

The Language of Painting in Nineteenth-Century

English Fiction

by

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For my parents

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Abstract

This thesis examines the material and aesthetic sustenance which the novel as developing genre drew from the burgeoning popular interest in the visual arts, particularly the pictorial arts, which took place during the course of the nineteenth century in Britain. The first chapter develops the concept of the language of painting which for the purposes of the thesis refers to the linguistic transactions occurring between word and pictorial image when writers on art formulate their impressions in language. This type of discourse is described as governed by conceptual repetition and firmly established techniques of *ekphrasis*, as well as by indirect and peripheral modes of reference, not to the concrete stylistic features of the works of art under consideration, but to their effect on the viewer, the metaphors they call to mind, and the processes which can be inferred about their conception. The first chapter also gives a survey of the most important thematic strains and structural developments which had been imported into literature by the end of the eighteenth century.

A chapter is then dedicated to each of five nineteenth-century novelists, Jane Austen, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Henry James, mapping out their individual grasp and knowledge of pictorial art in their particular circumstances, their experience of the art world, and the extent to which their experience of art is mediated by current painterly discourses. Each chapter next considers how pictorial material is appropriated in these novelists' fiction and whether the fiction draws structural support and meaning from pictorial concepts. The thesis furthermore investigates the inverse question of how the fiction itself becomes a context which not only reflects, but also shapes and alters inherited languages of painting.

The second chapter approaches Austen's social satire against the background of the aesthetic traditions which she inherits from the eighteenth century. It is argued that her own novelistic aesthetic gains more from the discourses surrounding the practice of picturesque landscape appreciation (and related forms) than from Reynolds's doctrine of the general and ideal dominating the mid to late eighteenth century.

The third chapter looks at the marked changes which occurred in the production and appreciation of pictorial art in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and finds that paintings and the language of painting became far more accessible as new

galleries and exhibitions opened to the public and were reviewed in periodicals and the popular press. This is the background against which Thackeray's expansive social satire is examined. The discussion involves the ways in which his fiction makes use (or fails to make use) of the variegated aesthetic emerging from his eccentric art reviews and his fiction's mimicking of the workings of caricature (and his own illustrations).

The fourth chapter shows Charlotte Brontë's approach to painting as an expressive rather than a satirical image. It traces her exploration of paintings as emotional and psychological spaces, and focuses on the way in which her idiosyncratic vision shapes and alters languages of painting acquired mostly at second hand.

The fifth chapter develops this enquiry by considering how Eliot's intellectualism deals with the personal and cultural symbolism inherent in works of pictorial art. It is argued that her use of pictorial imagery reveals contradictory strains in her fiction: on the one hand she employs a Ruskinian language of moral realism to theorise about a didactic-realistic aesthetic for the novel; on the other hand the symbolic implications of the works which she alludes to import an idealism at variance with this aesthetic into her fiction.

Chapter six indicates that whereas Eliot's attempt at illustrating her novelistic aesthetic from the language of painting is almost entirely based on an appraisal of painterly subject-matter, James expands the scope of this language's signifying power in fiction by deploying formal aspects of painting as structuring principles for the novel. The thesis ends by briefly relating James's use of painting to reflect self-consciously on the shape of the novel to developments in the modern novel.

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Chapter One

The Language of Painting: A Method and Some History

Not only metaphor: cultural motif, immanent religion, a faith
and a church. One thing always linked to another thing.

In a verse epistle to his painter friend, Mr Jervas, Pope works imagery drawn from the art of painting into skilled heroic couplets, giving concrete illustration to his belief in the fruitful interaction between the Sister Arts. But the poem does more than pay personal tribute to the joys and inspirations of such artistic partnerships.¹ While Pope is musing upon the frequency with which “images reflect from art to art” in his own experience (20), the poem itself enters into a vibrant and many-voiced conversation about the arts which reverberates motives and ideas far beyond the immediate scope of his creative friendship with Jervas. In the first place, he quite deliberately slots the poem into a wider discursive context by attaching it, quite literally, to a text which lies at the core of the gradually expanding body of literature which was coming into being on painting in neo-classical England. The work is *De arte graphica* (1668), Du Fresnoy’s terse Latin poem which activates a wealth of further intertextual links: it explicitly moulds its title on Horace’s *De arte poetica*, stamps the influential *ut pictura poesis* motif onto its opening lines, and fixes to these a polished fragment drawn from the mythical past of aesthetic theory, Simonides’ vividly equivocal conception (quoted by Plutarch) of picture as dumb poetry and poetry as speaking picture. In the rest of Du Fresnoy’s poem, well-worn aphorism, classical precept, and technical advice stand side by side, together providing a formidable catalogue of beliefs, ideas, and practices, ancient as well as modern, surrounding the art of painting. Pope’s epistle refers cryptically to many of these formulas, deftly turning painterly concept into literary effect, adapting Du Fresnoy (and his sources) to his own purposes, and even drawing creative sustenance from the fact that he is not dealing with the parent text in the original, but in the ready-transmuted form of Dryden’s prose translation (which, in turn, relies heavily on De Piles’ loose rendering of the poem into French).²

The intertextual chain, initially forged quite self-consciously, soon passes out of Pope’s personal control, for in the second place his poetic tribute to Jervas (through

Du Fresnoy and Dryden) forms part of a whole group of writings related in some way or other to De arte graphica. One of these, William Mason's florid poetic translation of 1783, reprints the "Epistle to Jervas" in its entirety, thus again fusing Pope's poem, this time retrospectively, with Du Fresnoy's appearance and continued influence in English writing on painting. Using Pope as a model, Mason prefaces his translation with an epistle to Joshua Reynolds, whose authoritative "Notes on the Art of Painting" functions as an appendix to this encyclopaedic edition of De arte graphica.³ Mason's epistle itself offers a veritable index of cross-references to the history of Du Fresnoy's assimilation into English letters. It points out that Dryden's translation, done for money rather than for love, is less than perfect, that the "illustrious wreath for Friendship's shrine" (25) which Pope has fashioned out of Dryden's prose and Du Fresnoy's painterly imagery is ingenious, but misplaced on Jervas's head, that his own prefatory "lays" do not aspire to praise Reynolds for his painting (though he hastens to assure the painter that such verses, unlike Pope's to Jervas, would be "truth-supported" and would "flow secure" - 46 - 48), but for his reinterpretation of De arte graphica in a specifically British context:

Know, when to thee I consecrate the line,
Tis but to thank thy genius for the ray
Which pours on Fresnoy's rules a fuller day:
Those candid strictures, those reflections new,
Refin'd by taste, yet still as nature true,
Which, blended here with his instructive strains,
Shall bid thy heart inherit new domains;
Give her in Albion as in Greece to rule,
And guide (what thou hast form'd) a British School. (49 - 57)

"Metaphor" has indeed expanded into "motif" and finally becomes institution as Mason charts Du Fresnoy's progress in English letters from the "imagery" which his writing on painting "reflects" to Pope's art, to the cultural and national dimensions this work acquires through the ministrations of the first Royal Academy president.

In his study of eighteenth-century treatises on art, Lawrence Lipking comments on exactly this type of conceptual repetition and expansion in the language used by writers on painting. He identifies De arte graphica as "one of those works which set the terms

in which men wrote about the arts”, suggesting, at the same time, that such an established “language” invites constant revision since its handy formulas tend to find their way into a variety of contexts and situations which reshape or manipulate their meanings.⁴ Thus, the complex of translations, commentaries, essays, and poems appended to Du Fresnoy’s verse treatise eventually comes to represent not so much a concern with the original text, but the various aims and projects of those who constructed their own work, in some way or other, from material assembled in De arte graphica.⁵ Du Fresnoy himself, after all, knew how to borrow poetic stature and authority for his undertaking by conflating Simonides and Horace in the first four lines of his poem.

What the French aesthetician’s lingering presence in English letters illustrates most strikingly, then, is the simultaneously traditionalist and accumulative nature of the language which writers use in their dealings with painting. Words and phrases current in this “language” acquire overlays of meaning which lend them conceptual or symbolic force; and such rhetorical gains are constantly yoked in new combinations and contexts as writers grapple with the business of turning painterly images and concepts into words.

The objection might be raised at this stage that I am over-simplifying matters by formulating a “language of painting” from texts diverse in status and aim. De arte graphica is primarily a treatise on painting, whereas Pope’s epistle is a poem which appropriates painterly material for mainly literary purposes. Mason, the self-consciously literary translator, would operate somewhere between the two, combing both aesthetic theory and English verse for a happy medium which would communicate De arte graphica to the British cultural scene while giving him a chance to display his expertise as a versifier. Inventing a single “language of painting” for all these texts may seem far-fetched, and yet the cultural climate which gave rise to English art criticism and history strongly favours such an approach. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth century presented an environment in which English letters were flourishing, while painting was struggling to shake off the reputation of being a merely mechanical craft. The “dumb” art, moreover, of necessity had to rely on language (often on literature) to become culturally articulate, a condition which inspired in English letters much eloquent writing on the visual arts, successful in introducing painting to the

world as an art form to be reckoned with, but literary in mode and approach nonetheless.

So, for instance, the first comprehensive English work on pictorial art, Franciscus Junius's The Painting of the Ancients (1638), provides a spectacular example of such practice. Avoiding any direct contact with extant paintings, the work draws all its material from Greek and Latin literary sources.⁶ Less drastic, but still restrictive, is the practice of searching painting for ideas equivalent to those which have been identified and discussed for centuries in literature, a method which drives Dryden (admittedly a reluctant commentator on painting) to his wits' end in his obsessively traced "parallel" between poetry and painting. Having ostentatiously paraded Aristotle's ideas on tragic flaws and their beneficial prompting of pity and terror in the beholder, he muddles into the following amusing mismatch: "Such in Painting are the warts and moles, which, adding a likeness to the face, are not, therefore, to be omitted; but these produce no loathing in us".⁷ Even Reynolds, the indefatigable defender and definer of painting in the later eighteenth century, often casts his own art into literary shackles. He imposes, for instance, a collection of moral metaphors on the purely painterly concept of draughtsmanship: an early and easily gained dexterity in this field suggests to him "frivolous pursuits", "corruption", "impetuosity", and "dissipation". Instead of indulging in such behaviour, young artists should contend over "who shall have the purest and most correct outline". Or, more fundamentally, he chains the "nobler branches" of painting to subject-matter "commonly supplied by the Poet or Historian", a restriction which inevitably forces further literary, as opposed to formal or technical, criteria onto painting.⁸

Pope's view of the Sister Arts in amicable co-operation, "each from each" drawing "new strength and light" (16), is a popular one; but what emerges from the survey above is rather an impression of literary dominance, a feature confirmed by another equally popular personified situation in inter-art comparison - that of rivalry between the arts. Poets often envy and painters gloat over the concrete immediacy of pictorial art; and yet there is no doubt that as long as the contest is conducted in language, which is the primary medium of one art but offers a mere approximation of the other, literature has the upper hand. It is partly this confidence which makes poets so eloquent and inventive in their appropriation of painterly material, for even while

praising painting for its excellence, they are subsuming this art under literary subject-matter and form, indirectly strengthening their own art's voice, and displaying its articulateness.

One of the prototexts of inter-art comparison, Leonardo da Vinci's firm assertion of "How painting surpasses all human works by reason of the subtle possibilities which it contains", rather splenetically inverts Simonides' dictum in an attempt to redress this imbalance: "If you call painting 'dumb poetry', then the painter may say of the poet that his art is 'blind painting'. Consider then which is the more grievous affliction, to be blind or to be dumb!"⁹ But for all Leonardo's irritation, the poet is of course not handicapped in this directly inverse way. Although his means of expression may lack the concrete immediacy of painting, his powers of observation, visual or otherwise, are in principle as whole as the painter's. Leonardo himself tacitly acknowledges this when he sets about demonstrating to the poet his artistic inferiority by basing his argument not on weaknesses of perception, but of expression:

If you know how to describe and write down the appearance of the forms, the painter can make them so that they appear enlivened with lights and shadows which create the very expression of the faces; herein you cannot attain with the pen where he attains with the brush.¹⁰

Because of its vivid expressiveness, Leonardo claims for painting a proximity to the central forms of nature, forms which are furthermore universally comprehensible and not bound by individual languages as is poetic description. Centuries later, Reynolds delivers a similar message, neo-platonised, to his Academy. Gleaning snippets from classical literary sources on painting, he demonstrates how painting gives access to the "perfect idea of beauty"; how the "intellectual dignity" of the "great style" lifts the painter above the level of the "mere mechanick" and "produces those great effects in an instant, which eloquence and poetry, by slow and repeated efforts, are scarcely able to attain".¹¹

Both of these painter-theoreticians, separated as they are in time and nationality, are in dead earnest, defending pictorial art in their various cultural set-ups against ignorance, easy dismissal, and over-simplification. To gain an impression of the complete confidence which poets, by contrast, enjoy in the unquestionable superiority of their art, one can put against these serious, contesting voices Dryden's easy-going

panegyric on Godfrey Kneller.¹² Thirty-nine lines suffice him to give a potted history of art, from the obscure origins of pictorial imitation, a figure traced in “Coal, or Chalk”, “Perhaps, the Shadow, taken on a Wall” (29 - 30), through stages of sporadic development, ancient Greek attempts at adding “posture, shade, and perspective” (37), the Roman decline, barbaric defacement of monuments, the “Iron Sleep” of the Dark Ages (57), and, eventually, “Raphael’s Age”, when the Sister Arts “at once . . . rise; / Stretch all their Limbs, and open all their Eyes” (59 - 70). Dryden is selectively versifying here a system also underlying Vasari’s Lives of the Artists, which places Raphael and his contemporaries at the pinnacle of painterly evolution.¹³

Realising full well that he cannot legitimately put Kneller’s competent but mundanely commercial portraiture at the same level as these painter-heroes’ accomplishments, Dryden nonetheless knows exactly how to exploit their excellence for encomiastic purposes which not only profit Kneller, but also his own literary art. In the first place, he firmly links the painterly stature of two artists from this age with that of two literary giants from the classical past:

One colour’d best, and one did best design.
Raphael’s, like Homer’s, was the Nobler part;
 But Titian’s Painting, look’d like Virgil’s Art. (62 - 64)

Next, he claims their kinship (distant, but flattering) for Kneller’s portraiture, not forgetting to draw attention in the last clause to his own position as subtle interpreter and guardian of painterly meaning, the one who offers his services as a translator of painterly language:

Thy Genius [Kneller’s] gives thee both; where true design,
 Postures unforc’d, and lively Colours joyn.
 Likeness is ever there; but still the best,
 Like proper Thoughts in lofty Language drest.
 Where Light to Shades descending, plays, not strives;
 Dyes by degrees, and by degrees revives.
 Of various parts a perfect whole is wrought:
 Thy Pictures think, and we Divine their Thought. (65 - 72)

A few lines later (87 - 88) he presents poetry as the watchful older sister who undertakes to intercept and temper the blast of criticism threatening to blight the younger art.

When it comes to addressing the theme of rivalry between the arts, Dryden is either mischievously playful or magnanimously generous, in each case acknowledging a respect in which painting surpasses poetry, while remaining supremely confident of poetry's ultimate superiority. So, he teases Kneller wittily by spiking an account of painting's more immediate appeal to patronage with a medley of satirical references to its basic deceptiveness:

Our Arts are Sisters; though not Twins in Birth:
 For Hymns were sung in Edens happy Earth,
 By the first Pair; while Eve was yet a Saint;
 Before she fell with Pride, and learn'd to paint.
 Forgive th'allusion; 'twas not meant to bite;
 But Satire will have room, where e're I write.
 For oh, the Painter Muse; though last in place,
 Has seiz'd the Blessing first, like Jacob's Race.
Apelles Art, an Alexander found;
 And Raphael did with Leo's Gold abound. . . . (89 - 98)

Or, repeating to Kneller Leonardo's claim that painting is more universally comprehensible than poetry (124 - 127), he nevertheless continues to regard literature as the foundation for the highest forms of painting. This assumption also offers Dryden a tactful retreat from too unrealistic an assessment of Kneller's talent; he presents the painter's "Genius" as "bounded by the Times" of lean patronage and bad taste (147) which force him into taking likenesses for a living, instead of tracing a nobler subject-matter, "Our Unities of Action, Time, and Place" (167).

In both poetry and early theoretical writings on painting, then, the younger Sister Art more often than not appears decked out in literary hand-me-downs. Since the eighteenth century the language used to discuss the visual arts has of course deviated somewhat from early literary patterns and has become more tailored to the specific requirements of such discourse. But despite the emergence of a specialised medium for discussing painting, certain linguistic traits remain inevitably operative in the way we

think about pictorial art, and, since this thesis concerns itself primarily with literature's appropriation of painting and the language of painting, it becomes necessary at this stage to arrive at as clear an idea as possible of the basic transactions which take place between pictures and words. In this respect I have availed myself of an impressively lucid account of the processes involved, Michael Baxandall's brief introductory glance at the "three characteristics of language that set preliminary conditions for the criticism and explanation of pictures".¹⁴

Firstly, he argues that "language is not very well equipped to offer a notation of a particular picture". Its "repertory of concepts" is "rather crude and remote" when it comes to capturing "a plane surface bearing an array of subtly differentiated and ordered shapes and colours".¹⁵ There is furthermore a clash of media between language's temporally linear and painting's spatial modes. Attempts at *ekphrasis*, classical rhetoric's ideal of plain declaration transferred to the literary genre of describing specific works of art, are therefore bound to follow linguistic principles first, no matter how closely the writer tries to adhere to a direct transcription of technical details, formal relations, and so on.

In the second place, Baxandall investigates the linguistic shape which thoughts about pictures most commonly take - and finds that the preposition "about" is literally expressive of the "slightly peripheral relation" which descriptive language bears towards actual pictures.¹⁶ This means that, instead of confining themselves to the relatively limited number of terms that refer "directly or centrally to the physical object" (concepts such as "large, flat, pigments on a panel, red and yellow and blue . . . perhaps image"), writers on painting draw extensively on what Baxandall calls the "three principal indirect moods" of language. These involve describing not the object directly, but its effect, inventing comparisons suggestive of similar effect, and "making inferences about the process which would produce an object having such an effect".¹⁷

To the first category belong terms such as "striking", "climactic", or "sad" which refer to "the effect of the picture on the beholder".¹⁸ The last example should make it clear why Baxandall regards terms of this kind as "a little soft" for use in critical language. The second category, "comparison words", provides a way of pointing and strengthening descriptive language. To illustrate this type of term, Baxandall lifts the phrase "columnar drapery" from Kenneth Clark's discussion of Piero della Francesca's

art, where the architectural metaphor lends shape to the critic's remark on a particular effect of painted drapery.¹⁹ To this I should like to add an illuminating example of "comparative language" which also provides ample illustration for some of the further points made by Baxandall on the language of painting. In *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753) Hogarth employs the descriptive phrase, "the Serpentine line" on which he single-mindedly bases his entire assessment of painterly form.²⁰ Deviations from this ideal of grace are usually associated with awkward or ridiculous effects. Raphael, for instance, changed "his taste of lines" from "a straight and stiff manner" at seeing Michelangelo's works, but then carried his fondness for "the serpentine line" "into a ridiculous excess, particularly in his draperies: though his great observance of nature suffer'd him not long to continue in this mistake".²¹ Those sections of Hogarth's criticism which refer specifically to Raphael's action or the processes of his art, clauses and phrases such as "on a sudden changed his taste", "he carried it . . . to excess", and "his great observance of nature" exemplify Baxandall's third "indirect mood" of language: they refer not to the painted object, but to "causes" which may have given rise to a type of art like Raphael's in his later period.²²

On the whole, Hogarth's description of linear quality, serpentine or otherwise, leads to a sensitive (and often amusing) formulation of meaning in visual form. Attitudes of the human body in action come to constitute, for Hogarth, "a sort of language which perhaps one time or other, may come to be taught by a kind of grammar-rules";²³ and, in fact, his commentary on a "sketch of a country-dance", drawn and engraved purposely to illustrate a wide range of painterly concepts and effects, seems to be a first step in this direction.²⁴ In discussing this engraving he devises a notational system humorously based on letter shapes and the symbols appearing on playing cards (apart from, of course, the basic "waving" line representing graceful beauty). So, for instance, "a Z stood for the angular position the body makes with the legs and thighs of the affected fellow in the tye-wig"; "[t]he uniform diamond of a card, was filled up by the flying dress, &c. of the little capering figure in the spencer-wig"; and "the two waving lines were drawn for the more genteel turns of the two figures at the hither end" (see fig. 1 for the shapes referred to by Hogarth).²⁵ Angularity in this description clearly signifies affectation, the diamond shape comical exuberance, and so forth.

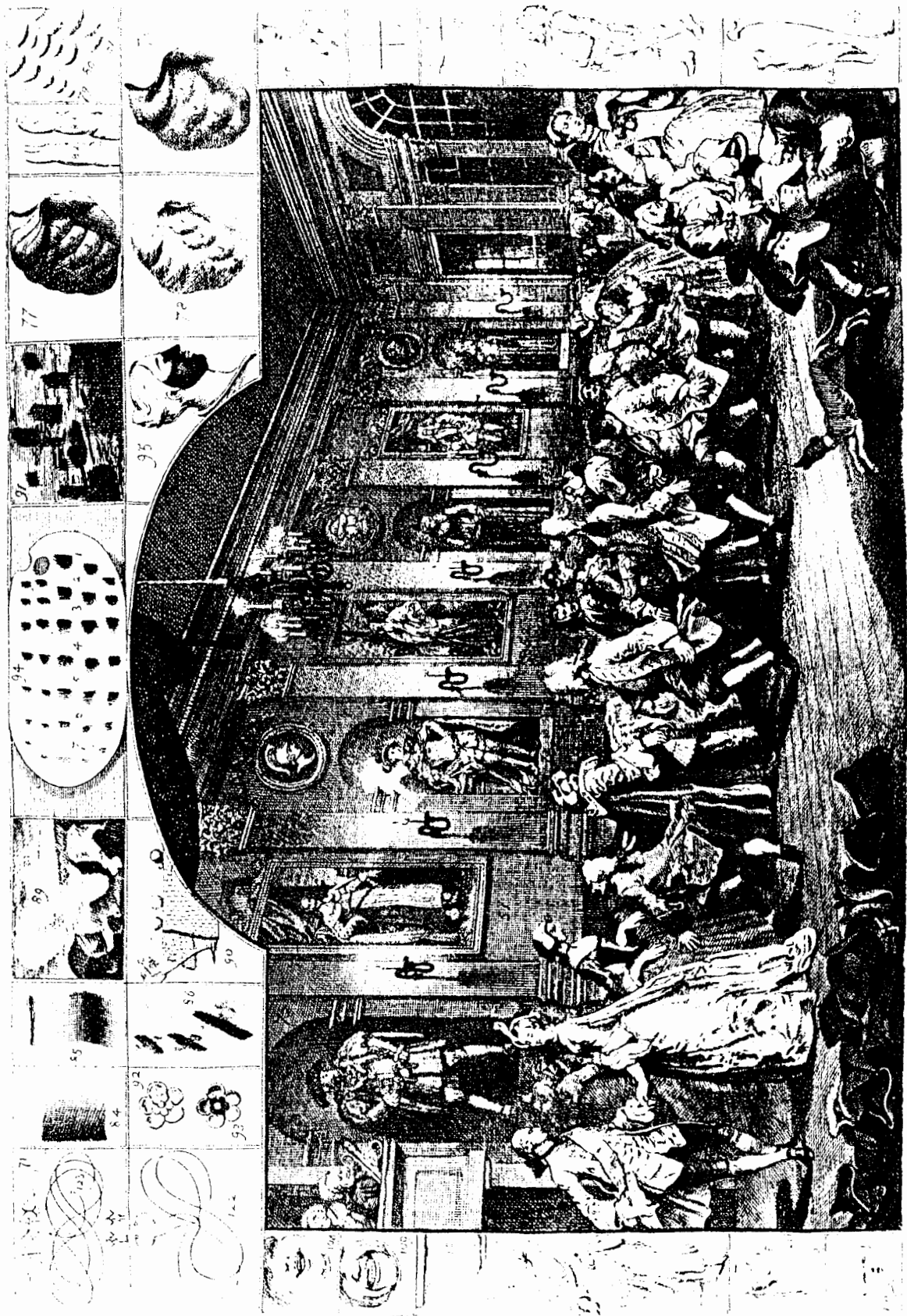


Fig. 1. William Hogarth, The Analysis of Beauty, plate II, (1753); rpt. in Hogarth: The Complete Engravings, eds. Joseph Burke and Colin Caldwell (Secaucus: Wellfleet, n.d.) plate 234.

The extracts above with their precise reference to Hogarth's accompanying engraving also serve to illustrate Baxandall's third main point about the "preliminary conditions" which language sets for the "criticism and explanation of pictures".²⁶ In Hogarth's description "words and concepts" have to be "matched" with the relevant shapes appearing in the engraving. The type of language used therefore functions deictically since it aims specifically at linking description and object. This happens in Hogarth's description when the demonstrative phrase, "the two figures at the hither end", directs the reader's attention to the relevant place in the picture. According to Baxandall this is what happens perpetually in art-critical description where words are after all used "in tandem with the object" and where much of their meaning depends on the actual picture they refer to. Baxandall here speaks of the "ostensivity of critical description" and goes on to point out that the presence or "availability" of the actual picture referred to becomes an important determining factor for the structure and meaning of art-critical descriptions. "Availability" can be of different kinds - a work may be present in reality, in reproduction, in memory, or "(more remotely) as a rough visualization derived from knowledge of other objects of the same class".²⁷ So, museum guides and exhibition catalogues usually refer to objects which are physically present; most modern art-historical publications can rely on photographic reproductions of art works; Hogarth provided his own illustrations; Reynolds originally addressed his Discourses to an artistic audience who had at least some experience of the technical matters he was touching upon and who were acquainted, if not always with specific originals, at least (through engravings, memory or extrapolations of both) with genres, schools, and the distinctive stylistic features of principal artists.

The linguistic features which Baxandall gathers from transactions between word and picture stay active, but acquire a special status and signifying power in literary works. As cultural artefacts, paintings bring to literature their own art's structures, which invite and inspire, as I have shown before, various forms of literary appropriation. Like art critics or historians, literary artists come up against incompatibilities between linguistic and pictorial forms of expression which they solve (again like the other group) through indirect means involving focusing on the painter at work, employing mediating metaphors for painterly form, or analysing the sensory and psychological impact of the art work on the viewer. Unlike art critics' efforts,

however, those of creative writers are not circumscribed by the immediate need to explain pictorial art in particular, and can therefore range far more freely and adventurously among the “indirect moods” of language, using painterly material primarily as a medium through which literary structure and meaning are pursued.

Pope’s catalogue of painters’ accomplishments in “The Epistle to Jervas” invokes qualities associated almost as a matter of idiom with the particular artists mentioned:

Each heavenly piece unwearied we compare,
Match Raffaele’s grace with thy lov’d Guido’s air,
Caracci’s strength, Correggio’s softer line,
Paulo’s free stroke, and Titian’s warmth divine. (35 - 38)

And yet, the sheer compression here into three pentameter lines of words which conflate painterly technique and effect (as in Veronese’s “free stroke”), or which call both of these up through moral and synaesthetic metaphors (as in Carracci’s “strength”), adds considerable resonance to Pope’s warm poetic appraisal of artistic friendship. Instead of referring to aspects of these painters’ art in order to elucidate their techniques and stylistic impact, Pope’s poetry economically repeats art-critical commonplaces of his day for the emotional “colour” and force they lend to his poetic exploration of friendship and inter-art comparison.

“Ostensivity” likewise survives in an altered form in literature, usually no longer directing attention to actual objects which complement the descriptive text from the outside, but often mimicking this demonstrative function for the sake of creating a greater sense of concrete vividness or immediacy in the text itself. When Pope leads his reader from one fancy portrait to another to illustrate women’s moral inconstancy in “To a Lady”, the “paintings” referred to cannot be identified with certainty (nor is the exercise really a pressing or even a relevant one); his language, however, retains a demonstrative immediacy through the measured repetition of deictic adverbs which create the illusion of the reader’s being guided from portrait to portrait in an imaginary gallery:

Arcadia’s Countess, here, in ermin’d pride,
Is, there, Pastora by a fountain side.
Here Fannia, leering on her own good man,

And there, a naked Leda with a Swan. (7 - 10)²⁸

Although the actual identity of these imaginary portraits is often not important, the issue of “availability” earlier associated with the demonstrative function of art-critical writing usually remains pertinently relevant in some form or other to the business of interpreting painterly material which has been absorbed into literature. “To a Lady” does of course not carry complementary illustrations; nor do the adverbs “here” and “there” function in a truly “ostensive” capacity; but in employing them, Pope does incorporate into his poem the experience of viewing pictures, portraits to be more exact, and ones which specifically belong to the sub-genre of the fancy portrait depicting sitters in fancifully adopted costumes, personas, and settings. The portraits referred to in this case are therefore “available” “in memory” or “(more remotely) as a rough visualization derived from knowledge of other objects of the same class”. They become imaginatively concrete and vivid in the poetry because of Pope’s ability to manipulate descriptive language and create striking poetic examples within the relatively broad theoretical category of a well known sub-genre.

At this point, having provided some history of painting’s early dependence on literary language for representation, and having investigated the extent to which linguistic features have continued to affect observations in art history and criticism, I want to suggest that the “presence” of painting in literature does not depend so much on writers’ and readers’ direct visual knowledge of actual objects of art, as on the ideas they have about such objects. These ideas, whether grounded in the writer’s or the reader’s mind, do not necessarily or even mainly stem from direct visual perception or a viewer’s actual experience of a painting, but frequently also from a traditional, yet expansive, language of painting formulated in the explanatory and creative writings on art current in that particular cultural context. I use the phrase “the language of painting” literally here to refer to the general descriptive and conceptual medium adopted (and constantly revised) by writers on art. A more finely tooled metaphoric version of the phrase occurs in the work of the art historian E. H. Gombrich who uses linguistic models figuratively to clarify his ideas about patterns of seeing and representation. In *Art and Illusion* he turns the phrase into a carefully circumscribed metaphor for the “developed system” of visual “schemata” which he regards as indispensable to painters in their attempts to “describe the visible world in images”.²⁹

The work as a whole argues against the possibility of disentangling visual perception from systematically built-up habits and experience; therefore, also against Ruskin's statement that "[t]he whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the innocence of the eye; that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify".³⁰ And furthermore, Gombrich argues against Impressionists' claims that they were directly capturing visual sensations as they fell on the retina of the "unbiased eye".³¹ Instead of innocence and freedom, Gombrich explores (with a sidelong glance at Whorf) the pre-conditioned habits which dominate human perception and "articulation" of the visible world.³² Creativity, for him, lies not in "innocent" or unedited reactions to visual stimuli, but in experiencing and representing such stimuli through a process which probes, adjusts, and so renews the "vocabularies" and rules of the visual "language" current in a specific cultural environment.

As so often in the case of metaphor, Gombrich's figurative language of art ends up shedding light on various aspects of his original vehicle, language itself, in this case the language which writers formulate and apply when dealing with pictorial art. His method of "analyzing afresh, in psychological terms . . . the process of image making and image reading"³³ suggests an approach to the ways in which creative writers, in their turn, receive, "read", and "remake" painterly material, regardless of whether this material becomes available through direct visual experience of painters' techniques and completed works of art, or, more circuitously, through the descriptive, critical, and creative writings which cluster increasingly around pictorial art, especially from the seventeenth century onwards in English letters. As I have argued, the system of schemata which literary artists draw on consists of both verbal and visual material, and like Gombrich's historical painters, writers can be observed going through the processes of adopting, then challenging, received patterns of observation (or the linguistic conventions representing them in writing) through their own art's textures and structures.

Appropriating painterly material for literary purposes is a highly deliberate move. Whereas painters may unconsciously follow a visual tradition or be under the sway of a particular habit of perception, writers usually make an active decision to include a specific kind of painterly image in their work, and have at least some idea of what they

intend with such inclusions. Writers furthermore avail themselves of visual material which has usually already passed into language in some way or other, often through ongoing polemical discussions of painterly concepts and effects. For this reason, the inclusion of painting in their writing always draws substance and meaning from a vast and ever-expanding language of art (to which they at the same time contribute). Painters can distance themselves from the linguistic activity inspired by painting; even those painters who choose to become involved in describing and discussing painting do so without directly affecting or immediately altering the means of their own art. Not so the creative writer, whose slightest reference to pictorial art invokes special meaning and demands special interpretation in that it activates, of necessity, an underlying traditional language of art. The moment a “portrait” or “landscape” appears in a work of literature, it does so as a cultural object which immediately opens up a vast substratum of meaning potentially relevant to its role in literature. This includes generic characteristics, thematic and symbolic associations, technical qualities, and so on. It is important to notice, however, that all of these are only potentially relevant, since writers’ particular awareness, verbal as well as visual, will to a large extent modify the appearance, nature, and significance of painterly material in their work. The meaning of appropriated material will therefore always be a complex function of writers’ grasp and knowledge of painting as a cultural activity and the conditions of their own artistic practice.

Literary artists, then, do not neutrally receive and transmit pictorial images or their cultural implications. To the contrary, works of literature themselves provide very definite contexts within which pictorial material signifies. This principle often goes unnoticed in studies juxtaposing the disciplines of creative writing and painting, as for example Jean Hagstrum’s pioneering work, *The Sister Arts*, which leads into a familiar cul-de-sac of inter-art criticism, that of trying to identify unequivocal painterly sources and allusions in literature, and then treating these as exact visual counterparts, or “illustrations”, as it were, of literary style.³⁴ Although one of his main aims is to assess the neo-classical poet’s modification of earlier pictorialist traditions in poetry, and later, when discussing Pope, he recognises the generic adaptations which pictorialism undergoes in a satirical context,³⁵ he still at times casts around for comprehensive pictorial analogues to express more vividly his own experience of Pope’s poetic

effects. In one such case, he turns to the sfumato techniques of a Correggio to capture his sense of the peculiar fluidity, motion, and transparency of pictorial imagery in The Rape of the Lock.³⁶ This reference to Correggio seems entirely opportunistic and contributes nothing to one's understanding of the workings of pictorialism in a satirical context. That Pope, for reasons of his own, could sometimes be straining against the very tradition of pictorialism (in particular, here, the technique of intensifying poetic vividness through pictorial allusion) never comes into Hagstrum's discussion. And yet, an awareness of the tension which exists between static and fluid conditions is of considerable importance in Pope's satirical poetry. What I propose next is a comparison of individual neo-classical poems with strong pictorial tendencies to reveal the widely divergent poetic intentions which they incorporate: from a firm adherence to the classical concept of enargeia, which involves introducing painterly references into poetry to create a sense of visual immediacy, to a sceptical questioning of this tradition itself. To illustrate these points, and to analyse the impact on poetic meaning of some of the visual and verbal schemata prevalent in the neo-classical language of art, I shall briefly turn to two poets' specific use of painterly images.

The elegiac nature of Dryden's "To the Pious Memory of . . . Mrs. Anne Killigrew" fundamentally determines the manner in which pictorial images function in this poem.³⁷ The "accomplisht young lady" of the dedication lies dead, leaving behind, amongst other memories, some poems and paintings of her own creation. As the full title announces, she was "excellent in the two Sister-Arts of Poësie, and Painting". These works, the paintings in particular, provide the poet with concrete reminders of the person he is mourning. He values her art not only for the lifelike vividness with which it depicts "Sylvan Scenes", but also for the clear impression it offers of the lamented woman's "Soul" and "the Image in her Mind" (106 - 108). Dryden's transcription of Mrs Killigrew's pastoral landscapes into poetry plays with visual intricacies such as transparency, reflection, shading, and perspective. The overall effect is richly evocative, applying qualities like lucidity, brightness, profundity, and beauty equally to the works of art and their creator. The confidence with which the poet depicts and interprets these landscapes reflects, and at the same time realises, the consolatory intention of the poem, as a number of painted scenes described in assertive

tetrameter couplets for the moment displace the ode's irregular rhymes and rhythms, in this way imposing order and dispelling grief:

The Sylvan Scenes of Herds and Flocks,
 And fruitful Plains and barren Rocks,
 Of shallow Brooks that flow'd so clear,
 The Bottom did the Top appear;
 Of deeper too and ampler Flouds,
 Which as in Mirrors, shew'd the Woods;
 Of lofty Trees with Sacred Shades,
 And Perspectives of pleasant Glades,
 Where Nymphs of brightest Form appear,
 And shaggy Satyrs standing neer,
 Which them at once admire and fear. (108 - 118)

Dryden's faith in Mrs Killigrew's skill as a painter (and his own ability as a poet to reconstruct both her paintings and her character in verse) receives fresh impetus in the next stanza, where the subject is portraiture, the first portrait that of James II:

The Scene then chang'd, with bold Erected Look
 Our Martial King the sight with Reverence strook:
 For not content t'express his Outward Part,
 Her hand call'd out the Image of his Heart,
 His Warlike Mind, his Soul devoid of Fear,
 His High-designing Thoughts, were figur'd there,
 As when, by Magick, Ghosts are made appear. (127 - 138)

Physical features are not mentioned here, apart from the king's general look. In their place, Dryden puts abstract qualities which he reads off the canvas as if he were noting down a number of facial features. The anaphoric simplicity of these lines reflects both the practised skill with which the painter is said to capture the king's essential image and the directness with which the poet turns pictorial signs into meaning. The next portrait, that of Queen Mary of Modena, is realised slightly more concretely, in that her primary quality is after all physical beauty. But also this portrait ends up idealising its sitter, at the same time projecting this idealisation onto the painter herself:

Our Phenix Queen was portrai'd too so bright,
 Beauty alone could Beauty take so right:
 Her Dress, her Shape, her matchless Grace,
 Were all observ'd, as well as heav'nly Face. (134 - 137)

Throughout the stanzas dealing with Anne Killigrew's paintings Dryden stresses the idealistic nature of her art, a quality which he transfers metaphorically to the painter herself in an attempt to preserve her image in all its most laudable aspects, thus securing for her a form of survival, and for her mourners, a type of consolation. Transcendence through art concludes this section of the poem as the poet recalls how, in life, the woman's "bright Soul broke out on ev'ry side"(145), and points out that it will continue to do so through her works of art.

