferated in the late 1880s and, especially, the 1890s. The inception of the genre and the brief lines of individual publications have generally been well chronicled.[53] Their development would have been impossible without the same technological developments in reproductive techniques that enabled the growth of the more widely circulating art magazines, let alone the popular illustrated journals, but their conscious aestheticism in preparation as well as content, their choice of expensive paper and its liberal employment in wide margins, their meticulous attention to type faces and textual decorations, all indicate a belief in producing a production which appears to be the result of individual care. This aesthetic approach links directly to the distinction in financing the two types of magazine. Whereas those aimed at a wide circulation looked to cover costs partly through

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52. Unsigned feature, 'Studio-Talk', Studio, 6, January 1896, p.251.

53. see E. Lenore Casford, The Magazines of the 1890s, Oregon 1929; J.R. Tye, Literary Periodicals of the Eighteen Nineties: A Survey of the Monthly and Quarterly Magazines and Reviews, unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1970.

direct sales, but principally from advertising revenue, the small review, whilst also depending partly on sales, relied more heavily from the money put into ventures by individual backers. Its reliance on the considerable assistance which could be brought by sales, however, is reflected in the prices charged for such publications. Whereas the Spectator and Saturday Review retailed at 6d, the Magazine of Art and Art Journal cost 1/-, rising to 1/6, privately produced aesthetic magazines habitually cost 2s 6d, even 5s. The top end of the range was represented by the pricey and pretentious Anglo-Saxon Review, aimed, in its imitation tooled leather binding, at the would-be connoisseur, and costing a guinea a volume.

The first of these small scale aesthetic magazines, the Century Guild Hobby Horse (1884-1892), provides an interesting example of the economics of their production. The magazine itself was closely connected with the beliefs which lay behind the Arts and Crafts Movement. A.H. Mackmurdo (1851-1942), together with Selwyn Image (1849-1930), had founded the Century Guild of Artists in 1882. Mackmurdo thought of the magazine as leading directly out of the formation of this organisation. He lamented the same losses in contemporary cultural life as had his mentor Ruskin. Believing it essential for the artist to take delight in the production of his work, he considered that, in :

> the applied arts, apart from the work done by Morris and William de Morgan, the divorce had become complete between the designer and the executant; that beauty was sacrificed to profit.[54]

He included the work of "our great popular school" of painters in his condemnation, as being, in company with architects and book designers, 'too influenced by commercial interests, too dependent upon the political eminence of our country'[55] to deserve the name "Art".

The magazine covered aesthetic matters in general rather than concentrating on the Guild's work, although advertisements refer the reader to the availability of their designs in furniture, wallpapers, stained glass, tapestries, cretonnes, silks, painting, and architecture. The readers were left in no doubt as to their editors' intentions. Issues I - III contained a statement on the contents page to the effect that 'the Century Guild of Artists seeks to express its thoughts on subjects bearing upon art, as they rise before the public mind': a statement which is expanded in all subsequent issues to link the magazine firmly to its parent movement, and to emphasise the stress which it placed upon the idea of the Unity of the Arts. The Guild itself is presented as an organisation which is based on this supposed

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54. A.H. Mackmurdo, History of the Arts and Crafts Movement, unpublished, William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, p.147. (Typescript)
55. History of the Arts and Crafts Movement, pp.200-201.

organicism: a group of craftsmen, all gaining from working with one another, none thereby losing their individuality, all contributing towards a whole whose integrity would be shattered by the removal of any one of its elements.[56] In a later issue, Image offers an explanation of the meaning of Unity of Art:

> We mean that all kinds of invented Form, and Tone, and Colour are alike true and honourable aspects of Art, whatever the material or purpose may be which accompanies them.[57]

The acceptance of this explanation, he believes, constitutes a challenge to the popular conception of "art". The examination of these qualities of Form and Tone will involve

> looking not only at, for example, Raphael's Madonna di San Sisto, already widely accepted as an artistic work, but at the productions of the unknown inventor of patterns which decorate a wall or water-pot.

In his manner of looking at artists' work, he reveals strong formalistic beliefs:

> That the one employs himself in representing the human form and the highest human interests, while the other employs himself in representing abstract lines and masses, this, so far as the claims to being an artist goes, makes no difference.[58]

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56. Selwyn Image, 'A Lecture on Art' (delivered December 1882), The Century Guild Hobby Horse, I, 1884, p.38.

57. Selwyn Image, 'On the Unity of Art', Hobby Horse, II, January 1887, p.4.

58. 'On the Unity of Art', p.5.

Nothing in art has the same significance for Image as design: whether the graphic techniques used 'form a Venus or a toadstool does not at the moment matter: all that matters is abstract line and mass'.[59]

The readership of the Hobby Horse was not extensive. John Addington Symonds put forward the hypothesis that it was put off by the magazine's over-didacticism. He objected, for example, to the fact that it stated its aim as existing as an 'attempt to rouse a finer interest in the Arts ... it always seems to me impolitic to press such intentions on a possible unsympathetic public'.[60] Perhaps the magazine's greatest failing was that it had no clear concept of its public. The formalist ideas which it contained could well have been pressed to the service of new movements in art, as happened, in a mild form, within the pages of the Studio. But modern art, with the exception of Millet, some of the symbolists, and the inward looking English successors to the Pre-Raphaelites, was continually treated with dislike or distrust, or was simply ignored. Whilst some innovatory qualities are present in the magazine's production, particularly in the way new techniques in graphic art and reproduction

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59. Selwyn Image, 'On Design', Hobby Horse, II, July 1887, p.119.

60. Letter to Herbert Horne, 13th December, 1888, The Letters of John Addington Symonds, ed. Herbert M. Schueller and Robert Peters, Detroit, 3 vols, 1967-69, vol. III, p.322.

were incorporated, its expensive format hardly aided these novelties in reaching a wider circle. More noticeably, the text itself continually refers backwards in time, lauding the classical and Renaissance periods as epochs when conditions in society allowed the production of nowadays unmatchable works of artistic excellence. Cries of lament are far stronger than pleas for change.

The Century Guild Hobby Horse is unusual in that records remain which show how restricted was the circulation of the small magazines, when they failed to attend to the demands of any wide based market and preached unfamiliar ideas. The cost of each copy was a high 2/6d. Circulation figures only exist for the first twelve issues (January 1886 to December 1889): subsequent issues were published by the proprietors at the Chiswick Press and the records have not survived. Of these twelve issues, 500 copies were printed of nos. 1-4; 600 of nos. 5-8, and 750 thereafter. Much of the circulation was by private subscription: the main outlet for private sale appears to have been Dunthorne's, the printsellers, where the figures mounted steadily in the first year - 33 of issue I sold; 52 of II; 101 of III and 143 of IV. The number of subscribers also grew slowly: 15 by the end of 1886, 30 by June of the following year, and 35 by December.[61]

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61. All these figures are taken from the records of Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., published on microfilm by Chadwyck-Healey & Co. Index Reference Letter C. 13, 55-58.

Judging by the slow increase in copies printed, the many prospectuses sent out by Kegan Paul did not have any great impact.[62] By 1891 the magazine was apparently only available to subscribers.[63] It does not seem to have attracted much interest outside the circles of those who were already committed to the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement, who were interested in aesthetic matters, both in the fine arts and literature, and who, in many cases, knew a proportion of the contributors personally. 'Its restricted personality is really to be lamented', wrote Matthew Arnold to Galton. 'Could not something be done?'[64] Galton suggested that he might take the practical and helpful course of writing something for the Hobby Horse himself, and Arnold responded by producing his 'Horation Echo', written and laid aside in 1847.[65] The request was a product of the editorship's wish

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62. 2,000 prospectuses were sent out in December 1885; 1,000 in April 1886; 500 in August 1886 and 300 in September 1886. In June 1887, an even greater attempt was made to increase circulation. 500 order forms, 1,500 contents and order forms, 3,5000 small prospectuses and 1,000 contents and small prospectuses were distributed. A further 2,500 prospectuses followed in September, and 750 in October. Figures: source as above.

63. Selwyn Image to his brother John, 15 May 1891: 'I would send you a copy of the H.H. - but now that it is published only to subscribers, I only have my one'. Selwyn Image Letters , ed. A.H. Mackmurdo, p.69. [1932,]

64. Arnold to Galton, 13 January 1887, Hobby Horse, January 1890, V, p.50.

65. printed Hobby Horse, II, July 1887, pp.81-82.

to attract well-known names to write for them in order that these names should be, as Arnold put it, 'a help with the general public'.[66] Ruskin had already been persuaded to contribute an article on Arthur Burgess - a personal reminiscence which turned into a lament for the present day.[67]

The Century Guild was disbanded in 1888, and the Hobby Horse ceased publication soon afterwards. Yet compared with the small circulation aesthetic magazines which followed it, often copying its format, it had been relatively successful in lasting as long as it did: a factor due more to the commitment and contacts of Mackmurdo and Image than to the financial support of its readership. Among subsequent small circulation magazines can be mentioned the Butterfly (1893-1894; 1899-1900) - 'a humorous and artistic periodical', according to its subtitle; the Evergreen (1895-1897); the Page (1898-1901); the Glasgow based Art and Literature (1889-1890); the Quarto (1896-1898) - 'an artistic literary and musical quarterly' - and the Windmill (1898-1900). In the same general category can be included those publications which had a more definitely circumscribed readership, circulating among members of a certain educational institution; such as the two periodicals bearing the title the Art Student,

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66. Arnold to Galton, 21 April 1887, Hobby Horse, V, January 1890, p.50.

67. John Ruskin, 'Arthur Burgess', Hobby Horse, II, April 1887, pp. 46-53.

one (1897-1898) an illustrated quarterly by the students of the Edinburgh schools of art; the other (1885-1887), conducted by members of the Birmingham School of Arts, and succeeded by the Quest (1894-1896), a far more self-conscious product of the Aesthetic Movement. But none of these publications are particularly germane to the argument of this thesis, except to broaden the context of those late Victorian publications which concerned themselves with artistic matters, for articles on contemporary art - except in the applied field - appeared as even greater rarities than in the case of the Century Guild Hobby Horse.

One further category of publication needs to be noted in this section: the works which, generally annual, served as regular accompaniments to exhibitions. These tended to serve a purely functional role, informing the spectator of the content of a work; perhaps, like a catalogue, providing supporting quotations from the appropriate literary texts, and frequently furnishing an aide-memoire in the form of a line drawing or, increasingly, a photograph. The best known of these productions was Henry Blackburn's Academy Notes, already mentioned as following the initial model of Ruskin's identically christened publication. A rival existed in the 'Black and White' Handbook to the Royal Academy and New Gallery Pictures (1892-1915), and Blackburn also launched the companion Grosvenor Notes (1878-1890, known during the

last two years of its existence as the Grosvenor Gallery), and New Gallery Notes (1888-1895).

The Blackburn publications were run from a flat in Victoria Street, where the proprietor also 'for a substantial fee'[68] instructed pupils in the art of press illustration. Blackburn thus simultaneously obtained capital for the production of the publications and free labour, for the more advanced students were turned to the output of line copies from photographs of the canvases taken in the artists' studios before sending-in day. Occasionally, the original artists provided the sketches themselves.

Whitelaw, writing about his time in Blackburn's studios in the early 1890s, draws attention to the target audience for his publications:

> In the days of which I am writing the denizens of Belgravia and Mayfair would have as soon thought of attending Burlington House unaccompanied by Henry's instructive little manual as they would have thought of closing their accounts with Mr. Schoolbred, missing an Irving first night at the Lyceum, or of being buried in other than the ancestral tomb .[69]

The circulation of Academy Notes was apparently large enough (I have not been able to find any figures) to prompt the

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68. David Whitelaw, A Bonfire of Leaves, 1937, p.15.

69. Bonfire of Leaves, p.16.

Artist to regret that it served as little more than an aide-memoire. It considered that Blackburn was missing an important opportunity to educate the public in an intelligent appreciation of the works it viewed - although it queried whether such a wide audience would continue to be reached, since the consequent extension of size would render it hard to maintain the current price of a shilling a copy.[70] Moreover, those who were prepared and able to pay more were served, between 1885 and 1919, by the Pall Mall Magazine, which issued 'Pictures of 1885 (-1919)', which :

> Proved a formidable rival, half-tone blocks superseding the line, direct reproduction from photographs being by that time a practical proposition.[71]

B. ART CRITICS

Who were the critics who wrote for these papers and magazines? What were their social and educational backgrounds? How far did their knowledge extend to the practical aspects of painting? What particular viewpoints held by them enabled the public to distinguish one critic from another?

Critics

The best known of the later Victorian and early Edwardian were all men. Among the more conservative could be counted

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70. Unsigned review, 'Art Literature', Artist, I, June 1880, p. 189.

71. Whitelaw, Bonfire of Leaves, p.17.

J. Comyns Carr (1849-1916); P.G. Hamerton (1834-1894); Harry Quilter (1851-1907); Robert Ross (1869-1918); Marion Harry Spielmann (1858-1948); F.G. Stephens (1828-1907); Tom Taylor (1817-1880); Thomas Humphry Ward (1845-1926) and, in many respects, Frederick Wedmore (1844-1921). The most prominent progressive critics included Roger Fry (1866-1934); W.E. Henley (1849-1903); Dugald Stuart MacColl (1859-1948); George Moore (1852-1933); Claude Phillips (1846-1924); E.M. Rashdall (1860-1888); Frank Rutter (1876-1937); Walter Sickert (1860-1942) and R.A.M. Stevenson (1847-1900).

This did not mean, however, that the profession was one from which women were habitually excluded. Indeed, the correspondent of the Artist, reviewing an exhibition at the New Gallery in 1892, remarked in passing that 'the lady critics ... at the press view numbered at mid-day fifteen to five men'.[72] Some personal prejudice against women critics is evident in private correspondence: in 1904, F.G. Stephens spoke slightingly of 'the prevalence of lady-critics and their little fooleries'.[73] But there seems

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72. Editor, 'The New Gallery, I', Artist, XIII, November 1892, p.331.

73. F.G. Stephens, letter to John Francis, 24 February 1904. Bodleian library, Mss don. d. 116. f. 207.

surprisingly little debate about the suitability or otherwise of women for this occupation, perhaps because the consumption of art belongs to the traditionally female sphere of non-sporting leisure activity. The best known of the women critics - Lady Colin Campbell (d. 1911); Emilia Francis Pattison[74] (1840-1904)-wrote primarily for weekly and monthly publications. The constrictions operating against women writing for newspapers are outlined in the following chapter.

Yet despite the acceptance of women within the profession, it was the men who obtained the better positions in the press, who were generally regarded as the most authoritative, and who were alone in developing the language of formal art criticism. That this should be so reflects not just the general pattern of gender dominance within Victorian society, but in particular the composition of the universities and the professions at the time. An overwhelming majority of Victorian art critics had university education or a formal training in such a field as the law. This cultural formation frequently brought them far closer to the values and assumptions of their readership, and, indeed, to the values of those who had the actual purchasing power to buy works of

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74. Emilia Pattison, who originally trained as an art student, took up criticism as her marriage to the writer Mark Pattison began to disintegrate. She was a supporter of Royal Academy traditions. Lord Leighton was a personal friend, and supplier of information about the London art world.

art, than to the producers of these works themselves. Although many of them did practise painting in their own right, it was only a few - notably Sickert, and to some extent MacColl and Stevenson - who trained alongside other artists whom they noticeably supported in their later criticism.

For the reasons given in the introduction to this chapter, I have chosen to write about each of the major critics individually. I hope that this section will serve its function as a source of reference in relation to the subsequent chapters of the thesis, outlining the most prominent tenets of each critic, and hence providing the necessary context for my later argument.

a. Conservative critics

J. Comyns Carr (1849-1916)

Originally articled in a stockbroker's office, and subsequently called to the Bar, Carr worked on both the Echo and Globe as a drama critic, before succeeding Sidney Colvin as art critic on the Pall Mall Gazette. He consciously modelled his style on that of his predecessor. Simultaneously, he wrote for the Saturday Review, Examiner, World and Manchester Guardian, and later contributed articles for the Portfolio, Academy, and Art Journal, among other periodicals. In 1875 he was appointed

English editor of L'Art. From 1883-1886 he was editor of the newly-established Macmillan's publication, the English Illustrated Magazine. Although not a practising artist himself, Comyns Carr traced his interest in painting to the fact that his elder sister studied it seriously.

Carr's relationship with the London art world was intensified through his connections firstly with the Grosvenor Gallery, founded by Sir Coutts Lindsay in 1877, and subsequently, after pulling out of his involvement with the Grosvenor, with the establishment, with his friend Hallé, of the New Gallery. He regarded the fact of the existence of both galleries as a direct reflection of the 'narrowest interpretation of its duties and responsibilities' which the Royal Academy adopted.[75] He castigated the Academy for being too anxious for the homage due to a national institution, and for its consequent persistent failure to advance with the growth of new ideas in art. His involvement with the Grosvenor Gallery had indeed followed a series of articles which he published in the Pall Mall Gazette advocating the reform of the Royal Academy, and which had been seen by Lindsay.[76] Two of the dominant exhibitors

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75. J. Comyns Carr, Some Eminent Victorians, 1908, p.127.

76. These articles, coming to the attention of Sir Charles Dilke, also led to an unsuccessful motion advocating the reform of the Royal Academy being put in the House of Commons.

at these galleries, emphatically praised in Carr's criticism, were close friends of the critic: Burne Jones, and Whistler, whom he had come to know well after writing a favourable review of his work in 1876. Carr liked to believe himself exempt from Whistler's general strictures against critics.[77]

To class Carr as conservative in the light of this opposition to the Academy perhaps seems at first glance unfair. But he remained unimpressed by the Continental influence on English art. Writing in 1908, he contrasted the current emphasis on technique - 'the assured sign of a passing period of decadence'[78] - with the atmosphere which existed when he began his career as a critic: a time when he regarded his own particular favoured artists, the Pre-Raphaelites, as embodying the essential artistic spirit which links the works of an estimable artist 'with the wider emotional movement of his generation'.[79] He agreed with the ideals of his friends Rossetti and Burne-Jones, especially the demand for painting to approximate as closely as possible to the conditions of poetry. It seems to have been this insistence on the inter-dependence of the arts which prevented him enthusing about any attempt to develop painting's particular formal qualities.

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77. 'The praise which I had bestowed upon his work on more than one occasion brought from him a warm letter of appreciation' Carr, Some Eminent Victorians, p.135.

78. Some Eminent Victorians, p.60.

79. Some Eminent Victorians, p.60.

P.G. Hamerton 1834-1894

Writing in 1868, Henry James remarked that :

> ...the profession of art critic, so largely and successfully exercised in France, has found, in England, but a single eminent representative.[80]

He was referring to Philip Gilbert Hamerton. Though James rapidly calls on Ruskin as a possible contender, the latter excludes himself from the American's sphere of reference through his tendency to extend himself into being a general critic of life, despite his inability to abandon an aesthetic standpoint.

Brought up alternately by unmarried aunts and an alcoholic father, Hamerton, in his autobiography, remembers no artistic influences during childhood other than the lessons he received from his school drawing master. When only fifteen, however, he began writing free-lance articles - cobbled together, he admitted, from the most publicly available information - for the Historic Times. He dates his interest in modern painting from a visit to London in 1851 and seeing Millais, in particular, at the Royal Academy: an interest which his purchase of the first volume of Ruskin's Modern Painters confirmed.[81] Although

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80. Henry James, 'An English Critic of French Painting', 1868, reproduced in The Painter's Eye, edited John L. Sweeney, 1956. The original appeared as an unsigned review of Hamerton's Contemporary French Painting, in the North American Review, April 1869.

81. In 1851, Millais exhibited Mariana, The Return of the Dove to the Ark, and the Woodman's Daughter at the Royal Academy.

at this time falling entirely under Ruskin's influence, he later completely repudiated his view that art could be learnt from nature:

> Nature does not teach art, or anything resembling it; she only provides materials. Art is a product of the human mind, the slow growth of centuries. If you reject this and go to nature, you have to begin all over again, the objection being that one human life is not long enough for that.[82]

In late 1853, Hamerton moved to London for five months to study landscape painting under Pettitt - a man with 'no conception of art',[83] and in the autumn of that year moved to Paris, learning French as well as continuing his practical art training. Not only did Hamerton later live in France but French criticism-'the most discriminating and the most accurate in the world'[84] - formed a model for his own artistic writing. From 1857, his French wife notes, the work of Troyon, in particular, and also Daubigny and Charles Jacque, did much to shake off his continued predilection for detailed topographical painting and the Pre-Raphaelites. Yet his own experiences of topographical painting in the open air provided the basis for his first, highly successful art book, A Painter's Camp in the Highlands (2 vols, 1862). Its combination of anecdote, description and artistic

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82. Hamerton, Autobiography, p.129.

83. Autobiography, p.42.

84. Autobiography, p.201.

generalisations led to Hamerton being invited to contribute to the Fine Arts Quarterly Review - he began with an elaborate criticism of the 1863 Salon - the Cornhill, and Macmillan's. Around 1865, he succeeded Frank Palgrave as art critic to the Saturday Review, making three or four extended annual visits to London for the purpose. His writing, especially on etching (which by now he himself spent much time practising) seems to have been immediately influencial:

> Tennyson has been very much interested in my articles, and has in consequence urged his publishers to employ Doré to illustrate the Idylls /sic/ of the King.[85]

A combination of continual travelling, and the social pressures attendant on his suddenly prominent rôle seem to have precipitated a nervous collapse in Hamerton: he resigned his full time Saturday Review post in 1868, although he continued contributing to it, as well as to the Globe and Pall Mall Gazette. From 1869, the launching and editorship of the Portfolio pre-occupied him. His writing was popular in the United States as well as Britain. From 1874-1880 he appeared regularly in the International Review, principally on the fine arts, as well as in the Atlantic Monthly. "Your name is now a household word in many quarters of this country",'wrote an American correspondent in the mid-seventies, 'and this was true

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85. P.G. Hamerton, undated letter to his wife, Autobiography, p.33.

not only in America, for many English letters echoed it'.[86] His style was authoritative and knowledgeable: so much so that even at a time of largely anonymous reviewing in the weeklies and quarterlies, his authorship could be deduced from internal evidence. Thus M. Véron, editor of L'Art, correctly presumed that Hamerton must have written the criticism of his Esthétique which appeared in the Saturday Review:

> Ce qui distingue cet article c'est une sérieuse connaissance du sujet et une puissance d'analyse des plus rares. Cela ressemble en rien à ces généalités vagues et flottantes dont se contentent la plupart des écrivains qui font de la critique dans la revue des journaux.[87]

Much of Hamerton's authority derived not just from the fact that he had a large number of acquaintances in the art world, but from his practical experience of the methods he describes. His wife commented on his book, Graphic Arts, that he had at some time tried all the arts of which he speaks (with the exception of fresco) - pen and ink, silver point, lead pencil, sanguine, chalk, charcoal, water and oil monochrome, oil and water colour painting, pastel, wood engraving, etching and dry point, acquatint and mezzotint, and litho-graphy.[88]

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86. Mr. Powers to P.G. Hamerton, c. 1876, Autobiography, p.444.

87. Autobiography, pp.455-6.

88. Autobiography, p.487.

Harry Quilter 1851-1907

Quilter was one of the best known and most mocked of Victorian reviewers: ' 'Arry's goose-quill',[89] ' 'Arry of commerce'[90] being the particular butt of Whistler's jibes against critics.[91] He frequently avowed independence from artistic movements and from the pressue of individuals, claiming to be 'a writer who does not attach himself to one special clique of critics, but endeavours to stand alone and tell the truth all round'.[92] But this seems to have been coupled with an indefatigable tendency for self-promotion and self-righteousness - he was an idiosyncratic heir to Carter Hall - which helped produce his unpopularity. These characteristics combined, however, to ensure his reputation in the Victorian world of letters.

The youngest son of William Quilter, first president of the Institute of Accountants and a well known collector of water colour drawings, he had been intended, after studying

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89. J.A.McN.Whistler, The Gentle Art, p.122.

90. The Gentle Art, p.121.

91. This animosity had both a critical and a personal basis. Following the publication of Whistler's Art and Art Critics after the Ruskin v Whistler trial, Quilter considered the older man to have been unfairly derided and completely misrepresented in this work, and persuaded Hutton, the Spectator's editor, to allow him to write a rather strong sub-leader explaining Whistler's mis-statements. Perhaps it was a piece of deliberate tactlessness that at the bankruptcy sale which followed the trial, Quilter purchased the painter's house in Tite Street, an acquisition for which Whistler never forgave him.

92. Harry Quilter, Sententiae Artis, 1886, p.xiii.

at Cambridge, to go into business, but instead travelled, particularly to Italy, and returned to study at the Bar, at the Middlesex Hospital, and at the Slade. As his D.N.B. biographer put it, 'the possession of a competence and a restless temperament disabled him from concentrating his energies.'[93] He continued practising as an artist throughout his life, exhibiting regularly at the Institute of Painters in Oil Colours from 1884-93, and having a one-man show at the Dudley Gallery in 1894. At best his style would be termed eclectic:

> He has been influenced by Rossetti, by Monet, by Whistler and by many others, but he has a poor memory for essentials and hardly the frankness of the genuine copyist.[94]

Between 1876 and 1887 Quilter worked as an art critic: mainly for the Spectator, but including a period (1880-1) on The Times. In addition, he lectured frequently, both in London and the provinces, on artistic matters. In 1888 he launched the Universal Review, which failed as a result of financial difficulties two years later. His remaining years were spent as a free-lance article writer on a variety of subjects, and, from 1894-96, running boarding schools at

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93. W.R., 'QUILTER HARRY (1851-1907)', Dictionary of National Biography, 2nd Supplement, 1912, vol. III, p.147.

94. P.C., 'Mr. Harry Quilter at the Dudley', Artist, XV, February 1894, p.41.

Mitcham and Liverpool on a self-formulated 'rational' system.

Quilter's overall output was tremendous. Between 1872 and 1890, he estimates, 'I must have seen and written of nearly half a million pictures and sculptures, and criticised several hundred books, chiefly relating to art'. This work, he appears to warn any future evaluator of his writings :

> ... has been done for the most part at a few hours notice, and generally with no time for revision or reflection. This is one of the conditions of newspaper writing.95

In the writing of criticism Quilter puts great emphasis on precision and clarity. He particularly disliked the fashion for purely subjective, emotional criticism, finding it unintelligible in its inaccessibility :

> ... for all any one knew to the contrary, the writers might be writing about the Apocalypse or the Inferno, or the Decameron, or the Conservative Ministry, or Llewelyn Davies' sermons or any other subject, and writing in Arabic, Hindu or the Cuniform character as far as the understanding of ordinary people went.96

For the critic 'must interest Tom, Dick, and Harry at all hazards, or he will receive short, sharp shrift from his

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95. Harry Quilter, Preferences in Art, Life and Literature, 1892, p.vii.

96. Letter to Mrs. C.W. Earle, reprinted in Mrs. C.W. Earle, Memoirs and Memories, 1911, p.297.

editor and his public'.[97] Consequently, Quilter was unprepared to seek, himself, for new forms in verbal expression with which to describe or explain changing artistic forms. In a readily assimilable manner, 'just and enlightened criticism'[98] - unlike dangerously vague subjective writing - should serve to diffuse, as clearly as possible, the knowledge of the principles of art, the principles by which both its production and consumption should operate.

Above all, believed Quilter, criticism must not mislead, nor must its subject matter be used as an occasion for self-indulgent humour on the part of a writer. This writer should appreciate rather than perform; should attempt to sink his identity into that of his subject. Any other treatment is not fair on the artist: a man who is, in his way, a tradesman, and a tradesman particularly dependent on popular opinion and fashion, for his commodity is not purchased from true necessity. This popular opinion, Quilter asserts, can only find expression in the press. And he uses a comparison which underscores his understanding of works of art as a market commodity. Suppose one were, in a newspaper, to attack the quality of silk on sale at Marshall and Snelgrove and the ignorance of the proprietors in such matters, whilst

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97. Harry Quilter, Opinions on Men, Women and Things, 1909, p.230.

98. Quilter, Opinions, p.228.

insinuating that, nonetheless, they enticed the public into purchasing in their store through an enticing window display, the certain result would be a libel suit with the vendor receiving heavy damages. But the artist who is misrepresented or misunderstood traditionally takes no such redress.[99]

What Quilter believed the guiding principles of art to be is more clearly shown by what he attacks than by what he praises. Believing that artists should paint to tell us what they feel, not to show off their technical virtuosity, and that, above all, art 'should never lose its grip upon life',[100] since it is intimately connected with the great passions, desires, sufferings and joys of humanity, Quilter nevertheless dissassociates himself from Ruskin's fancied necessity of tracing a moral and religious principle throughout. Despite expressing reverence and gratitude for the older critic, he condemns him also for leading the way towards what he interprets as a decline in English art. Ruskin's enthusiasm for nature led too many artists to become trapped within a dull realism. In addition, Quilter finds a 'growing tendency to copy the worst fashions of our Continental neighbours',[101] particularly when it comes to cheap sentimental scenes or costume compo-

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99. Opinions, p.234. Quilter conveniently passes over the notable legal wrangle of his arch-enemy Whistler.

100. Harry Quilter, The Academy 1872-1882, 1883, p.3.

101. Quilter, Opinions, p.7.

sitions. This adherence to the fashionable has led to too close a relationship between the painter and 'Society', manifested in the tendency of the 'Society' papers to 'chronicle his doings and applaud his eccentricities, and so he becomes a hot-house plant and lacks vitality'.[102] Inevitably, he finds himself painting not what he likes best or believes in most, but that which the public will buy most readily. Almost contradicting his repudiation of Ruskin, Quilter sees this general weakness in English art as being in its turn partly due to 'the decay of religious belief, the decadence of national morality'.[103] This preoccupation with morality became increasingly pronounced in his later writings, his strictures extending to literature as well as painting. He vituperatively condemned Arthur Morrison's A Child of the Jago, for example, for its unpleasantness.[104] This puritanical emphasis was seen as being out of step with current trends by his more progressive critical colleagues. Writing in 1895, Marriott Watson placed Quilter's views very firmly in the mid century, sarcastically drawing attention to his refusal to confront contemporary conditions:

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102. Opinions, p.7.

103. Opinions, p.7.

104. Harry Quilter, 'The gospel of intensity', Contemporary Review, 67, June 1895, pp.761-782.

> He will not have the problems of the East End, or the horrid problems of sex come between the wind and his nobility. All life is a garden that smells sweet, and every one lives happily ever afterwards. We are to drag out our days in a Fool's Paradise.

But by now, according to Watson, the influence of Quilter and his opinions was gradually waning:

> ...not even Mr. Quilter will suffice to chain us up again to the horse-hair sofas of middle-Victorian taste.[105]

Marion Harry Alexander Spielmann 1858-1948

Spielmann, editor of the Magazine of Art from 1887-1904 and a regular contributor to the Pall Mall Gazette during the 1880s, was relatively unusual among Victorian art critics in that his own practical training was in the applied rather than the fine arts. He studied both architecture (at University College London) and engineering. The son of a foreign currency exchange dealer, he began his active interest in art as a collector of small pictures and old master drawings. Spielmann's admiration for Ruskin - 'the most distinguished figure in the arena of Art-philosophy for half-a-century and more, the philanthropist-militant par excellence'[106] is

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105. Marriott Watson, 'Mr. Quilter's Gospel', Saturday Review, 79, 15 June 1895, pp.784-5.

106. M.H. Spielmann, John Ruskin: A sketch of his life, his work, and his opinions with personal reminiscences, 1900, p.16.

evident in his laudatory biography of the older critic, and in all the principles which underlie his own practice.

Frederick G. Stephens

As art critic for the Athenaeum from 1861-1901, F.G. Stephens occupied a monolithic position in conservative Victorian reviewing. His friendship with Holman Hunt and Millais whilst studying at the Royal Academy led to his journalistic debut in the Germ: subsequently, in addition to his regular contributions to the Athenaeum, he wrote for the Critic, London Review, Art Journal, Macmillan's, Magazine of Art, Portfolio and many other publications - French and American as well as English. There was a close link between Stephens and his friend Lord Leighton, the latter trading accurate inside information in exchange for column space in the Athenaeum in which to air his views.

Apart from his perennial support for Pre-Raphaelitism, Stephens's criticism has few distinguishing features besides its ubiquity and clumsiness: when Randall took over the Athenaeum in 1901 he considered that Stephens wrote so badly that he dismissed him and employed Roger Fry in his place.[107] Stephens's notices were little more than lists of works exhibited, a stylistic trait which permeated even writing which one might

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107. Leslie A. Marchand, The Athenaeum. A mirror of Victorian Culture, Chapel Hill, 1941, p.91n.

assume was intended to have greater anecdotal readability, such as the pieces which formed his series of popular monographs on Artists at Home.[108] He continually sheltered behind such terms as 'breadth', 'solidity', 'genuine', 'masterpiece', 'sincere' and 'exquisite veracity' - words which tell us extremely little about the paintings themselves, being used merely as ticks of commendation. Stephens's preferences in art never changed. The Artist lamented in 1892 that 'the Athenaeum has not been able for thirty years to see any art beyond the pre-raphaelites'.[109]

Tom Taylor 1817-1880

Apart from acting for many years as art critic for both The Times (1857-1880) and the Graphic, Taylor's principal connections were with the literary and public world. After studying and teaching at Cambridge, he became professor of English literature and language at London University, before taking up, successively, the assistant secretaryship and secretaryship of the Board of Health. Simultaneously, he was employed in non-critical journalism, writing leaders for the Morning Chronicle and Daily News and pieces for Punch (of which he became editor, 1874-1880). Additionally, he was a prolific playwright, especially of domestic comedy: over

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108. F.G. Stephens, Artists at Home, 1884, illustrated with photos by J.P. Mayall.

109. Unsigned, 'Collated Opinion', Artist, XIII, November 1892, p.333.

seventy of his pieces were performed on the London stage.

Taylor's position on The Times led to him being popularly regarded, during his lifetime, as a critic whose authority was second only to that of Ruskin. He was well thought of both for the accessibility of his approach to a wide readership, and for his lack of partiality:

> He wrote his criticism neither for the pedant nor for the exquisite; neither spent months upon disturbing the attribution of a picture of but secondary interest, nor finely spun a web of delicate writing and fragile conjecture for himself and three friends ... He retained and developed wide sympathies in all matters of art, and so never drifted into the position of the mouthpiece of a clique - the ecstatic advocate or the heated opponent of the latest fashion in painting.[110]

His reputation led to his selection as editor of the manuscript autobiographies left by Robert Haydon and Charles Leslie (a personal friend) and of Leslie's uncompleted life of Sir Joshua Reynolds. In addition to his art criticism for the daily press, Taylor contributed articles on painting for, among other periodicals, the Fine Arts Quarterly and the Portfolio. Also, he composed handbooks designed to educate those with no knowledge of artistic matters - notably the two hundred page Handbook to Pictures in the International Exhibition (1862) which, in an informative rather than critical style, sketched the rise of English art, the biographical background of living painters, and guided the uninitiated

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110. Frederick Wedmore, 'Obituary, Tom Taylor', Academy, XVIII, 17 July 1880, p.51.

viewer around the works on display: he repeated the method, more concisely, for the foreign exhibits. Taylor also used this handbook format in the thirty-two page description he provided for the dealer, Louis Flatow, on the occasion of his purchasing and exhibiting Frith's The Railway Station. This pamphlet forms one of the fullest and most sustained examples of Victorian narrative art criticism.

Taylor's attitude towards art was Ruskinian in his perception of its function, yet in practice tended towards an appreciation of the narrative and sentimental. He believed firmly in the moral value of art, approving of Leslie's paintings, for example, because they were:

> ...stamped in every line with good taste, chastened humour, graceful sentiment ... which makes us happier, gentler, and better to look upon ... which help us to love good books more and to regard our fellow creatures with kindlier eyes.[111]

He expressed his delight that such works were to be found in large cities:

> ...where they will counteract the ignoble effects of industrial occupation by their inborn refinements, their liberal element of loveliness, their sweet sentiment of nature, their literary associations, and their genial humour.[112]

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111. Tom Taylor, preface to C.R. Leslie, Autobiography, 1860, p.xv.

112. Autobiography, p.xxi.

Taylor, supporting democracy rather than elitism in artistic matters, continually urged the government to adopt a policy of employing artists to decorate public buildings. For similar reasons, he attacked what he interpreted as the conservatism of the Royal Academy in failing to encourage painters of domestic bourgeois subjects: indeed, the proliferation of such canvases in the last quarter of the century may well partially be a result of his influence.

Thomas Humphry Ward 1845-1926

Humphry Ward, a London vicar's son, was tutor and fellow in mathematics at Brasenose College, Oxford, and edited a comprehensive three volume anthology for Macmillan, The English Poets, before moving to London in 1881 to take up the post of art critic on The Times. He supplemented his critical activities by dealing in old masters. Ward's tastes were consistently conservative, supporting the Royal Academy, admiring Leighton and Alma-Tadema, and, among foreign artists, Millet.

Frederick Wedmore 1844-1921

Wedmore, chief art critic to the Evening Standard for thirty years, was born in Bristol, and educated privately at Weston-super-Mare, Lausanne and Paris. In addition to his work as art critic, he wrote realist influenced short stories (or 'imaginative pieces', as he preferred to call them), such as

A Chemist in the Suburbs (1893) and The Vicar of Pimlico (1894), which he published in the Illustrated London News, New Review and Sketch. His free-lance art criticism appeared in a variety of specialised and general periodicals, including the French L'Art. Wedmore appeared to derive a considerable amount of impetus from abroad, both from France, and from the United States, where he travelled, lectured and gave readings. He contrasted America with 'our rather allegory-ridden, legend-ridden, tradition-ridden England'[113] of 1885. In the former, there was no prejudice to be overcome for an artist selecting modern life as his subject; no overpoweringly stultifying body such as the Academy.

But the appeal of France lay less in the fact that the country manifested the most advanced of modern artistic developments - something noticed by Wedmore in his article in the Fortnightly Review of 1883 praising the Impressionists - but in the grace demonstrated by the painting of its past: in the work, for example, of Ingres. Wedmore always admired a quality which he called 'Style': hence when he first read Pater's The Renaissance he was struck not just by Pater's ideas and personality 'as the High Priest of an artistic religion', but by the fact that he was 'that rare creature,

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113. Frederick Wedmore, Memories, 1912, p.92.

the maker of perfect sentences'.[114] He characterised Pater's statements as embodying the elements which he most favoured, whether in writing or painting: measure, tolerance, and charm. Perhaps it was the quality of preciousness which Wedmore himself emanated which led to Whistler's violent outburst against him. He classed him with two other of his critical bêtes noirs, Marion Spielmann and Claude Phillips,[115] labelling him a 'conceited empty pilfering ass',[116] and refused to allow any lithograph by himself to appear in any of the critic's articles.

b. New Critics and their successors

Roger Fry 1866-1934

Roger Fry is today probably the best known of early C20th art critics. He has also received far more critical attention than his immediate predecessors.[117] His determined

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114. Memories, p.157.

115. J.A.Mc.N. Whistler, letter to D. Croal Thomson, 29 April 1894, Ms. in National Library of Congress, Washington D.C. (the Pennell Collection)

116. J. Mc.N. Whistler, letter to Tom Way, 5 November 1895, typewritten transcript in National Library of Congress, Washington D.C. (the Pennell Collection)

117. see Tancred Borenius, 'Roger Fry as Art Historian', Burlington Magazine, 65, 1934, pp.235-36.
Jacqueline Falkenheim, Roger Fry and the Beginnings of Formalist Art Criticism, 1980.
Solomon Fishman, The Interpretation of Art, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963
Graham Hough, 'Ruskin and Roger Fry: Two Aesthetic Theories', Cambridge Journal, 1, 1947-48, pp.14-27.
Berel Lang, 'Significance or Form: The Dilemma of Roger Fry's Aesthetic', Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 21, Winter 1962, pp.167-76.
Frances Spalding, Roger Fry, art and life, 1980.
Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry. A Biography, 1940.

attempt to examine the relationship between vision and design; his admission of design as a primary aesthetic quality; his practical involvement (as both organiser and painter) in the contemporary art world, and his many connections with the Bloomsbury group, have all contributed to his reputation. During the period discussed in this thesis, however, Fry's innovatory contributions to art criticism were, with the exception of his involvement with the Post-Impressionist exhibitions, largely concerned with his interest in the art of the past.

After reading science at Cambridge, Fry studied painting in London with Francis Bate, toured Italy, primarily looking at pictures,[118] and in 1892 went for a year to Paris to continue his painting at the Academy Julien. On returning to England, and setting up on his own as a painter, he sent his first (rejected) pictures to the New English Art Club, considering, as he wrote later, that it was the centre 'of the serious artistic life of the day'.[119] It was at this

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118. Even at this stage he noted that 'My study of Italian drawings has influenced my work in the direction of demanding more complete design in a picture'. (Woolf, Roger Fry, p.83).

119. Fry, p.83.

time, in the early 1890s, that he started writing for weeklies (the Athenaeum and Pilot in particular), in order to supplement an allowance he otherwise found insufficient. Criticism, during this period, was without doubt a secondary activity for him. Virginia Woolf commented that :

> His writing never satisfied him: there was nothing plastic about it; pen and ink, were meagre tools compared with brush and paint. But his mind was stored with ideas and arguments, and editors were ready to accept notes and half columns, reviews of books and reviews of picture shows, if not more serious contributions.[120]

In the last line Woolf is probably referring to the article Fry wrote on Impressionism around October 1893, in which he tried to explain that 'painting is not mere representation of natural objects', an article intended for, but refused by, the Fortnightly.[121]

In 1901, Fry took over from the ageing and tedious Stephens as chief art critic on the Athenaeum, where he had so much column space at his disposal that he could write on technical and historical matters (the use of tempera, the attribution of Old Masters) as well as on contemporary art. As Woolf, again, chronicles, he managed, even if contributing

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120. Fry, p.88.

121. Letter to Lady Fry, 27 October 1893, Letters of Roger Fry, ed. Denys Sutton, 1972, p.155.

on such obscure subjects as Pesellino or Matteo da Siena, to write about painting as a matter of surpassing interest, of the greatest importance; and, in addition, to concentrate his attention on the 'squares of coloured canvas'[122] themselves, not to use them as jumping off points for personal reveries or biographical disquisitions. Vernon Randall, his editor on the Athenaeum, thought highly of his style, knowledge and taste, and considered him 'one of the few writers on art today who deal in a lucid way with the philosophic side of the subject'.[123]

Unsurprisingly, Fry showed himself to be :

> ...an undaunted enemy of the sloppiness, the vagueness, the sentimentality which has filled so many academies with anecdotes of dogs and duchesses. He detested the story-telling spirit which has clouded our painting and confused our criticism.[124]

Nevertheless, until led to consider otherwise by seeing a still-life by Chardin in April 1902, he appears to have considered content to be of primary importance. It was not until his Essay in Aesthetics of 1909 that he began to develop fully his theory of the dissociation of form from content.

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122. Woolf, Fry, p.116.

123. Testimonials for Slade Professorship, 1910, Bodleian Ms. Top. Oxon c.178, p.59.

124. Proof copy of address given by Virginia Woolf at the opening of the Roger Fry Memorial Exhibition, 12 July 1935. Bodleian Ms. Don. e. 820, p.7.

Interestingly, around the early years of this century, Fry, like MacColl, spoke of Tolstoi's What is Art? (1898) 'as being a "pointer" in aesthetics',[125] yet seems to pass over completely the Russian's passionate emphasis on the necessary connection between art and morality, taking up only his belief that art is the expression and the communication of emotion. The only specifically ethical standard which Fry applied was that of honesty: honesty in an artist's devotion to his task - the creation of form - and honesty in the sense of fidelity to his own vision.[126]

The most important specific contribution made by Fry to the criticism of contemporary art within this period occurs in relation to the Post-Impressionists. This relationship first manifested itself in a letter Fry wrote to the Burlington Magazine in March 1908, defending Cézanne and Gauguin. In this letter, he maintained that these artists are:

> ... not really Impressionists at all. They are proto-Byzantines rather than Neo-Impressionists. They have already attained to the contour, and assert its value with keen emphasis. They fill the contour with wilfully simplified and unmodulated masses, and rely for their whole effect upon a well considered co-ordination of the simplest elements.

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125. Thornton, Diary, p.56. Frank Rutter, too, was much influenced by Tolstoi in the early years of this century.

126. Soloman Fishman, The Interpretation of Art, 1963, p.108.

> Content does not come into the question: his concern is entirely with form. Moreover, he does not consider this form to have come into being through some instinctual arrangement of shapes on canvas, but to be the product of careful and conscious thought. The implication is that it can best be appreciated by the same means. He contrasts the still lifes by Cézanne to be seen at the International Exhibition with those by Monet, and finds in them "a great advance in intellectual content. It leaves far less to the casual dictation of natural appearance. The relations of every tone and colour are deliberately chosen and stated in unmistakable terms".[127]

On the eve of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition (January/February 1910), the Burlington Magazine published two articles on Cézanne by Maurice Denis, translated by Fry, and prefaced with an introductory note by Fry, in which he speaks of the new tendencies which had recently become manifest in French art, a new conception of art 'in which the decorative elements preponderate at the expense of the representative', in which not only is a new conception of the purpose and methods of painting gradually emerging, but 'a new hope too, and a new courage to attempt in painting that direct expression of imagined states of consciousness which has for so long been relegated to music and poetry'.[128]

Although the introduction to the catalogue of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition was actually composed by Desmond MacCarthy, the show's secretary, it was based on notes supplied

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127. Roger Fry, 'Letters to the Editor: The Last Phase of Impressionism', Burlington Magazine, XII, March 1908, p.375

128. Roger Fry, introductory note to Maurice Denis, 'Cézanne - I', Burlington Magazine, XVI, January 1910, p.207.

by Fry. The introduction to the French section of the second (1912) show was directly written by Fry. This introduction shows him ready to extrapolate the notion of non-representational art from the work of the Cubists and neo-cubists who comprised the most innovatory elements in this exhibition. He wrote that the logical 'extreme' (not the most sympathetic of words) 'of such a method' as theirs 'would undoubtedly be the attempt to give up all resemblance to natural forms, and to create a purely abstract language of form - a visual music'.[129] This misinterpretation of their actual aims underlines Fry's concern not only with the possibilities for an entirely theoretical, self-referential and design-based mode of painting (although this was never what Fry openly advocated), but in its references to language, hints at the difficulties facing any critical method which would be able to articulate, in a satisfactory manner, the formal concerns of such art.