The intensity of this climax depends to a large extent on Dryden's belief that painting can capture and preserve ideal form, both of the object represented, and of the image called up by the creative mind. Painting (and painters) receives quite a different treatment in Pope's "To a Lady", the satirical nature of which provides an altogether sceptical framework for the introduction of painterly images. Pope captures and interprets not a face idealised, but the dizzying problems involved in fixing and depicting human nature. The many faces of "one Nymph" (5), he argues, demand an artistic medium and techniques of representation which might "Catch ere she change, the Cynthia of this minute" (20). In the place of Dryden's fixed delineations and definitive forms comes a spirited *sprezzatura* technique as capricious as the changing image it pursues. Consequently the lines, "Some wand'ring touch, or some reflected light, / Some flying stroke alone can hit 'em right"(153 - 154), technically so similar to Dryden's list of unequivocal abstract qualities distilled from the king's painted image, express instead a bewildering negation of determinacy. Whereas the repetitive "His Mind . . . his Soul . . . / His . . . Thoughts" idealises character confidently step by step, each of Pope's repetitions of "Some" is linked to an elusive adjectival participle which causes the imagery to veer off in a new direction, so that the final "flying stroke" is masterful, but a lucky one nonetheless.

The difference here is between regarding painting simply as an ideal and concretely fixed image of reality, and recognising the complexities inherent in this mode of representation; between seeing human nature as something which can be reflected

idealistically and in full, and noticing the difficulties of representation arising from imperfection and temporal change. Apart from the elegiac nature of Dryden's poem, Anne Killigrew's reverent treatment of her royal sitters itself leads the poet's attention away from concrete reality and inclines it towards ideal representation. And, for a moment, the exasperating pictorial sequence of moral transformations in Pope's "To a Lady" seems to stabilise in a comparable royal portrait:

One certain Portrait may (I grant) be seen,
Which Heav'n has varnish'd out, and made a Queen:
The same for ever! and describ'd by all
With Truth and Goodness, as with Crown and Ball. . . .

(181 - 184)

But instead of presenting this portrait as a Platonic counter-argument to the elusive and fluctuating female identity which he pursues earlier in the poem, Pope aims at it an attack which skewers royalty, sycophantic artists, and empty poetic courtesy with a single thrust. The subsequent couplet, "Poets heap Virtues, Painters Gems at will, / And show their zeal, and hide their want of skill" (185 - 186), exposes his praise as irony, idealistic idiom as cliché, and revered emblems as automatic tokens. What seems at first sight an icon of powerful significance becomes upon investigation deceptive surface, as Pope, with the satirist's impudence, dares to probe beyond the magnificent appearance of royal garments: "That Robe of Quality so struts and swells, / None see what Parts of Nature it conceals" (189 - 190).

In Dryden's poem the royal portraits capture and preserve both the sitters' and the artist's presence ideally. Pope, by contrast, treats the portrait, whether of nymph or queen, with a lack of reverence which dismantles the idea of painting as immutable form, and in its place uncovers a whole range of satirical possibilities based on realistic observation, a quick eye for perceiving new metaphoric links between painterly technique and literary effect, and an excellent ear for recognising and rearranging the variable (often contradictory) strains of his era's language of painting. Although he does not reject the possibility of true likenesses, he points out that a single static impression could be misleading, that paintings could deceive, so to speak, even while offering tantalisingly clear images of realities that are far from simple. Maybe most essentially, he alerts one to the fact that art is never neutral, that the painting as an

image with cumulative aesthetic and cultural implications in literature signifies not merely through straightforward representation, but also through effects, means and structures which demand more specific interpretation. Thus, Pope's satirical poetry gives voice to tensions, between ideal and real, fixed and evanescent form, which are completely missing from the simple idealistic discourse and static imagery of Dryden's elegy.

Not that Dryden is unaware of these tensions. The omission from the elegy stems from artistic choice, not ignorance, for in his theoretical and critical writings he shows a clear awareness of the tensions which exist in discourses on the visual arts between the ideal and the real, and also of their significance for literary practice, especially as far as the writer's choice of genre is concerned. His preface to Du Fresnoy's *De arte graphica* hastily proliferates (in the manner characteristic of this rushed treatise) anecdotes and quotations from Bellori's *L'idea del pittore* (1664) which all stress the need for the painter to reconstruct and perpetuate a Platonic idea of perfect nature in painting.³⁸ Through Bellori's contexture of artistic voices echoing from antiquity and the Italian Renaissance, Dryden shapes his own conception of the painter as ideal artist who can look beyond the imperfections of reality and repossess in the mind, as well as on canvas, the realm of true forms. But this represents only one side of Dryden's viewpoint. Despite his liberal dependence on Bellori in his preface, he abandons him with an ungrateful jab at this theoretician's pompous style, and only a grudging acknowledgment that there may be "somewhat in the matter" of his writing. Instead he turns to Philostratus, whose "plainer" poem, *Imagines*, brings him down from the heights of Platonic-Christian philosophy, and roots his attention in the study of human nature. The successful painter, he says, has to observe the "signs" of passion, whatever "is contained in the constitution of the cheeks, in the temperament of the eyes, in the naturalness . . . of the eyebrows; and in short, whatsoever belongs to the mind and thought". "He who thoroughly possesses all these things", Dryden concludes, deviating substantially from his esoteric idealism of before, "will obtain the whole, and the hand will exquisitely represent the action of every particular person".³⁹ Shortly after, he further explains how the "ideal of perfect Nature" which Bellori advises the "learned Painter" to form could have severe limitations for some kinds of painting:

Now as this idea of perfection is of little use in Portraits, or the resemblances of particular persons, so neither is it in the characters of Comedy and Tragedy, which are never to be made perfect, but always to be drawn with some specks of frailty and deficiency. . . . The perfection of such stage characters consists chiefly in their likeness to the deficient faulty nature, which is their original. . . .

“Perfection”, therefore, becomes a relative concept as Dryden spells out the specific conditions and artistic aims encoded in an artist’s choice of a particular genre. Had his own aim in the Killigrew ode been comic or tragic (to use his own categories above) instead of elegiac, he would certainly have approached his painterly imagery quite differently.

Dryden, then, effects a quick reconciliation between the ideal and the real, a dichotomy which from the outset rules the discourse surrounding the visual arts. Since the debate around this dichotomy is central to the way in which pictorial art functions in literature, in fact, central to the novel’s appropriation of pictorial art, it demands further discussion. It can be argued that the passage of pictorial imagery into the fictional world and aesthetic structure of the novel is a function of Dryden’s type of pragmatic bridging of opposites which lingers on in neo-classical English writing on painting. It reappears, for instance, in Reynolds’s *Discourses*, which set themselves the monumental task of strengthening the painter’s professional and national pride by making the “grand style” the foundation of nascent British art, while at the same time taking care not to discourage the “humbler” attempts of students and “lesser” artists bound to a more realistic subject-matter, such as portraitists and painters of landscape. Like Dryden, Reynolds regards the great painter as one who can see past the blemishes of particular objects and can draw from these “an abstract idea of their forms more perfect than any one original”.⁴⁰ Again like Dryden, the concept of genre offers Reynolds an escape from a potentially rigid idealism, in that he recognises that all painterly genres cannot equally satisfy the demands of the great style: whereas the “History-painter” who “paints man in general” approaches close to the ideals of the great style, the “Portrait-painter” “renders a particular man, and consequently a defective model”.⁴¹ Thus, although Reynolds quite openly favours the “grand style”, he leaves at least some room for the type of subject-matter which one would associate

most obviously with the fast-developing genre of the novel. The novel's appropriation of such pictorial material, however, is far from a simple linear development. In the next few pages, I shall suggest a number of the stages by which painting became "available" to novelists.

To begin with, Reynolds emerges as an ingenious manipulator of arguments which ostensibly favour artistic freedom and encourage a multiplicity of approaches to painting. Time and again, however, this variability is eventually drawn into and qualified by the inflexible premises of his "grand style", but not without introducing discourses somewhat at variance with the idealistic one openly favoured by Reynolds. Discourse XIV, delivered shortly after Gainsborough's death in 1788, comprehensively illustrates this feature of Reynolds's writing. It generously acknowledges the late painter's accomplishment, but always with a clear sense of his "humble" place in the history of his country's art and in the hierarchy of genres. When Reynolds describes Gainsborough as "among the very first" of a developing English school, he carefully shades "first" into the surrounding syntax so as to designate chronology more than merit: "If ever this nation should produce genius sufficient to acquire to us the honourable distinction of an English School, the name of Gainsborough will be transmitted to posterity . . . among the very first of that rising name".⁴² Likewise, he places his fervent admiration for Gainsborough's realistic "landskips" and "little ordinary beggar-children" into a qualifying framework: he rates these accomplishments above those of the late Roman school, but only because he prefers "genius in a lower rank of art, to feebleness and insipidity in the highest".⁴³ To what an extent relegating Gainsborough to a humble place is a pre-condition of Reynolds's praise cannot quite be established; but throughout this Discourse one gets a distinct sense that Reynolds needs to restate his own credo by reinterpreting this painter's successes and by circumscribing his fame in terms of his own idealistic beliefs. If Gainsborough could become famous without travelling to Italy, it was only because his "style and department of art" could draw its materials from "every where about him; he found them in the streets, and in the fields".⁴⁴ He could only get away with paying the "masters" insufficient attention, since in his kind of painting he could supply "the want of them" by "natural sagacity, and a minute observation of particular nature". In the process, Reynolds claims, he gave up the opportunity of looking at nature with "a

poet's eye", contenting himself with giving "a faithful, if not a poetical, representation of what he had before him". If he neglected the "great historical painters of former ages" at least he had the sense to concentrate on "the Flemish school", a lower, but "necessary" branch of art. But although Reynolds nails Gainsborough to his "place" in this way, he nonetheless here celebrates a type of artistic originality which was "not academical, or antique, but selected . . . from the great school of nature". More to the point, it is a talent which Reynolds regards as not poetic, one which lies closer to the novel as an art form.

Gainsborough's greatest accomplishment remains for Reynolds his "good sense and judgment" which prevented him from aspiring beyond his chosen department, unlike Hogarth, "who, with all his extraordinary talents, was not blessed with this knowledge of his own deficiency" and dared to attempt "the great historical style".⁴⁵ This reference to Hogarth is of importance in various ways. In the first place, it illustrates the consummate ease with which Reynolds's tidy system displaces even the greatest names in eighteenth-century British painting. He may be correct in criticising Hogarth's forays into historical painting, but, in the second place, his facile positioning of empirical observation and a non-idealistic aesthetic at the lower reaches of the rising British School illustrates exactly how out of touch his theoretical position was with the real developments in his country's art. Although his system of thought allows him pragmatic manoeuvres into the "humbler walks" of art, where his criticism operates at times with real discernment, he invariably returns with unabashed confidence to the academic spheres of immutable ideas and fixed forms. Nowhere do Reynolds's theoretical procedures show the strain of such manoeuvring more clearly than in his brushes with Hogarth, who remains, for all Reynolds's high-handed theorising, probably the most original and influential painterly figure in eighteenth-century English painting.

One of the first of these brushes, Reynolds's satirical attack in The Idler on The Analysis, displays an early adroitness in stratifying arguments and manipulating various languages of painting side by side to create the impression of theoretical flexibility. In a curious reversal of roles, he himself becomes the spontaneous observer: "For my own part, I profess myself an Idler, and love to give my judgment, such as it is, from my immediate perceptions, without much fatigue of thinking"⁴⁶. Continuing this ironic

reversal, he satirically grafts Hogarthian ideas onto a species roundly despised by Hogarth himself, the connoisseur, freshly returned from Italy,

his mouth full of nothing but the Grace of Raffaele, the Purity of Domenichino, the Learning of Poussin, the Air of Guido, the greatness of Taste of the Caraccis, and the Sublimity and grand Contorno of Michel Angelo; with all the rest of the cant of Criticism, which he emitted with that volubility which generally those orators have, who annex no ideas to their words”.

The “Hogarthian” persona, equipped in this way with “a few names” and “a few rules of the Academy”, accompanies the increasingly exasperated Idler through the galleries at Hampton Court, lamenting in each painting they encounter the lack of “the flowing line” or the “pyramidal principle” (the paintings looked at include Raphael’s cartoons and a Van Dyck portrait). With these last two snatches of “critical cant”, Reynolds shifts directly to Hogarth’s main aesthetic principles in *The Analysis*, more specifically, to their first deployment in the preface, where Hogarth deals with, amongst others, Raphael and Van Dyck.

It is ironic that Reynolds, of all people, should be mocking Hogarth for his inflexible premises. Although *The Analysis* invites satire with its single-minded aim of decisively fixing the principles underlying the fluctuating “IDEAS of TASTE”⁴⁷ and its proud adoption of an all-purpose variety-in-unity logo (see fig. 2), it nonetheless formulates an aesthetic which demystifies “grace” and “beauty”. In the place of unquestioning reverence for these qualities, Hogarth suggests a system of observation that “may teach us to see with our own eyes”.⁴⁸ The irony becomes glaring when, towards the end of the satirical letter, Reynolds himself assumes a fixed position of the kind he becomes famous for: he concludes that in the higher reaches of artistic excellence the common rules governing “a lower class of Painting” no longer apply.⁴⁹

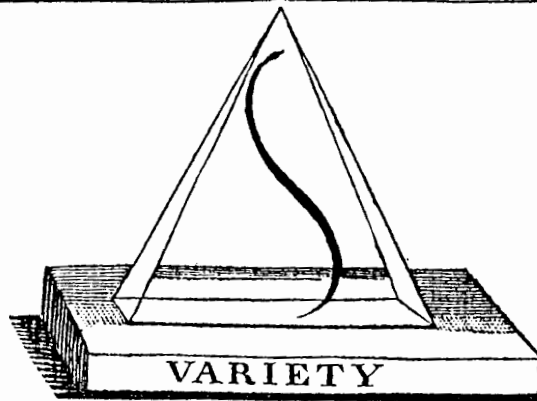
Reynolds devises his aesthetic specifically for artists. Consequently, much of his discourse is explicitly educational and addressed to students, their tutors, and “humble” professionals. But over-arching whatever he may have to offer in the line of practical advice or technical criticism, are always the shimmering structures of ideal beauty derived from past grandeur and the superior artist’s poetic vision. Projected onto these is a glorious future for British art. Hogarth, against this, shuns “the broad, and more

THE
ANALYSIS
OF
BEAUTY.

Written with a view of fixing the fluctuating IDEAS of
TASTE.

BY WILLIAM HOGARTH.

*So vary'd be, and of his tortuous train
Curl'd many a wanton wreath, in fight of Eve,
To lure her eye.----- Milton.*



L O N D O N :

Printed by J. REEVES for the AUTHOR,
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MDCCLIII.

Fig. 2. William Hogarth, Title-page, The Analysis of Beauty.

beaten path of moral beauty” into which he says “mere men of letters” are “obliged so suddenly to turn” when they encounter the intricate difficulties of analysing in writing such matters as painterly grace and beauty.⁵⁰ Reynolds, of course, is no mere man of letters and The Analysis, which in any case precedes the first discourse by a good fifteen years, here derides the theoretical conduct of writers like Du Fresnoy and De Piles. But despite the seniority of The Analysis, it supplies a lively antithesis to Reynolds’s academic edifice. In many respects, Hogarth’s thought and practice retain their vitality while Reynolds’s monumental idealism lingers on increasingly in the form of splendid ruins and scattered fragments.

If this last statement seems daring in the light of the unquestionable authority which Reynolds continued to bear in the general thought on painting of early to mid-nineteenth-century Britain (especially as diffused by exhibition and gallery reviews), a quick survey of Hogarth’s aesthetic principles and methods in The Analysis should show up the fundamentally different types of influence under consideration here. Whereas Reynolds’s theory is deliberately retrospective in drawing up plans for a future school from past periods of splendour, Hogarth’s seems to tap quite naturally into sources as diverse as antiquity, the British empirical tradition, and contemporary stage conventions to send forth many shoots suggestive of fresh thought and development, in painting as well as in various other cultural fields. Characteristically, Hogarth sets about educating the eye itself; Reynolds focuses almost entirely on the mind. Beauty, therefore, is not in The Analysis an idea handed down from on high, but a quality traced in nature and society “in a systematical, but at the same time familiar way”, so that anyone, “ladies, as well as gentlemen”, stands a chance of “gaining a perfect knowledge of the elegant and beautiful in artificial, as well as natural forms”.⁵¹ Obstructing such “natural” knowledge are dogmatic habits of observation and ideas of art, the dismantling of which gives Hogarth his most pressing “purpose in hand”:

the setting forth, in the strongest colours, the surprising alterations objects seemingly undergo through the pre-possessions and prejudices contracted by the mind. ---- Fallacies, strongly to be guarded against by such as would learn to see objects truly!⁵²

Not that Hogarth is here devising an early version of the “innocent eye”. Throughout his treatise he advocates an intricate system of three-dimensional

observation based on an essentially active eye and a keenly developed visual memory capable of following into space (and even out of sight) the “variety of lines” which for him constitute the form of objects.⁵³ A medley of shapes and objects ranging from the curves of a child’s face to the coils of the human pelvis, from corsets to fashionable coiffures, illustrates the workings of this visual system in the “familiar way” promised by the introduction (see fig. 3), while light-hearted analogies interlace with solid theoretical principles to produce an aesthetic which is remarkably versatile, approaching natural form, social behaviour, and art with the same unflagging vivacity. “Pursuing is the business of our lives”, he begins a discussion of “intricacy” as an element of the beautiful.⁵⁴ Before long he has talked about the pleasures of hunting, shooting, solving allegories and riddles, and following “the well-connected thread of a play, or novel, which ever increases as the plot thickens”. Next, he translates these pleasures into a landscape aesthetic: “The eye hath this sort of enjoyment in winding walks, and serpentine rivers, and all sorts of objects, whose forms, as we shall see hereafter, are composed principally of what I call, the waving and serpentine lines”. His definition of intricacy as an aesthetic principle finally rolls together instinct and art in a slightly illicit metaphor which enlivens his theoretical writing while at the same time expressing his belief in the common principles sparking off all human enjoyment of pleasure and beauty: “Intricacy in form, therefore, I shall define to be that peculiarity in the lines, which compose it, that leads the eye a wanton kind of chace, and from the pleasure that gives [sic] the mind, intitles it to the name of beautiful”.

Hogarth’s almost breathless proliferation of parallel enjoyments gives but a slender sample of how richly his writing gathers and disseminates cultural material. In not much over a page he formulates a landscape aesthetic strongly suggestive of the picturesque (which becomes such an influential cultural force in landscape gardening, painting, and the literature of Sensibility); he anticipates by a few years Edmund Burke’s philosophical and psychological enquiry into the principles underlying the mind’s response to external objects;⁵⁵ and, switching to a comic mode (an habitual move in this treatise, captured graphically in the central country-dance sketch’s modulation from the graceful to the ridiculous), he slips in the convolutions of social behaviour which lend technical and satirical structure to his own visual narratives, as well as to contemporary literary genres like the Comedy of Manners and various



Fig. 3. William Hogarth, The Analysis of Beauty, plates I and II, border detail, rpt. in Hogarth: The Complete Engravings, plates 233 and 234.

fledgling forms of the novel. Most importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, The Analysis shows at work a language of painting which breaks away from idealistic discourse and an automatic attribution of the best in painting to indefinable “poetic” faculties. Instead, like Hogarth’s painting, this work employs a medium which is closely referential, yet imaginatively suggestive of the mental and emotional possibilities contained in visual forms (especially in the configurations of human action and behaviour which, for him, become “a sort of language”). It is quite fitting that The Analysis should tempt even a Reynolds into inventing a fragment of fiction, the portrayal of the strutting connoisseur in Hampton Court Gallery, which differs so radically from his usual critical procedure (note the straightfaced manner of the other Idler letters). The richly varied approach leading up to Hogarth’s consideration of aesthetic questions represents, after all, also the main routes by which English fiction appropriates painting in the eighteenth century. Bernard A. Richards notes that novelists found it difficult to “attach” themselves to Reynolds’s doctrines of generality and universality.⁵⁶ Against this, The Analysis reflects modes of perception and strains of painterly discourse which come into play at a time when novelists start recognising the creative possibilities which painting holds for their germinating art form. Small wonder that Fielding called for Hogarth’s pencil to give substance to particular moments of his fiction (Tom Jones, ch. 8)

In the terms of my preceding discussion, the novel constitutes another distinct literary “context” which receives and shapes the “schemata” of painterly language according to its own forms and intentions. This is not to say that the novel has nothing in common with poetry’s means of appropriating painterly imagery. Diverse elements of poetic use pass straight into the novel, both at the level of Dryden’s idealistically static treatment of the portrait as a quick and fool-proof index to character, and of Pope’s animated subversion of such imagery to suggest deceptive surface and fleeting realities. Goldsmith, for example, slips a mixture of fairly conventional images drawn from painting into The Vicar of Wakefield (1766) with an ease and versatility attesting to the common currency which these fragments of painterly discourse have acquired through frequent literary use.

In the initial “description of the family of Wakefield” he relies on fancy portraiture to render concrete a sense of the elder daughter’s confident bearing and character:

“Olivia, now about eighteen, had that luxuriancy of beauty, with which painters generally draw Hebe; open, sprightly, and commanding”.⁵⁷ Goldsmith’s portrayal of Olivia may here be straightforward enough, but in the rest of the novel his use of painterly material involves a more complex exploration of the suggestive possibilities generated in literature by the indirect types of description prevalent in the language of painting (what Baxandall calls the “indirect moods” of art-critical description). Later in the novel, Goldsmith’s touchstone of sense and sound judgment, Sir William Thornhill (at this stage still disguised as the penniless wanderer, Mr Burchell), illustrates an abstract point he is making about assessing character by invoking an aesthetic parallel of the day. This allusion contributes several moral metaphors to the discussion, mainly by referring to the processes and effects of painting. Character should not be judged by its “freedom from defect” but by “the greatness” of its “beauties” is Mr Burchell’s basic tenet, which he proceeds to illustrate as follows:

“The scholar may want prudence, the statesman may have pride, and the champion ferocity; but shall we prefer to these the low mechanic, who laboriously plods through life without censure or applause? We might as well prefer the tame correct paintings of the Flemish school to the erroneous, but sublime animations of the Roman pencil.” (97)

This fragment of aesthetic controversy echoes the spirit and sentiments of Reynolds’s first two Idler letters (written in 1759, a couple of years before The Vicar of Wakefield). Letter no. 1, principally aimed against Hogarth, ends with a firm denunciation of “scrupulosity, a servile attention to minute exactness, which is sometimes inconsistent with higher excellence, and is lost in the blaze of expanded genius”.⁵⁸ The second applies the categories distinguished above, as well as the marked connotations Reynolds associates with each, to Dutch painting on the one hand, and “the old Roman and Bolognian Schools” on the other.⁵⁹

With phrases like “low mechanic”, “laboriously plods”, and “erroneous, but sublime animations”, Goldsmith takes over the connotative language which makes Reynolds’s preference of the “grand style” over the “lower orders” such a distinctly moral choice. But apart from thus expanding the suggestive range of Mr Burchell’s argument, Goldsmith’s acceptance of the Reynoldian aesthetic at the end of chapter 15 prepares the ground for a pivotal satirical attack on the Primrose family’s disastrous

breach of decorum, which, more than any of the external misfortunes besetting them, speeds their temporary decline into shame and poverty in the second half of the novel. One of Reynolds's earliest principles, formulated first in the Idler letters and expanded later in the Discourses (with reference to Gainsborough and Hogarth in no. XIV), is that of artistic decorum which advises the painter to keep to his particular "order" of art, and the critic to adapt his criteria depending on whether he is dealing with the higher or the lower orders. Goldsmith incorporates this snippet of aesthetic doctrine into his fiction by depicting the Primrose family's aspirations above their station in terms of painterly genre. With their retreat into "humbler circumstances" (33) at the beginning of the novel they are placed at the heart of a rural and domestic idyll strongly reminiscent of Low Country landscape and genre painting of the seventeenth century. "Nothing could exceed the neatness of my little enclosures: the elms and hedge-rows appearing with inexpressible beauty", Dr Primrose recalls fondly. Moving indoors he stresses the aesthetic pleasures residing in simple domesticity and meticulous housekeeping:

Though the same room served us for parlour and kitchen, that only made it the warmer. Besides, as it was kept with utmost neatness, the dishes, plates, and coppers being well scoured, and all disposed in bright rows on the shelves, the eye was agreeably relieved, and did not want richer furniture. (40 - 41)

Some of Mrs Primrose's schemes for entrapping the resident Squire into the family are quite in keeping with such an existence: she draws attention to her daughter's proficiency at baking cakes, gathering gooseberries, and preparing pickles. But the lengths to which the family are prepared to go to satisfy their social desires involve sacrificing the merits of their "humble order" and aspiring to the "grand style", a breach of decorum graphically satirised in the historical piece painted of them by a strolling limner.

As in Pope's "To a Lady", Goldsmith's satire here hinges on treating the painted image as misleading surface. The chapter heading, "The family uses art, which is opposed with still greater", concisely settles the meaning of "art" in this context as deceptive design (ch. 16). Lacking Mr Burchell's perspicacity into matters of both character and aesthetics, the family fails to take into account that, in the first place, the

dissolute Squire's artfulness outstrips theirs by far, and secondly, their indecorous designs are setting them up for ridicule.

Goldsmith's "historical family piece" (101) is closely related to Pope's satirical fancy portraits in "To a Lady"; but apart from showing the extent to which the novelist may draw on the same basic language of painting as the poet, and even for similar purposes, the painting at the centre of Goldsmith's novel also displays characteristics and techniques of appropriation peculiar to the appearance of painterly imagery in prose works. Whereas paintings usually operate in poetry through quick reference and concentrated effect, the more dilute prose medium of the novel and its hybrid flexibility of form make possible, in addition to accommodating "poetic" types of painterly imagery, a further leisurely development of such material. Goldsmith aims his main satire at the Primroses' excess and folly, but in the process of elaborating the circumstances surrounding their choice of pictorial genre, the sitters' poses, the painter's execution of the work, and the finished product's fate, he includes a great deal of incidental humour which greatly expands the range of the central satirical image and its implications for the narrative as a whole.

The decision to have the family painted arises from "a sort of rivalry in point of taste" in which the Primroses are engaged with their neighbours. The seven Flamboroughs, they find, have been drawn in a number of circular frames (or "oranges"), "a thing quite out of taste, no variety in life, no composition in the world". Desiring for themselves "something in a brighter style" they resolve upon a multiple fancy portrait. Their decision is inherently deceptive in that they pretend to be "infinitely more genteel" than their rivals while they actually pay less, "since one frame would serve for all". The irreconcilable mixture of history and mythology (causing gross iconographic confusion) which arises from individual family members' choice of personas comments on their collective and independent lack of moral sense. Although Dr Primrose is depicted in his own person as a country vicar, a choice which initially suggests level-headed moderation amidst his family's extreme fancies, he is shown in the incongruous act of presenting his unreadable tracts on monogamy to a Venus, the homely Mrs Primrose with diamonds encrusting her stomacher and hair. The two youngest boys accompany her as Cupids, the wilful Olivia is an Amazon, meek Sophia a shepherdess "with as many sheep as the painter could put in for nothing", and non-

descript Moses merely dressed up in a hat and white feather. A telling addition to the portrait's symbolic range is the inclusion of Squire Thornhill, who insists on "being put in as one of the family - in the character of Alexander the Great at Olivia's feet" (102). His presence in the painting sparks off various interpretations comically at odds with one another and illustrative of several important thematic traditions associated with the painting as literary image. Goldsmith characterises him as an indomitable conqueror; the family merely sees his presence as a concrete sign of his entrapment in their midst; and in the neighbourhood the Squire's premature physical union with the family gives rise to prurient gossip.

The painting's wider satirical impact on the community is reinforced by a description of the artist's performance and the unfortunate circumstances under which the family is forced to exhibit their portrait. Once again their lack of taste becomes apparent in the discrepancy between their naïve commendation of the artist's work and Goldsmith's obvious satirical appraisal: the painter sets off with great "assiduity and expedition", manages to complete the large piece in "less than four days", and is extremely generous with his colours. But all this industry and art eventually amount to glaring spectacle: because of its inordinate size, the painting cannot be conveyed into the house and the Primroses find themselves uncomfortably stuck before a merciless public gaze:

The picture, therefore, instead of gratifying our vanity, as we hoped, leaned in a most mortifying manner, against the kitchen wall, where the canvas was stretched and painted, much too large to be got through any of the doors, and the jest of all our neighbours. One compared it to Robinson Crusoe's long-boat, too large to be removed; another thought it more resembled a reel in a bottle; some wondered how it could be got out, but still more were amazed how it ever got in.

In 1766, the year of The Vicar of Wakefield's publication, Lessing brought out his attack on what he regarded as contemporary critics' and artists' crude view of the ut pictura poesis tradition. According to his Laocoon, facile equations of the Sister Arts' distinct "objects" and "manners" of imitation had generated "a mania for pictorial description in Poetry, and for allegorical style in Painting".⁶⁰ "To oppose this false taste, and to counteract these unfounded opinions" about the similarities between the

arts, Lessing sets about stressing the widely divergent effects which the basic spatial-temporal difference has on each art's form and choice of subject-matter.⁶¹ The visual arts, he points out, have "material limits" which "confine" their imitations to "a single moment".⁶² Lessing argues that this constraint should compel the sensible visual artist to choose a moment "fruitful of effect", one which "leaves free play to the power of imagination".⁶³ Extremes of passion and any other fleeting moments are therefore unsuitable to visual representation, since climactic moments leave the imagination no further scope. All transitory actions, furthermore, "obtain, when prolonged by Art, so unnatural an appearance, that their impression becomes weaker with each repeated inspection, and ends in our feeling disgust or fear at the whole object".⁶⁴ The poet, by contrast, practises what Lessing calls "progressive imitation",⁶⁵ and is as a result free from this temporal constraint:

He takes up each of his actions as he likes from their very beginning and carries them through all possible changes up to the very end; each of these changes which would have cost the painter a whole work specially devoted to it, costs the poet only a single trait. . . .⁶⁶

Lessing steers away from applying one art's expectations and restraints to the other, substituting for this convention a detailed analysis of the specific changes and adjustments which material undergoes when it passes from one art form's set of aesthetic considerations to another's.

Recent critics have made much of Lessing's influence on ut pictura poesis theories of his time. Wendy Steiner regards his differentiation of the arts as central to the "romantics' concern with art's expressive rather than mimetic capacity" which makes "the painting-literature analogy decidedly marginal in nineteenth-century criticism".⁶⁷ In his work on literary painting, Richard D. Altick similarly links Lessing with the support given by Romantic literary critics to the "growing anti-pictorialist tradition in poetry".⁶⁸ Neither of these critics seems to give the practice of ekphrasis (a direct offshoot of ut pictura poesis parallelism) its rightful place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century development of the novel and its related body of criticism. Altick admittedly hints at the continuation of ut pictura poesis ideas into the nineteenth century; but it is in the nature of his study to concentrate on these tendencies as they materialise in literary pictures rather than in pictorial literature. One must keep in mind

that it took some time for Lessing's differentiation of the arts to filter through into English letters, even more so in the case of the novel which was at the time establishing its credentials as a serious art form, often by stressing exactly its "mimetic potential", and as often relying in the process on concepts such as ekphrasis and enargeia. A further consideration is that influence in cultural fields frequently does not work in a straightforward fashion. Pope's "To a Lady", decidedly pre-Lessing, is after all an attempt at redressing in literature the shortcomings of the "single moment" given "unchangeable duration" by the art of painting. When post-Lessing novelists take note of the differences between the arts, they may therefore do so from other sources. As in the case of Pope, they may furthermore use the discrepancy itself to generate literary meaning, so that instead of accepting Lessing's influence directly, and shunning ekphrasis, they may absorb his ideas into the general language of painting available to them and turn these to creative use in particular fictional contexts.

The family portrait in The Vicar of Wakefield is a case in point. Although pre-Lessing, Goldsmith's leisurely prose ekphrasis in this part of the novel does not rely uncritically on the ut pictura poesis tradition of pictorial description. Instead, it exploits for humorous effect the awkwardness which arises when an inappropriate moment is frozen. In the world of the novel, the Primroses' folly persists concretely for all to see. Furthermore, although novelists' art does not depend on the single moment, they may profitably avail themselves of a painterly image resembling what Lessing describes as the moment "fruitful of effect which leaves free play to the power of imagination". Such an image is frequently composite, and, although constructed in the temporal medium of language, it borrows at least some impact from the concrete, spatial nature of painting. Functioning as an essentially static image, it arrests the flow of narrative, usually to comment indirectly, through the suggestive workings of painterly language, on the fictional world in which it occurs. On the most basic level, its effects may merely be to make descriptions more vivid (the concept of enargeia) or to create a particular atmosphere. In more complex cases, the painterly image presents hints and clues, which, challenging the reader's imagination to free play, suggest or even stimulate developments in the surrounding narrative, whether they be of plot, character, theme, or overall aesthetic strategy. To return for illustration to Goldsmith: the Primrose portrait anticipates the family's fall into shame and misery, it reinforces

various character traits mentioned elsewhere in the novel, it reinvests thematic interest in the value of simplicity and contentment, and it furthers the general satirical policy of this novel.

Two important strains of painterly use take on form in the later eighteenth-century novel. Goldsmith's humorous expansion of incidents related to and inherent in the limner's attempt at immortalising the Primroses represents one of these. The other involves a shift of focus, from the painting as object which materialises in the narrative principally through direct description, to the painting which registers its presence chiefly through the effect it has on the receptive sensibilities of its fictional beholders in the novel. A work which nurtures both these strains is Horace Walpole's Anecdotes of Painting in England, published in four volumes over two decades (1762 to 1780). As Lipking shows in his chapter on Anecdotes, Walpole's influence did not particularly flow from diligent scholarship and considered opinion.⁶⁹ Of far more force are the detached, even condescending, attitudes and the confident personal touch which he brings to bear on the lives and works of painters in England. The type of material which this work releases is invaluable to the world of fiction. Instead of reverent artistic hagiography, Walpole engages in variegated gossip, lively fragments of what well-known painters did and said, the odd embedded verbal painting to show off descriptive skills, casual criticism, and observations based on uncertain mixtures of conventional and fresh response, generously laced with literary analogy. Composed by and intended for the sampling connoisseur, the work includes catalogues of individual painters' output, the locations where particular paintings could be viewed, and economic histories of various works.

While Hogarth and Reynolds's writing above all formulates aesthetic principles (albeit of widely different kinds), Walpole's deflects the language of painting into shallow but lively channels where it conveys quick assessments of character and reputation alike, or races through many a light-hearted incident involving painters, patrons, and works of art. Holbein, the reader is told, painted a fly on an eminent patron's portrait to leave a "specimen" of his imitative powers; the story is derivative and apocryphal (probably taken from Vasari, who recounts a similar prank played by the youthful Giotto on Cimabue), but lively enough to win it a place in Walpole's fragmentary "history".⁷⁰ Elsewhere, Walpole offers as his own Dryden's reservations

about the undemanding age in which he and Kneller had to exercise their respective arts:

In truth, the age demanded nothing correct, nothing compleat. Capable of tasting the power of Dryden's numbers, and the majesty of Kneller's heads, it overlooked doggerel and daubing. What pity that men of fortune are not blest with such a pen or such a pencil! That a genius must write for a bookseller, or paint for an alderman!"⁷¹

Also in this case, a stylish turn of phrase and conciseness weigh far more than originality.

So the Anecdotes progresses, repeating well-worn material, but doing so in easily digestible prose. Throughout, however, mixed into conventional matter, can be found moments of first hand response when Walpole harnesses his powers to convey a concrete sense of particular pictures. These attempts at ekphrasis are wide ranging, both in manner, and in the type of critical view which transpires. Hogarth's art, for instance, gives him the opportunity to execute two very different kinds of word-painting. The first is marvellously direct, starting with a quiet declaration of personal ownership and contact with Hogarth: "I have a sketch in oil that he gave me. . . ." ⁷² Walpole next deploys a number of simple descriptive constructs to measure out the painting's visual components:

The scene is the committee; [appointed by the House of Commons to enquire into cruelties committed against prisoners in the Fleet prison] on the table are the instruments of torture. A prisoner in rags half starved appears before them; the poor man has a good countenance that adds to the interest. On the other hand is the inhuman gaoler.