William Ernest Henley 1849-1903

Henley, born and privately educated in Gloucester, was the son of a bookseller. Henley never attempted painting himself, although his younger brother, Anthony Warton Henley, worked as a landscape artist.

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129. Roger Fry, 'The French Group', Catalogue to the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, 5 October - 31 December 1912, pp.26-27.

From 1877-78, Henley edited the weekly review London. Most of his own contributions were of literary criticism. Between 1878-1882 he wrote regularly for a variety of publications, including the Athenaeum, St. James Gazette, Vanity Fair, Saturday Review and Pall Mall Gazette, for which he was drama critic. In 1882, he was appointed editor of the Magazine of Art (although his correspondence shows him to have been in effective control since the November of the previous year). He held this position until 1886 (with a break from January - October 1884). During this period, he worked to improve the critical standard of the magazine, providing an opening for, among others, R.A.M. Stevenson. Henley's stress on what he considered to be critical excellence, and his belief in the constant domination of an editor over the tone and direction of any publication, led to continual clashes with his publisher, Cassells. He eventually was led to resign the editorship. In particular, they objected to his enthusiasm for Rodin (a degree of praise which so raised Rodin's reputation in England that the sculptor executed a free bust of Henley in gratitude), and, to a lesser extent, to thatfor Whistler. In both cases, Cassell's considered that Henley's preference worked against popular taste and was responsible for the drop in the journal's sales.

Henley continued for some time to act as an adviser to the Art Journal. From 1889 - 1894 he took charge of the

National (formerly Scots) Observer, a somewhat conservative production in its politics and social bias. Indeed, Henley provides a clear-cut example of a critic who was progressive in his artistic views and conservative in his political ones. He was a confirmed Tory, described by Yeats as one who grew 'into a violent unionist and imperialist'.[130] But his views on painting challenged the mid-Victorian orthodoxy. He directly opposed Ruskin, speaking disparagingly of the older writer as one who:

> ...uplifted a most beautiful voice and tenored nonsense, nonsense, for many years and through interminable volumes.[131]

In his many literary reviews, Henley insisted strongly that both poets and novelists have a social function, especially since their work deals naturally with ideas of moral significance. Painting, on the other hand, relies for its effects, he believed, on line and colour arranged in suggestive designs. He persistently demanded that painting should be non-literary in its conception (whilst, on the other hand, he took a strong interest in the art of illustration). Henley, believing that the primary condition of art lies in its strenuously disciplined technique, considered that a good

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130. Quoted in J.R. Buckley, William Ernest Henley, Princeton, 1945, p.129.

131. W.E. Henley, Views and Reviews, II, 1902, pp.204-5.

picture is determined by its creator's capacity for design and powers of selection, coupled with ability in draughtsmanship and sensitivity to colour. Moreover, it was not just in the visual field that he displayed this willingness to jettison the connection between art and the literary tradition. In criticism, too, he favoured 'the gradual elimination of literary interest from the art-critic's tale of tools'.[132]

Dugald Stuart MacColl 1859-1948

Together with R.A.M. Stevenson, MacColl was one of the most influential of late Victorian and early Edwardian art critics, particularly through the part he played in establishing the value of the Impressionists. The eldest child of a Presbyterian minister, MacColl studied at both University College, London and Lincoln College, Oxford, before travelling extensively in Europe and, in 1889, attending art classes at the Westminster School, under Fred Brown, in 1889. At this time, according to Alfred Thornton, a fellow student, the atmosphere at this art school 'was sympathetic to France; Manet, Monet, and Degas were appreciated and understood'.[133]

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132. Views, II, p.165.

133. Thornton, Diary, p.18.

This preparation fitted MacColl for the post of art critic on the Spectator from 1890-1896, followed, after a short pause, by a similar appointment on the Saturday Review until 1906.[134] As a supporter of both the French and self-styled London Impressionists (Steer, the Sickert brothers, Sidney Starr, Theodore Roussel, etc.) MacColl found that the opportunity of addressing the Spectator's 'very large public was a remarkable one, as if a heretic had been offered the pulpit of St. Paul's.'[135] Alfred Thornton confirms this judgment: 'that the solid, if not solemn, Spectator should have produced such a revolutionary art critic was astounding'.[136] Throughout this period, MacColl continued painting. He was a regular exhibitor at the New English Art Club from 1892, and the new Goupil Galleries opened with a show of his works in December 1893. In 1906, MacColl became keeper of the Tate Gallery where he instigated a forward looking programme: this included showing many Turners which had been unearthed from the store. From 1911 to 1924 he was keeper of the Wallace Collection, and a member of numerous committees. After giving up his permanent post as art critic, he continued as an

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134. The first contribution signed with his name is a review of the New English Art Club's exhibition, 21 November 1896.

135. D.S.MacColl, Life, Work and Setting of Philip Wilson Steer, 1945, p.43

136. Thornton, Diary, p.20.

occasional contributor to artistic periodicals.

In the preface to a collection of his artistic journalism, Confessions of a Keeper, and other Papers, he makes it quite clear what he considers his specific duties to have been:

> The first task for a critic in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to champion some of the senior artists still in dispute, Manet, Degas, Whistler, Rodin, the Impressionists, and others. The second was to single out the newer talents of the time. There were old masters as well to review in current exhibitions. There were various campaigns as well, for the preservation of Marble Hill, the completion of Stevens' monument, the arrest of Richmond's mosaics, the reform of the Chantrey purchases and other features of administration at the Academy and the public galleries; single acquisitions like the Rodin; the foundation of the National Art Collections Fund and the Contemporary Art Society, the salvage of Hugh Lane's pictures and foundation of a Foreign Gallery.[137]

In a more general declaration, he states that the ideals of a critic are to see an object honestly and completely, and to use words as precisely as he can. Nevertheless, he was aware that a critic's task is necessarily a selective one: that his or her statement may be true of what he or she has taken into account but, since a residuum is necessarily left over, a 'true' statement, from the moment it is made, begins to be untrue. This principle of seeing an object honestly applied to painter as well as to critic. He believed - and here may lie the root

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137. D.S. MacColl, Confessions of a Keeper, and other Papers, 1931, pp.v-vi.

of his objections to abstract art - in the importance of studying nature at first hand (Ruskin was, after all, 'the enchanter of my youth'):[138] he criticised Blake, for example, for his mistaken belief that his imagination was as precise and particular as his observation and memory.[139]

For MacColl, the appreciation of a painting was an intensely personal process: hence one which could not be subjected to any set of rules, nor one, in fact, which he believed to be significantly affected by historical knowledge. A picture, or other work of art, is most fully understood, according to MacColl:

> ...when we give ourselves to it wholly, passing through it as a gate into the world it opens, and allowing the world to enlarge itself infinitely, to the exclusion of all others.[140]

The test of a work of art, he continued, lies in its ability to occupy one's attention fully, and such a quality is not likely to be easily found.

The formal qualities in painting which MacColl most admired, sound draughtsmanship and an understanding of proportion, mass and colour are discussed much more fully in relation to his criticism in Chapter VII, where I show the

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138. D.S.M., 'Ruskin and his Critics II', Saturday Review, XC, 20 October 1900, p.488.

139. D.S.M., 'Old Masters and Amateurs', Spectator, 88, 28 January 1893, p.128.

140. D.S.M., 'Ruskin and his Critics II', Saturday Review, XC, p.488.

grounds on which he based his enthusiasm for the Impressionists. Among English artists, MacColl's warmest support was for Philip Wilson Steer, a painter to whom he devoted a most commendatory biography. He repudiated strongly the notion that his praising of Steer was a result of their well-known personal friendship (a belief voiced most strongly in reviews, in both instances of exhibitions at the Grafton Gallery, by Charles Holmes, The Times 22 April 1909 and by Roger Fry in the New Statesman, 29 March 1924). He stressed that 'admiration came first; friendship followed' (an admiration which, on Thornton's testimony, would have been general in the Westminster School in the late 1880s), and that his friends were uncomfortably aware that a close relationship between them and the critic laid them open to more severe, rather than more lax, criticism.[141]

It seemed to be Steer's use of colour, above all, that excited MacColl: the range and delicacy of his colour combinations, and the fact that Steer managed to convey feeling for his subject matter along with his technical boldness. He could be contrasted on this count with, for example, Seurat and Signac, with their 'false theory' of pointillisme, ruining a fine original sense of colour through the substitution of 'ridiculous showers of dots' which resulted in a loss of vividness and the consequent substitution of a 'foggy whitish grey'.[142] Whilst MacColl admitted that Steer

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141. MacColl, Steer, p.50.

142. MacColl, Steer, p.38.

had made a few experiments in pointillisme, he stated expansively that 'everybody' was glad when the painter discovered that he could achieve the same, or greater, brilliance of effect without the dots.[143]

MacColl's objections to pointillisme are most fully stated in the final chapter of his major critical work in book form, Nineteenth Century Art. Frank Rutter enthusiastically praised :

> . . . this sumptuous volume /which/ is not only the most important of the many art publications in 1902, but also the most notable contribution to art criticism since the late Mr. R.A.M. Stevenson's Velasquez.[144]

Like the concealed message of Stevenson's work, MacColl's book seems primarily designed as a eulogy of 'the practices and doctrine of Impressionism, the special art of the nineteenth century'.[145] Even the subdivisions of his introductory chapter, 'The Vision of the Century', give a clear indication of his bias throughout: 'The Painter's Image in Values of Light'; 'The Limits of Light in Painting'; 'Truth of Impression'. It emerges clearly that MacColl's

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143. D.S.M., 'New English Art, 1900', Saturday Review, XC, 24 November 1900, p.646.

144. Frank Rutter, 'Round the Galleries', Sunday Special, 4 January 1903, p.6. The book was produced in conjunction with the Fine Art Section of the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901. All the illustrations were taken from works on show on this occasion, for which MacColl had organised the Impressionist section.

145. D.S. MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, Glasgow, 1902, p.3.

most important criterion is that a painting should represent 'imaginative vision, that is vision determined by an intrigue of beauty and interest'.[146] MacColl saw the essential characteristic of nineteenth century art to be a hunger for the full visible beauty of the subject: a hunger which required that 'the object shall not be imagined and abstractly constituted, but present, to be scrutinised and yield up the secret and bloom of its life'.[147] This insistence on the relationship between painting and an external object also lay behind his denial that possibilities could be found in non-representational art. Much of his enthusiasm for the Impressionists rested not just on their technical endeavours to create, with honesty, their vision of the world but on the way this technique reflects certain aspects of the world - especially, as with Steer, its constantly changing chromatic variety, its 'radiant surface'.[148] Certainly, he believed in the importance of design, but not as an end in itself: rather, as an element which links the general vision preceding the execution of a picture, and the general aspect of its completion.[149]

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146. MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, p.3.

147. MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, p.147

148. MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, p.153.

149. D.S.M., 'Three Galleries and a Mezzotint', Saturday Review, XC, 14 July 1900, p.46.

As we shall see in Chapter VII, MacColl did not maintain his practice of finding new artists to champion into the early years of the twentieth century. He failed to take heed of his own advice. When he reviewed the seventeenth exhibition of the New English Art Club, he :

> ...cannot help wondering whether it ever occurs to the gentlemen who employ well-established reputations as a means of keeping youth at bay, that there must come too soon a time when the stage will be empty of the figures they have taught themselves to believe they admire, and behind whom they screen the eternal timidity of the critic without conviction. ... When the tale of work of Puvis and Legros, of Whistler and Degas, of Watts and Burne-Jones and Manet is unhappily completed, will the volte-face not be a little sudden? Would it not be prudent to cast about for their successors while there is time?[150]

But in expressions of near religious fervour which, in their vituperativeness, rival the outpourings of Impressionism's early detractors, MacColl weighed in against non-representational art. His terminology was, indeed, very similar to the language used in Nazi invectives against 'degenerate art'. He attacked 'Rimmon, the anti-god, otherwise known as the 'School of Paris'; attacked :

> ...sculptors who offer a stone or geometry in place of human forms, or tie distortions together with bits of wire and string; painters who make hoops of trees, substitute plumber's tubing for the limbs of man, empty swishings of the brush or cookeries from the palette for landscape; spread apocalyptic skies in arbitrary tints over paralytic buildings; join in exercises after the doodlings of a Klee and incandescent bosh of a Kandinsky, or disinter visceral wrigglings from the 'subconscious' as the stuff of super-dreams.[151]

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150. D.S.M., 'The New English Art Club', Saturday Review, LXXXII, 21 November 1896, p.540.

151. D.S. MacColl, letter to the editor of Art and Reason, reprinted in In Memoriam: Philip Wilson Steer, 1944, p.8.

The newer French art critics were automatically condemned as conspirators in this corruption. MacColl complained that the School of Paris is not :

> ... native but exotic, an invasion of the barbarians. When the baser types which every race produces take up a traffic in the production and marketing of art, corruption smells to high heaven, rendered the more noisome by a venal journalism.[152]

The one work of art produced by these moderns for which he does find some praise is Picasso's Guernica, on the grounds of its inspiring sentiment. Nonetheless, he condemns the 'not easily decipherable fury'[153] of its execution.

This acute, if embarrassingly voiced distress at developments in modern art seems traceable to MacColl's distrust of any painting which appears to exist to illustrate theory alone. He provided his own gloss to Clive Bell's coinage, 'that elementary and therefore popular fallacy, 'Significant' (i.e. meaningless) 'Form'.'[154] From the time of the First Post Impressionist Exhibition onwards, it is clear that MacColl's allegiance does not rest so much with the principle of the New as with his early enthusiasm for the French and English Impressionists: those painters who,

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152. In Memoriam, p.9.

153. In Memoriam, p.10.

154. In Memoriam, p.8.

for him, represented a kind of culmination, with consequent stasis, in a long artistic tradition primarily concerned with the most truthful representation of our vision of the world's beauties. Notably, his later artistic concerns - with the Wallace Collection, National Art Collections Fund, and so on, tended to look to the traditions of the past rather than to their development into the future.

George Moore 1852-1933

George Moore is a problematic critic. He was closely associated in the public mind with the New Criticism: he strongly promoted the Impressionists, deriving many of his supportive arguments from the personal friendship and knowledge of their work which he professed to possess. Yet far more than with any of his progressive contemporaries, his enthusiasm sometimes seems little more than a self-publicising pose; his claims to acquaintance and exclusive information decidedly spurious.

Born in Ireland, the eldest son of the M.P. for Mayo, Moore lived with his family in London from 1868, taking evening classes in drawing and painting at the South Kensington Museum. In 1870, on the death of his father, he decided to take up painting seriously, going to stay in Paris in March 1873, and enrolling in classes first at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and then at the Salon Julien. In 1876,

he seems to have decided he had more potential as a writer than as an artist, and from 1878, produced volumes of poetry (Flowers of Passion; Pagan Poems); a play, Martin Luther, in collaboration with Bernard Lupez who had introduced him, apparently, to the café society of Montmatre; short stories, reviews, and short articles. His first, controversial, naturalist novel, A Modern Lover, appeared in 1883.

Moore was thus already established in literary circles when his first art criticism, for the Bat, appeared in May 1886.[155] His most prolific years were the early 1890s, when he contributed regularly to his brother's paper, the Hawk, in late 1889 and 1890 (writing, additionally, on art for the Fortnightly Review and Magazine of Art), and then, from April 1891 to November 1898, in the Speaker. Whilst fulfilling his required duty of reporting on the current London exhibitions, Moore clearly, whenever possible, took the opportunity to stress the importance of the French Impressionists. His other two recurrent themes were attacks on the Royal Academy, and the defence of the New English Art Club Artists. After 1895, Moore wrote only the occasional articles on art, preferring to concentrate on his fiction.

As can be seen from his expedient change of mind over

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155. The unsigned article 'Half-a-Dozen Enthusiasts', Bat, May 1886, pp.185-6, bears no signature but the section on Degas is strikingly similar to passages in the piece entitled 'Degas' in Impressions and Opinions, 1891.

A complete list of Moore's art criticism can be found in Edwin Gilcher, A Bibliography of George Moore, DeKalb, Illinois, 1970.

Degas's L'Absinthe, discussed in Chapters I and VII, Moore was not dependably consistent in his opinions. Whilst usually a vociferous admirer of recent French painting, he could adopt a sudden insularity, demanding 'the calm of national character' instead of the 'noisy idiosyncrasy' found abroad:

> Our lives should be one long sacrifice for this one thing - national character. Foreign travel should be eschewed, we should turn our eyes from Paris and Rome and fix them on our own fields.[156]

By the mid nineties, Moore asserted that France is 'all decadence'.[157] His enthusiasm for the Impressionists became one for a period of recent artistic history, rather than for current developments. Moreover, MacColl, at least, seems to have regarded him as something of a time-server even in relation to the Impressionists, designating him a 'doubtful convert' to the ranks of the New Critics.[158]

Certainly, the controversy over Degas's painting stimulated the somewhat opportunistic appearance of Moore's Modern Painting, a selection of two years' art criticism in the Speaker. MacColl, in a long review of the book, complained about its looseness of construction, its prevalent journalistic style, the temporary interest of many of the

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156. G.M., 'A Great Artist' /Charles Keene/, Speaker, III, 4 April 1891, p.397.

157. George Moore, Modern Painting, new and enlarged edition, 1898, p.96.

158. MacColl, Steer, p.42.

current exhibitions and passing controversies referred to, and the tendency of the personality of the author to obtrude. Nonetheless:

> ...regarded as blows in a critical campaign for good painting as against bad, the articles are well directed and effective.[159]

Moore himself seems to have regarded Modern Painting as something of a tract for the times: it was never revised, and he never allowed it to appear in a collected edition of his works.

Generally, however, Modern Painting met with an interested if slightly qualified, reception. Pater, whose aesthetic prose Moore had admired since 1885, wrote on Modern Painting in one of his very rare excursions into the subject of contemporary painting, praising the younger man's power to arouse the 'general reader, lost perhaps in a general sleep of conventional ideas', by means of his knowledgeable, 'perfervid conviction'.[160] The Sketch advised a reading

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159. Unsigned review, 'Modern Painting', Spectator, 70, 18 November 1893, p.720. The review is identified by Jean C. Noël, George Moore: l'homme et l'oeuvre, Paris 1966, p.606, as being by MacColl. Moore had begged MacColl personally to review the book:

> Your review of my book is of great importance; the Spectator is the very best paper for it to appear in. So I will venture to beg you to do it at your very earliest convenience. Every copy of the book sold means the propagation of our ideal.
> (reprinted Joseph Hone, The Life of George Moore, 1936, p.184.)

160. Walter Pater, 'Modern Painting', Daily Chronicle, 10 June 1893, p.3.

of the book to convert anyone who previously regarded New Art Criticism as a sort of voluble crotchet, although the writer of this particular review clearly does not have complete sympathy for Moore's opinions, his hostility towards the Academy and 'hatred of the pictorial anecdote', only for the stimulating quality of his stylistic approach, and his ability to understand, and interpret, 'the language of paint'.[161]

In his criticism, Moore played considerably on the personal knowledge of the Impressionists which he claimed to possess. These claims are made at their fullest in Confessions of a Young Man (1886: revised edition 1926) and Reminiscences of the Impressionist Painters (1906). He claims that it was his 'good fortune to know these men /Manet, Degas, Renoir, Pissarro, Monet and Sisley/ when their talent was beginning, before they were known to the rest of the world'.[162] His claims have been challenged. In his article 'George Moore and Modern Art',[163] Douglas Cooper attempts to demonstrate the falsification behind

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161. L.F.A.,'"Modern Painting", by George Moore', Sketch, III, 30 August 1893, p.250.

162. George Moore, Reminiscences of the Impressionist Painters, /Dublin, 1906, p.9.

163. Douglas Cooper, 'George Moore and Modern Art', Horizon, VI, February 1945, pp.113-130.

many of Moore's claims. Cooper's evidence, however, rests mostly on what he regards as significant omissions: the fact that Moore is never mentioned in the correspondence of Manet, Cézanne and Degas; the fact that Moore did not comment on the Second, Third and Fourth Impressionist exhibitions (April 1876, May 1877, May 1879), nor on the large sale of Impressionist paintings at the Hotel Drouot on May 28th, 1877; the fact that he did not use any of his income to purchase such works, and so on. Cooper suggests that such was Moore's embarrassment at becoming friendly with, for example, Steer, Whistler and Tonks on his return to England from seven years' residence in France during which time he spent, on his brother's testimony, more attention to musical comedy than to painting, that he wrote extravagant claims into his memoirs to repair any apparent breaches in the knowledge he felt obliged to claim.

Certainly, the lack of reciprocacy in all French records helps point to the fact that Moore was perhaps over-amplifying the contacts he claims. On occasion, he does present directly misleading information, as when he falsifies the chronology of Manet's life. But, as Noël indicates in George Moore: l'homme et l'oeuvre:

> ...il faut voir aussi que ces articles n'ont pas été rédigés pour servir de doeuments aux historiens futurs. Chacun est un acte tactique dans une campagne prolongée, dirigée contre un petit nombre d'objectifs ... Moore mène la lutte selon ses moyens et son

> tempérament, avec ses infidélités de memoire, ses impulsions, ses préjugés, et même ses incohérences, mais aussi avec son don de peindre par les mots ce qu'il voit, avec sa sympathie, son entrain contagieux, sa verve polémique.[164]

Moore, whatever his defects of accuracy, was popularly associated with the publicisation of Impressionism. He was influential, despite his frequent flirtations with jingoistic sentiments, and despite his habit of conflating aesthetic with moral issues, in forming the vocabulary, the terms of reference in which the Impressionists were discussed in the 1890s.

Claude Phillips 1846-1924

The son of a Court jeweller, Phillips was educated on the continent, at London University, and subsequently read for the Bar, becoming a recognised authority on International Law: a career which, since he specialised in Italian cases, allowed him leisure to study the art of that country in particular. Initially a music correspondent for his cousin's paper, the Daily Telegraph, Phillips began contributing articles on the history of painting for the same publication. He acted from the 1880s to 1896 as English correspondent to the Gazette des Beaux Arts, and joined the staff of the Telegraph on a permanent basis in 1897. His historical knowledge led to him

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164. Noël, Moore, p.209.

being appointed to the Consultative Committee of the Burlington Magazine, to which he also contributed.

Phillips, despite the conservatism of the Telegraph, was unusually receptive to modern artistic developments. Oliver Brown records the interest which he took in the pioneering exhibitions at the Leicester Square Galleries in the 1900s.[165] Among the painters he most admired was Monet, with his 'magic skill', 'the greatest living landscape-painter of his school', whose art he regarded as 'epoch-making ... as regards technique'.[166] This example illustrates Phillip's belief in linear historical development - and, unlike MacColl and Moore, he did not regard the Impressionists as the end of a line. He claimed that art which stood still froze, and became:

> ...meaningless in its repetition of pictorial ideas and formulas, of phases of feeling and modes of expression.[167]

Edward Montague Rashdall 1860-1888

Although only twenty-eight when he died, Rashdall had played an important rôle in introducing to England some of the technical aspects of Impressionism, particularly through

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165. Oliver Brown, Exhibition, 1968, p.38.

166. Claude Phillips, 'The Quality of Emotion in Modern Art', Emotion in Art, 1925, p.29. The article originally appeared in the North American Review, 1902.

167. Phillips, 'Quality of Emotion', p.30.

his writing for the Artist. Educated at public school and Oxford, he subsequently took up painting under Francis Bate, and became a personal friend of Monet and several other Impressionists. He was, as his obituary in the Artist put it, 'in sympathy with what are known as advanced views in Art'.[168]

Frank Rutter 1876-1937

> Frank Rutter ... was the avant-garde enthusiast among the popular critics and praised the French painters when he had the opportunity. He was above all the champion of the New English Art Club ...[169]

Rutter became a professional critic in 1901, working, in particular, for the Financial Times and the Sunday Special and Times He remained art correspondent for the Sunday Times until 1938. He learned during his time at Cambridge that 'you did not speak about the Royal Academy if you pretended to be interested in modern art',[170] but, he claimed, he did not really know what a modern art exhibition could be like until he visited the International Society's show of 1898 (including works by Degas, Monet, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec,

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168. Unsigned obituary, 'E.M. Rashdall', Artist, IX, October 1888, p.319.

169. Brown, Exhibition, p.38.

170. Frank Rutter, Art in My Time, 1933, p.53.

Bonnard and Vuillard.) This produced an instant desire in him:

> ...to see more of the French Impressionists. Nothing like their colour had ever greeted my sight before. I was enchanted by the magic of its sparkle, its astounding luminosity, its truth to all one's experience of Nature in her most brilliant moments of sunshine.[171]

He obtained a card enabling him to visit Durand-Ruel's private collection, an experience which he recounts in the vocabulary of passion: he 'fell in love' with Renoir's La Loge and his river scenes; 'adored' Degas's ballet girls, 'gazed with delight' at all the Sisleys, nearly all the Monets, and Pissarro's landscapes and boulevard scenes.[172] Rutter's interest was confirmed in print when he had the opportunity to review the works displayed in the Fine Art Section of the 1902 Wolverhampton International exhibition. At the end of this decade, in addition to newspaper journalism, Rutter could put forward his critical ideas, his enthusiasm for the Impressionists and their successors, in the journal which he edited, the Art News, organ of the Allied Artists Association. This paper ran from October 1909 to April 1912.

As will be seen in Chapter VII, Rutter was probably the

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171. Rutter, Art in My Time, p.54.

172. Rutter, Art in My Time, p.55.

most patient of all the critics in his desire to explain, carefully and sympathetically, the principles which lay behind Post-Impressionism. He was capable of putting himself into the position of the bewildered, uninformed spectator. Unlike many of the New Critics, he showed a tendency to place art in terms of contemporary politics and social conditions, although without adopting any Ruskinian moral emphasis in so doing.

Walter Sickert 1860-1942

Sickert is certainly better remembered as a painter than as a critic, but throughout his life he contributed writing on artistic matters to a variety of periodicals, both in the form of articles, and in a proliferation of letters, which, as Clive Bell rather uncharitably put it, flaunted an 'air of profundity combined with scintillating snappiness', but are 'as often as not silly, incoherent, beside the point and ungrammatical'.[173] His style always tended to be showy - Osbert Sitwell, not himself renowned for a tight control of vocabulary, described it as :

> ... discursive, loaded with opinions and prejudices, encrusted with wit, wisdom, cleverness and folly, rising on the wings of high spirits, or falling into melancholy indulging in some passages that are as idealistic and perspicacious as they are true, and others that rail and mock and tease and glitter.[174]

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173. Clive Bell, Old Friends, 1956, p.18.

174. Osbert Sitwell, 'A Short Character of Walter Richard Sickert', in Walter Sickert, A Free House!, 1947, p.xv.

Sickert came from an artistic family; his father painted, family friends included the Holman Hunts, Burne-Joneses and Morrisses.[175] After a short period acting, Sickert studied at the Slade until persuaded by Whistler, in 1880, to leave the art school and work under him in his studio, preparing canvases, helping Menpes print Whistler's Venetian etchings, and gaining advice, and artistic contacts, from the painter himself. In return, Sickert began to champion Whistler in the press: a process which began with a contribution to the Pall Mall Gazette in June 1882, defending Whistler's Scherzo in Blue, exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery.[176] And this intervention inaugurated :

> ... a defence that was carried on with some obstinacy in whatever papers would put up with it. In Truth, in the Pall Mall Gazette, The Whirlwind, the London edition of the New York Herald, the Speaker and the Saturday Review, I insisted, in and out of season, on the excellence and importance of Whistler's art.[177]

Through Whistler and the portrait painter Jacques-Emile Blanche, Sickert became friendly with Degas, admiring in particular the Frenchman's ability in draughtsmanship. This friendship was reflected not just in Sickert's own work, but in the enthusiasm

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175. For full biographical accounts of Sickert's life, see
Wendy Baron, Sickert, 1973.
Marjorie Lilly, Sickert. The Painter and his Circle, 1971.
Denys Sutton, Walter Sickert, a biography, 1976.

176. Comment quoted in unsigned 'Occasional Notes' ('an Art Student writes to us as follows ...') Pall Mall Gazette, 7 June 1882, p.4.

177. Pall Mall Gazette, 7 June 1882, p.4.

for the Impressionists which runs through his criticism.

Moreover, Sickert's personal contacts among the Impressionists proved useful for other sympathetic critics of the time. When D.S. MacColl visited Paris in the early 1890s with the intention of seeing as many works as possible by Degas, Sickert furnished him with letters of introduction to the dealers who handled the Frenchman's work (Durand-Ruel, and Boussod and Valadon) and to the private collections (e.g. of Blanche, Fauve and Rouart) in which examples of his artistic production could be found.

Sickert reserved his highest praise for those works of art, such as Whistler's paintings, which induce in the spectator 'the reverential awe, the sense of something super-human'.[178] No sense of awe, however, was called forth by the 'earth-shaking jumble' of works shown at the second Post-Impressionist exhibition, despite his having given a qualified welcome to the first. This muted welcome had been stimulated not just by the opportunity to see works by Cézanne, Gaugin, and Van Gogh, but because it created a 'rumpus' and a 'consequent crowd' of people discussing these new artistic developments.[179] But in 1912, Sickert could not resist treating this 'cubical, conical, cylindrical,

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178. Walter Sickert, 'Art', Whirlwind, i, 28 June 1890, p.6.

179. Walter Sickert, 'Post-Impressionists', Fortnightly Review, LXXXIX (n.s.), January 1911, p.79.

rhomboidal invasion'[180] with derision. His favourite target was anything which appeared to him pretentious: thus the Higher Art Criticism (by which he seems to have understood those who wrote for the Burlington) was abandoned by him as 'Double-Dutch'. 'I remember the occasion', he recalled in 1912:

> ...of my definitive renunciation, perhaps I should call it my defeat. I used to follow, with the respectful awe of a peasant in the presence of learning, the Hornes, the Loesers and the Berensons in their complex incantations; "How can anyone", I used to think, "know so much?"[181]

Indeed, for Sickert, any painting that required explanation in words 'stands self-condemned'. Here lay the deficiency of Futuristic art; 'here we have the condemnation of Matisse and Picasso, and even of most of Cézanne's canvases'.[182] By implication, Sickert stood by his artistic mentor, Whistler, in denying that the art critic is 'the necessary blister for the health of the painter'.[183] Rather, he enjoyed his part-time profession as an opportunity to point out 'certain useful truths' which do not appear to be 'sufficiently understood by writers on art who are not artists',[184] and

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180. Walter Sickert, 'A Critical Calendar', English Review, 10, March 1912, p.713.

181. Sickert, 'A Critical Calendar', p.714.

182. Walter Sickert, 'The Futurist "Devil Among the Tailors" ', A Free House! p.110 (originally published English Review, April 1912)

183. J.A. McN. Whistler, 'Whistler v. Ruskin: Art and Art Critics', Gentle Art, 2nd (enlarged) edition, 1892, p.30.

184. Walter Sickert, 'Exhibititus', New Age, VI, 28 April 1910, p.612.

to state his views on his contemporaries in a spirited, not to say outspokenly candid fashion.

Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson 1847-1900

> What is called art criticism can scarce ever be quite the same as it was when he began his work of suggestion, edification, inspiration. Then it was all rhetoric and morals. You esteemed a painter because he exampled the charm of the domestic hearth; or because, Nature being the sole and only thing worth taking to your soul, he treated Nature as a common harlot, and did what he would with her; or because he could neither paint nor draw, yet, in the absence of both drawing and paintings, he appeared to have something to say which, ill said or not at all, was yet so gloriously suggested, that there you were, you know! There you were! But for Stevenson, there you might be still. But in his placating irresistible way, he took his public to first principles. He stood by the elements of art.[185]

The influence of R.A.M. Stevenson on the development of a language of formal art criticism was considerable. He had extensive practical experience as an artist himself, studying first at the Edinburgh School of Art (1871-3) and subsequently at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp;[186] in Paris under Carolus Duran, and at Barbizon and Grez. But, as Sidney Colvin indicates in the Dictionary of National Biography:

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185. W.E. Henley, Views and Reviews, II, 1908, pp.206-7.

186. It seems likely that 'Art Life in Antwerp', Saturday Review, 10 February 1883, p.178, showing, as it does, a close practical knowledge of the daily life of an art student in this city, represents R.A.M. Stevenson's first piece of art writing for this periodical. The article stresses the primacy which was placed at the Ecole on accurate draughtsmanship.

> ...theory was his element. His friends, foremost among them W.E. Henley, began to urge that he should turn his powers of exposition to practical account.[187]

According to Stevenson's DNB entry, from 1883-1889 he contributed regularly to the Saturday Review, writing on music as well as painting. Denys Sutton, in his useful short biography of Stevenson, queries the earlier of these dates on internal evidence, a conclusion which I must uphold. Quoting Stevenson's obituary notice in the Pall Mall Gazette in support, Sutton suggests 1886 as an alternative.[188] Certainly, as I show in Chapter VII, certain notices of 1885, if not earlier, point to Stevenson's particular preoccupations. However, the date of 1883 itself is borne out by a few scattered references in Stevenson's correspondence in the Beinecke collection.[189] In the absence of other evidence, I would therefore suggest that Stevenson was an occasional contributor up to 1886, and a regular correspondent for three

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187. S.C., 'Stevenson, Robert Alan Mowbray' Dictionary of National Biography, Supplement 1900-1910, p.1228. Stevenson taught an undergraduate painting class in Cambridge under Colvin's Slade professorship in 1882.

188. Obituary, Pall Mall Gazette, 19 April 1900, p.3.

189. See letters from W.E. Henley to Robert Louis Stevenson, nos. 4843 (26 July 1885) and 4845 (16 October 1885), A Stevenson Library: catalogue of writings by and about Robert Louis Stevenson, formed by Edwin J. Beinecke, compiled by George L. McKay, New Haven, 1958, vol. IV, p. 1414.

Denys Sutton, in R.A.M. Stevenson, Velasquez... With a biographical study of the author by D. Sutton, 1962, pp. 14-15.

years from that date.

After a period as Professor of Fine Arts at University College, Liverpool (1889-1893), Stevenson became a regular critic for the Pall Mall Gazette until 1899. His most influential work, The Art of Velasquez, did not deal directly with contemporary art. First published in 1895, the text was revised and expanded for Williamson's series of 'Great Masters' (1899). This examination of Velasquez was inseparable, however, both in the terms used and the values stressed, from Stevenson's long standing championship of both Whistler and the Impressionists. In order to achieve greater recognition for innovative modern art, Stevenson attempted to formulate the qualities he found in an earlier, already prestigious painter in a vocabulary which drew attention to Velasquez's parallels with nineteenth century techniques. The subsequent overlap of terminology results in a denial of historic specificity to both Spanish artist and French movement - thus Velasquez, in Stevenson's conclusion, becomes 'the great Spanish Impressionist'.[190]

One element was particularly praised by Stevenson: the ability to achieve artistic unity. Whistler, for example, was applauded, above all, for his Velasquez-like talent in

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190. R.A.M. Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p.124.

integrating a portrait with its surroundings in terms both of composition and atmosphere. If an artist does not strive for an overall effect of unity in a painting; if 'some vice of handling, or some exaggerated imitation of a method' predominates, and the important forms are not allowed their due prominence but are subordinated to 'wiry representations of detail', then there is no chance of Stevenson's most valued general effect, 'the broad shimmer of light and the aerial suppleness of a natural envelopment' being achieved.[191]

The unity of which Stevenson spoke was one both of composition - he saw one of 'the worst faults of bad English realism' as lying in 'the incapability of realizing anything but separate objects one by one'[192] - and of something by definition far more nebulous: 'atmosphere'. Atmospheric unity can be determined by a painting's use of colour and tonality. It is an attribute which for Stevenson was ultimately relevant not just to the harmonies achieved on a canvas's surface, but to the whole setting in which a painting is seen. Hence he praised the attention Whistler paid to gallery decoration. If more galleries were aware of the obligation of a painting to bring every colour it contains 'under the rule of some marked and patent tonality',

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191. Unsigned review, 'The Royal Academy IV', Saturday Review, LXIII, 4 June 1887, p.800.

192. Unsigned review, 'Landscape at the Exhibitions', Saturday Review, LXI, 29 May 1886, p.740.

they would not so frequently 'present acres of undigested colour, more disagreeable than a lodging-house heart-rug'.[193]

Stevenson, as one would expect, strongly attacked the policies of the Royal Academy, those guardians of British art who 'must think of the taste of those who pay the shilling', with their preference for 'nice little fables with a very obvious moral'.[194] He did not deny that genre painting could have a place, both serving, broadly speaking, a moral end - to make spectators aware of the 'crushing burdens' of the 'labouring poor' - and an aesthetic one:

> A great workshop, a dock, or a crowded street is full of combinations of colour and line. There is no kind of human toil which does not form the character of the workman, and leaves its traces on his whole body. If genre pictures are worth painting at all, these are the things which it ought to represent. But it is just this outward paintable world which our artists neglect.[195]

Nonetheless, it is unquestionable that the 'wrong sort of realism' must be avoided: 'the realism of storytelling and illustrative incident, instead of the realism of effect'.[196] And this phrase of Stevenson's neatly serves to encapsulate the difference between the old and the new critics. As we shall see in Chapter V, the older critics based their reviewing on the belief that pictures could, in some way, be 'read', and written about in the same terms, and according

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193. Unsigned review, 'Pictures in Edinburgh', Saturday Review, LXI, 8 May 1886, p.644.

194. Unsigned review, 'The Picture Galleries - III', Saturday Review, LV, 19 May 1883, p.632.

195. Unsigned review, 'The Picture Galleries - V', Saturday Review, LV, 3 June 1883, p.697.

196. Unsigned review, 'The Grosvenor Gallery - V', Saturday Review, LXV, 19 May 1888, p.595.

to the same criteria, as narrative fiction. The newer critics, on the other hand, of whom Stevenson was among the most lucid as well as the most influential, were well aware that new developments on the canvas surface, forcing them to look again at the concepts of form, structure, tone and colour, could no longer be described in the tired language of their predecessors.

CHAPTER IV: THE PROFESSION OF ART CRITIC

'Those who undertake to enlighten public opinion and public taste in matters of literature or art, undertake a most important - I had almost said a sacred - trust. It is not only that the public look to them, upon matters on which the public must be necessarily less informed or enlightened, for assistance in the formulation of their judgement and their taste, but it is also this, that those who are struggling in the race of public competition for public favour, as the means of their livelihood or success in life, have a right to expect that their performances shall be scanned by fair and impartial critics; for, of course, it would make all the difference to the artist whether he is praised or censured in journals of extensive circulation'.

Lord Chief Justice Cockburn's Charge to the Jury, re Ryan v. Wood, Court of Queen's Bench, February 8th 1886.

'Let there be no critics:'[1] cried Whistler in 1878. He was pleading for works of art to be received in silence, as, he asserted, was the practice 'in the days to which the penmen still point as an era when art was at its apogee'.[2]

Whistler's pamphlet, Art and Art Critics, appeared immediately after the libel case of Whistler v. Ruskin had been concluded. It is a vindication and an expansion of the

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1. Whistler, Gentle Art, 2nd (enlarged) edition, 1892, p.30.
2. Gentle Art, 2nd ed., p.30.

position he took during the trial, when he aligned himself with the Attorney General's contemptuous classification of those 'some people who would do away with critics altogether'.[3] It is also, paradoxically, an effort to gain recognition through print for the seriousness of his own critical ideas, particularly those relating to the autonomous language of painting. By attempting to open a theoretical debate, he hopes to show his beliefs to be more than self-publicising gestures. Though Whistler had emerged the legal victor from the trial, Ruskin had won a moral victory. His critical tenets emphasising the connections between Art and Ethics had been left undiminished in the public eye: Ruskin's position as art critic was, during the trial, left completely unassailed:

> To have said that Mr. Ruskin's pose among intelligent men, as other than a littérateur, is false and ridiculous, would have been an invitation to the stake; and to be burnt alive, or stoned before the verdict, was not what I came into court for.[4]

Whistler proceeds to invite assassination in his pamphlet through querying Ruskin's very credentials for writing about art. A life spent, like Ruskin's, among pictures, does not in itself qualify one to express opinions about them - the policeman who guards the works in the National Gallery would have equal justification for asserting himself. The only type of criticism

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3. Gentle Art, 2nd ed., p.29.

4. Gentle Art, 2nd ed., p.26.

whose validity Whistler admitted during the trial was technical criticism, expressed by 'a man whose life is passed in the practice of the art he criticises',[5] but, ignorant of, or more probably ignoring Ruskin's experience as a practical painter and draughtsman, he condemns him in outraged terms for having the impudence to preach to young men what he cannot perform himself.[6]

Whistler's campaign was not, however, as a contemporary noted, 'so much against Mr. Ruskin personally as against the rights or claims of criticism'.[7] The introductory paragraphs of Art and Art Criticism complain that the essence of the trial seems either to have been missed or willingly winked at by reporters in their comments, whilst :

> ...the war, of which the opening skirmish was fought the other day in Westminster, is really one between the Brush and the Pen; and involved literally, as the Attorney-General himself hinted, the absolute "raison d'être"of the critic.[8]

Whistler acknowledges the critic to be a creature of relatively recent growth. Personal bitterness is apparent as he speaks of the evil that these critics perform: furnished with the

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5. "The Action", Gentle Art, p.5.

6. "Whistler v. Ruskin", Gentle Art, p.34.

7. Frederick Wedmore, 'Mr. Whistler's Theories and Mr. Whistler's Art"; Nineteenth Century, 5, August 1879, p.334.

8. "Whistler v. Ruskin", p.25.

means of furthering their foolishness, they spread prejudice, and through the papers, "thousands are warned against the work they have yet to look upon".[9] His fundamental case is that judgment upon a work of art is not a question of personal preference: art should be based upon laws as rigid and defined as those of the known sciences, and the layman, however much he might pride himself on his 'Taste', should remain as discreet and taciturn on the subject of art as he would on engineering or astronomy.

Whistler continued the attack on Ruskin in his Ten O'Clock Lecture, originally planned as an article for the English Illustrated Magazine, and finally delivered in London on February 20th, 1885.[10] Though not published until 1888, it received wide press coverage at the time of its delivery. Opposition to the older critic is found not merely in the thinly disguished portrait of the haranguing, exhorting, denouncing "Sage of the Universities - learned in many matters, and of much experience in all, save his subject",[11] but by Whistler's attack on the belief that art is linked, either as

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9. "Whistler v. Ruskin", p.31.

10. The lecture was repeated in Cambridge, Oxford, and four more times in London, its notoriety being used on the last occasion to inaugurate the discussion-orientated Chelsea Arts Club in 1891. Mallarmé translated it into French: it was published in Paris in 1888.

11. "Ten O'Clock", Gentle Art, p.149.

product or as determinant, to the society in which it is executed. Ruskin is not Whistler's only target, however. He also protests against the work of the "unattached writer" - a designation apparently applied to the freelancing newspaper or periodical critic who sees a work of art solely in terms of the story it tells or fails to tell, and who thus brings about 'the most complete misunderstanding as to the aims of the picture'.[12] He mocks, too, the beliefs of Morris and other backward looking inhabitants of the 'little hamlets /which/ grow near Hammersmith',[13] asserting that the notion of the one-time existence of an artistic period or an art-loving nation is mere idealistic fallacy: as with his censures on Ruskin, this attack is linked to Whistler's denial of any relation between art and history. He disposes of the clerical, pigeon-holing labours of the new breed of art historians, such as Crowe and Cavalcaselle, 'sombre of mien, and wise with the wisdom of books, who frequent museums and burrow in crypts; collecting - comparing - compiling - classifying - contradicting'[14] - they reduce art to statistics and hence kill it. Slightly mocking biblical solemnity is used to warn against the catastrophe that is to come upon the country since the amateur, the

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12. "Ten O'Clock", Gentle Art, p.146.
13. "Ten O'Clock", Gentle Art, p.139.
14. "Ten O'Clock", Gentle Art, pp.148-9.

'Dilettante stalks abroad' and 'the voice of the aesthete is heard in the land'.[15] To the artist, those various forms of criticism or response which Whistler enumerates are, he says, both vulgarisation and popular pretension, fostering the illusion that the mysteries of art are easily accessible, and that the majority of the population have the ability to enter the privileged 'gentle circle' of this goddess.[16]

Behind much of Whistler's attack lay not merely his belief that visual art was untranslatable into any other form, that it spoke adequately in its own language, but a proclaimed intense dislike of the fact that the art critic, by the mid nineteenth century, had come to act as a "middleman" between public and artist.[17] The sincerity of his distaste at recognizing the commercial importance of art can be questioned, coming from one whose correspondence shows a punctilious concern with payment for his works: it is partly a desire to emphasise what he sees as the decontextualisation necessary to a 'pure' aesthetic response. This denial of art's function as a social activity was the aspect of Whistler's polemic to which both his supporters and detractors most frequently objected.

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15. "Ten O'Clock", Gentle Art, p.152.
16. "Ten O'Clock", Gentle Art, p.152.
17. "Ten O'Clock", Gentle Art, p.146.

Even such an admirer as Sheridan Ford, the compiler of the unauthorised collection of Whistler's letters to the press, took up the significance of a remark made by Oscar Wilde in his review of the Ten O'Clock Lecture that 'An artist is not an isolated fact':[18]

> While Art has no need of the Pen, the Public, of which the Newspaper is the Voice, has need of Art, and the Pen must be reckoned with.[19]

The implications of what Henry James described as Whistler's 'little diatribe against writers on art' gain importance through being seen in the context of a growing public examination of the rôle and function of the art critic:

> The painter's irritated feeling is interesting, for it suggests the state of mind of many of his brothers of the brush in the presence of the bungling and incompetent disquisitions of certain members of the fraternity who sit in judgement upon their works.[20]

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18. Oscar Wilde, "Mr. Whistler's Ten O'Clock", Pall Mall Gazette, 21 February 1885, p.14.

19. J.M. McN. Whistler, The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, ed. Sheridan Ford, New York and London, 1890, introduction, p.29.