At this point, a curious imaginary parallel appealing to the reader's knowledge of Continental painting and English literature expands the "picture's" affective range: "It is the very figure that Salvator Rosa would have drawn for Iago in the moment of detection". The rest of the description manipulates words referring to design, colour, and composition in such a way as to conclude this exercise with a complex character-sketch which captures the painter's concrete efforts on canvas as well as the finished picture's emotional impact on the viewer:

Villany, fear, and conscience are mixed in yellow and livid on his countenance, his lips are contracted by tremor, his face advances as eager to lie, his legs step back as thinking to make his escape; one hand is thrust precipitately into his bosom, the fingers of the other are catching uncertainly at his button-holes. If this was a portrait, it is the most speaking that ever was drawn; if it was not, it is still finer.

Walpole's attention to the figure's position in space, as evident in his use of the contrasting verbs "advances" and "step back", lends dimension to this description (as does Hogarth's physiological baroque in the painting itself). Such semantic contrasts concisely signify the gaoler's mixture of villainy and fear. Also on a more general level, variegation is the main stimulus which propels the *Anecdotes* forward, variegation of material, tempo, and mode. "Encomiums" like the one above stand next to satirical accounts; together they amount to a chequered "history of a great man's excellencies [sic] and errors".⁷³ Like Reynolds, Walpole points his censure mainly at Hogarth's departure from his "proper sphere" to try his hand at history painting. The result is a second type of *ekphrasis*, less direct, and satirical in nature, which creates a ridiculous discrepancy between the painter's lofty intentions and the viewer's irreverent response:

After many essays Hogarth at last produced his Sigismonda --- but no more like Sigismonda, than I to Hercules. Not to mention the wretchedness of the colouring, it was the representation of a maudlin strumpet just turned out of keeping, and with eyes red with rage and usquebaugh, tearing off the ornaments her keeper had given her. To add to the disgust raised by such vulgar expression, her fingers were bloodied by her lover's heart that lay before her like that of a sheep's for her dinner. None of the sober grief, no dignity of suppressed anguish. . . .⁷⁴

A satirical description like this to a large extent exploits the basic differences in medium highlighted by Lessing: the arrested image is at the mercy of the writer's ability to proliferate impressions in a temporally fluent medium. In cases where the painter's work is perceived as awkward or ridiculous, these impressions often become wildly indignant or elaborately comical, deriving their impetus more from a display of

associative and improvisatory ability than from the writer's actual knowledge of painting. That this type of writing may pose a serious pitfall for art criticism becomes evident in the many art reviews of the nineteenth century which use indignation and jocularity as springboards for critical confidence or personal liberties.⁷⁵ Walpole's satirical ekphrasis borders on excess, especially towards the end. But on the whole he keeps the description in check by transcribing the picture not so much into a personal language of association as into Hogarth's own mock-heroic iconography. As a satire on history painting the *Sigismonda* could have succeeded, Walpole implies, thus neatly turning the picture against itself: "Hogarth's performance" in this work "was more ridiculous than any thing he had ever ridiculed".⁷⁶

The last remark, emerging as it does from Walpole's controlled descriptive technique and his reliance on the reader's knowledge of Hogarth's more usual satirical manner, again potently illustrates the suggestive economy which lies telescoped in the language of painting. Its hidden articulations can open up unexpected worlds, writers of fiction came to realise as the language of painting started appearing more and more frequently in accessible prose publications like the Anecdotes. And indeed, in 1780 (the year in which Walpole's fourth volume appeared), a slim work on painters and their doings strikes out in a new direction and annexes exactly such undiscovered worlds for fiction. The exuberant young William Beckford, eager to show off how well-versed he already was in aesthetic manners, and bent on ridiculing as many aspects of the art world as he could find occasion to, launched into a series of satirical pranks which left a host of theorists, critics, historians, patrons, and artists, both historical and contemporary, with their hair ruffled. To try and stabilise the point of view behind Beckford's Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters is a self-defeating exercise: the precocious author is far too rapt with his own agility to stay for observation. If anything, he adopts a Swiftian policy of radically shifting his sights, catapulting his reader through heady changes of perception. The work abounds in preposterous points of view, usually the result of aesthetic trends or painterly traditions, reduced to the absurd. Og of Basan, the prototypical Romantic artist who restlessly searches the heights and depths of nature, culture, and his own psyche for new sensations, produces an altar-piece through which Beckford pokes fun at miraculous subject-matter in religious painting. At the same time, the picture of the

beheaded St Denis which so admirably expresses “[t]he astonishment in the head at finding itself off its own shoulders” giddily mocks Og’s artistic self-involvement, while as an exercise in quirky viewpoint it functions as an apt metaphor for Beckford’s whimsical experiments with contrasting perspectives (see fig. 4).

Several attempts have been made at comprehensively identifying Beckford’s satirical targets. John Gibson Lockhart whose comments were used to promote the sale of the 1834 edition singled out “the Dutch and Flemish schools”.⁷⁷ To this André Parreaux has added “an eighteenth-century school of German painters led by Raphael Mengs”. Gemmett enlarges the scope by pointing out that a “final objective of the book . . . was to satirize certain biographical or critical studies of painters published in the eighteenth century” (he discovers, in particular, traces of Descamps’ La Vie des Peintres Flamands, Allemands et Hollandois in Beckford’s Biographical Memoirs). And most recently, Lipking refers to the “Northern painters” in general, “the fanatics and miniaturists who lose themselves in the particular”, before persuasively offering as one of Beckford’s victims Walpole himself, the collector of “minute facts” and raconteur of “tall stories” about the visual arts.⁷⁸

What these attempts bring home most forcibly is the sheer inexhaustibility of Beckford’s satire. By far the most compelling and detailed “life” in the Biographical Memoirs is that of Og, and it is again among his feverish artistic activities that one finds some indication of Beckford’s satirical scope. Between copying the paintings of Raphael in the Vatican apartments and abandoning himself to a fit of melancholy madness, the impossibly versatile Og dashes off a piece of writing enigmatically described as a “dissertation upon the plurality of worlds”. Og is certainly an expert on plurality, judging by the many conflicting talents and character traits he displays; but so is Beckford, in his own way, constantly pitching one imaginary world against another, embodying in Og’s wild visions a satirical version of the Burkean sublime, and providing the same chapter with a counter-balance in the shape of the smooth-tempered artist, Andrew Guelph, whose beautiful moonlit scenes of dancing peasants, and even application have brought him “a plurality of sequines”. The Biographical Memoirs restlessly multiplies incidents and conversations from painters’ lives, creates aesthetic viewpoints, techniques, and detailed oeuvres for all of these, provides them



Fig. 4. William Beckford (?), Og of Basan's picture of St. Denis, frontispiece to second and third editions, The Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters, ed. Robert J. Gemmett, (1880; Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1969, following page 60.

with a system of patronage, and invents for them critics and rival artists. Each of these regions is rich in satirical potential; together they spark off endless permutations.

Within this mass of shifting scales and criteria, Beckford is particularly blessed with the ability to base each artist's creative "identity" on a few chosen principles, for instance Og's wild sensibility or Sucrewasser's trifling insipidity. To build up a particular painter's "life", Beckford uses whatever painterly material comes to hand, boldly shaping a range of current aesthetic questions as well as firmly established historical categories to further his chosen satirical design for each chapter. His method does not involve using the individual lives as platforms from which to direct consistent satirical sallies against external targets in the world of painting, but to apply such external material opportunistically in the construction of fantastic edifices which take his initial designs to ridiculous (often self-destructive) extremes. The principle is similar to the one reigning in Pope's "Epistle to Cobham", where various characters' "ruling Passions", like "[f]its", lend "vigour" to their lives (as indeed they do to Pope's satire) "just when they destroy" (223). Excess, of various kinds, topples Beckford's painters. His exuberant elaborations on the nature and consequences of particular types of excess lend body to the imaginary lives, but also bring them to absurdly logical conclusions. The wide range of materials drawn into his satire through these elaborations is selected in conformity to the pattern of each individual life (or world) and not primarily, as critics have suggested, in response to "the judgements of a refined . . . taste" or his "middle-of-the-road" aesthetic.⁷⁹ This is not to deny his astonishing command over the language of painting. When he started scribbling the Biographical Memoirs at the age of seventeen, he had obviously been looking at and reading about painting with great vigour for years. But the most consistent element of his satire at this stage (as in the case of many a youthful satirist) is his brilliant irreverence which grasps at opportunities to show off skill without necessarily wanting to dismantle, through consistent effort, whole systems of thought or behaviour.

The life of his first extraordinary painter, Aldrovandus Magnus, is for example consumed by ambition. This gives Beckford a chance to laugh at history painting, grandiose schemes, and maybe Reynolds, at the helm of the country's greatest artistic projects (the Royal Academy and the foundation of a British School). The young Aldrovandus certainly aspires to something approximating the "grand style" set out in

Reynolds's Discourse IV, and manages so well to advance the "general idea" over "particularity"⁸⁰ in his history paintings, that he has no trouble converting a particular picture's subject-matter from one fable into another when occasion calls for this: for the love of a "haughty beauty", Ann Spindlemans, "he impiously changed the sacred story of Bell and the Dragon, begun for the Benedictines, into the garden of the Hesperides, guarded by a sagacious monster" (42). Scandalised by this aberration, his master, Jean Hemmelinck, plunges into "sage discourses" delivered in a ponderous "figurative style" to correct his disciple's youthful "folly", and to impress upon him the "golden advantages", the chains, medals, and gems which would reward diligent labour (42 - 43). (In Discourse I Reynolds warns professors of art to "watch over the genius" of talented youngsters so that their minds might not be "debauched and deceived" by an early mastery of "a facility in composing"; the "reward of eminence", he stresses, can only be obtained through moral industry, as illustrated in "the lives of the most eminent Painters" where "every page informs us, that no part of their time was spent in dissipation".)⁸¹ Aldrovandus takes heed, assiduously courts royalty with his talent, and arrives at "the summit of prosperity" (45). Hemmelinck, in a comic aside censuring ambition, dies of gluttony, just like Pope's Helluo ("Epistle to Cobham", 234 - 237), except that the Flamand boorishly devours a "huge pike" (itself renowned for its voracity) whereas the British bon-vivant expires on choice servings of salmon's belly and jowl. A similar fate, cleverly translated into pictorial terms, hits Aldrovandus' enormous historical scheme of "a suite of paintings which was to contain the whole history of the Goths and Vandals" (46). He runs out of canvas, but through his influence with the Duke Podebrac manages to monopolise the domain's supplies by a proclamation whereby it becomes treason to withhold any canvas from "the aforesaid Aldrovandus Magnus, Knight of the most noble order of the Ram" (47). By focusing on the power and ambition controlling this painter's work in extravagant detail, Beckford tacitly criticises a policy which effectively gives history painting a stranglehold on all other genres. Built into Aldrovandus' policy, however, is Beckford's own satirical principle of self-destruction, which again operates with the nicety of a Pope couplet. Embarking on his most ambitious work ever, a picture on the subject of Prince Drahomire who was swallowed up by an earthquake, Aldrovandus "cried aloud for canvas, but instead of canvas, his disciples, with singed beards,

brought the news of the conflagration of his ware-house, in which every thread of it was consumed" (47). "A paroxysm of grief", claiming the great painter's life, concludes this series of catastrophes.

It would be going too far to claim that Beckford's aim in this first "biography" is totally to discredit Reynolds's emphasis on diligence, aspiration, and superior styles in painting. Likewise, the ridiculous Pomeranian pair, Andrew Guelph and Og of Basan, hardly constitutes a systematic attack on particular kinds of landscape painting or Burke's polarised enquiry into matters of taste and sensibility. Beckford has his laugh, then moves on, often to a world in which Reynoldian or Burkean principles would themselves be an antidote to excess. Sucrewasser, who advances from painting trifling scenes on snuff-boxes to copying Titian, never daring on the way to confront nature directly, seems to justify both Reynolds and Burke. In Beckford's scheme of things, this non-entity dies of a cold after a long and sterile life. With the brigand-artist, Blunderbussiana, Beckford counters Sucrewasser's blandness with yet another wild visionary, this time one who explores, not the mysteries of savage places, but of human anatomy. Beckford embroiders with delight on the ghoulish sublime:

In the spring he used early in the morning to quit his cave, and frequently trussing a body over his shoulders, repaired to a wood, and delighted himself in exploring it. Instead of carrying with him, in his walks, a nice pocket edition of some Elzevir classic, he never was without a leg or an arm, which he went slicing along. . . . (86)

Fittingly, Blunderbussiana dies in a surreal fever, fancying himself set upon by severed limbs and heads. When Beckford eventually turns his satire specifically against seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish painting, he does so to introduce a world ruled by a contrary form of excess, one which leads him to select only those Netherlandish schools and genres supporting his portrait of the painstaking Watersouchy. The character stimulates satirical comments on the *fijnschilders* (with their meticulous finishing techniques), opulent still life, and placid domestic conversation pieces; omitted are, for instance, the boisterous farmyard and tavern scenes of Netherlandish genre painting which generally draw much derisive comment from critics of the Dutch and Flemish schools. This last chapter conclusively shows that selection of material in the *Biographical Memoirs* depends on internal structure, on the satirical design of

Beckford's individual "worlds" and his arrangement of them in relation to one another, and not on the consistency of the satirical views he directs outwards at the world of painting.

Apart from immediately changing the scene from "the rocks of Dalmatia" (Blunderbussiana's haunts) "to the levels of Holland" (90), the chapter on Watersouchy ingeniously balances the one on Aldrovandus, drawing the Biographical Memoirs to an impressive close. At one pole of the work, Beckford mocks panache, on the other, pernicky fiddling; grandiose schemes oppose an obsession with minutiae; history painting gives way to lesser forms. Whereas Aldrovandus shot to fame with his enormous compositions, Watersouchy creeps through years of apprenticeship to the Leyden fijnschilder of genre scenes, Gerard Dou. After a year the master allows him to finish "[t]he collar of a lap-dog, a velvet bracelet, and the lace round the caps of the gossips" in a large family group commemorating a christening (95); after eight years, Dou suffers him "to group without assistance" his first independent compositions, "[a]n arm chair of the richest velvet, and a Turkey carpet".

Beyond these bold contrasts, there is also some oblique thematic continuity between chapters one and five. In the last "biography", Beckford above all derides the effects of clinging too closely to diligence and decorum, in art as well as in life. Watersouchy exhausts his energies in observing splendid form: of obsequiously polite social behaviour and costly possessions, both of which find a place in his flattering portraits of Antwerp dignitaries. Beckford's ekphrasis is highly substantive here, capturing both the wealth of accessories and Watersouchy's painstaking pace in executing these. The legends on coins and individual hairs of eyelashes become visible through his labours, and once a whole month goes by in his "giving" the ringed fingers of the Burgomaster's lady "the last touch of perfection" (106). Such confined efforts and limited scope of vision, once again taken to ridiculous extremes, result in a gradual dwindling away of powers. After a particularly laborious endeavour only "a circle of old ladies" can nurse Watersouchy's exhausted spirits. He takes to cordials and becomes "fond" of "news and tulips", composes "little pieces" depicting pet dormice and bits of cheese to thank his comforters, and, while expiring, paints a flea.

Although drawing primarily on aspects of Netherlandish painting for his satire in this chapter, Beckford happily slips in other jibes when the opportunity presents itself.

The fun made of minute particularity may seem to reinstate Reynolds's authority; and yet, Watersouchy's advice to himself on his way to Antwerp translates painterly imagery into moral metaphors in a manner which only slightly exaggerates such practice in Discourse I: "Let all your actions be regular as the strokes of your pencil, and let the varnish of your manners shine like that of your paintings" (97). Elsewhere, a description of a De Mierhop table piece trifles with Burke, invoking something approximating a culinary sublime: "The vapour smoking over the dishes judiciously concealed the extremities of the repast, and gave the finest play to the imagination" (93). Sometimes Beckford manipulates painterly material for sheer fun: Maria Sibylla Merian, mainly a finicking painter of flowers and insects, gives him a chance to snigger at Watersouchy's moral rigidity and sexual squeamishness: "He adored the extreme nicety of her touch, and not a little admired that strict sense of propriety which had induced her to marriage; for it seems she had chosen Jean Graff of Nuremburg for her husband, merely to study the Nud in a modest way" (100).

Such exuberant additions expand the range of Beckford's satire to an extent which is still bewildering, much more so at the time of the Biographical Memoirs' first publication when ordinary readers, even critics, found Beckford's intentions obscure and the blurred boundaries between fact and fiction untenable. Tracing the work's history in the critical reviews which appeared in Beckford's lifetime, Gemmett concludes that it took a third edition and a good fifty years before readers showed signs "of coming to terms with Beckford's satire".⁸² He finds the solution to the reading public's "insensitivity" to the satirical nature of this work in Beckford's own correspondence: "'except among a few gentlemen, there is no sound taste for the arts in England'"⁸³. To this one may add a pointed reference in the Biographical Memoirs itself to the general lack of expertise and interest in the visual arts in England: at the famous public confrontation over the respective merits of nut-oil and egg white varnish, the mercurial Og completely routs Soorcroust of Vienna (a slavish copyist of Titian and as insignificant as his friend Sucrewasser); "[a]fter this disgrace", Beckford notes with masterly comic control, "Soorcroust went to England" (82). This is the only time he mentions his home country in the Biographical Memoirs.

Beckford's first attempt at fiction, then, proves to be precocious in more than one way. It demonstrates the extensive satirical potential which painterly material holds for

fiction. In many respects, however, Beckford's deployment of this satire is far too fluent and specialised for a public much taken by the new readability of prose fiction, but still largely inarticulate when it comes to the language of painting. A pleasant coincidence is that the second edition of the Biographical Memoirs appeared in 1824, the year of the foundation of the National Gallery in London, an occasion which did much to stimulate popular awareness of the arts in Britain. The next edition, appearing in 1834, takes one right into the world of Thackeray's bustling satirical reviews and an ever-burgeoning public interest in the arts, developments which form the basis of my discussion of Thackeray's writing. Beckford is also the first writer of fiction to show an intense interest, albeit jocular, in the creative mind and life which can be extrapolated from the procedures of painting. Not until Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre does such material find serious expression in fiction. Concurrently with Beckford's impressive early discoveries in these regions of painterly fiction, other developments, some less firmly based on a thorough command over pictorial language, were taking their course in the English novel. Writers of fiction continued to adapt poetry's use of the visual arts to their own needs. And late eighteenth-century forms like the novel of Sensibility and Gothic fiction rang their own changes on a growing stock of images and themes derived from painting. Since all of these have some bearing on my treatment of Jane Austen's art, but also to a lesser extent George Eliot's and Henry James's, a quick look at Sensibility and the Gothic is necessary to supplement my previous views of painterly usage in eighteenth-century literature.

Both these forms mark a shift towards registering the significance of painterly imagery in a fictional world through their effect on the receptive abilities of beholders, a tendency identified linguistically by Baxandall and ascribed convincingly by Lipking also to Walpole's perceptions in the Anecdotes, especially to the part in volume I on Gothic architecture. Closely analysing several of these comments on the Gothic, Lipking identifies in Walpole's writing a "language of sensation that considers architecture to be primarily a psychological mechanism for conveying impressions".⁸⁴ Though hardly sensational and more closely linked to actual pictorial effect, the language describing Hogarth's Fleet prisoner and warden certainly derives much of its force from evoking, as well as capturing, an implicit viewer's first hand response to

depictions of misery and cruelty. To the novelist of Sensibility this shift in emphasis signals yet another means of opening up internal prospects.

Sterne's sentimental traveller, for instance, frequently goes so far as to dispense completely with any particular pictorial stimulus from the outside, instead allowing his imagination to handle the brush freely. Fear of arrest in France (he is at this stage travelling without a passport) figuratively puts him in a "frame" which he sketches in with his own elaborate sensations about "the miseries of confinement".⁸⁵ His "picture" of an imaginary captive (or really, series of "pictures") repeatedly culminates in eruptions of feeling: "But here my heart began to bleed - and I was forced to go on with another part of the portrait" (202), or " - I saw the iron enter into his soul - I burst into tears - I could not sustain the picture of confinement which my fancy had drawn" (203). A lighter scenario, one of his amusing little love games, takes not an empty frame but a blank canvas as a point of departure. The traveller and an unknown young woman find themselves unexpectedly left alone while the master of the Hôtel goes off to fetch a key. They wait, hand in hand, their faces turned towards the locked door of the carriage shed. Had they been facing the street, the traveller remarks, they would have commented on "objects and occurrences without"; but "when your eyes are fixed upon a dead blank - you draw purely from yourselves" (90). By this stage, as the reader is soon to find out through one of Sterne's temporal loops into the past which leaves the pair stranded at the door for a whole chapter, the traveller has already composed an imaginary picture of the woman's face and has followed this up with a glance at the "original"; which puts his mind in yet another "frame" to express the curiosity and benevolence he feels towards the lines "traced" on her face by imagined "distresses" (92 - 94). Neatly summarising Sterne's use of pictures as devices of sentiment, Yorick later gives the following half-innocent, half-tantalising account of the rules whereby he travels and flirts:

It is for this reason, Monsieur le Compte . . . that I have not seen the Palais royal - nor the Luxembourg - nor the Façade of the Louvre - nor have attempted to swell the catalogues we have of pictures, statues, and churches - I conceive every fair being as a temple, and would rather enter in, and see the original drawings and loose sketches hung up in it, than the transfiguration of Raphael itself. (218 - 219)

These are blasphemous words in a country where Raphael's aesthetic reign was to be indisputable for many years to come. But Sterne, of course, does not quite share his traveller's easy off-centring of art appreciation as one of the hubs of the Grand Tour. His humorous deviations display an acute awareness of the effects which pictorial principles can lend his style of writing. In fact, his treatment of pictorial imagery in A Sentimental Journey contributes greatly to the rhythm of arrest and flow which makes this novel such a compelling exercise in mapping the mind's subjective wanderings. It is exactly this binary quality of his technique which most fascinates Virginia Woolf in an introductory essay to this novel. Fresh from making the painter, Lily Briscoe, draw the final, stabilising line in To the Lighthouse, she comments on the possibility of achieving compositional stasis in worlds of perpetual movement:

No writing seems to flow more exactly into the very folds and creases of the individual mind, to express its changing moods, to answer its lightest whim and impulse, and yet the result is perfectly precise and composed. The utmost fluidity exists with the utmost permanence. It is as if the tide raced over the beach hither and thither and left every ripple and eddy cut on the sand in marble.⁸⁶

Stability of a different, more literal, kind is an effect which the pictorial image conveys also to the Gothic novel. The type of fictional world invoked by those late eighteenth-century novels commonly described as Gothic usually abounds in aristocratic or religious strongholds, places in which paintings might be expected, and do indeed turn up with more than incidental frequency. Their function is to hint enigmatically at a hidden, in most cases a forcibly suppressed, state of order which has somehow become subsumed under a false status quo, usually one showing the turmoil and strain of unjustly imposed authority. Operating as concrete narrative clues, paintings assist in driving the Gothic plot towards resolution, more precisely, towards the deposition of false authority and the reinstatement of just order.

Some adjustment is necessary to this scheme of interpretation which may otherwise seem too glib an equation of Gothic novels to revolutionary fable, especially given their time of composition towards the end of the eighteenth century. Far from supporting the overthrow of aristocratic power, the Gothic more often confirms the validity of a ruling class, as long as it upholds the principles of humanity and

orderliness. In this respect, the genre much rather tends towards enacting a fable of moderate reform, preserving an important place for legitimate hereditary power in well-ordered societies, while deflecting just indignation in the direction of misbehaving or corrupt members of such leading classes: the usurpers, tyrants, and bullies. Paintings, especially portraits, are frequent props in the construction of stories which subscribe to this basic plot design. The presence of paintings is a concrete sign of an estate's, and therefore a family's, stability. The Gothic novel frequently presents such a symbol under a layer of antiquarian dust. In these novels portraits usually appear as relics of formerly stable genealogies. They are discovered in locked up closets and hidden galleries where they arrest the beholder's attention through the circumstances of their discovery or a strong personal aura, and usually they prompt investigation. As mute signals of a mysterious past existence, they demand to be read, and on their interpretation (correct or incorrect), relies a fragment of Gothic plot and a considerable portion of Gothic atmosphere.

As in the novel of Sensibility, it is again the viewer's response which gives substance to the pictorial image; and often the painting itself is similarly reduced to prompt a response not in terms of pictorial qualities of form and style, but in its capacity as an unusual object exciting interest and compelling investigation. The only pictorial quality to survive this reduction is the distinctly literary tradition of enargeia; and even here the painting's concrete aspect is demonstrated more through its emotional impact and the forward motion it gives to external plot, than through any textural presence in the writing itself.

At its most emblematic, the portrait image acquires an ominous "Last Duchess" aspect, especially in narratives liberally supplied with corpses and incarcerations where an enclosing frame and captured countenance become directly symbolic of the fate suffered by persons long dead or missing. In Clara Reeve's The Old English Baron (1778) two portraits with their faces turned to the wall lead Edmund, a peasant foundling, to the discovery of his parents' aristocratic identity and the foul play which had led to their murder years before.⁸⁷ The sense of foreboding, horror or mystery accompanying the presence of such paintings adds to the emotional atmosphere and narrative tension of Gothic literature; but not infallibly. Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) so overloads the painting as emblem of horror that the image lapses

into ludicrous tautology. A veiled painting repeatedly strikes viewers speechless or senseless with the intensity of its visual impact, in this manner perpetuating its terrible secret.⁸⁸ Radcliffe seems to forget about her device once it has fulfilled its sensational function and remembers only in a feeble endnote to the plot to identify it as a wax memento mori encased in a wall, a veritable dummy of horror (662). The ghostly picture which somehow becomes animate, follows viewers with its eyes, or even quits the frame, is another stock-in-trade of Gothic horror. In Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764) this convention figures in a genealogical battle conducted through works of art.⁸⁹ The usurping bloodline, represented by the tyrant, Manfred, draws inspiration from the sighing and beckoning image of the original usurper, his grandfather, Ricardo (24), whereas the suppressed bloodline gains confidence through a young "peasant's" mysterious resemblance to a portrait of the original usurper, Alfonso the Good (52, 85), who lends further force to their just cause by making unnerving appearances at the Castle of Otranto in the shape of a gigantic statue from a nearby church. The interplay between posing a mystery and unravelling it so basic to Gothic plot structure involves the portrait in discoveries which in modern thrillers would require the apparatus and techniques of pathology. Again and again portraits play a convenient role in recognition scenes. The evil Schedoni in The Italian finds a miniature of himself on his sleeping victim just as he is about to stab her (Ellena eventually turns out to be not his daughter, as he thinks, but his niece).⁹⁰ And, in The Mysteries of Udolpho, the main thrust of the plot is to match a series of unidentified portraits with their living counterparts (or, at least, with close relatives who traditionally resemble them exactly).

From the plot summaries above it becomes evident that, although at times tortuous, the narrative structures, thematic implications, and types of pictorial symbolism which evolve from the Gothic novel's use of painterly material remain relatively simple and direct. But they nonetheless stay part of the ever-expanding language of painting which novelists have at their disposal. Even though new developments in exhibiting, viewing, and reviewing painting gradually work their way into the vocabulary and syntax of this language, a peculiarly Gothic figure like for instance the dumb-struck viewer appears in many guises throughout the nineteenth century and beyond: Catherine Morland, inventing Gothic plots before Mrs Tilney's

portrait; Gwendolen Harleth in shocking confrontation with a pictorial memento mori at her moment of theatrical triumph; or Milly, painfully sensing her own mortality in the Bronzino at Matcham. These examples all reinforce what I called, at the beginning of this chapter, the “traditionalist” or retentive character of painterly idiom. But they equally focus attention on the flexibility which a specific literary context and individual writers’ approach impart to such basic material, as well as the continuous expansion which the language of painting undergoes through artistic, critical, and scholarly endeavour. The freshly accumulative nature of painterly language evokes in literature a many-layered response which displays creative writers’ individual experience and manipulation of established pictorial traditions, as well as their more experimental probing of recent developments. Innovation, in the example taken from Northanger Abbey, is purely literary and consists in Jane Austen’s realising the satirical value of a painterly image ready-transmuted by Gothic fiction; the example from The Wings of the Dove, on the other hand, illustrates James’s more immediate and particularly visual apprehension of what pictorial form can suggest to literature: Milly’s morbid reaction depends on James’s own sensitive awareness and formulation in language of the awkward, flattening effect characteristic of Mannerist art. My method, then, is to analyse novelists’ use of pictorialism and pictorial allusions in the manner of Jeffrey Meyers and Marianna Torgovnick, but with this important difference, that I also pay extensive attention to the linguistic forms which have come to surround such material in particular cultural contexts or in the works of individual writers.⁹¹

Reynolds’s vision for British artists was the establishment of a national school and a recognition that the painter’s art not merely involved craft, but possessed a “poetic” force. Inspired by a similar idealism, but nurtured more organically on British artistic traditions like the Romantic landscape, Ruskin, years later, undertook “to declare and demonstrate, wherever they exist, the essence and the authority of the Beautiful and the True”.⁹² He concentrates not on the “old masters”, but on living artists of British origin. Although one couldn’t justifiably claim that Ruskin’s fervid belief in painting as a vehicle for moral vision or his defence of home-grown talent altered the stature of British painting itself, his writings were enormously influential in expanding the expressive range of painterly language and in suggesting to viewers a method of pursuing meaning through visual form. George Eliot, for instance, mastered Ruskin’s

techniques of “reading” the pictorial clues which according to him embody the “thought” and increase the affective intensity conveyed by painting. Transferring these techniques to a rehabilitated version of Dutch and Flemish genre painting, she used the language of painting to circumscribe the aesthetic aims of her early fiction. But, as I shall indicate in my chapter on Eliot, her later fiction largely swings away from exploring the use of a painterly aesthetic as an aid to structuring her novelistic-vision; unlike Henry James, who throughout his creative life appropriates painting as an analytic and synthetic process of observation which renders his writing concrete at the same time as making it richly suggestive. The thesis ends with the beginning of James’s late period, and therefore inevitably sends feelers into the twentieth century. Since I view the language of painting as an endlessly accumulative system, a probe into the late twentieth century might register nineteenth-century trends retrospectively. For a final illustration, then, of the method I propose to follow in discussing the fiction of the nineteenth century, I turn to A. S. Byatt’s recent novel, *Still Life* (1985), which has provided me with an epigraph, and might, through the range of its reference to particular paintings, as well as to theories of perception surrounding them, draw together the disparate methodological and historical materials dealt with in this chapter.

In Byatt’s prologue, set in 1980, almost thirty years after the period in which this novel’s main action takes place, the playwright, Alexander Wedderburn, is heading for a rendezvous with an old friend in a room full of Van Goghs at the Royal Academy Post-Impressionist exhibition. His progress towards Room III is measured in a succession of adverbial and adjectival phrases. These operate cumulatively to suggest the full cultural consciousness which this prospective viewer brings to bear on reading paintings:

So here he was, a distinguished public man, also an artist of a kind, stepping obediently through Room I (French 1880s) and Room II (British 1880s and 1890s), on a lead grey morning, to the pale grey, classical, quiet place where the bright light shone and sang off pigment so that the phrase miraculous stuff, seemed merely accurate.⁹³

Complement and apposition in subsequent sentences reinforce the complexity of experience which informs Wedderburn’s perception of individual works: Room III

contains, amongst others pictures, “an Arles ‘Poets’ Garden” which “he hadn’t seen before, but recognised, from small photographs, from charged descriptions in the painter’s letters” (1). Byatt next offers a densely packed visual account of the painting, clearly as refracted through the variegated consciousness which she has constructed so meticulously for her character:

He sat down and saw a bifurcated path, simmering with gold heat round and under the rising, spreading blue-black-green down-pointing vanes of a great pine, still widening where the frame interrupted its soaring. Two decorous figures advanced, hand-in-hand, under its suspended thickness. And beyond, green green grass and geraniums like splashes of blood. (1)

Continued exposure to the painting results in further descriptions, or rather, modes of description, as the colours and shapes on Van Gogh’s canvas lead the viewer’s perceptual faculties an intricate dance of both immediate and remembered sensation. Wedderburn’s visual impressions materialise in language, of course. He is, after all, himself a literary artist, which explains the prominent and sustained efforts of style marking his visual experience. The painted garden, with its keenly sensed path, pine, figures, and flowers breaks up at a second viewing into its technical constituents and a great many powerful but unruly associations which amount to the following close-up: “He stared at the serenely impassioned garden made out of a whirl of yellow brushstrokes, a viridian impasto, a dense mass of furiously feathered lines of blue-green, isolated black pot hooks, the painfully clear orange-red spattering” (2).

The radically different style of this description once again reveals the variety of experience which makes up Wedderburn’s mind, this time by bringing to the surface his struggles of thirty years before with Van Gogh and language. A Gombrichian process of reviewing and reworking conceptual modes dominates Byatt’s (and her fictional character’s) return to this relatively distant past, as Wedderburn proceeds to sort through the deposits of literary and painterly material formed during previous attempts at coming to terms with Van Gogh in language:

He had had trouble finding an appropriate language for the painter’s obsession with the illuminated material world. . . . At first he had

thought that he could write a plain, exact verse with no figurative language, in which a yellow chair was the thing itself, a yellow chair, as a round gold apple was an apple or a sunflower a sunflower. Sometimes he still saw the brushstrokes, as it were, in this naked way, so that his earlier thoughts of this garden had to be undone, the idea of black wings to be stripped from the painted leafage, the vulgar idea of blood splashes washed off the notation of geraniums.

As in Gombrich's thinking, however, the artist (here Wedderburn, Van Gogh - and ultimately, Byatt herself) labours under Whorfian predestiny; and Ruskin's "innocent eye" remains, as ever, strictly hypothetical, as layer after layer of obstructive material continues to deflect attempts at seeing "in this naked way". The very process of stripping away obstacles to pure sight serves only to uncover further ones:

But it couldn't be done. Language was against him, for a start. Metaphor lay coiled in the name sunflower, which not only turned towards but resembled the sun, the source of light.

Van Gogh's idea of things had also been against him. The yellow chair, besides being brushstrokes and pigment, besides being a yellow chair, was one of twelve bought for a company of artists who were to inhabit the Yellow House, the white walls of which should blaze with sunflowers as the windows of Gothic cathedrals blazed with coloured light. Not only metaphor: cultural motif, immanent religion, a faith and a church. One thing always linked to another thing. (2)

Whereas Van Gogh's evasiveness at times tinges Wedderburn's personal survey with post-Modernist despondency, the painter offers Byatt herself a combination of vivid signs and ever-expanding significance which becomes her chief means of suggesting "life" in 1950s Britain. Her selection of epigraphs for the novel tellingly juxtaposes Proust's "petite image claire et usuelle", which attaches to words explanatory pictures of the objects they refer to, and (through Foucault) Cuvier's flux of meaning which springs from endlessly shifting relationships between contiguous elements. (Cuvier's categories are "les substances mortes" and "les corps vivants", cleverly spliced in Byatt's own title, Still Life.) Thus, the complex interactions between

paintings and people in her “Post-Impressionist” prologue bring into play powerful concrete stimuli on the one hand, and on the other, a range of perceptual responses, minutely differentiated according to the particular viewer involved, so that Byatt’s characters are themselves on retrospective exhibition, as it were, in the prologue, figuring as organised complexes of ready-made impressions, the origins and development of which she undertakes to trace in the course of the novel.

Like Wedderburn, her next viewer, Frederica Potter of the Radio 3 Critics’ Forum, enters into the prologue through snatches of critical, literary, and personal reactions to the paintings on exhibition. These, however, completely overthrow the gentle (if at times anxious) rhythms of the playwright’s lyrically tentative attempts at formulating Van Gogh in language. Apart from the obvious and solid scholarly knowledge with which Byatt invests Frederica’s perceptions, the novelist indulges in a brilliant play of glancing suggestion which exactly captures this character’s formidable, yet fastidious, and even slightly ridiculous, bearing. As background to Frederica’s critically proficient response to painting, Byatt sets the comical misconceptions of a viewer armed with a sound guide to the exhibition. For this, she draws on Butor’s light-hearted introduction to the essay “Les Mots dans la Peinture” in which he describes his astonishment at the automaton-like behaviour of viewers in the Washington National Gallery, until he realises that a hidden sound guide determines their responses, that “[u]ne voix secrète les faisait voir”.⁹⁴ But Frederica’s scornful observation of her ingenuous fellow-viewers does not put her own superior response to painting beyond the reach of Byatt’s ironic approach. Whipping up a whirl of cross-references (resembling Butor’s “halo de commentaires”)⁹⁵ around Monet’s fittingly turbulent Au Cap d’Antibes par vent de mistral, Byatt rushes her clever newcomer to the novel from literary association to exhibition catalogue entry, from fragments of aesthetic theory to personal impulses, in the process creating a character whose mental attitudes become an amusing counterpart to Monet’s “formless formed plungings of water and wind” (3).