20. Henry James, "On Art-Criticism and Whistler", The Painter's Eye, 1956, p.175. Reprinted from The Nation, 13 February 1879, p.119. The situation was not, apparently, any better in James's own country, where the ignorance of critics had been attacked for some years:

> Every man who has run through the galleries of Europe imagines that he is capable of judging his contemporary artists, at least, and so we have a plethora of half-fledged social and newspaper critics, who, with their senseless babbling and scribbling, cloud public judgment and confuse public feeling.

Unsigned article, 'The Basis of Criticism', Crayon, i, New York, 21 March 1855, p.177.

Whistler's demand that critics should possess a specialised knowledge of their subject was far from unusual among those who attempted to prescribe their attributes. Complaints against the incompetent, slapdash, facile and uninformed work of the profession's practitioners were frequent. Despite the occasional plea for Pater's Renaissance not to be ranked with the review section of the North Boreshire Advertiser,[21] the 'whole race of writers upon art' inevitably became 'confounded in one common anathema'.[22] When obvious antipathies were displayed, the writer was inevitably attacked by the injured and his partisans, if a work was emphatically praised, he or she was accused of unreasonable partiality. Yet a middle line represented no ideal, either. MacColl suggested that the close personal relationship which critics assume in their capacity as a reader's adviser should demand of the writers a code of conduct identical to that which they would adopt when counselling a friend. The conscience of those critics who have been developing for years 'a kind of callous, bored good-nature' should be jolted in order to remind them of their responsibility: do they consider a picture good enough to recommend a close friend to purchase it? If they are not prepared to accept such responsibility, they have no right to praise the work.[23]

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21. W.G. Blaikie Murdoch, "The Art of Criticism", Memoirs of Swinburne, Edinburgh, 1910, p.117.

22. Quilter, Opinions, p.235.

23. D.S.M., "The New Gallery", Saturday Review, LXXVI, 15 October 1898, p.500.

This plea for sincerity while exercising one's commercial function is, of course, no guarantee of a lack of partiality, since virtually all critics had their own particular group of individual artists which they deliberately promoted: 'Much of even the best writing on art has usually the stamp of special cliques and art friends about it, the flavour of mutual admiration societies'.[24] Almost alone in his disavowal of partisanship was Harry Quilter, who prided himself on his objectivity and his presentation of both sides of a question, even if, as he re-iterated with growing bitterness, this policy had resulted in almost unbearable personal isolation.[25] Quilter pointed out the fact that the direction of the favouritism might not be left up to the critic: newspaper proprietors could not afford to offend those whose advertisements were a continual source of revenue. The principal medium for the distribution of advertisements and for art criticism was, after all, identical. Quilter was speaking from experience, since he had himself been ordered by his editor to review certain

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24. Mrs. Russell Barrington, 'Is a Great School of Art Possible in the Present Day?', Nineteenth Century, 5, April 1879, p.720. She adds that the influence of practising artists is particularly apparent when the newspaper writer passes from treating 'the literary aspect of art' to the technical matters about which he or she knows little.

25. Harry Quilter, Sententiae Artis, 1886, pp.xiii-xiv.

engravings and photogravures more leniently. He knew that such a policy resulted in a lower standard being :

> ...admitted for those phases of art which are commercially profitable to the paper, and that critics are forced, or at all events tempted, to bestow upon the exhibition, for instance, of large picture dealers, or the publications of the great art publishing firms, an amount of praise and attention which are very frequently entirely undeserved.[26]

He adds that he fears it cannot be denied that :

> ...certain publishers, picture dealers, proprietors of art exhibitions, etc., whose advertisements are more numerous or more valuable than the rest, do receive, not only an amount of notice, but an amount of praise, which is in proportion to their monetary importance.[27]

Quilter, always anxious to prove his personal incorruptibility, may perhaps be an unreliable source, but nevertheless he goes on to assert that so long as critics continue to be poorly paid, and so long as they are recruited without reference to their artistic knowledge, they are exposed to certain temptations:

> There are loads of ways in which the moneyed dealer, or publisher, or theatrical lessee can make the critic's path pleasant, or the reverse, and he does make it so.[28]

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26. Quilter, Opinions, p.245.

27. Opinions, p.246.

28. Opinions, p.247.

J. Comyns Carr certainly found his critical integrity compromised by one of his editors, Carter Hall, who sometimes gave way:

> ...to very pointed suggestions that the mercantile interest of the Journal must not be wholly sacrified to my independent views upon Art.
>
> At first these suggestions were only tentatively put forward, and always with an elaborate deference to my better judgment as a critic, but day by day they became more encroaching, until at last the conviction was forced upon me that the columns under my charge were intended to serve as a useful support to the advertisement department of the journal. After a while these constant inferences became so galling and exasperating to me that I determined to break our connection, and in a letter, which I strove to make polite but which I intended to be deeply sarcastic, I ventured to hint that the criticism I was called upon to write was now required to take so entirely the colour of an advertisement, I thought it would be better that it should pass directly into the hands of the manager of the advertisement department.[29]

Archibald Henderson recalls how the last press view Shaw attended was in the capacity of art critic to a Sunday paper[30]:

> ...which had just then passed into the hands of a Jewish lady. "My Academy notice", as he once told me, "appeared padded out to an extraordinary length by interpolations praising the works of the Jewish lady's acquaintances - 'No.2744 is a sweet head of Mrs. - by that talented young artist Miss -' and so on. Naturally I resigned in a highly explosive manner".[31]

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29. Carr, Some Eminent Victorians, pp.148-149.

30. The paper in question was Truth.

31. Archibald Henderson, George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century, 1911, Vol.i. p.171.

As Helene Roberts points out: 'that artists and dealers tried to court or bribe critics was a testimonial to the widespread belief in their influence'.[32]

Direct evidence for collusion between the great mass of critics and individual galleries or dealers is hard to establish, though it would be surprising if the majority of critics were not favourably disposed towards their personal friends. How far favouritism was perceived by the general public is far more debatable. Indeed, in 1898, the compiler of the second edition of the catalogue to the exhibition organised by Boussod, Valadon and Co. at the Goupil Gallery felt that he could assert:

> ...the independence of Art Criticism in England is well known.[33]

Thus he felt the reprinting of the ubiquitously favourable press notices on this exhibition of works by English, French and Dutch painters (in particular, the Maris brothers, Mauve, and Whistler) would be uncynically regarded as providing an

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32. Helene E. Roberts, 'Exhibition and review ...', p.87.

33. 'Opinions of the Press', [p.i], in A Collection of Selected Works by Painters of the English, French & Dutch School, 1898.
The journals from which the 'opinions' were drawn were Bazaar, Bristol Times, Builder, Daily Chronicle, Daily News, Daily Telegraph, Echo, Gentleman, Glasgow Herald, Globe, Lady's Pictorial, Manchester Courier, Manchester Guardian, Morning, Morning Leader, Morning Post, News of the Week, Pall Mall Gazette, Public Opinion, St. James's Gazette, Standard, Sussex Daily News, Table Talk, Times, Truth, Western Morning News, Western Press, and World.

objective evaluation of the quality of the paintings on show. But any attempt to direct public taste through an appeal to anything other than the most firmly rooted expectations and prejudices was, as the perpetually embittered Harry Quilter notes:

> ... a more than parlous matter. Those who endeavour to guide public opinion arouse animosity almost in proportion to their earnestness and insight.[34]

In an age when, compared with the C18th, fewer artistic principles were held significantly in common, many critics attempted to play safe by presenting the reader with purely descriptive reviews, supporting Quilter's maxim that :

> "Exposition" is easy enough and even more safe than easy.[35]

In such cases, where critics avoided overt evaluation and judgment, their aesthetic values remain embedded, often undeliberately, in their choice of vocabulary and the very selection of the works they wrote about.

Ruskin, on being asked how he would advise a country reporter, who had no special knowledge of art, to go about his task, replied that he considered it a newspaper writer's duty to point out to his readers things in a picture which they

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34. Quilter, Preferences, p.ix.

35. Preferences, p.ix.

would have missed without his help. The reporter should stick to commenting on content:

> ...the best thing he can do is to describe carefully the subject of the pictures he thinks likely to please simple people, if they are shown what is in them, and, as far as his editor will allow him, to take no notice of pictures attracting merely by their tricks of painting.[36]

Art critics and reviewers for the provincial press were far from being without guidance in their duties and pre-requisites. A certain amount of resentment at the apparent leisured effortlessness of their occupation perhaps lay behind some of the continual attack on this most 'pleasant mode of earning a livelihood, ... constantly feeding one's eyes upon pictures by clever painters'.[37] For 'painting seems so simple, the object which it proposes to itself is apparently so obvious, that everyone secretly believes himself competent to judge of it'.[38] Yet the impression of facility was a false one, as was stressed even by the many manuals available for the instruction of the hack journalist. They emphasize the indispensability of specialised knowledge to a writer on art

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36. Ruskin, 'Arrows of the Chace', Works, XXXIV, p.576, reprinted from the Pall Mall Gazette, 21 October 1884, which in its turn was quoting from a series of papers on journalism being contributed by Arthur Reade to the Printing Times.

37. J. Dawson, Practical Journalism: how to enter thereon and succeed, 1885, p.56.

38. Philip G. Hamerton, 'Art Criticism', Thoughts About Art, 1873, p.153.

far more strongly than in the case of those reviewing concerts, drama, or even eisteddfodau.

If possible, an expert should be employed by a paper: in large provincial towns, 'the reporter is rarely called upon to "do" the pictures; and, in our opinion, he ought never to be asked'.[39] Failing the availability of this expert, the reviewer should at least be accompanied round the exhibition by one who is himself a practising painter.

No one believed that art criticism was a trade which could be learnt overnight. 'Good criticism', commented F.P. Verney in the Contemporary Review, 'demands at least as long and severe an apprenticeship as that in ironmongery'.[40] The complete novice who followed the advice laid down in The Reporter's Handbook was left in no doubt as to where to begin: 'Get a catalogue'.[41] The list of questions with which s/he was then furnished indicated the habitual emphasis of reviews in the provincial press: the primary importance of the exhibition was as a social event in the calendar of a local community. The reporter should inquire about the specific significance of the exhibition. How much money are the organisers trying to raise, and for what purpose? Should the aim of the show be to

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39. A.A. Reade, Literary Success: being a guide to practical journalism, 1885, p.90.

40. F.P. Verney, 'Where are we in Art?' Contemporary Review, XXXVI, December 1879, p.597.

41. E.P. Davies, The Reporter's Handbook, 1884, p.38.

finance some new building, the writer should obtain the particulars from the architect. Who originally conceived the idea of holding the exhibition? The names of the committee must, as one might expect, be prominently mentioned. The number of oil paintings, water-colours, etchings, engravings and sculptures must be carefully counted. When the question of providing a commentary on the works themselves finally arises, the reporter is issued with a glossary of the most common words and phrases used, followed, in this journalist's dictionnaire des idées reçues, by a list of noted painters, arranged according to their choice of subject matter, from which to draw his informed remarks and comparisons. Thus, if he is conveniently faced with a representation of a bowl of fruit, he can praise or damn it by means of the biographical reference to be found under "Grapes":

> Zeuxis, who is said to have painted grapes so well that the birds came and picked at them.[42]

Most reviewers of exhibitions were exhorted, however, to obtain a far wider knowledge of art than could be gleaned from the pages of a handbook. This knowledge, as was continually stated, required a dual foundation: 'to write on art requires two distinct educations; one in literature and philosophy, the other in practical art-work'.[43] Art history, through the successive periods of its evolution from classical times, should be thoroughly mastered; the lives of the principle

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42. Reporter's Handbook, p.40.

43. Reade, Literary Success, p.59.

painters and sculptors read, and the results of this mass of reading verified by the study of actual paintings and statuary - feasible in any large English city by the 1870s. The understanding of contemporary art, it is suggested, will be greatly aided by visits to artists' studios: permission to visit these was usually readily granted (often, no doubt, by those anxious to obtain some free publicity in the many columns in the art press devoted to work in progress) and, whilst :

> Many excellent painters and sculptors have neither the time, inclination, nor the requisite literary training to enable them to write on their art, ... some of these will discourse in their studio in such a way that teaches more than most of the professionally written pages published in the best art journals of the day.[44]

Yet such bookish knowledge was rarely regarded as sufficient, particularly since it encouraged an over-literary response to painting. Such a response had long been distrusted: "pleasant" practitioners of fine writing could easily, as the New Monthly Magazine had pointed out as early as 1843, pour forth :

> Whole pages of Twaddle written, not on the picture, but on supposed beauties and intentions never intended by the artist .[45]

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44. Percy Russell, The Author's Manual, 1891, p.59.

45. Unsigned article, 'A Few Words about the Cartoons', New Monthly Magazine, LXIX, 1843, p.261.

Whistler was far from being alone in asserting that painting could only be understood by a practising artist. This belief belonged to the tradition of Reynold's maxim that "the knowledge which an artist has of his subject will more than compensate for any want of perspicuity in the matter of treating it",[46] repudiated by Hazlitt but continually restated throughout the C19th. Only rare voices of dissent were heard, in particular towards the end of the century, when the Wildean adherents of the belief in criticism for criticism's sake,

Sir Joshua Reynolds, The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, ed. Edmund Malone, 4th edition, corrected, 1809, vol. II, p. 186. With the exception of the writer of an article on 'The Characteristics of Modern Painting' in the Temple Bar Magazine, 28, January 1870, pp.170-181, the Victorian echoers of Reynolds seemed to ignore their mentor's qualification in his dedication to Metcalfe in the Journey to Flanders:

> Nor is it an inconsiderable advantage to see such works in company with one who has a general rectitude of taste, and is not a professor of the art .... A species of benefit may be obtained which we are not likely to derive from the judgment of painters; who being educated in the same manner, are likely enough to judge from the same principles, are liable to the same prejudices, and may sometimes be governed by the influence of an authority which perhaps has no foundation in our nature (f.n., p. 172, differing in minor respects from the first edition of the Journey to Flanders. The Temple Bar critic mistakenly cites this as a letter to Metcalfe.)

The belief that art should only be written about by artists dated back far beyond the eighteenth century. Dürer, for example, wrote c. 1513: 'The art of painting cannot be truly judged save by such as are themselves good painters; from others verily it is hidden even as a strange tongue'. (The Writings of Albrecht Dürer, translated and edited by W.M. Conway, 1958, p. 177)

implicitly countering Ruskin's demands for an artist's understanding of physical structures, pointed to what they considered the absurd illogicality of admiring and extolling a critic's theoretical knowledge of art, when the painter himself is ignorant of the technicalities of what he describes on canvas:

> Whistler himself was not a builder of bridges and barges, nor was he a maker of rockets; yet he dared to depict his impression and personal vision of such things, and the excellence of this painting is not lessened by his want of the intimate acquaintance which would have been his, had he been engaged in one of the said trades. It is improbable that Monet ever acted as a gardener or engine-driver.[47]

As can be seen from the biographical remarks in the previous chapter, art critics were not infrequently unsuccessful painters themselves, who had perhaps trained alongside the practising artists they subsequently supported. The relative novelty of someone being a successful practitioner in both verbal and visual spheres is reflected in Gleeson White's response to D.S. MacColl's Umbrellas, shown at the New English Art Club in 1892. The work, he claims :

> ...has a vivid perception of the right accent in the right place that distinguishes certain "Spectator" articles signed with the same initials. Can it be that an art critic knows how to paint? The idea is too much to accept without further evidence but exquisitely right use of colours and words so noticeable in each occasion provokes the enquiry.[48]

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47. W.Murdoch, 'The Art of Criticism', Memoirs of Swinburne, Edinburgh, 1910, p.120.

48. Gleeson White, 'The New English Art Club', Artist, xiii, May 1892, p.136.

It seems, however, another indication of the respect which a critic was expected to have for his or her subject that practical experience was habitually demanded of them; not so much that they might have a more intimate understanding of the formal qualities of a work, but more to give them an increased moral comprehension, enabling them to realise the extreme difficulty, the years of training, which lay behind the art they presumed to criticise so lightly. Often heavily influenced in their manner of progression by Ruskin's Elements of Drawing, courses of practical self-instruction for the critic were suggested:

> Try to copy in outline in pencil: if you can do that right, try a form in sepia; if you can do that, try it again on canvas, and feel how the intractible nature of the pig dwells in those uncompromising bristles, which refuse for hours of trouble to do anything you want.[49]

It seems that it was believed possible to train both painter and writer simultaneously. Thus an advertisement in the Artist reads:

> An experienced Artist and Art Critic is prepared to receive a resident pupil on special terms. Full technical and literary instruction.[50]

The most thorough discussion of the 'old feud ... between

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49. R.S. Tyrwhitt, 'The Limits of Modern Art-Criticism', Nineteenth Century, 4, September 1878, p.514. Tyrwhitt was in fact Ruskin's secretary.

50. Advertisement, Artist, viii, March 1880, p.95.

Artist and Critic'[51] can be found in Fraser's Magazine for August 1875. William Allingham thought that it was a rare sort of critic whose technical knowledge and experience were up to those of the average artist, but attacked artists, despite possessing this knowledge, for overvaluing technique at the expense of subject.

The most thorough prescriptive description of the duties of an art critic can be found in an article which P.G. Hamerton wrote for the Cornhill. Alarmed by Ferdinand de Lasteyrie's information that fewer qualifications are required from Parisian critics than from any other writers for the French press, and that the most inexperienced youths start their journalistic career through the uninformed criticism of pictures, he felt an urgent need to define 'the relation between the critic and the artist on the one hand, and the critic and the pupil on the other'.[52] His numbered list of a critic's eleven duties or functions was frequently reproduced in the advice offered to young critics. Only a couple of his tasks were perhaps sometimes irrelevant to the reception of contemporary art: the exalting of 'the fame of dead artists whose example may be beneficial',[53] and the weakening of 'the

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51. P.W., / William Allingham 7, 'Artist and Critic', Fraser's Magazine, n.s. xii , August 1875, p.255.

52. Hamerton, Thoughts about Art, p.152. 'Art Criticism' appeared in the Cornhill Magazine, 8, September 1863, pp. 334-343

53. Thoughts about Art, p.156.

fame of dead artists whose names have an injurious degree of authority'.[54] Otherwise, the first and most important function of the art critic is to utter unpopular truths - 'truths which others do not yet perceive'.[55] Hamerton asserts that popular truths are well enough stated already: he is thus making it clear from the outset that he is not primarily concerned with descriptive criticism, which can do little other than to embody, implicitly, such received opinion.

On the other hand, overtly hostile art criticism could in some quarters, be regarded as a form of bad manners. Certainly, its very assertiveness could be seen as self-defeating. Norman MacColl, editor of the Athenaeum, when writing to F.G. Stephens, considered that a critic should, though not ever praising a bad picture, find no more fault with it than necessary: too great severity defeats its own ends. Rather than attacking two of his particular targets, Frith and Orchardson, Stephens is advised to consult the passage in Arnold's Essays in Criticism where Arnold contrasts Palgrave's criticism with that of Gustave Planchet: the former vehement; the latter, to his advantage, temperate:[56]

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54. Thoughts about Art, p.156.

55. Thoughts about Art, p.153.

56. M. Arnold, 'The Literary Influence of Academies', The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, ed. R.H. Super, vol. III, Lectures and Essays in Criticism, Michigan, 1962, pp. 253-4.

> It seems to me a canon in literature that the appearance of reserved force is the great thing to be aimed at in hostile judgements. You produce a much greater effect if you make the reader think that, badly as you have spoken of a picture, you could be far more severe on it if you chose - in fact if instead of throwing all the mud you possess, you make him see how much more you could throw.[57]

Perhaps obliquely, Mr. Bowen, the solicitor acting for Ruskin in 1878, suggested that the average person (as signified by a jury member) would, on balance, tend to have more in sympathy with favourable rather than with aggressive criticism. He believed, therefore, in the necessity of getting recognised artists (such as Burne-Jones) to speak in favour of Ruskin's point of view, rather than assuming the critic's prose will have the power to convince, for the jury:

> ..., would look to the language used rather than to the provocation + their sympathies would rather lean to the side of the man who wanted to sell his picture than to the side of the outspoken critic whose criticism interfered with the sale of a marketable commodity.[58]

The artist - a 'thin-skinned, impressionable being, with sensitive nerves and perceptions', was frequently described as one who would benefit from criticism but who would respond particularly readily to praise, to anything which lightened the depressing 'chill of fashionable indifference'.[59]

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57. Norman MacColl to F.G. Stephens, May 10th 1871, Bod.ms. don.d.116. f 42-43.

58. Defendant's Brief for Whistler v. Ruskin 1878, mss. in the Pennell Collection, National Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

59. Frances P. Verney, 'Where are we in Art?' Contemporary Review, XXXVI, December 1879, p.597.

Hamerton further proposes that the critic must 'instruct the public in the theoretical knowledge of art';[60] must 'defend true living artists' - especially young ones - 'against the malice of the ignorant'[61] and must prevent 'false' living artists 'from acquiring an influence injurious to the general interests of art'[62] - thus countering the defence, frequently uttered by insipid critics, that one should not withhold criticism because of financial compassion for a painter's livelihood.

The writer must 'speak always with absolute sincerity',[63] and must not fear being inconsistent in his judgments, since a writer who is both honest and intelligent will be perpetually reviewing his own conclusions. The critic's flexibility is also stressed in two further demands. He must be continually enlarging his own powers of sympathy - essential as painting is an expression of human feeling. In addition, he must do his best to resist the formation of prejudices.

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60. Hamerton, Thoughts about Art, p.153.

61. Thoughts about Art, p.155.

62. Thoughts about Art, p.155.

63. Thoughts about Art, p.158.

The most formidable of all Hamerton's precepts is the obligation he places on the critic to 'make himself as thoroughly informed as his time and opportunities will allow about everything concerning the Fine Arts, whether directly or indirectly'.[64] The qualification, 'time and opportunities', is certainly a necessary one: to follow Hamerton's programme would demand a substantial private income and relatively unlimited leisure. Yet, though extreme, it presents a full summary and vindication of the Ruskinian thoroughness which their advisers and detractors expected from the art critic. After recommending the making of up to a thousand careful studies from nature, he should turn to copying parts of paintings and drawings by different masters. Then he must embark on more academic study:

> It is necessary to indicate the immense range of literary culture essential to the art critic. The success of historical painting is not to be estimated by persons ignorant of history, nor can illustrations of poems be intelligible to spectators who have never read verse. And there is this peculiarity about the position of every art critic, that his knowledge must embrace the knowledge, not of one artist only, but of thousands.[65]

With heavy irony, the Saturday Review's critic elaborated on the critic's duty of explaining 'to a not particularly well-educated world the matter in hand'. Young ladies who have never heard of Penelope may learn from the critic that she

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64. Thoughts about Art, p.159.

65. Thoughts about Art, p.159.

was the wife of Ulysses and occupied herself with embroidery:

> The public cannot imagine why Mr. Calder Marshall's Thetis is holding a baby up by the heel. Their natural inclination is to think of Solomon, and to blame the unnatural mother. Then the critic, by virtue of his researches into Lemprière and other heathen writers, is able to inform his readers that Thetis is merely giving her boy a dip in the water which makes men invulnerable. Thus the character of the silver-footed goddess is cleared, and every one is happier and wiser.[66]

'Nor can people who stay at home become art-critics', continued Hamerton.

> No one can judge authoritatively of the representation of a class of scenery with which he or she is not familiar. The range:
>
> ...of our landscape-painters is extensive. They illustrate every kind of scenery in Europe, and of late years they penetrate into Egypt and Asia. The critic must follow them everywhere, taking memoranda of natural facts. He must also travel to see pictures. The critic of literature may find in London all the books he needs; but the productions of painters are not so easily accessible. The colour of a picture cannot be reproduced. Hence nothing but the original handiwork of the painter himself is of the least use for reference. And to grasp the whole mind of a great artist we must see all his works, for every great artistic nature is so large that each picture is a new revelation of power before unknown to us.[67]

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66. Unsigned article, 'Art Criticism' Saturday Review, LV, 19 May 1883, p.624.

67. Hamerton, Thoughts about Art, pp.159-60.

The expense of such a course of self-training is obvious. Additional financial obligations were faced by female art critics. Writing about the position of women in journalism generally, Emily Crawford reminds her readers of the necessity of a correspondent of either sex possessing great reserves of nervous force - mentioning that women of good constitutions are more elastic in recovering from strain than are men - and of stamina. Also, sensibly, she recommends that a would-be journalist learns to type. She points out, however, requirements of the profession which could easily cause difficulties for a woman with a family: one must generally work at night, sometimes all night, since printers are waiting for their copy. Hence, though 'a press life need not disqualify a woman for home life',[68] she must have a good housekeeper, and will have to send her children to school. Thus, not only is an income over and above that received from criticism - her husband's? - assumed, but the convenience of women engaging, if possible, in weekly or monthly, rather than daily journalism, is suggested.

The difficulty of writing to a tight deadline was frequently commented upon by critics. Whether a review had

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68. Emily Crawford, 'Journalism as a Profession for Women', Contemporary Review, 64 , September 1893, p.370.

to be written in an evening or overnight depended on whether the private show was held one or two days in advance of the general public's admission. The Saturday Review's critic complained in 1883:

> Does anyone imagine that the art critic likes having eight hours, at the utmost, in which to inspect and form his opinion about eighteen hundred works of art? Suppose a man goes to the Academy at ten, on the morning of the Press view, and stays till six, lunching on a cake of chocolate as he walks round, and denied even the refreshment of a cigarette, he will probably be removed in the condition of a colour-blind idiot before dinner-time. Yet even this conscientious critic would only have, we think, twenty seconds and a trifle over to give to each exhibited masterpiece.[69]

The paucity of facilities at the Academy press views - let alone the fact that only one day was allocated to them - was a perennial source of complaint: so much so that Harry Furniss, artist and occasional writer, used them as a basis for a comic attack in the Daily News. He dwelt on the lack of refreshment, the provision of only one catalogue per critic, and only one invitation per journal, describing critics retiring into corners where they nervously eat sandwiches and, 'when the doorkeeper's eyes are turned, sip sherry and water from a travelling flask'.[70] The Saturday Review's

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69. 'Art Criticism', Saturday Review, LV, 19 May 1883, p.25. Henry Morley ('Pictures at the Royal Academy', Fortnightly Review, xvii, 1872, p.695) made a similar calculation, estimating that if a critic gave one minute's viewing time to each work in the 1872 R.A. exhibition, it would take 25 hours to see them all.

70. Harry Furniss, letter, 'A Growl at the R.A.' Daily News, 7 May 1887, p.5. An editorial, 'The R.A. Again', in the Saturday Review, LXIII, 14 May 1887, p.678, condemned this letter by Furniss: whilst admitting the justice of his accusations, i considered that reform was not to be accomplished through 'bad jests, and might as well as not be treated in decent English'. But an unsigned editorial, 'The R.A. and the Critics', Daily News, 10 May 1887, p.5, had supported Furniss, particularly over the question of time available and commented that 'probably the younger and less known men suffer most from the taste of critical views as managed at present.' →

correspondent contrasts the rôle of the art critic with that of the novel-reviewer, assuming that the number of novels published each year is roughly equal to the number of pictures exhibited at the Academy, yet though, he asserts, the 'general run' of the latter is much superior to the former, the fiction reviewer has leisure to read the books that come in to him or her during the year, and can do so in the comfort of their own home.

An additional constraining factor on the critic was the number of column inches determined to be at his or her disposal. The editorial in the Artist, June 1892, lamented:

> Our own journal, to adequately chronicle the shows of the month, ought to be at least twice its present size, and to give it justly critical notices as distinguished from a mere chronicle, it needs a still further enlargement. We never leave even a minor gallery without thinking that in common fairness more ought to be said about it than we have space to say. Yet our paper gives far more space to exhibitions than do the great dailies.[71]

Evidence of the tight control held over the length of contributors' pieces can be found in the correspondence between the editor of the Athenaeum, Norman MacColl, and F.G. Stephens:

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71. Unsigned notes, 'From Month to Month', Artist, XIII, June 1892, p.178.

As to next week suppose we have
3 cols. Institute
3 cols. Salon
1 col Meissonier
Then the week after (May 24)
5½ ~~4~~ cols. Acad
3½ cols. Meissonier
Then again May 31
4½ cols. Salon
4½ cols. Academy
then June 7
4½ cols. Salon (conclusion) 72
4½ cols. Acad

The effect of these restrictions of time and space was several-fold. Firstly, reviewers tended to concentrate on artists whose names were already familiar. 'The praise or blame is determined by the popularity of the artist', maintained Harry Quilter, 'and the remarks which have been made upon his work in previous years'.[73] Secondly, they often singled out works which appeared to stand out in some way - not necessarily through the competence of their execution. Elizabeth Pennell claimed, in 1893, that 'The evil result of the modern system of exhibitions is a demand for novelty at any cost'.[74]

It is hardly surprising that Quilter should remark despairingly that the very term 'art criticism' encompasses

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72. Letter from Norman MacColl to F.G. Stephens, 9 May 1884, Bod. mss. don. d. 116. f.126.

73. Harry Quilter, 'The Relation of Criticism to Production in Art', National Review, XXV, June 1894, p.476.

74. Elizabeth Robins Pennell, 'The Two Salons', Fortnightly Review, LIX (n.s. LIII), 1893, p.774.

so many different abilities, scholarly, practical and moral, that it is indeed a mistakenly idealistic term, with few writers even able to hope to possess even a large proportion of such qualities.[75] Not only did few critics have the time or money at their disposal to achieve the demands set by Hamerton and others, but the market price for such Crichtonian qualifications was about equal 'to the wages of a kitchen maid'.[76] Quilter was perhaps being unduly pessimistic about a journalist's salary. By the end of the century, there was no set rate of pay for the monthlies, but a contributor to the Cornhill or Macmillan's, for example, could expect to get a guinea a page. Pay was slightly better in the weeklies, a guinea a column being standard. An article in the Spectator or Saturday Review paid about five guineas. The daily papers gave between a guinea and a half to two guineas a column, though the Pall Mall Gazette was the only evening publication to rise to the latter figure. The average fee in the provinces would be about a guinea a column.[77] Certain types of writing, particularly that which presented "exclusives", paid somewhat better. 'I can remember the time', wrote C. Lewis Hind:

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75. Quilter, Opinions, p.229.

76. Opinions, p.230.

77. An Editor, How to Write for the Press, 1899, pp.115-18. A kitchen maid in the 1880s and 90s could, in fact, expect to be paid about £7 p.a., in addition to her board, lodging and uniform: Duncan Crow, The Victorian Woman, 1971, p.315.

> ... when Edmund Yates, proprietor and editor of The World, gladly paid a guinea for a small paragraph, describing the picture that an eminent Royal Academician was painting for the next exhibition.[78]

Despite the many idealistic demands placed on them, few critics seemed to remain unaware of their primary, commercial function as middleman: the end to which the prescriptive precepts inevitably led. As Quilter himself pointed out, painters need to live, and to live they must sell pictures. The critic:

> ... if he is to have any reason for existing at all, is placed between the picture-buyer and the picture-producer for the express purpose of guaging the artistic value of the latter's achievement, and interpreting its meaning to the world at large.[79]

Ruskin, in a manuscript dealing with the Whistler case and perhaps intended to answer some of the artist's points, had, in recognising this fact, no qualms about deliberately amalgamating the responses due to differing media:

> ... the function of the critic in his relation to contemporary art is of course the same as that of the critic with respect to contemporary literature; namely, to recommend "authors" (the word is properly common to men of original power in both the arts) of merit to public attention, and to prevent authors of no merit from occupying it.[80]

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78. Lewis Hind, Naphtali, p.131.

79. Quilter, Opinions, p.287.

80. Ruskin, Works vol. XXIX, p.585. 'Whistler v. Ruskin',

Certain critics resented this linking of art and commerce. As early as 1830, Fraser's Magazine had grumbled that 'art has too grovelling and mercantile a spirit; it keeps its ledgers, its debtor and creditor accounts, and smacks of the counting house'.[81] And the protests became persistent around the late 1850s and early 1860s: a period when the Royal Academy exhibitions were dominated by anecdote and landscape, when the Pre-Raphaelites had lost their initial bite and there were few controversial continental products to be seen. 'Pictures are now but a portion of domestic furniture',[82] complained the Saturday Review's critic after visiting the Royal Academy summer exhibition in 1857. In 1861, the smaller galleries, too, were accused of promoting paintings as 'a mere manufacture and a dull routine of trade'.[83] In 1862, he repeated his observations of 'the growing demand for what may be called "furniture pictures" ':[84]

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81. Unsigned article (W.H. Leeds), 'Strictures on art and exhibitions', Fraser's Magazine, II, August 1830, p.96.

82. Unsigned review, 'The Royal Academy Exhibition II', Saturday Review, III, 23 May 1857, p.475.

83. Unsigned review, 'The Suffolk-Street and Portland Galleries', Saturday Review, XI, 4 May 1861, p.447.

84. Unsigned review, 'The British Institution and the 'Female Artists' Exhibitions'. Saturday Review, XIII, 8 March 1862, p.271.

The 'great annual commercial advertisement of all the art of the day',[85] was, throughout the period, the Royal Academy summer exhibition. This, the 'main incident of the year' for 'the majority of fashionable circles in London',[86] with the opportunity it afforded to look at people as much as at the crowded and poorly-hung pictures, assumed, in the eyes of the more cynical critics, the nature of an establishment entertainment - 'chartered by Royalty, blessed by the Church, flattered and enriched by State and Society',[87] as D.S. MacColl put it. The multiplicity of pictures, as well as the crowds attending, increased the viciously competitive nature of this 'distinctly commercial enterprise'.[88]

With his typical contempt for the general public's response to artistic matters, MacColl designated the Academy summer exhibitions as:

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85. R.A.M. Stevenson, 'General Impressions of the Royal Academy of 1893', Art Journal, XXI, August 1893, p.241.

86. Unsigned article (Alfred Austin), 'The Characteristics of Modern Painting', Temple Bar, XXVII 28 January 1870. p.173.

87. D.S.M., 'The Royal Academy - I', Spectator, 68, 7 May 1892, p.642.

88. Moore, Modern Painting, p.280.

> ... a place where such few painters as are artists have to fight for inches of ground, have to contend for the attention of the public with this crowd of competing entertainers, with this clamour of cheap-jack and peep-show; and they have to do it because here is the one arena where there is a chance of their entertainment paying its way. Why, you ask, does the painter come there at all? He comes because he must try to earn his pittance. And why does the critic come? He comes, to speak plainly, to try to make the public pay for the artist. Left to themselves, they will never attend to this quiet performance; they are enjoying themselves elsewhere. It is the business and honour of the journalist critic to make them attend, by every argument and coercion he can bring to bear, to render them uncomfortable and ashamed, to induce them to feign a pleasure that is not theirs, but his, and to pay for it, and thereby for the existence of the artist. It would be useless, it would be rude, to interrupt their enjoyment. If this much more important matter were not at stake; but it may be hazarded that ... a man feels a certain proud and fearful joy in affecting an admiration, if only he somehow have absorbed the conviction that it is right to do so; that in the end the good picture will serve his turn, will give him a tepid pleasure almost as well as the bad.[89]

In Nineteenth Century Art, MacColl recognises the importance of exhibitions as markets for unattached artists, but considers that they will 'stamp the century with a peculiar gross way of taking art'.[90] This grossness is emphasised by the distaste he shows for the communal activity of public viewing: 'people indulged in the picture-pleasure by indiscriminate debauch'.[91] He implies that

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89. D.S.M., 'The Royal Academy - I', p.642.

90. D.S. MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, Glasgow, 1902, p.2.

91. Nineteenth Century Art, p.2.

aesthetic consumption belongs naturally to the realm of the private. As an intimate pursuit, ideally it would not, for MacColl, involve the enforced depersonalisation resulting from the fact that painting is habitually initially consumed through a medium for commercial display and transaction. Artistic prostitution is seen to be an economic necessity, but one which undermines the possibility for direct emotional contact between artist and viewer.

Yet whilst the primary function of the art critic for the daily, weekly or periodical press was, and is, undoubtedly commercial, this occupation as middleman was dependent on the secondary and far more wide-reaching function of reinforcing existing values, or establishing new ones. On these values, obviously, the commercial potentiality of a work largely depends. In the following chapters, I intend examining the means by which various standards in subject matter and execution were transmitted to the reader.

CHAPTER V: NARRATION AND ART CRITICISM

For many Victorian spectators, their favourite pictures were those which told stories: a preference constantly stressed in the criticism of the period:

> The vast majority of English folk cannot and will not consider a picture as a picture, apart from any story which it may be supposed to tell.[1]

A picture which told, or which could be made to tell a story, served the requirements of both those who required art to instruct, and those who expected it to entertain.[2] But from the knowledge that it was possible to 'read' certain types of pictures in narrative fashion, thus enabling a sequence of events to be deduced from them, developed the popular, if

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1. J.A. McN. Whistler, quoted in 'Celebrities at Home: Mr. James Whistler at Cheyne Walk', The World, No.203, 22 May 1878, pp.4-5.

2. The Victorian predeliction for narrative painting is well known and relatively well documented. Much of this documentation, however, such as Graham Reynolds' Painters of the Victorian Scene (1953), Raymond Lister's Victorian Narrative Paintings, (1966) and Christopher Wood's Victorian Panorama (1976), does little more than introduce the reader to once-popular works which had become lost in neglect and obscurity during the first half of this century. The nomenclature 'scene', 'panorama' underlines the reflective bias of these authors, stressing content, relying on the apparent easy comprehensibility of the canvases illustrated to provide, above all, visual information about past social conditions. The contemporary critical reception of the works remains largely undiscussed, with the notable exception of Rosemary Treble's introduction to the catalogue of the Arts Council Exhibition of Great Victorian Pictures (1978), and the same catalogue's anthologised criticism of the critical response to individual paintings. Peter Conrad's The Victorian Treasure-House (1973) sets narrative painting in a somewhat wider context.

usually unarticulated critical premise that stories so told should be subject to the same criteria as verbal fiction. It was assumed, in fact, that paintings could be written about using the same vocabulary, and employing the same modes of discussion, that were conventionally regarded as appropriate to prose fiction.

The initial sight of a painting may produce a sharp judgment of approval or condemnation, the spectator being unaware that his or her adoption of a preference occupies a quantifiable period of time. But to read about a painting confirms the materiality of its existence, making one consider it as a cultural artifact, a physical given which remains constant through the temporal process of our appreciation. What is more, the process of reading may well be interrupted by pauses of unpredictable length caused by glancing from the text, to the art object or reproduction, and back again. What has been read already, and what is read subsequently, may well be modified by this mediation between text and picture. This pattern is, of course, common to all writing on art. What is peculiar to the relationship between narrative painting and criticism is that not only is the moment of activity represented on the canvas surface given duration - it lasts as long as it takes to read about it - but the characters depicted are, explicitly or implicitly, given their own temporal existence. The reading of a 'realist' novel presupposes our compliance with the conventions

of manipulated times ('thus, the author gives us a summary, which we read in two minutes (he might have spent two hours writing it), of a narrative which a certain character might have told in two days, of events extending over two years'.)[3] The reading of a narrative picture demands the acceptance of a further convention: that the painting represents no more than a frozen moment in the history of the protagonists, and that the artist, through clues on the canvas, or writer, through supplying commentary, can furnish them with a past, and perhaps a future, as well as a present. This is essential to a moral interpretation of a picture, since it introduces the ability to link cause and effect.

The operation of narrative art criticism can best be examined through looking at the different types of picture which the Victorians found amenable to such an approach.

Most obvious are those works which directly serve as illustrations to a printed text, either published in the same volume or issued independently. An analysis of Academy catalogues reveals how frequently painters depended on pre-existent verbal formulations either to provide the subject matter for their canvas or, in the shape of a quotation, to

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3. Michel Butor, 'Research on the Technique of the Novel', Inventory (trans. Richard Howard), 1970, p.21.

explain, or to give added authority, to the message contained within their work.[4] This latter use of literature underlines the apparent prestige held by the word over the visual aesthetic in the Victorian period.

A similar type of narrative reading takes place, involving the bringing of previously-held knowledge to bear on a picture - when the subject represents a contemporary or historical event, or a mythological scene. Certainly, it increasingly became part of a critic's, or, on occasion, catalogue compiler's function, to provide the information necessary for the depiction to be widely understood. Reviewing the Academy exhibition of 1888, for example, the Athenaeum's critic felt it necessary to quote seventeen lines from the Iliad as a gloss to Leighton's Captive Andromache, and accompanied Alma-Tadema's Roses of Heliogabalus with a highly factual potted biography of the Roman Emperor.[5]

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4. The following figures illustrate the number of works, in all categories, at the Royal Academy summer exhibitions in the latter half of the nineteenth century, which were based on a literary theme, or identified in the catalogue by means of a quotation:

1855	147	of	1558	(9.43%)
1865	122	of	1077	(11.33%)
1875	132	of	1408	(9.37%)
1885	129	of	2134	(6.04%)
1895	105	of	1713	(6.12%)

5. Unsigned review, 'The Royal Academy (First Notice)', Athenaeum, no.3158, 5 May 1888, pp.572-3.

But I wish to concentrate on those narrative critical approaches which assumed that the picture contained within itself elements which allowed it to be 'read' as if a verbal fictional form. Noticeably, most of the examples cited come from the mid to late C19th rather than the early twentieth century. Writing in 1903, J.C. Horsley commented that:

> It is not unusual now for the attendants at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition to be asked by visitors, "what has become of the artists who used to tell delightful stories in their pictures".[6]

Whilst both catalogues and criticism show that he was exaggerating its absence, narrative art certainly declined as an exhibited form after the turn of the century.

In the first type of narrative painting that I wish to discuss - that which follows the tradition of Hogarth - we have works which in themselves form a sequence. This can take direct chronological form, a series hung in an order which gives it meaning, intended to be read, like a sentence, from left to right: for example Frith's Road to Ruin (1878) ('I thought I could show some of the evils of gambling, my idea being a kind of gambler's progress',)[7] or the same artist's The Race for Wealth (1880). Frith's commentator, Tom Taylor,

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6. J.C. Horsley, Recollections of a Royal Academician, ed. Mrs. Edmund Phelps, 1903, p.224.

7. W.P. Frith, Autobiography, vol.ii, p.121.

in his pamphlet accompanying the exhibition of this latter series, draws his analogy on this occasion, incidentally, not with the narrative of the novel but with the forms of the stage:

> These five pictures are to be looked at as the five acts of a domestic drama dealing with the real life of the day.[8]

He thus implicitly suggests that narrative painting has links not just with the process of flux represented by fiction, but with the stage convention of holding a moment of action frozen into a tableau.

An alternative sequential form is one which provides not a choice of endings - as unlikely a bestowal of independence on the spectator as it would be in the case of the reader of a Victorian novel - but differing aspects of the same consequential development. In the first painting of Egg 's Past and Present (1858) is a family drawing room at the moment of the mother's adulterous revelation; the two following canvases show two night scenes, the first depicting the somewhat older children gazing out at bedtime over the rooftops to a distant star; the second the mother with an illegitimate (and dead, the Athenaeum reviewer hinted) child

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8. Tom Taylor, The Race for Wealth, 1880, p.2.

at her breast, also gazing at the starlit heavens, in that traditional iconographical haunt of Victorian fallen women, under the Adelphi arches.[9] Indeed, the precise significance of the juxtaposition of these 'Present' canvases is not entirely graspable without the additional narrative information supplied in the cumbersome description under which the work was first exhibited:

> "August the 4th. Have just heard that B- has been dead more than a fortnight, so both his children have now lost both parents. I hear she was seen on Friday near the Strand, evidently without a place to lay her head. What a fall hers has been! "[10]

The second type of narrative reading involves the deciphering of symbolic elements which the artist has deliberately included in a single picture, using these to bring out the full significance of the event which the composition depicts. Ruskin provides the well-known paradigm for such a reading. In Modern Painters:III (1856), he speaks of painting beginning 'to take its proper position beside literature'.[11] By this, he means that narrative painters are no longer employing themselves merely in showing 'the outward verities of passing events - battle, councils, etc.',[12]

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9. c.f. Arts Council of Great Britain, Great Victorian Pictures, (1978), pp.32-33.

10. Royal Academy Summer Exhibition Catalogue, 1858, p.18.

11. Ruskin, 'Modern Painters : III', Works, V, p.127.

12. 'Modern Painters : III', Works, V, p.126.

but are abandoning the role of chronicler in favour of inventing the stories they paint. As an example of this laudable tendency, he cites Holman Hunt's The Awakening Conscience, helping to launch, as R.A.M. Stevenson put it in 1886:

> ... the confusion between literary aims or conceptions and those proper to the plastic arts, a confusion now common, and in a great measure due to Ruskinian influence.[13]

Ruskin claims to be baffled by the fact that Hunt's work is not more readily understood. No one, surely, he believes, could remain unmoved by the countenance of the 'lost girl, rent from its beauty into sudden horror'.[14] But he can only assume that the full meaning of the picture is wasted through a spectator's reluctance to look at the details which make up the whole: in other words, to abandon, temporarily, a visually perceivable aesthetic unity for a thematic unity which can be grasped only through conscious, and sustained, mental activity. In encouraging us to examine the detail, to lose aesthetic and imaginative cohesion by lapsing, as George Eliot would have it, from picture to diagram, Ruskin remarks that, in general:

> Nothing is more noticeable than the way even the most trivial objects force themselves upon the attention of a mind which has been fevered by violent and distressful excitement.[15]

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13. Unsigned article, 'Mr. Holman Hunt', Saturday Review, LXI, 20 March 1886, p.405.

14. Ruskin, 'The Awakening Conscience', 'Reviews, Letters, and Pamphlets on Art, 1844-1854', Works, XII, p.334. (reprinted from The Times 25 May 1854).

15. 'The Awakening Conscience', Works, XII, p.334.