The almost feverish play of pre-“formed” languages making up Frederica’s response to painting, although quite different from Wedderburn’s meticulously constructed layers of meaning, again suggests a Gombrichian system of visual schemata determining the way in which images are formed and read. In fact, it is

probably no coincidence that the prattling viewer who falls victim to Frederica's censorious stare should confuse Monet with Churchill. Elaborating on this error, Byatt introduces another string of associations which reaches through Churchill and touches upon even Gombrich himself. Frederica's "reading" of the Monet takes a preliminary turn through Proust (which once again echoes Butor, this time his essay on Proust, Manet, and the "fictive" painter, Elstir),⁹⁶ then muses on the visual manifestation of "light", a quality which for Churchill breathed "meaning" into the painted "cryptogram" on canvas, and which inspired him to such eloquence that Gombrich repeated his remarks on the translation of "mere pigment into light" when he came to write the section "From Light into Paint" in *Art and Illusion*.⁹⁷

It is with Gombrich that Byatt later in the novel restates the importance of pre-formed meaning for her own artistic credo. Towards the end of chapter 7, in a bravura passage consciously reminiscent of Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode", she has the narrative voice attempting to approximate the visual sensations of the new-born baby, William, as he lies "amongst" a "glory" of diffusely coloured light (107). But what Byatt (like Wordsworth before her) ends up registering through her infant's eye is, of course, the sad irretrievability of such primary sensation, of uninterpreted (and therefore uninterpretable) light; thence the self-conscious paralepses persistently stalling her flow of lyricism to re-establish the essentially negative outlines which her description of the baby's experience inevitably has to follow. The glorious "swathe of light", "streaked and stroked" with iris and daffodil which Byatt imaginatively projects onto her infant's retina thus becomes refracted and dispersed by the processes of adult perception. "The light . . . was a warm light", the narrative voice states with seemingly quiet confidence, then quenches both light and confidence with a wordy concessive clause: "though it is not possible for me to say whether he in any way associated synaesthetically the ideas of warmth and light" (107). Likewise, halting paraphrase and approximation swell the previously recorded "dashes and flashes" of colour which the child receives from the bouquet of spring flowers into a needlessly technical list of colours. The narrative voice adds preposterously, "though of course he could not name or distinguish these divisions of light". And next follows a long series of similes, inappropriate in their complexity, which "might have" conveyed the baby's sensations "[i]f he had been capable of simile, which he was not".

“Art”, Byatt concedes after this intentionally self-defeating demonstration, “is not the recovery of the innocent eye, which is inaccessible”. She continues with what amounts to pure Gombrichian pastiche which echoes Alexander’s earlier difficulties with appropriating Van Gogh in language:

‘Make it new’ cannot mean, see it free of all learned frames and names, for paradoxically it is only a precise use of learned comparison and the signs we have made to distinguish things seen or recognised that can give the illusion of newness. I had the idea that this novel could be written innocently, without recourse to reference to other people’s thoughts, without, as far as possible, recourse to simile or metaphor. This turned out to be impossible: one cannot think at all without a recognition and realignment of ways of thinking and seeing we have learned over time. We all remake the world as we see it, as we look at it. (108)

Like Gombrich, Byatt takes traditional schemata as a point of departure and finishes with an emphatic confirmation of the innovative abilities inherent in individual talent: “Even the innocent eye does not simply receive light: it acts and orders. And we always put something of ourselves . . . into our descriptions of our world, our mapping of our vision” (109).

Again, as so often in this novel, she finds in painting an objective correlative which unites diverse thought processes and thematic developments into a powerfully suggestive image, that of the self-conscious artist, forever reaching through and beyond established modes of seeing, a portrait of Van Gogh, painted by himself: “He radiated brushstrokes in a self-portrait from his own eyes like twin suns. It is new and the opposite of innocent: it is seen, and thought, and made” (109). The verb “radiated” picks up the imagery of warmth and light which Byatt uses in speculating about the infant’s mental response to the “glistening particles” received on his retina. Her speculation entertains the possibility that the child’s brain, or at least “those parts of the brain which become the rods and cones of vision” might have had some “preparatory dream of light” in the “lightless amniotic fluid”, and therefore might start organising his vision mentally in terms of “precognition” even from the moment of birth. (Describing the sense of sight at its most basic, Gombrich speaks of the “welter



Fig. 5. Vincent van Gogh, Self-portrait
(1889/1890), Louvre, Paris.

of dancing light points” “we get on the retina” which stimulates “the sensitive rods and cones that fire their messages into the brain”).⁹⁸

But beyond forming part of a chain of imagery relaying an impression of the internal working of the eye, the verb “radiated” also projects meaning outwards onto the shapes appearing on Van Gogh’s canvas. Through Baxandall’s indirect moods of “comparison” and “inference”, the word “radiated” alludes to the riveting effect of the spirals and concentric forms in which Van Gogh’s later artistic vision materialises (see fig. 5). But “radiated” refers as much to Byatt’s writing on Van Gogh as to Van Gogh’s painting. She draws his art into the descriptive textures and thematic patterns of *Still Life*, trusting that his brushstrokes, available at least in memory to most of her readers, will start radiating meaning to her writing itself. In this, she repeats in slightly altered form Pope’s belief in the reflection of meaning from art to art. This thesis will argue that imaged in writers’ shaping of painterly material lie modes of seeing, thinking, and making which give meaning to literary construction.

Notes and References to Chapter One

¹ Pope’s “Epistle to Mr. Jervas” was written c. 1715 and published in 1716. *The Poems of Alexander Pope: A One-Volume Edition of the Twickenham Text*, ed. John Butt (Frome: Methuen, 1963) 249 - 251. Line references will be cited in the text.

² Dryden’s translation appeared in London in 1695. As far as De Piles’ contribution is concerned, Lawrence Lipking points out in *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) that “on its first appearance *De arte graphica* was already cloaked and to some extent modified by a tissue of De Piles’ introductions, annotations, interpretations, translations, and addenda. De Piles’ ‘observations’ alone are almost four times as long as the text he observes” (42).

³ The title page alone reflects the edition’s encyclopaedic nature: *The Art of Painting of Charles Alphonse du Fresnoy*. Translated into English Verse by William Mason, M. A. with Annotations by Sir Joshua Reynolds, Knt. President of the Royal Academy (Dublin, 1783). The table of contents furthermore gives a clear indication of the degree of intertextuality courted by this translator and editor. The work contains: Mason’s Epistle to Joshua Reynolds, a Preface, The Life of Du Fresnoy, The Art of Painting with the Original Text Subjoined, Reynolds’s Notes on The Art of Painting, A Table of the Rules Contained in the Foregoing Poem, The Sentiments of C. A. du Fresnoy on the Works of the Principal and best Painters of the two last ages [done either by Dryden “very carelessly” or by “some inferior hand”], Mr. Dryden’s Preface, with a Parallel of Poetry and Painting, Epistle of Mr. Pope to Mr. Jervas, and A Chronological list of Painters, from the Revival of the Art to the Beginning of the Present century (by Thomas Gray)!

⁴ Lipking 39.

⁵ Lipking puts side by side six versions of Du Fresnoy’s opening lines as represented by De Piles (1668), Dryden (1695), Defoe (1720), Wills (1754), Mason (1783), and Churchey (1789). This fascinating exercise displays the way in which various followers of Du Fresnoy use his Horatian “analogy of the arts in order variously to promote some view of their own about painting or to insinuate painting’s aesthetic and social value” (46 - 47).

⁶ Franciscus Junius the Younger changed his own De pictura veterum into the English version, The Painting of the Ancients, in 1638. I am indebted to Lipking for this information (23).

⁷ John Dryden, "A Parallel of Poetry and Painting", The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, vol. 2 (London: 1852) 390.

⁸ Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses on Art, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) 17 - 19, 62, and 57, respectively. The references are to Discourse I (1769) and Discourse IV (1771).

⁹ The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Edward MacCurdy (1938; London: Jonathan Cape, 1954) 211.

¹⁰ Leonardo 213.

¹¹ Reynolds, Discourse III (1770) 42 - 43.

¹² Dryden, "To Sir Godfrey Kneller", The Poems of John Dryden, ed. James Kinsey, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958) 858 - 863. Line references will be cited in the text.

¹³ See Vasari's prefaces, especially 1 and 3, which identify Leonardo as the artist who introduced Raphael's age, the period when painting reached its pinnacle. In the section "Sentiments of C. A. du Fresnoy . . ." appended to Mason's edition of De arte graphica, Raphael's continued supremacy in eighteenth-century Britain is presented as follows: "he possessed the Graces in so advantageous a manner, that he has never since been equalled by any other" (123).

¹⁴ Michael Baxandall, Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanations of Pictures (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) v.

¹⁵ Baxandall 3.

¹⁶ Baxandall 5.

¹⁷ Baxandall 6 - 7.

¹⁸ Baxandall 6 (but the examples are my own).

¹⁹ Baxandall 6.

²⁰ William Hogarth, The Analysis of Beauty, ed. Joseph Burke (1753; Oxford: Clarendon, 1955). See also Hogarth's explanation of the centrality of this line to his work: ". . . I drew a serpentine line lying on a painter's pallet, with these words under it, THE LINE OF BEAUTY" (10).

²¹ Hogarth 8 - 9.

²² Baxandall's own examples of terms through which "we describe the effect of the picture . . . by telling of inferences we have made about the action or process that might have led to the picture being as it is" are "assured handling, of a frugal palette, excited blots and scribbles" (6).

²³ Hogarth 149.

²⁴ Hogarth 146.

²⁵ Hogarth 147.

²⁶ Baxandall v.

²⁷ Baxandall 8.

²⁸ Pope, "Epistle II. To a Lady: Of the Characters of Women" (1735), ed. Butt 559 - 569. Line references will be cited in the text.

²⁹ E. H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960). See also Marianna Torgovnick, The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel: James, Lawrence, and Woolf (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), for a concise survey of how recent scholars have challenged "Gombrich's hegemony in perceptual theory" (27). The basic premise underlying Gombrich's work, however, continues to offer a very fruitful way of approaching perception as a pre-conditioned activity. See, for instance, my discussion later in this chapter of the immensely rich use which a recent "pictorialist" novel, A. S. Byatt's Still Life, makes of Gombrich.

³⁰ John Ruskin, The Elements of Drawing (1851; London: J. M. Dent, 1907) 3n.

³¹ Gombrich 297 - 298.

³² Gombrich 90 and 411n.

³³ Gombrich 25.

³⁴ Jean H. Hagstrum, The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). Mario Praz, in Mnemosyne: The Parallel between Literature and the Visual Arts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), also looks for exact inter-art equivalents. His search for "Sameness of Structure in a Variety of Media" (heading to chapter 3) takes as point of departure the "importance of memory", in particular the characteristics of a cultural age's "aesthetic memory" (the characteristic way in which people of a certain epoch see

and memorise facts aesthetically - 57 - 58). Although this seems close to Gombrich's approach to visual perception, Praz applies his basic premise in a far looser way, in that he uses it to identify forms or shapes common to poetry and painting in particular periods. According to this method, Donne and the Mannerist painters, for instance, have the serpentine line in common (92 - 97). Apart from the fact that "structures" dominating the visual arts can only be metaphorically relevant to poetic form (and vice versa), Torgovnick's warning of "imperialism" is pertinent here. She points out that Praz's practice of designing a particular "handwriting" for each age depends on "conceptions grand but often vague" which "frequently require stripping a period of all the counter-tendencies and quirks that make it interesting (5 - 6).

³⁵ Hagstrum recognises, for instance, that it is "wrong to assume that the pictorialist artist died when Pope turned to moral and satirical poetry" and explains the various changes in this poet's pictorialist techniques in terms of "the requirements of the genre to which Pope turned" (234).

³⁶ Hagstrum 220.

³⁷ Dryden, "To the Pious Memory of the Accomplisht Young LADY Mrs Anne Killigrew, Excellent in the two Sister-Arts of Poësie, and Painting. An Ode", ed. Kinsley, vol. 1, 459 - 465.

³⁸ Dryden, "A Parallel of Poetry and Painting", The Literary Works of Joshua Reynolds, vol. 2 (London: 1852) 381 - 387. Dryden introduces this substantial and convenient loan from Bellori as follows: "to avoid tediousness, I will not translate the whole discourse, but take and leave, as I find occasion" (381).

³⁹ Dryden, "Parallel" 387 - 388.

⁴⁰ Reynolds, Discourse III 44.

⁴¹ Reynolds, Discourse IV 70.

⁴² Reynolds, Discourse XIV (1788) 248.

⁴³ Reynolds, Discourse XIV 249.

⁴⁴ Reynolds, Discourse XIV 252 - 253.

⁴⁵ Reynolds, Discourse XIV 254.

⁴⁶ Reynolds, Letter no. 1 to The Idler Sept. 1759, The Literary Works of Reynolds, vol. 2, 123.

⁴⁷ See Hogarth's sub-title: "Written with a view of fixing the fluctuating IDEAS of TASTE".

⁴⁸ Hogarth 22.

⁴⁹ Reynolds, Letter no. 1 to The Idler 126.

⁵⁰ Hogarth 3 - 4.

⁵¹ Hogarth 23.

⁵² Hogarth 25.

⁵³ Hogarth 26.

⁵⁴ Hogarth 41 - 42.

⁵⁵ Edmund Burke's Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful appeared in 1757.

⁵⁶ Bernard A. Richards, "The Use of the Visual Arts in the Nineteenth Century Novel", diss., University of Oxford, 1972, 216.

⁵⁷ Oliver Goldsmith, The Vicar of Wakefield (1766; London: Collins, 1953) 27. All further references to this novel will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁵⁸ Reynolds, Letter no. 1 to The Idler 126.

⁵⁹ Reynolds, Letter no. 2 to The Idler Oct. 1759, The Literary Works of Reynolds 129.

⁶⁰ Lessing, Laocoon, trans. and ed. Sir Robert Phillimore (London: 1874) 3.

⁶¹ Lessing 4.

⁶² Lessing 28.

⁶³ Lessing 29.

⁶⁴ Lessing 29 - 30.

⁶⁵ Lessing 4.

⁶⁶ Lessing 36.

⁶⁷ Wendy Steiner, The Colors of Rhetoric (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) xii.

⁶⁸ Richard D. Altick, Paintings from Books: Art and Literature in Britain, 1760 - 1900 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985) 56 - 57.

⁶⁹ See Lipking's chapter on Walpole (ch. 6).

⁷⁰ Horace Walpole, Anecdotes of Painting in England; With some Account of the principal Artists; And incidental NOTES on other ARTS; Collected by the late Mr. George Vertue, vol. 1 (Strawberry-Hill: Thomas Farmer, 1762) 64. Vasari gives an account of a similar prank by Giotto in The Lives of

the Artists, trans. George Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) 80. A selection of Vasari's Lives appeared for the first time in translation in England in 1685 (translated by William Aglionby).

⁷¹ Walpole, Anecdotes, vol. 3 (Strawberry Hill: Thomas Farmer, 1763) 108 - 109. Although Walpole recognises the financial necessity which determined Kneller's devotion of his talents to portraiture, his tone is far more cynical than Dryden's, and at times it is downright gossipy: quoting "the author of the Abrège", he gives the following account: ". . . Kneller preferred portrait-painting for this reason. 'Painters of history, said he, make the dead live, and do not begin to live themselves till they are dead.-- I paint the living and they make me live'" (107n.).

⁷² Walpole, Anecdotes, vol. 4 (Strawberry-Hill: Thomas Kirgate, 1771; despite the date announced, the actual publication of this volume was delayed until 1780) 71 - 72.

⁷³ Walpole, Anecdotes, vol. 4, 79.

⁷⁴ Walpole, Anecdotes, vol. 4, 78 - 79.

⁷⁵ See Altick's comment on this tendency in British art criticism of the 1870s (236).

⁷⁶ Walpole, Anecdotes, vol. 4, 78 - 79.

⁷⁷ For these views, see Robert J. Gemmett's introduction to Beckford, The Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters, ed. Gemmett (1880; Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1969) 27 - 29. All references to the work itself will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁷⁸ Lipking 160 - 161.

⁷⁹ Respectively, Gemmett (quoting Lockhart) 27 and Lipking 160.

⁸⁰ Reynolds, Discourse IV 57 - 58.

⁸¹ Reynolds, Discourse I 17 - 18.

⁸² Gemmett, Introduction 25.

⁸³ Gemmett, Introduction 30 - 31.

⁸⁴ Lipking 151.

⁸⁵ Laurence Sterne, A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick, ed. Gardner D. Stout, Jr. (1768; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) 201. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁸⁶ Virginia Woolf, Introduction, A Sentimental Journey (London: Oxford University Press, 1928) viii.

⁸⁷ Clara Reeve, The Old English Baron, ed. James Trainer (1778; London: Oxford University Press, 1967) 53. A slightly different version of the novel was published in 1777 under the title The Champion of Virtue. A Gothic Story.

⁸⁸ Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (1794; London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

⁸⁹ Walpole, The Castle of Otranto, ed. W. S. Lewis (1764; London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁹⁰ Ann Radcliffe, The Italian or the Confessional of the Black Penitents, ed. Frederick Garber (1797; London: Oxford University Press, 1968) 234 - 235.

⁹¹ Particularly useful has been Meyers's practice in Painting and the Novel (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975) of regarding novelists' use of painterly material as "similar" to their use of metaphor, symbol, archetype, and myth, all of which evoke meaning through "suggestive allusion" (1). Torgovnick's definitions of "pictorialism" in the novel and the rigorous discipline with which she resists "imperialistic" sallies outside the defined territory have likewise proven helpful in a field of study frequently characterised by opportunistic connections and critical cul-de-sacs.

⁹² John Ruskin, Preface to the first edition of Modern Painters, vol. 1 (1843), The Works of John Ruskin, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 3 (London: George Allen, 1903) 3.

⁹³ A. S. Byatt, Still Life (London: Chatto and Windus, 1985) 1. All further references to this novel will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁹⁴ Michel Butor, "Les Mots dans la Peinture", Repertoire IV (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1974) 32.

⁹⁵ Butor, "Les Mots" 31.

⁹⁶ Butor, "Les Oeuvres d'Art Imaginaires chez Proust", Repertoire II (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1964) 252 - 292.

⁹⁷ Gombrich 38 - 39, 406n.

⁹⁸ Gombrich 50.

Chapter Two

Jane Austen: A “wanton kind of chace” through Aesthetic Tradition

Painterly images are sparse in Jane Austen’s writing. Her fiction contains a few cognoscenti, some dabblers, various references to domestic art forms, and a sprinkling of portraits; the letters an occasional exhibition and the famous “bit of Ivory” comment with its thumbnail aesthetic. In all these cases her language is remarkably elliptical, reducing pictorial elements to a minimum which often becomes telling in itself. Right from the start, in the juvenilia, she mockingly elbows aside the central function of painting as a description or record of events. “The History of England”, written with self-confessed subjectivity by “a partial, prejudiced, and ignorant Historian”, makes fun of Edward V’s reign by structuring it around a pictorial lacuna: “This unfortunate Prince lived so little a while that nobody had time to draw his picture.”¹ Elsewhere the picturesque comes in for ridicule. In an epistolary scrap a young lady reports after her sister’s rather precipitate tour through Wales that she “has taken a great many Drawings of the Country, which are very beautiful, tho’ perhaps not such exact resemblances as might be wished, from their being taken as she ran along” (177). Typically irreverent, Austen subsequently makes the letter deviate into an account of the shoes worn out and repaired during the journey, implying that these incongruous details offer a far better record of the tour than the young tourist’s hastily performed drawings. Her own letters continue the tendency to use pictures as starting-points for satire. A catalogue of the pictures in Steventon parsonage drawn up for her sister shortly before the family’s disruptive move to Bath begins straightforwardly - “the Battle peice, Mr. Nibbs, Sir Wm East” - then brackets the rest together in “& all the old heterogenous, miscellany, manuscript, Scriptoral peices”.² The collective description consciously blurs pictorial exactness to suggest an amusing jumble which in the usual manner of her correspondence makes light of personal discomfort and treats the move with frivolity and self-mockery.

From 1811 onwards, intermittent stays with her brother Henry in London expanded Austen’s knowledge of painting: she visited the Liverpool Museum, the British Gallery, and the private collection of the Count D’Entraigues in 1811, the exhibitions of the Society of Painters in Oil and Water-Colours and the British

Academy, as well as the Reynolds retrospective organised by the British Institution in 1813.³ These all find their way into the letters, but always drastically pruned of information to leave only deliberately limited and subjective impressions which again present the self in a slightly ridiculous light. She confesses that her “preference for Men & Women, [sic] always inclines” her “to attend more to the company” than to the paintings on show (267). When visiting the Count’s collection she leaves Henry to appreciate the “fine Paintings” while entertaining herself with “a Miniature of Philip 5. of Spain” which, she claims, “exactly” suits her own “capacity” (276). And, although the 1813 exhibition in the Spring Gardens is “not thought a good collection”, she comes away “very well pleased” for having found a portrait which will serve as a “likeness” of her own fictional creation, Jane Bennet (309 - 310).

Occasionally Austen can be found responding seriously to the visual arts, for instance when she treats Benjamin West’s His Rejection by the Elders as a moment of religious insight: “I do not know that it is reckoned superior to his ‘Healing in the Temple’, but it has gratified me much more, and indeed is the first representation of our Saviour which ever at all contented me.”⁴ But paintings more often than not receive comical treatment in her writing. An early letter sketches a social visit where portraits and people present themselves in an almost indistinguishable throng:

At Nackington we met Lady Sondes’ picture over the Mantlepeice in the Dining room, and the pictures of her three Children in an Antiroom, besides Mr. Scott, Miss Fletcher, Mr. Toke, Mr. J. Toke, and the Archdeacon Lynch.⁵

The double illusion of treating paintings as people (“we met Lady Sondes’ picture”) and people as paintings (the equating “besides”) lends a humorous touch to the description which is quite in keeping with the satirical exuberance levelled at the company in the rest of the letter. Much of the effect lies in turning human beings into inanimate targets for satire and the inverse mock-serious treatment of objects as human beings, a process which she happily applies to herself once literary fame makes people “all curiosity to know” about her appearance. An Irish admirer’s enquiries - “what I am like & so forth”- prompt the following simpering self-portrait, frozen in an awkward pose: “I do not despair of having my picture in the Exhibition at last - all white & red, with my Head on one Side”.⁶

In his article on Austen and the visual arts, Lance Bertelsen places this novelist's pictorial sensibility and overall technique as a writer firmly within an eighteenth-century context, to be more precise, within the context of the aesthetic principles underlying what he calls the "'undetermined' manner of eighteenth-century portraiture and the verbal economy of literary pictorialism."⁷ He argues that the "manner" of her literary portraits draws her into line with the eighteenth-century tradition of capturing general, as opposed to particular, nature. Referring, amongst others, to Johnson, Gilpin, Reynolds, and Cosway, Bertelsen stresses that such generalisation does not involve a loss of definition, but instead accounts for the creation of strikingly essential images in the works of these writers and painters.⁸ An important aspect in the production of such vivid images rests for him with the viewer or reader whose "responsibility" it is to "complete imaginatively the suggestions implicit in the generalized, essential, or synecdochic image offered by the artist."⁹ Bertelsen gleans these ideas directly from Reynolds, who associates the unfinished manner of Gainsborough's portraits with their ability to capture a "striking resemblance", and who argues that viewer complicity enhances such a likeness (according to Reynolds, the vivid "general effect" captured in a Gainsborough portrait reminds the viewer of the original sitter, whereupon the "imagination" takes over and "supplies the rest . . . perhaps more satisfactorily . . . than the artist, with all his care, could possibly have done").¹⁰ Bertelsen claims a comparable aesthetic for English miniaturists of the time, and, with the help of Jean Hagstrum, locates the same nucleus of ideas in the "literary pictorialism" practised by poets like Dryden and Pope. He quotes Hagstrum as saying: "Pictorialist poets breed pictorialist readers. . . . a reader trained to see pictures in poetry would see one even when the poet gave him only the slightest visual hint".¹¹

All this, then, indicates for Bertelsen that the striking immediacy of Austen's art arises from her "ability to select and integrate her 'visual hints' - and thus provoke her readers' artistic complicity - with an economy, accuracy, and insight into character unsurpassed by any other English novelist."¹² While I am not quarreling with the lavishness of Bertelsen's praise, the source from which he draws his enthusiastic conclusions remains somewhat alien to Austen's art. He uncritically assumes that "the indeterminate manner of eighteenth-century portraiture" is at the bottom of "the indeterminate manner of Austen's physical characterisation". In his effort to find an

exact pictorial equivalent for Austen's fictional portraiture, Bertelsen overlooks the changes which an individual artist may ring on carefully established expectations. Continuing the general bearing of my introductory paragraphs with their list of light-hearted painterly "ellipses" selected from Austen's letters and early creative work, I maintain that her art subverts such expectations and plays with received aesthetic notions instead of passively corroborating them; and, to follow through Bertelsen's interest in reader response, I shall argue that the sensation in reading her novels is not primarily one of satisfaction at being able to recognise and supply "the rest" from general hints, but one of delight at the agility with which she appropriates and reshapes aesthetic traditions as well as particular cultural objects to suit the premises of her own art.¹³

Despite the apparent frivolity, the apparent lack of deep interest or thoroughgoing knowledge which frequently seems to govern Austen's attitude to pictorial art, she proves herself acutely aware of the possibilities offered to fiction by painting and the language of painting. Even her most trivial references show a basic recognition of the literary potential inherent in painterly concepts and issues. Almost all the examples quoted from the juvenilia and letters exploit the static immobility of pictorial art for humorous effect, and do so in an interesting variety of ways. In some cases she exhibits awkwardly frozen images, in others she attacks immobility itself by blurring pictorial vividness into completely subjective and utterly unreliable impressions. In the novels she continues to pay attention to the humorous side of the spatial-temporal tension existing between the arts. Added to this, she develops a limited but versatile painterly vocabulary which comes to her mainly through literary rather than strictly visual art forms. So, for instance, she draws on the way in which paintings function in both the Gothic novel and the novel of Sensibility. Writings on the picturesque and applied fields like Repton's aesthetic for "improving" landscapes and estates furthermore provide her with material, especially for the conversations of her characters. Throughout, however, she is scrupulously attentive to the credibility of her fictional worlds. The only paintings to find their way into her narrative are ones which are credibly and concretely part of these worlds, and when characters engage in aesthetic talk, they almost always do so with a complete authenticity of individual voice. As Austen herself confesses, her "preference" is "for Men & Women". What comes across

most clearly in her use of painterly material is the extent to which it reflects the psychological and moral behaviour of individual characters in subjective detail, while at the same time illustrating the tight control which she practises over the incorporation of such material.

To return for a moment to Bertelsen's suggestion that Austen's prose is visually incomplete: compared with a novelist like Fielding, her "manner" is indeed "indeterminate". Unlike Fielding, who repeatedly calls to aid Hogarth's craft to particularise characters' expressive physiognomies and poses or to draw up the typical mock-heroic narrative tableaux from which action emanates in his fiction, Austen seems quite to ignore the potential force of *ekphrasis*. This quality was lamented by one of her first commentators, George Lewes, who in typical Victorian vein sets great store by a novelist's ability to "picture" fictional worlds concretely. Recognising the fact that Austen's art lacks detailed word-pictures because her "genius" is "[s]o entirely dramatic, and so little descriptive", he nonetheless finds fault with the "purblind world" which he imagines her fictional environments to be, and wonders whether "the absence of all sense of outward world - either scenery or personal appearance" - could be due to shortsightedness!¹⁴ As noted earlier, Bertelsen equates this quality with "the indeterminate manner of eighteenth-century portraiture". I want to suggest, however, that such an equation does not recognise the involved interaction which takes place in Austen's writing between general and specific. Instead of merely reflecting an established painterly aesthetic, her "indeterminate manner" forms part of the intricate working of her fiction, in that it prepares the ground for the depiction of more specific moments of narrative, frequently realised satirically and paying minute attention to particular effects and objects. In demonstrating this relationship between general and specific in her work, I shall for the moment fit pictorial references into the broader context of the role played by concrete objects in her prose.¹⁵

Austen does not usually elaborate on the material object. Possessions are mentioned in the general form of a character's ten thousand a year or the beauty of an estate in a manner which shuns the specific, as for instance in this view of Pemberley which is partly realised through the eyes of one who might have been mistress there:

It was a large, well-proportioned room, handsomely fitted up.

Elizabeth, after slightly surveying it, went to a window to enjoy its

prospect. The hill, crowned with wood, from which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good; and she looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks, and the winding of the valley as far as she could trace it, with delight.¹⁶

Although it is Elizabeth who views the scene, the authorial voice stamps her sensations and expressions with its own strong control: “she looked on the whole scene . . . with delight.” The specific object’s physical characteristics are played down, or, when mentioned, set in a verbal environment which leads away from the specific and stresses a generality of almost stereotypical or at least self-evident good taste: a “well-proportioned room”, “a beautiful object”, a “disposition” which is “good”, a “whole scene” consisting of river, trees, banks, and “winding valley” in almost arbitrary arrangement. A critic of Wordsworth would do well to attach not inconsiderable significance to a hill recently descended, “receiving increased abruptness from the distance”. But in Austen’s sentence the hill and its accumulative specificity of adjectival phrases add up to nothing more than a soberly appreciative predicate (“was a beautiful object”) which would defy even the most hard-pressed critic’s efforts at linking the precipitous seeming hill with Elizabeth’s previous summary rejection of Darcy’s proposal or her realisation of the irrevocability of past action.¹⁷

This is not to deny Austen’s writing either precision or depth. It is exactly against such a neutrally portrayed world, firmly controlled by an authorial voice, that objects and scenes do emerge with impressive clarity. The indeterminacy of the description above leads on to Elizabeth’s momentous discovery of the real Darcy in Pemberley gallery, a scene which I shall accord more attention later. Frequently, in keeping with the satirical nature of her work, a shift to the specific acquires ironic prominence. In fact, finicky details often spark off a sense of the ridiculous in Austen’s writing, as can be seen maybe most clearly in those exemplary documents of daily trivia, her personal letters. She laces a long paragraph on haberdashery with self-mockery - “next week shall begin my operations on my hat, on which you know my principal hopes of happiness depend”; and, to dwell for a moment on the domestic art of hat-trimming, a debate whether “only one Orleans plumb” is really worth “four or five pretty sprigs” of artificial flowers is jauntily settled with, “Besides, I cannot help thinking that it is more

natural to have flowers grow out of the head than fruit.”¹⁸ Likewise, objects become weighty in her novels usually when characters regard them as such.¹⁹ In this respect Lewes is quite correct in noting her “dramatic” rather than “descriptive” propensity. Objects receive definition in her prose not through authorial description, but by stimulating dramatic discussion among characters. Thus, the piece of court plaster and pencil stub lovingly put to rest in a bed of “softest cotton” and commemorated with the inscription “Most precious treasures” act as a conversational pivot in *Emma*.²⁰ The episode demonstrates, on the one hand, Harriet’s adolescent passion for Mr Elton, and on the other, Emma’s veiled amusement and skepticism at encountering these objects as love tokens (their comic incongruity, furthermore, reminds Emma not only of Harriet’s silliness, but also of her own during the affair with Mr Elton).

In the section of *Northanger Abbey* which deals with Catherine’s visit to the Tilneys, Austen systematically attacks the object given undue significance. Evocative and mysteriously loaded objects which signpost plot developments in the Gothic novel of the late eighteenth-century figure parodically in this section of *Northanger Abbey* as the laughable constructs of Catherine’s immature imagination. Misled by a code of interpretation which makes sense in (and literally of) the Gothic novel, she regards a number of neutral objects from her surroundings as strangely significant, and proceeds to link them in a plot of intrigue which she imposes on the relatively unexceptional Tilney household. Catherine sets off for the Abbey steeped in the spirit of the novels she has consumed during her holiday in Bath. She arrives with her memory refreshed, for during the course of their journey Henry teasingly casts her prospective visit in Gothic terms. Included in the inventory of Gothic machinery making up his fantasy appears “the portrait of some handsome warrior” whose features, he predicts, will strike Catherine so “incomprehensibly” that she will not be able to withdraw her eyes.²¹ At the Abbey, she decides that the portrait of the late Mrs Tilney is indeed capable of supporting fantasy, especially after Eleanor has mentioned the General’s objection to the likeness. Catherine’s fancy is quick to overleap the boundaries of rational explanation: “Here was another proof. A portrait - very like - of a departed wife, not valued by the husband! - He must have been dreadfully cruel to her!” (181). What is parodied here is the blunt way in which the Gothic novel stresses the ominous “Last Duchess” aspect of the portrait as literary image.

Although amusing and to the point, Austen's parodic scheme for this part of the novel displaces a more sensitive depiction of adolescence with its perplexing mixture of insights and oversights. During the Bath section of the novel Catherine emerges as naïve, but far from stupid; mistaken in Isabella, but quick to register a well-founded dislike for John Thorpe and a liking for the Tilneys; ardent and artless in her observations, but humble enough not to be selfishly subjective. The interlude at the Abbey temporarily upsets this balance, concentrating on artificial parodic aspects of the narrative and effectively negating Catherine's carefully assembled identity by substituting for it, wholesale, a Gothic heroine's consciousness.²² Whereas her excited chatterings about The Mysteries of Udolpho in Bath exactly capture her naïve spontaneity, her reaction to Mrs Tilney's portrait (as to most of the "Gothic" objects at the Abbey) is peculiarly negative. This is the case not only because she is looking for what is not there, but also because this elliptical portrait in the first place belongs to the Gothic substratum of the novel and only peripherally to Catherine's consciousness as it has gradually become known to the reader:

It represented a very lovely woman, with a mild and pensive countenance, justifying, so far, the expectations of its new observer; but they were not in every respect answered, for Catherine had depended upon meeting with features, air, complexion that should be the very counterpart, the very image, if not of Henry's, of Eleanor's; - the only portraits of which she had been in the habit of thinking, bearing always an equal resemblance of mother and child. A face once taken was taken for generations. But here she was obliged to look and consider and study for a likeness. She contemplated it, however, in spite of this drawback, with much emotion; and, but for a yet stronger interest, would have left it unwillingly. (191)

Described in terms of the Gothic characteristics which it lacks, the portrait forms part of a series of negatives built into the novel to satirise popular novelistic conventions (especially those belonging to Gothic and other romance forms) while at the same time cataloguing them. Such *paraleipsis* occurs throughout the novel, but especially at the beginning and whenever the narrative introduces new developments. Thus, the synopsis of Catherine's early life states that her father "was not in the least

addicted to locking up his daughters” (13), that “[t]here was not one family among their acquaintance who had reared and supported a boy accidentally found at their door” to lend romance to her young existence (16); once the narrative proper gets under way with Catherine’s invitation to Bath, her mother has “no notion” of the “general mischievousness” of “lords and baronets” who “delight in forcing young ladies away to some remote farm-house” (18); during the journey “[n]either robbers nor tempests befriended them, nor one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero” (19), and so on (emphases mine).

Initially, this negative catalogue operates at a strictly narratorial level and serves to outline the ordinary nature of Catherine’s history. In this form it accounts to a large extent for the boisterous humour which aligns this novel so closely with the spirit of the juvenilia. At the Abbey, however, the negative catalogue ceases to comment on narrative procedures alone, and becomes applicable also to Catherine’s consciousness. But in acquiring this second function, the device loses most of its comic pungency, as Catherine’s encounter with Mrs Tilney’s portrait clearly illustrates. Austen’s writing becomes needlessly dilatory as she pushes both Mrs Tilney’s pictured identity (her “mild and pensive countenance”) and Catherine’s genuine emotional reaction at seeing the portrait to the very fringes of the description, putting at its centre a lengthy allusion to the exact resemblances expected in Gothic family portraiture.

Different literary aims and representational modes are at odds here, assigning conflicting values to the painterly image. In the first place, it satirises the excesses of Gothic fiction. Secondly and less successfully, it superimposes a Gothic heroine’s sensibilities on Catherine, leaving few gaps for her native good sense and warm feelings to shine through. And, ironically, the portrait in the third place gives concrete shape, albeit obliquely, to some of Catherine’s instinctive insights into the Tilney household’s emotional make-up. Even at Bath she senses the striking differences of temperament between the overbearing General and his engaging younger children. At the Abbey, Mrs Tilney’s mild features strike a sympathetic chord in Catherine, providing her with a genealogical clue to the younger Tilneys’ attractive ways, even though the physical resemblance between mother and children is less than arresting. In some ways therefore, and in conflict with Austen’s satirical emphasis, the portrait

disparaged by the General and treasured in private by Eleanor indeed comes to draw attention to the way in which this patriarch's ill temper disposes of "good spirits".²³

Much energy has gone into debating the success of Austen's forays into the Gothic. Critics speak of brilliant (or mechanical) parody, intentional (or unintended) ironies.²⁴ One of the most extensive studies is Judith Wilt's which argues that Northanger Abbey constitutes a "complex admission, rather than a rejection or parodying, of the Gothic". According to her The Mysteries of Udolpho in particular provides Austen with the "machinery" for sensitively exploring and judging character throughout the novel.²⁵ It is a point of view which curiously mimics Catherine's consciousness at the Abbey, in that it frequently foists unjustifiable Gothic constructs on Austen's fiction, for instance when Wilt associates Bath and its social organisation with a labyrinthine Gothic setting which gives a "sense of being coaxed down a dark path by an invisible hand" or when she sees Catherine as the innocent victim of Henry's threatening and pseudo-patriarchal manipulation.²⁶ The breach, however, between the Bath and Abbey sections should not be overlooked, and in this respect an image like Mrs Tilney's portrait and the conflicting values surrounding it suggest that Austen's manner of incorporating Gothic material involves an irresolute rather than a complex and consistent fathoming of implications. Her borrowings in this novel at times undermine meaning carelessly instead of mining the full potential of allusive sources for the particular purposes of her fiction.

This is not the case in Sense and Sensibility where a painterly image does operate at various levels of the narrative and equally comes to suggest conflicting values; this time, however, without obscuring its own significance and workings as an image. Whereas the narrator of Northanger Abbey becomes self-consciously engaged in meta-literary issues which lie outside the boundaries of Catherine's world, Sense and Sensibility displays a less ambitious yet more consistent narrative framework. The implications of the portrait miniature which Lucy carries around in her pocket as proof of her engagement to Edward are altogether more organic to the world of this novel. In symbolising Lucy's hold over her reluctant lover, Edward's miniature is distantly related to the Gothic portrait. But Austen successfully translates this image into a comic mode, placing the miniature at the core of schemes and discoveries somewhat reminiscent of the Comedy of Manners. In Sheridan's The School for Scandal an

elaborate situation of error, complication, and gradual discovery develops around a collection of family portraits. The young profligate, Charles Surface, sets about auctioning them, not realising that one has come to life in the person of his returned uncle and guardian, Sir Oliver, who is at first shocked by his nephew's disregard for social decorum and family pride, then won over by the jocular but sincere affection which Charles expresses towards his own portrait. Austen likewise uses Edward's miniature to set up new points of contact and tension between her characters. Her agent is Lucy, who shrewdly shows off the picture to Elinor while pretending to consult her on the difficulties of a secret engagement:

Then taking a small miniature from her pocket, she added, "To prevent the possibility of mistake, be so good as to look at this face. It does not do him justice to be sure, but yet I think you cannot be deceived as to the person it was drew for. - I have had it above these three years." . . .

. . . She put it into her hands as she spoke, and when Elinor saw the painting, whatever other doubts her fear of a too hasty decision, or her wish of detecting falsehood might suffer to linger in her mind, she could have none of its being Edward's face. She returned it almost instantly, acknowledging the likeness.²⁷

Lucy's real intention is of course to display the miniature as an unequivocal sign of contractual possession, hoping in this way to discredit Edward's regard for Elinor or to frighten her away. Although but a single item in Lucy's lengthy disclosure, the portrait nonetheless becomes a particularly apt focus for the various ramifications of this puzzling affair. Vividly and amusingly, but not without disturbing undertones, it suggests the mock-tyrannical manner in which Lucy exerts power over her lover and keeps him safely buttoned up against potential pick-pockets. Her artful placing of the portrait as a seemingly unambiguous clue extends her manipulative behaviour towards Elinor, but at the same time draws attention to the latter's careful unpicking of the formidable "body of evidence" (139) meant to exclude Edward from her interest. Unlike Catherine Morland, Elinor digests evidence sensibly, not sensationally. The intense suffering which initially follows upon Lucy's revelation soon gives way to a more detached and objective perspective which embraces other viewpoints and takes further circumstances into account. Elinor draws her first conclusions as follows:

the picture, the letter, the ring, formed altogether such a body of evidence, as overcame every fear of condemning him unfairly, and established as a fact, which no partiality could set aside, his ill-treatment of herself. - Her resentment of such behaviour, her indignation at having been its dupe, for a short time made her feel only for herself. . . . (139)

That this period of anger and self-indulgence is short-lived becomes evident when the main clause of self-pity, after a slight semi-colon pause, gives way to a long series of conjecture and reflection in quite a different mode: “but other ideas, other considerations soon arose. Had Edward been intentionally deceiving her? Had he feigned a regard for her which he did not feel?”, and so forth, until her imaginative reconstruction of Edward’s entrapment causes her to weep “for him, more than for herself” (139 - 140).

In the terms of Marilyn Butler’s “War of Ideas” this process would mark the victory of “the objective ethical code” over “the relativist subjective one”.²⁸ But although composed by an author “remarkably sure of her values”,²⁹ not even the early novels of Austen submit to such rigid division quite without resistance. Seemingly obvious clues on the surface hide complexities underlying them, as is also the case with the ideas and moral strains introduced by her novels. Splitting her second novel down the middle with “sense” on one side and “sensibility” on the other, with an accompanying tabular division of the author’s values into approval and satirical disapproval, is surely too regimental an approach to Austen’s main artistic concern - that of capturing human nature in action, and not dissected into abstract categories. A more acceptable point of view is Tony Tanner’s. Without denying the degree of “schematization” occurring in this early novel, he argues that

the stuff of a novel may well belie the apparent simplicity of its structuring. The fact that Marianne has plenty of sense and Elinor is by no means devoid of sensibility should alone convince us that Jane Austen was already enough of a novelist to know that nothing comes unmixed, that qualities which may exist in pure isolation as abstractions only occur in people in combination, perhaps in confusion, with other qualities, in configurations which can be highly problematical.³⁰

The disparaged portrait and coddled miniature of Austen's two earliest novels hint at intricacies of meaning which lie concealed in the "apparent simplicity" of her compositional structures. Both pictorial images are conventional - a Gothic death emblem and a love token - but neither is to be taken at face value. In Pride and Prejudice the portrait again functions as an image on the borderline between objective and subjective observation. On the one hand Austen raises some doubts about the possibility of capturing a satisfying impression of specific human nature in a single image, on the other she uses a portrait to reveal the "truth" about a particular character. The meeting-point between these opposites lies in her intricate play with a seemingly simple image or concept, in this case the business of taking likenesses as a metaphor for judging character. In the usual manner of her writing, she rings numerous and unexpected changes on this theme, in the process generating a whole range of viewpoints (of varying subjectivity) which are firmly kept in place by the authorial voice. The poised complexity arising from this constant weighing and counterbalancing of material sets up a kinship with Pope's use of painterly material. Both explore and define the premises of good sense, taste, and manners by pursuing human nature through permutations of individual attitudes (which more often than not illustrate these premises negatively). And both show minute awareness of the way in which general concerns and concepts can be made to function concretely within the boundaries of their art, usually by focusing satirical attention (the sharpness whetted or tempered according to the occasion) on individual behaviour.

Miss Bingley starts off the series of references to portraiture in Pride and Prejudice by imagining the genealogical upheaval which Darcy's interest in Elizabeth could cause in the gallery at Pemberley. The remark is designed to mock Elizabeth's social inferiority, but ricochets badly on the speaker when Darcy neither shares her snobbery nor allays her jealousy:

"Do let the portraits of your uncle and aunt Philips be placed in the gallery at Pemberley. Put them next to your great uncle the judge. They are in the same profession, you know; only in different lines. As for your Elizabeth's picture, you must not attempt to have it taken, for what painter could do justice to those beautiful eyes?" (52 - 53)

The gallery indeed comes to reflect the course of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship, but not in the crude way imagined by Miss Bingley. Instead of reinforcing prejudice, the pictures at Pemberley clarify misunderstandings. To start with, the picture of Wickham among a collection of miniatures and the housekeeper's comment that "he has turned out very wild" (247) stress the treacherousness of his striking appearance and corroborate Darcy's previous account of him. The fact that Wickham's miniature is suffered to remain in the collection is partly accounted for by the housekeeper: "This room was my late master's favourite room, and these miniatures are just as they used to be then. He was very fond of them" (247). The image of past harmony which this undisturbed collection reflects hints at the admirable qualities of the present owner: he overlooks his own grievances to commemorate his father's attachments in life.

The picture gallery itself further reveals Darcy's true character to Elizabeth and as such provides an impressive climax to the repeated references to portraits which occur in an earlier conversation between them. At the Netherfield Ball Darcy resists Elizabeth's attempt at fixing his image: "I could wish, Miss Bennet, that you were not to sketch my character at the present moment, as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either." She insists playfully: "But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity" (94). Pemberley offers such "another opportunity". Whereas her previous attempt at finding out his nature is an amusing game tending "[m]erely to the illustration of your character", as she puts it to Darcy, her encounter with his full-length portrait leads to a discovery of both the real Darcy and of her true sensations towards him. His ascent from the tangle of misconceptions which has so far surrounded his image is neatly captured in Mrs Reynolds's promise of a "finer, larger picture" of him "in the gallery upstairs" (247). Elizabeth's meeting with this "striking resemblance" is richly suggestive. The painting not only corrects and completes her opinion of him, but also calls up a strong sense of physical presence which gradually discovers her sexual interest:

Elizabeth walked on in quest of the only face whose features would be known to her. At last it arrested her - and she beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face, as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her. . . .

There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance. . . . as she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression. (250 - 251)

Austen's description plays subtly with tensions between fixity and flexibility, inverting these categories in a way which renders the animate inanimate and vice versa. Elizabeth's "arrest" in front of the picture bestows such strong life on it that the painted expression of Darcy's eyes comes to suggest "his regard" for her. His image loses the chill bestowed on it by Elizabeth's "First Impressions",³¹ a step which is necessary before she can be assimilated into the world of Pemberley and can contribute to its transformation from a place of painted people to a vibrantly lively household.³²

Instead of comical people-painting equations or misleading clues, Darcy's portrait represents a moment of vivid but solemn insight; but far from using this painting as a simple mechanism of mystery and revelation as the Gothic plot does, Austen's art incorporates it in a gradual process of discovery which includes both external evidence and self-searching. The main thrust in this novel is away from an easy labelling of people towards a realisation of the elusiveness and complexity of human character. The difficulties residing in "fixing" character appear again and again: in Darcy's remark to Miss Bingley that "[i]t would not be easy . . . to catch" the "expression" of Elizabeth's eyes, but that "their colour and shape, and the eyelashes . . . might be copied" (53); in his resistance to Elizabeth's bantering character-sketch at the Netherfield Ball; in Wickham's deceptively beautiful countenance; in the way that the real Darcy can be recognised only once he has been observed in a variety of situations; and finally, to venture out of fiction and into biography, in Austen's failure to track down a satisfying image of Elizabeth at the art exhibitions she went to in London, so that in the end she had to invent a further fiction around her central characters to explain the absence:

We have been both to the Exhibition & Sir J. Reynolds', - and I am disappointed, for there was nothing like Mrs. D. at either. I can only

imagine that Mr. D. prizes any Picture of her too much to like it should be exposed to the public eye. - I can imagine he wd have that sort of feeling - that mixture of Love, Pride & Delicacy.-³³

After the playful second chances of Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park comes across as a much starker novel, both in the moral distinctions it draws between characters and in the explicit metaphorical structures it employs to illustrate different categories of behaviour, attitude, and mental constitution (the landscape at Sotherton and the theatre at the Park, for instance, are both richly metaphorical in this way). If rigid in its moral scheme, the novel nonetheless explores complexity of character as assiduously as Pride and Prejudice, and it is frequently through an introduction of visual material that Austen expands the psychological dimension of her characters. For the moment I shall concentrate on a few objects of domestic art which subtly influence the way in which Fanny is perceived in this novel.

Fanny's apparently unshakeable moral judgment has long been a point of contention among critics. They either dismiss her as impossibly virtuous, a milksop in fact,³⁴ or interpret her as a convincing embodiment of an abstract moral argument. In the latter group, Butler and Tanner argue in their various ways that Fanny's immobility in the world of the novel is indicative of moral objectivity, enduring patience, and detached insight.³⁵ Such a view, however, turns her into a statically ideal figure and overlooks the complexities of character and narrative vision which come into play in the course of Austen's particular portrayal of her consciousness. As with other characters, the novelist undertakes a detailed mapping of Fanny's emotional and psychological progress, and although she does not err and repent like Catherine or Emma, she nonetheless has to undergo significant growth before she can share in the tempered triumphs of marriage and resolution which conclude this less than joyful novel. Austen's stance towards Fanny is therefore not wholly uncritical, nor is her tone unrelievedly serious in presenting this over-conscientious figure.³⁶ Strains of naïveté frequently mingle with this character's native good sense, for example when Fanny visits the chapel at Sotherton, and, much like Catherine Morland, is keenly disappointed to find "a mere, spacious, oblong room" when her "imagination" has "prepared her for something grander". Paraleipsis again marks the distance between reality and subjective expectation. Fanny complains to Edmund:

“This is not my idea of a chapel. There is nothing awful here, nothing melancholy, nothing grand. Here are no aisles, no arches, no inscriptions, no banners. No banners, cousin, to be ‘blown by the night wind of Heaven.’ No signs that a ‘Scottish monarch sleeps below.’”

(85 - 86)

At this point Edmund checks the stream of naïve Romantic association by pointing out that they are not looking over a remote castle or monastery, but a relatively modern private home.

To accommodate Fanny as a complex emotional and psychological entity, Austen uses an intricately mixed style of presentation which firmly establishes admirable traits of her character while at the same time highlighting amusing particulars of her thoughts and feelings. The East Room at Mansfield Park, a place exclusively identified with Fanny, reflects this approach in providing a composite image of mental discipline and resilience, but also a number of emotionally laden objects of domestic art which characteristically prompts Austen’s sense of humour. Taken in its entirety, the old school room represents the cumulative powers of constructive thought and associative memory which enable Fanny to draw spiritual sustenance from external surroundings (whereas other characters are inextricably caught up in their own subjective fancies, ambitions, and eventually, sufferings). Distress turns into gain in the East Room as Fanny directs her mind away from self-indulgence to some external “pursuit” or “train of thought” (151). Such exertion not only strengthens her mind against immediate ills, but reciprocally adds to the general consolatory atmosphere of the place, so that “she could scarcely see an object in that room which had not an interesting remembrance connected with it” (151 - 152).

Having established Fanny’s general cast of mind with a description of the room as a whole, Austen moves on to some decorative details which involves a gradual modulation of tone towards the subtly humorous:

The room was most dear to her. . . . its greatest elegancies and ornaments were a faded footstool of Julia’s work, too ill done for the drawing-room, three transparencies, made in a rage for transparencies, for the three lower panes of one window, where Tintern Abbey held its station between a cave in Italy, and a moonlight lake in Cumberland; a

collection of family profiles thought unworthy of being anywhere else, over the mantle-piece, and by their side and pinned against the wall, a small sketch of a ship sent four years ago from the Mediterranean by William, with H.M.S. Antwerp at the bottom, in letters as tall as the mainmast. (152)

Many of these objects have been discarded, reflecting satirically on the high-handed manner in which charity is doled out at Mansfield Park. William's sketch, by contrast, produces a sympathetic glimpse at the warm relationship between Fanny and her brother, and an equally sympathetic, if humorous, depiction of William's pride in the navy and the part he plays in it. But the domesticity and fond distortions of the art forms mentioned also reflect more personally on Fanny, especially her timidity and clinging dependence. Some of their implications are even more piquantly satirical. The transparencies, for instance, superimposing their faddish reproductions of popular picturesque scenery on to the Mansfield Park outdoors, have a decidedly second hand quality which suggests Fanny's habitual dependence on Edmund for her views of nature (and just about everything else). She experiences, often with great intensity, what has come his way in the course of a polite education (at Eton and Oxford); Cowper (56) or a night scene (113) thus comes alive for Fanny through Edmund's education, but although his influence is of great value to her, such experiences remain at the level of precept and again emphasise Fanny's material and moral dependency. There is also some further amusement in Austen's description of the way in which Fanny derives benefit from the "friendly" and essentially undemanding familiarity of the East Room: troubled by her cousins' insistence that she should act in their play, she withdraws to her "nest of comforts", "to try its influence on an agitated, doubting spirit - to see if by looking at Edmund's profile she could catch any of his counsel, or by giving air to her geraniums she might inhale a breeze of mental strength herself" (152). Her idealisation of Edmund's judgment finds ironic shape in the portrait profile, a form of likeness both abstract and stylised. Fanny's attempt to "catch" "counsel" from a firmly delineated yet vastly over-simplified image of her cousin raises questions about her insight and clarity of vision, at least as far as Edmund's character is concerned. And, in fact, the limitations of her one-sided view are painfully exposed before the end of the chapter, when instead of conforming to her simplified view of his clear-cut moral

profile, Edmund's moral zig-zagging over whether to act in the play or not make her realise that even he could be "inconsistent" (156).

A humorous touch like Edmund's reduction to a cardboard cut-out does not detract from Fanny's ultimate moral stance.³⁷ As I shall show later, Austen reinforces the imagery of the East Room and the mental strength it signifies by juxtaposing Fanny's aesthetic sensibility with the Crawfords'. What this slight reference to a simplified form of portraiture does highlight, however, is an area of subjectivity in Fanny's vision which she has to overcome before her moral stance becomes her own rather than a cast-off from Edmund. Portraiture and subjective vision go hand in hand in Austen's writing, and paradoxical as it may seem, the over-simplified profile of Edmund and the over-endowed portrait of Harriet in *Emma* are related images in their basic reflection of subjectivity. Lacking original substance, the ornaments in Fanny's meagre art collection communicate her dependence on Edmund's point of view and her isolation from experiences authentically her own; Emma's art, although at its best brimming with vitality, becomes an image of her wilful subjectivity taken to an extreme. The chapters constructed around the likeness of Harriet draw comprehensively on previous occurrences of the pictorial image in Austen's oeuvre. The portrait functions as a satirically loaded object, a narrative prop and clue to hidden events, a sign of dangerous subjectivity, and an image with far-reaching aesthetic implications.

Daunted by the prospect of "long evenings" spent listening to the "quiet prosings" of her father's friends (22), Emma emerges as an artist in the sense of a fabricator not only of portraits, but also of plots. She has considerable confidence in her ability to shape the materials of everyday life into significant events. Despite Mr Knightley's protestations to the contrary, she insists on having planned the Westons' marriage, and her self-confidence is further strengthened by her father's concerned admiration: "'Ah! my dear, I wish you would not make matches and foretel things, for whatever you say always comes to pass'" (12). The decision to "improve" Harriet soon becomes another such a matrimonial scheme. In her role as fabricator of events, Emma is something of a more talented, more powerful Catherine Morland. Whereas the latter encounters clues which she links into an improbable narrative, Emma plants the clues of her projected fiction, and waits for other characters to connect them. The portrait of Harriet lies at

the core of this romance in the making. It reflects all the essential relationships and events of Emma's plot in its role as "a standing memorial of the beauty of one, the skill of the other, and the friendship of both; with as many other agreeable associations as Mr. Elton's very promising attachment was likely to add" (47). But although the portrait has unequivocal significance in Emma's project, Mr Elton construes its meaning quite differently - as an eligible woman's display of talents and charms.

The matrimonial motive behind Emma's portrait of Harriet, the attention she focuses on Harriet as a sitter, and the care with which she dispatches the finished product under the escort of Mr Elton provoke the same mixed humour as that arising from Lucy's pocketing of Edward. The image of Harriet immobilised, improved, and parcelled up is immediately and concretely funny, while at the same time calling up Gothic echoes. But apart from stressing immobility, the portrait also presents itself as a work in progress. As in *Pride and Prejudice*, the process of taking a likeness becomes a controlling metaphor in Austen's exploration of the relationship between objective and subjective vision. In this respect, the fact that Emma is a literal painter of portraits whereas Elizabeth paints figuratively reveals an important difference between these equally high-spirited characters. Elizabeth's attempts at forming an impression of Darcy are light-hearted pursuits of a favourite pastime. Since her impressions are neither aimed at fulfilling a particular purpose, nor given concrete shape, they can be adjusted according to new information, so that the final impression of Darcy is gleaned from a variety of sources. Her discovery of the full-length portrait at Pemberley marks a balanced encounter between subjective observation and external evidence. Quite the opposite occurs in *Emma*. Taking Harriet's portrait sinks her further and further into misconception and self-delusion. She sets out from the beginning to create a false likeness, one which would present her subject in such a way as to suit her matrimonial projects and prophecies. Her decision "to throw in a little improvement to the figure, to give a little more height, and considerably more elegance" (47) comments directly on her other attempts at improving Harriet's mind and prospects, for instance the impressive reading-lists never begun, or, more seriously, her interference with Robert Martin's proposal (an interlude in the painting episode). The alterations to Harriet's figure all aim at giving her a greater degree of superficial consequence, just as Emma's indoctrination of her mind on the subject of marriage is based on false class values.

Emma makes herself guilty here of a wilfully faulty aesthetic which also spreads to her judgment of gentlemanliness: although she finds Mr Elton's extravagant displays of gentility increasingly off-putting and she is secretly impressed by the noble simplicity of Robert Martin's letter of proposal, she nonetheless perseveres in her project of pairing Harriet off with a gentleman in name rather than in essence.

Harriet's portrait figures prominently in only two chapters. The implications of this image, however, find resonance in the metaphoric material of the novel as a whole and come to illustrate the workings of Austen's technique as a novelist at its most involved. As a narrative prop, the portrait occurs as one in a set of ambiguous images around which much of this novel's action resolves itself. The misunderstandings occasioned by the portrait are reinforced and further complicated by the three main participants' involvement in the "literary" pursuit of drawing up a book of riddles. Once the situation clarifies itself with Mr Elton's inconvenient declaration of love, Emma is left to ponder the ambiguity of signs which have previously seemed perfectly clear to her:

The picture! - How eager he had been about the picture! - and the charade! - and an hundred other circumstances; - how clearly they had seemed to point to Harriet. To be sure, the charade, with its "ready wit" - but then, the "soft eyes" - in fact it suited neither; it was a jumble without taste or truth. Who could have seen through such thick-headed nonsense? (134)

Emma's mortification at her lack of perspicacity cures her of taking an active part in planning further romances; but the sudden arrival of Jane Fairfax shows that she is still as likely as ever to read the events of others' lives in terms of her own fanciful plots. Solving Jane's "riddle" (Emma's own word for her - 285) involves her in a further misreading of clues, although this time she approaches Catherine Morland's state of encountering rather than creating them. The mysterious gift of a piano provides some material for her plot; so does Jane's embarrassment at discerning the name "Dixon" in a word puzzle which Frank prepares for Emma's entertainment. In both these cases, Frank and Jane know the true meaning of these signs, while Emma is again far off the mark.

Portrait, charade, mysterious gift, and word puzzle all form part of a tantalising game which Austen plays with her fictional world and her reader in this book of riddles. Ambiguous clues control the flow of information among her characters as well as between the fictional world and the reader. Through these images she graphically illustrates her characters' misconceptions, deceit, and discoveries, in that the novel compels the reader to take part in the process of revelation by constantly reviewing previous material in the light of new information. As focal points of interest, these images also show how Austen's novels excel at concentrating characters' attentions on a single object, activity or issue to generate an array of viewpoints and attitudes, some of them objectively reliable, others wildly subjective. This is essentially part of what Lewes calls her dramatic genius, and it is also in this respect that her art is at its most vivid and precise. Far from wanting to evoke a striking image of Harriet's physical appearance, her main interest lies in Emma's subjective manipulation of this image, Mr Elton's complete misunderstanding of what she wants to communicate with the portrait, and various other characters' viewpoints which do not add any substance or clarity to the likeness, but reveal their own attitudes or habits of observation. In one such scene which has the portrait at its centre, the focus glances completely off the concrete likeness to follow a shifting array of viewpoints: Mrs Weston and Mr Knightley's objective criticism that Emma has made Harriet too beautiful and too tall, Mr Elton's enthusiastic but pretentious explanations that this is the "effect of shade", "proportions", and "foreshortening", and Mr Woodhouse's mixture of automatic admiration and concern for the painted figure's health (47 - 48).

The technique of proliferating viewpoints around a focal point of interest demonstrates a kinship between Austen's art and late eighteenth-century writings on the picturesque, more convincingly so if one keeps in mind that she frequently involves her characters in a discussion of aesthetic questions, particularly those pertaining to landscape appreciation. The technique represents a process whereby a picture "infinitely varied" can be derived from essentially "simple parts", a lesson taught by Gilpin in his writings on the picturesque.³⁸ This exponent of the picturesque, moreover, educates the eye to analyse not only landscape into its component parts, but also the occasional portrait. He views Holbein's portrait of the More family, for instance, very much in the light of his requirement for unity in diversity in landscape: "Indeed every

family-picture should be founded on some little story, or domestic incident, which, in a degree, should engage the attention of all the figures". Applying this criterion to other portraitists, he finds that Van Dyck creates "so many distinct portraits, stuck together on the same canvas" whereas Reynolds's "great fertility of invention in employing the figures of his family-pictures, is not among the least of his many excellencies".³⁹

Whether Austen is directly influenced by such deviations into the "picturesque" of human groupings or whether she gleans aesthetic principles in a more general way from Gilpin is not really the question here. Her depiction of characters often displays a principle of unity in diversity closely resembling Gilpin's systematic but variable approach to natural form which slots individual effects into a tightly controlled frame of observation.⁴⁰ Thus, when Catherine and the Tilneys step out to admire the scenery around Beechen Cliff, the narrator's sober appreciation firmly fixes the scene from which her characters' individual viewpoints are to radiate: "that noble hill, whose beautiful verdure and hanging coppice render it so striking an object from almost every opening in Bath" (106). Catherine's first remark, "I never look at it . . . without thinking of the south of France", comically reflects her aesthetic naïveté. The Tilneys, against this, base their response not on Radcliffe, but on Gilpin himself: "They were viewing the country with the eyes of persons accustomed to drawing, and decided on its capability of being formed into pictures, with all the eagerness of real taste" (110).

Having established both the basic scene and her characters' different levels of aesthetic awareness, Austen starts manipulating the situation for humorous effect. Her main vehicle is Gilpin, who in the process comes in for a few laughs himself despite the genuine admiration evident in her use of his principles to show "real taste" in action. For all his systematic arrangement of scenes, Gilpin is inevitably hampered by the limitations of subjective response, geography, and the weather. Frequently an element of relativity creeps into his observations which at times strikes an unintentional comic note of the kind that Austen is quick to sense and exploit. He often complains, for instance, about a vantage-point which is either too high or too low to allow a proper picturesque view. Sometimes the weather intervenes: after spending many pages describing his method of analysing picturesque scenes along the banks of the Wye, he has to confess that rain obscured his vision for two thirds of the journey.⁴¹ In Northanger Abbey a similar comic tension develops between ideally resynthesised

landscapes and the real scene as the Tilneys' Gilpinesque views start clashing with Catherine's (for once) common-sensical observations:

Here Catherine was quite lost. She knew nothing of drawing - nothing of taste: - and she listened to them with an attention which brought her little profit, for they talked in phrases which conveyed scarcely any idea to her. The little which she could understand however appeared to contradict the very few notions she had entertained on the matter before. It seemed as if a good view were no longer to be taken from the top of an high hill, and that a clear blue sky was no longer a proof of a fine day. She was heartily ashamed of her ignorance. (110)

With his subsequent "lecture on the picturesque", Henry intends to wipe out her ignorance; but there is also considerable social comedy in the role he assumes as a "clever young man" (111) and Catherine's readiness to show herself willing. Henry's flood of picturesque jargon and his pupil's overwhelming response climax in the complete elimination of Bath from the landscape:

He talked of fore-grounds, distances, and second distances - side-screens and perspectives - lights and shades; - and Catherine was so hopeful a scholar, that when they gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape. (111)

This may be indirectly aimed at Gilpin himself who after all regarded Bath as picturesquely not "amusing".⁴² That Henry, however, is slightly taken aback by Catherine's aesthetic "progress" is suggested by the ironic use Austen makes of picturesque language to mock his conversational manoeuvring away from the topic. He proceeds from a foreground of immediate reference to a transitional middle distance, and from there into an ever hazier "distance" of wider reference until he eventually lapses into silence:

Delighted with her progress, and fearful of wearying her with too much wisdom at once, Henry suffered the subject to decline, and by an easy transition from a piece of rocky fragment and the withered oak which he had placed near its summit, to oaks in general, to forests, the

inclosure of them, waste lands, crown lands and government, he shortly found himself arrived at politics; and from politics, it was an easy step to silence. (111)

Henry's glib handling of picturesque props like rocky fragments and withered oaks to create visually "interesting" landscapes in the passage above further pokes fun at Gilpin. But the most impressive aspect of Austen's use of picturesque language here is the way in which it helps her arrange a scene which exactly captures the many comic uncertainties and over-eagernesses of incipient relationships. Picturesque language and practices come under comic focus also in Sense and Sensibility, again refracted through particular characters' points of view. Edward laughingly mimics this language when placing his realistic aesthetic next to Marianne's picturesque one: "I shall call hills steep, which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight, which ought only to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere" (97). As suggested previously, Austen does not reject Marianne's "sensibility", and definitely not in favour of Edward's utilitarian views. What their debate does highlight is their author's keen eye for artistic effect and economy. Whether her characters come armed with the venerable Gilpin or not, their aesthetic views are richly suggestive of psychological and moral dimensions which are usually revealed by way of contrast to a clearly endorsed authorial viewpoint.

Telling comparisons of aesthetic viewpoint substantially fill out the moral scheme underlying Mansfield Park. To begin with, Fanny's reveries in Mrs Grant's shrubbery on the effects of cultivation on nature reinforce the general symbolic implications (and some of the humorous nuances) of the East Room. Her description of how "a rough hedgerow . . . never thought of as any thing, or capable of becoming any thing" can be "converted into a walk" (208) again illustrates the fruitful relationship she perceives between individuals and their environment. Nature, according to Fanny, cultivates as it is cultivated: the hedgerow turned into an ornamental walk not only affords convenient exercise, but also mental recreation by stimulating thoughts on "the operations of time" and "the changes of the human mind" (208). As in the East Room passage, Austen again leavens her presentation of Fanny's aesthetic awareness with humorous touches of the same kind as Edmund's reduction to a cut-out and "mental strength"

scented with potted geranium. She mischievously punctuates “some tender ejaculation of Fanny’s, on the sweets of so protracted an autumn” with a “sudden swell of a cold gust shaking down the last few yellow leaves about them”, forcing the rhapsodist and her companion to “jump up and walk for warmth” (208).

Such humorous treatment does not undermine the validity and force of the links which Fanny perceives between the receptive mind and its surroundings. Nor does it weaken the contrast set up between her productive sensibility and the Crawfords’ egocentrically sterile relationship with their environment. “[W]hen I am sitting out of doors, I am very apt to get into this sort of wondering strain”, Fanny explains after one of her reveries. Mary upsets the balance maintained in these observations by confessing that for her self-interest outweighs everything else: “To say the truth . . . I am something like the famous Doge at the court of Lewis XIV; and may declare that I see no wonder in this shrubbery equal to seeing myself in it” (209 - 210).⁴³ As frequently the case, Mary pictures herself at the centre of the scene. Realising the incongruity of her presence in a country parson’s garden, she is nonetheless quick to appreciate its possibilities for off-setting her attractions, as her first remark upon encountering Edmund soon after demonstrates: “‘Well,’ said Miss Crawford, ‘and do not you scold us for our imprudence? What do you think we have been sitting down for but to be talked to about it . . .?’” (211). Egocentricity has by this stage become a characteristic of Mary’s behaviour. Earlier in the novel Austen exploits her performances on the harp to picture in ironic detail both Edmund’s easy impressionability and Mary’s adroitness at turning her environment into an inviting frame:

A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself; and both placed near a window, cut down to the ground, and opening on a little lawn, surrounded by shrubs in the rich foliage of summer, was enough to catch any man’s heart. The season, the scene, the air, were all favourable to tenderness and sentiment. Mrs. Grant and her tambour frame were not without their use; it was all in harmony; and as every thing will turn to account when love is once set going, even the sandwich tray, and Dr. Grant doing the honours of it, were worth looking at. (65)

Equally egocentric, but more actively so, is Henry Crawford's attitude to the world around him. Whereas Mary envisages herself as the focus-point of any scene, her brother transforms scenery to suit aspects of his character. Austen's chief instrument for revealing the moral weaknesses prevalent in Henry's aesthetic is a series of allusions to the writings and pictures of the controversial late eighteenth, early nineteenth-century landscape gardener and "improver" of estates, Humphrey Repton. The satirical status of this historical figure is established from the moment Maria Bertram languidly suggests his name as a trademark of fashionable taste. A cluster of opinions particularising various characters' preoccupations and attitudes soon develops as Austen defines and reinforces the satirical relevance of her source material. Mr Rushworth and Mrs Norris find Repton's high fees an immediate recommendation. Mary approves of the ready-made nature of the product he offers clients: "had I a place of my own in the country, I should be most thankful to any Mr. Repton who would undertake it, and give me as much beauty as he could for my money; and I should never look at it, till it was complete" (57). This viewpoint is pitched against Edmund's preference for a more personal and organic approach: "I would rather have an inferior degree of beauty, of my own choice, and acquired progressively" (56). Fanny, of course, echoes Edmund at this stage: "It would be delightful to me to see the progress of it all" (57). As far as Repton's actual methods are concerned, Austen for the moment limits herself to an oblique jibe directed through Mr Rushworth's obtuse account of the "two or three fine old trees cut down" at Compton and the suggestion that the old avenue at Sotherton would suffer the same fate (55).

Throughout this chapter, Henry stays out of the discussion apart from announcing himself an enthusiastic improver (61). Likewise, during the visit to Sotherton he is far too engrossed in illicit love-making to formulate any specific opinions on landscape. As later with the private theatricals, he uses the improvement scheme as an aid to flirtation. When he insists on visiting "a knoll not half a mile off, which would give them exactly the requisite command of the house" (98), his concern is not with gaining an aesthetic vantage-point, but with getting rid of Mr Rushworth. It is not until much later that Austen reveals Henry as a true Reptonite, and in so doing delivers a hidden but powerful judgment on his character at a time when he seems poised for radical personal improvement. The young man sitting between Fanny and Lady Bertram

during a game of Speculation, assisting both and displaying “high spirits”, “happy ease”, “quick resources”, and a “playful impudence” (240) appears much closer to the lively prankster, Frank Churchill, than to the heartless rake of earlier episodes or to the adulterer of the future. But the plans for Thornton Lacey Parsonage which he sketches out during pauses in the play graphically intersperse elements of fundamental dishonesty with these attractive qualities, preparing the ground for his final moral lapse towards the end of the novel.

As Alistair Duckworth notes in *The Improvement of the Estate*, the language which Henry uses when suggesting alterations to the Parsonage closely mimics both Repton’s prose style and his pictorial device of super-imposing a cut-out depicting undesirable features on a picture of the “improved” landscape, so that changes to a site can be illustrated by merely removing the “slide” (see figs. 6 and 7).⁴⁴ Henry’s passive imperatives in the following passage (like Repton’s) glibly transform the scene without taking into account the amount of labour proposed (or capturing the sense of organic progress so important to Edmund and Fanny):

“The farm-yard must be cleared away entirely, and planted up to shut out the blacksmith’s shop. The house must be turned to front the east instead of the north - the entrance and principal rooms . . . must be on that side, where the view is really pretty. . . . You must make you a new garden at what is now the back of the house. . . . The meadows beyond what will be the garden, as well as what now is, sweeping round from the lane . . . to the principal road through the village, must be all laid together of course. . . . They belong to the living, I suppose. If not, you must purchase them.” (242)

Duckworth treats the estate as a potent symbol of moral and social conservatism in Austen’s fiction. A “long tradition of anti-improvement literature” and contemporary political prose such as Burke’s which frequently employ metaphors of estate management to comment on social change provide Duckworth with “an appropriately serious context” for interpreting her use of the improvement “motif” and her general attitude to Repton. Like Butler, Duckworth throughout stresses Austen’s commitment to social continuity and traditional morality. Against this background, Henry’s plans for the Parsonage come to signify “a rejection of a traditional shape of reality”; more

particularly, “his wish to re-orient the front of the house suggests a desire for complete cultural re-orientation”.⁴⁵

Although Duckworth impressively combines his thematic framework and historical material to arrive at specific interpretations of Austen’s work, a reading such as the one above simplifies and generalises, sometimes at the cost of accuracy, the range and precision of her allusions to Repton. In the first place, the aesthetic underlying Repton’s thinking and practice offers far more scope for particular satire than Duckworth recognises. And secondly, at its most successful, Austen’s satire finds its primary targets within her fictional worlds themselves and refers only indirectly to wider issues and contexts, no matter how eager critics are to settle her position in, for instance, the intellectual climate surrounding an event like the French Revolution.⁴⁶ A wish for “cultural re-orientation” or radical change is hardly a concern of Henry’s. Most of his activities (including his rakish behaviour) confirm rather than contradict his happy status as one of the landed gentry. Nor is it likely that his adherence to Reptonian ways of viewing the world should introduce such a political motif into the novel when Repton himself (in the early 1790s) scarcely veils his disapproval of revolutionary developments elsewhere and expresses the hope that “[i]n this country, there will . . . for ever exist different orders and degrees of society”. Linking these “orders” directly to property ownership, he furthermore maintains that “so long as such distinctions remain, it will be proper (to avoid confusion) that the residence of each should be marked by such distinct characters as may not easily be mistaken.”⁴⁷

Continuing in this vein, Repton preposterously turns the display of material wealth into something of a moral obligation securing social and aesthetic order. After a rather transparent reference to “those countries where it would be dangerous to display any external ornaments of grandeur” he reasserts his own materialist aesthetic with all the cunning of an expert salesman dealing in the fears and vanities of a wealthy clientèle (like Mr Rushworth):

but rank and affluence are not crimes in England, on the contrary we expect to see a marked difference in the Stile, the Equipage, and the mansions of wealthy individuals, and this difference must also be extended to the grounds in the neighbourhood of these mansions, since

congruity of stile and unity of Character are the first principles of good Taste.⁴⁸

One of the most striking aspects of Repton's writing is the way in which he passes off a rampant lack of tact and moderation for a kind of organicism. So, quoting Burke on the need for decorum, congruity, and reason in aesthetic matters, he justifies the removal of an old mill and bridge at Attingham Park in Shropshire. Although he has to admit that these structures are highly picturesque in themselves, he finds that their state of disrepair taints the estate's grandeur, causing the classical colonnade of the mansion which is visible through the trees to suggest "some Grecian temple in ruins, and not a part of the modern inhabited palace."⁴⁹

While Gilpin disinterestedly promotes an appreciation for the beauties and intricacies of the picturesque, Repton rarely cultivates these for their own sake. He seems always more concerned with the external moral, social, and materialistic meanings which such features might project (or, in his own words, with the "emblematic similarity" existing between estates and owners).⁵⁰ This type of symbolism is very common in literature (used for instance by Austen herself when she makes Elizabeth continue her reassessment of Darcy at Pemberley). But Repton often overlooks inherent symbolic qualities or simplifies associations to suit his own purposes. His approach results in tactless excesses very similar to those satirised in Henry's extensive blocking out of farming and communal activities from a country parson's residence. In fact, many of Repton's suggestions for improvement, even some aesthetically pleasing or obviously practical ones, are undermined to such an extent by comic incongruities and symbolic insensitivities that they could very well pass for satire in another context. There is the notorious picture of his own garden "improving" a peg-legged beggar into an herbaceous border (see fig. 6).⁵¹ Another sketch peels away a group of workmen, peasant women and children to replace them with a deer park. Yet another substitutes elegant sight-seers and a painter "taking" the view for a party of labourers clearing away a bank. And at Attingham Park he advises the owner to add a spire to a distant church "because the general outline of the horizon . . . wants some object to rise above it, and check the eye in its range. . . ."⁵² Surely even Pope or Austen could hardly wish for a more pungently ironic image of materialistic hubris.