By analogy, he suggests that because the girl portrayed is herself in a state of emotional stress, she would be aware of the significance of the objects in the room: hence our consciousness of these objects is channelled through our response to her situation, through our sympathy which has initially been awakened by her despairing expression. This apparent fusion of the emotional state of the principal protagonist with that of the spectator is used to underscore the mimetic fallacy inherent in Ruskin's narrative explication: that what is depicted has actual existence. And his certainty that we should interpret the picture in a literary fashion is inherent in his verb:

> There is not a single object in all that room ... but it becomes tragical, if rightly read.[16]

He continues by pointing to the single meaning he believes to be designated by each of the visual signifieds:

> That furniture so carefully painted, even to the last vein of the rosewood - is there nothing to be learnt from that terrible lustre of it, from its fatal newness; nothing there that has the old thoughts of home upon it, or that it is even to become part of a home? Those embossed books, vain and useless - they also new - marked with no happy wearing of beloved leaves; the torn and dying bird upon the floor; the gilded tapestry, with the fowls of the air feeding on the ripened corn; the picture above the fireplace, with its single drooping figure - the woman taken in adultery; nay, the very hem of the poor girl's dress, at which the painter has laboured so closely, thread by thread, has story in it, if we think how soon its pure whiteness may be soiled with dust and rain, her outcast feet failing in the street; and the fair garden flowers seen in that reflected sunshine of the mirror, - these also have their language -
>
> "Hope not to find delight in us, they say,
> For we are spotless, Jessy - we are pure".[17]

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16. 'The Awakening Conscience', Works, XIII, p.334.
17. 'The Awakening Conscience', Works, XIII, p.334-5.

The danger inherent in such a complete commentary is that it may come to function as a substitute for the picture itself, inviting the reader to believe that the reading is now closed. Yet as subsequent research has shown, still further elements which Hunt may have intended to be gleaned through his composition remain to be elucidated. Thus George Landow, for example, draws attention to the similarity in the positioning of the two figures to Dürer's Young Woman Attacked by Death (The Ravisher) (c.1495):[18] in each, the girl struggles from the embrace of her seducer and is reaching towards (new) life. Additionally, of course, even the signifieds which Ruskin/Hunt have stressed among the furniture and decor bear a changing signification to all later spectators due to the fact that the surroundings lose their contemporaneity, and become, instead, emblems of 'Victorian-icity', redolent of the taste of a whole class and period. Paintings, like works of literature, can never hold the fixed meaning which Victorian critics unquestionably assumed could be placed on them: meaning never reposing within the work like an invisible essence, but always to some extent produced and reproduced by each successive consumer.

But we only have to look at two examples from sequences already mentioned in this chapter - Past and Present

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18. George P. Landow, William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism, New Haven and London, 1979, p.52.

and The Race for Wealth - to show how prevalent was this mode of composition and explication, with its dependance on a belief in an a priori meaning, or set of meanings, to be unlocked and described. This type of detailed reading was aided by the Victorian fashion for crowded, heavily-ornamented interior decoration: in a painting, 'the higher the level of denotation, the more particular the objects represented ... the greater its potential for verbalisation'.[19]

Reviewing the first picture in Egg's series, with its similar theme to Hunt's picture,[20] The Times' reviewer missed few of the nuances of the opening scene. The wife :

> ... lies prostrate before her heart-stricken partner, who holds the letter, the evidence of her treachery, in his hand. Their two children look up from their amusement of card castle-building at the sound of her fall. Their card castle has a French novel [by Balzac] for its foundation - a Hogarthian indication of the source of their mother's perversion, a mode of pointing a moral carried still further by the 'goodly apple rotten at the core' on the table, and the pictures of Adam and Eve driven out of Paradise and Stanfield's 'Abandoned' on the walls.[21]

The mirror above the fireplace reflects the open door through which the wife will shortly leave: at this moment, fallen on the floor, the positioning of wrists and bracelets makes it look as though she is shackled.

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19. Ronald Paulson, Emblem and Expression, 1975, p.8.

20. Hunt himself wrote about his friend Egg's work, insisting that it should be called The Adulteress, and defending it in terms which would equally well fit The Awakening Conscience. He comments that 'it is the fashion ... to denounce all morals that are severe, particularly on this subject', but claims that Egg nonetheless 'determined to make a sacrifice of popularity for the principle that he felt it might illustrate'.

21. Unsigned review, 'Exhibition of the Royal Academy (Third Notice)', The Times, 22 May 1858, p.9.

Similarly, pictures hung in the interiors of The Race to Wealth play an important role in Taylor's reading. In No. 2, 'The Spiders at Home', we can identify 'good modern pictures' on the walls - works by Turner, Egg, C. Leslie, Frank Stone and Linnell. Within the setting of the invegling financier's habitation, these are used as part of the means by which it is shown that money 'can command splendour, "society", fine art, and voice authoritative upon it'.[22] Revealing in a different way (indicating past hopes and prophesying imminent disaster) are the works hanging above the country rector's breakfast party in No. 3, Victims. They:

> ... suggest dreams of cathedral preferment, of deaneries and canonries, who knows? even a bishopric, perhaps; and, alas, side by side with these high hopes, hangs an ominous foreshadowing of shipwreck:[23]

In Inquiries into the Fundamentals of Aesthetics, Stefan Morawski remarks that 'Quotes are a proof if not a badge of learning'.[24] In picking up these visual references, the critics are assuming a certain cultural awareness among their readers. It is a mode of explication which fosters the sense of a common cultural and social identity. The term 'para-quotation' is coined by Morawski to signify the use of a

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22. Tom Taylor, The Race for Wealth, p.9.

23. Taylor, Race for Wealth, p.10.

24. Stefan Morawski, Inquiries into the Fundamentals of Aesthetics, 1974, p.341.

certain type of interpolation 'with a stimulatory-amplificatory function' - such as Piscator's employment of captions or film sequences to anticipate actions on stage, or Manet's use of a Japanese print (which serves both amplificatory and ornamental ends) in his 1867 portrait of Zola.[25] Not only, argues Morawski, is paraquotation a means adopted particularly by artists with theses to prove (as in the case of Hunt or Egg or Frith), but quotations habitually:

> ... accumulate in art when the boundaries between it and other forms of social consciousness become vague.[26]

The overlap between 'readable' pictures, and the combination of elaborate-yet-resolved plots and solid specificity of detail embraced by the mid-Victorian novel hardly seems accidental.

Yet just as the late Victorian novelist (Meredith, James, Gissing) frequently presented open endings, without the fictional tidiness of, say, Middlemarch's conclusion, so the late C19th and early C20th narrative artist came to favour 'problem' pictures, in which critic or spectator could guess at the significance or outcome of a depicted occasion where quite clearly something was going on, but in which, intentionally not enough clues were provided to make the meaning clear.

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25. Morawski, Fundamentals of Aesthetics, pp.355-6.

26. Morawski, Fundamentals of Aesthetics, p.359.

Prominent among such painters was John Collier (Trouble (1898), The Cheat (1905), Mariage de Convenance (1907), Sentence of Death (1908) and The Prodigal Daughter (1903). The Times's critic, reviewing this last picture, shows his own mistrust of open-ended narrative: the work is :

> ... the popular attraction, and to a certain extent the popular puzzle ... This is an English Magda - the runaway daughter of a quiet old couple, returning in her finery to her simple home. The details of the dramatic moment are a little difficult to understand; has she just entered the room, or is she leaving it, repelled? Is she telling a story, or has she told it, unforgiven, and is she about to pass out again into the night? 27

Press guesswork irritated Collier to the point of exasperation. The Times obituary quotes him (in 1920, when he gave The Fallen Idol to be sold in aid of St. Dunstan's) as observing that his 'problem pictures':

> ... are nothing of the kind. The ones that have been so termed merely depict little tragedies of modern life, and I have always endeavoured to make their meanings perfectly plain. If ever again I paint a picture of modern life, which is doubtful, I shall give it a title a yard long, setting forth the life history of the characters, and, if necessary, their names and addresses.28

in something like, one imagines, Ford Madox Brown's explanatory, biographically detailed pamphlet which accompanied the exhibition of Work (1852-63) at the Piccadilly Gallery in

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27. Unsigned review, 'The Royal Academy First Notice', The Times, 2 May 1903, p.13.

28. Unsigned obituary, 'John Collier', The Times, 12 April 1934, p.17.

1865. Yet the press could not be stopped from hazarding interpretations of Collier's, Orchardson's and Yeames's canvases. Orchardson, indeed, calling one of his paintings An Enigma (1891), said that he was himself uncertain of the precise narrative explanation of his work.[29] In some cases, perhaps the popularity of these paintings with uncertain fictional outcomes can be linked to the enthusiasm for detective stories.[30] Cassell's Magazine, a frequent vehicle for popular suspense fiction, showed its awareness of the similarity of the two forms by offering a prize for the best explanation of Yeames's Defendant and Counsel.[31]

Unsurprisingly, such 'problem pictures' and the solutions appended to them by Philistine critics provided easy targets for more sophisticated reviewers. The Bat's critic, writing of Orchardson's "Mariage de Convenance" - After, exhibited at the Academy in 1886, commented:

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29. Hilda Orchardson Gray, The Life of Sir William Quiller Orchardson, R.A., 1930, pp.276 and 301.

30. For the rise of this genre, see A.E. Murch, The Development of the Detective Novel, 1958.

31. According, at any rate, to Yeames's nephew, M. Stephen Smith, Art and Anecdote, 1927 , p.220. I have, however, found no record of this contest in the pages of any of Cassell's publications. Smith adds that the custodian of the Bristol Art Gallery where the picture now hangs, 'said he had so many people asking him for its story that out of self-defence he had had to concoct one himself about it, which he regularly repeated to questioners'.

> Quite a crowd of men stopped in front of this go rgeous bit of painting, and they interchanged views. One thought that the deserted husband ought to drink some more of the brandy that was on the table, to cheer him up; another suggested that he should seek solace at the stage door of the Gaiety, alleging as a reason that there was plenty of space to give a Bohemian dinner in that dining-room, and so on, until at length a youth wondered why he didn't go after her.[32]

One further variant of narrative reading assumes not so much that there is one definite story, and perhaps moral, to be disinterred from the painter's visual evidence, but rather, assuming the explanation of the activities portrayed to be self-evident enough, uses them as a starting point for speculating about possible aspects of the behaviour of the depicted characters. Again, Tom Taylor, in his pamphlet on Frith's The Railway Station (1862) offers an early paradigm for this mode of reading, providing not a key to this crowded work (as the single sheet accompanying John Martin's The Last Judgement (1853) enabled the viewer to recognise precisely which individuals the painter had selected for the elect, which to be damned), but a set of viable alternatives. On the right, a man is being arrested on the steps of the railway carriage which would have conducted him to sanctuary: he is:

> ... a fraudulent banker, or actuary, bank cashier, or railway clerk - who has long been carrying on his embezzlements.[33]

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32. Unsigned article, 'Amongst the Academicians', Bat, II, May 1886, p.125.

33. Tom Taylor, The Railway Station, 1862, p.6.

Taylor interprets expressions on the faces of individuals: the detective preparing this criminal's handcuffs smiles as he anticipates the satisfaction of his employer, the honour in store for himself and his companion, the newspaper glory when the trial comes up, and the financial reward. True to his Ruskinian tenets, Taylor does not fail to seize an opportunity for moralizing. He focusses on the wedding group 'which forms the centre of the picture, both pictorially and morally'. Its brightness and beauty are juxtaposed with 'the sickening fear and agony of the felon incident' in both moral and visual chiaroscuro:

> So it is that the darkest shadows and brightest lights of life come together; that joy is intensified by sorrow, and sorrow deepened by joy, as the painter uses his lights and darks to relieve each other.[34]

The alternation of brightness and shade serves as an elementary symbol for the wheel of fortune: perhaps the broken-hearted wife of the criminal, who shrinks under her husband's shame, had just as gay a group of bridesmaids: 'who knows if her hopes were not as high, the prospect before her as sunny to the eye, as this young bride's?'[35]

But Taylor does not see himself as possessing any specially privileged insights into this composition. Rather,

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34. Railway Station, p.10.

35. Railway Station, p.10.

the essence of this mode of criticism - of this mode of painting, too - lies for him, as, implicitly, for many conservative critics, in its democracy, in its accessibility. Frith's Railway Station, he claims, is typical of any busy platform:

> There is nothing here that does not come within the round of common experiences. We are all of us competent to understand these troubles or pleasures, anxieties or annoyances: there is no passage of these many emotions but we can more or less conceive ourselves as passing through. The painter in choosing such a subject, makes every spectator his critic.[36]

To some extent Taylor is abnegating his own responsibilities, arguing himself out of a job. More importantly, in the context of narrative criticism, he is underlining the mimetic principles on which it is based. He assumes that the same method of interpretation can be used not just for the forms of art and fiction, but for art and non-mediated experience. Hence, necessarily, it becomes that much easier to draw connections between the two in the sphere of morality.

The subject matter of genre painting, as Wedmore stated in his book on the subject, must be :

> "not too bright and good
> For human nature's daily food".[37]

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36. Railway Station, p.5.

37. Frederick Wedmore, The Masters of Genre Painting, 1880, p.3.

Wordsworthian sentiments (perhaps transmitted through the beliefs and vocabulary of George Eliot) inform his ensuing praise: genre painting :

> ... records the struggles, the character, the happiness, the folly of men. It has in it what interests the intelligent curiosity of common folk. And, like the intimate studies of our greatest fiction, it is itself history, and itself analysis.[38]

Indeed, Wedmore complains that the honour which has recently been granted to those who have attempted such a task in English literature has been denied 'to such workers in the art of painting'. It may indeed be the case, he argues, 'that for the telling of a particular message, for the expression of a particular order of thought, the language of the one art is fitted more finely than that of the other'.[39] But, since both possess specific advantages and disadvantages ('The painters are few who have grappled successfully with the unfolding of a narrative, and there are not many writers who in the vivid presentation of incident have had a painter's success')[40] neither form can claim permanent primacy: both,

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38. Genre Painting, p.3. Adam Bede, 1859, vol. II, p.5
Compare George Eliot,
"It is for this rare, precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings, which lofty-minded people despise. I find a source of delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence, which has been the fate of so many more among my fellow-mortals than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world-stirring actions".

39. Genre Painting, pp.4-5.

40. Genre Painting, p.5.

indeed, can cope equally well with what Wedmore would classify as the third essential element of narrative, the successful depiction of character. It seems, however, that he is being somewhat optimistic in this claim, since pictorially presented character must always be deduced from physical expression and action, rather than self-revelation through mono/dialogue. Hence personages in commentaries on Victorian paintings tend to become reified, with a fixed role. Thus develops the temptation to paint, or interpret a painting like a morality tableau, in which each character can be identified with an ethical stance. In a painting like Dicksee's Confession, where the past and present circumstances of the protagonists are deliberately left open to varying interpretations, the fixed role of the character is simply that of being ambiguous. Yet the possibility that a modern artist, particularly one, according to Mrs. Barrington, possessing religious feeling, could treat, successfully, the same 'subtler thought and moral fervour' which 'finds expression pre-eminently in the writings of "George Eliot" '[41] remained a desideratum for many of the more moralising writers on art.

Not only was the same language used to describe narrative paintings and novels, but, understandably, direct parallels

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41. Barrington, 'Is a Great School of Art Possible?' p.120.

were frequently drawn between the two forms in terms of their status within a particular branch of the arts. When linked to the prevalent Victorian belief that a novel was a lesser form of composition than poetry, this meant, if only by implication, a relatively low aesthetic value being placed on narrative art. In the eyes of its detractors, the novel was no more than an entertainment, more likely to engage the imagination than the moral faculties. An anonymous littérateur in the Saturday Review could advise those about to compose fiction that:

> ... the average reader of novels is not a critical person: he does not care for art for art's sake; ... all he asks is that he may be amused and interested without taxing his own brains.[42]

Despite the fact that I cited Ruskin's guide through the Awakening Conscience as an example of narrative approach, and a moral one at that, Ruskin himself differentiated between Hunt and those who painted merely 'the outward verities of passing events': the latter, if they 'worked worthily of their mission would become, properly so called, historical or narrative painters', whilst Hunt and his peers were designated, because of their faculties of originality, invention and feeling, 'poetical painters'.[43]

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42. Unsigned article, 'To Those About To Write a Novel', Saturday Review, LXIII, 22 January 1887, p.122.
43. Ruskin, 'Modern Painters: III', Works, V, pp.126-7.

To state that an artist's theme would be better suited to print than canvas was one means of simultaneously attacking trends in popular fiction, and of indicating that a painter had slipped either into the tedious, or the morally or visually unpleasant. Thus the Standard's critic castigates Frith's inability, as a 'painter of the things of the day' to avoid 'the dangers of the commonplace': his Academy exhibit of 1881, For Better, For Worse, is seen as typical of his tendency to be often 'too much bent upon the representation upon canvas of themes more fitted for fiction'.[44]

It is not surprising that condemnation of writers who devoted themselves primarily to narrative explication should come from those critics who were engaged in analysing and describing the formal qualities of works of art. Ruskin's surprise that the Awakening Conscience should not be more readily graspable can be read as more than a rhetorical device, since of all modes of painting, the genre scene (even when, as in this case, it embodies a significant number of highly symbolic signifiers) is designed to be the most easily understood without recourse to verbal mediation. Thus the Saturday Review critic could praise E. Blair Leighton's Cut Off Without a Shilling (shown at the Dudley Gallery Art Society, 1885) as

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44. Unsigned review, 'The Royal Academy', Standard, 30 April 1881, p.3.

'one of those powerful, crisp, effective examples of domestic genre that needs no interpreter ... the accessories are painted with the firmness and searching conscientiousness so necessary to the effective telling of a story'.[45] The ease of the task of the critic who attempted to recapitulate on the incident shown in such a canvas excited a certain amount of scorn, but still more culpable was the tendency of some to translate everything depicted into narrative terms. Whistler, in his diatribe against the 'unattached', amateur writer, complains how;

> For him a picture is more or less a hieroglyph or symbol of story. Apart from a few technical terms, for the display of which he finds an occasion, the work is considered absolutely from a literary point of view; indeed, from what other can he consider it? And in his essays he deals with it as with a novel - a history - or an anecdote. He fails entirely and most naturalistically to see its excellences, or demerits - artistic - and so degrades Art, by supposing it a method of bringing about a literary climax.[46]

The critics' predilection for narrative was attributed by others, as well, to their intellectual training. The comments which Sharp made in the National Review, during a plea for the inception of an art of art criticism, suggest that the more literary based an education, the greater danger there is in susceptibility to textual allusion:

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45. Unsigned review, 'Art Exhibitions', Saturday Review, LX, 28 November 1885, p.715.

46. Whistler, The Gentle Art, p.146.

> Nine tenths, most certainly seven tenths, of our art writers are literary men; in other words, they are men in whom the literary instinct is dominant. The literary art-critic is sympathetic, appreciative, easily interested or repelled; he looks first to the subject, and then to the technique.[47]

He is attracted, above all, by such pictures as Cormon's Victors of Salamis, at the Salon, or Alma-Tadema's Women of Amphissa. The first thoughts which arise in his mind are of classical allusions:

> ...of the frenzied Chyades, the women sacred to Dionysos, the Phocian war, the taking of Delphi, and so forth - the Greek triremes, and the routed hosts of the Persian. Delightful mental vistas open up before him; a flood of light from the past irradiates the picture upon which he looks. He omits to notice that the wives of Amphissa are posed as if they were servant girls in front of a country photographer.[48]

Remarks in the press about narrative art, whether they upheld or lamented its popularity, formed an important part of the continual debate about aesthetic élitism. The Pall Mall Gazette leader of 1892 which strongly attacked the demands put forward by the New Critics stresses that the public attends the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition expecting to find what it likes:

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47. William Sharp, 'The Royal Academy and the Salon', National Review, IX, June 1887, p.516-7.

48. 'Royal Academy and the Salon', p.516.

> ...and we do not know why we would expect the Academy to fill its walls with those esoteric pieces which are the joy of the elect.[49]

The context of this remark shows 'the elect' to refer rather to those trained in a particular kind of aesthetic sensibility, than to those who have benefited from the same classical education as Sharp's example of a critic. The Pall Mall's writer makes the obvious point that artists paint partly in order to live: this necessitates pleasing the public, rather than devoting themselves to interesting but generally unintelligible experiments; experiments which deliberately shut themselves off from one of the main sources of interest which art has always commanded - subject - and from one of the major means of sustaining that interest - telling a story. Only if members of a new school paint popular subjects and pretty scenes 'will they get fair play with the public'. Otherwise the contest between the old and new will be an unequal one, the old always being able to win popularity through subject matter, whatever the relative merits of methods employed.[50] The type of subject approved for such experimentation is defined in the Pall Mall Gazette's actual

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49. Unsigned leader, 'Painters and Public', Pall Mall Gazette, 29 April 1892, p.1.

50. 'Painters and Public', p.1.

review of the year's Academy exhibition. It commends the 'homely realism' of the Newlyn pictures, especially the verisimilitude and detail of Stanhope Forbes's Forging of the Anchor - 'it is as good as a photograph'; it praises the sentiment displayed in the portrayal of a fisherman's cottage at dusk, with a pious grandmother and little girl 'reading a good book in the window seat', and in the painting of King Charles at Edgehill, with the little drummer boy 'who has broken his drum rather than it should be beaten for the King's enemies' :'there is surely enough to satisfy two of the greatest of British instincts - the domestic and the military'.[51]

It is immediately, and unsurprisingly, clear that the leaderwriter's enthusiasm for content not only bears no relation to how a picture is painted, as Whistler would have been quick to point out, but, like so much criticism which depends on the existence of anecdotal narrative style for its own form, it implicitly denies the spectator the possibility of finding satisfaction in formal, rather than narrative, criteria.

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51. Unsigned review, 'Round the Royal Academy', Pall Mall Gazette, 30 April 1892, pp.1-2.

CHAPTER VI: MORAL JUDGMENT AND ART CRITICISM

'The greater part of all the art criticism that has ever been written has been moralistic in tone or content; often vehemently moralistic, dealing quite freely in adjectives like "noble" and "exalted" or "base", "vile", "corrupt", "sordid", and "vicious".'[1] The criticism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries proves no exception. To discuss the ways in which the vocabulary and arguments of art criticism transmit notions of value through the employment of ethical or moral assumptions is to look at a major aspect of the secondary level of aesthetic consumption: in other words, to examine the function that these assumptions (whether consciously or unconsciously voiced) play in the establishment and maintenance of a dominant ideology.

Lord Leighton believed that there was no country outside Britain:

> ... in which the task of unravelling the complex question of the true relation of Morality and Religion to Art is one of greater delicacy.[2]

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1. Arnold Isenberg, 'Ethical and Aesthetic Criticism', Aesthetics and the Theory of Criticism, ed. William Callaghan [and others], 1973, p.266.
2. Frederic Leighton, Addresses delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy, 1896, p.39.

In the second of his lectures delivered as President of the Royal Academy - the first President since Reynolds to take advantage of this respected establishment position to explain to a wide audience his views on the purpose and function of art - Leighton attributed this complexity to the strength of the English Protestant tradition. In this lecture, which focusses entirely on the question 'What is the relation in which Art stands to Morals and Religion?',[3] he highlights the dichotomy which faces the perplexed student of artistic matters. On the one side :

> ...it is asserted that the first duty of all artistic production is the inculcation of a moral lesson, if not indeed of a Christian truth; and that the worth and dignity of a work of Art are to be guaged by the degree in which it performs this duty. Unless it preach, as from a pulpit, the cardinal doctrines of the Faith, or declare - whether by an ambiguous symbolism, or by definite embodied example - the loftiness of virtue and the deadliness of sin; unless a very gospel made more eloquent by form and colour cry aloud to us from the canvas or from the marble - then, we are told, the artist has laboured in vain, for his work fails in the fulfilment of the highest function of Art.[4]

This contention goes hand in hand with the notion that since a man is mirrored in his work, so the most noble productions can only be attributed to the 'most pious and God-fearing men'.[5]

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3. Leighton, Addresses, p.38. The lecture was delivered on December 10 1881.

4. Leighton, Addresses, pp.39-40.

5. Leighton, Addresses, p.40.

In opposition to this doctrine, Leighton points to the belief that the function of Art is absolutely unconnected with ethics; that its special, distinct province ;

> ... is to satisfy certain cravings, and to excite certain emotions in our nature to which it alone has access; and that without Art not a few of our keenest and deepest capabilities of emotion would lie unaroused and barren within us.[6]

Indeed, Leighton was prepared to allow an independent expressional significance to line, form, and colour. The natural corollary to this position is, as he points out, that since artistic production is seen to spring from aesthetic rather than ethical impulses within the artist, so the product 'is independent of his moral attitude and unaffected by it'.[7] But these two theories, so apparently consistent in themselves and distinct from one another, encouraged, as Leighton points out, wholesale partisanship:

> ... the student who sees them distinctly formulated is tempted to fling himself without further questions into the arms of one or of the other, accepting it unreservedly and in all its parts.[8]

To accept the former set of beliefs was to ally oneself

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6. Leighton, Addresses, p.40.
7. Leighton, Addresses, p.40.
8. Leighton, Addresses, p.40.

with the conservative art critics of the period, who showed no hesitation in believing that art possessed an indivisible link[9] with morality. This belief enabled them to use middle class moral norms as a means of praising or condemning painting, and hence strengthened the social function of these critics. The doctrine also gave them a conventional tool with which to attack those artistic forms which appeared to attempt a rupture with tradition. If such a threat could be presented, however metaphorically, as a potentially corrupting presence, challenging and infecting accepted social values, it of course appeared more serious than if opposed on grounds of personal aesthetic preference alone.

The employment of moral vocabulary in the criticism of art during this period can be broken down into three major categories. Firstly, the idea, prevalent since the Renaissance, that art must deliberately serve a didactic end as well as pleasing the eye,[10] persisted, above all through the writings of Ruskin and his followers. The

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9. In concentrating on the specific historic implications of the relations between art morality and criticism, I do not have space to examine the development of variegated theories concerned with the affective properties of art. For these, see

   Isenberg, Aesthetics
   Joseph Margolis, The Language of Art & Art Criticism Detroit, 1965, pp.135-147.
   F.E. Sparshott, The Structure of Aesthetics, 1963, pp.296-303.

10. c.f. H.R. Rookmaker, 'Art, Morals and Western Society', Beyond Aesthetics, ed. Don Brothwell, 1976, pp.179-197.

second supposition, also based on a belief in the affective properties of art, is in many ways the obverse of the first. It rests on the belief that art has the power to influence for the bad as well as for the good, both through its content, and, to a lesser extent, through the style in which it is executed. The third area for examination will frequently overlap with the intentions behind the first two categories, for, in addition to this prescriptive adoption of moral attitudes towards art, certain types of description, particularly those used in pejorative criticism, deserve attention in this chapter, since they use states of being or modes of conduct as convenient value-bearing metaphors.

The Victorians tended to assume that art, in its broadest sense, had particularly powerful affective properties. 'The songs of a nation, to quote once more the poor old truism, affect men's manners more than their laws', wrote Leslie Stephen in 1875, expressing his view that art is both producer, as well as product, of society:

> The poems which they learn by heart, the novels with which they amuse their leisure, the pictures which hang upon their dwelling-rooms, affect their whole theory of life and conduct, or they do nothing.[11]

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11. Unsigned article, /Leslie Stephen/, 'Art and Morality', Cornhill Magazine, 32, July 1875, p.92.

Thus, he believed, creative works should, without exception, 'stimulate the healthy, not the morbid emotions: and, in that sense, all art and poetry should be moral and even didactic'.[12] Such an attitude as Stephen expressed did not just assume that art had the power to influence conduct in specific instances: rather that exposure to, and enjoyment and understanding of representations which were both of the beautiful, and which, simultaneously, were aesthetically satisfying in their own right, was an experience capable of contributing to a person's entire moral education. Frequently, the concepts signified by 'moral' were regarded as synonymous with Christian behaviour and attitudes: through responding to that which is visually pleasing, one was presumed to be responding also to the beauty and generosity of God's creation. The artist was repeatedly encouraged to study, and to derive his or her inspiration, from the physical world, since Art cannot go beyond Nature. 'Of all the little lying Hobgoblins which infect the Higher Life', wrote Wyke Bayliss in 1879:

> ... there is none more dangerous than that which is perpetually whispering to the artist that his power is creative. There is no such thing as creative power in Art. The poet and the painter can no more create a subject than they can create the colours with which they paint it, or the ink with which they write about it. The beautiful lines of Nature are the painter's, from which to select and arrange, but he cannot go outside it, any more than he can add to it a single atom.[13]

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12. 'Art and Morality', p.101.

13. Wyke Bayliss, 'Dualism in Art', Magazine of Art, II, March 1879, p.77.

Hence it is easily possible to see how some of the objections raised against non-representational, self-referential art were essentially moral in nature. Such painting could be dismissed as 'non-art' since the painter him or herself was manifestly the primary creator, assuming responsibility for far more than the selection and embellishment of God's world. Art itself as understood by certain representatives of the aesthetic movement, provided a new, alternative deity, and was not linked to a higher organisational and spiritual form.

For the attitude of those who believed in art for art's sake and in the value of the immediate responses which were generated when standing in front of a work, was a direct repudiation of the Ruskinian belief that art must be seen in a social context. 'The sphere of Art and the sphere of Ethics are absolutely distinct and separate',[14] asserted Oscar Wilde, attacking those who criticised The Picture of Dorian Gray from a moral standpoint. Swinburne anticipates this in his review of Hugo's L'Année Terrible:

> The rule of art is not the rule of morals; in morals the action is judged by the intention, the doer is applauded, excused or condemned, according to the motive which induced his deed; in art, the one question is not what you mean but what you do.15

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14. Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', Intentions, 1891, in The Artist as Critic, ed. Richard Ellmann, 1970, p.393.
15. Algernon Swinburne, 'L'Année Terrible', 1872, The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, 1925-27, vol. XIII, p.242.

The fact that Rutter, writing in 1933, could remark that 'today, in the nineteenth-thirties, this very moderate statement of the case reads almost like a platitude', serves as an effective measure of the change in critical emphasis within fifty years.

In the context of Wilde and Swinburne's remarks, the comment of George Moore in Confessions of a Young Man:

> What care I that some millions of Israelites died under Pharaoh's lash or Egypt's sun? It is well they died so that I have the pyramids to look on ... That the model died of drink and disease in the hospital is nothing compared with the essential that I should have La Source, that exquisite dream of innocence[17]

is not exclusively a statement supporting the importance of the autonomous existence of art. It involves, also, questions of judgment. It is a vindication of the importance, to Moore, of his own aesthetic response: a refusal to share standards of judgment based, like so much mid/late nineteenth century criticism, on "common-sense" morality. Bayliss, for example, unquestioningly accepted

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16. Frank Rutter, Art in My Time, 1933, p.29.

17. George Moore, Confessions of a Young Man, 1888, pp.190-191.

that Art is Utterance and hence that it is governed by the same moral imperatives that he believes should govern all speech acts: 'whatever language we speak we must speak the truth in it'.[18] This is a connection between aesthetics and experience which Moore implicitly severs.

But such an attitude would have been incomprehensible to the majority of the middle class audience. Much of the chattier criticism reflects a demand for reassurance that the model does not, as it were, die from drink and disease. It stresses the personal integrity of the artist. Again, critical authority for this approach is found in another familiar Ruskinian precept, stressing that art is an index of the moral condition of its executor: 'Great art is produced by men who feel acutely and nobly; and it is in some sort an expression of this personal feeling'.[19] This viewpoint is itself based on a far older notion: as Mrs. Russell Barrington reminded her readers, in Plato's Phaedrus, Socrates puts the artist alongside the philosopher, musician and lover as having a role in which the soul which has seen most of the truth manifests itself. Gloomily, she adds 'somehow the art we see in our annual exhibitions, taken as a whole, hardly enforces to our minds the truth of the wisdom of Socrates.'[20]

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18. Bayliss, 'Dualism in Art', p.77.
19. Ruskin, 'Modern Painters: III', Works, V, p.32.
20. Barrington, 'Is a Great School of Art Possible?' pp.91-2.

Transferred to a popular level, this interpretation is central to series with such titles as 'The Artist at Home', which concentrate, above all, on the comfort and respectability of the painter's domestic arrangements. Thus F.G. Stephens, for example, when describing Alma Tadema, suggests through his inclusive pronoun that the reader will share his assumption about this man's moral worth:

> Out of his genial blue eyes, his energetic face, his stalwart figure, as well as from the very grip of his hand, emanate kindness and firmness. Every nerve of his senses seems to say: there is not so much good fortune in this man, as will. We are at once impressed by such a distinct and vigorous personality as this; we feel here is a man in whom the world believes, because he believes in himself, and here is one who, in spite of all those never-tiring labours in the studio, remains prompted by a rare conscientiousness, and is not satisfied until perfection is achieved.[21]

And such conscientiousness, such perfection is reflected - sometimes almost literally, in his penchant for polished surfaces - in the detail and finish of Tadema's own painting. Stephens also finds it easy to correlate the moral worth of the man with the literal worth of his lavishly decorated and ornamented home: surroundings which are presented more in terms of reward for excellence of character than as the perceived result of his economic success. Similar considerations are reached by Wilfred Meynell, who guided the readers of the

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21. F.G. Stephens, Laurence Alma Tadema R.A.: A sketch of his life and work, 1895, p.15.

Magazine of Art round a guided tour of Tadema's furnishings, stressing the abundance of portraits and busts representing Mrs. Alma-Tadema and thus, through emphasising the full Victorian homeliness of it all, humanising, demystifying the artistic process through rooting it very firmly in the ideological and material world which the readers themselves inhabit or wished to inhabit, and to which they were accustomed to apply moral concepts.[22] One further linked example reinforces the premises behind this approach. The terms in which Helen Zimmern defended Alma-Tadema's The Death of the First Born against hypothetical attacks of hyper-morbidity blur the distinctions between the artist's physiological and mental health, and the moral atmosphere generated by his work: 'Alma Tadema is always healthy; there is no trace of morbidness in his nature, and sorrow as rendered by him is what it should be, a grief, but nothing false and strained'.[23] Her meaning becomes entirely clear when put alongside her earlier comments in the Art Annual. She here makes reference to Tadema's early illness, when studying law rather than painting, but reassures us that now he :

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22. Wilfrid Meynell, Some Modern Artists and their Work, 1883, p.77.

23. Helen Zimmern, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, 1901, p.77.

> ...is in all senses of the word healthy ... his work is wholesome and pure, as only the work can be of a man physically as well as mentally healthy. Mens sana in corpore sano.[24]

But the more general application of moral standards in the judgement of painting would not be possible without Ruskin's evolved belief that art is related not merely to an individual's state of mind, but that aesthetic production is also, in some way, an effective guide to the collective moral condition of the society in which it is produced. Hence - although not by Ruskin - conscious recourse to previous artistic styles could be interpreted not only as anachronistic, but indeed as dishonest, adopting the property of another age. Thus a review of Mallock's A Familiar Colloquy on Recent Art criticises the author for ignoring one particular aspect of the relation between ethics and aesthetics: what Mallock confidently calls the 'aesthetic sin of deliberate, elaborate, self-conscious archaism - the enormous sin of insincerity, in a word - by which the art of Burne-Jones, of Swinburne (to take types), has fallen'.[25] Their efforts are further described as 'imitation', as 'sham', as falling away from the desirable qualities of 'impulse and vigour' into 'effeminacy'.

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24. Helen Zimmern, 'L. Alma-Tadema', Art Annual, 1886, p.3.

25. Unsigned feature, 'Notices of Books', Magazine of Art, I, November 1878, p.xxviii.

The voices of dissent that were raised against Ruskin's view that the art of a nation is an exponent of its ethical state did not come from the Art for Art's Sake lobby alone. The reviewer of Ruskin's Lectures on Art in the Spectator looked to a popular conception of Ancient Greece to provide his refutation, arguing that :

> ... in some degree, the art of Athens was noble because her morality was low. Athenian life was a sunny, unanxious, careless, Pagan life.[26]

Unprompted by religious zeal, the mind naturally turned to the beauty which surrounded it: whilst if Greece had fallen under the sway of Moses, all this would have been exchanged, at the expense of Art, for a sense of duty. These arguments are echoed by Leighton in his Royal Academy lecture of 1881 when he argued that there was scanty historical evidence for the conventional linking of a perceived downward course in art from the late sixteenth century onwards with the decline in religious faith. Indeed, he produced contrary examples which he trusted would be readily accepted. Taking Spanish art, Leighton noted that there were fervently religious painters, such as Morales el Divino, Juanes, and Luis de Vangas, at the time when the Catholic faith was absolute. These men went in for fasting, prayer, and self-flagellation - but whatever

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26. unsigned review, 'Art and Morality /Second Notice/', Spectator, 43, 13 July 1870, p.979.

their degree of religious merit, who, he enquires, would wish to claim for them the same level of artistic excellence as was manifested by such great painters of the seventeenth century as Murillo and Velasquez? [27]

The dissociation of these critics from the aesthetic movement is important. The Spectator's reviewer, certainly, attacked their artistic self-absorption, believing that someone who is too immersed in the passive consumption of art becomes a kind of moral down and out, 'the poorest creature presented by this poverty-stricken earth'.[28] When Goethe excused himself for not being troubled by the invasion of Germany by the French with the plea that he was an artist, and that the mere breath of political life would disturb the Olympian serenity of his soul:

> ...he uttered a sentiment which all the magnificence of his intellect is powerless to redeem from the reproach that it is morally despicable. [29]

In other words, faith in the affective powers of art is predicted on a belief in the immorality involved in separating the sphere of aesthetics from other forms of activity.

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27. Leighton, Addresses, p.45.
28. 'Art and Morality', Spectator, p.980.
29. 'Art and Morality', Spectator, p.980.

Yet, despite the importance accorded to such affective powers, over-didacticism was frequently frowned at, even by such a habitually censorious journal as the Builder. In an editorial on the 1891 Royal Academy exhibition, Fildes's The Doctor was unfavourably contrasted with Herkomer's On Strike - 'a kind of moral picture too, a lesson against strikes but there is something' (without specifying precisely what) 'in it besides the mere morale'. Despite the care with which The Doctor had been executed, the expressiveness with which the concentration of the eponymous figure is rendered, and the pathos conveyed, the critic queries whether it is in the 'true sense a 'picture'? We think not: the moral interest overrides the artistic'. [30] And, although many paintings were subjected to didactic analysis, it is fair to point out that on other occasions critics either deliberately, or unthinkingly, sheltered behind their role as observers and maintainers of 'artistic values' when faced with a work of apparently didactic intentions. Thus the Artist's critic paradoxically comments:

> M. Barrias' was a happy thought - "L'aumone à Venise" - two gondolas gliding past each other; the one filled with beggars, the other occupied by some well-to-do tourists; it affords contrasts of colour and effect.[31]

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30. 'The Royal Academy Exhibition', Builder, LX, 9 May 1891, p.363.

31. 'Penguin', 'The Paris Salon', Artist, 1 June 1884, p.188.

And a parodic treatment of the moralistic tendencies of criticism was always an easy way for an advocate of progressive art forms to attack the type of painting (let alone the abstemious sentiments) favoured by such writers. Thus Marx's son in law, Edward Aveling,[32] described, in 1884, a portrait by Herkomer which :

> . . . ought to be purchased by the Licensed Victuallers' Defence Association. It is a picture of the chairman of the Church of England Temperance Society, and ought to do more to convert teetotallers than any amount of songs in praise of wine. For one cannot but conclude that the severe attack of colic from which the gentleman is suffering must be due to persistent water-drinking.[33]

The Builder does not specify what it believes the moral of The Doctor to be. The elucidation of the lesson taught by this and other moralistic paintings is dependent not so much on an examination of the narrative concept of the picture as it appears to our twentieth century eyes, but on a consideration of its employment within contemporary didactic contexts. This leads us to a closer analysis of this specific instance in which painting was perceived to exert moral influences.

In 1892, according to Fildes's son, newly-qualified doctors were addressed by a leader of the medical profession.

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32. Aveling, for a short while, edited the section 'Art Corner' on the periodical Our Corner, a position subsequently held by Mary Reed and by George Bernard Shaw.

33. Edward Aveling, 'Art Corner', Our Corner, iv, 1 July 1884.

'A library of books written in your honour', he said:

> ... would not do what this picture has done and will do for the medical professions in making the hearts of our fellow men warm to us with confidence and affection. ... Above everything, whatever may be the rank in your profession to which you may attain, remember always to hold before you the ideal figure of Luke Fildes' picture, and be at once gentle men and gentle doctors.[34]

More general in its social application is the interpretation offered by T.W.M. Lund in The Religion of Art. He defends the choice of a painful subject, since pain is 'a large and precious part of Life's discipline' and may cleanse and ennoble our feeling,[35] just as, on similar grounds, he defends the subject matter of Leighton's Perseus and Andromeda, and Jessie Macgregor's The Reign of Terror. He commends the fact that Fildes, having concentrated on the physician's sympathy, illuminated in technical terms by the lamp's glare, has removed the possibility of 'barren sentimentalism': a potential pitfall if the stress had fallen on the agonising parents or the child itself. The picture teaches us that 'life is as precious a possession in the cottage as in the palace'.[36]

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34. L.V. Fildes, Luke Fildes, R.A.: A Victorian Painter, 1968, p.118.

35. T.W.M. Lund, The Religion of Art in Three Pictures, Liverpool, 1891, pp.48-9. The other works discussed are Maurice Greifenhagen's An Idyll, and P.H. Calderon's Elizabeth of Hungary's Great Act of Renunciation.

36. Religion of Art, p.51.

But Lund himself manages to supply the sentimental emotion which he has just praised Fildes for omitting. For, through the figure of the doctor, we are reminded that :

> ...there are men and women in this selfish world of avaricious calculation ready to step down into the arena of filth and fever, with their own life in their hands, to stake it against Death, as though it were but a poor pawn, for the small possession of an infant's life.
>
> Do we doubt, in an age of sordid competition, that there are men and women who will freely give time and strength, which they might coin into gold, to rescue mites of humanity from disease, and make the hearts of yokels sing for joy?[37]

In his next sermon, Lund not only encourages his congregation and readership to think of Fildes's actual doctor as a type on which to model their own tenderness and generosity, but reminds them also of Christ's redemptive characteristics, of the fact that he was 'pre-eminently a Physician of Humanity'.[38] Speaking to a Liverpool audience, Lund seems to have had specific social encouragement in mind. Fildes's picture is to be kept in one's mind's eye 'when we are short of sympathy with the woes of our kind, and fail of fellowship with the brave dutifulness which works in back slums'.[39] This geographical frame of reference soon undergoes metaphoric transference when Lund tells the congregation that they should turn their attention,

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37. Religion of Art, p.51.

38. Religion of Art, p.62.

39. Religion of Art, p.62.

as physicians of humanity themselves, to the diseases which centre on four great nuclei in the surrounding 'sick world': on :

Insanitary Air,
Insanitary Wealth,
Insanitary Mind,
Insanitary Soul.[40]

Lund was not, of course, alone in using a painted text on which to base a sermon inculcating certain Christian morals. Thus an anonymous pamphlet headed Art Sermons, put out by the Florence Gallery in 1892, restates yet again the message of The Light of the World, re-iterating Ruskin and the Reverend Glover[41] as it tours the by now familiar iconography of ivy, hemlock, nettles and false wheat, of white robe, royal mantle, thorn and the golden crowns and jewelled breast plate. The Reverend Canon Farrar speaks warmly of Edwin Lond's The Parable of the Sower;[42] the Reverend E.A. Tugman finds three predictable lessons in Holman Hunt's The Triumph of the Innocents: 'that we ought to look on the other side of sin, sorrow, and suffering'; 'that our life is consecrated to GOD by suffering'. and that 'all things work together for good in those who love GOD'.[43] But the writers

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40. Religion of Art, p.64.

41. Rev. R. Glover, 'The Light of the World', 1871.

42. Reverend Canon Farrar, Description of the Parable of the Sower, 1891.

43. Reverend E.A. Tugman, Consecrated Lives . Lessons from Mr. Holman Hunt's 'The Triumph of the Innocents', 1894, pp.6-8. Holman Hunt is quoted on the title page of this SPCK booklet: 'Your little sermon expounds my purpose simply and clearly in a manner that will not fail to be interesting'. Hunt added a few notes himself to the pamphlet.

pages 267/8 missing

Dickens's vituperative remarks on Millais's Christ in the House of His Parents are well known, commensurate with the low church piety which pervaded Household Words. Equivalent attitudes persist much later in the century. Thus in 1886, the critic of the Saturday Review,[45] when writing of Vernet's Golgotha, currently on show at the 'Salon Parisien', 160 New Bond Street, conflates the dual bogeys of the 'spirit' of Zola and the horrific descriptions of Flaubert's Salammbô to indicate the painting's 'revolting excesses'. Vernet, on this occasion, is accused of a form of fantasy rather than true realism: instead of pursuing laudable 'patient research in historic veracity', he is a painter who, having found nothing in the Gospel narrative of the Crucifixion other 'than an incentive to reproduce the horrors of the abattoir or the torture chamber degrades art and profanes a sacred theme'.[46]

Yet Art was, more frequently, though perhaps not always necessarily consciously, conceived of as a substitute for religion. Bernard Shaw enunciated a theory that art's power had won for it the privileges of religion: hence London

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45. Almost certainly R.A.M. Stevenson, particularly in view of the fact that he mentions Vernet's position as 'a leader of acknowledged influence' as director of the Antwerp Academy.

46. Unsigned review, 'A Show à la Wiertz', Saturday Review, LXI, 16 January 1886, p.84.

of these tracts differ from Lund's preaching in that they chose works which are already specifically religious in intent: Lund is unusual, although not unique, in drawing a prolonged Christian moral from an overtly secular painted text.

Overt references to religious teaching are not common in nineteenth and early twentieth century press criticism, and, predictably, they decline alongside the inter-related factors of smaller numbers of religiously inspired works in exhibitions[44] and the lessening public influence of openly proclaimed Christian doctrine. But the passive acceptance of Christian tenets by a substantial portion of a critic's readership could be a useful critical tool. Treatment of religious themes according to realist principles, for example, could be turned to give added weight to the condemnation of that particular technical style. Such themes provided a clear litmus test of whether the spiritual (good) or the material (bad) was seen as being in aesthetic ascendance.