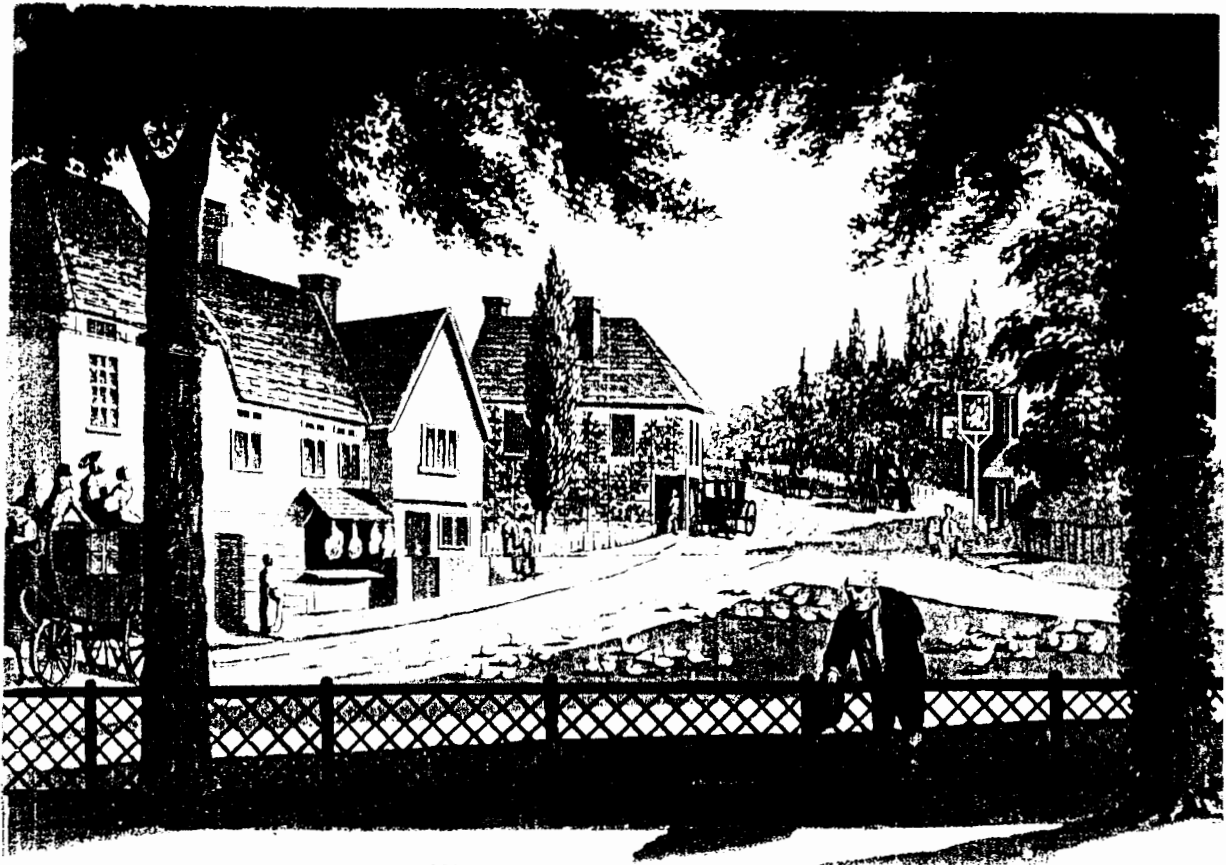


Fig. 6. Humphrey Repton, Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening (London, 1816), illustration to fragment XXXVI.

Duckworth's argument that Austen makes Henry "go beyond" Repton's practice in his wish to import a "higher character" to the Parsonage and to "raise it into a place"⁵³ therefore breaks down on a closer investigation of her source and its striking relevance to the theme of deceptive appearances in *Mansfield Park*. The concepts of "deception" and "appearance", characteristically trimmed and polished to suit his needs, frequently crop up in Repton's writings, as for instance in the section "Of Deceptions" in *The Red Book for Garnons*, Herefordshire, which justifies both as essential aesthetic measures:

it is the business of Taste to deceive, if so hard an appellation deserves to be given to all those efforts, by which Art endeavours to conceal her own works, and make them appear the products of Nature only.

Every attempt to improve may be called a deception, we plant a hill to make it appear higher than it is, we open the banks of a natural river to make it appear wider, we sink a fence betwixt one lawn and another to give imaginary extent, without the necessary confinement. . . .⁵⁴

So far so good. Austen is certainly enough of an Augustan not to quibble with a suggestive shading of art and nature into each other. But Repton (and with him, Henry) takes deceptive appearance beyond the level of aesthetic ingenuity and playfulness to create illusions of social magnificence and to satisfy private fantasies of grandeur. Should a public road run through an estate, Repton advises that it would be "an allowable deception to disguise that public road, and make it appear private, and as part of the approach." This can be done "by obliterating every idea of its being a public road" and stamping on it unequivocal visual signs of private ownership: "the Entrance from the turnpike ought to be marked by such a building as may impress the mind with the full belief that the road belongs only to the proprietor and not to the public." The importance of outward visual prominence for Repton becomes evident in his next remark: if the house itself cannot be "much seen from the surrounding neighbourhood, it is the more necessary that some conspicuous object should mark a command of the property" and impress the minds of observers.⁵⁵ Elsewhere he illustrates how difficult it is to "annex ideas of grandeur and magnificence to a mansion which appears to have little extent of park belonging to it". The solution lies in effacing whatever objects distract from the importance of the house (he mentions ploughed fields, barns, and

cottages) since “it is only the appearance and not the reality of extent” that is necessary to satisfy the [observer’s] mind”⁵⁶ (for a similar process, see fig. 7).

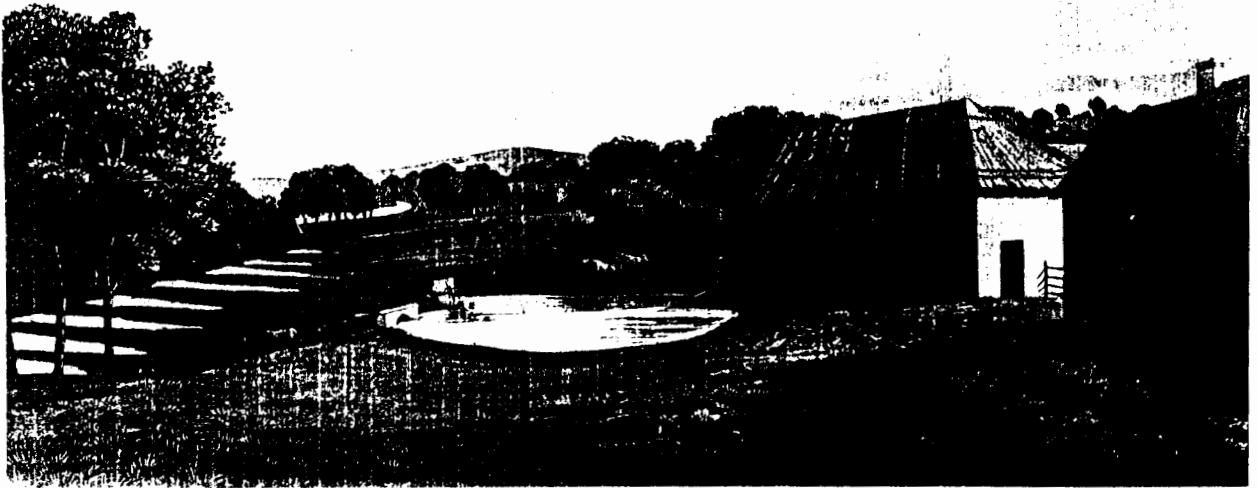
In Mansfield Park Austen puts to satirical purpose both the obsessive materialism of Repton’s landscape symbols and his way of creating illusions by stamping these symbols on the environment, often with little regard for tact or truth. Mimicking Repton’s thought processes in Henry’s plans for Thornton Lacey, she exposes the false motives and values underlying his attempts at moulding the parsonage, its surroundings, the associations which they give rise to, and even the minds of those most intimately concerned with the place:

“From being the mere gentleman’s residence, it becomes, by judicious improvement, the residence of a man of education, taste, modern manners, good connections. All this may be stamped on it; and that house receive such an air as to make its owner be set down as the great land-holder of the parish, by every creature travelling the road; especially as there is no real squire’s house to dispute the point. . . .”

(244)

It is significant that Edmund, Fanny, and Sir Thomas resist Henry’s suggestions and flatteries in their various ways: Edmund insists on his own modest plans (242), Fanny fails to share Henry’s enthusiasm, and Sir Thomas delivers his “little harangue” on the claims of a parish and the duties of a clergyman (248). Only Mary is receptive to his schemes, since they enable her to indulge “agreeable fancies” of her own, and, again following the Reptonian method, “to shut out the church, sink the clergyman, and see only the respectable, elegant, modernized, and occasional residence of a man of independent fortune” in the “picture” she has been “forming” of Thornton Lacey (248).

The links between the improvement schemes in Mansfield Park and Emma’s pictorial “improvement” of Harriet are clear to see. Emma hopes to blot out the obscurity surrounding Harriet’s birth by presenting her as a good marital prospect. Like Repton, she manipulates associations: she gives Harriet more distinctive features, more height, and “considerably more elegance” to suggest that although obscure, Harriet’s origins must surely be genteel (47). Also in this respect, then, Austen’s use of pictorial material culminates in Emma’s portrait of Harriet. In this novel she seems to exhaust the possibilities which the visual arts could hold for her fiction. Persuasion and



VIEW FROM THE SOUTH FRONT OF FRODIE HOUSE DORSET. N. GOLD ESQ.

Fig. 7. Humphrey Repton, Fragments, facing 104.

what exists of Sanditon return to simple emblems and people-painting equations. Captain Benwick's miniature, meant to signify undying love for one woman, proves misleading (if only slightly so) when it finds its way to another. And in Sanditon the arrangement of late husbands' portraits hides the fact that Lady Denham's aristocratic title was bought with her first husband's money:

- and as Lady D. was not there, Charlotte had leisure to look about, & to be told by Mrs P. that the whole-length Portrait of a stately Gentleman, which placed over the Mantlepeice, caught the eye immediately, was the picture of Sir H. Denham - and that one among many Miniatures in another part of the room, little conspicuous, represented Mr Hollis. - Poor Mr Hollis! - It was impossible not to feel him hardly used; to be obliged to stand back in his own House & see the best place by the fire constantly occupied by Sir H. D.⁵⁷

These are Austen's last words in fiction. Her only other reference to painterly imagery is to be found outside her novels, in a letter to her story-scribbling nephew Edward. When a year after the publication of Emma she describes her fiction as "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour" she is again using an image of painting to mock herself and the limited scope of her art.⁵⁸ Her fictional career, then, comes to a halt on a pictorial image of comic immutability. But the repetition in Sanditon of this well-trying device does not signal a paucity of creative ideas. In fact, the fragment is characterised by a restlessness of perception and presentation which suggests that Austen was about to take her exploration of subjective viewpoints and radical shifts in perspective even further than in Mansfield Park and Emma. A marked development of her oeuvre is the way in which she increasingly draws descriptive material into her characters' subjective fields of vision, so that instead of the relatively static natural scenes observed from a distance in the first three novels, the environment is far more often woven inextricably into characters' desires, schemes, and subjective responses in the latter half of her career.

The Crawfords' Reptonian "sliding" from real to desired landscape provides an excellent example of Austen's satirical animation of basically static material in her fiction. Sanditon displays a repetition of such visual techniques, but the fragment also

gives strong hints of new vistas which without doubt would have led to a widening of horizons in Austen's fiction. The carriage drive to Sanditon in chapter 4 for instance repeats the array of "prospects" generated by the drive in Mansfield Park to Sotherton. Charlotte notices a "snug-looking" place on the way which Mr Parker identifies for her, initially with pride and a sense of nostalgia, as "the house of my Forefathers" (379). But as they continue on their journey, the farmer's fond memories give way to the prospector's sanguine hopes, causing him to put the "honest old Place" increasingly in unflattering juxtaposition with the family's new house in "modern Sanditon" (380). The passage "slides" between past and future, between traditional and nascent society, as the carriage moves past the house. This "sliding" is not limited to Mr Parker's conflicting attitudes towards the old house, but is neatly reinforced by the split in attitude between himself and Mrs Parker. Looking at the receding farmhouse "through the back window with something like the fondness of regret", Mrs Parker reminisces about the old place's productive kitchen garden and its cool shades in summer. In speeches alternating with hers, Mr Parker in each case mentions a corresponding weakness (a kitchen garden is a constant "Eyesore" and boys should "run about in the Sunshine" to be hardy) and stresses how modern Sanditon has improved the family's general situation (380 - 381). Although she accepts his suggestions, Mrs Parker "(still looking back)" reiterates her nostalgic view of the past: "one loves to look at an old friend, at a place where one has been happy" (381). Once the "old House" has been "quite left behind" (382), the conversation turns to new developments, the road dips into the village of Sanditon, where a few signs (like blue shoes in a shop window) give "valuable proof of the increasing fashion of the place"; it then ascends Mr Parker's "health-breathing Hill", from the top of which "the Modern" view begins. The chapter ends with Charlotte's surveying a scene which is new to her, and, in its haphazard and unmediated immediacy, also to Austen's fiction: through an "ample Venetian window" at Trafalgar House, she looks over "the miscellaneous foreground of unfinished Buildings, waving Linen, & tops of Houses, to the Sea, dancing & sparkling in sunshine & freshness".

In the course of the Sanditon fragment, Austen indeed turns her back on farmhouses nestling in comfortable hollows and isolated communities (like the Willingden of the first two chapters), to focus her attention on life in a seaside resort

which aspires to the fashionable. Unlike the broader social worlds of Bath and London represented in several previous novels, Sanditon is an unsettled environment, far from established as “fashionable”, and restlessly engaged in its own commercial improvement. Although there is little point in trying to conjecture how this novel would have developed, the chapters dealing with modern Sanditon have a bustling and expectant quality, new characters pour into the novel with every carriage descending the hill, even more are eagerly expected, identities are confused, and those who do emerge frequently do so as caricatures, for instance Mr Parker’s set of hypochondriac siblings. For all its novelty of style and scenery, however, the fragment continues to explore the increasing complexity characteristic of the later novels, in which Austen multiplies viewpoints around seemingly simple situations, so that far from adhering to a Reynoldian doctrine of the universal and general, her aesthetic can much rather be seen as an off-shoot of Hogarth’s “[i]ntricacy in form” which “leads the eye a wanton kind of chace”. In combining such a lively aesthetic with the miscellaneous foreground of modern life in Sanditon, Austen’s last fictional fragment anticipates the unwavering satirical close-ups on unsettled and bustling social worlds encountered in Thackeray’s novels.

Notes and References to Chapter Two

¹ Jane Austen, *Minor Works*; ed. R. W. Chapman, *The Works of Jane Austen*, vol. 6 (London: Oxford University Press, 1954) 139 - 141. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

² Jane Austen, “To Cassandra Austen”, 30 Nov. 1800, letter 29 of *Jane Austen’s Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1952) 101. All further references to the letters will be to this edition.

³ These visits are recorded in the following letters to Cassandra Austen in Chapman (ed.): 18 Apr. 1811, letter 69, 267 - 271; 25 Apr. 1811, letter 70, 272 - 277; and 24 May 1813, letter 80, 309 - 313.

⁴ Jane Austen, “To Martha Lloyd”, 2 Sept. 1814, letter 99.1, ed. Chapman 507. As Lance Bertelsen points out, however, a “process of ‘familiarization’ may be found” in her response to this painting. Even here she attaches considerable value to her own response and stresses its subjectivity: “. . . it has gratified me . . .” (see Lance Bertelsen, “Jane Austen’s Miniatures: Painting, Drawing, and the Novels”, *Modern Language Quarterly* 45 (1984): 355n.).

⁵ Jane Austen, “To Cassandra Austen”, 15 Sept. 1796, letter 6, 13 - 14.

⁶ Jane Austen, “To Cassandra Austen”, 3 Nov. 1813, letter 90, 368.

⁷ Bertelsen 370.

⁸ Bertelsen 359, 363.

⁹ Bertelsen 360.

¹⁰ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 259, qtd. in Bertelsen 362.

¹¹ Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) 267, qtd. in Bertelsen 367.

¹² Bertelsen 367.

¹³ See John Odmark, An Understanding of Jane Austen's Novels (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), on the spaces to be filled in by the reader in Jane Austen's fiction. Odmark himself maps out in detail how he thinks these spaces should theoretically be filled in (or how he thinks Jane Austen would have wanted them filled in). Useful in this respect is Michael Williams's objection in Jane Austen: Six Novels and their Methods (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1986) that Odmark "is so preoccupied with accounting for authorial control and guidance that the reader seems . . . to be being led passively to preordained conclusions" (6). A general point which could be made about studies setting themselves the task of providing an allusive or historical background to Jane Austen's novels is that they frequently do not recognise the essentially elliptical, synecdochic nature of her art, nor the havoc which a satirical method wreaks with established bodies of knowledge.

¹⁴ [G. H. Lewes] "The Novels of Jane Austen", Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine (July 1859): 99 - 113 in Brian Southam (ed.), Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge, 1968) 158 - 159.

¹⁵ For a lucid general discussion of this subject, see Michael Irwin, Picturing: Description and Illusion in the Nineteenth-Century Novel (London: George Allen, 1979).

¹⁶ Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd ed., The Novels of Jane Austen, vol. 2 (1813; London: Oxford University Press, 1932) 246. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

¹⁷ Although Rosemarie Bodenheimer shows convincingly how "[t]he multiplicity of views, all fine", encountered at Pemberley "contributes to the general strategy of piling up positive impressions, and of superseding the earlier rigid and partial assessment of Darcy" ("Looking at Landscape in Jane Austen", Studies in English Literature 21 (1981): 610. See also 611n.). For a view which presents Elizabeth's "ability to appreciate the landscape of Pemberley" as a "consequence of her review and correction of her initial prejudiced impression of Darcy's character", see Roberta B. Hannay, "Jane Austen and the Picturesque Movement: The Revision of the English Landscape" DAI 46 (1985): 706A (Columbia University).

¹⁸ Jane Austen, "To Cassandra Austen", 27 Oct. 1798, letter 10, 23, and 11 June 1799, letter 21, 67.

¹⁹ See Barbara Hardy, "Properties and Possessions in Jane Austen's Novels", Jane Austen's Achievement, ed. Juliet McMaster (London: Macmillan, 1976) 79 - 105 for a fuller assessment of the occurrence and function of objects in this novelist's "object-world". Whereas I stress the ironic prominence of objects as it relates to my topic, Hardy's reading includes a wider range which, however, rests on the same basic assumption that Jane Austen's world of objects is character-bound. See also Michael Irwin's various discussions of the ways in which Jane Austen realises (or omits to realise) the concrete world of faces, clothing, buildings, villages, and towns.

²⁰ Jane Austen, Emma, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd ed., The Novels of Jane Austen, vol. 4 (1816; London: Oxford University Press, 1933) 337 - 340. Future references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

²¹ Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd ed., The Novels of Jane Austen, vol. 5 (1818; London: Oxford University Press, 1933) 158. All future references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

²² See Alistair M. Duckworth's objection that "we are not convinced by her suddenly acquired susceptibility to lurid Gothic imaginings" at the Abbey and that Catherine's progress as a moral heroine is interrupted by her being required to be an agent of Jane Austen's response to the Gothic novel (The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971) 92 and 95).

²³ See Tony Tanner's argument that "when it comes to the prospect of a hidden evil or horror in Northanger Abbey, Catherine is, as it were, wrongly right" (Jane Austen (London: Macmillan Education, 1986) 45).

²⁴ See my earlier reference to Duckworth's objection (n. 22). Marilyn Butler, in Jane Austen and the War of Ideas (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), finds Catherine Morland a "coarser conception" than her namesake in the earlier fragment, "Catherine, or the Bower". According to Butler, Catherine Morland "has been crossed with the burlesque heroine of the 'female quixote' variety, so that many of her intellectual errors are grosser and far more improbable" (173).

²⁵ Judith Wilt, Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot, & Lawrence (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 127, 149, and 131.

²⁶ Wilt, 138, 146 - 147.

²⁷ Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd ed., The Novels of Jane Austen, vol. 1 (1811; London: Oxford University Press, 1933) 131 - 132. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

²⁸ Butler 191.

²⁹ Butler 1.

³⁰ Tanner 77. For a further discussion which sees the need for making "complex discriminations between the two items" and their mixed and problematic manifestations in the characters, see Ian Watt's introduction to the 1961 Harper and Row edition of the novel, "On Sense and Sensibility", republished in his edition of essays, Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963) especially 46 to 51.

³¹ Jane Austen's preliminary title for this novel.

³² William C. Snyder suggests that Elizabeth's "disposition" is "to supply the place with the only feature it lacks - family. . . ." In accompanying her uncle and aunt Philips to Pemberley, she begins the process of reanimating the place ("Mother Nature's Other Natures: Landscape in Women's Writing, 1770 - 1830", Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal 21 (1992): 150).

³³ Jane Austen, "To Cassandra Austen", 24 May 1813, letter 80, 312.

³⁴ For a witty summary of the "insults" which are levelled at Fanny with "varying degrees of animosity", see Michiel Heyns's chapter on Mansfield Park in his recent book, Expulsion and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: The Scapegoat in English Realist Fiction (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 55 and 55n.

³⁵ Although Heyns includes Butler and Tanner in his list of detractors, they both also strongly defend Fanny's position as vital to what they regard as Jane Austen's moral scheme in Mansfield Park. See for instance Butler 223 and Tanner 156 - 157 and 161.

³⁶ Bodenheimer discusses the way in which Fanny is frequently depicted as comically "scrambling for rhetoric" in an attempt to impress others with her sensitivity to nature or to reinforce her sense of herself (614 - 616). For a truly compelling argument which sees Jane Austen's ironic attitude towards Fanny extending throughout the novel, see Heyns 50 - 89.

³⁷ Snyder goes too far, however, when he regards Fanny as Edmund's moral guide. Arguing in general that the picturesque functions as an extensive metaphor of inclusion and integration in women's writing of 1770 to 1830, he reaches the following conclusion about Fanny's moral position: "Putting connection above individuality, Fanny operates within the circumscriptions of Mansfield, always there to 'retrieve' Edmund from his little disasters, to incline him toward Nature as well as toward intimacy" (153). In the first place, Fanny derives her picturesque sensibility mainly from Edmund; in the second place, as Michael Irwin concisely indicates, Mansfield Park is far from an ideal place morally, and although the "'idea' of Mansfield Park" (as a place standing for "some important values concerning family life") "may have survived" at the end of the novel, "it has taken a bad battering" (131 - 132).

³⁸ William Gilpin, Observations on the River Wye, and several parts of South Wales, Relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty (Made in the Summer of the Year 1770) (London, 1782) 8.

³⁹ Gilpin 4.

⁴⁰ Snyder aptly describes "[t]he picturesque process of integrating a variety of features in natural objects and atmospheres" as "an inclusive one which tests aesthetic depth without relinquishing control" (144).

⁴¹ Gilpin 6 and 15.

⁴² Gilpin 93.

⁴³ See Bodenheimer for an interesting reading of Fanny's exclamation as one which is equally self-absorbed, and which furthermore lacks Mary's ability to view herself with wit and irony (616).

⁴⁴ Duckworth 52. "Slide" is Repton's own word for the removable flap.

⁴⁵ Duckworth 44 - 45 and 52.

⁴⁶ See for instance Warren Roberts, Jane Austen and the French Revolution (London: Macmillan, 1979).

⁴⁷ Humphrey Repton, The Red Book for Antony House in Cornwall (c. 1794), ed. Edward Malins, reproduced in facsimile (London: Basilisk, 1976) vol. 2 of The Red Books of Humphrey Repton (3 vols.) n. pag. (from "Character and Situation").

⁴⁸ Repton, The Red Book for Antony House, n. pag. (from "Ornamental Gardening").

⁴⁹ Repton, The Red Book for Attingham Park, Shropshire (1798), ed. Malins, vol. 3, n. pag. (from "Of Landscape-painting").

⁵⁰ Repton, from a poem written in the guest book of Costessy, Norwich, quoted by Malins in his introduction to The Red Books of Humphrey Repton 13.

⁵¹ The picture is from Repton's Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening (London, 1816). It illustrates fragment XXXVI which describes the principle of "appropriation" as practised from his own property in Hare Street (232 - 234).

⁵² Repton, The Red Book for Attingham Park n. pag. (from "Of Landscape-painting").

⁵³ Duckworth 52.

⁵⁴ Repton, The Red Book for Garnons, Herefordshire (1791) qtd. in Lawrence Fleming and Alan Gore, The English Garden (London: Michael Joseph, 1979) 153.

⁵⁵ Repton, The Red Book for Antony House n. pag. (from "Approach").

⁵⁶ Repton, The Red Book for Antony House n. pag. (from "Character and Situation").

⁵⁷ Jane Austen, Sanditon; ed. R.W. Chapman, The Works of Jane Austen, vol. 6, Minor Works, 427. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁵⁸ Jane Austen, "To Edward Austen", 16 December 1816, letter 134, 469. That Jane Austen is perfectly aware of this limited scope becomes evident in her humorous response to James S. Clarke's suggestion in a letter that she should write an "historical romance, illustrative of the history of the august House of Cobourg" (James S. Clarke, "To Jane Austen", 27 March 1816, letter 126a, ed. Chapman 451). Her reply reads as follows:

But I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter. No, I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way . . ." (1 Apr. 1816, letter 126, ed. Chapman 452 - 453).

Chapter Three

Picture Gossip and Pictorial Rhapsody: Thackeray's Pictures of Satire and Sentiment

Unlike Austen, who acquired a language of painting mainly through reading and isolated visits to exhibitions, Thackeray came to fiction equipped with a fully developed vocabulary gleaned from his own practical experience as an aspiring artist and from almost a decade's concentrated writing on the visual arts for newspapers and magazines.¹ His literary apprenticeship furthermore took place against the backdrop of a steadily growing popular interest in the arts, a development strengthened by many contributing factors. From the National Gallery, established in 1824, issued a steady flow of the British public, impressed by their first hand encounters with "old masters" from abroad, or with their native Hogarth, whose Marriage à la Mode for the first time showed its original tones to viewers mostly accustomed to the set of prints. Many other classics usually hidden in private collections all over Britain were temporarily exhibited under the auspices of the British Institution. On the modern scene, the Royal Academy continued its yearly summer shows, while the Old and New Societies of Painters in Water-Colours exhibited works on a less ambitious scale.

Apart from original works, a growing number of prints came into circulation in the nineteenth century. These were available throughout the eighteenth century, initially reproducing established masterpieces for connoisseurs, but publishers and printers gradually reached a wider public by expanding both their market and scope to include subjects from British painting (especially Reynolds and historical works) and later even "low" genre and rustic subjects. Edward Forster's collection published in 1807 covers all these categories, although it retains an air of exclusivity by advertising itself very clearly on the title-page as "now in the Possession of the King, and several noblemen, and gentlemen of the United Kingdom". The collection accordingly guarantees its exclusivity through "safe" choices - the only English painters, for instance, to find representation are the established "masters", Wilson, Gainsborough and Reynolds; and the commentary carefully apologises for regrettable choices of subject like Adrian van Ostade's Dutch Boers Regaling by pointing out that although the painter is merely an "imitator of nature", he is nonetheless "well acquainted with the magic power of

chiaroscuro".² More popular, perhaps, were George Morland's country sketches, widely admired at the turn of the century and appearing in a range of media: from well-defined wood-cut to decorative colour stipple, from atmospheric mezzotint to the free-flowing lines of soft-ground etching.³ Morland's quiet drawings showing farm activities, laundresses at work, children playing with pets, and gently restrained village entertainment declined in popularity in the early nineteenth century, giving way to a fervid patriotic taste for battle scenes, heroes, and Gillray's harsh political caricatures spawned by the French Revolutionary Wars. The printing practices of the 1820s and 1830s, furthermore, affected by the invention of techniques like lithography and especially steel plate printing, differ drastically from those governing the past decades. The latter technique enabled printers to take an almost unlimited number of impressions from a single design without loss of definition. Cheap prints reaching a mass market were the result, providing the public with products as various as John Martin's religious extravaganzas, Turner's Picturesque Views in England and Wales (1826-38), and designs for the illustrated Annuals, often distinguished by poor quality and mawkish sentiment.

The public's increased contact with pictorial art through galleries, exhibitions, and the printing trade stimulated writings on the visual arts, in the shape of both full-length books and articles in magazines.⁴ Starting with Hazlitt's Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England, several studies on the English as artists and collectors appeared during the 1830s, presenting readers not only with factual information, but also with a variety of literary styles which strive, each in its own way, to turn visual perceptions and effects into words. So, for example, Hazlitt relies on what he calls "the catholic language of painting"⁵ and his own idealistic lyricism to convey the essence of good art, while in his Tour of a German Artist in England a less "literary" viewer like Passavant articulates the pictures he encounters in unadorned phrases.⁶ As relative luxuries these books reached a fairly limited public. A far larger number of readers became acquainted with the ways in which language grapples with painting through the fast expanding trade in newspapers and periodical magazines. After years of desultory reportage on the arts, Blackwood's Magazine launched John Eagles on his career as regular art critic. Assuming the persona of the "Sketcher", a rather old-fashioned figure who is equally at home among turn of the century landscape poets and writers on the

picturesque, Eagles initially runs a general series on painting. His main focus is landscape, his aesthetic preference for “old masters” like Claude and Poussin who capture “permanent and general nature” in their paintings.⁷ Eagles’s language often reverts to the idealistic abstractions found in Reynolds’s *Discourses*. Other terms used by the Sketcher include, of course, the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque. The strain on this outmoded and inflexible language of painting becomes visible at times, for instance when he has to admit that “ten thousand gradations and shades of forms and sentiments” in natural scenery and painting alike lack names; or when he realises that a conventional term of approbation like the ubiquitous picturesque can betray him: if the word is made to include “the pigsties, the dunghills, and the human brutes of Ostade, and Claude’s temples”, he complains, “it is a mere *ignus fatuus* that will lead the Sketcher into quagmires”.⁸ To avoid getting thus bogged down, the Sketcher takes refuge in “poetical” landscapes (like Claude’s) which do not challenge the boundaries of his critical language too obviously. Someone like Morland is summarily rejected as all “mud and dulness”,⁹ while most other modern British landscape painters are pronounced “greatly deficient in poetical feeling”, even to the extent of becoming somehow indecent: “for lack of this better guide”, Eagles decides after seeing the 1835 Royal Academy and Water-colour exhibitions, “the hand has run riot over the colours of the palette, and they are crude, unharmonious, gaudy, staring, presuming”. Compared with these, the “old masters” in the National gallery or the British Institution exhibitions offer “repose for the eyes”. Both Turner and Constable turn up as examples of riotous painters, the former by “throwing the gauze of flimsy novelty over his genius”, the latter by painting *The Valley Farm* in a manner which makes it look as if it has passed under “an accidental shower of white lead”.¹⁰

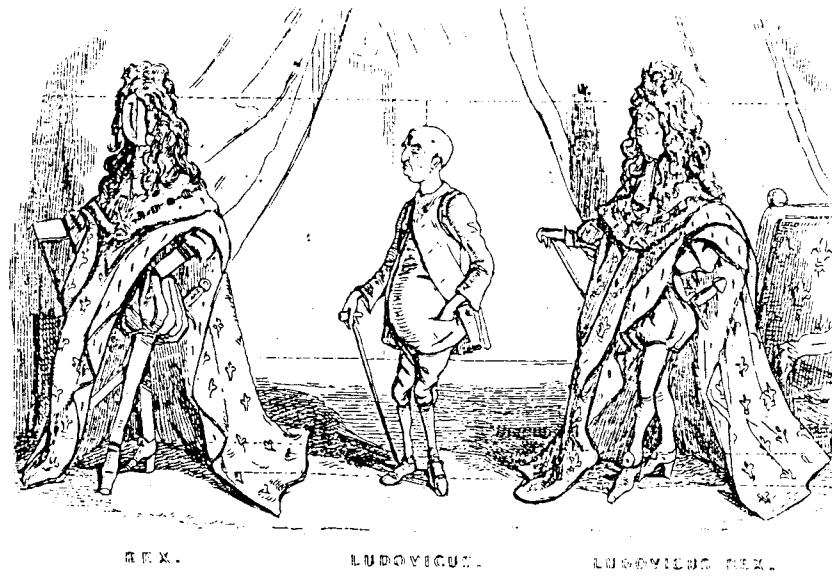
The style of criticism emerging from attacks like these is hardly in keeping with the Sketcher’s earlier effusions on the beauties of Nature and pastoral landscape. Probably sensing this inappropriateness, Eagles drops the persona from his writings on art in 1836,¹¹ and becomes a straightforward, hard-hitting critic of the British art scene, commenting on matters such as the lethargy reigning among those in charge of national collections, deficient public taste, and the shortcomings of the annual exhibitions. In the last category, modern landscapists continue to call forth his wrath: Constable, again, who obstinately refuses to become “chaste and sober” in his colouring, even

when painting homage to Reynolds in his Cenotaph, but insists on a finish “flickering throughout with impertinent lights, and dots of all colours, utterly ruinous to the sentiment”,¹² and Turner, of course, his especial bête noire, whose experiments draw an increasing barrage of virulence and exasperation: “a strange jumble” and “[a]ll blood and chalk” in October 1836, “[w]hite brimstone and stone-blue” in “dreadful and dreaming disorder” in September 1837, and the sarcastic conjecture two years later that there must be “some disease in Mr Turner’s eyes”.¹³

Thackeray does not differ from the Blackwood’s critic too drastically, and, in fact, shares quite a few of his more traditional points of view. He sometimes champions overt didacticism in painting. Like Eagles, he praises Biard’s picture, The Slave Trade, because it delivers “the best, most striking, most pathetic lecture against the trade” by depicting the brutality of dealers and the wretchedness of slaves in meticulous detail.¹⁴ Both critics are left in the dark by Turner’s experiments, although they express their confusion in different ways, as I shall point out later. Despite these similarities, however, Eagles’s contributions are useful chiefly as a foil to set off the more attractive elements of Thackeray’s criticism. The most important difference between their types of criticism is one of tone. Thackeray after all writes mainly for Fraser’s, a magazine still in its first youthful phase of satirical irreverence, whereas Eagles writes for a Blackwood’s grown somewhat more staid since its inception. Both writers adopt personae, but with vastly different effects: the poetically respectful Sketcher tends to tone down Eagles’s criticism and make it excessively moralistic, while Thackeray’s Michael Angelo Titmarsh lends a distinctively light touch to even commonplace opinions. He swaggers from exhibition to exhibition, delivering self-important judgments, committing faux-pas, deviating wildly, and often rambling on until he is forcibly silenced or becomes too hopelessly drunk to continue. Presented through this medium, much of Thackeray’s criticism is satirical, mocking contemporary artists and critics, parodying his own efforts, and focusing on the social activities surrounding the visual arts. Titmarsh is at his best when reminiscing about the art student’s life in Rome or gloating over the consternation in London art circles when he arrives as a critic. Thackeray, too, is in his element while creating a fictional, or, at least semi-fictional, world of art which provides a satirical counterpoint to the real environment of exhibitions and galleries dealt with in his more factual moments as a journalist. It is

significant, under the circumstances, that Eagles chooses landscape as his main area, whereas Thackeray comments mostly on genres which are rich in human interest.