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44. The figures for religiously-inspired works exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition are as follows:

1855	48	of	1558	(3.08%)	
1865	30	of	1077	(2.78%)	
1875	38	of	1408	(2.69%)	
1885	22	of	2134	(1.03%)	
1895	25	of	1713	(1.45%),	suggesting a gradual if jerky decline

These figures do not include architectural designs, nor paintings of church views and interiors.

shopkeepers :

> ... who would fiercely resent a compulsory church rate, who do not know Yankee Doodle from Luther's hymn, and who are more interested in photographs of the latest celebrities than in the Velasquez portraits in the National Gallery, tamely allow the London County Council to spend their money on bands, on municipal art inspectors, and on plaster casts from the antique.[47]

The list of virtues which art can and should teach us, according to Shaw, could stand as a list of prescriptives governing the beliefs behind the critical attitudes discussed in this section. It should :

> ... refine our sense of character and conduct, of justice and sympathy, greatly heightening our self-knowledge, self-control, precision of action, and considerateness, and making us intolerant of baseness, cruelty, injustice, and intellectual superficiality or vulgarity.[48]

The second assumption to be discussed in this chapter, that art can influence for the bad as well as for the good, can be seen to work on two levels. One, unsurprisingly, rests on the critics' objection to anything which would be regarded as unseemly - above all, this meant a painting which revealed an undesirably suggestive amount of flesh.

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47. Bernard Shaw, 'The Sanity of Art', , Major Critical Essays, 1932, p. 316.

48. 'The Sanity of Art', Major Critical Essays, p. 315.

The other (sometimes linked) level of discussion involves the whole debate about naturalism, important in literary circles as well as in the visual arts. It centred around both the issue of what should, or should not, form the subject matter of art, and the degree of idealisation which an artist should employ.

Both these assumptions relied not only on the notion that art should, in some way, be equatable with beauty, but on the idea that art is created in order to last, created as a bearer of values which it is desirable to perpetuate. 'Vulgarity' - a key word of condemnation - and 'good art' do not go together. 'Vulgarity', commented the Saturday Review's fiction critic, holding George Moore's Spring Days at an arm's length, 'can never have place or prominence in such books or such pictures as are destined to escape burial in the great river of indifference and oblivion. It is Art's great glory to have the power of rescuing us from vulgarity'.[49]

Nudity was, of course, a predictable target for those who concerned themselves with the content of mid and late

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49. Unsigned review, 'Novels', Saturday Review, LXVI, 22 September 1888, p.355.

Victorian art. Invariably any hint of apparent sexual over-emphasis would be picked up by someone. Thus the Spectator's critic for example, viewing the Royal Academy exhibition of 1871, remarked of Leighton's Greek Girls Picking up Pebbles by the Sea: 'Surely ... the ugly effect of the breast-bands is unnecessarily exaggerated'.[50] Editors had to be prepared for criticism if they introduced any form of nudity into their pages. J. Comyns Carr relates how, in the 1880's Walter Crane contributed designs to accompany his own poems in the English Illustrated Magazine. In several of the designs:

> ... nude figures had been introduced, but treated in so ideal and imaginative a spirit that it seemed impossible they could provoke a protest even from an early Puritan; and yet immediately after their publication I received a letter of passionate rebuke from a reader of the magazine dwelling in the suburbs, who with scathing criticism, obviously inspired by the loftiest moral indignation, recommended me, if I wished to study my own vile form, to look in the glass, and not, by giving such indecent pictures to the world, to pollute the purity of the reader's home.[51]

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50. V., 'The Royal Academy [Second Notice]', Spectator, 44, 10 June 1871, p.704.

51. Some Carr, Eminent Victorians, pp.161-2. Comyns Carr continues: 'The letter, I think, was dated from the Old Kent Road, and the only pleasure I could draw from it rested on the fact that my magazine was entertained in so unexpected a quarter'.

Even the praise for nude representations which came from the most authoritative of written sources does not seem to have been sufficient to combat popular prejudice, nor to legitimise the work in terms of its commercial potential. The Times commented of Alma-Tadema's Hadrian in England visiting a Romano-British Pottery: 'the figures are drawn with an accuracy that is beyond praise, the nude slave being exceptionally striking in this respect;'[52] the staid Athenaeum remarked that 'he never drew the nude with greater success'.[53] Yet the pictures passed through the hands of various dealers, the last of which told Alma-Tadema that the presence of this figure was to blame for the commercial failure, 'and that he would like to have the figure dressed'.[54]

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52. Unsigned review, 'The Royal Academy (First Notice)', The Times, 3 May 1884, p.7.

53. Unsigned review, 'The Royal Academy (First Notice)', Athenaeum, no.2949, 1884, p.571.

54. F.G. Stephens, Laurence Alma-Tadema, 1895, p.18. 'In order to save a masculine piece of painting which the artist considered one of his most successful pieces of brushwork, he cut the canvas into three pieces; made of two of them, by means of additions, pictures sufficient in themselves, and received the third piece containing the slave in payment of his trouble'.

The patina of antiquity was often seen as bestowing a certain amount of moral respectability. As Dr. Phene, speaking at the Edinburgh Social Science conference in 1880, said in his paper "On the Humanising and Refining Effects of Art", in Greek work, 'you never saw a trace of anything that the most morally trained person could take exception to:' but - continued the Artist's reporter of this conference:

> ... he was bound to say that, although he had been familiar with the nude form from his childhood, he could not go into the Paris Salon and look at their interpretations of nude form without blushing.[55]

Hence to use a supposedly classical subject as an excuse for painting the indecent seemed particularly to be condemned. The Spectator's critic, incensed by the Academy's hanging two pictures by M. Hebert in 1871, attacks him for painting women in :

> ... the attire which (as the dictionaries tell us) was worn only by women of loose reputation. The Greek dress was tight, as befitted the climate. It was sometimes short, as in old Lacedaemon. But that diaphanous gauzes, more innocent than pure nudity, were worn by girls or women of good repute, no one will believe.[56]

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55. Unsigned report, 'Social Science Congress: Art Section', Artist, I, November 1880, p.326. This sentiment was strongly endorsed by W.B. Richmond, one of the most vociferous self-appointed vigilantes of the late nineteenth century, and President of this conference.

56. 'The Royal Academy /Second Notice/', Spectator, p.705.

Nor would Greek men have thought of engaging in games with a helmet as their only covering when women spectators were present. It was regarded as a misapplication of classical authority to cite the sculptors' ideal of, for example, the Venus of Milo as an excuse for painting 'similarly half-draped figures in a picture of manners with the ultra-realistic treatment fashionable in the present day'.[57]

Not even the distanced classical, however, was protection against the extremely puritanical. The Venerable William Sinclair, Archdeacon of London, speaking of the need for purity and the dangers which lurked for young men, saw blame to lie within the education system:

> ... classical literature, which is part of cultural education, abounds in immoral and unrestrained sentiment. In art itself, the love of the beautiful, particularly in human form, easily degenerates into sensual imagination.[58]

But generally, at least in highly educated circles, the artists of the Renaissance, still more those of classical times, were considered to provide a standard of artistic beauty against which contemporary portrayals of unclothed

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57. 'The Royal Academy /Second Notice/', p.705.

58. Venerable William Sinclair, The Cleansing of a City, 1908, p.39.

bodies should be judged: 'Greek statues were ideal and represented the highest and most beautiful types of the human figure'.[59]

As Richard Jenkyns rightly points out in The Victorians and Ancient Greece, the Victorians seemed to differentiate between nudity as portrayed in sculpture and as portrayed in painting. Thus when Samuel Carter Hall suggested that French nudes looked as if they had taken their clothes off, Greek ones looked as if they had never thought of clothes, he was drawing his responses from two differing art forms.[60] When one moved away from Greek, or at least classically based art which 'allowed one to contemplate the naked body with a good conscience, and at the same time to congratulate oneself on possessing a taste far removed from the common herd's',[61] the situation became somewhat different, and censure was widespread. Critics repeatedly commented that it was 'unnecessary' to show such a proliferation of flesh. The nudes of Cabanel, Bougereau and others on exhibition at the Paris Salon formed favourite targets.

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59. Sir Coutts Lindsay, speaking at the prize giving of the Manchester School of Art, December 19 1879. Artist, I, January 1880, p.10.

60. Richard Jenkyns, The Victorians and Ancient Greece, 1980, p.135.

61. Victorians and Ancient Greece, p.135.

The public, as well as the critics, joined in the debate about the suitability or otherwise of displaying the unclothed human form. A notable correspondence took place in The Times from May 20 1885, following a letter headed 'A Woman's Plea' and signed by that mythical personage, 'A British Matron'. She claims to have waited in vain for any public remonstrance against the exhibition of nudity to 'the gaze of multitudes' at the Academy and Grosvenor galleries:

> Can any one venture to deny that, at an exhibition purporting to be for general education or entertainment, no picture should find place before which a modest woman may not stand hanging on the arm of father, brother or lover / a subsequent correspondent inserted a parenthetical exclamation mark at this point_/ without a burning sense of shame?[62]

All that remains 'to complete the degradation of our galleries' is for women artists, already content to shame their sex by representations of female nudity, to execute pictures of unclothed men. A spate of letters, some critical, some supportive, followed. The majority appeared under pseudonyms, as though the writers wished to disassociate themselves from the theme of sexuality when placed in the public gaze. 'A British Parent' enquired 'why was the human form made "divine" and the model for

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62. The Times, 20 May 1885, p.10.

beauty if neither fit to be seen nor even represented'?;[63] 'Senex', whilst suggesting that the Royal Academy borrows the Neapolitan Museo Borbonico's inscription 'Oggetto osceni' [sic] to place above one of its doors, shows concern for the eighteenpence an hour which models are paid for their pitiable trade - 'Not, alas! the most pitiable of all, but one too often adopted as the only practicable means of escape from a still worse alternative'.[64] 'A.S.B.' comments that it was a good thing Providence saved the British Matron from being an art loving Frenchwoman, since 'on the walls of this year's Salon, I counted the other day no less than 78 pictures representing whole-length and 38 half-length absolutely nude ladies'.[65] The original correspondent obtained support from 'Another British Matron' who would certainly bar her daughter (not, incidentally, the sons to whom she also acknowledges being mother) from the Academy until things changed for the better:

> Our honour for ourselves, our love for our daughters, and our regard for the future welfare of our country, whose warriors, statesmen, and citizens are to be born of our daughters, compel us to decry and discountenance, with all our power, these stealthy, steadfast advances of the cloven foot.[66]

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63. The Times, 21 May 1885, p.10.

64. The Times, 21 May 1885, p.10.

65. The Times, 23 May 1885, p.10.

66. The Times, 23 May 1885, p.10.

Others commented that how one responds to the undraped representation of the human form is a question of culture, education and habit: The Soudanese, for example, are accustomed to seeing unwedded girls go around absolutely unclothed. Among those who attempted to defend nude representation on aesthetic grounds was 'H', writer of the longest and most authoritative response, during which he sums up the opposition to the British Matron by declaring that:

> The terms upon which the undraped is a noble subject of art are these - (1) a manifest appeal to the love of beauty, and not to appetite; (2) an ideal presentation, and not a literal transcript of individual fact; a generalisation in the imagination, and not a photographic record of the particular; (3) the observation of certain special artistic conventions as old as Praxiteles. [67]

The Artist might sneer at these, and further, letters as 'the annual outburst of righteous indignation concerning the studies of nude figures',[68] but nevertheless the volume and variety of the correspondence seems indicative of a strong, even passionate middle class interest in this particular conjunction of art and morality.

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67. The Times, 25 May 1885, p.11.

68. Unsigned notes, 'From Month to Month', Artist, VI, June 1885, p.178.

As Jenkyns suggested, the crucial distinction in the minds of those critics who seemed to take seriously the question of the undraped figure seemed to be one between nudity and nakedness. Thus R.A.M. Stevenson could praise the summer show at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1883 for being the only current exhibition showing any pictures of the nude whatsoever - 'the highest and most difficult of all branches of art'. He saw successful representations of the nude to be the basis of skill in figure painting, and claimed that he would like the young painters encouraged by the Academy to begin by exhibiting such studies, uncommercially viable as he realises the exercise would be.[69] Yet, as he put it, 'the nude does not mean', simply, 'the painting of naked women'.[70] He was aware of the difficulty any critic faces when writing about the representation of the unclothed body, for any show of dislike on the writer's part, even if prompted by purely technical considerations, is bound to be taken by someone else as a manifestation of prudery. As an example, he takes Matthew Hale's Psyche Before Venus: a canvas to which he had objected, primarily, on the grounds of its 'glaring and red' gaudiness, its portrayal of figures as 'sanguine, even fleshy'.[71]

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69. Unsigned review, 'The Picture Galleries - V', Saturday Review, LV, 2 June 1883, p.697.

70. 'The Picture Galleries - V', p.698.

71. Unsigned review, 'The Picture Galleries', Saturday Review, LV, 5 May 1883, p.567.

But subsequent critics had found the work 'daring', original, poetic even': those who opposed it had been 'roundly taxed with affected prudery, and asked how we contrived not to be shocked by Mr. Calderon's undraped bather and Mr. Van Haanen's naked model'. Stevenson defended himself as objecting to the Venus not :

> ... because she displays her unveiled charms to the world, but because she is vulgar. The sight of the human form does not offend our eyes in any way, provided that it be presented in an artistic spirit and painted in an artistic way.[72]

This belief - that subject matter is subordinate to style - is, of course, important to Stevenson's formal analysis of works of art, as discussed in the next chapter. It also leads one into the whole late nineteenth century debate about artistic realism, which concerned itself with ideas about the appropriateness of both content and technique.

Perhaps - difficult as the distinction can be to draw - naturalism is the more apt term for the focus of the critics' objections. It was certainly the term which they preferred to use, whether in English or French form ('Naturalisme' which is a vulgarised realism ...')[73] Naturalism 'of the vulgar

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72. 'The Picture Galleries - V', Saturday Review, p.698.

73. 'Penguin', 'The Paris Salon', Artist, V, June 1884, p.187.

marchand de vin school' could be defined easily enough through postulating an apparently appropriate, vulgar, public. Such a work as Goeneutte's Premier Accroc was, in the opinion of the Artist's critic, not fit for the walls of the Salon, let alone the Academy; it was fit ' and then only, if such publications must be printed, for the "Vie Parisienne" '.[74] The Artist's readership is invited to build on a sense of cultural identity with the magazine which they are themselves patronising through the denial which is expected of them of the moral values represented by an entirely different type of publication. Whilst realism, if not pushed to excess, could be regarded as something to be applauded as one among several artistic components, nevertheless, 'realism without idealism is not art'.[75] This idealism is not just a matter of choice of subject: the critic cites Israels, Frère and Edelfelt as examples of how the most common-place events of life can be idealised by finding and emphasising what elements of beauty do exist, and playing down the unpleasing factors. For :

> ... ugliness is another craze of the realists. Nature to them has no beauties, grace does not exist, and yet Rembrandt knew how to make ugliness attractive. Manet's pot-house men are intensely vulgar: Rembrandt's never are, because their traits are softened down: whereas the French painter exaggerates and makes the most of a squint, or a wart, or a beery complexion - and revels in it.[76]

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74. 'The Paris Salon', p.187.

75. 'The Paris Salon', p.187.

76. 'The Paris Salon', p.188.

Such a style of painting as Manet's could popularly be interpreted as being unnatural, perverted, since conservative criticism accepted as a commonplace that 'what human nature asks for in a work of art is that it should be beautiful'.[77] Further reviews in the Artist and many other periodicals of the period continually re-iterate the desire for the artist to 'show that there are after all some gleams of sunshine between the clouds'.[78] Millet is cited as an example when it comes to the portrayal of rustic subjects, since in his painting there is 'a slight and almost undefinable idealism pleasantly perceptible'.[79] The equation of art with escapism is blatant. Such artists as L'Hermitte,[80] who make no attempt 'to show the pleasanter or less depressing side of the toiler's life', are severely criticised. In his work :

> ... every suggestion is of pain, of a struggle for existence that knows no rest or moment of relief, of misery that knows no alleviation. It is hard to believe that in subjects such as these is to be found the real field for the exercise of the artist's powers.[81]

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77. Unsigned review, 'English and French Impressionists', The Times, 18 April 1889, p.8.

78. Unsigned review, 'MacLean's Gallery', Artist, V, May 1884, p.133.

79. Unsigned review, 'The Proprietary Galleries', Artist, V, December 1884, p.371.

80. L'Hermitte's La Moisson was exhibited at Messrs. Tooth's gallery late in 1884, along with the more favoured Mid-day Rest 'where, at least, the gaunt spectre of poverty is not so obtrusive, and of which some pleasant recollections are possible'. 'The Proprietary Galleries', p.371.

81. 'The Proprietary Galleries', p.371.

Indeed, such naturalism could be seen as a denial of nature: not of nature in the sense which could be equated with the countryside, and hence agricultural labour, but of the invoked 'natural laws of perspective, colour and beauty'.[82] The presentation of 'the lowest ranks of the people', whether in literature or painting, was only to be countenanced by many commentators if it 'showed us how poverty and true nobility can be combined'.[83] Calderon's own strong susceptibility to physical repulsion, even to class difference, shows as he describes how portraits of 'sodden beer and absinthe drinkers moodily scowling at us with bleared eyes

... hundred of blue-bloused labourers, of a debased type, doing nothing in particular; and thousands of ill-favoured, wooden-shod females awkwardly perspiring in the sun'[84] have done nothing to further this end. When 'Penguin' gave his catalogue of the major practitioners of this disfavoured naturalism, he singled out Manet, Degas, and Zola.[85] The inclusion of the novelist in this list, alongside the artists, is important, since the debate about realism/naturalism in late nineteenth century English art should not be separated

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82. Penguin, 'The Paris Salon', Artist, IV, June 1883, p.189.

83. P.H. Calderon, 'Realism in Art', Art Journal 24, February 1884, p.58. The substance of this paper formed the prizegiving address by Calderon to students of Blackheath Hill school.

84. 'Realism in Art', p.58.

85. 'Penguin', 'The Paris Salon', Artist, 1884, p.187.

from contemporaneous literary controversy. Parallels, indeed, were easily and none too discriminatingly drawn between the two forms. Thus, choosing to ignore the dissimilarity in a style of depiction, in one of his early reviews, H.G. Wells comments, with reference to Stephen Crane's Maggie: a child of the streets that :

> ...the literature of the slum multiplies apace; and just as the mud of the Port of London has proved amenable to Mr. Whistler, so the mud of the New York estuary has furnished material for artistic treatment to Mr. Crane.[86]

Zola-esque was an easy term of condemnation, whether in reference to literature or painting: its invocation did not necessarily imply any acquaintance whatsoever with the work of the French writer.[87] The phrase normally referred to the question of content (the activity of manual labour; the presence of alcohol; physically explicit sexuality; work-houses or institutions; untidy or dirty domestic interiors) but sometimes to the method of painting ('photographic', sometimes 'realistic', indicating that both humans and objects

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86. H.G.W., 'Another View of Maggie', Saturday Review, LXXXII, 19 December 1896, p.655.

87. For the critical reception and linked realist theory of Zola's work in England, see

Clarence R. Decker, 'Zola's Literary Reputation in England', PMLA, XLIX, December 1934, pp.1140-1153.
William C. Frierson, 'The English Controversy over Realism in Fiction', PMLA, XLIII, June 1928, pp.533-550
P.J. Keating, 'French Naturalism and English Working-class Fiction', The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction, 1971, pp.125-138.

are delineated in unambiguous clarity). Thus, for example, the Saturday Review's critic, when reviewing the painting section of the Italian exhibition (Earls Court 1888), speaks of 'some horrible few Zolaistic realismswhich ought to be burnt',[88] and produces, for an example, Natale Attanasio's Lacrimae Rerum ;'a painful picture ... representing :

> ... the interior of that department of a mad-house which is devoted to women suffering from religious mania. There are subjects best left alone, and this is one of the number.89

The belief that some things are far pleasanter to look on, and to know about, than others, relates not just to the question about what is admissible in terms of the portrayal of contemporary life, but is linked to the whole debate concerning the proper subject matter of history. Despite the huge popularity of some militaristic themes, especially following the Crimean war, (Elizabeth Butler's The Roll Call, (1874); Scotland for Ever! (1881)) the popularity of the domestic genre scene, whether modern or classical, was correctly perceived as being connected with the developing interest in social history. Percy Cross Standing, in his

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88. Unsigned review, 'The Pictures at the Italian Exhibition', Saturday Review, LXV, 23 June 1888, p.759.
The reviewer probably had in mind such paintings as
Angelo Morbelli: Gli Asfissiati [o] Il Suicidio
" " Il Viatico and
Luigi Nono : Refugium Peccatorum
as well as Attanasio's work.

89. 'The Pictures at the Italian Exhibition', p.759.

life of Alma-Tadema, draws attention to the artist's friendship with Georg Ebers. Ebers wrote of the contemporary trends in historiography, the turning away from a chronicling of royal families and governments, and extended this praise of modes of writing to the historical artists. Alma-Tadema, he says, also:

> ... perceives that a people's true history is the history of its civilisation, which teaches the normal character of nations, their life in a condition of health, and he joyfully perceives how much more delightful it is ...

He extends this proper sphere of the verbal historiographer to the historical artist: a convenient means of praise to apply to Alma-Tadema. Yet if the concept of 'true history' is applied to contemporary life, if it is realised that today's present not only contains but becomes history, then idealism in the painting of the contemporary is far more readily picked up as falsification. This point was quickly seized on by the socialist critic Mary Reed who not only praised realism - albeit the tamed veracity of the Newlyn School - but also saw it as pointing a moral lesson. She singles out George Clausen, noting his closeness to Millet and, in particular Bastien Lepage; she commends:

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90. Percy Cross Standing, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, 1905, pp.31-2.

> ... his dispassionate observation and sympathy with the proletarian, painting into his peasants' hands and faces the record of the sorrow of dumb generations of oppressed and joyless human beings:[91]

a style of rhetoric unfamiliar to English art criticism of this time. It is in clear contrast, for example, to Crowe's typical dismissal (in his pigeon holing manner) of Bastien Lepage's art as 'melancholy and depressing'.[92] In a later article, Reed takes on those people who protest against such subjects as Bramley's Hopeless Dawn on the grounds that all art must convey rest and beauty. Whilst she would not deny art its ability to draw forth expressions of joy and gladness, she asks whether this view :

> ... does not infer, when used as the absolute criterion of art, a condition approximating to mental sybaritism, a shrinking from the knowledge of hard and bitter facts, because such knowledge must sooner or later tear away the roseate veil of fantasy.[93]

Yet few among the more conservative artists were willing for the stress on material 'truth' to assume importance when it jarred against their belief in the necessity of beauty. Instead, they preferred to concentrate on the far more nebulous, yet frequently re-iterated concept of 'artistic

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91. Mary Reed, 'Art Corner', Our Corner, XI, May 1888, XI, p.324

92. J.A. Crowe, 'Continental and English Painting', Nineteenth Century, 27, April 1890, p.584.

93. Mary Reed, 'Some Minor Variations on Realism', Our Corner, November 1888, p.295.

truth'. Sophia Beale commends Velasquez's Boar Hunt for commemmorating a picturesque occasion, noting its aura of elegance - a blending of technique with the rather dandified subject matter:

> On the other hand, when a painter is void of refinement, and gives us steamboat loads and railway stations crowded with the vulgarest people in the most repulsive garments, we may well wish that he would not send us down to posterity in such fearsome guise.[94]

If art is to be conceived of as something of lasting value; if, indeed, it is this attribute which, as was commonly believed, conferred upon a work its status as 'art', it is important that what one retains in paint about current society is what one should wish to record. Writing about art is one means by which a readership can be reinforced in its beliefs as to where the lasting values of their society reside.

In addition to these prescriptive employments of moral attitudes to art, certain further modes of description - particularly in pejorative criticism - must be considered in this chapter: modes which use states of being or aspects of conduct as convenient value-bearing metaphors. Whereas

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94. Sophia Beale, 'French Art', Art Journal, 25, May 1886, p.132.

the two types of overtly moralising art criticism already discussed centre around the responsibility of the artist, in this case the finished work itself is frequently constructed as subject. It is conceived of as a body, possessor itself of physical and mental attributes and defects. This normative approach habitually employs pairs of opposites used to define the human Victorian subject, and plays on associations of approval and disapprobation: health/disease; mental equilibrium/insanity; decorum/ unruliness or vulgarity. Short nineteenth century lists of desirable artistic qualities read like a paraphrase of Victorian moral values: 'strong individuality, earnestness of feeling, and healthiness of conception'.[95] Notably, as I shall show, the majority of these values are masculine rather than feminine, in their emphasis, possibly a reflection of the fact that the consumption of art through reviews, although essentially in itself a domestic activity, belonged to the same public sphere as the display and socialisation connected with exhibitions. This public emphasis is especially visible when the subject is constructed through terms of political correctness, or patriotic or jingoistic associations, notably through the use of the concept

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95. Alfred Beaver, 'French Influence on British Art', Artist, VIII, October 1887, p.310.

of revolution or when the critic is drawing on anti-Continental prejudices.

If the painting is conceived of as a body, it follows that it can be constrained in the same way as the human Victorian and Edwardian subject. It can be consigned to silence, simply by not being written about. This can be the fate of both the undistinguished and unremarkable, in public terms, and of the incomprehensible challenger, both apparently unworthy of serious consideration. Or it can be treated, and often hastily dismissed, with a measure of derisive levity, designed to reinforce the reader's belief in the stable good sense of an already trusted critic and publication. In either case, the effect is one of marginalisation, of being denied a place within the dominant discourse.

In general, to parallel artistic with political revolution signified a pronounced condemnation of sudden change, of any upheaval which threatened established orders. Hence the role that establishment art - the art of the Royal Academy, even of the Grosvenor Gallery - played in the upholding of the social status quo became consolidated. Thus The Times critic, commenting on the Impressionist pictures hung by Durand-Ruel in

his exhibition of April 1874,[96] found in them a harshness in the juxtaposition of tints, a crudeness of local colouring, a studied avoidance of delicate workmanship, and so on. He failed to see how any critic who reveres the artistic (and by implication, social) values of 'subordination and reserve' could write in their praise; speaks of the undesirabiltiy of losing sight of 'the right relation of parts and whole', and concludes:

> One seems to see in such work evidence of as wild a spirit of anarchy at work in French painting as in French politics.[97]

Two years later, The Times described the Impressionists as 'ostentatiously defiant both of rule and culture';[98] the use of the word 'rule' is ambiguous, indicating both an avoidance of traditional artistic principles and a potentially subversive rejection of a proper subordination within a power structure. This mode of attacking Impressionist art continued: the National Observer's reviewer prefaced his

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96. The pictures in question were:

Manet:	A Spaniard
Manet:	A Misty Morning near Paris
	The Seine near Paris
	Ste. Adresse near Havre
Pissarro:	Springtime
	Cornfields
	The Seine at St. Denis
	View of Pontoise
Sisley:	A Street at Poissy
	A Hill near Poissy
	A Street in the Suburbs

97. Unsigned review, 'Society of French Artists, Bond Street', The Times, 27 April 1874, p.14.

98. Unsigned review, 'Continental Pictures', The Times, 25 April 1876, p.5.

comments on the three Monet canvases shown at the New English Art Club, 1893, by stating that

> Claude Monet's art is the very anarchy of painting. It tramples upon the traditions of all the schools,[99]

although his subsequent remarks betray the confused nature of his response, since he is forced to acknowledge that the 'blobs of discordant and unpleasant colour' which represent the Study of a Haystack do, indeed, have an aesthetic appeal when viewed from a distance.

'Revolutionary' was in itself a word of condemnation. Thus Max Nordau, having described Besnard's women as adorned with 'grass-green hair, faces of sulphur-yellow or fiery-red, and arms spotted in violet and pink', consolidates his point: 'that is to say ... a fondness for bold, revolutionary debauch of colour',[100] thus bonding together the disruptive potential of political change and sexual licence to emphasise his abhorrence of post-Impressionism. When Wake Cook asserts his belief in progress in art, he makes it clear that he means the maintenance of standards already attained and their gradual improvement

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99. Unsigned review, 'New or Old?' National Observer, 15 April 1893, p.542.

100. Max Nordau, Degeneration, 1895, p.11.

> ... by progressive evolution, and not overturned by a French Revolution which shall begin by guillotining Academicians and other guardians of law and orderly development.[101]

Wake Cook was the most fervent, probably the most consistently extreme of those who equated the danger of change in art with political revolution. The very title of his work, Anarchism in Art and Chaos in Criticism draws this analogy, which he elaborates in a vituperative attack against 'decadence', against the 'anti-patriotism' which an interest in French art reveals, condemning, with a neat bit of bellicose word play, those artists who, in the late nineteenth century, tried to upset British painting as :

> A few daring anarchists [who] crept in and tried to spike the canons of Art and to dynamite established reputations.[102]

One of his favourite targets is Whistler with his International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers. With a somewhat hazy grasp of recent political history, he comments that :

> ... this International Society of Artists seems too much the analogue of the portentous 'International' which threw its shadow over the political world in the sixties. The anarchical tendencies are but too evident in their exhibitions.[103]

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101. E. Wake Cook, Anarchism in Art and Chaos in Criticism, 1904, p.47. This work originally appeared as a long series of articles in Vanity Fair in 1903-4.

102. Anarchism in Art, p.12.

103. Anarchism in Art, p.17.

His moral and political 'crusade', as he himself termed it, was conducted in the pages not only of Vanity Fair, but of the Contemporary Review, the Hibbert Journal and, during the period of his art editorship, of the huge, glossy Throne. As late as 1924 he was still ranting against Bolshevism and modernism, which shared in the spirit of 'revolt against all authority and established usage which is rampant throughout the world'.[104]

But Cook was not just as an isolated eccentric among early twentieth century critics. Robert Ross, reviewing the first Post-Impressionist exhibition, noted the significance in the choice of opening day - the Fifth of November, appropriate for 'revealing the existence of a widespread plot to destroy the whole fabric of European painting'. Roger Fry was the 'new Guido Fawkes', the paintings his 'gunpowder'.[105] The Outlook intended a derogatory reference by labelling the Futurists 'this group of fervid Italian revolutionaries'.[106] The writer was broadly sympathetic to certain Futurist aims - to their plea for freedom from tradition, the importance they placed on thinking for onself, and the 'unworthiness of tying one's mind to a

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104. E. Wake Cook, Retrogression in Art and the Suicide of the Royal Academy, 1924, p.3.

105. Robert Ross, 'The Post-Impressionists at the Grafton', Morning Post, 7 November 1910, p.3.

106. J.B.M., 'The Italian Futurists and the X-Rays in Art', Outlook, 23 March 1912, p.439.

convention chiefly because the latter has a market value' - all particularly deserving of consideration in the peculiarly reactionary English art climate. Nevertheless, he continued :

> ... it is not by violence of this kind that evolution is stimulated, any more than a comatose Government is to be stirred into life by the breaking of other people's windows.[107]

Yet there was a certain justice behind this critic's charge, since the Futurists themselves had drawn deliberate attention to the radical nature of their work in the introduction to the Sackville Gallery exhibition. Indeed, the artists' very act of compiling the exhibition and producing a manifesto themselves (with no precedent in England, among innovatory movements of this period, apart from the London Impressionists exhibition of 1889) indicates a desire for direct intervention of an international nature not associated with the Impressionists or Post-Impressionists. In the catalogue, they proclaimed their art to be 'violently revolutionary', spoke of their activities in terms of a fight, and of the necessity of spectators themselves participating in the action; described how they are ;

> ... destroying each day in ourselves and in our pictures the realistic forms and the obvious details which have served us to construct a bridge of understanding between ourselves and the public[108]

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107. 'The Italian Futurists', p.439.

108. Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carra, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, Gino Severini, 'The Exhibitors to the Public 1912', Futurist Manifestos, ed. Umbro Apollonio, 1973, p.50. The ideas contained in this lecture were developed at length in a lecture on Futurist Painting delivered by Umberto Boccioni at the Circolo Internazionale Artistico, Rome, 29 May 1911.

The vocabulary of revolution could be used in a praiseworthy sense even by English critics supporting the changes taking place in painting, relatively rare though this was. Frank Rutter, carefully weighing the implications of the title, Revolution in Art, dedicated it :

> TO THE REBELS OF EITHER SEX ALL THE WORLD OVER WHO IN ANY WAY ARE FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM OF ANY KIND.[109]

The introduction of politics as a criterion in art criticism is, of course, closely linked to the theme of nationalism and patriotism. National pride is inescapable in the popular art magazines, with their series on Great British Paintings, Great British Artists, and the like. But it is most frequently invoked in press criticism of exhibitions when English art appears under threat from foreign invaders. This tendency had the sanction of no less than Ruskin himself. Writing the preface to Ernest Chesneau's The English School of Painting he comments that :

> After being for at least half a century paralysed by their isolation and self-sufficiency, the British Schools of painting are now in the contrary danger of losing their national character in their endeavour to become sentimentally German, dramatically Parisian, or decoratively Asiatic.[110]

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109. Frank Rutter, Revolution in Art, 1910, no page no.

110. John Ruskin, preface to Ernest Chesneau, The English School of Painting, 1885, p.ix.

The Morning Post's correspondent turns with relief in April 1910, to the 'quiet unassertive atmosphere' of the Old Water-Colour Society in Pall Mall, where works by, for example, Walter Crane, Henry Tuke and Alfred Parsons were being exhibited: corporately manifesting, it is suggested, a display of reserved English 'good manners'. The critic compares the experience of leaving 'the galleries which specialise in advanced art' (probably an allusion to the current International Exhibition at the Grafton) for these familiar shores, with the 'extraordinary satisfaction' offered by the first sight of Liverpool or Dover after a protracted visit to the Continent. He speaks of the :

> ...odd feeling of relief and security which familiar things, irrespective of their quality, produce. There is a sense of home-coming, a recognition of welcome faces, and the hand-grips of friends, the memory of whom has become a little dimmed in the brilliant cosmopolitan semi-Semite society we have enjoyed for so long.[111]

When foreign art was under attack, derogatory national stereotypes were readily called into use. Thus the Outlook, correctly picking up the echoes of Whitman's grandiose, rather pompous rhythms in the Futurist manifesto, charts the increasing feverishness of the lines, deeming them far

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111. Unsigned review, 'Water-Colour Society's Exhibition', Morning Post, 7 April 1910, p.3.

more appropriate to the invariably exuberant operatic Italian nature - 'an art for transpontine music-halls' - rather than for the measured sobriety of a West End picture gallery.[112] Wake Cook, as one would expect, is antagonistic towards foreign interventions on the British art scene. His writing demonstrates how xenophobia can be used as a category in both actual and metaphoric terms, describing the 'persistent defamation of all that is best in our Art, by aliens, semi-aliens, or foreigners to our national sentiment'.[113] Clearly, an artist does not have to be the bearer of a continental passport in order to be classified as in some way an interloper, an invader, a threat to the ideal of a national culture.

The condemnation of excess, and the favouring of moderation, so often brought in when criticising undesirable continental characteristics, was employed when discussing two further areas in particular: the inclusion and elaboration of detail, and the tonal qualities of colour. The former was the shakier ground, since, as already stated, much highly finished minutiae could convey a notion of value, since it was a visible manifestation of effort and expended

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112. 'The Italian Futurists', Outlook, p.439.

113. E. Wake Cook, Anarchism in Art, 1904, p.77.

time. Hence a certain reluctance to criticise: the Spectator accurately noted that 'we are rarely ... led to lament the useless labour bestowed on close and servile imitation'.[114]

Far more ready a consensus was reached over the employment of colour; bright meant vulgar. In the same Spectator review, the critic attacked 'crude and gaudy colour' in general, and showed how he equated the appreciation of artistic moderation not with any innate faculties of perception, but with exposure to aesthetic experience: hence, one can say, with the membership of a cultural élite. The lack of tonal subtlety and 'trick of contrast', the pains-taking reproduction of detail - 'all these things are only too sure to attract the uneducated public'.[115] The previous year 'V', reviewing the Royal Academy exhibition, hinted that the repeated use of violent colour contrast might be enough to damn the character of the artist, despite making the generous qualification that:

> ... though it invariably communicates a taint of vulgarity to any picture in which it occurs, it is too much to conclude from a single instance that it denotes a vulgar mind.[116]

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114. Unsigned review, 'The Water-Colour Landscapes of the National Gallery', Spectator, 46, 22 March 1873.

115. 'Water-Colour Landscapes', p.374.

116. 'V', 'The Royal Academy', Spectator, 46, 22 June 1872, p.787.

In the same review, 'modest' is recurrently employed as a word of highest praise: contrasted with 'conscious display' and showiness are the works of H.S. Marks - 'his pictures always have an air, as it were, of self-respect'.[117] Moreover, this employment of colour as a touchstone of moral tone was not the exclusive prerogative of the conservative critics. Transferring primacy, as was the tendency of the New Critics, to the paintings themselves, R.A.M. Stevenson, whilst acknowledging the subjectivity lying behind his preference for the shadows and half tones of Velasquez, attacked chromatic brilliance for giving a picture 'an air of insincerity, shallow pomp, and decorative flashiness'.[118] D.S. MacColl invoked the gamut of associations with second rate Parisian music halls when he dismissed Gustave Moreau's works as 'gaudy tinsels'.[119] Paintings were more commendable too, without the Veneering-like fatal newness given by 'the hideous dazzle and glaze of varnish'.[120]

Since the consensus of acceptability in matters of colour was a readily accepted one in press criticism, it

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117. 'The Royal Academy', p.788.

118. R.A.M. Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p.59.

119. D.S.M. 'Art at the Paris Exhibition - I', Saturday Review, XC, 15 September 1900, p.327.

120. Unsigned review, 'Mr. Armitage's Wall-Pictures', Spectator, 43, 26 March 1870, p.404.

was an area where it was easy to raise cheap laughs. The Artist's critic could refer to one of Mary Cassatt's paintings on show at the Fifth Impressionist painters exhibition as 'a study of a very ugly and very décolletée young woman containing combinations of reds, greens and yellows which 'remind one strongly of the scales of a mackerel, after a week's exposure at a fishmonger's'.[121] The blobs of Monet's Study of a Haystack are 'slabs of pink suggesting cheap confectionery'.[122]

The artistic decline which the more conservative critics thought they perceived towards the end of the century was frequently spoken of in terms of disease and decay: symptomatic of a far wider moral and spiritual degeneration. Such an analogy is not, of course, limited to this period. Lukács, in the article 'Healthy or Sick Art?', paraphrases the message of writers fifty years earlier:

> ... we find that the conception of what is socially healthy is equally and simultaneously the basis for all really great art, for what is socially healthy becomes a component of man's historical self-awareness.[123]

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121. 'M', 'Art Abroad, France', Artist, 1, April 1880, p.117.

122. 'New or Old?', National Observer, p.542.

123. Georgy Lukács, 'Healthy or Sick Art?', Writer & Critic, 1970, p.103. For further confirmation of these views, see Susan Sontag, Illness as Metaphor, 1978 which concentrates particularly on the actual and metaphoric associations of T.B. and cancer.

This attitude is necessarily predicated on the belief that a painting mirrors the 'essence' of the wide social setting of its production. Hence, wherever the 'modern spirit' has spread, it has been attended by 'languor of the imagination':

> ... shown now in fantastic extravagance, now in tame reproduction of dry fact, in delirium or paralysis, equally symptomatic of decaying vitality.[124]

As seen earlier, Helen Zimmern praised the healthy openness of Alma Tadema's art: 'whether he paints the glad, sensuous world of the ancients, or the tragedies which befell them, there is never in his work the sickly introspection, the hyper-analysis of modern days'.[125]

The best known exponent of this viewpoint, although hardly its initiator, was Max Nordau. The English translation of Degeneration ran to four editions in the year of its appearance, 1895. The anonymous author of a counter-blast to Nordau - Regeneration - confirms that the German's work 'produced no small sensation throughout the world, and not least in this country'. Though not having the impact of a sensational novel read by millions, it has 'imposed itself on every educated mind':

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124. Unsigned article, 'Materialism in Modern Art', Church Quarterly Review, XXII, April 1886, p.169.

125. Zimmern, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, p.77.

> It is no exaggeration to say that, like a sharp trumpet-blast, it has awakened the educated classes from the lethargy consequent upon the sin of clashing opinions and contradictory systems;

his work has 'become as it were a nightmare to millions of minds'.[126]

Nordau's argument, based on the researches of the Italian Caesar Lombroso, was to prove that degeneracy was not confined to 'criminals, prostitutes, anarchists and pronounced lunatics';[127] indeed it was found also among authors and artists, particularly among those who in some quarters had been much revered as the creators of new art. Such madness, when exhibited through literature and art, is especially disturbing since, he argues, it is from these productions that an age derives its ideals of morality and beauty. Since there is a tendency for the fashionable to wish to be in the know about the latest artistic trends, the danger of 'fin-de-siècle' art, coupled with the sordid novelty of realism, acts as a lure. And these rich educated people should be aware of their responsibility

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126. Anon. Regeneration: a reply to Max Nordau, 1895, p.9. It seems, ironically, that much of this writer's argument is based on the fact that Nordau is himself - seen from an English perspective - a foreigner, and hence seeing conditions which are applicable to this country through a dangerously distorted lens.

127. Max Nordau, Degeneration, p.vii.

towards the snobs, the fools, blockheads, the weak and the nervous, who 'affect to have the same taste as the select and exclusive minority'.[128] Defining 'degeneration' as a morbid deviation from the 'original type', he perceives it in spectators and artists alike. The former turn up their eyes and fold their hands in attitudes of worship before pictures at which the 'commoner sort' (here implicitly defined as the bearers of common sense rather than as social inferiors) burst out laughing: pictures like Henry Martin's Every Man and his Chimera :

> ... in which bloated figures, in an atmosphere of yellow broth, are doing incomprehensible things that need profound explanation.[129]

The analysis which much modern art demands is equated with a need for diagnosis, with prognostications of illness or insanity. This diagnostic approach is seen particularly clearly when Nordau subjects the Impressionists to examination. According to him, their style becomes at once intelligible to us if we keep in view the researches of the Charcot school into the visual derangements which take place in this hysterical subject. Indeed, these artists are speaking the truth when they tell us they reproduce nature

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128. Degeneration, p.12.

129. Degeneration, p.27.

as they see it, for the artist who suffers, as they do, from :

> ... nystagmus, or trembling of the eyeball, will, in fact, perceive the phenomenon of nature trembling, restless, devoid of firm outline.[130]

Such afflicted have gaps in their field of vision, producing strange effects, such as placing 'in juxtaposition larger or smaller spots which are completely or partly dissociated'.[131] Some painters, such as Puvis de Chavannes, are classified as suffering from achromatopsy, or a loss of sensitivity to colour, leading to a perception of everything as a uniform grey. The 'screaming yellow, blue and red of a Besnard' is attributable to 'hysterical amblyopia', or dulness of vision, since, according to Gilles de la Tourette's Traité clinique thérapeutique de l'Hystérie, perception of these colours remains longest when eyesight deteriorates, since they are seen with the outermost part of the retina. The 'violet pictures of Manet and his school' are attributed to the fact that these painters suffered from hysteria and neurasthenia, and hence adopted those tones which were most in accordance with their condition of lassitude and exhaustion.[132]

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130. Degeneration, p.27.

131. Degeneration, p.28.

132. Degeneration, p.29.

Challenging forms of art have, for once, been subjected to an attack which does not attempt to dismiss them peremptorily, but puts them into the subordinate position of patients. Despite the completely hypothetical way in which Nordau applied scraps of scientific knowledge to individual artists ('I could prove Nordau to be an elephant on more evidence than he has brought to prove that our greatest men are degenerate lunatics',[133] commented Shaw), the very fact that apparently verifiable, objective terminology was being used to translate art criticism, normally associated with a certain amount of subjectivity, into the factual sphere of the clinic gave Nordau's work a certain authority. This authority, whilst no doubt subjectively applied by Nordau, was immediately re-appropriated by other critics:

> Already we have native writers, without half his cleverness or energy of expression, clumsily imitating his sham-scientific vivisection in their attacks on artists whose works they happen to dislike.[134]

There was nothing new, however, about the construction of the artistic subject through metaphors of disease, metaphors which encompassed both physical and mental afflictions. In the former category, J. Beavington Atkinson

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133. Shaw, 'The Sanity of Art', Major Critical Essays, p. 326.

134. 'The Sanity of Art', Major Critical Essays, p. 332.

for example, contrasted the atmosphere around Delaroche's studio in 1836 with the prevalent tendencies in 1870s salon art, which then had little of Cabanel's 'voluptuousness', Gérôme's 'diablerie' :

> ... or of the sybarite languor of Hébert; such taints indeed when they lay hold on the arts of a people are but too apt to become contagious.[135]

At the end of the period, Robert Ross warned of the dangers of the Post-Impressionist tendency taking hold as an epidemic: 'If the movement is spreading, it should be treated like the rat plague in Suffolk. The source of the infection [i.e. the pictures] ought to be destroyed'.[136] Critics, as well as artists, were attacked in this vocabulary of health and disease. J. Stanley Little, in the course of a plea for the Barbizon painters to be considered 'impressionists in the true sense of the term', spoke out against :

> ... the false friends of impressionist art - the sickly critics who rave over a blur, and contort language into paralytic convulsions over a meaningless smudge, until men of robust minds and wholesome sympathies turn away in disgust.[137]

Nor was this vocabulary unique to the criticism of art: Clement Scott, best known among the drama critics at the end

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135. J. Beavington Atkinson, 'English Painters of the Present Day. VI. - Edward Armitage, A.R.A.', Portfolio, I, April 1870, p.49.

136. Robert Ross, 'The Post-Impressionists at the Grafton', Morning Post, 7 November 1910, p.3.

137. J. Stanley Little, 'The Future of Landscape Art', Nineteenth Century, 30, August 1891, p.205.

of the century, denounced in the Daily Telegraph the first performance of Ibsen's Ghosts as 'an open drain', 'a loathsome sore unbandaged', and 'a lazar house with all its doors and windows open'.[138] Scott continued to rail against drama's own 'new critics' who 'advocate suicide and glorify the dramatization of the Contagious Diseases Act'.[139] His own criterion of a subject's suitability paralleled that of many art critics: that it should be discussable at a mixed dinner party.