His first review of a Royal Academy exhibition takes the form of a letter from Titmarsh to “Monsieur Anatole Victor Isidor Hyacinthe Achille Hercule de Bricabrac, Peintre D’Histoire” - admittedly farcical exuberance, but nonetheless shrewd in its mock-heroic joining of the grand and the trivial, elements which often clash in the nationalistic or impossibly ambitious history paintings of the mid-nineteenth century. Titmarsh himself has two paintings on exhibition, typifying the genres which Thackeray aims his satire at most consistently in this article: one is an “historical picture of ‘Heliogabulus in the ruins of Carthage’” and the other a pretentious portrait, a “full-length of ‘Sir Samuel Hicks and his Lady,’ - sitting in a garden light, Lady H. reading the Book of Beauty, Sir Samuel catching a butterfly, which is settling on a flower-pot”.¹⁵ The types of fictional painting graphically satirise artistic as well as social pretension, an area of interest which becomes a mainstay of his fiction. Thackeray’s satire gains authenticity from the fact that he, like Titmarsh, is a failed painter turned critic, and although the years spent copying in the Louvre were unsuccessful in setting him up as a professional artist, they impart a quality of easy confidence to his writings on art. He is not only well qualified to capture the social voices at play in galleries and exhibitions, but also to look behind the canvas and into the studios of painters at work. Very often the result is a multi-layered satire on the art scene which explores the relationships between art critics, artists, viewers, and works of art in ever-shifting combinations. At a water-colour exhibition Thackeray places Titmarsh in a position to overhear the “sweet whispers” of “pretty women with pretty pink bonnets peering at pretty pictures”.¹⁶ In the first place, he laughs at the impressionable art critic who peeps under girls’ bonnets instead of attending to the works on exhibition. But apart from the obvious humour of the situation, the reiterated adjective “pretty” becomes a satirical term which conveys Thackeray’s critical judgment of both the social scene and the pictures on display. Whereas the first repetition seems nothing more than a Titmarshian flourish of gallantry, the second links the girls, their bonnets, and the paintings in such a way as to suggest a general insipidity of taste and style. Although the connection is not made openly, the viewers and the paintings end up caricaturing one another, especially when Titmarsh later identifies the pictures admired by the girls as a certain



'Rex. Ludovicus. Ludovicus Rex'

Fig. 8. William Makepeace Thackeray, Rex. Ludovicus. Ludovicus Rex, rpt. in Catherine Peters, Thackeray's Universe (London: Faber, 1987) 70.

Mr Richter's depiction of "great goggle-eyed, red-cheeked, simpering wenches, whose ogling has become odious from its repetition." In another instance, Thackeray reacts against the French tendency towards classical idealism (as represented by works which he had seen in the Luxembourg gallery) by making Titmarsh reveal the crude technicalities which underlie this type of grand composition. "What a classicism", he exclaims, "inspired by rouge, gas-lamps, and a few lines in Lemprière, and copied half from ancient statues, and half from a naked guardsman, at one shilling and sixpence the hour!"¹⁷ A passage like this plays shrewdly with the indirect descriptive moods available to the writer on painting: the conventional term, "classicism", with its accompanying connotations of moral idealism, is comically undermined by Thackeray's focus on the real means and objects through which the painter has achieved his vision. Pictorial language here illustrates Thackeray's tendency to juggle with illusion and reality, a tendency which finds ample expression in his early caricatures and mature writing alike (see fig. 8 for a caricature which epitomises this trend).¹⁸

To speak of caricature when referring to Thackeray's vivid satirical representations of the art world is not far-fetched. The French artist Honoré Daumier, whom he praises enthusiastically in the *London and Westminster Review*,¹⁹ explores similar situations along very much the same lines in his numerous caricatures of painters' studios or exhibitions at the Salon. Painters cringe before critics or critics before painters, sitters encounter their portraits in all sorts of humorous situations, and narrow-minded viewers exhibit surprise or moral outrage at whatever is being shown (see figs 9 to 11). Thackeray himself publishes some caricatures in the manner of Daumier. *Punch*, for instance, carries comparable pictures in 1846 which show two painters' dismay at finding their contributions to the Royal Academy exhibited on the skirting-board and pressed against the ceiling.²⁰ As usual in caricature, most of the humour lies in exaggerated facial expression and bodily posture as the painters stretch and strain to see their own work (figs. 12 and 13). Another common practice of the caricaturist is to develop and refine particular characteristics for recurring figures by placing them in a variety of comical situations. This is the principle behind Titmarsh, and also behind many of Thackeray's later fictional characters who define themselves principally through their behaviour in numerous small incidents. Daumier's designs again stand out as important models. In the article on Parisian caricatures, Thackeray



Imp. Bertels, Paris.

Fichtre !... Epatant !... Sapristi !... Superbe !... ça parle !...

Fig. 9. Honoré Daumier, À Travers les Ateliers..., Le Boulevard, Apr. 1862, rpt. in Daumier: 120 Great Lithographs, ed. Charles F. Ramus (New York: Dover, 1978) 101.



— Il n'y a pas à dire, c'est bien moi, c'est bien mon galbe; mais je regretterai toujours que l'artiste
à eu l'entêtement de ne vouloir pas reproduire mes lunettes, non plus que mon faux col!...

Fig. 10. Honoré Daumier, Le Public à l'Exposition...,
Le petit Journal pour rire, 1864, rpt. in Daumier:
120 Great Lithographs, 105.



Marinet 172. r. Rivoli et St. Yvonne

Lith. Destouches Ed. r. Paradis 176

Cette année encore des Vénus... toujours des Vénus!... comme s'il y avait
des femmes faites comme ça!...

Fig. 11. Honoré Daumier, Cette Année encore des Vénus...,
Le Charivari, May 1864, rpt. in Daumier: 120 Great Litho-
graphs, 107.



Fig. 12. Thackeray, Punch (1846).



Fig. 13. Thackeray, Punch (1846).

especially admires the way in which the French artist creates a whole world of satire by putting through their paces the “two types of clever and stupid knavery”, Robert Macaire, and his “friend, accomplice, butt, and scapegoat”, Bertrand.²¹ Most striking in the Macaire Picture Gallery is the balance which Daumier maintains between continuity and new invention:

The countenance and figure of Macaire and the dear stupid Bertrand are preserved, of course, with great fidelity throughout; but the admirable way in which each fresh character is conceived, the grotesque appropriateness of Robert’s every successive attitude and gesticulation, and the variety of Bertrand’s postures of invariable repose, the exquisite fitness of all the other characters, who act their little part and disappear from the scene, cannot be described on paper, or too highly lauded.²²

The metaphor of verbal caricature for Thackeray’s writing breaks down, however, on a number of counts. Thackeray’s professed inability towards the end of the quotation to capture the immediacy of the cartoons in words can be related to the most important of these: whereas each Daumier lithograph represents a fairly self-contained unit which can be interpreted and enjoyed by itself, even when part of a series, verbal caricature has no such independence and is invariably found embedded in writing which differs from it in various degrees; sometimes just in a slackening of intensity, but sometimes even in a complete change of style and mood. It is in this respect that Titmarsh fails Thackeray (or Thackeray, Titmarsh), since the principles according to which this fictional persona’s characteristic snippets of caricature appear and disappear in the overall context of the Fraser’s reviews and discussions of art are never established.

Assuming a comical persona has its dangers, then, in the case of an undisciplined writer like Thackeray who is inconsistent and who rarely takes the trouble to set up boundaries between facetious and serious comment, thus blurring the edges of his criticism and sometimes calling its sincerity into doubt. One example of such confusion will suffice. Among British painters, Thackeray singles Eastlake out as one of a very small group of artists who “have kept to the true faith, and eschewed the temptations” of voluptuous colour and form posed by artists like Titian and Rubens.²³ But when Titmarsh presents an example of Eastlake’s painting, he does so with a rhetorical

flourish which signals imminent deflation: "Who does not recollect his portrait of Miss Bury?" Thackeray's response to this portrait dissolves into an incongruous mixture of the ideal and the ridiculous: "Not a simple woman - the lovely daughter of the authoress of Love, Flirtation, and other remarkable works - but a glorified saint". Despite such mockery, Titmarsh (or Thackeray?) suggests that this painting and a melancholy Saint Sebastian by the same painter "merit to hang in a gallery where there were only Raffaelles besides". The tone stabilises in a serious mood, liberally tinged with sentimentality, when Titmarsh identifies Mr Severn as "another of the school", whose "simple pictures" with their "hidden and indefinable charm" evoke "a certain emotion of awe - with that thrill of the heart with which one hears country children sing the Old Hundredth. The singers are rude, perhaps, and the voices shrill; but the melody is still pure and godlike. Some such majestic and pious harmony is there in these pictures". The critic seems to be sincerely touched; for the moment, at least, since the feeling soon evaporates with a comically self-indulgent reference to Titmarsh's own Heliogabalus at Carthage, which, we are told, likewise breathes "some faint odour of celestial incense". The tone oscillates uneasily between the serious and the comic, with the result that both categories become suspiciously vague - even more so when the image of children singing a traditional hymn reappears a year later as a way of sanctioning sentiment unequivocally in paintings by Wilkie, and to worsen matters, again by Eastlake. Wilkie's technically flawed but expressive Grace before Meat, "translated into sounds", becomes "a sweet and touching hymn-tune, with rude notes of cheerful voices", whereas Eastlake's Our Lord and the Little Children likewise comes "straight to the heart", causing "all criticism and calculation" to vanish "at once"²⁴

The tone is unambiguous here, mainly because Titmarsh has been marginalised; but one cannot help feeling that this clarity has been gained at the expense of freshness and vigour. Satire has given way to sentimentality in what may be regarded as an early instance of the notorious "lyric leak".²⁵ Judith L. Fisher bases her definition of Thackeray's "aesthetic of the mediocre" on his seemingly uncomplicated emotional reaction to humble religious art like Eastlake's, and Laura Fasick argues that "'gentle, kind thoughts' - more properly described as feelings - are the primary criteria by which paintings are judged in Thackeray's art criticism".²⁶ It is as well to remember, however,

that Thackeray's highly flexible criticism displays many approaches which are in striking conflict with the moralistic and sentimental attitude described by these critics. His satirical impulse, combined with the strains and weaknesses of impromptu composition, makes it difficult for Thackeray to sustain a particular point of view, and for the critic to identify any single element as conclusively "primary" in his attitude to the visual arts. It is for this reason, too, that his most efficient satire on the visual arts appears in Punch, where the briefness of his entries secures an unmitigating satirical intensity which mimics the immediacy and independence of visual caricature most closely. Painting no. 34, by a Mr. Trundler, R.A., depicts "A Typhoon bursting in a simoom over the whirlpool of Maelstrom, Norway, with a ship on fire, an eclipse, and the effect of a lunar rainbow". No. 1311, by the same painter, bears the title The Duke of Wellington and the Shrimp, and is accompanied by the following lines from an unpublished poem: "And can it be, thou hideous imp, / That life is ah! how brief, and glory but a shrimp!"²⁷ The latter parodies Turner's strange painting of Napoleonic tenacity which represents the exiled Emperor in full uniform on the beach, contemplating a limpet (see fig. 14). Turner certainly invites satire with this painting, a challenge which Thackeray accepts with glee. Unlike Eagles's moral outrage and waspish gibes about eye disease, these two satirical "paintings" vividly capture and joyfully exaggerate salient aspects of Turner's art without belittling him as an artist.

Although the satirical impulse of Thackeray's art criticism is central to the way in which paintings function in his novels and has therefore received all my attention so far, a few points remain to be made about some views and critical methods falling outside satire's range but still finding a place in his fiction. These include his innate respect for the painter's art, the subjective, frequently sensual, delight with which he encounters pictures, and the imaginative language of painting which he devises to convey his responses. Turner again provides fitting illustration. Throughout his career, Thackeray confesses himself baffled, yet awe-struck by this painter's innovations. "Is the picture sublime or ridiculous?" he asks of Slavers throwing overboard the Dead and Dying - Typhoon coming on exhibited in 1840, then goes on to give an animated description which communicates the picture's energy mainly by imaging Turner at work or by assigning active verbs to the colours and forms on the canvas:

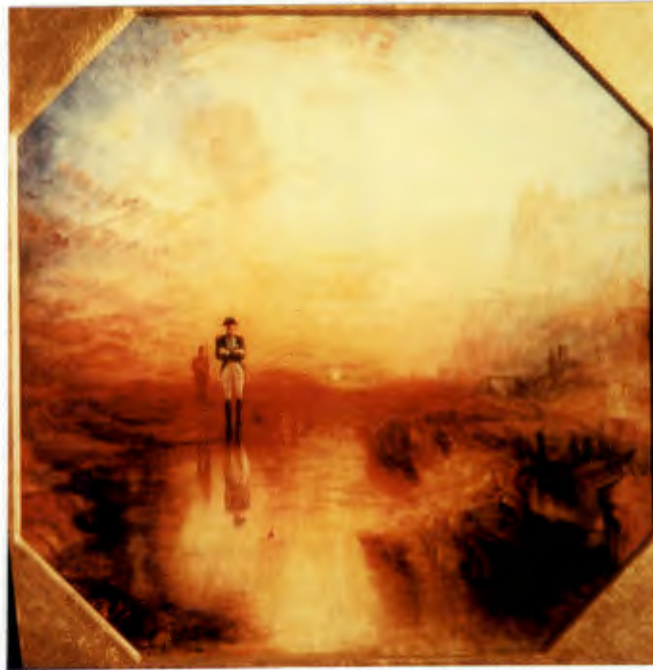


Fig. 14. J.M.W. Turner, War: The Exile and the Rock Limpet (1844), Tate Gallery, London.



Fig. 15. Watteau, Embarkation for Cythera (1717), Louvre, Paris.

Rocks of gamboge are marked down upon the canvass; flakes of white laid on with a trowel; bladders of vermilion madly spirted here and there. Yonder is the slaver rocking in the midst of a flashing foam of white-lead. The sun glares down upon a horrible sea of emerald and purple, into which chocolate-coloured slaves are plunged, and chains that will not sink. . . .²⁸

Biard's "pathetic lecture" against slavery discussed on the same page of this review is far more comprehensible to Thackeray, and specifically along the emotional lines suggested by Fisher: "It stirs the heart more than a hundred thousand tracts, reports, or sermons: it must convert every man who has seen it". He furthermore treats Turner satirically, imagining how Wilberforce's statue would flee in terror if "confronted with this picture". And yet his energetic description of Turner's *Slavers* as "the most tremendous piece of colour that ever was seen" and one which "sets the corner of the room into a flame" conveys also a different kind of appreciation, based on sensory impact and amoral delight, both qualities which are far from insignificant in his experience of art and life.

Five years later Turner's paintings "mesmerise" him. Like the Eastern magicians who "make children see the sultauns, carpet-bearers, tents, &c., in a spot of ink", so "the magician, Joseph Mallard" creates "little boats full of harpooners", gondolas, and a "beautiful whale" out of "streaks of yellow", "vermilion blotches", and "a smear of purple".²⁹ Even in his *Morning Chronicle* notices of the Royal Academy exhibitions which are necessarily more straightforward and neutral than the ones in *Fraser's*, Thackeray continues the same mixture of concrete reference and figurative language in trying to capture Turner's maddening powers of eluding and deluding the viewer. Focusing on the viewer's impressions, Thackeray employs a gradually unfolding Homeric simile to capture the exasperating process of viewing a Turner painting:

As the traveller in the desert beholds at a distance pools of the most delightful water . . . so, as you look from afar off at Mr. TURNER's pictures, you behold all sorts of wonderful and agreeable sights . . . but on coming up to the picture, behold it was all an illusion - a few washes of gamboge, putty, and vermilion are flicked over a canvass at hazard

seemingly; it is only at a distance that they condescend to take a shape, but near at hand they are intangible as Eurydice.³⁰

Although the deluded traveller's close-up encounter with "sand, rubbish, vanity, and vexation of spirit" satirises Turner's art on one level, the simile as a whole communicates his obvious fascination with the artist's ability to conjure up illusions. A passage like this furthermore illustrates the type of imaginative response which Thackeray is capable of towards painting in general, despite the satiric pranks he plays on it. He has an ability to enter into paintings, experiencing them with highly developed sensual and emotional faculties which often lead to a spirited kind of synaesthetic criticism: Etty sends him rushing off, "drunken with the luscious colours that are poured out" and "warm" with the sight of "beautiful syrens";³¹ or he projects himself "into a green, shady landscape of Lee or Creswick", and follows "a quiet stream of babbling beneath whispering trees".³² But the climax of this kind of criticism is certainly to be found in a bravura passage on a "little Watteau" in the Louvre, "a rare piece of fantastical brightness and gaiety". After some lively remarks on ladies and gentleman in brocade and satin, the painting induces a delightful series of associations which playfully transfer pictorial effects to the viewer's palate, establishing Thackeray's particular tastes as a bon vivant critic (see fig. 15):

Yonder, in the midst of a golden atmosphere, rise a bevy of little round Cupids, bubbling up in clusters as out of a champagne bottle, and melting away in air. There is, be sure, a hidden analogy between liquors and pictures: the eye is deliciously tickled by these frisky Watteaus, and yields itself up to a light, smiling, gentlemanlike intoxication. . . . yonder landscape of Claude, calm, fresh, delicate, yet full of flavour, should be likened to a bottle of chateau-margeaux. And what is the Poussin before spoken of but romanée - galée, - heavy, sluggish, - the luscious odour almost sickens you; a sultry sort of drink; your limbs sink under it, - you feel as if you had been drinking hot blood.³³

Thackeray's characteristic preference for lighter forms of intoxication is important here. Encountering Poussin every day, he says, would make an ordinary man "hobble off this mortal stage in a premature gout-fit". A couple of years later he finds it a

comfort that great master-pieces confront one only now and then, "handed round like tokay at dessert, in a few houses, and in very small quantities".³⁴ It is partly on comments like these that Fisher bases her description of Thackeray's "aesthetic of the mediocre" and his appreciation of humble domestic genre and religious painting. But such comments also reconfirm that tone and style are inextricably part of meaning in both Thackeray's art criticism and his fiction. Translating paintings into different types of wine surely squares ill with developing an aesthetic only of the mediocre. Even when Thackeray is expressing conventional or mediocre pictorial tastes, the texture of his writing is bristling with striking images which suggest a multiplicity of view-points, some of them in conflict with domesticity or mediocrity. Not least of all, his art criticism frequently strikes a note reverberating outside the range of art, for instance the Watteau passage above which satirically foregrounds the dilettantish art critic and the gourmandising society he belongs to.

Flexibility, then, and a distinctively light-hearted tone which places painting firmly in a bustling social context are features at least as characteristic of Thackeray's art criticism as his taste for the moral, domestic or mediocre. These are also the features of his art criticism which inform his fictional writing most consistently, for he tries his hand at many different styles, experimenting with tone in especially the lighter ranges of burlesque and humorous social commentary in his early creative work. Many critics have commented on this multiplicity of styles: Juliet McMaster remarks that novelists who depend on "irony and an intimate communication" with readers tend to use parody as an "initial creative impulse"; Kathleen Tillotson sees his flexibility of style as "an unwillingness to commit himself, an awareness that he had not yet found his medium"; Michael Wheeler similarly shows Thackeray in search of his own literary identity, a process which sets him working against the conventions of "fashionable sub-genres, such as the historical romance, the silver-fork novel, or the Newgate novel".³⁵ All these critics link Thackeray's attempts to Austen's fluent exercises in burlesque, adding that his profession as a journalist makes him equally at home with the literary traditions of his day. In this respect Tillotson refers to the "half-delighted familiarity" which parodists must have with their originals.³⁶ Thackeray indeed has a talent for summing up the general "feel" of a rival's prose, for instance when he refers to Bulwer's style as "some pretty things" done "in the upholstery line of writing".³⁷ But

apart from originally furnishing his parodies, “upholstery” (like roguery), remains an essential part of Thackeray’s mature art, and pictures, in turn, are significantly part of the “upholstery” of his social worlds. The four novels which I intend discussing in detail, Vanity Fair, Pendennis, The Newcomes, and The Adventures of Philip, all display a drive towards providing a “silver fork” environment for their main characters. Movements up or down the social scale form the main edifice of plot (as far as it does exist) in Thackeray’s novels. Though mostly falling within the fairly limited range of the upper middle class, his environments are varied enough to allow for such fluctuation. Houses in town, country estates and expensive hotels figure at the top of the register (incorporating a few aristocratic environments); there is furthermore a profusion of places where young men at the beginning of their careers or families of good breeding but straitened means may be found: his fiction abounds in modest rented rooms, army barracks, painters’ studios, student lodgings, Continental boarding-houses, and so forth. These are all environments in which one would expect some form of pictorial decoration. Together with other details of furniture, clothes, and even the courses served at dinner, pictures play a lively part in the many minute situations and incidents which characteristically cluster within the larger units of plot development in Thackeray’s novels and give his prose its distinctive character.³⁸

In this respect Thackeray differs substantially from Austen: whereas she carefully tones the odd pictorial image and its implications into the overall “plan” of her mature novels, Thackeray has the journalistic impulse to capture “whole” social worlds in the texture of his busy but loosely designed prose (which, by the way, does not change much from his early journalistic days). An aspect which Thackeray comments on approvingly in the works of the caricaturists, Philipon and Daumier, is the way in which sociological record and satire join forces to produce lively accounts of contemporary French society. Although they mock social practices through comical exaggeration, their pictures still constitute “a very curious and instructive commentary upon the present state of society in Paris” which will give later generations the “advantage of knowing intimately and exactly the manners of life and being of their grandsires”.³⁹ Hogarth similarly combines morals, manners, and history. In his fifth lecture on the eighteenth-century English humorists (delivered in 1851 and 1852), Thackeray gives a detailed visual description of that “most important and highly

wrought of the Hogarth comedies”, Marriage à la Mode. Although this lecture series continually veers towards uncritical description of works and simple biographical anecdote which make it far from impressive, Thackeray is quite clear about the specific features which he appreciates in Hogarth, the satirist: he speaks of “[t]he care and method with which the moral grounds of these pictures are laid”, apart from the “wit and skill” of this “observing and dexterous artist”. At the same time, he praises Hogarth as a social historian whose works give “the most complete and truthful picture of the manners, and even the thoughts, of the past century”.⁴⁰

Thackeray’s literary art is quickened, then, by a quality of concentrated, yet rapidly animated, visualisation which owes something to eighteenth-century moral satire as well as to nineteenth-century popular French caricature. As cultural objects, furthermore, paintings enter his narrative with a wide spectrum of ready-made meanings which can be exploited satirically. They traditionally reflect a household’s social standing or individual characters’ tastes or nature. A novel as early as Defoe’s Roxana exploits the metonymic connection between painting and social status by having the main character dispose of pictures when her husband deserts her in a penniless condition; conversely, a new pictorial image marks a return of fortune when she consents to live with a wealthy merchant. He presents her with a miniature surrounded by diamonds which she stitches on to her vest, an image clearly expressive of her new, luxurious, yet socially irregular, life-style. Once Pendennis’s father, a provincial apothecary, has made his fortune and left the surgery at Bath for a small private estate, he immediately acquires a collection of paintings which not only testifies to his new elevated position, but also denies his humble past:

Heaven knows where they came from, but a whole range of Pendennis portraits presently hung round the doctor’s oak dining-room; Lelys and Vandykes he vowed all the portraits to be, and when questioned as to the history of the originals, would vaguely say they were ‘ancestors of his’.⁴¹

Thackeray uses the convention quite often, sometimes with mild humour (as in the Pendennis extract above), sometimes mechanically (just about all his young bachelors have pictures of ballet dancers or actresses in their rooms, suggesting the transitional social phase that they are passing through). But at his best he is capable of injecting life

into literary cliché, for instance when he hits on the idea in Vanity Fair of suggesting material instability by turning Moss's spunging-house into an impromptu art gallery with a perpetually revolving stock of paintings on exhibition as fortunes are lost and remade.⁴² Or, later in the same novel, he makes convention scintillate through sheer stylistic brilliance. Becky's adventures take her to an evening entertainment presented in Rome by the eminent Prince and Princess Polonia. The occasion is splendid, of course, and Thackeray characteristically poised to deflate it. The Prince's saloons are said to bustle with bright crowds, "[h]is halls blazed with light and magnificence; were resplendent with gilt frames (containing pictures)" (824). Relegating pictorial content to an inferior syntactic position, the brackets neatly repeat the preposterously prominent frames, which, in their turn, stress the nouveau riche Prince's metonymic regard for possessions as merely indicative of wealth.

A world of fluctuating fortunes, such as the one Thackeray depicts in his novels, renders paintings particularly vulnerable to satirical treatment. As conventional tokens of constancy or genealogical continuity they are almost always at odds with what is actually happening in the novel at the time of their mention. The Osborne's family portrait in Vanity Fair draws open narratorial scorn for its false depiction of harmony and love: "George was on a pony, the elder sister holding him up a bunch of flowers; the younger led by the mother's hand; all with red cheeks and large red mouths, simpering on each other in the approved family-portrait manner" (282). The description immediately precedes the obliteration of George's name from the family Bible and Mr Osborne's will, justifying the narrator's earlier comment on the "bitter satire" revealed in later years by these "flaunting childish" portraits "with their farce of sentiment and smiling lies" (282). In a more humorous vein, the portrait of Jos triumphant on an elephant finds its way first to a public auction (after his father's bankruptcy), then into the opportunistic Becky's possession, where the "funny fat picture" (821) lies dormant until poverty and a chance meeting with the Sedleys much later make it useful to her. She rediscovers the portrait, significantly, in a writing-desk containing documents of her tangled affairs, both financial and amorous. Her new circumstances transform the comical curiosity of "a gentleman in pencil, his face having the advantage of being painted in pink" into an emblem of touching loyalty: "I bought it," said Becky, in a voice trembling with emotion; 'I went to see if I could be of any

use to my kind friends. I have never parted with that picture - I never will” (860 - 861). From this point onwards Jos is completely under her sway.

The most elaborate instance of this kind in Vanity Fair is the cumulative reference to George’s portrait after his death. Amelia’s worship of the miniature reflects satirically on his inconstancy in life, as well as on her own fanciful infatuation. She idolises his image in a carefully sanitised form which suppresses all memory of his flirtations with Becky and her own helpless jealousy in Brussels. The birth of their son helps to absolve him further: the child represents to Amelia, in living miniature, the “elder George returned”, but “improved, and as if come back from heaven” (488). The power of this sanctified image is considerable, turning Amelia into the guilty party towards the end of the novel for ever having suspected George’s fidelity: after quarrelling with Dobbin for alluding to the affair in Brussels, she hurries to the portrait to try and find absolution through self-chastisement:

She went and leaned on the chest of drawers over which the picture hung, and gazed and gazed at it. Its eyes seemed to look down on her with a reproach that deepened as she looked. The early dear, dear memories of that brief prime of love rushed back upon her. The wound which years had scarcely cicatrized bled afresh, and oh, how bitterly! She could not bear the reproaches of the husband there before her.

(846)

The portrait’s power does eventually pale, however, before probably the only straightforward, non-satirical episode in the novel, when Thackeray sums up the limitations of Amelia and Dobbin’s love. They are again in confrontation in this episode, and Dobbin himself is voicing his bitter realisations about their respective infatuations:

“I know what your heart is capable of: it can cling faithfully to a recollection, and cherish a fancy; but it can’t feel such an attachment as mine deserves to mate with. . . . I knew all along . . . that I was a fool, with fond fancies, too, bartering away my all of truth and ardour against your little feeble remnant of love.” (852 - 853)

What Dobbin complains of here is essentially the overall ironic policy of the novel which keeps characters' lives artificial and unmodulated specifically to aid Thackeray's satirical bent. John Carey finds visual elements (light and colour) at the heart of Thackeray's ironic detachment. He argues that whenever his writing manages to capture these effects in "quick, bright perceptions" (rather than the "[s]lovely formulas" which regrettably occur with greater frequency in the later works) they become charged with satiric intent. Such imagery, he points out, operates mainly by presenting objects with a degree of clarity which at the same time flattens and simplifies perception. Carey explains the resultant gain in ironic dimension as follows:

The importance, for Thackeray, of the arresting light-effects that people make with their clothes and bodies, for instance, relates both to a watchfulness and to a detachment from them, as people, that permit irony to operate. Similarly, the definiteness of his colouring, with its hard contrasts and unqualified tones, is of a piece with the peremptoriness and certitude that irony roots in. More tolerant, concessive or involved meanings could not co-exist with light and colour as Thackeray apprehends them.⁴³

Painting enters into Carey's arguments only in so far as it helps to establish Thackeray's general habits and modes of perception. One can, however, cite specific pictorial traditions operating concretely in the fiction which pinpoint the workings of his ironic style more directly (if less subtly) than Carey's vast category of light and colour imagery. These are the conventions belonging to popular prints such as those which accompany sentimental verses or impossible romances in the numerous *Annuals* of the day. In a Fraser's review Thackeray launches fierce attacks against these "gaudy volumes" with their self-explanatory titles like Gems of Beauty, Flowers of Loveliness, and Forget-Me-Not.⁴⁴ He blames them for encouraging bad taste, bad engravings, and worse paintings, and for leading painters into "a kind of prostitution" of their art. Much of his criticism is directed against their artificiality and total lack of life; "all . . . bad - bad in artistical feeling, careless in drawing, poor and feeble in effect", he complains while paging through the *Zuleikhas*, *Angelicas*, and other exotic maidens adorning the 1837 Keepsake:

There is not one of these beauties, with her great eyes, and slim waist, that looks as if it had been painted from a human figure. It is but a slovenly, ricketty, wooden imitation of it, tricked out in some tawdry feathers and frippery, and no more like a real woman than the verses which accompany the plate are like real poetry.

Both Becky and Amelia are associated with similar prints. In each case, the comparison leads to a deliberate simplification of character for satiric purposes. On the rare occasions that Becky appears in her son's nursery, she resembles "a vivified figure out of the Magasin des Modes - blandly smiling in the most beautiful new clothes and little gloves and boots" (477). In his innocence the boy translates her distant coldness into that of an "unearthly being . . . to be worshipped and admired at a distance". But the pictorial style clearly indicates a complete absence of spirituality or natural impulse. It characteristically dwells on effects of surface and artifice, reducing the human wearer to a basic shape, a tailor's dummy. Becky's accoutrements certainly possess more life than she herself does when she goes on her maternal rounds to the nursery:

Wonderful scarfs, laces, and jewels glittered about her. She had always a new bonnet on: and flowers bloomed perpetually in it: or else magnificent curling ostrich feathers, soft and snowy as camellias. She nodded twice or thrice patronizingly to the little boy. . . . (477)

The head moves mechanically, like a puppet's. So does the hand which waves gracefully at passers-by when the child goes driving with her. Together with entrances and exits from the nursery these are the only verbs pertaining to Becky in the long passage describing her exertions as a mother. The paragraph contrasts sharply with the boisterous one directly preceding it which has Rawdon bounce the child in play or toss him wildly in the air (476). Her passivity towards her son is furthermore off-set by the almost frenetic liveliness of her social manner. The pictorial image thus very aptly captures and comments on a specific aspect of her behaviour.

By contrast, the print associated with Amelia reflects her nature more generally. It belongs to Dobbin, who has nipped it from a "book of fashions" and pasted it in the lid of his writing-desk for the resemblance which he fancies it bears to Amelia. The narrator rejects the likeness, claiming that he has seen it, and "can vouch that it is but the picture of a high-waisted gown with an impossible doll's face simpering over it"

(549). But his protest only serves to particularise the ironic relevance of the picture. The badly drawn figure lacks dimension and reality, and therefore reflects the extent of Dobbin's illusion and Amelia's insipidity all the better. As such it anticipates Dobbin's bitter speech (quoted earlier) with impressive clarity. Apart from suggesting the art of the *Annuals*, moreover, the picture of Amelia illustrates Thackeray's ability to make elements from his variegated art criticism signify in his fiction. In "Picture Gossip" he complains about Eastlake's clichéd conception of women which represents a "pure and beautiful" face, but one which "we have seen" "at any time these ten years". "She is getting rather tedious", he adds, "that sweet, irreproachable creature. . . . She may be an angel; but sky-blue, my wicked senses tell me, is a feeble sort of drink".⁴⁵

A peculiarity of Thackeray's own illustrations to *Vanity Fair* may be worth noting here. Though usually amusing in conception, his actual drawings often fail through ill proportions, stiffness, weak two-dimensionality, and a too automatic recourse to fine parallel lines or cross-hatching to hide faults of design or create atmosphere (usually succeeding only in cluttering his pictures). These weaknesses become most evident when he attempts subtle portraiture, whereas simpler expressions of character, especially coarse or comical physical types (mostly male), seem to suit his style quite well. One thinks for instance of Rawdon's lugubriously dishevelled form, Jos's rotundity displayed in all sorts of uncompromising positions, the heavy-jowled tenacity of Mr. Osborne, and various affected or leering gentlemen like Sir Pitt and Lord Steyne (see figs. 16 to 19). All these illustrations owe their success to the caricaturist's overstatements, so that it comes as a bit of a surprise to find that Thackeray is singularly adept at depicting Amelia, probably the character in *Vanity Fair* most lacking in distinctive features. The reason for this lies in the fact that he follows, deliberately or unconsciously, the example set in many of the *Annuals*. He gives Amelia a bland inexpressiveness which constitutes a perfect visual accompaniment to her literary image of unblemished yet stagnant virtue. As drawings these are extremely simple, relying on an almost childish schematisation of features. The face is usually a full oval, slightly inclined to left or right, the eyebrows and eyes accentuated, with the irises not fixed on anything in particular, yet raised in an habitual attitude of unspecified appeal. Slight darts and dashes mark out a barely perceptible nose and mouth, and the figure is drawn in simple postures of repose. The overall effect is one of infantile sugariness,



Fig. 16. Thackeray, Vanity Fair
(1847).



MR. JOS SHAVES OFF HIS MOUSTACHIOS

Fig. 17.



MR. OSBORNE'S WELCOME TO AMELIA

Fig. 18.



Fig. 19.



MRS. OSBORNE'S CARRIAGE STOPPING THE WAY

Fig. 20. Thackeray, Vanity Fair.

very much along the lines of the picture which Dobbin associates with her (see figs. 18 and 20). Becky's sensuality and complexity, on the other hand, defy the simple lines of sentimental print. As I mentioned earlier, the picture from the fashion magazine refers only to one aspect of her behaviour - her maternal passivity. For the rest, the flexible nature of her schemes and vices, the facility with which she shifts and switches roles, soon exhaust Thackeray's little stock of technical resources as a draughtsman. His Becky has pinched features (reflecting too literally her symbolic surname), and often an unnaturally twisted body instead of the variable expressions which her character requires (see fig. 16).

The Annuals serve Thackeray's satirical purpose again in his next novel, Pendennis. This time he focuses on their literary component, but with reference to the pictures which frequently accompany the writing in publications like these. His primary butt is the young Pendennis who, for the sake of an income, has to adapt his high-flown poetical aspirations to the level of the Spring Annual, a publication full of thumping ballads and sentimental verse, and "daintily illustrated with pictures of reigning beauties, or other prints of a tender and voluptuous character" (396). The aspiring poet's humiliation is complete when he is required to write verses to fit previously prepared plates, instead of having his own work illustrated. The first assignment involves a picture titled The Church Porch in which a Spanish girl is hastening to church watched intently by a cloaked man hidden in a niche. The "poem" arising from this unpromising material combines ridiculous romantic passion with mechanical versification (398 - 399). Pendennis's mawkish verses for magazines find further application in the novel when Thackeray uses them to mock the character's superficial and mercantile engagement to Blanche Amory. His love letters contain verses which are "first addressed to Blanche, per post", then earn him some money by appearing in the popular publication, the Roseleaves, where their easy sentiment is plaited into a "pictorial garland" of female beauties (827).

The images referred to so far function in their fictional contexts in a way which could best be described as textural. They lend firm outlines and well-defined surfaces to Thackeray's ironic definition of social environments and characters without influencing the overall structure of his fiction much. Critics generally value even his best work more for its bold patterning than for its structural soundness.⁴⁶ The later

work displays a gradual shrinking of ironic distance between narrator and main character which has far-reaching effects for both the texture and the structure of his writing. The Master Puppeteer of Vanity Fair puts his characters through their paces with little compunction and less compassion. Pendennis, by contrast, introduces a fairly sympathetic omniscient narrator who vacillates between mocking a young scapegrace and the society he keeps, and enthusiastically admiring the moral purity of mothers and wives whose virtue somehow safeguards his passage through life (Thackeray himself comes perilously close in this novel to the Eastlake type of pure woman whom he mocks in his art criticism and Vanity Fair). The Newcomes and The Adventures of Philip to a large extent repeat the formula in that each traces a young man's struggles to reach social and material security through moral diligence. The dangers that beset him are as various as ill-fated love, evil mothers-in-law, and flawed tempers. In each of these novels the narrator belongs to the fictional world which he depicts. The role is fulfilled by Pendennis who, being a personal friend of both Clive Newcome and Philip Firmin, naturally saves his satiric fervour for society at large, while dealing fairly gently with his friends. The result is a widening gap between sentimentality and satire (whereas sentimentality usually is satire in a novel like Vanity Fair). As far as pictorial images are concerned, striking ones still occur. The Newcomes, with its artistic subject-matter, is rich in these. Philip, too, contains a few, for instance Lord Ringwood's wry bequest of a picture which amounts to a joke from the grave: instead of the earl's fortune, his toadying kinsman, Twysden, inherits a small legacy and an enormous portrait of the ugly old man. With Thackeray's usual comic precision, the amount which Twysden has to pay to have the picture transported from the earl's country estate to his own house in town almost completely absorbs the legacy. But apart from such pungent imagery, the novels from Pendennis onwards abound in sentimental icons treated with rhapsodic reverence.