This criterion was certainly not fulfilled by such full blown types of sensuous beauty as Rossetti's Bocca Bacciata at the 1883 Academy, and his Lady Lilith, shown at the Burlington in the same year. The Saturday Review's critic felt obliged to pass by these because of the unhealthy aura emanating from them. The physical horrors he glimpsed seem irrevocably linked to the types of women he fears are being portrayed: his distaste is closely allied to the fear of sexually transmitted disease, described in terms which suggest by analogy that Rossetti is himself suffering from a debilitating infection:

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138. George Rowell, The Victorian Theatre. A Survey, 1956, p.129.

139. Quoted by Mrs. Clement Scott, Old Days in Bohemian London, 1919, p.269.

> The twining and distorted figures, the gigantic arms, the giraffe-like necks, the morbid sickliness, the degraded air, the sensual expression of a majority of them, are but too indicative of a fall in the painter's artistic power.[140]

The practice of uncompromising realism was readily condemned as 'that morbid craving for all that is sordid and ugly', and 'unhealthy appetite' which, in the case of Bastien Lepage, applies not only to his subject matter but to the increasing 'certain crudeness of tints' - lividness appears to equal feverishness.[141] D.S. MacColl greeted the twentieth century in gloomy terms. The latest painters execute their work as though Manet had never been: 'on the morrow of the discovery of light, the fog reappears'. MacColl adopts omens of sickness from antiquity: 'The very idea of painting is threatened with eclipse, while the fantastic tentatives of "L'Art Moderne" a kind of international influenza spread by publications like 'The Studio' exercise themselves upon the picture pegs'.[142] Wake Cook seized on the prevalent colour tones of Whistler and his followers as a hopeful indication that their movement is

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140. Unsigned review, 'Picture Exhibitions', Saturday Review, LV, 20 January 1883, p.82.

141. Unsigned review, 'MacLean's Gallery', Artist, V, May 1884, p.133. The picture specifically being discussed is Bastien Lepage's Amour au Village, currently on show at Maclean's Gallery.

142. D.S.M., 'Art at the Paris Exhibition - II. Manet', Saturday Review, XC, 22 September 1900, p.359. MacColl continually spoke out vituperatively against symbolist art.

'sickening to its death ... they are painting flesh in the ghastly greys of advanced decomposition ... A form of black death is invading their art'.[143] The emergence of Futurist painting was termed an 'outbreak', 'interesting but not dangerous': not, evidently, 'interesting' in terms of the conditions of Victorian womanhood, since so unpregnant did it seem, so unlikely to engender further developments in this country, that 'there will be no need to inoculate the students in our various schools of art against infection'.[144] Rather, in its inept, incoherent state, it is a patient to be examined.

The physically unhealthy could be shunned, removed from contagious effect or dissected; those considered mentally unsound publicly ignored, or confined to their own specific location, visitable, perhaps, in a spirit of horrified curiosity, just as English asylums had provided a public spectacle as late as 1770. Wake Cook saw the Grafton Galleries as one such private institution, calling them 'that sumptuous asylum for the insane'.[145] If the inmates had already been declared insane, their classification by critics was much easier.

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143. Wake Cook, Anarchism in Art, p.8.

144. 'The Italian Futurists', Outlook, p.439.

145. Wake Cook, Anarchism in Art, p.17.

Thus Ross could make full use of Van Gogh's known insanity: he presents the artist as :

> ...the typical mastoid and degenerate of the modern sociologist. Jeune Fille au Bleuet and the Cornfield with Blackbirds are the visualised ravings of an adult maniac. If that is art it must be ostracised, as the poets were banished from Plato's republic.[146]

The norm against which this unhealthiness was judged was one of adult male heterosexuality. Virility was a frequently invoked criterion when judging the art of the period. Earlier in this chapter, 'effeminacy' appeared as an accusation levelled against medieval and Renaissance imitators in general: the Magazine of Art's critic, earlier in 1878, had voiced a protest against a specific work, Burne-Jones's Le Chant d'Amour, exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery, as 'unmasculine'. Unable, in a different era, to reproduce medieval feeling and thought, the potential 'strenuous paganism' of the subject matter has been 'emasculated by false modern emotionalism'.[147]

The employment of the vocabulary of masculine power and domination is a consistent characteristic of the conservative art criticism, particularly in the earlier years under discussion. Millais, exhibiting Moses at the Royal Academy

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146. Robert Ross, Morning Post, 7 November 1910, p.3.

147. Unsigned review, 'The Grosvenor Gallery. Second Notice', Magazine of Art, 1, July 1878, p.81.

in 1871, was praised for the fact that his painting was habitually 'strong': he never shows 'weakness or infirmity of purpose', and this particular canvas is 'vigorously executed'.[148] Poynter's painting was praised as 'manly' by the same journal.[149] 'Effeminacy' is a word used again and again by Robert Buchanan in condemnation of D.G. Rossetti's poetry and painting. Both exhibit a combination of 'weary, wasting, yet exquisite sensuality; nothing virile, nothing tender' (he seems intent on excluding acceptable female as well as male characteristics) :

> ... nothing completely sane; a superfluity of extreme sensibility, of delight in affected forms, lines, and tints, and a deep-seated indifference to all agitating forms, all tumultous griefs and sorrows, all the thunderous stress of life, and all the straining storm of speculation.[150]

Yet on occasion, 'femininity' (as opposed to 'effeminacy') could be seen as a desirable attribute of a work of art. This was particularly true in the case of water colour painting, a genre not associated with 'high' or public art; a domestic genre, finding its place, like the Victorian conception of the woman, within the home. Thus 'V', reviewing the Water

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148. V., 'The Royal Academy', Spectator, 44, 27 May 1871, p.638.

149. V., 'The General Exhibition of Water-Colours', Spectator, 43, 19 February 1870.

150. Robert Buchanan, The Fleshly School of Poetry, 1872, p.34.

Colour Societies in 1871, could remark of Dodgson's Summer Morning on the Lyn :

> Here are to be found some of the highest qualities of the landscape painter ... the tender grey and delicate curves of the water-worn rocks where they peer above the stream; the glowing nut-brown of the river-bed as seen through the water itself; general fulness of tone; and last, not least, the modesty of nature that governs the whole.[151]

Consciously or not, this reflects the periodical's position towards women: as can be seen from the reporting of the House of Commons debate of the same year on suffrage for women householders, the Spectator held decidedly unsympathetic views about the question of women's rights.

The conventional attribution of the female gender to Art itself enabled further metaphors of social behaviour to be used. Thus Mrs. Russell Barrington, distressed at the levity with which the British public regarded artistic matters, castigated society for only flirting with Art, not marrying her, not looking to her for anything more than passing amusement, not knitting 'her into the earnest, real duties of everyday life'.[152]

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151. 'V', 'Water-Colour Societies', Spectator, 44, 29 April 1871, p.511. My italics.

152. Barrington, 'Is a Great School of Art Possible?', p.99.

Furthermore, if art is to be considered with full seriousness, if it is to be regarded as having reached its full potential, it must possess the attributes of a mature adult. Common to the vocabulary of derisory detraction, whether referring to Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, Cubists or Futurists, are references to childishness: simultaneously signifying lack of finish, training, forethought, messiness, imperfect perception of proportion and perspective - childishness in short, denoted productions which have no value outside the tight family circle, the production having significance, even comprehensibility, only within a family, within a small artistic circle.

Not that all these implications seem apparent to those who employ childishness in their vocabulary of condemnation: rather, it often seems to be a last ditch insult. Thus Scawen Blunt, faced with the Post-Impressionists, finds no traces of sense, skill, taste or cleverness:

> Nothing but that gross puerility which scrawls indecencies on the walls of a privy. The drawing is on the level of that of an untaught child of seven or eight years old, the sense of colour that of a tea-tray painter, the method that of a schoolboy who wipes his fingers on a slate after spitting on them.[153]

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153. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, My Diaries, Part II, 1900-1914, 1920, p.343.

The utterances of such an unruly, unpromising juvenile would certainly not be attended to by the conservative art critic with any seriousness. And the politically unsound, the sick, the insane are tidily disposed of through being consigned to their separate institutions - in other words, discussed in those periodicals (Whirlwind, Studio, New Age) which specifically favoured modern art and allowed its supporters to provide it with a metalanguage.

In Madness and Civilization, Foucault describes some of the methods employed in Pinel's asylum. He tells of the release of one particular prisoner, who, after his chains were struck off, was placed into social circumstances where Pinel had :

> . . . ' "ordered expressly that everyone imitate his [the inmate's] own reserve and not address a word to this poor madman. This prohibition, which was rigorously observed, produced upon this self-intoxicated creature an effect much more perceptible than irons and the dungeon; he felt humiliated in an abandon and an isolation so new to him amid his freedom. Finally, after long hesitations, they saw him come of his own accord to join the society of the other patients; henceforth, he returned to more sensible and true ideas" ' 154

Foucault sees a paradox here. The dungeon, chains, and

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154. Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization (1961) trans. Richard Howard, 1965, p.260.

sarcasm to which this proud former ecclesiastic had previously been subjected were, to the sufferer, the very element of his liberty. Similarly, when Impressionist or other modern art is scorned, railed against, and made into a spectacle of humiliation, it achieves a sense of its own oppositional identity. But when such art was consigned to silence, when it was not discussed, when 'the entire show of presumption and outrage was replaced by indifference',[155] it, no less than the confined asylum inmate, did not disappear. Foucault speaks of the incessant dialogue which, in the nineteenth century, took place between reason and madness. He sees guilt as a motivating force behind this dialogue: guilt on the part of authority, for allowing a problem to remain in its midst; guilt on the part of the confined subject, unable to fulfil his or her social function of communication. Similarly, establishment outlets for art criticism felt, with time, bound to take note of this alien presence in their galleries, which was manifestly not going to remove its embarrassing presence. And those who spoke for this art - Stevenson and MacColl, at first, then such writers as Frank Rutter and Roger Fry - recognised the liabilities, and particularly the poor commercial possibilities, of remaining in proud isolation.

The significance of the criticism discussed in the final two chapters is that it attempted to assimilate progressive

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155. Madness and Civilization, p.260.

art forms into the dominant cultural discourse. Allowed space within the columns of widely read newspapers and periodicals, with competent translators speaking for it, the wayward art-subject became, to a certain extent, legitimised, and brought within the mainstream culture of bourgeois society. But in the following chapters, I wish to argue that the analogy with psychiatric analysis should not be forgotten, that the marginalisation I have been discussing here is not to be treated quite as lightly as it was often employed by the sneering critics. For in the nineteenth century, madness and abnormality was something to be observed, to be described, to be responded to, above all, with the eye. With the development of psychoanalysis under Freud and his followers, listening to verbal language became all important. Similarly, it was no longer sufficient, in order to understand a picture, to look at it without listening, as it were, to its own specific language. The new critics realised that modern art could no longer be written about in the same terms as a nineteenth century novel, that it had formal arrangements and theoretical criteria which constituted a discourse of its own. And language, the language of the critics, became necessary to act as the bridge between the otherwise marginalised subject, and the public.

CHAPTER VII: THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORMALIST ART CRITICISM: LANGUAGE AND ART

In Chapter I, I indicated how the New Critics considered themselves as fulfilling the role of interpreters. This awareness of their task inevitably led to some reconsiderations of the relationship between painting and language: a relationship which, in many cases, sustains the understanding, appreciation, and commercial value of much twentieth century progressive art.

At the beginning of the period under discussion, the notion that visual works could be spoken of as if the direct correlative of verbal forms was a commonplace: this is evident with reference to the narrative assumptions which were discussed in Chapter V. The Magazine of Art of 1878 confirms this linguistic correlation:

> The great works of great masters, though simple, are not easy to understand. Their language must be studied as carefully as the language of Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare.[1]

In some cases, the assumption that art behaves in a manner analogous to already-known verbal languages enabled statements to be made about the function and implicit

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1. Unsigned, 'Introduction', Magazine of Art, I, May 1878, p.4.

aesthetic value of a given work of art, according to parallels drawn with a particular hierarchy of literary forms maintained by the critic. Thus the Saturday Review's writer conveyed the fact that he found little aesthetic merit in the documentary travel art from the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand shown at Burlington House in February 1886. He commented that these close observers of nature, the 'conscientious draughtsmen' who were here exhibiting their work lacked any easy ability to perceive 'the intrinsic emotional character of lines, masses and colour' - in other words, the sense of 'lyrical unity' by which Francis Palgrave, for example, judged poetry.[2] Instead, they 'only use the language of art as a plain and useful prose wherewith to register facts'.[3] The Artist, in 1893, put forward the point of view that what the public chiefly admired in art, what distinguished it from photography, for example, was that extra addition which it brought to nature, a quality which the writer found easiest to term 'poetry'. This preference, it was declared, would determine the journal's own choice of critic:

> ... it is to the "literary" critic that the public will turn, simply because this "mood", this power of addition, in the painter is the poetic - the literary - quality in him, only to be fairly interpreted through the same quality in the critic.[4]

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2. Francis Palgrave, The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language, 1861, preface iii.

3. Unsigned 'Minor Exhibitions' Saturday Review, LXI, 13 February 1886, p.226.

4. 'The New Criticism', Artist, 14, October 1893, p.296.

Even the New Critics found the analogy between the painting they most admired and the literary form which they most praised a useful one to make. This becomes most apparent when they are examining parallels between their own work and that of the literary critic: a task which, in each case, differs from mere paraphrase in that it stresses treatment rather than subject. In other words, they concentrated on what made a painting, as they put it, 'poetic'. Were they to be concerned only with defining subject, a mere transcription of a catalogue title would suffice. But yet, as Stevenson points out with reference to the 1888 Royal Academy exhibition, works may have lofty, noble titles, but such verbal labelling cannot cover up banality of execution. He refers to poetry itself to illustrate how, in either medium, the same statement may be made 'baldly or poetically': if 'you translate Milton's "Avenge, O Lord!" you have but the text of a common Scotch sermon'.[5]

Other writers were in no doubt that painting could be spoken of in terms taken directly from the description of verbal forms. Following the premise that 'writing ... is but a simpler form of drawing',[6] Walter Crane had no

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5. Unsigned review, 'The Grosvenor Gallery - II', Saturday Review, LXV, 19 May 1888, p.592.

6. Walter Crane, Line and Form, 1900, p.4.

hesitation in speaking of line as language. The endless variations which result from the fact that each designer and draughtsman uses lines in a different way, he termed 'dialects'.[7] Poor drawing could be considered as analogous to undeveloped, ungrammatical language. The reviewer of 1883, when faced with Whistler's work, could praise enthusiastically the painter's ability to render the effects of Venetian water, but constantly attacked the lack of finish and form in his figures. The people represented in Wool Carders, for example, had no discernible merit: 'they are ridiculous shadow-like suggestions which are as much worth understanding as gibberish language'.[8]

The most extreme reaction to the traditional view that art could be spoken of as a potentially learnable language was to declare it untranslatable. Such an idea was put forward by Whistler himself, in the rhetorical question:

> Art, that for ages has hewn its own history in marble, and written its own comments on canvas, shall it suddenly stand still, and stammer, and wait for wisdom from the passer-by?[9]

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7. Line and Form, p.22.

8. Unsigned review, 'Mr. Whistler's Exhibition', Saturday Review, LV, 24 February 1883, p.242.

9. Whistler, 'Whistler v. Ruskin: Art and Art Critics', Gentle Art, pp.33-4.

This idea, that art speaks with its own language, demanding no further interpretation was already, of course, something of a commonplace: a rhetorical employment of imagined self-sufficiency which concealed the fact either that the critic lacked the technical expertise necessary to discuss the work more fully, or that his or her readers would be bored or bewildered by such an exercise. The Spectator's critic, discussing Gérôme's The Game of Chess, Cairo, comments that if the protagonists 'want any further interpretation than their own intent figures, the want is hardly to be removed by words'.[10] The following year, reviewing the Water-Colour societies and faced with Alfred Hunt's view of Naples with Vesuvius in the background, the same critic summarised the contents of the picture and concluded:

> This is certainly a lame attempt to describe the drawing. But, by way of excuse, it may be said that where the painter's art has been most potent, verbal description must always be inadequate. And as this is a picture depending entirely on its poetical treatment, the final sentence must always undoubtedly be contained in an exhortation to go and see it.[11]

The notion that a work of art needs nobody to speak on its behalf had already been given support on moral grounds. For example, the editorial writer in the Fine Art Annual for

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10. 'V', 'The French and Flemish Pictures', Spectator, 43, 30 April 1870, p.555.

11. 'V', 'The Water-Colour Societies /Second Notice/', Spectator, 44, 13 May 1871, p.576.

Christmas, 1872 commented that 'All good pictures speak for themselves much more eloquently than humanity can speak for them, and as their eloquence is that of silence, the most sensitive cannot call it egotism or vanity'.[12] Interestingly, the point of view which maintained that a work of art should require no further explanation beyond its own existence had backing in some nineteenth century literary circles, where it was believed that in no way should it be necessary to provide a commentary on a literary text. Moreover, a specific analogy with visual practices could in this case be employed in order to emphasise the principle. Thus Charlotte Brontë, for example, writing to her publishing friend and adviser W.S. Williams, explains aspects of Lucy Snowe's character to him, adding that if the full expression of these aspects is not to be found in the novel, there must be a great fault somewhere. 'I might explain away a few other points', she adds:

> ... but it would be too much like drawing a picture and then writing underneath the name of the object intended to be represented. We know what sort of pencil that is which needs an ally in the pen.[13]

In a less specific context, W.G.B. Murdoch, in The Art of Criticism, quotes John Davidson's maxim to the effect that

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12. Editorial, Fine Art Journal, Christmas 1872, p.iv. Despite its name, this was a publication intended to have a general appeal, combining high quality artistic reproductions with short stories and a survey of the coming year.

13. Quoted by Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë, 1857, vol. ii, p.268.

> . . . literary criticism is always attempting a very absurd thing - the explanation of passionate utterance by utterance that is unimpassioned: it is like trying to paint a sunset in lamp-black.[14]

Most notably, the idea that paintings were in some way untranslatable received backing in recent writing on aesthetics, especially in Pater's essay 'The School of Giorgione'. Pater criticised the mistake of much popular criticism in regarding poetry, music and painting as 'but translations into different languages of one and the same fixed quantity of imaginative thought',[15] supplemented only by certain technical qualities - colour in painting, sound in music, and rhythmical words in poetry. He believed that the starting point of all aesthetic criticism lay in the recognition of the opposite principle: that each art brings with it an individual quality of beauty:

> Each art, therefore, having its own peculiar and untranslatable sensuous charm, has its own special mode of reaching the imagination, its own special responsibilities to its material.[16]

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14. Quoted by W.G.B. Murdoch, 'The Art of Criticism', Memoirs of Swinburne: With Other Essays, 1910, p.125.
15. Walter Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, Fourth Thousand, revised and enlarged, 1888, p.135.
16. 'The School of Giorgione', The Renaissance, 1888, p.136.

This truth, in Pater's opinion, most needs reinforcing with regards to art criticism, because of the popular idea, already illustrated in this chapter, that painting can be praised most emphatically through analogy with poetry. For Pater, 'the possession of the pictorial gift, that inventive or creative handling of pure line and colour', is 'quite independent of anything definitely poetical in the subject it accompanies'.[17] The weaving of light that is colouring, the arabesques traced in the air that are drawing, are the essential pictorial qualities that first of all delight the senses. This remains the case despite the admitted tendency of all arts not to supply the place of each other but, reciprocally, to lend each other new force. And despite the familiarity of Pater's essay, one further point is worth emphasising, since it articulates most clearly one end of the late nineteenth century aesthetic spectrum: his belief that design and colouring can be in themselves all-satisfying. As we shall see, many of the New Critics betrayed an uneasiness at the idea of the total abandonment of subject, however much they might wish to relegate the concept of subject to a minor position. Their notion that there must be a clear dividing line between principles governing such decorative arts as wallpaper, carpet, curtains and upholstery design and painting itself goes some way towards explaining their

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17. 'The School of Giorgione', The Renaissance, 1888, p. 137.

extreme unease when faced with any type of painting which approached the abstract. They found themselves unable to acknowledge the idea that 'Notes, colours, and forms are not signs. They refer to nothing exterior to themselves'[18] as relevant to easel painting. This, in its turn, was partly to restrict them in the development of a style and vocabulary with which to discuss modern artistic developments.

The foundations of the principles which govern much abstract art theory can, however, be found in Pater. He considered that in its primary aspect, a 'great picture has no more definite message for us than an accidental play of sunlight and shadow for a few moments on the wall or floor'[19] - indeed, in truth, it is itself a space of just such fallen light. The subject of a poem or picture is nothing without its form, and this form, or mode of handling, 'should become an end in itself, should permeate every part of the matter'.[20] Although Pater does not explicitly suggest that the form could become the matter, the work becoming self-referential, it is implicit in his argument, particularly when he maintains that art is continually striving to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material, in his idea that

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18. John-Paul Sartre, What is Literature?(1948), translated B. Frechtman, 1950, p.1.

19. Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', The Renaissance, 1888, p. 138.

20. 'The School of Giorgione', The Renaissance, 1888, p. 140.

painting should be food for the eye rather than the intellect.

Even before Pater uttered his neat description of 'all the arts in common aspiring towards the principle of music',[21] it was by analogy with music that a few writers had already glimpsed the possibility of just such an abstract art form. In 1871, H.R. Haweis had drawn a clear distinction between painting and musical composition as currently practised: the painter finds his material on the surface of the world, in the landscape through which he walks, but the composer finds only the rough material of sound around him in every-day life. This has to be subjected to far more rigorous human organisation, 'refined and made luminous by deliberate arrangement'.[22] He saw a possibility for colour providing a rival to sound as a vehicle for pure emotion, but as yet:

> ... no method has yet been discovered of arranging colour by itself for the eye, as the musician's art arranges sound for the ear. We have no colour pictures depending solely on colour as we have symphonies depending solely upon sound ... I will express my conviction that a Colour-art exactly analogous to the Sound-art of music is possible, and is amongst the arts which have to be traversed in the future.[23]

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21. 'The School of Giorgione', The Renaissance, 1888, p.140.

22. H.R. Haweis, Music and Morals, 1871, p.8.

23. Music and Morals, p.32.

Here he might be pre-figuring, for example, Harold Rosenberg's praise of Rothko: 'his emotionally charged reds, blues, browns, black-greens succeeded in stirring up feelings - awe, anguish, release - too deeply buried to be brought to the surface by visual metaphors',[24] yet Haweis goes on, by parallels with both fireworks [25] and orchestral concerts, to show that what he primarily had in mind was some fluid

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24. Harold Rosenberg, 'Rothko', The De-definition of Art, 1972, p.105.

25. Haweis may just possibly have been influenced not just by actual pyrotechnic displays, but by Whistler's Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Valparaiso (1866). Whistler's other paintings featuring fireworks, however, post-date Haweis's study.

Whistler himself, in the analogy between painting and music which he makes in the Ten O'Clock, sees a far greater similarity even than Haweis between artist and composer:

> Nature, contains all the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music.
>
> But ... the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful - as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he brings forth chaos from glorious harmony. (Whistler, Gentle Art, pp.142-3).

Whistler's sympathy with the French notion of 'correspondances' is clear from the title of many of his pictures.

light show, a display of holograms before the scientific expertise was there to create it.

Such an idea was anathema to those who, following Ruskin, believed in the supremacy of line and form. Form might legitimately be sacrificed to some degree, as in the loss of outline and blending of parts which takes place in Turner, or the flatness of mass which is visible in Giorgione and Titian, but only under the condition that the painter is attempting to represent the natural occasions in which form is lost by Nature in the presence of very vivid colour.[26] But 'all arrangements of colour, for its own sake, in graceful forms, are barbarous'.[27] Ruskin was, however, ready to admit the difficulty, even the impossibility, of the task facing the critic who must write about colour. He conveyed this through a simple, concrete example: 'We could not, by any number of words, describe the colour of a riband so as to enable a mercer to match it without seeing it'.[28] This particular problem persisted through and beyond the period for those critics who, struggling to find terms with which to describe new paintings, were not happy with the idea that there might remain certain untranslatable aspects of art. In Transformations, Roger Fry attacked the persistence

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26. Ruskin, 'Modern Painters; II', 1846, Works IV, p.301.
27. Ruskin, 'Seven Lamps of Architecture', 1849, Works III, p.18C
28. Ruskin, 'The Laws of Fesole', 1879, Works XV, p.356.

of the idea, as he saw it, that colour is an accessory and, as it were, an afterthought. Rather, in proportion to the degree in which artists realise the importance of its integral employment, so 'the principles which underly its evocative power will claim a more conscious and deliberate investigation':[29] an investigation for which the verbal tools have not yet been fully developed.

The difficulty of assimilating Pater's aesthetic beliefs into the criticism of painting partly lay, as I have already indicated, in the fact that even the New Critics were quick to point out the difference in task between one who is primarily commenting on decorative art, and one who writes about exhibited canvases. Not only were the critics thus reproducing the poetry/prose distinction, they were helping to reinforce the primary value of an art form whose manifestations were individual and non-repeatable. To illustrate the difference between tasks, MacColl drew on Walter Crane's articles concerning the English revival of decorative art,[30] which, he considered, betrayed ' the more conclusively an habitual arrest of his mind in the matter of pictorial art'.[31] Crane had implied that since painting directly

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29. Roger Fry, Transformations, 1926, p.224.

30. Walter Crane, 'Design - Part I', Magazine of Art, 16, January 1893, pp.78-93; 'Design - Part II', February 1893, pp.131-136.

31. D.S. MacColl, 'Mr. Whistler's Paintings in Oil', Art Journal, n.s. 13, February 1893, p.89.

includes more aspects of the natural world than does decorative work, the effort of design in it is in some way relaxed or eliminated. MacColl accused him of reducing painting to the conceptual level of photographic reproduction, arguing that the less abstract the matter of art, the more complex, indeed, are the claims made on what he calls the designing faculty. He enquired whether Crane really believed that the plotting out of space to be filled is not a preoccupation of the picture-maker:

> ... that the division of his spaces, the distribution of his masses, the position of his accents is not half the battle; that the placing of a figure on the canvas and the shape it cuts against the background are not to him as essential a matter in this art as the geometrical planning of the other?[32]

MacColl believed that it is no less a feat to discover and detach a beautiful image than to invent one. He cited Whistler's Nocturnes as examples, where the painter had used lights and mists and 'the phrasing power of shadows to new-relate the elements of form' within a scene, without distorting it:

> All this is to design in more complex terms, and to surprise a more intimate poetry than "decorative" painting is in the way to do.[33]

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32. 'Mr. Whistler's Paintings in Oil', p.91.

33. 'Mr. Whistler's Paintings in Oil', p.92.

Whilst Crane particularly stressed the importance of the linear element in design, MacColl reminded his readers of the importance of conscious colour-designing to the effects of Whistler's chromatic modulations.

During the course of this article, not only does MacColl make it clear that he has more admiration for that art which treats a recognisable subject, he also reveals a misunderstanding, never fully resolved in his criticism, of Crane's concept of abstraction. He confused abstraction with the employment of fixed signs when he asserted that no doubt Crane would consider that emblems of Life and Time, of Virtues and Vices, are 'more poetic' than portraits of people. But :

> ... a little white girl leaning on a mantelpiece and looking into a mirror is more poetic -

MacColl was never self-conscious about using this literary term of judgement :

> ... than an emblematic woman looking into an emblematic mirror. The abstract suggestion is included in the beautiful reality ...[34]

On occasion, MacColl betrayed a certain enjoyment of sheer pattern, commending Sickert's Portrait of Mr. George Moore, for example, firstly for its design and colour, then

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34. 'Mr. Whistler's Painting in Oil', p.92.

for its expressiveness, then from the pleasure one receives from examining its handling:

> . . . how the drawing is built up, the deliberate skill and subtlety of the touches. Or resolve it into colour patchwork; no Turkey carpet could be finer.[35]

But while he accepted that a painter first appeals to the eye through the proportions of his drawing, the 'pattern of his figure', and the colour scheme of his design, he continually pressed against what he termed the absurdity of 'the purism that would limit a painter to the shape and colour of his image',[36] especially if he could double the appeal of such an image by using it as a symbol - a concept which, rather confusingly in the light of the fact that he never attempted to draw a formal distinction between the two - he did not seem to equate with an emblem. Hence, for example, he would not wish to take away from Burne Jones the right to use an image of a door with a figure passing in or out in order to impress upon the imagination the coming in of Day or the going out of Night, a process of composition which he saw as analogous to composing 'the poetry of literature', the author assembling images which both play to eye

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35. D.S.M., 'The New English Art Club', Spectator, 67, 5 December 1891, p.809.

36. D.S.M., 'The Leyland Sale and Guildhall Exhibition', Spectator, 68, 28 May 1892, p.745.

and mind, and tickle the ear.

Crane attempted a reply to MacColl in a later number of the Art Journal and in subsequent writings. Not only did he refuse to modify his ideas, he clarified them, particularly in Line and Form (1900), where he argued that although there is a distinction between a pattern and a picture, there is no fundamental difference. A pattern may be an arrangement of lines and forms, and a harmony of planes and tones of colour, but, in general terms, these words also describe a picture. Moreover :

> ... certain recurrences of line and form; certain re-echoing notes of the same, or allied colour, are necessary to both pattern and picture. The abstract ingredients appear to be the same in both cases.[37]

The only distinction lies in the fact that whereas a pattern is not necessarily a picture, a picture is bound to be a pattern. It seems that it was the practitioners and theorists of decorative (as opposed to representative) art at the end of the nineteenth century who grasped most clearly the principles according to which painting, and the consequent verbal elucidation of its theory, was to develop. Such foresight was not possessed, as we shall see, by the majority of critics of contemporary painting, still bound to the necessary presence of a subject drawn from the verbally

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37. Walter Crane, Line and Form, 1900, pp.259-60.

notable visible world. Rather, such a relatively pioneering critic as MacColl seldom wasted an opportunity, in fact, of attacking the concept of purely abstract painting. His clearest repudiation comes in the remarks he makes in Nineteenth Century Art on Whistler's canvases and prose writings. Again, he uses a concept drawn from literary criticism in order to express a value which he claims lies beyond the pleasure transmitted by aesthetic patterning:

> We have only to turn to ... the famous passage in which he translates his nocturnes into literature, to see that a particular nuance of signification and poetry is as necessary a part of these pictures as their tone. If they were copies of stains in a carpet they would be beautiful stains; as a vision of luminous vapour and of London seen in this beautiful stain they are poetry.[38]

It is this notion that a picture contains 'signification' - a word which, in this context, partly suggests the ability of a painting to be translated into and comprehended by means of verbal language - that qualified it as a work of art, even if, as MacColl repeatedly makes clear, the scene or object signified is not itself of central importance.

In this brief discussion of the theme of abstract qualities and art criticism in the late nineteenth century,

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38. MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, Glasgow, 1902, pp.155-6.

the comments of one other writer should at this point be noted: those of Robert Louis Stevenson in his essay of 1885, 'On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature'. It seems probable that this may have influenced the developing criticism of his cousin, with whom he certainly discussed and corresponded on aesthetic matters. After drawing a distinction between two classes of arts: the representative (sculpture, painting, acting) and the self-sufficient and presentative (architecture, music, dance), R.L. Stevenson asserted that each may claim a common ground of existence:

> ... it may be said with sufficient justice that the motive and end of any art whatever is to make a pattern; a pattern, it may be, of colours, of sounds, of changing attitudes, geometrical figures, or imitative lines; but still a pattern.[39]

Even though the executors of each art form may carry out their task unconsciously, 'it is still imperative that the pattern shall be made'.[40] Whereas the critics of the mid eighties and early nineties might have regarded the philosophy behind these remarks as being dangerously close to the ethos of wallpaper design, these ideas were certainly important for the next generation. Frank Rutter, in the

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39. R.L. Stevenson, 'On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature', Contemporary Review, 47, April 1885, p.550.

40. 'Technical Elements of Style', p.550.

nineteen twenties, having just criticised the followers of the Impressionist masters, in particular, for paying insufficient attention to pattern or design in painting, claimed that 'pattern is the first essential in any work of art',[41] and clinched this affirmation by quoting what he considered to be the definitive words on the subject: the remarks of R.L. Stevenson cited above.

Yet Stevenson, in this article, and more particularly Pater and Crane, stand out, like all other writers on aesthetic theory alone, from critics in newspapers and periodicals. For it was not their primary task to act as middlemen, responsible for educating a potentially wide sector of the middle classes into an understanding and acceptance of new forms of art. Nor were the critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries themselves in the same position as their successors, the major modern American manipulators of painters' styles, of taste and the art market, creating and developing theories which subsequently found expression on canvas. Rather, the direction of their writing was limited by developments in painting - in particular by the exhibition of Impressionist works in this country - and by a need to

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41. Frank Rutter, Evolution in Modern Art, 1926, p.50.

explain, among other things, the optical and technical theories which lay behind these developments. They helped to reinforce the necessity of their task by maintaining that 'the man who has no interest in technical questions has no interest in art'.[42] This criticism helped to sustain, also, such English painters as Sickert and Steer whose work fundamentally followed Impressionist principles. It was a new generation of critic who spoke for the Post Impressionists, but they, too, were primarily explaining technique, rather than initiating it.

I wish to take the case of Impressionist painting, and the response which it met at the hands of English critics, in order to show its importance to the development of formalist art criticism in this country. In their rejection of the principles along which abstract art was later to develop, the New Critics might, at first glance, seem somewhat short sighted and conservative. But this is a glance of hindsight. Impressionism, with its stress on the interplay of colour and light, with its preference for the depiction of atmosphere rather than of hard-edged, static objects, presented a challenge to the pen as well as to the eye. Whilst they had only a limited success in their role of textual explicators, translating this new language of

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42. R.A.M. Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p.124.

French art for the benefit of a largely timid, if not agressively xenophobic public, their interpretative methods, and the fact that their criticism appeared in widely read newspapers and magazines, significantly broadened the possibilities for serious art criticism.

In order to situate the important interventions of MacColl and R.A.M. Stevenson, in particular, it is first necessary to look at the initial response which Impressionist painting received in England.

The first Impressionist paintings to be seen in London were included in Paul Durand-Ruel's exhibition of December 1870, held at 168 New Bond Street. Durand-Ruel included Monet's Entrance to Trouville Harbour, and Pissarro's A Snow Effect and Upper Norwood, among a heterogenous collection of French paintings which ranged from Ingres to Corot, Daubigny, Jules Dupré, Diaz, Troyon and Théodore Rousseau. Two years earlier, in July 1868, Manet had visited London for a few days, writing to Zola that he had been "enchanté de mon excursion; j'y ai été très bien reçu; il y a quelquechose à faire là-bas pour moi, je crois, et je vais le tenter la saison prochaine. J'ai vu quelques artistes fort aimables qui m'ont engagé à me produire. Il n'y a pas chez eux cette espèce de jalousie ridicule qu'il y a chez nous; c'est presque tous des gentlemen. Je crois qu'à un moment donné on pourra écouler la brochure là-bas'.[43]

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43. P. Jamot and G. Wildenstein, Manet Paris, 1932 , vol. I. p.84.

Manet was referring to Zola's brochure Mon Salon, published in 1866, which contained articles defending Manet, Monet and Pissarro. But not only did this small introduction fail to appear in England; Manet's projected exhibition never materialised, and the reception accorded to the Impressionist works seen in London between 1870-1876 bore no resemblance to the enthusiastic reaction prophesied by the French painter. Monet, Pissarro and Sisley had taken up residence in London during the period of the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune (October 1870-June 1871). But their presence in London was noted only obliquely, The Times commenting, apropos of Durand-Ruel's first exhibition, that, 'exiled from Paris by the war, French art has for the moment sought a home in England'.[44] In what is, to date, the only sustained analysis of the reception of Impressionist art in England - an analysis which is somewhat selective, even misleading, in the information it presents, and which does not give fair weight to the opinions of the New Critics - Douglas Cooper notes Durand-Ruel's claim that 'the press was very favourable and the art critics of every paper wrote long and laudatory articles'.[45] As Cooper indicates, it is

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44. Unsigned review, 'Exhibition of French Pictures', The Times, 19 December 1870, p.4.

45. Douglas Cooper, The Courtauld Collection, 1954, pp.22-3.

impossible to find any substantiation for this piece of fantasising, although Cooper's attempt to suggest complete critical silence - "I have been unable to trace any reference in the English press of the time to the Impressionist pictures included in these exhibitions"[46] - is not quite just. The exhibitions at the Bond Street Galleries continued until 1875. In 1872, the Art Journal included Pissarro's A Country Road and Sisley's After Rain in its lists of landscapes which, it claimed, constituted a profitable study;[47] in the winter of 1873, it noted the appearance of Pissarro's Autumn.[48] The Athenaeum remarked on the same picture as 'a brilliantly painted landscape'.[49] Moreover, the Art Journal commended Pissarro's Winter Scenery and Upper Norwood, shown in the French section of the 1871 International Exhibition, as 'two winter subjects of much natural truth', although remaining silent on the

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46. Courtauld Collection, p.23.

47. Unsigned review, 'Exhibition of the Society of French Artists, 168 New Bond Street', Art Journal, 34 (n.s. XI), December 1872, p.309.

48. Unsigned review, ' Society of French Artists ', Art Journal, 35 (n.s. XII), December 1873, p.368.

49. Unsigned review, 'Society of French Artists, New Bond Street. - Winter Exhibition of the French Gallery', Athenaeum, No. 2402, 8 November 1873, p.602.

subject of Monet's exhibits.[50] The Times included Sisley, Monet and Pissarro in its short list of interesting young painters when reviewing Durand-Ruel's spring exhibition of 1873,[51] and carried a much longer notice the following year, which laid down the terms which later unfavourable critics of Impressionist painting were readily to take up: 'we find a harshness in the juxtaposition of tints, a crudeness of local colouring, a heaviness of hand, what seems a studied avoidance of delicate workmanship, and, in short, what in France would be called a franchise naïve et brutale'.[52] But little claim can be made for these brief references as constituting any remarkable response to Impressionism. The Royal Academy Selection Committee were unimpressed by Monet and Pissarro, rejecting the works which they submitted in the spring of 1871. Small wonder that, in May of the same year, Pissarro wrote from London to Theodore Duret in Paris in the most disconsolate of terms:

> Je ne resterai pas ici, et ce n'est qu'à l'étranger que l'on sent combien France est belle, grande hospitalière. Quelle différence ici! On ne recueille que le mépris, l'indifférence, et même la grossièreté, parmi les confrères la jalousie et la défiance la plus égoiste ... excepte Durand-Ruel qui m'a acheté deux petits tableaux, ma peinture ne mord pas, mais pas du tout, cela me poursuit un peu partout ...[53]

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50. Unsigned review, 'International Exhibition. The French Pictures', Art Journal, 33, September 1871, p.218.

51. Unsigned review, 'Pictures by French Artists', The Times, 22 April 1873, p.12.

52. Unsigned review, 'Society of French Artists, Bond Street', The Times, 27 April 1874, p.14.

53. Lionello Venturi, Les Archives de l'Impressionisme, Paris - New York 1938, vol.i, p.27.

Various reasons can be put forward for what, in retrospect, it would be tempting to regard as a lack of critical perception. Firstly, the works were being shown at a small, virtually unknown gallery, and the majority of reviewers confined themselves to the Academy and the more popular shows. Secondly, art criticism did not, on the whole, occupy much space in the press. As was made clear in Chapter III, The Times was something of an exception in its coverage, and among the non-specialist publications, only the Athenaeum seemed to attempt what came close to a saturation coverage of art exhibitions. Until the foundations of the Magazine of Art in 1878, and the Artist in 1880, the Art Journal was the only notable art periodical. Moreover, Durand-Ruel's collection did not represent the only foreign paintings on show in London in the early 1870s. The Art Journal, in April 1870, noted rather disapprovingly that there were currently four galleries devoted entirely to this type of work: 'It is by no means impossible that we may be going too far with our patronage of Continental Art'.[54]

In the third place, the Impressionist paintings shown by Durand-Ruel existed in the context of his exhibitions

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54. Unsigned feature, 'Minor Topics of the Month', Art Journal, 32 (n.s. IX), April 1870, p.126.

only as isolated examples. Thus it was not possible, without an awareness of developments in Paris which the London critics did not appear to possess, to perceive these painters as representing a cohesive tendency, whether stimulating or threatening. In addition, their works - largely relatively small scale landscapes, or portrait/genre scenes (such as Manet's A Spaniard, shown Spring 1874) - nearly all fell into categories which did not present any noticeable challenge in subject matter to an English audience. Degas's sporting topics (such as Getting Ready for the Start, or A Race-Course in Normandy, both exhibited Summer 1873) escaped comment, as, perhaps more surprisingly, did his The Parisian Laundress (exhibited Winter 1873), which, because of its uncompromisingly realist subject matter, one might have expected to draw adverse criticism.

Cooper states that Durand-Ruel was obliged, for financial reasons, to close his gallery in London at the end of 1875. He does not mention a further exhibition of "French and Other Foreign Painters" which was held at the Bond Street Gallery in 1876, under the auspices of the dealer Deschamps. This included works by Degas, Sisley, Manet and Berthe Morisot. One of these canvases, Manet's Les Canotiers, provoked another piece of hostile criticism from The Times. The painting had already been severely attacked at the previous year's Salon, as George Heard

Hamilton demonstrates in Manet and his Critics.[55] Now The Times commented that cynicism in conception and execution had rarely been carried further than in the depiction of 'this singularly offensive couple'. The mode of execution was as unpleasing as the choice of human subjects, heavily reminiscent of the coarsest methods of the scene painter. It is as well, the critic concludes, 'that visitors to this Gallery should have one such rampant example of Manet before them, if only to know what they escape'.[56] Hamilton acutely comments that the art journalist, like the average spectator, was at a loose end in front of this simple subject. 'Had the boating theme been treated as an excuse for an amusing reflection on summer pleasures and the lights of love it would have been closer to their hearts as well as to their previous experience'.[57]

I have found no record of any Impressionist paintings exhibited in London during the next five years, and press commentary on their activities in France was scanty and largely antagonistic. In 1880 the Artist, after making a cheap joke about the appropriateness of the fifth Independents exhibition opening on All Fools' Day, claimed to treat the

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55. George Heard Hamilton, Manet and his Critics, New Haven 1954, p.187 ff. Castagnary, in the Siecle, (29 May 1875) was almost alone among French critics in praising Les Canotiers.

56. Unsigned review, 'Continental Pictures', The Times, 25 April 1876, p.5.

57. Hamilton, Manet and his Critics, p.188.

artists with some seriousness, but after enumerating the characteristics of "Impressionalism" - a disdain for conventionality, a proud contempt for the natural laws of colour, and a determination to break the laws of perspective - persisted in treating this 'variegated collection of rainbow-tinted landscapes' as laughingly unintelligible: 'They are either very bad practical jokes, or melancholy proofs of the urgent need of education for the artistic masses. The best you could say of them is that they are lively'.[58] On the whole, the critical emphasis of these years suggested that Impressionism was a spent force, a passing eccentricity to which England had been wise not to pay too much attention, and to which the French were at last beginning to react sensibly: 'The public is beginning to get tired of this sort of amusement, at the cost of a franc, when good pictures may be seen at the various clubs for nothing'.[59] The Artist's same correspondent noted with relief in May 1883 that "The cant of "Impressionisme" has happily died out here [Paris], and so 'the conceit of calling an effect of colour a picture has worn itself out'.[60]

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58. M., 'Art Abroad. France', Artist, I, April 1880, p.117.

59. Penguin, 'Art Notes from Paris', Artist, III, April 1882, p.123.

60. Penguin, 'Paris Notes', Artist, IV, May 1883, p.154.

Yet these derogatory remarks contrast strongly with the report of the London Impressionist exhibition of 1883 in the same issue of the Artist. Here, if the French artists are criticised for anything, it is for shrinking from publicity and hence not making themselves better known. They are praised for their directness, their simplicity, their ability to express the swift, momentary impression.[61] This show proved a turning point not just in the reception of the Impressionists in England, but in the development of English art criticism, Again, it was Durand-Ruel who organised the display of sixty-five works, this time at Dowdeswell's Galleries in New Bond Street. He had held a small Impressionist exhibition in the previous year at 13 King Street, St. James's, which had attracted very little attention. But in contrast, this show prompted some considerable press reaction. The collection included three works each by Berthe Morisot and by Manet, seven by Monet, eight each by Sisley, Degas and Renoir, and eleven by Pissarro, in addition to paintings by Boudin, Mary Cassatt and J.L. Brown. The phrasing of the catalogue's preface, however, hardly suggests that a wide audience was being sought - it speaks of introducing the painters 'to the English connoisseur'. Indeed, the Artist remarked that 'the exhibition, important as it is, is hardly one to attract the mass. Truth is

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61. Unsigned review, 'La Société des Impressionistes', Artist, IV, May 1883, pp.137-138.

always unpalatable ...'[62] This select nature of the exhibition's appeal is confirmed by the fact that Theodore Duret's remarks, taken from the preface to the catalogue to the recent Renoir exhibition in Paris, are quoted in the catalogue in their original French. Their purposes is to give a clear exposition of the aims of the Société and a definition of the word "impressionist":

> Les impressionistes, poussant encore plus avant, s'il est possible, dans chaque scène vue, dans chaque physionomie ou figure reproduite, observent l'aspect fugitif, la notation spéciale de moment, l'impression, en un mot, de l'objet, pour la fixer sur la toile. Et c'est pourquoi ce nom d'impressioniste a été accepté par les artistes ...[63]

The author of this Preface, before passing to some laudatory remarks about 'the wonderful effects of light, the complete command of colour', had the advantage of being able to refer the interested spectator to Frederick Wedmore's article in the Fortnightly Review,[64] the first full length article on the Impressionists published in England. Wedmore's importance lies in his appreciation of the Impressionists' treatment of everyday life. He felt obliged to look to earlier painters

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62. 'La Société des Impressionistes', p.138.

63. Preface to the Catalogue of Paintings, Drawings and Pastels exhibited by members of 'La Société des Impressionistes', 1883, p.iv

64. Frederick Wedmore, 'The Impressionists', Fortnightly Review, xxxiii, January 1883, pp.75-82.

for the authority of precedent. Luca della Robbia modelled his Florentine Virgin Marys at San Miniato and in the Bargello from women he knew and enjoyed looking at, assumed Wedmore: he thus surmises, for example, that della Robbia shared with the recent French painters the belief that 'the art that has the chance of living is generally the art that is inspired by the life of its own day'.[65] Like George Eliot, he notes that the seventeenth century Dutch were characterised by their 'treatment of contemporary life, the work-a-day existence, often of very unromantic people, this artistic dealing with common and familiar things'.[66] Moreau and Lavreince gave us the social life of Paris in the eighteenth century, and, in recent years, Turner anticipated Monet in realising that man's work within Nature had to be accepted: in Rain, Steam and Speed, for example, the mill chimney and railway bridge were incorporated into the artistic design in lieu of a Grecian temple or Roman aqeduct. Nonetheless, Wedmore's article is not free from censorious remarks which show that, despite his partial enthusiasm, he retained many of the idealising criteria inherent in Victorian aesthetic criticism. Thus Degas and Renoir are reproved because, as

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65. 'The Impressionists', p.75.

66. 'The Impressionists', p.78.

'painters of figure subjects', they are apparently 'without appreciation of the finer forms of nature in human life ... hardly once in their work is there any chance indication of a noble or dignified sentiment, of any appreciation of moral force or moral beauty'.[67]

The response generated by the exhibition in the daily and weekly press veered from the laudatory to the violently condemnatory. For the Morning Post, it had 'besides its novelty ... the pleasant recommendation of being also mirth-provoking';[68] whilst Punch's critic had been advised by an artistic friend 'to go and see it, because he was told it was "horridly funny".'[69] The Times castigated the exhibitors for flying in the face of all tradition.[70] On the other hand, the critics of the Standard, Daily Telegraph, and Artist, were more measured in their reservations, more fulsome in their praise. The very size of the show, which demonstrated that the Impressionists were a united force, ensured

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67. 'The Impressionists', p.78.

68. Unsigned review, 'The Impressionistes', Morning Post, 26 April 1883, p.5.

69. Unsigned review, 'Mistaken Impressions', Punch, 84, 5 May 1883, p.208.

70. Unsigned review, 'Two Minor Exhibitions', The Times, 24 April 1883, p.3.

a wider reception than was accorded to Durand-Ruel's promotional efforts of the 1870s. Moreover, the increasing understanding shown to these artists in France underlined the fact that they represented no transitory phenomenon. The Standard, after noting that the Impressionists were 'individual, brilliant, engaging', commented that 'they are a force to be reckoned with'.[71]

The criticism which was devoted to the Impressionists painters over the next twenty years was far from being universally favourable, but no longer were they treated in England as a passing fad. Their importance to the development of art, and to landscape painting in particular, became widely recognised, by practitioners as well as reviewers. Thus in 1887, the Artist could comment that 'Impressionism in some form or another is becoming the central idea in a very large proportion of modern picture production. The desire to paint effects rather than subjects is rapidly spreading, and bids fair to grow into the chief motive of our art'.[72] From 1887, Impressionist works were, in some measure, to be seen annually in London in all the years which preceded Durand-Ruel's large exhibition of 1905 (with the apparent exception of 1894 and 1902). They appeared in the

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71. Unsigned review, 'The Impressionists at Messrs, Dowdeswell's', Standard, 25 April 1883, p.2.

72. Unsigned editorial, 'From Month to Month', Artist, VIII, August 1887, p.258.

annual exhibitions of the Royal Society of British Artists, the New English Art Club, the International Society, and elsewhere. Very few seem to have been sold to British collectors:[73] this is possibly a reflection of the comparatively high prices which were asked for them as well as of their limited appeal. At the December 1887 exhibition of the RSBA in Suffolk Street, for example, Monet's four works - Coast of Belle Isle, Bretagne; Meadow of Limetz; Village of Bennecourt, and Cliff Near Dieppe, were each priced at £160: only three other paintings - two by Grace, one by Alfred Stevens were priced higher in an exhibition of 543 items. Investment in an art form which might, after all, prove no more than a passing phase, does not appear to have been considered worthwhile. In the twentieth century, and more particularly since the Second World War, innovatory, experimental art has come to be seen as representing something of value by the very nature of its challenging novelty. Purchasers have become alerted, by critics and galleries, to the apparent desirability of obtaining a moment of art history, or at least art fashion. But in the last nineteenth century, the new did not bear such status.

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73. For a comprehensive study of the early purchasers of Impressionist works in this country, see Cooper, Courtauld Collection, pp. 60-68. But note the reservations of Clive Bell, who, when reviewing Cooper's work, accused him of underplaying the enthusiasm shown for Post-Impressionist art, in order to emphasise the far-sightedness of Samuel Courtauld. (unsigned review, 'The Courtauld Collection', Times Literary Supplement, 26 March 1954, p.200.

Among the most notable of these regular, if small scale, appearances of the Impressionists was the 1889 Goupil Gallery exhibition of some twenty works by Monet, paintings which, The Times commented, 'will severely strain the faith of the ordinary British Visitor. Whether good or bad, they are certainly unlike anything he has ever seen before in art; the question is whether they are equally unlike anything in nature'.[74] Noteworthy, too, was the showing of Degas's L'Absinthe at the inauguration of the Grafton Galleries in 1893.

As already discussed in Chapter I, L'Absinthe became the pivot around which the essential critical question of the period revolved: the problem of whether supremacy should be given, in one's consideration of art, to subject or style. MacColl was prepared to admit that this representation of what the Globe called a 'coarse-featured man and a woman of the most degraded type, both under the influence of the deleterious drug',[75] was indeed 'repulsive as you would have seen it, before Degas made it his'.[76] The artist had performed an exercise of transformation, translating the scene into paint as it could have been turned into 'fit words'.

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74. Unsigned review, 'The Royal Society of British Artists', The Times, 29 November 1887, p.4.

75. Unsigned review, 'The Grafton Gallery. Second Notice', Globe, 25 February 1893, p.3.

76. D.S.M., 'The Grafton Gallery', Spectator, 70, 25 February 1893, p.256.

Whilst the 'mysterious relations of idea and sound should effect us as beauty, so does this master of character, of form, of colour, watch until the café table-tops and the mirror and the water-bottle and the drinks and the features yield up to him their mysterious affecting note'.[77] The Philistine's remonstrances in the Westminster Gazette at the idea that this painting could, in any way, be regarded as setting a standard, gave rise, as noted earlier, to MacColl's most sustained statements about writing on art.

MacColl expressed his belief in the desirability of putting forward 'standards', something which must necessarily entail voicing strong opinions, otherwise the critic will do little more than rehearse lukewarm eulogies, or, alternatively, will praise excessively on shaky grounds: 'if you do not know good from bad, to the hedging notice will succeed the puffing notice, in which fashionable morality is the only standard'.[78] MacColl maintained that a critic without a clear understanding of style and technique was too much at the mercy of subjectivity, response depending on one's state of mind when confronting a work. With his parodic talent, MacColl

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77. 'The Grafton Gallery', p.256.

78. D.S.M. 'The Standard of the Philistine', Spectator, 70, 18 March 1893, p.357.

imitated a Ruskinian proclaiming on one occasion that the most stammering, imperfect attempt to portray the Heavenly Host is preferable to presenting drunken boors; on another, maintaining that it is an example of diseased modern vanity when a man imagines he can disguise his imaginative and executive weaknesses by the exalted nature of his subjects. Once again, MacColl is comfortable in using an analogy between art and language: as we saw in Chapter I, the Philistine places all his energy in supporting :

> . . the old, old fallacy about subject, as if it was subject and not predicate that stamped its value on a sentence.[79]

The Philistine cannot see that what matters, above all, is the dignity of the performance. And to clinch his point that to speak warmly of a picture is hardly the same thing as condoning the subject matter of which it is constituted, MacColl draws a literary parallel: 'To praise Macbeth is not exactly the same thing as encouraging murder, or insisting that only murder should be written about'.[80]

The analogy between verbal language and artistic style is continued by MacColl through the following weeks' pieces.

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79. D.S.M., 'The Standard of the Philistine', p.357.

80. D.S.M., 'Subject and Technique', Spectator, 70, 25 March 1893, p.388.

In both writing and conversation, he believes, his readers find it easier to pick up nuances, to recognise refinement or want of refinement, than they do with painting, since painting 'speaks a language by no means so generally known or so readily acquired'.[81] In other words, though there may be verbal means of explaining what is going on on the canvas surface, painting is not a form which can be readily turned back into a pre-existent verbal equivalent. That is the trap suggested by the narrative painter, with his evident literary inclinations towards steering the sentiment of the public. MacColl is aware of the difficulties of explaining to anyone who 'has not an eye for the language of painting' exactly where the pictorial element comes in, but suggests that it is possible to convince this person that there is:

> ... a gap in the set of terms under which he looks at a picture, and that it is just that part, which does not exist for him, that makes it a picture.[82]

It is this gap - the terms with which to discuss the question of technique - which the New Critics seemed confident of supplying. Self-evidently, it was not an area in which expressions already designed to discuss verbal, 'literary'

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81. 'Subject and Technique', p.388.

82. 'Subject and Technique', p.388.

language would suffice.

MacColl's argument in fact necessarily implies that there is a difference between the literary and the artistic critic. This point was developed in a further skirmish over New Criticism later in 1893. This was inaugurated by Joseph Pennell's attack on Raphael as being not only no painter, but a dishonest man. Basing his judgement on technical criteria alone, Pennell, writing in the Star, castigated the Sistine Madonna for being :

> ...as blatant a piece of shoddy commercialism as has ever been produced.[83]

Baldry in the Globe, Henley in the National Observer, Gleeson White in the Studio and, to a muted extent, Vernon Blackburn in the Sketch expressed sympathy for Pennell's point of view. On the other side were ranged Hamerton, in the Contemporary Review, incorporating his remarks into a long article on the 'Foundations of Art Criticism',[84] and Marcus Huish in the St. James's Gazette, who declared that :

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83. Quoted by P.G. Hamerton, 'The Foundations of Art Criticism', Contemporary Review, 64, September 1893, p.412.

84. 'Foundations of Art Criticism', pp.405-414.

> . . . an attempt has lately been made by a certain section of artists to show that the only perfect art critic is the art craftsman, and that, given a knowledge of technique, no literary qualification is necessary.[85]

He does not qualify precisely what he means by 'literary', but Hamerton, quoting Pennell to illustrate 'the new school of criticism - strong in statement, aggressive and contemptuous in tone, but lacking the note of culture',[86] illustrates the unease felt by the old guard, apprehensive that established standards of decorum were somehow slipping away. Yet even the Artist, in one of its less avant-garde phases, and whilst drawing its readers' attention, in the same article, to the 'noble contribution' made by Ruskin to art criticism, could see some logic behind the New Critics' arguments. It explained that they insist upon the fact :

> . . . that a work of Art should be aesthetically beautiful - beautiful in form, line, composition and colour, and that the rest does not matter. Subject they treat as of supreme inconsequence. It is merely the paper on which the artist writes. What he says is alone of importance.[87]

Whilst the stress on beauty is perhaps over-emphatic here, the writer is correct in perceiving the direction in which

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85. Quoted in unsigned article, 'The New Criticism', Artist, XIV, October 1893, p.295.
86. Quoted, 'The New Criticism', p.295.
87. 'The New Criticism', p.296.

criticism was to move.

The critical debate over L'Absinthe, and the degree to which Impressionism in general had made critics revise not just their ways of looking at painting, but their whole terminology, was crucial to the development of English formal art criticism. But by the time of the L'Absinthe controversy, it does not seem as though Impressionism as such was exactly fighting for survival in England, or even, especially when it could be discussed alongside native landscape painting, struggling for the acknowledgement of its importance in the press. Even the Daily Telegraph noted that the productions of Impressionism permeated, where they did not overwhelm, the paintings of the younger generation. Since 'to stem such an onrushing stream no artificial barriers will suffice, ... it is, therefore, manifestly wiser to direct all efforts towards shaping and guiding a movement which has practically conquered all opposition'.[88] Indeed, the critic welcomes Degas's painting as a 'masterpiece of interpretative realism'. No doubt, the very fact that the Impressionists, unlike the Post-Impressionists in 1910, were not easily singled out for special attention when they exhibited, but rather, in

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88. Unsigned review, 'The Grafton Galleries', Daily Telegraph, 18 February 1893, p.8.

the 1890 and 1900s, were assimilated into the practices both of modern gallery policy and of everyday, largely unspecialist and non-technical reviewing, aided the slow, progressive, if somewhat uninformed acceptance of these artists in England. It took the L'Absinthe controversy, however, before a relatively wide public realised not only that changes were taking place on canvases - a regular visitor of the smaller and more modern galleries would, after all, have made this out for him or herself - but that art criticism, the writing which served to support both new and old movements, was a far less stable form of discourse than many might formerly have believed.

By the turn of the century, the word "Impressionism" was being used so widely, so loosely, that it was tending to forfeit its original meaning. Wynford Dewhurst's Impressionist Painting (1904) included such artists as Toulouse-Lautrec and Max Liebermann. Back in 1892, when listing the "Schools of Painting: and their essential Divisions", the Artist's heading of the Impressionist School, whilst encompassing the names of Manet and Degas, also gave space to, among others, Albert Moore, Francis Bate, and W.Q. Orchardson. Pissarro, for that matter, appeared among the practitioners of the Symbolist school.[89] As early as

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89. The Editor, 'Schools of Painting: And Their Essential Divisions', Artist, XIII, September 1892, pp.260-261.

1881, the Art Journal was using the relevant word carelessly, when describing The Pool, a run-of-the-mill landscape painting by Cecil Lawson, as 'a good specimen of the so-called "impressionist" style of landscape, apparently painted anyhow when looked at closely, but, when seen from a distance, impressive and harmonious'.[90] Whistler, despite his personal lack of enthusiasm for the French painters, was continually referred to as an "Impressionist", both during his lifetime and in obituary notices - 'the great Anglo-American master

> ... was among the pioneers of the higher, subtler impressionism',

commented the Daily Telegraph.[91] Among other English artists, the term was frequently applied to such painters as John Stott, Stanhope Forbes, and George Clausen:

> painters who, when they looked to France, found their inspiration not in Degas or Monet, but in the sentimental, anecdotal naturalism of Bastien-Lepage.

In other words, Impressionism was taken to mean a variety of things by a variety of people. So great was the confusion that Mauclair, in The French Impressionists, tried unsuccessfully to substitute another phrase. He maintained that the suppression of local colours, and the division of tones by the process of touches of pure, juxtaposed colour - identifying elements which he was putting forwards as characteristic of the whole

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90. Unsigned review, 'The Royal Academy. The One Hundred and Thirteenth Exhibition', Art Journal, n.s. 1, June 1881, p.186.

91. Unsigned obituary, 'Death of Mr. Whistler', Daily Telegraph, 18 July 1903, p.9.

school - 'are the essential principles of chromatism (for this word should be used instead of the very vague term "Impressionism")'.[92] Frank Rutter, too, would have preferred to use the word "luminism" to distinguish the productions of the French. For, as a correspondent to the Saturday Review noted in 1901, excepting only MacColl, 'the utter confusion of the English writers in the very use of the word has been for long too appalling to encourage hope of understanding'.[93]

Many people regarded 'the giving of an impression' as a satisfactory definition of the genre. ' "The man who is bold enough to exhibit a sketch" has been suggested as a rough and ready description of an impressionist as the public understands him', reported the Studio in 1893,[94] even though this critic himself 'knows better than to take these "rapid impressions" as spontaneous attempts to jot down quickly the facts seen in a single glance. The picture may have been chosen in a second; but it has been fashioned as slowly as a Holbein or a Tadema'. Indeed, the painstaking nature of Monet's technique, in particular, had

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92. Camille Mauclair, The French Impressionists 1860-1900, 1903, p.99.

93. H.P.H. Friswell, letter, 'D.S.M. and the Impressionists', Saturday Review, 91, 2 February 1901, p.141.

94. The Lay Figure, 'The Lay Figure Speaks', Studio, I, June 1893, p.126.

already been made clear to readers of the Artist by E.M. Rashdall. Rashdall explained how Monet built up layer upon layer of comparatively unmixed colour, laying this on his canvas by means of long thin hog-hair brushes, waiting for each mosaic-like surface to dry before the next was applied.[95] But the myth of haste remained, and furnished a formidable weapon to the detractors of Impressionism, who played on their audience's belief in value for money in a work of art.

The degree to which apparent speed in execution was perceived as being a necessary characteristic of this new form of art could colour the manner in which exhibited works were reviewed. Thus, for example, the Daily Telegraph's critic was not too harsh in his treatment of the 1883 show, since he understood the word to mean purely the "intent to grasp every subject in its most fugitive aspect. Finish, in such an art as this, is really not in question". Indeed, he criticises J.L. Brown, and, to a lesser extent, Monet and Boudin, for possessing perhaps too much finish.[96] But most critics made less effort to be accommodating. Armitage, attacking the Paris Salon in 1887, castigated the Impressionists

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95. E.M. Rashdall, 'Claude Monet', Artist, IX, 2 July 1888, pp.195-197.

96. Unsigned review, 'Paintings and Drawings', Daily Telegraph, 26 April 1883, p.4.

exhibiting there for their sickly tones, their childish drawing and fumbling and unsteady touch.[97] On another occasion, Stephens complained against the crudity of the "impressions" and the way in which colour was 'jumbled into an undigested sort of chiaroscuro'.[98] The authoritative voices of recently popular English artists were raised in horror. Frith, writing in the Magazine of Art, called the style a more dangerous "craze" than Pre-Raphaelitism, taking leave to doubt 'that Nature could ever have made such an impression at all, unless the receiver of it was in a state of disease'.[99] One of these very Pre-Raphaelites, Holman Hunt, spoke to the effect that he wished these artists had been more fastidious as regards their selection of natural aspects, and not so proud of having evidently been in a hurry.[100] These attacks on lack of precision and careless speed of execution had many parallels in press reviews. The Impressionists became an easy subject for jokes:

> "What is an 'Impressionist' picture?" asked the country cousin of the art critic. "An impressionist picture", said the critic, "is one that leaves on

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97. E. Armitage, 'The Impressionists', Athenaeum, No. 3117, 23 July 1887, pp. 123-124.

98. Unsigned review, 'Minor Exhibitions', Athenaeum, No. 3147, 18 February 1888, p.219.

99. W.P. Frith, 'Crazes in Art', Magazine of Art, II, May 1888, p.191.

100. Unsigned, 'Mr. Holman Hunt on Art', Artist, IX, May 1888, pp.135-136.

> your mind the impression that it is a picture of a cow, until you look at the catalogue and find that it is the picture of a water-spaniel.[101]

The humorous potential of the term is no doubt due to its peculiar advantage of being, 'to most people, a mere phrase, utterly unintelligible, and consequently suggestive of high culture'.[102] MacColl commented that it is a word to which a marked reaction, in either direction, is inevitable: he spoke of '... the undefined enthusiasm, the very defined distaste, that the word "impressionism" excited'.[103] Sickert went even further: a very cultured writer, he maintained, will 'use the word "Impressionism" sometimes, with a sneer, will touch it, as it were, with the end of his lips, much as a lady might use the word 'Socialist' in a drawing room.'[104]

Attacks on the Impressionists were sometimes witty, usually ill-informed. How, then, did the New Critics in general, and their most persistent and articulate spokesmen,

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101. Column filler, Artist, XIII, June 1892, p.163. The joke is retold from the Globe.

102. Charles W. Furse, 'Impressionism - What it Means', Albemarle Review, I, August 1892, p.47.

103. 'The New English Art Club', Spectator, 5 December 1891, p.809.

104. Walter Sickert, 'The Language of Art', A Free House!', 1947, pp.92-93. The piece first appeared in New Age, 28 July 1910.

D.S. MacColl and R.A.M. Stevenson, in particular, go about correcting popular prejudices? How did they attempt to educate those of the public who were receptive to new ideas to the new way of seeing which was necessary for an understanding of Impressionist art?

MacColl isolated three particular grounds on which the public broadly deemed these artists to have offended. Firstly, they had upset the habitual logic of approach to things. Secondly, the novelty of new natural effects had been introduced, and in the third place, a new limit of convention in natural effects had been established:

> The public disliked a picture on all three counts. It objects to the image of nature in general relation to thought and sentiment because it is not habitual; it objects to the nature in it because it does not know what nature is like; it dislikes the art in it because it is art, and thinks the familiar pictures are nature. It may be added, that it is hopeless to attempt to persuade anyone who is not constructed for the purpose that a particular picture is beautiful. That is all that art criticism can hope to do .[105]

Three methods of appeal through 'reasonable logic' stand out. Firstly, the New Critics attempted reassurance by demonstrating that many of the techniques adopted by the

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105. D.S. MacColl, 'The Logic of Painting', Albemarle Review, II , September 1892, p.86.

Impressionists, particularly in the treatment of light and form, were not as new as might be suspected, but had firm historical precedent. Secondly, appeals were made to the public on objective, scientific grounds, helping them to understand the colour laws which underlay many of the French artists' practices. Thirdly, the charge of scrappy, untrained drawing was repudiated.

The Victorian public set great store by the notion of historic precedent, since it underpinned their belief in measurable progress.[106] The crucial aesthetic work of the late nineteenth century, a work essential to an understanding of the principles which the New Critics maintained lay behind modern French art, was, indeed, the study of a past master, R.A.M. Stevenson's Velasquez, 'the great Spanish Impressionist'.[107] The contemporary significance of this text was immediately recognised. The Saturday Review exclaimed enthusiastically - whilst being unable to conceal a certain ambiguity in its attitude towards more recent

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106. For the general historical context of nineteenth century evolutionary thought about society, see J.W. Burrow, Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory, 1966.

107. R.A.M. Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p.29.

painting - that here the 'gospel of Impressionism' was being preached with fulness and with fervour. 'And how reasonable, how persuasive a gospel it is, when set forth in illustration of the triumphs of its greatest master, and not clouded by the comparatively faltering efforts of the young men of today'.[108]

Crucial to Stevenson's study, as to the press debates about Impressionism in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, is his attitude towards the question of subject. As the L'Absinthe controversy showed, many Victorian critics preferred idealisation to what they considered unnecessary dwelling on painful, sordid subjects. The lady correspondent to the Artist condemned the Impressionists' 'admiration for the ugly and the vulgar';[109] Furse notes with distaste their predeliction for choosing their subjects from the 'every-day vulgarities' that surround them, 'provided they are sufficiently repulsive and ugly'.[110] But Stevenson agreed with none of this emphasis on subject: for him, subject is useful to the painter only in so far as it gives him or her a pretext for making the most of what is beautiful in their own art: 'no subject can make or mar art; subject is

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108. Unsigned review, 'The Art of Velasquez', Saturday Review, LXXXI, 18 January 1896, p.78.

109. Penguin, 'Art Abroad. Art in Paris', Artist, 2, May 1881, p.153.

110. Furse, Albemarle Review, August 1892, p.47.

indifferent except for its favourable or unfavourable effect on the artist'.[111] With more than an echo of Ruskin, Stevenson argued that a noble or ignoble effect will be produced according to whether the rendering of a subject records a grand or trivial manner of using the eyesight; that is, whether it shows a mean and petty anxiety about details, or reveals sympathy with large shapes and with the actual quality of paint. His belief in the necessity of possessing a 'larger mind' extends to aesthetic consumption as well as production: the notion that 'art is meaningless without personality'[112] belongs to both processes. Stevenson suggests that the painting of Velasquez - and, by analogy, that of the Impressionists - is hardly caviare to the general, who comprehend and relish 'the cheaper realism of the Dutch masters',[113] or, indeed, that of the Academy genre canvases. In other words, it is to the subject, rather than to the more important criterion of technique, that they are giving their attention.

One reason why Stevenson felt able to stress technique rather than content was, in fact, his strongly developed

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111. Stevenson, Velasquez, p.19.

112. Velasquez, p.59.

113. Velasquez, p.26.

awareness of the dissimilarities between art and literature. He differed entirely from those Victorian critics who believed that they could treat paintings in the same way that they might approach the novel form, directing their attention to narrative and to potential moral implications. Perhaps writing under the influence of Lessing's Laocöon, Stevenson perceives that 'Arts such as painting and sculpture, that appeal to the eye and display their contents simultaneously, differ vastly from those that unfold their matter to the ear in sequence'.[114] This conception of simultaneous display led him directly to consider the aspect of space, and hence the rendering of light and aerial volume within painting. Velasquez is specially praised for his expression of space as well as of form: for his ability to render the 'mystery of enveloping air'.[115] This favoured word, 'aerial', was employed by Stevenson as early as 1887, when, describing Monet's The Coast of Belle-Isle, Bretagne, he commended the manner in which 'local colour, sunlight, sky reflections, etc., all fall into a harmonious whole, without holes or breaks in the continuity of the aerial envelope'.[116] Subsequently, he was to use it as one of his highest terms

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114. Velasquez, p.31.

115. Velasquez, p.44.

116. Unsigned review, 'The Royal Society of British Artists', Saturday Review, LXIV, 3 December 1887, p.760.

of commendation, speaking, for example, of the 'profound aerial truth' of the shadowy Dancers by Degas shown at the International Exhibition of 1898.[117]

The technical qualities of form and light, although always seen as interdependent by Stevenson, vie for precedence in his criticism, At times, form is seen primarily as a catalyst in the presentation of light. Again, we see the importance to him of basing his standard on works of the past. Rembrandt is commended for perceiving that form has no independent existence but derives its importance from being mainly a deflector of light, a 'producer of shadowy abysses and depths ... the cause of passages, gradations, culminations, crescendos, and decrescendos in the impalpable and airy inhabitant of space'.[118] Able as Rembrandt was at building a unity of design, he must command the most admiration for his 'whole impression of reality, coloured and modelled by an effect of light'.[119] Stevenson's emphasis in this passage is identical to the terms in which he treats the Impressionists. In discussing their later works, he concentrated almost entirely on their treatment of light.

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117. R.A.M.S., 'The International Society', Pall Mall Gazette, 10 May 1899, p.2.

118. R.A.M. Stevenson, 'Rembrandt and Burne-Jones', Art Journal, n.s. 19, January 1899, p.57.

119. 'Rembrandt and Burne-Jones', p.58.

Reviewing the 1899 International, he seized on the word 'iridescent' and used it to describe Monet; Sisley's "high dazzling iridescent landscape, La Plaine de Champagne" and the 'vibrating iridescence' of the Pissarros:[120] an over-working of a descriptive term which at least indicates the direction of his preoccupation.

Sometimes, however, the concept of form became predominant in Stevenson's writing, in a way which clearly looks forward to the æsthetic postulations of Clive Bell. Whilst chiaroscuro and colour may be absent from any given work, he asserted that 'form must be present in every kind of work that appeals to the eye'.[121] Like Bell, he regarded the revelation of form as an inevitable consequence of the production of a successful work of art: 'Those blots of colour and tone with which the impressionist renders the envelope and general aspects of a scene cannot but reveal form if they give any true account of art'.[122]

Both MacColl and Stevenson believed in the importance of unity in painting. MacColl, for example, himself looked to historic precedent when quoting Sir Joshua Reynolds on the uselessness of paying attention to detailed particulars

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120. 'International Society', Pall Mall Gazette, 10 May 1899, p.2.

121. Stevenson, Velasquez, p.19.

122. Velasquez, p.75.

which do not assist the expression of the entirety.[123] Quoting Reynolds' remark that excellence in art 'will never be acquired by an artist unless he has the habit of looking upon objects at large, and observing the effect which they have on the eye when it is dilated and employed upon the whole, without seeing any one of the parts distinctly', MacColl comments that this 'is the method of Impressionism'. And throughout Velasquez, Stevenson follows MacColl in asserting that Impressionism is an art form predicated on the notion of unity: such unity can 'lift truth into poetry';[124] it is the ensemble of a scene which 'hypnotises and fascinates an impressionist as if it were a real, personal, and indivisible entity and not a mere sum of small quantities'.[125]

When it came to explaining the technical bases of Impressionism, Rashdall, before his early death in 1888, made an attempt to enlighten the practising painter and interested reader through the pages of the Artist. P.G. Hamerton, editor of the connoisseurs' magazine, the Portfolio, wrote with some understanding, if only limited sympathy, about the light and colour effects the Impressionists were

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123. D.S.M., 'The Old Water-Colour Society', Spectator, 67, 12 December 1891, p.846.

124. Stevenson, Velasquez, p.19.

125. Velasquez, p.75.

attempting to achieve. But it was MacColl who was the most persistent, patient, and generally accurate presenter of colour theory to the general public.

'The peculiar interest and excitement of modern painting has been the exploring of natural light and colour',[126] he maintained. His wide understanding of the hypotheses of Young and Helmholtz, Rood, Chevreul and others, is clear from two articles in the Saturday Review, 'The Spectral Palette'[127] and 'The Godfathers of Monet',[128] as well as from the section appended to the chapter on Impressionism in Nineteenth Century Art.[129] Moreover, he had the ability to explain to a largely lay readership not just the correct chromatic principles, as he understood them, but, with equal clarity, to lay bare the idiocies inherent in 'ludicrous musical theories, fallacious colour-charts, and spectral palettes',[130] not to mention the pseudo-scientific ideas of harmony, which had dogged the history of colour research. This precise knowledge enabled MacColl to praise or condemn a work on scientific rather than

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126. D.S.M. 'The Academy - II. The Rape of Painting', Saturday Review, XCI, 18 May 1901, p.632.

127. D.S.M., 'The Spectral Palette', Saturday Review, XCI, 9 February 1901, pp.170-1.

128. D.S.M., 'The Godfathers of Monet', Saturday Review, XCI, 23 February 1901, pp.233-4.

129. D.S. MacColl, 'Note on the Spectral Palette and Optical Mixture', Nineteenth Century Art, 1902, pp.166-68.

130. 'The Spectral Palette', Saturday Review, 9 February 1901, p.171.

subjective grounds, an important development in criticism within the non-specialist press. Thus, for example, he attacks pointillisme through showing, concisely, that the supposed "primary" colours of the spectrum are fixed neither in hue nor tone; that if from a spectrum of a given illumination we choose three hues as primaries we cannot match them in pigment, and that the nearest matches will not behave like the spectrum hues in either pigment mixture or optical mixture; and that these pigments will not only not give us by mixture the intermediate hues of the high pitch obtainable in separate pigments, but are even more defective in the lower registers approaching black;[131] 'The setting of the palette in strict imitation of the spectrum seems to me almost as unreasonable as to insist that a cook should build up his dishes from their chemical elements, with the further restriction that he can neither obtain nor combine them in the necessary manner'.[132] When Dewhurst and Mauclair, in their longer works on Impressionism, found it necessary to discuss technical matters, particularly in connection with Monet, their ground had already been prepared for them by MacColl. Such critics of the 1900s as Frank Rutter and Laurence Housman incorporated technical details in their criticism with little hesitation. A vocabulary already prepared, to

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131. 'The Godfathers of Monet', Saturday Review, XCI, 23 February 1901, p.233.

132. 'The Spectral Palette', Saturday Review, XCI, 9 February 1901, p.171.

some extent, to cope with formal concerns was essential to those writers who attempted a sympathetic response to Post-Impressionism.

The third means of combating the opponents of Impressionism was to counter the charges of loose, unfinished drawing. The earlier Impressionist works, in particular those of Manet and Degas, provided an opportunity for the critics to demonstrate 'what stringency of discipline permitted the freer handling of the latter'.[133]

MacColl, reviewing the portfolio of Degas's drawings which had been brought out by Goupil in 1898, asked his readers to remember the extraordinary outburst of ignorance and contempt which had greeted the work of this artist only five years earlier. 'The greatest living virtuoso of drawing' was then accused of being a loose, hasty and impatient sketcher. MacColl, however, directs us to look at his 'sense of formal beauty and vital structure'.[134] Manet, too, was commended by MacColl for his 'love of solid sculpturesque forms'.[135]

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133. Unsigned review 'The New English Art Club', Spectator, 67, 5 December 1891, p.809.

134. D.S.M., 'Arrears of Galleries', Saturday Review, LXXXV, 26 March 1898, p.426.

135. 'Art at the Paris Exhibition - II. Manet', Saturday Review, 22nd September 1900, p.359.

It was Degas, above all, who provided the paradigm for other critics anxious to prove the Impressionists' base in sound draughtsmanship. 'Not in vain was he the pupil of Ingres', remarked a writer - probably Charles Whibley - of an article on the artist in the National Observer.[136] 'In nothing so much does he exhibit his reverence for the austerity of the great masters as in the purification of his method from all that is cumbersome and clumsy'. And Wedmore, reviewing the Grafton Gallery show of 1905, commented of Degas's The Races. Before the Start: 'Draughtsmanship again. The horses are drawn as finely and decisively as on a Greek bas-relief ...'[137] Even those critics who were ill-disposed towards the French artists could have some of their prejudices contradicted by Degas. The Saturday Review's correspondent, looking towards the Impressionists shown at the New English Art Club in 1891 for 'a hearty though not unsympathetic' laugh at their expense was forced to admit that Répétition had 'high executive merit'.[138]

It was this very praising of careful draughtsmanship based on traditional methods which hampered some of the

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136. Unsigned, 'The Folly of Eclecticism', National Observer, IX, 4 March 1893, p.388.

137. Frederick Wedmore, 'Grafton Gallery: Impressionist Figure Painters', Standard, 20 January 1905, p.8.

138. Unsigned review, 'Picture Galleries', Saturday Review, 82, 26 December 1891, p.721.

New Critics in their relationship towards Post-Impressionist art. Pointillisme was particularly unappealing to MacColl since not only did it depend on what he considered the incorrect theory of the divided palette, but its inevitable procedure by tiny dots of colour 'abolishes all fine drawing'.[139] Stevenson shared MacColl's anxiety in this respect. Discussing Pissarro's exhibits at the Grafton in 1899, he noted that 'one should note the loss of structural planes in Pissarro's later spotted style shown here',[140] and query whether he has gained enough to make up for the loss of the tranquil beauty of his earlier landscapes. The technical terms in which the New Critics encouraged their readers to think about painting were not flexible enough to deal with evolving modes of applying paint to canvas.

Despite the efforts of MacColl, Stevenson, and other critics to explain the principles of Impressionism to the English public, protests against the French artists continued. The same old terms of condemnation were repeatedly trotted out. In 1894, for example, the Sketch referred to their quips and cranks and eccentric moods,

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139. 'The Spectral Palette', p.171.

140. R.A.M.S., 'Exhibitions: The Grafton Gallery', Pall Mall Gazette, 12 June 1899, p.3.

their 'perversions of inspiration', their 'out-Heroding Herod for pure ugliness' sake', and their tendency to paint 'every object in Nature, whether man, woman, or cockroach, in the most hideous aspect it is possible to conceive them'.[141] But by the end of the century, the Impressionists no longer scandalised, even if their methods and ways of seeing appeared to be feeding only sluggishly into more recent art. 'It seems strange', wrote Stevenson of Monet in 1899, 'to remember that the gentle, fastidious folk of the New English Art Club went mad at one time over the almost rude naturalism of this great, unaffected prophet of nature'.[142] To some extent, the critics' campaign to achieve respectability for their protégées had succeeded, but they did not, on their own admission, seem to have bred much discrimination, whether among exhibition organisers or the general public. 'A few years ago', commented MacColl in 1898, 'London took flight before a Degas, of all things; the other day the same London, with sad cultured eagerness, went to study Lautrec's Moulin Rouge at Goupil's, and no one blushed'.[143] The current Guildhall exhibition was bred, he considered, of

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141. Unsigned, 'The Art of the Day', Sketch, IV, 3 January 1894, p.529.

142. 'The International Society', Pall Mall Gazette, 10 May 1899, p.2.

143. D.S.M., 'French Pictures at the Guildhall', Saturday Review, LXXV, 18 June 1898, p.813.

thoughtless eclecticism. If one particularly likes Renoir, then Puvis de Chavannes should seem a tedious pedant; conversely, to an admirer of Puvis, Renoir must appear a sentimental charlatan. Moreover, if someone really appreciated Monet, 'he would take care to find less frowzy examples'. As it is, the exhibition 'is like nothing so much as a resurrection of ancient school treats, the buns, the ginger-beer, the toffee of bygone salons'.[144]

As I have already mentioned, those critics who had associated themselves most closely with the Impressionists' earlier work showed only muted enthusiasm for their more recent productions. MacColl made his personal preferences clear in a review of the International Exhibition at Knightsbridge in 1899, when he claimed that the inclusion in this show of Manet's Musicians Ambulants and Whistler's Piano Room demonstrated that something had been lost in art since the 1860s. For all his reputation as a New Critic, for all his importance in conveying the principles behind impressionist art to the general public, MacColl emerges, by the end of the century, as being somewhat conservative in his artistic priorities. What was lacking for him in the new works being produced was 'the sculpturesque sense of form, the grasp of a solid world of things in the

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144. D.S.M. 'French Pictures at the Guildhall', Saturday Review, 18 June 1898, p.813.

round".[145] The inevitable result was that "the art in the hands of the followers is in a state of decadence".[146] Although MacColl goes on to make some ambiguously vague remarks about the later Impressionists and their use of aerial forms in painting, never quite venturing to place value judgements on them, it is clear that by now the early works of the Impressionists he admired the most, Manet and Degas, had themselves become a historically sited standard by which to judge more recent work. What MacColl was totally unable to grasp or accept was, potentially, the key concept which transformed much twentieth-century avant-garde painting: namely, the fact that the canvas surface is unquestionably irredeemably flat. He was as firm an adherent to the notion of linear progress, as unsympathetic to rupturing established criteria, as many far more conservative critics. The difference between him and them lay in the degree to which not only had he demonstrated that the Impressionists belonged to the line of tradition, but in the manner in which he fully and seriously discussed theoretical questions in his criticism.

Yet if the Impressionists no longer shocked the majority of the gallery visiting public, examples of their work were not particularly familiar to those who were not

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145. D.S.M., 'The International Exhibition', Saturday Review, LXXXVII, 27 May 1899, p.651.

146. 'The International Exhibition', p.651.

also acquainted with French or American collections: 'Monet is more familiar in American backwood towns than here',[147] complained MacColl in 1901. Cooper carefully demonstrates how slowly English collectors began to purchase Impressionist paintings within the private sphere.[148] Their absence from public galleries led to the fierce campaign of Rutter, MacColl and others to acquire some of these works for the nation.[149] When the paintings did appear in exhibitions, this enabled the principles which had been articulated in the serious art criticism of the eighties and nineties to be restated and consolidated. This was especially true on the occasions of the Hanover Gallery exhibition of January 1901 and, notably, of the huge - 315 exhibit - show organised by Durand-Ruel at the Grafton Gallery in 1905. There was, after all, relatively little new innovatory art to be seen in this country in these years, whether home-produced or Continental in origin. The late 1890s onwards was, to all appearances, 'a slack-water time', with 'little talent and less direction for it', where 'nothing is pressed to danger-point, and everybody

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147. D.S.M., 'Impressionists in London', Saturday Review, XCI, 26 January 1901, p.106.

148. See above, foot note 73.

149. See Rutter, Art in My Time, pp.101-120; Frank Rutter, 'Round the Galleries', Sunday Times, 22 January 1905, p.4; Sunday Times, 29 January 1905, p.4; Sunday Times, 26 March 1905, p.5.

retires convinced of the justice of his neighbour's observations'.[150]

Durand-Ruel's 1905 exhibition was by far the largest selection of Impressionist art ever to be seen in England. It attracted a large number of spectators: 'over eleven thousand people visited the exhibition, a larger number than had visited any two exhibitions in the same galleries for many years past',[151] and provoked a large amount of press comment. Laurence Housman, writing in the Manchester Guardian, claimed that in this, 'perhaps the most important collection of French art that has been seen in London for a generation', there was scarcely anything not worth studying. Nor does this simply depend on historical interest, with the Impressionists representing an interesting episode in recent art: rather, their 'tenets are still the tenets of a militant school out of which we may expect further developments and fresh reputations to arise'.[152] The St. James's Gazette noted the 'very interesting exhibition of pictures' and claimed that, through the efforts of Durand-Ruel, prejudice against these artists had now been broken down. Nonetheless, the critic singles

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150. D.S.M., 'The New English Art Club', Saturday Review, LXXXVI 19 November 1898, p.668.

151. 'Round the Galleries', Sunday Times, 26 March 1905, p.5.

152. Laurence Housman, 'French Pictures in London: Two Kinds of Impressionism', Manchester Guardian, 17 January 1905, p.5.

out certain dangers in their work - 'the unconscious passing from realism to vulgarism and exaggeration, the expenditure of splendid energy and magnificent colour on unworthy subjects', and hints that one element which has rendered this art potentially unacceptable in this country is the violence of its tonality. Thus Monet's 'luminous, hazy effects are more comprehensible than his midday colouring, which is almost too patchy and violent for English taste'.[153] The Daily Telegraph, on the other hand, was somewhat more cautious than these two papers. The success of Manet, Degas, Monet and Renoir 'with the general public, with the lovers of art as an essential expression of nature, is unexpectedly great, though those opposed to them in principle and practice may - perhaps not unnaturally - continue to shift and shudder, and lift their skirts in sadness and disgust'.[154]

Yet despite the relatively enthusiastic press comment which greeted the 1905 Durand-Ruel exhibition, few works found purchasers. Writing in 1933, Frank Rutter's memory may have been unduly pessimistic with regard to the turn-stile figures, but his comment carries a certain weight:

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153. Unsigned review, 'French Impressionists at the Grafton Galleries', St. James's Gazette, 17 January 1905, p.18.

154. Unsigned review, 'Whistler at the New Gallery', Daily Telegraph, 23 February 1905, p.11.

'The truth must be told. Except among a few hundred of artists, art students and enthusiasts, the Impressionist Exhibition made very little impression on London or England. The general public was hardly aware of its existence, and it received nothing like the public attention that was given five years later to the Post-Impressionist Exhibition of 1910'.[155]

The reasons for this are relatively easy to establish. Impressionism was no longer a new form, capable of shocking or surprising, of being turned into an item of general controversy. It had filtered into the English exhibitions of the previous twenty years in sufficient quantity to excite critical comment and explanation which had familiarised the public with the concepts at issue. But, on the other hand, it had not proved itself the type of modern French painting which most readily attracted English buyers. The dictum that a painting should tell a story was slow to sink from prominence, and had, in particular, encouraged the appreciation of Bastien-Lepage and his followers. It was this strand of French painting, rather than Impressionism. which had, moreover, fed most directly into English art, both into private collections, and into the productions of the Newlyn school (Clausen, La Thangue, H.S. Tuke, Stanhope

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155. Rutter, Art in My Time, p.120.

Forbes and James Charles), and the Glasgow group (George Henry, John Lavery, James Guthrie, and others). Nevertheless, by 1911, Dewhurst could assert confidently that 'it may be said that we are all impressionists now'.[156] Since much critical comment had been at pains to emphasise the traditional rather than the innovatory qualities of the Impressionist movement, this only served to exaggerate the impact, when it came, of Post-Impressionist art.

Whilst the Saturday Review designated the years around the turn of the century a 'slack-water period' in terms of the production and exhibition of art in England, others pointed out that it was not a particularly lively time for art criticism. By 1905 Stevenson had been dead for five years: whilst MacColl, disillusioned with the latest developments in modern art, was anxious to consolidate the work of previous decades. As already quoted, he wrote in 1931 that 'The first task for a critic in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to champion some of the senior artists still in dispute, Manet, Degas, Whistler, Rodin, the Impressionists and others'.[157] An air of critical lethargy was noted by Joseph Pennell in late 1904. Whilst, he said,

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156. Wynford Dewhurst, 'What is Impressionism?', Contemporary Review, xcix, March 1911, p.302.

157. D.S. MacColl, Confessions of a Keeper, and other Papers, 1931, p.v.

people in the late 1880s and early 1890s 'thought a new era in art criticism had dawned', some of the practitioners had died, some 'grew gradually conventional in their own prejudices ... the state of British art criticism is seven times worse than it was before'.[158]

Yet, even at this time, not all criticism was in fact moribund in its attempt to present new forms of art to the public, nor was it without a certain amount of innovatory work as its subject. Three major exceptions to the generalisation which disclaims the existence of innovatory painting in England in the nineteen hundreds can be made: the occasional appearance in exhibitions of works by Cézanne, the foundation of the Allied Artists Association, and, to a lesser extent, the development of Sickert's work.[159]

Sickert's priorities stimulated already existing areas of critical controversy. He was unusual among contemporary British artists for his attention to technical matters. As Harrison states in English Art and Modernism, 'the overall composition, and particularly the disposition of tone, are attended to with the kind of deliberation reserved for attempts to establish value independent of

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158. Unsigned review, 'Art and Artists', Star, 27 December 1904, p.1.

159. For an admirable account of the latter two cases, see Charles Harrison, English Art and Modernism 1900-1939, 1981, Chapter 1.

occasion'.[160] Moreover, the content of some of his paintings revived the nineteenth century arguments about suitable subjects. Almost all his works depicted ordinary, undistinguished people - 'the more our art is serious, the more it will tend to avoid the drawing room, and stick to the kitchen',[161] he said - and this tendency itself was interpretable as a diversion from the proper matter of art. Additionally, the Camden Town Murder series (1908-9) were particularly condemned for their theme, and for their juxtaposition of clothed man and naked woman.

Sickert was one of the artists who assisted Frank Rutter in setting up the Allied Artists Association in 1908, along with Spencer Gore and Lucien Pissarro. This Association followed the pattern of the French Salon des Indépendants with its large, eclectic, jury-free exhibitions, which were held in the Albert Hall from 1908-14. But more important than the criticism which accrued to these shows was that writing which attempted to explain the work of Cézanne to the public. He exhibited at the 1905 Grafton show, the 1906 and 1908 Internationals, and at the Modern French Artists exhibition in Brighton in 1910, an interesting

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160. Harrison, English Art and Modernism, p.33.

161. Walter Sickert, 'Idealism', Art News, I, 12 May 1910, p.217. Reprinted in A Free House!, p. 208

precursor of the later Post-Impressionist exhibition of the same year. In the general press, Cézanne tended to suffer, since he was judged according to the same criteria as the Impressionists themselves. This was bound to happen when MacColl and others had established standards based on truthfulness in colour rendering, draughtsmanship, and modelling ability. In 1905 the Daily Mail critic, after commenting on the work of Manet, Monet, and Renoir, wrote that 'Cézanne, after these masters, strikes one as an exceptionally able amateur',[162] to which Rutter added: 'That was putting it very kindly, even generously, for few would admit at the time that Cézanne was "exceptionally able", though many would agree that he looked like an amateur'.[163]

The first generation of New Critics could see the theoretical implications lying behind Cézanne's work, but clearly did not approve. MacColl commented that in his painting, 'the simplification becomes almost ludicrous'. Never mind the details of the silly construction of the suburban villa :

> ... and the jarring forms of the trees in the garden, but take the blots of lovely tone that, without the slightest premeditation, these misfortunes offer to the sunlight.[164]

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162. Unsigned review, 'The Great Impressionists', Daily Mail, 17 January 1905, p.3.

163. Rutter, Art in My Time, p.112.

164. D.S.M., 'Art at the Paris Exhibition - II. Manet', Saturday Review, XC, 22 September 1900, p.359.

Yet rephrased positively by Roger Fry, ludicrous simplification was to become 'extreme brevity of ... synthesis'.[165] Other later critics, too, were to point to the difficulty of simplification, citing Dürer's reputed death-bed comment that he had begun to see how simple nature was. 'Simplification of nature necessitates an exact knowledge of the complications of the forms simplified', wrote one who signed himself S F-G, in the Art News. It is a 'geometrical simplicity which design demands',[166] hardly one likely to appeal to somebody believing that design is not in itself the end of art. Some of Fry's remarks about Cézanne - whom he saw as rediscovering the 'principles of structural design and harmony'[167] which underlay earlier 'great art'; describing his 'great advance in intellectual content'[168] over the Impressionists, sound as though he was extolling the same ideals of historical tradition and linear progress as MacColl. But it was the expressive qualities in Cézanne's work, qualities which were enhanced by his command of form, which attracted Fry the most. Perceiving these, he came to speak of Cézanne's painting as the antithesis of Impressionism.

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165. Maurice Denis, 'Cézanne - I', translated and introduced by Roger Fry, Burlington Magazine, XVI, January 1910, p.207.

166. S.F.G.,'Exhibitions. Cezanne Gauguin Van Gogh, & Co., at the Grafton Galleries', Art News, II, 15 December 1910, p.19.

167. Roger Fry, 'Art and Life', published in Vision and Design, 1920, from notes of a 1917 lecture to the Fabian Society, p. 8.

168. Roger E. Fry, 'The Last Phase of Impressionism', Letters to the Editor, Burlington Magazine, XII, March 1908, p.375.

In general, however, the supporters of Post-Impressionism, including Fry himself, were initially unwilling to stress the break with artistic tradition which these artists represented. Aware that Impressionist art had, in the opinion of the more avant-garde public, become acceptable as a standard of recent excellence, they were anxious to press this to their advantage, stating that the new painting, with its decorative elements preponderant at the expense of the representative, was a direct outcome of Impressionism, taking rise among the Impressionists, even if 'it implies the direct contrary of the Impressionist conception of art'.[169] This point was re-iterated on the first page of the 1910 Grafton catalogue. Indeed, at the time, the Athenaeum's critic (probably Fry) warned sternly against those writers who found that the greatest attraction about these painters :

> ...is that their acceptance would seem to imply a wiping-out of our whole system of aesthetics - a cleaning of the slate and a fresh start.[170]

Indeed, he concludes, to people greedy for novelty, the pictures 'will probably be rather a corrupting influence'.[171]

However, the attempt of certain New Critics to examine Post-Impressionism within the context of the history of

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169. 'Cézanne - I', Burlington Magazine, January 1910, p.207.

170. Unsigned review, 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists', Athenaeum, No. 4333, 12 November 1910, p.598.

171. 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists', p.599.

aesthetic reception, finished by implicity using the reference points of history to emphasise these artists' clear break with tradition. Finberg initially seems to be pleading with the readers of the Star to treat the Post-Impressionists with some sympathy, by calling on their memories: Millet, Whistler, Corot, Delacroix, Ingres, the Pre-Raphaelites and Rodin were all initially jeered at and hated. Hence, one can see that it is unpolitic to be too quick to dismiss: the National Art Collections Fund may well be collecting subscriptions with which to buy these works in twenty years time.[172] Yet he admits that, after giving the Neo and Post-Impressionists careful, respectful consideration, whilst admitting the sincerity and seriousness of the artists' intentions, he is left cold and hostile by the Grafton Gallery exhibition of 1910. With what appears to be genuine bafflement, rather than a desire to progress by means of cheap jibes, he noted that such artists as Gauguin, Matisse and Van Gogh 'want to represent the sensation of savages, children, or madmen', to go back to an ulta-primitive directness of vision: 'in a word, to deconceptional art'.[173] This lack of intelligible

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172. A.J. Finberg, 'Art and Artists: This Latest Thing from Paris', Star, 8 November 1910, p.2.

173. 'This Latest Thing from Paris', p.2.

content, in a work which, he believes, must hence be the product of 'men with abnormally developed anti-social and anti-intellectual instincts'[174] makes the painting almost impossible to write about. And so he stops. But in his realisation that the essence of the art lies in its deconceptional nature, he is at least providing some means of understanding it - if not of enjoying or approving of it - for his readership.

Finsberg's reference to primitive art deserves stressing. Whilst the praisers of the Impressionists had looked to earlier practitioners of Western Art for the legitimisation of their arguments, the promulgators of Post-Impressionism encouraged their readers to look not just backwards but sideways. Frank Rutter, reviewing the 1910 Paris autumn salon, admitted that these 'ultra-modern painters', who no longer call science to their aid, insisting no longer, for example, on the intrinsic truth of their colour, may be called 'extremists'. If, however, they are to be given credit for :

> ...sanity and sincerity of attention, you must not judge their works by the standards of Leighton and Bouguereau, but by what you have seen in museums of Polynesian and negro curiosities.[175]

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174. 'This Latest Thing from Paris', p.3.

175. Frank Rutter, 'Round the Galleries: The Autumn Salon', Sunday Times, 2 October 1910, p.12.

He repeated this view when faced with the Grafton Gallery exhibition later in the year: Gauguin, he said, should not be judged by the standards of Manet, any more than Manet by the standards of Ingres.[176] Indeed, he understandably queried whether it was helpful to the understanding of two different movements - that of Manet and his followers (Signac, Seurat) who aimed at a truthful understanding of things seen, and of the more modern painters - to mix them up in the same exhibition.

The Post-Impressionist Exhibition of 1910 has been well covered elsewhere.[177] The many antagonistic critics formed a tempting target for those who supported the new French tendencies. As the Art News commented:

> The paintings have been so ill received that one feels more ready to pour a stream of violent abuse on the heads of the critics and public than attempt a piece of more or less intelligent criticism.[178]

Yet the favourable criticism which did appear in the press - largely from the pens of Fry and Rutter - joined with articles on Cézanne and Van Gogh, the introductory notes to the

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176. Frank Rutter, 'Round the Galleries', Sunday Times, 13 November 1910, p.14. Rutter repeated this criticism on the Art News, 15 November 1910, p.13, and much of it also appears in the final chapter of Revolution in Art.

177. See especially: - Ian Dunlop, The Shock of the New, 1972 ; Royal Academy, Post Impressionism, introduction by Alan Bowness, catalogue edited by John House and Mary Anne Stevens, 1979 ; Barry Bullen: Post Impressionism: The English Critical Response (forthcoming)

178. 'Cézanne Gauguin Van Gogh', Art News, 15 December 1910, p.19.

Grafton Gallery catalogue, and Rutter's own booklet Revolution in Art to provide an informed and sympathetic basis from which to develop an understanding of this new painting.

One technique used by whose who wished to emphasise that there was much worth studying in Post-Impressionism was to go half way towards meeting a potentially suspicious readership, asking initially the almost despairing rhetorical question, phrased by Rutter:

> How can one explain or justify the Salon d'Automne to readers unacquainted with the later development of modern art?[179]

briefly travelling with their eyes through rooms full of 'horrible monstrosities' - a cannon-ball floating in a sea of mustard which the catalogue reveals to be a bowl of tulips; 'some semblance to a human face composed of and emerging from a geometrical medley of dull yellowish-green triangles, segments, and rhomboids',[180] then claiming their own boldness at taking on this garish, strange medley and, with pioneering spirit, attempting to introduce the reader to some fundamental concepts. Thus Rutter pointed out on

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179. 'Round the Galleries: The Autumn Salon', Sunday Times, 2 October 1910, p.12.

180. 'Round the Galleries: The Autumn Salon', p.12.

this occasion that what was to be looked for was emotion, not intellectuality; that Picasso, Matisse and Derain are smashing the fallacy that imitation is art, just as Whistler, thirty years earlier, had fought, struggled and kicked against the idea that every picture must tell a story. The shining virtue of the ultra-modern movement, in Rutter's eyes, was the passion for simplicity: 'To give a maximum of expression by a minimum of means: that, I confess, appears to me a noble ambition for any artist to possess'.[181] Understanding of a painter's aims and ideals, proclaimed Rutter in full intentionalist faith, is essential to any pronouncement on the success or failure of his or her performance, and it is to this end, he explains, that he informed his readers. Subjectivity was not, for him, in question when it came to art criticism: 'dislike or bias is the one thing which should be ruled out of the judicial inquiry that fair criticism should be'.[182] The principles expounded, he proceeded to give an example of their application, taking Matisse's *La Danse* :

> It is idle ... to say that you do not like the raw blue and green against which the red figures of Henri Matisse are dancing. It is more pertinent to observe that those same figures are tremendously expressive of life and movement, and are executed

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181. 'Round the Galleries: The Autumn Salon', p.12.

182. 'Round the Galleries: The Autumn Salon', p.12.

> with an amazing simplicity. Here is a diagonal figure sweeping through the air, here an upright twirling through the dance in an ecastasy of supple posturing, and all expressed in a brick-red monotone confined by half-a-dozen swirling outlines. You may like it or dislike it, but to deny its emotional force or the mastery of its execution is to confess a lack of sensibility and an ignorance of the value of simplicity.[183]

As much as the earlier New Critics, Rutter was anxious to make logical argument, rather than personal response, the key note of his criticism.

In many ways, the remaining earlier New Critics - MacColl in particular, and, to a lesser extent, Finberg - were more formidable opponents of Post-Impressionism than the hysterical detractors in the daily press, since they had already fought their battles, and had come to be respected as thoughtful, intellectual writers. The remark made by the Athenaeum's reviewer that the Post-Impressionists 'may usefully serve to remind the proud of intellect that art is not always effective in proportion as it is intellectual, or even in proportion as it is grammatical',[184] serves as a risposte not only to the older critics' reserved attitudes, but to their beliefs about the relationship between art and

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183. 'Round the Galleries: The Autumn Salon', p.12.

184. Unsigned review, 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists', Athenaeum, No. 4333, 12 November 1910, p.599.

the organisation of verbal language.

Even more than Impressionism, the new art forms shown at the Grafton were dependent on the written word. The catalogue furnished an introduction which was a necessary adjunct to the understanding and interpretation of the works on show. The Athenaeum deemed the Notes to the exhibition catalogue on the whole well-written, but declared that they did not take the reader very far towards defining the aims of the Post-Impressionists. Nevertheless, they served to show precisely how these painters differed from their Impressionist predecessors. Whilst the earlier artists insisted firmly on the importance of rendering an exact impression at an exact moment, often, the Notes maintained, they completely failed to express the essence and associations of their subjects, 'that emotional significance which lies in things, and is the most important subject matter of art'.[185] Desmond MacCarthy gave brief sketches of the styles of each of the major artists exhibiting, stressing the pattern making of Cézanne, the morbid emotionalism of Van Gogh, the theoretical decorativism of Gauguin, and Matisse's search 'for an abstract harmony of line, for rhythm'.[186]

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185. Unsigned introduction, 'The Post-Impressionists', catalogue to the Grafton Gallery exhibition, Manet and the Post-Impressionists, 1910, p.9.

186. 'The Post-Impressionists', p.11.

In drawing the public's attention to the connection between their painting and that of primitive artists or of young children, he described the aims of these last two practitioners as 'putting a line round a mental conception of the object' rather than attempting 'to represent what the eye perceives'.[187] It was this isolation of the conception of the object which MacColl particularly criticised. For him, it broke down the system of structures which constituted the language of art, reducing art to a kind of emblemism. He accused Fry of having started the will-of-the-wisp chase for 'a painting that should use symbols free from particularity like words, as Mallarmé sought for verse that should use words and their associations freely, almost like music'.[188] But painted symbols of their own can supply no 'argument' (a word used by MacColl which perhaps implies that he believes paintings must have some temporal, cause and effect relations with the actual world):

> ...they represent the nouns of speech, but not the verbs, nor any conjunctions except 'and'; while Mr. Fry and his school are taking away most of the adjectives.[189]

An impoverished, incomplete language, indeed, for MacColl.

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187. 'The Post-Impressionists', p.12.

188. D.S. MacColl, 'A Year of Post-Impressionism', Nineteenth Century and After, lxxi, 1912, p.300.

189. 'A Year of Post-Impressionism', p.300.

Rutter's pamphlet, Revolution in Art, was, like the catalogue introduction, a direct by-product of the exhibition: 'hastily written in defence of certain artists whose work, at the moment of writing, is being exhibited in London for the first time'.[190] Where he differs significantly from Fry, and, for that matter, from almost all major contemporary art critics since Ruskin, is in linking the new paintings with the social and political climate of 1910. He argues that this is revolutionary art, not in the popular conception of a picture portraying 'red-capped incendiaries threatening and ill-treating exquisitely attired aristocrats',[191] but in visual terms. But, 'indirectly it may not be altogether unconnected with the present unrest in politics and economics', since art is 'the mirror of life'.[192] Rutter used the fact of this exhibition to make his own democratic point: these artists were, in a sense, making their own declaration of independence; 'they proclaim the right of the artist, as of other human beings, to liberty of action, to freedom of expression'.[193] Like Fry and MacCarthy, he stresses that

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190. Frank Rutter, 'Foreword', Revolution in Art, no page number.

191. Revolution in Art, p.1.

192. Revolution in Art, p.1.

193. Revolution in Art, p.2.

the end to which these artists use their freedom of expression is in underlining the notion that it 'is the function of art not merely to state a fact, but to communicate an emotion';[194] to 'deliver a message to the soul of man'.[195]

Writing in 1912, MacColl greeted the critical response to Post-Impressionism with a certain cynicism. The critics were, he said, this time determined to be on the winning side. 'A few bravely, if wistfully, declared themselves fossils; some were uneasily upon the fence; the rest were practising, a little asthmatically, the phases of an unknown tongue'.[196] The new religion, with Fry as its chief prophet, had been established within three months: 'the old gods being bundled without ceremony into the lumber-room, and the ardent weathercocks of the Press pointing steadily for the moment into the paulo-post-futurum'.[197] Yet even if Post-Impressionism and the critical writing which supported it could be spoken of scathingly as an unknown tongue, and the whole style as breaking accepted rules of artistic grammar, Fry still used

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194. Revolution in Art, pp.3-4.

195. Revolution in Art, p.8.

196. MacColl, 'A Year of Post-Impressionism', p.285.

197. 'A Year of Post-Impressionism', p.285.

the concept of language to explain the new ideals. In a lecture given at the close of the Grafton Gallery exhibition, and reprinted in the Fortnightly, he postulated the current artistic problem as that of discovering 'the visual language of the imagination':[198] that is, to discover what arrangements of form and colour are calculated to stir the imagination most deeply through the stimulus given to the sense of sight. He does not, by the term 'visual language of the imagination', seem to be seeking to suggest anything necessarily abstract: rather, he underlined that the problem was inseparably connected with rendering the actual world of nature, in the manner, however, in which it furnishes the visual images which make up so much of our inner and contemplative life. What these Post-Impressionist artists were gaining for future imaginations was :

> . . . the right to speak directly to the imagination through images created, not because of their likeness to external nature, but because of their fitness to appeal to the imaginative and contemplative life.[199]

In this lecture Fry posed the hypothesis which he consolidated in his introduction to the catalogue of the

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198. Roger Fry, 'Post Impressionism', Fortnightly Review, LXXXIX, May 1911, p.857.

199. 'Post Impressionism', p.857.

second Post-Impressionism exhibition of 1912.[200] Echoing Haweis, he argued that 'there is no immediately obvious reason why the artist should represent actual things at all, why he should not have a music of line and colour'.[201] He admitted that intense aesthetic pleasure is possible from looking at a pattern, and directed his audience to verify this statement by considering the pottery in the exhibition. Particular rhythms of line, particular harmonies of colour have their spiritual correspondence, he maintains. However, Fry was not yet ready to admit the potential strength of the play upon the emotions exercised by the pure effects of light, colour and form alone. Such effects, he claimed, were weak compared with the effect of pure sound. Hence the painter must intensify his appeal, believed Fry, through calling up reminiscences and remembered images

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200. The 'logical extreme' of the French Post-Impressionists' method 'would undoubtedly be the attempt to give up all resemblance to natural form, and to create a purely abstract language form - a visual music; and the later works of Picasso show this clearly enough. They may or may not be successful in their attempt. It is too early to be dogmatic on the point, which can only be decided when our sensibilities to such abstract form have been more practised than they are at present. But I would suggest that there is nothing ridiculous in the attempt to do this'. Fry, 'The French Group', catalogue to Second Post Impressionist Exhibition, 1912, pp.26-27.

201. Fry, 'Post Impressionism', p.862.

of visible or visually conceivable objects out of the whole range of the visible world - an action which does not necessarily entail, however, giving the natural object an illusive likeness. Incorporating these remembered images, though, the painter must be as careful as the poet who avoids allowing some word of which, perhaps, 'the sense may demand to destroy the ictus of his rhythm'.[202] Fry uses poetry as a guideline here not as a commonly accepted touchstone of cultural excellence, but simply because it represents a technically complicated form of expression.

For MacColl, this type of acknowledgement of technical complexity did not serve to validate the criticism of Fry, Rutter and the others. Rather, he continued to characterise the Post Impressionists and their supporters as reformists rather than revolutionaries:

> Personal feeling, then, is the note of the movement, and the 'Post-Impressionists', therefore, are not classic at all, but extreme Romantics.[203]

Above all, he was not prepared to accept the idea of the loss of the exterior subject, not the subjectivism involved in the practice and consumption of this art. He quoted

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202. 'Post Impressionism', p.863.

203. MacColl, 'A Year of Post-Impressionism', p.292.

Maurice Denis's article on Cézanne in the Burlington Magazine, where the Frenchman described Cézanne imagining a sketch, assembling 'colours and forms without any literary preoccupation: his aim is nearer to that of a carpet weaver than of a Delacroix',[204] and also the supporting remarks of Sérusier which Denis incorporated into the same article: ' "the purpose, even the concept of the object represented disappears before the charm of his coloured forms".'[205] Yet MacColl believed that beauty in painting is impossible without significance, and that the existence of beauty in design or colour does not constitute significance in its own right. Moreover, he did not accept that signification of emotion is anything other than a means of conveyance, certainly not an end in itself. Once again, MacColl made an analogy between art and language to convey his point. We could, he thought, test his hypothesis by asking a good reader to recite a poem in a language known to him yet not to ourselves:

> The result, if the language is sonorous, is gently pleasant for a very short time; soon, even for the most poetical, it becomes unbearably monotonous, so much is the virtue of poetry a combination of sound-beauty, fit and ingenious arrangement of words and ideas, weight of feeling and significance. The same is true of painting. The most decorative of our oil-paintings, if we see them at such an angle that the 'subject' is not grasped, are poor things

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204. 'A Year of Post Impressionism', p.287.

205. 'A Year of Post Impressionism', p.287.

> beside a rich carpet or enamel ... If, then, Cézanne had ever succeeded in getting rid of subject, he would not thereby have become a 'classic' painter, or anything like it; he would have ceased to be a painter at all.[206]

But MacColl's argument depends on his faith in the primacy of the written and spoken word. However, if feelings and emotions can be said to exist independently, or at least anterior to verbal expression, then, contrary to MacColl's belief that the new art was attempting to convey something as concrete as the nouns which partially constitute speech, it was in fact escaping from participation in such a codifying practice. This he did not grasp.

Nonetheless, the Post Impressionist painting of 1910, and the artistic developments of the succeeding years, quickly demonstrated that it became the task of the critic, or the responsive spectator, to put into words what had not previously been verbally conveyed, but which was now presented in the system of relations apparent on any one canvas. The new art could no longer be conceived of as the re-interpretation of a pre-existent verbal order; new art criticism no longer consisted of a repossession of this order. Hence the critic's role was to become both

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206. 'A Year of Post Impressionism', p.288.

more creative - and certainly, at times, more subjective - and also more concerned with the task of primary verbal identification, with the description of what is indeed taking place on the immediate site of production, the flat canvas surface.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER VIII: THE FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN ART CRITICISM

1910 may seem a strange date on which to end, rather than begin, a thesis dealing with the problems of writing about contemporary art. The exhibition 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists', followed by the second Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1912, and, to a lesser extent, the Futurist exhibition in the same year, did far more to stimulate press discussion about current developments in painting than any previous shows had done.

Moreover, other artistic events of 1910 had foregrounded the formalist aspects of criticism on which an understanding of Post-Impressionist art and its successors depended. The Burlington Magazine's publication of Fry's translation of Maurice Denis's article on Cézanne, describing and explaining an art 'in which the decorative elements preponderate at the expense of the representative',[1] has already been mentioned. Although historical precedence is still brought forward in justification, the emphasis has changed. In Fry's introduction to this article, the older progressive critics' corner-stone of Velasquez, with his powerful discriminations of light and shade pressed into the treatment of a representative subject, is explicitly subordinated to the values of

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1. Roger E. Fry, 'Introductory Note' to 'Cézanne - I', (Maurice Denis), Burlington Magazine, XVI, January 1910, p.207.

El Greco, with his capacity for 'direct decorative expression'.[2] Further critical writing which stressed formalist considerations appeared in relation to two other exhibitions of the year, in particular: the Anglo-Japanese show held in Shepherd's Bush in the spring of 1910, and the 'Modern French Artists' on view at Brighton Public Art Galleries from June to August. 'Purely aesthetic' qualities appeared far easier to recognise and accept in art which came from a different cultural tradition. Additionally, certain critics drew explicit links with the principles which could be seen to be in operation in this Eastern art, and current emphases in art criticism. Thus The Times' reviewer says that:

> Oriental art will give fresh authority to those principles which we are now discovering in the primitive Italians -

in Fry's work on Giotto, for example. He goes on to praise certain works for being 'marvels of abstract design'; for their 'sheer force of design, a design so balanced and so precise that it seems like a kind of poetic geometry', for the deliberate systems of selection and formulae of design which enhance this decorative art'.[3]

The Brighton exhibition included works by Degas, Renoir, Monet, Matisse, Vuillard, Signac, Gauguin, Bonnard, Serusier

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2. 'Introductory Note', p. 207.

3. Unsigned review, 'Japanese pictures at the Japan-British Exhibition', The Times, 16 May 1910, p.4.

and Redon. The catalogue introduction by the organiser, Robert Dell, drew heavily on Denis's article and Fry's introduction to it, although, unlike later critics, Dell attempted to draw a relatively smooth progression and clear historical lineage between the Impressionists and these later artists. The Times critic, again, was largely sympathetic towards, and knowledgeable about, the works on show. As in the case of the Japanese art, he looked back, by way of comparison, to the early Renaissance, to Giotto, Piero della Francesca and the Sienese school. Like Dell, he too saw an 'entirely logical development' from the works of the Impressionists, 'impressionist curiosity about new aspects of reality and new methods of representing them' giving way to 'a curiosity about new methods of expressing the emotions aroused by reality', and went on to stress the importance placed by painters of this 'new movement' on rhythm and colour, in particular. And, in emphasising how expression is replacing representation, he finds in these new works 'the reason why they are so unintelligible to the public, who miss in their works those facts which they expect to find in a picture'.[4]

This question of public intelligibility and accessibility became a crucial one. When P.J. Konody, reviewing the 1911 exhibition of Cézanne and Gauguin's works at the Stafford

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4. Unsigned review, 'Modern French Pictures at Brighton', The Times, 11 July 1910, p. 12.

gallery for the Observer, drew attention to the speed with which Post-Impressionism and its attendant critical language had been accepted within England, he confines this acceptance to an unmeasurable sector, the 'intelligent public':

> Scarcely a year has gone by since Gauguin, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Matisse and their artistic kinship burst upon the peace of the land at that memorable Grafton Gallery exhibition which caused so much derision, amusement, indignation and exaggerated enthusiasm. Scarcely a year - but the battle is over and won, and Post-Impressionism has taken firm root among us. We have become so accustomed to it - and to the new jargon it has introduced into art criticism - that the exhibition of paintings by Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin is in no way bewildering and does not impress one as at all abnormal. Another year or so, and the intelligent public, including the enthusiastic apostles of Post-Impressionism, will be able to judge between the success and failure of this new art instead of accepting or rejecting everything indiscriminately.[5]

'Intelligent' has, in this context, a highly specialised sense, of course, since it is implicitly linked to those who not only deliberately acquaint themselves with the new works through exhibitions, but also have the opportunity and inclination to learn about the importance of verbal and spatial relationships, for example, from the vocabulary and arguments put forward by such critics as Konody, and found in such specialist, avant-garde and culturally élitist journals as New Age and Rhythm.

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5. P.G. Konody, 'Cézanne and Gauguin at the Stafford', Observer, 3 December 1911, p.10.

The critical emphasis which made it possible to explain - indeed which significantly supported - Post-Impressionism was increasingly developed outside journalism and reviews, hence bypassing the demands of the newspapers and weekly journals for contemporaneity, rapid copy, and compression. Roger Fry and Clive Bell rapidly consolidated their aesthetic theories, but were under no pressure to do so in relation to contemporary art alone. Bell's concept of Significant Form was designed to explain the common quality in all visual art objects that stir the aesthetic emotions: it was a concept where the stress fell not on the presentation of narrative, representational and symbolic features on canvas but on the manner in which 'lines and colours combined in a particular way', the satisfaction of 'certain forms and relations of forms'.[6] Bell's gospel of pure aesthetics had, indeed :

> . . . given baffled connoisseurs a new catchword, 'significant form', a new text by which they could assess nicely the merits of all works of art, past, present and future.[7]

As with Konody's emphasis on the 'intelligent public', Rutter's use of the word 'connoisseurs' is important. For this thesis is not a study of the growth of aesthetic theory, a history already well documented with relation to the early decades of this century. Nor is it a history of the primary

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6. Clive Bell, Art, 1914, p.8.

7. Rutter, Art in My Time, p. 159.

objects of visual art. Although it has, necessarily, chronicled the growth of the specialist art periodicals, the most important part of its argument has rested on an examination of the treatment of contemporary art in the press designed for the non-practising, non-coterie art public. Certainly, after 1910, both Bell and Fry went on publishing in magazines designed for the non-specialist reader, as well as in the unmistakably connoisseur-orientated Burlington: Bell in the New Republic, Athenaeum, and New Statesman; Fry in the Athenaeum, and, much more infrequently, for Vogue. But none of these outlets seem to have reached audiences as large as those suggested by the circulation figures of the Saturday Review and the Spectator at the end of the C19th, let alone as the daily and Sunday press. What's more, it was the volume publication of these men - Art (1914), Vision and Design (1921), and Transformations (1926), which established their views firmly among the art-orientated public, even considering that some of the chapters had originally appeared, independently, as articles. And, what perhaps differentiates these new theorists most sharply from their predecessors is the fact that although closely associated, often as friends, with the practitioners of avant-garde art forms, their ideas are not, on the whole, continually seen to be tried and tested in relation to fresh productions, as had been the practice of Stevenson, MacColl, Rutter, and the other critics discussed in the previous chapter.

So what was the importance of these earlier journalistic critics? Above all, notwithstanding the publishing habits of some of their successors, they established the legitimacy of the serious discussion, in the non-specialist press, of the principles lying behind contemporary art: not just art produced according to traditionally accepted criteria, but that which was trying to establish a re-evaluation of the experience of vision in relation to the objects and illumination of the material world. Despite MacColl's assertion that 'a victory over the Philistines, indeed, is nothing to be proud of; their applause is as unmeaning as their hooting',[8] it is clear that he, Stevenson and the others waged and won an important campaign. By the turn of the century, MacColl himself clearly believed, indeed, that something had been achieved:

> Criticism in almost all the important papers is now independent of the Academy; its latest recruits are now thoroughly informed, scholarly and liberal, in marked contrast to the old type of picturesque reporter, whose ignorance reduced him to the function of an academic tout.[9]

Yet, besides the fact of informed discussion, what, exactly, constituted this achievement?

Firstly, by 1910, there seems a general unwillingness to assume that because something is experimental, unfamiliar,

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8. D.S. MacColl, 'Mr. Whistler's Paintings in Oil', Art Journal, n.s.13, March 1893, p.89.

9. D.S.M., 'Provincial Galleries', Saturday Review, XCI, 22 June 1901, p.798.

that it must be condemned. MacColl's later outraged comments in the face of abstract art show that in practice he became unwilling to take heed of his own warning about the blindness of critics to change, but in relation to the Impressionists, he spoke up for innovation. Once again, he sought historical justification. When Giotto, Masaccio and Donatello gave bone and body to their human subjects, and when Piero della Francesca tried out his understanding of perspective, MacColl argued that 'critics must have shaken the head over the departure of imagination and the intrusion of trivial reality. They were wrong. Each of these new explorations meant for the artists a new flight for the imagination, a fresh excitement about the image',[10] Stevenson countered one specific criticism of the Impressionists - their alleged unnaturalness in painting figures from above - in similar fashion: 'But when it was first introduced did even perspective look natural? ... Artists should not be censured for their admitted carelessness of public opinion, as the most natural view looks unfamiliar to creatures of habit'.[11] This harking back to earlier example helps explain, of course, some of the difficulties experienced by MacColl and Whibley, for instance, when faced with Post-Impressionists and later artistic developments. They, like other Victorian critics, believed that

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10. D.S.M., 'The Academy-II', Saturday Review, XCI, 18 May 1901, p.632.

11. Stevenson, Velasquez, p.51.

one could speak with justification of the progress of art, that it could be measured and described in linear terms, and apparently new practices traced back to identifiable ancestors. This evolutionary attitude implied, among other things, that avant-garde painting could only move forward in one main direction at any given moment. And the heterogenous collection of works shown at the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions, with the additional alternative provided by the Futurists, of course constituted a challenge to this notion. As the twentieth century continued, it became clear that both critic and interested lay spectator alike had to be prepared to accept the existence and equal value of a plurality of aesthetic theories.

The second noticeable achievement of the art critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is closely related to this first development. By 1910, there was an active willingness to expand, alter and invent the language used to describe and explain art. Critics no longer fought shy of neologisms: indeed twentieth century artistic experimentation promoted their rapid coining. Perhaps it was because English-born artists were themselves less adventurous than their European counterparts that the English language nevertheless, lagged behind continental countries

in the employment of a flexible artistic vocabulary. Fry, for one, was still well aware of this inadequacy some eighteen years later, when he maintained that one of the difficulties in writing about French art had always been the absence of English equivalents for some technical words. In 'Words Wanted in Connexion with Art', he searches in vain for satisfactory English renderings of éclat, écriture (not in the Saussurean sense, but referring to the rhythm of the handling of paint), grisaille, nuance, matière ('in the special sense of the quality given to his pigment by an artist') and art pompier, used to describe work which 'appeals to the general public rather than to those familiar with the principles and methods of serious art':[12] to those people who remained antagonistic towards the new art and its attendant vocabulary. They were those members of the public who persisted in demanding a narrative element in their painting; whose modern novelists were Bennett and Wells and Galsworthy, the butt of Virginia Woolf, who in her opposition to their fiction borrowed directly from the vocabulary used in the analysis of impressionist art.

Of course, this paucity of critical vocabulary could be turned to pragmatic ends. A critic could emphasise a painting's

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12. Roger Fry, 'Words Wanted in Connexion with Art', S.P.E. Tract No.XXXI, 1928, pp.330-1.

undesirable incomprehensibility by simply stating that he or she could not find the words to describe it. Or, if they lacked understanding of a certain artistic development, but did not necessarily wish to damn it out of hand, they could act like Frank Rutter, stressing the inadequacy of any verbal means by which the internal logic of the work could be deciphered, and subsequently presented to the public. Rather than using any ready established vocabulary of denigration, Rutter seemed in 1910 to be prepared to wait, to struggle with Picasso's latest productions in the expectation of arriving at comprehension at some later date. Rutter had observed his effort to evolve :

> ... a new vision of form, building up his paintings with a series of cubes, greyish to yellow green in colour, about three inches square as a rule, cubes some square to the spectator, others at angles, and all ingeniously fitted together to express his feeling for form. It is highly logical, but to me it appears very complicated, but I confess for its proper elucidation at the moment <u>je ne suis pas a / sic / la hauteur</u>.[13]

The third major development in art criticism throughout the period that I have discussed in this thesis was clearly established by the 1890s, let alone 1910. The type of criticism which gave primacy to pictures which told stories, or at least which assumed that what is depicted on the canvas

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13. Rutter, <u>Revolution</u>, p.54.

surface is a static moment seized from a world of sequential time had been strongly discredited. This led towards an appreciation of painting based on the fact that only what can be seen there is there , by route of Maurice Denis's well known comment that ;

> . . . a picture before being a war-horse, a female-nude, or some anecdote - is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.[14]

Whilst the fervid, evangelical tone of some of Fry and Bell's criticism could be mocked, the fact that they ;

> . . had renounced the mammon of "subject" in pictures, they went whoring no more after the Babylon of painted "interest", nor did they hanker after the flesh-pots of artistic "representation" [15]

completely altered the emphasis in art writing.

The dropping of the narrative emphasis from avant-garde painting, and hence from the criticism which described and explained it, produced the fourth and most important development of the period 1878 - 1910: a change in the relationship between the canvas and the written word, and the consequent establishment of the genre of art criticism: a genre clearly different from that of literary criticism.

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14. Maurice Denis, quoted in The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Art, ed. Harold Osborne, Oxford 1981, p.154.

15. D.H. Lawrence, 'Introduction to these Paintings', (1936) Lawrence on Hardy & Painting, ed. J.V. Davies, 1973, p.143.

No longer could the same terms and techniques which were regularly pressed to the service of narrative fiction or lyric poetry fulfil a satisfactory double function in writing about the visual arts. Indeed, as early as 1878, the new Magazine of Art had claimed that the criticism of art :

> ... has grown into a special province of literature, with technical terms, almost a language of its own. And if we are right that great masters express themselves in characters only to be understood by study and experience, we cannot wonder if descriptions and decisions are often unsound and clothed in words borrowed but not mastered.[16]

If, in the light of much of the press reviewing of the next decades, including that in the Magazine's own columns, these comments seem outrageously optimistic and premature, the editorial writer was certainly pointing to the developments of the next quarter century.

Today, critics and theorists have a firm grasp of the fact that there are crucial differences between art and literary criticism.[17] Genette's remarks describe the most obvious of these differences: they rest in the separate relationship, within each genre, between the verbal tools of the critic, and the media which are served by his or her

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16. Unsigned, 'Introduction', Magazine of Art, I, May 1878, p.4.

17. See especially, the contributions to Teoria e Pratiche della Critica d'Arte, ed. Egidio Mucci and Pier Luigi Tazzi, Milan 1979: the collected papers of a highly stimulating symposium on the subject.

discourses:

> ... la critique d'art ou la critique musicale ne s'expriment évidemment pas en sons ou en couleurs, mais la critique littéraire, elle, parle la langue de son objet; elle est meta-langage, « discours sur un discours » .[18]

He acknowledges that art can be conceived of as a language, a system of relations whose different arrangement or contextualisation produces different meanings, a quantity of differences which it becomes the duty of art criticism to distinguish. As we saw in the last chapter, the more progressive critics had come to accept speedily the idea that the technical aspects of art constituted an interpretable language. The difference between them and earlier Victorian artists and critics was that they saw themselves as interpreters or explicators rather than translators: they dismissed the belief that painting could find or reproduce a precise equivalent in narrative form. When they spoke of the 'language' of painting, therefore, it does not seem to have been in entirely metaphorical terms, as had been the case when critics spoke of its 'poetry'.

Moreover, the notion became clearly established that what was observable on the canvas surface need never necessarily have been previously expressed in verbal form,

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18. Gérard Genette, 'Structuralisme et critique littéraire', Figures I, Paris, 1966, p.146.

whether in terms of the names adhering to observable referents in the 'actual world', in terms of the already-stated emotions of the painter, or the emotional response he or she intended to produce in the consumer. This fact shifted the balance between art and imaginative writing. In the nineteenth century, content was swapped - painting far more frequently taking illustrative inspiration from written work than the occasional poem or paragraph prompted by the subject matter of a painting. When it came to formal elements, narrative technique found its would be parallel in genre canvases: 'poetic', as we have seen, was a ready term of praise for an ability to evoke pleasant atmosphere or desirable sentiment. But the impact of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition was such that art was perceived, for the first time, to have the potential to influence the formal arrangement of language, as this language itself interprets the world. The paintings, already to some extent familiar to Arnold Bennett from his residence in France, caused him to reflect :

> I have permitted myself to suspect that supposing some writer were to come along and do in words what these men have done in paint, I might conceivably be disgusted with nearly the whole of modern fiction, and I might have to begin again.[19]

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19. Jacob Tonson [Arnold Bennett], 'Books and Persons', New Age, n.s. VIII, 8 December 1910, p.135. Katherine Mansfield, too, claimed that two of the Van Gogh paintings at this exhibition 'taught me something about writing, which was queer, a kind of freedom - or rather, a shaking free'. (Anthony Alpers, Katherine Mansfield, 1954, p.135).

He had always repudiated with disdain the critical epithet 'photographic' applied to his own work, he notes, but is now worried that perhaps he and some of his contemporaries 'had been concerning ourselves unduly with essentials; that we had been worrying ourselves to achieve infantile realisms?'[20] If Bennett was not to put this inspiration into practice himself, the close connections between the novelistic technique of his literary antagonist, Virginia Woolf, and the aesthetic theories of Fry and Bell, in particular, have been extensively documented.

The debate concerning the extent to which art could be discussed in words at all continued on a small scale. Something of the idea that art Speaks with its own untranslatable language remains in the relatively recent anti-formalist belief that art can be over written about. Thus Harold Rosenberg, in a lecture given in the Los Angeles County Museum in the early sixties:

> Painting today is frequently analysed in terms of space, color and line relations ... In the end, the close visual study of paintings destroys their visual reality.[21]

But this is an argument which, in fact, is based on formal grounds: an assumption that a canvas's artistic importance

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20. 'Books and Persons', pp. 135-6.

21. Quoted by Glaser, 'Modern Art', p.154.

rests in the impression which it creates as a unified whole. Although anti-theoretical, it does not explicitly share Whistler's quasi-mystical stance that discussion of art causes something of its so-called essence to evaporate. In general, however, the idea that the sense of form and colour and the treatment of three-dimensional space in relation to a two-dimensional representational surface - the characteristic preoccupations of modern art - could be satisfactorily described and explained became established by these important late nineteenth and early twentieth century critics. These critics demonstrated that there was, indeed, as Foucault was subsequently to put it, a link between the 'knowledge, pleasure, and truth' that the action of visual perception entailed, and the 'pleasure of theoretical contemplation'.[22]

What must be acknowledged, however, is that this pleasure in theoretical contemplation, whether experienced by the consumer of art or of the criticism it spawned, did not take place in a social vacuum. Art criticism, as well as its subject, might well have become technically and intellectually more sophisticated. But its relationship towards society, even towards the middle class society

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22. Michel Foucault, 'History of Systems of Thought', Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, ed. Donald Bouchard, trans. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, Oxford, 1977, p.202.

which formed the bulk of its nineteenth century readership, shifted. For, co-existent with the theoretical gains summarised in the first part of this conclusion, there were, necessarily, some losses in social terms.

Indeed, the stress on the formalistic qualities of a work has led to a general diminishing, within press reviewing, of the old Ruskinian emphasis on the connection between art and the society which both produced and consumes it. Among the avant-garde critics I have discussed, Frank Rutter, and then only in glancing remarks which are rarely incorporated as an integral part of his argument, is the only writer to have considered the social and political implications of art. And, subsequently, with some notable exceptions - Herbert Read and John Berger - English criticism of contemporary art has, this century, tended to ignore such aspects of cultural production.

The second important loss has been the progressive disappearance of much serious, explanatory criticism from the non-specialist press. Particularly since the Second World War, informed, detailed writing has tended to become concentrated in such magazines as Studio International, Art, Art News, Art International, and so on. These periodicals are supported above all by those who are directly involved, either as practitioners, entrepreneurs, or investors, in the

contemporary art world: a relatively small group, analagous in their possession both of a certain type of cultural knowledge, and in their control of funds, to the eighteenth century connoisseurs: consumers at a primary as well as at a secondary level.

In the non-specialist press, there has been a marked reaction against what, it is suggested, is esoterically theoretical criticism, with its power to exclude all but a circle of cognoscenti. It is still true today, as Max Kozloff remarked in the sixties, that 'there has been, rather obviously, an undercurrent of anti-intellectualism in the whole discussion of art itself'.[23] This is the case not just, as one might expect, in the popular press - as with the outraged howls over the Tate Gallery's purchase of André's bricks - but with the 'quality' press as well. It becomes a potential badge of peer group recognition: a means of avoiding consideration of social and political issues which is just as effective as an exclusive stress on formal questions. Even with the enormous wealth of art historical scholarship available on the artists of the past, this anti-intellectualism spreads to the retrospective exhibitions. Thus Marina Vaizey, for example, when reviewing Turner and the Sublime, speaks in the woolliest of subjective terms:

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23. Quoted Glaser, 'Modern Art', p.155.

> The exhibition is put together with intelligence and heart, and it shows us Turner's art, mind and heart - whole. As spectators, it is as though we were in conversation with someone of experience, who still experimented, who was open to the new while understanding the old: wise, witty, imaginative and warm.[24]

Such criticism shows a dangerous tendency to retreat into nineteenth century terms of reference: terms drawn from, and designed to appeal to, a consciousness which believes values to be so self-evident, and so unquestionably held in common, that there is no need to spell them out, let alone any urge to examine them.

The retreat of theoretical criticism from the non-specialist press is linked closely to the third loss in modern writing on art, already mentioned in this conclusion: that of accessibility to the general reader. This bears a direct relation to the degree in which modern art has been presumed to be, and presented as, theoretically 'difficult', and the effect which this apparent difficulty has had on the composition of art's audience in England. The 'large class' of the public, which the Artist had described in 1880 as wanting 'a few lines of description, couched in non-critical language; a concise enumeration of the "points"

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24. Marina Vaizey, 'Turner: the sublime revolutionary', Sunday Times, 17 May 1981, p.41.

of the greater works; some key to the painter's intention'[25] were both difficult to cater for, and, in relation to this new art, difficult to find. As Henry Geldzahler has put it:

> The history of modern art is also the history of the progressive loss of art's audience. Art has increasingly become the concern of the artist and the bafflement of the public.[26]

He goes on to argue that the increasing concern both of art and of the criticism which supports it has been with 'the basic elements of painting, the painter's vocabulary', with no concessions being made to a hypothetical audience. This has had the effect of slimming and attenuating 'the public for art to an alert and interested few attuned to the closest scrutiny of formal variations and adjustments'.[27] Attuned, also, he might have added, to the commercial potential of ensuring that these variations and adjustments were seen to be important.

To some extent, this tendency of modern art to become 'difficult' is linked to the development of other cultural

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25. Unsigned editorial, Artist, I, 1 October 1880, p. 305.

26. Henry Geldzahler, 'The Art Audience and the Critic', Hudson Review, xviii, Spring 1965, p.105.

27. 'The Art Audience and the Critic', p.106.

forms, notably film and television, which have taken over some of the entertainment functions, the presentation of narrative sentiment and easy moralising, of the Academy art of the nineteenth century. With the depopularisation of modern art has come, as already mentioned, a changed commercial emphasis. It is now the avant-garde, the innovatory work which, somewhat speculatively, is bought, either privately or by galleries, as investment: investment in a moment of formalistic change which may come to bear value, as representative of a particular development in art history, according to the significance attached to it by current and subsequent critics. Art critics hence have come to work in far closer collusion with gallery owners and exhibition organisers, for the immediate benefit of both parties. This can be seen at a public level: currently in England, the huge amount of support for Arts Council shows, at the expense of smaller galleries, may be regarded as a reflection of the desire of critics to obtain 'one of the most powerful positions any art critic in history has ever been permitted to hold',[28] a place on the Art Panel of the Arts Council. It has been the practice of the entrepreneurs to elevate objects to the status of 'art' by

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28. Janet Daley, 'The Art Critics', Literary Review, (no vol. no.) July 1981, p.1.

including them in their domain; that of the critics to legitimise in prose, or by media appearances, this continual production of the new, the 'eternal avant-garde'.[29]

None of this would have been possible without the developments which took place in art criticism between the late 1870s and 1910. It was during this period that the relationship between painting and writing irrevocably shifted. The acts of telling stories, delineating landscapes or recording the visual attributes of portrait sitters were narrative or descriptive tasks which could have been executed in prose, albeit, maybe, with a different emphasis. This was a process which criticism found easy to copy in its own practice. But with the realisation that painting could be regarded as speaking with a separate, expressive language of its own, so the function of criticism became one of explanation and definition. This practice, when carried to its furthest limits, enables the critic both to classify what counts as art, and to suggest its future theoretical progress - even if this form of prescriptive criticism is initially dependant on developments which have taken place in the process of recording colour, texture, line and form on the canvas surface. Whilst nineteenth century painting, and the criticism to which it gave rise, had been dependent

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29. Jack Burnham, The Structure of Art, New York, 1971, p.2.

on the prior existence of the written, spoken or silently present word, so, by 1910, criticism had become dependent on the language of art itself. 'A contemporary painting or sculpture', commented Harold Rosenberg in 1972, 'is a species of centaur - half art materials, half words'.[32] Whilst this had been equally true in the nineteenth century, by 1910 the head and body of this mythological beast had clearly reversed their positions.

32. Harold Rosenberg, The De-definition of Art, New York, 1972, p.55.

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