The tendency weakens Thackeray's later writing perceptibly. As the concentration of pithy and comical images decreases, the narrative as a whole, never powerfully structured in itself, tends to wilt. Thackeray's ambitious project in The Newcomes of turning a painter's experiences into a structural mainstay brings along its own further problems. In the first place, personal intensity and unity of vision such as one would expect an artist to possess is completely foreign to Thackeray's manner of creating

characters (strangely enough, since he celebrates genius convincingly in his art criticism and describes artistic vision with great energy, for instance in the case of Turner). It may be because he recognised this weakness that he made Clive an unsuccessful painter, relieving his central character of any real need to impress with originality or distinctiveness. But this results in a second quandary: if Clive does not carry the narrative as a painter, his character has to be interesting in some other way, and it is in this respect more than any other that the novel fails. Thackeray ends up placing a half-baked character at the centre of his narrative: Clive is at the same time a social creature whose movements in society are cramped by his choice of painting as a profession; and a painter whose talent is hamstrung by his social interests and aspirations. The conflict provides enough material for a novel in itself, but this again requires a searching analysis of motives and desires which Thackeray does not take on. And whereas two-dimensionality is a deliberate ploy in *Vanity Fair*, the withdrawal of consistent irony from the later novels often leaves flat characters stranded as sorry remnants of past ingenuity. Flashes remain, however, for in typical fashion Thackeray is at his most successful with Clive when he takes a satirical look at the clash between high aspiration and mediocre abilities, grand forms and sordid realities. So, for instance, his description of the young painter's first composition after acquiring a studio humorously scrambles genre conventions, the painter's own ideals, and external reality to suggest the hubristic nature of Clive's ambition:

Of course our young man commenced as an historical painter, deeming that the highest branch of art; and declining . . . to operate on any but the largest canvases. He painted a prodigious battle-piece of Assaye. . . . A piece of ordnance was dragged into the back-yard, and the Colonel's stud put into requisition to supply studies for this enormous picture. Fred Bayham . . . appeared as the principal figure in the foreground, terrifically wounded, but still of undaunted courage, slashing about amidst a group of writhing Malays, and bestriding the body of a dead cab-horse, which Clive painted, until the landlady and rest of the lodgers cried out, and, for sanitary reasons, the knackers removed the slaughtered charger.⁴⁷

Most humour of this kind, however, is reserved for minor figures. In fact, Clive's career is often significant only in as far as it enables Thackeray to introduce various artistic environments and characters, usually in a manner which echoes or even directly copies his writings on art for Fraser's and Punch. The young Clive is for example encouraged by the portrait-painter, Andrew Smee, whose practice of flattering acquaintances into becoming sitters for his portraits comes in for satirical treatment in a long passage which alternates the painter's hypocritical flourishes in free indirect speech with wry narratorial comment. In ecstasy about the pictorial potential of Colonel Newcome's gray cavalry uniform, Smee rejects the usual "vermilion" British uniform as "hideous", pompously claiming that "Rubens himself could scarcely manage scarlet", and that the red on Cuyp's horseman in the Louvre "was a positive blot upon the whole picture". He concludes with an exclamation that there is "nothing like French gray and silver!" At this point, the narrator interrupts to remark on the painter's own appetite for blazing reds in portraiture which causes him to entreat "all military men whom he met to sit to him in scarlet" (165). The passage later records a number of jokes made at the avaricious painter's expense which further reflects Thackeray's talent for quick improvisation on painterly themes: "Smee plastered his sitters with adulation as methodically as he covered his canvas. He waylaid gentlemen at dinner; he inveigled unsuspecting ones into his studio, and had their heads off their shoulders before they were aware". (165-166)

Clive's entrance into a studio for formal instruction likewise opens up a fund of minor incidents and characters exactly suited to Thackeray's taste for producing rapid verbal caricatures. Gandish, who runs the studio, has his prototype in Punch in the figure of Professor Growley Byles, a frustrated painter whose review of the Westminster Hall Exhibition makes more reference to his own absent paintings than to the actual works on show.⁴⁸ One of his works in progress, a Boadicea, which shows the Icenian chief tattooed "all over an elegant light blue", finds its way into The Newcomes as a mock-heroic example of Gandish's own extravagant attempts at High Art (as Smee, for once witty, points out, "fourteen feet high, at the least!" - 166 - 167). Byles's idea for his next big project, a picture of King Alfred cooking muffins in a goatherd's hut, further parodies the pretensions of this kind of art: "The reader may fancy the muffins boldly grouped, and in flames, the incensed harridan, the rude hut, -

and the disguised monarch. With these materials I hope to effect a great, lofty, national, and original work, when my "Boadicea" is off the easel". This picture also materialises in Gandish's studio, a comically cluttered composition showing the refugee king meekly (but majestically) receiving a blow from the peasant's wife for burning a cake, royal officers and daylight streaming through an open door in the background, signifying, in Gandish's words, "the dawning of 'Ope'" (168). The pupils provide their share of incidental humour: young Moss, the son of the money-lender in Vanity Fair whose spunging-house has a constant turn-over of pawned paintings on exhibition, is for example depicted at work on a Marsyas, the satyr flayed by Apollo, a subject which comments astutely on his underhand business deals with fellow-pupils (171). In some cases pictorial imagery spills over into the general social environment of the novel. Ethel, Clive's beautiful cousin who spurns his love through her own confused pride and the family's matrimonial ambitions, comments with bitter sarcasm on her position on the marriage-market by turning a public art exhibition into an elaborate metaphor:

"I think, grandmamma . . . we young ladies in the world, when we are exhibiting, ought to have little green tickets pinned on our backs, with 'Sold' written on them; it would prevent trouble and any future haggling, you know. Then at the end of the season the owner would carry us home."

(273-274)

That evening she indeed appears with a bright green ticket pinned on her frock, pertly announcing herself as "a tableau-vivant . . . Number 46 in the Exhibition of the Gallery of Painters in Water-colours" (274).

Images such as these, which are closely related to the types of verbal and visual caricature on the art world occurring in his periodical writing, lend amusing variety to Thackeray's fiction. But they do not disguise the problems which he experiences in The Newcomes with the overall direction of his narrative. Attempts at infusing life into the novel by giving Clive a strong presence fail almost completely. As a young man he comes across as an artificial conglomeration of boisterous high spirits and random aesthetic theories which never gel into individual consciousness; in maturity he is plaintive and almost completely passive. The letters from abroad which Pendennis

includes in his narrative increase rather than alleviate this sense of artificiality. In the first place, they represent a rather mechanical effort at giving the narrator access to Clive's mind; and secondly, instead of capturing the young painter's impressions of the Louvre, Belgium, or student life in Rome in bold personal tones as they were intended to do, their wordiness disperses vitality. Even where the sentiments are plausibly Clive's, they run into laborious literary compositions which destroy one's faith in his mental and imaginative powers. His effusions on the Venus de Milo, for instance, merge Philistinism with a sentimental brand of neo-classicism. Initially he assesses the statue in terms reserved for society beauties, then apostrophises her rhapsodically as goddess of "beautiful bountiful calm" - and the following new aesthetic:

"Art ought not to be a fever. It ought to be a calm; not a screaming bull-fight or a battle of gladiators, but a temple for placid contemplation, rapt worship, stately rhythmic ceremony, and music solemn and tender. I shall take down my Snyders and Rubens, when I get home; and turn quietist."

(206)

As so often happens with views expressed in the letters, however, the resolution is left as a loose strand, never to be tied more firmly into the overall narrative of Clive's progress as a painter. Thackeray's own attitude is ambiguous here, for while he is satirising Clive's effusiveness, the aesthetic itself is substantially the one which he adopts for the incorrigible J. J. Ridley.

Significantly, the Clive of maturity, portrayed almost entirely in the negative as his wife's domestic desires and his father's business ideals encroach more and more on his artistic endeavours, is far more credible as a character than the voluble young man. In dealing with the MacKenzies, Thackeray's attention shifts back to attitudes and traits which his art is most at home with. The very first report one hears of Rosey disqualifies her from the role of painter's wife: in a letter to Clive, the satirical Pendennis describes how the MacKenzie mother and daughter regarded the National Gallery as "dreary", patriotically admired only a Scottish picture at the Royal Academy, but thought "Madame Tussaud's interesting exhibition of Waxwork the most delightful in London" (210). Oppressive aesthetics accordingly characterise Clive's claustrophobic marriage. His father's money engages a professional decorator to furnish the couple's

house, creating an atmosphere in which Rosey is cloyingly ubiquitous and Clive sadly pushed to the periphery. Thackeray's description cleverly weaves variations on Rosey's name into the texture of his prose:

Roses and Cupids quivered on the ceilings, up to which golden arabesques crawled from the walls. . . . You trod on velvet, pausing with respect in the centre of the carpet, where Rosey's cypher was worked in the sweet flowers which bear her name. . . . What étagères, and bonbonnières, and chiffonnières! . . . What frightful Boucher and Lancret shepherds and shepherdesses leered over the portières! . . . Little Rosey bloomed in millinery . . . and poor Clive, in the midst of these splendours, was gaunt, and sad, and silent. . . . (633 - 634)

The Colonel's Indian banking company likewise honours the bride by handing over a gift at its annual dinner - a centre-piece for her table, the monstrosity of which equals the satirical wedding-cake in Madame Bovary. Thackeray elaborates on its self-important (and often contradictory) imperial symbolism with descriptive glee:

There was a superb silver cocoa-nut tree, whereof the leaves were dextrously arranged for holding candles and pickles; under the cocoa-nut was an Indian prince on a camel, giving his hand to a cavalry officer on horseback - a howitzer, a plough, a loom, a bale of cotton . . . a Brahmin, Britannia, and Commerce with a cornucopia, were grouped round the principal figures: and if you would see a noble account of this chaste and elegant specimen of British art, you are referred to the pages of the Pall Mall Gazette of that year. . . . (632)

The occasion affords further opportunity for ironic incongruity when the ceremony of presenting the gift climaxes in a toast to British artists "àpropos of this splendid specimen of their skill". The two artists present suffer acute annoyance: J.J. is seen "eyeing the trophy" with a "queer expression" on his "shrewd face", while Clive, more closely involved, falls moodily silent (633 - 644).⁴⁹ Subsequent episodes elaborate on his discomfort. The Colonel, previously fairly satisfied with Clive's choice of profession, resents his lassitude in business affairs once their prosperity has turned his palette and brushes into "toys" which keep him from "a much higher station in the

world" (635). The complaint is repeated in Rosey's petulant tones: she accuses Clive of spending too much time away from her, "painting a horrid beggar-man dressed up as a monk" and returning home "with his hands all over horrid paint" (656).

Although Thackeray succeeds in mocking social prejudices against art, he never manages to develop artist characters powerful enough in their vision to counteract popular misconceptions convincingly. The most consistent impression of Clive's artistic make-up to emerge from the narrative is literally sketchy - he displays great facility as a draughtsman, but spoils his original designs when turning them into finished compositions. His best pieces are spirited sporting sketches and chalk likenesses of military men. Although quite valuable as a comment on Clive's easy-going and pleasure-loving temper, this aesthetic feature is far too slight to bear much thematic weight in itself. Thackeray deliberately sets out strengthening the structural function of painting in this novel by introducing J.J., the diligent artist, as a counterpart to the dilettantish Clive. In this he is only moderately successful, mainly because he approaches J.J.'s artistic ability from the outside, in terms that are abstract and excessively moralistic. Even when Thackeray illustrates the workings of J.J.'s imagination concretely, his language soon lapses into abstractions which overtly and doggedly translate the elements and effects of art into moral concepts. Thus, the colourful throng of imaginary places and creatures evoked in the young artist's mind whenever he hears Miss Cann's performances on the piano, draws from Thackeray the following rhapsody, the first of many "lyric leaks" prompted by J. J.: "O enchanting boon of Nature, which reveals to the possessor the hidden spirits of beauty round about him! spirits which the strongest and most gifted masters compel into painting or song". (119) Equally forced is the obvious approval with which the narrator mentions J.J.'s delight in practising the "hundred pleasant dexterities and manipulations of his craft", in drawing "every knot in an oak panel, or every leaf in an orange tree" (390), and the subsequent elaborate allusion to the Biblical parable of moral readiness:

whenever you found him he seemed watchful and serene, his modest virgin-lamp always lighted and trim. No gusts of passion extinguished it; no hopeless wandering in the darkness afterwards led him astray. Wayfarers through the world, we meet now and again with such purity, and salute it, and hush whilst it passes on. (390)

Thackeray's respect for moral diligence and the redeeming powers of art culminates in an impossibly glorious transfiguration of the artist towards the end of the novel. Unleavened by any trace of irony, this is Thackeray at his most stodgily sentimental:

The painter turned as he spoke; and the bright northern light which fell upon the sitter's head was intercepted, and lighted his own Out of that bright light looked his pale thoughtful face, and long locks and eager brown eyes. The palette on his arm was a great shield painted of many colours: he carried his maul-stick and a sheaf of brushes along with it, the weapons of his glorious but harmless war. With these he achieves conquests, wherein none are wounded save the envious: with that he shelters him against how much idleness, ambition, temptation!

(653)

After more heroic rhetoric of this kind, he arrives at the following weighty maxim: "Art is truth: and truth is religion; and its study and practice a daily work of pious duty". The metamorphosis of a palette into a shield is a trick more naturally expected in mock-heroic writing. The completely humourless use of the device here contrasts sharply with Thackeray's usual comic inventiveness in dealing with painters, their instruments, and the absurd delusions of "high art".

The dichotomy set up between J.J. and Clive constitutes a further humourless reinterpretation of an eighteenth-century source - Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness*, which follows Francis Goodchild's industrious rise to social eminence and Tom Idle's slothful journey through moral decay. Thackeray presents his two painters in a series of parallel situations, some worked out in detail, others more generally allusive. In Baden-Baden, while Clive is embroiled in love affairs, his own and that of his friend, Jack Belsize, J.J. is steadily working away at his painting. When Clive arrives at his rooms with Jack after the disturbing event on the promenade, he finds J.J. "utilising the last rays of the sun to tint a sketch" (286). The next morning, Clive wakes up amidst the relics of the previous night's turbulent discussions. The scene is substantially Hogarthian: empty champagne flasks, bottles of seltzer-water gone flat, "glasses with dregs of liquor, ashes of cigars, or their black stumps, strewing the cloth" litter the room; and from the adjoining apartment comes the sound of J.J.'s singing, as "the colours arranged themselves to his satisfaction over his peaceful and happy work"

(292). Instead of Clive's many troublesome relationships, J.J. has only one in Baden - with a "strawberry-girl", who, the narrator prudishly hastens to add, is "a little village maiden of seven years old, whose sweet little picture a bishop purchased at the next year's Exhibition" (293). In Rome, while Clive dashes off hundreds of sketches and enters into the pleasures of Anglo-Roman society with equal gusto, J.J. works long hours, produces few sketches, but finishes two "beautiful little pictures" which sell at a good price (393). At the Royal Academy exhibition a few friends have pleasure in recognising Clive's likenesses in the miniature room, "[w]hilst all the world" is "crowding" around a pair of J.J.'s pictures (459). Clive produces a harsh electioneering caricature of his hated cousin Barnes at a time when J.J. is at work on a delicate portrait of that paragon of wives and mothers, Laura Pendennis (652 - 3). And so on, until the reversal of their positions is complete, and J.J., the butler's sickly son, becomes the supervisor of Clive's faltering career.

At this point, Thackeray alludes overtly to his Hogarthian model:

Not a little touching was it to us, who had known the young men in former days, to see them in their changed positions. It was Ridley whose genius and industry had put him in the rank of a patron - Ridley, the good industrious apprentice, who had won the prize of his art - and not one of his many admirers saluted his talent and success with such a hearty recognition as Clive, whose generous soul knew no envy, and who always fired and kindled at the success of his friends (725).

He does, however, make significant modifications to his Hogarthian source material. In his lecture on Hogarth, he mentions Industry and Idleness for its streamlined moral clarity,⁵⁰ a quality which is definitely not transferred to the novel. Although J.J.'s conduct and success fit him neatly for the role of Francis Goodchild, Clive, the implied Tom Idle of this narrative, never becomes morally reprehensible. In Hogarth's set of engravings, Tom Idle is decidedly sordid, gambling away in a grave-yard while Francis Goodchild sings dutifully in church (figs. 21 and 22). The signs of Idle's debauchery are far more serious than Clive's: whereas Idle wakes up next to a prostitute in a ruined chamber clearly symbolising his moral degeneracy, Clive's bedroom reflects only slight moral disorder (see fig. 23; for another example reflecting Hogarth's unflinching approach to "morning after" iconography, see fig. 24). Clive's

The IDLE 'PRENTICE at Play in the Church Yard during Divine Service.



Proverbs Ch. XIX Ver. 29.
*Judgments are prepared for the wicked,
& stripes for the back of fools.*

The INDUSTRIOUS 'PRENTICE performing the Duty of a Christian.



Psalm CXLIX Ver. 9.
*Thou shalt love thy law it is my
meditation all the day.*

Figs. 21 and 22. Hogarth, Industry and Idleness (1747); rpt. in Hogarth: The Complete Engravings, plates 204 and 205.



Fig. 23. Hogarth, Industry and Idleness, rpt. in Hogarth: The Complete Engravings, plate 209.



Fig. 24. Hogarth, Marriage à la Mode, Shortly After the Marriage (1745); National Gallery, London.

misdemeanours and suffering, by contrast, are sentimentalised and blamed on many other factors apart from his own laziness: his father's inability to understand him, Ethel's pride, Rosey's superficiality, the rise and collapse of the Bundelcund Banking Company, his mother-in-law's tyranny. Hardship in any case lays bare moral fibre, not depravity, in Clive, just as prosperity and happiness have tended to accentuate his radiant attractiveness, manly vigour, and immense popularity, rather than his careless frittering away of talents. Hogarth's art operates through stark morals and clear-cut distinctions; so does Thackeray's, in a work like *Vanity Fair*. But by the time he has arrived at *The Newcomes*, sentiment and sympathy, those twin forces of high Victorian literature (and painting), have smoothed over the satirist's harsher practices. The tendency generally interferes with Thackeray's appreciation of eighteenth-century humour. In 1851, when he launches his lecture series on English humorists, he asks permission from his audience to speak "of the men and their lives, rather than of their books".⁵¹ This personal and sympathetic approach is sadly out of step with the critical faculties which he reveals in, say, his livelier art criticism. And, although he later takes for granted that "[t]he moralists of that age had no compunction", he starts off his lectures, incongruously, by emphasising the humorist's gentleness and by embedding (in quick parenthesis) satire's more abrasive qualities into a long list of sympathetic kindnesses: "The humorous writer professes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness - your scorn for untruth, pretension, imposture - your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy".⁵²

As far as Victorian imitations and views of Hogarth are concerned, the tendency to sentimentalise his type of satirical picture is a fairly general one. Augustus Egg, for instance, repeats many of Hogarth's moral clues and narrative codes in his sequence *Past and Present* (1858) - pictures within pictures comment on the action, household objects reflect moral states, children at play highlight the corrupt features of their elders - but whereas Hogarth's imagery is wittily (and often grimly) satirical, Egg uses these means to flood his pictures with sentiment and conventional moral censure. Nineteenth-century critics also transform Hogarth's art to suit their own era's expectations of "moral" painting. John Eagles of *Blackwood's* again serves as a convenient spokesman. He refers to Hogarth as a "most tragical and pathetic painter of manners", an artist who created "histories wonderously pathetic" and who rejected "all

the conventional trumpery, as all unfit for the play of the strong passions of erring and suffering human beings". He can imagine Hogarth "shedding tears of sympathy over the dire miseries he represented", and, finally, he formulates an assessment which seems to fit Egg's straightforwardly emotional art far better than Hogarth's involved pictorial wit:

We know not if, out of the divine walk of Art . . . we have ever been so affected by any historical picture, as by that scene of "Marriage à la mode," where the adulterous wife is kneeling to her dying husband. The grand moral effect is instantaneous - the story told, as it should be, at a glance.⁵³

In keeping with this general movement from satire to sentiment, in his era as well as in his own oeuvre, Thackeray turns Clive's professional failure into an illustration of suffering and moral integrity: Clive's "generous soul", though disappointed, knows no envy. This brings one to a wider application of Hogarth's pictorial parallel in The Newcomes. A sub-title announces that the novel as a whole aims at presenting the "Memoirs", not of a single person, but of "a most respectable family". Although Thackeray recognises Clive as "the hero" of this novel, he places him in an extensive family context which includes, in more or less detail, the activities and circumstances of four generations (if one includes Barnes's doomed progeny, legitimate and otherwise). Thomas Newcome, Clive's grandfather, sets the tone of industrious achievement for his descendants: originally a foundling, he first works as a weaver in his native village, then goes to London to seek his fortune, and finds it, through "honesty, thrift and ingenuity" (and, of course, hard work). The formula adopted for his success story is pointedly also Hogarth's:

This fact may suffice to indicate Thomas Newcome's story. Like Whittington, and many other London apprentices, he began poor and ended by marrying his master's daughter, and becoming sheriff and alderman of the City of London. (13)

Up to this point in the family's history, the adjective "respectable", which occurs in the sub-title, functions unequivocally, but as soon as the banker twins, Brian and Hobson Newcome, take over the family business, at least some irony starts fermenting in

Thackeray's use of the word: the former marries an earl's daughter and becomes the proudly dignified Sir Brian Newcome, while the latter, though more human, is drawn into a display of material prosperity and moral superiority by his competitive middle class wife. By the time Barnes comes into his inheritance, the family's original success story has become completely corrupted. Although Barnes is easily as industrious as his grandfather, and fairly successful at scaling the social ladder, he lacks morals: he abandons his illegitimate family and treats his wife so brutally that she elopes with a former lover. It is against the background of such "success" and "respectability" that Colonel Newcome and his son Clive are depicted. The Colonel has to make his own way and has managed to do so, for he arrives from India a renowned soldier and well-to-do (if not rich) gentleman. The experience of establishing himself through his own exertions has obviously been morally curative. Unlike his half-brothers who have lost all their spontaneity and most of their humanity through business, the Colonel returns from his professional life an affectionate naïve, always enthusiastic about distributing love and money. (His only aberrations occur when he himself becomes a wealthy businessman, but these proceed from the same Quixotic enthusiasm, not from a loss of moral integrity.)

In deciding to become a painter, Clive, too, displays the same kind of pioneering spirit as his ancestor. The decision exasperates the pretentiously respectable branch of the Newcome family. Uncle Hobson is at a loss to understand why the Colonel does not set up his son in "respectable business", betraying his inability to deal with anything not conforming to a middle class mentality: "I ain't proud. I have not married an earl's daughter. . . . I mean I don't care what a fellow is if he is a good fellow. But a painter! hang it - a painter's no trade at all - I don't fancy seeing one of our family sticking up pictures for sale". (187). Mrs Newcome, as always, supports her husband's fumbling prejudices with a rigorous display of self-righteous virtue:

His boy [the Colonel's], she was afraid, was leading the most irregular life. He was growing a pair of moustachios, and going about with all sorts of wild associates. She found no fault; who was she, to find fault with any one? But she had been compelled to hint that her children must not be too intimate with him. (187)

Even the highly individualistic Colonel in this respect goes along with the "polite world" which "permits a gentleman to amuse himself" with the "Muse of Painting" but not "to take her for better or for worse" (256). A similar attitude, though never registered consciously, enervates Clive's own drive to become a professional painter: in prosperity he frequents the company of dandies whose portraits he draws "for nothing", causing professional painters to complain that he would "spoil the trade" (442). Despite this dilettantish streak, he does remain loyal to his choice, and in poverty manages to keep his family alive with his art.

Not at any stage of his career, however, could he be described as a successful painter. The position remains reserved for J.J., the truly industrious apprentice. Viewed from all these different angles, Thackeray's use of the Hogarthian model becomes a bit too relative for comfort: Clive fails professionally, whereas characters as divergent as Barnes and J.J. prosper, one by sacrificing integrity, the other by exercising it. Like his father, Clive manages to carry forward the old weaver's legacy of generosity, kindness and loyalty - features which earn him respect, whereas the rest of the Newcome family (with their precarious but heavily protected respectability) draws mockery and scorn. In all these cases Thackeray refers only to the Francis Goodchild half of Hogarth's parable (although some of Clive's youthful recklessness obviously recalls the unfortunate Tom Idle's). Thackeray furthermore broadens and modifies his original to such an extent that most of Hogarth's satirical clarity is lost in the process. One could argue that Thackeray deliberately reinterprets Hogarth in this manner to reinforce the sense of moral relativity which he creates in the introductory chapter with its scrambled moral fables. What he tries to establish in these programmatic pages is, in the first place, that "[a]ll types of all characters march through all fables" (4); and secondly, that these types do not appear as individual manifestations in reality, but combine to form composite characters. The novelist, as student of human nature, therefore encounters a dynamic complex of typical features when he depicts individual character. "This, then, is to be a story", Thackeray promises,

. . . in which jackdaws will wear peacocks' feathers, and awaken the just ridicule of the peacocks; in which, while every justice is done to the peacocks themselves, the splendour of their plumage . . . and the magnificence of their tails, exception will yet be taken to the absurdity

of their rickety strut, and the foolish discord of their pert squeaking. . . .

(4 -5)

Or, put more straightforwardly, Thackeray's realistic broadening of the fable's narrow stereotypes reads like this: "It does not follow that all men are honest because they are poor; and I have known some who were friendly and generous, although they had plenty of money" (5). Thus, Thackeray's modified version of Hogarth may indeed aim to illustrate, ironically, that an industrious apprentice could be bad, and an idle one good, or realistically, that either of them could be a moral mixture. But, if this is the case, Hogarth loses his satiric force for very commonplace gains, and unreliable ones at that, for when Thackeray alludes to the apprentice's parable to praise J.J.'s achievements, the history of Francis Goodchild functions quite straightforwardly again, throwing into confusion any further claims of intentional irony or a deliberately broadened scope. Such inconsistency seems careless rather than crafty, more so if the heavy sentimentality and high-flowing idealism which accompany J.J. as a character are kept in mind.

In fact, Thackeray is peculiarly limited in his view of J.J., and therefore also of the ways in which art can offer transcendence. Success requires long hours and self-denial. But then, the craft itself comes easily to J.J. Thackeray's overall presentation of what is involved in becoming a painter is remarkably cavalier. The following description of art students at work glosses over the process of painting a picture with glib ease (and for once the attitude is not assumed for satirical effect, but rather represents a nostalgic reliving of his own experiences as an aspiring artist):

Their work is, for the most part, delightfully easy. It does not exercise the brain too much, but gently occupies it. . . . The mere poetic flame, or jet of invention, needs to be lighted up but very seldom, namely, when the young painter is devising his subject, or settling the composition thereof. The posing of figures and drapery; the dexterous copying of the line; the artful processes of cross-hatching, of stumping, of laying on lights, and what not; the arrangement of colour, and the pleasing operations of glazing and the like, are labours for the most part merely manual. These, with the smoking of a proper number of pipes,

carry the student through his day's work. If you pass his door you will probably hear him singing at his easel. (388)

Although J.J. does not participate in the social joys of studio life, his artistic efforts are equally fluent. Even as a professional he smiles and sings while his paintings somehow compose themselves. Thackeray's criteria for artistic success are furthermore suspiciously conformist. They almost always reflect narrow social or official opinions. J.J.'s advancement socially, for instance, causes much amazement and admiration: through his art he reaches the incongruous position of dining in company while his father waits as a servant. His paintings, too, are mentioned only as external signs of success: they sell for good prices, or receive flattering public notice at the Royal Academy. Considering Thackeray's usual sensitivity to the pretence and hypocrisy which make up social opinion, and especially his satiric alertness to potentially ridiculous situations in the visual arts, one cannot but find his sudden servility to these values rather bland.

The later novel, The Adventures of Philip, continues in this vein. J.J. re-appears, now firmly established as "the R. Academician", and treated only a fraction less seriously. He dines with lords and has "many fine carriages" stop at his door and "splendid people" enter it to visit the private preview of his paintings before they are sent off to the Royal Academy.⁵⁴ He still "warbles at his work, or whistles at it, smiling" (148). And the narrator still slips in lyrical rhapsodies on the position of the successful painter as "one of life's summa bona" (154). The language used to describe J.J.'s "matchless dexterity" reinforces the impression received in The Newcomes of his art as facile, though elaborately finished and minutely detailed. Pendennis watches him at work with an awe reserved for magicians and heroes:

I have seen him, with an old pewter mustard-pot for a model, fashion a splendid silver flagon in one of his pictures; paint the hair of an animal, the folds and flowers of a bit of brocade, and so forth. . . . Over the details of that armour, that drapery, or what not, the sparkle of that eye, the downy blush of that cheek, the jewel on that neck, there are battles to be fought and victories to be won. Each day there must occur critical moments of supreme struggle and triumph, when struggle and victory must be both invigorating and exquisitely pleasing. . . . (154)

Thackeray's own admiration for bold and speedy execution in art (as for instance embodied in Rubens's work) makes Carey suggest that his depiction of J.J. as a "finikin" artist is in itself subtly subversive. He mentions the novelist's frustration with painters like Dou who cultivate too exquisite a finish, and claims that Thackeray "came to think, as his snobbishness increased, that there was something positively ungentlemanlike in laborious devotion to art".⁵⁵ "The unlikely John James Ridley" therefore becomes for Carey a "fictional outlet for this set of prejudices". Thackeray certainly picks out accomplishments of a rather mechanical and superficial kind when describing his fictional painter's formidable talents, particularly if one keeps in mind that Ruskin had been insisting on the supremacy of a truly creative imagination over mere manual dexterity for a good decade when J.J. made his first appearance. There is of course no reason why Thackeray should follow Ruskin's aesthetic lead; it is perplexing, however, that his fictional descriptions of a talented painter should be so uninspiring compared with the inventive and dynamic writing which painters in real life (like Watteau and Turner) draw from him.

Although Carey is quite correct in pointing out that J.J.'s art does not answer to Thackeray's own tastes, he is not justified in seeing this discrepancy as a form of censure or prejudice. It is far more likely that J.J.'s shortcomings simply reflect the basic tendencies of the later novels. Like Becky and Amelia before them, the two painters in The Newcomes start off their young adult life together; but whereas Thackeray devises a dual narrative in Vanity Fair which takes into account the various adventures of both main characters, the later novel introduces J.J. mainly as an abstract and essentially static set of ideals off-setting Clive's fluctuating history.⁵⁶ The reason for J.J.'s reappearance in Philip is more obscure. Thackeray again places his diligence in opposition to a young man's luxurious laziness, but without having any real need to do so, since Philip's wealth and poverty, indolence and industry, are structurally quite independent from J.J.'s activities. In fact, his reasons for reviving J.J. seem entirely suspect: instead of showing real interest in the development of a successful painter's art, he seems merely reluctant to do away with a serviceable stock character whose behaviour requires no further invention on the part of the writer, but whose accomplishments give ample opportunity for passionate rhapsodies on art.

Strangely enough, however, Thackeray at times uses his main character, Philip, to develop the psychological identity of this minor and almost completely shadowless figure. Typical of his later fiction (and contrary to Carey's suggestion), he fleshes J.J. out by adding pathos to his original circumstances, instead of paring him down to a number of features which can be easily satirised. The satirical comments which might apply to J.J.'s friendship with the rich and beautiful Philip initially issue not from the narrator, but from an envious fellow-painter: "Do you know why Ridley is so fond of Firmin?" asked Jarman. "Because Firmin's father hangs on to the nobility by the pulse, whilst Ridley, you know, is connected with them through the sideboard" (155). The narrator, Pendennis, explains the nature of the relationship differently, in psychological, not social terms: "Weakly himself, and almost infirm of body, with sensibilities tremulously keen, the painter most admired amongst men strength, health, good spirits, good breeding. Of these, in his youth, Philip had a wealth of endowment". Although Pendennis claims over the page that "Jarman was quite right when he said Ridley loved fine company" and adds that J.J. "would rather have been gentleman than genius ever so great", his attempts at showing the painter in a satirical light never really convince. And yet, having admitted J.J. in all his laboured glory into the narrative with no particular role to play, and having deployed sentiment rather than satire to develop this character, Thackeray achieves a few momentary, but truly poignant touches with this painter figure. These occur when J.J. uses his talent as a means of "copying" the emotional intensities of his friend's life. When Philip marries Charlotte, J.J. falls in love with her and produces his Portrait of a Lady. Likewise, when Philip becomes a father, J.J. responds with A Cradle and hangs about the mother, and not really because, as Pendennis suggests in a gossipy tone, "there are pearl and rose tints on her cheek, which are sure to fascinate a painter" (495). But for all his fond attention, J.J. necessarily remains an "outcast from marriage and love" (494). Charlotte returns his "adoration" with "a condescending shake of a soft little hand, and a kind look from a pair of soft eyes", while continuing to be totally absorbed in Philip, and later, in their children (494). J.J.'s peripheral position in this family group is made graphically clear in the penultimate chapter, when the Firmin children spoil some pictures which he draws to keep them happy during Charlotte's illness. The narrator mentions the artistic

merit (and value) of these chance sketches, then describes what happens to them in the children's hands:

They painted the soldiers yellow, the horses blue, and so forth. On the horses they put soldiers of their own construction. Ridley's landscapes were enriched with representations of "omnibuses". . . . I daresay, as the fever left her, and as she came to see things as they were, Charlotte's eyes dwelt fondly on the pictures of the omnibuses inserted in Mr. Ridley's sketches, and she put some aside and showed them to her friends, and said, "Doesn't our darling show extraordinary talent for drawing? Mr. Ridley says he does. He did a great part of this etching."
(599)

In this passage, written towards the end of his career, Thackeray overlays pictorial imagery with off-hand narratorial conjecture in the manner of his most inventive writing, illustrating that at their best, his fictional paintings function as compact ironic images, not as elaborate emotional descriptions. Their ironies are quick, as in the passage above where the spoilt drawings and the mother's fond partiality strike a quick semantic discord. What is more, this example of futile dedication finally shows that pathos functions most strikingly in Thackeray's fiction when it is merely glimpsed through the surface textures of his satire.

Notes and References to Chapter Three

¹ For a consideration of Thackeray's artistic taste and a concise survey of the different types of writing he undertook on pictorial art, see part I of Judith L. Fisher's article, "The Aesthetic of the Mediocre: Thackeray and the Visual Arts", *Victorian Studies* 26 (1982): 66 - 82. See also Catherine Peters, *Thackeray's Universe: Shifting Worlds of Imagination and Reality* (London: Faber, 1987) 62 - 71, for a description of his activities during the years 1833 to 1835 which gradually confirmed that his strength lay in caricature and a comic vision of society.

² Edward Forster, *The British Gallery of Engravings, from Pictures of the Italian, Flemish, Dutch, and English Schools* (London, 1807) n. pag.

³ See for example Morland's collection of soft-ground etchings published in 1793 by D. Orme.

⁴ For a concise survey of developments in areas of the Victorian art scene such as changing patterns of patronage and art criticism, see George P. Landow, "There Began to Be a Great Talking about the Fine Arts", *The Mind and Art of Victorian England*, ed. Josef L. Altholz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976) 124 - 145.

⁵ William Hazlitt, *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England with a Criticism on "Marriage-a-la mode"* (London, 1824) 56.

⁶ J. D. Passavant, *Tour of a German Artist in England*, trans. Lady Eastlake (London, 1836).

⁷ [John Eagles] "The Sketcher, No I", *Blackwood's Magazine* Apr. 1833: 685.

⁸ [Eagles] "The Sketcher, No II", *Blackwood's* June 1833: 957.

⁹ [Eagles] "The Sketcher, No II", *Blackwood's* June 1833: 960.

- ¹⁰ [Eagles] "The Sketcher, No XII", Blackwood's Aug. 1835: 200 - 201.
- ¹¹ The Sketcher continues to contribute snatches of verse.
- ¹² [Eagles] "The exhibitions: British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, etc. - 1836", Blackwood's Oct. 1836: 549.
- ¹³ [Eagles] "The exhibitions . . ." 551; "Exhibitions - The Royal Academy - and its Exhibition", Blackwood's Sept. 1839: 312.
- ¹⁴ [W. M. Thackeray] "A Pictorial Rhapsody by Michael Angelo Titmarsh", Fraser's Magazine June 1840: 731. Eagles comments as follows on this picture in Blackwood's Sept. 1840: 381: "We hope this picture will be engraved, and cheaply distributed: it is better than volumes upon the slave trade".
- ¹⁵ [Thackeray] "Strictures on Pictures", Fraser's June 1838: 758 - 759.
- ¹⁶ [Thackeray] "A Second Lecture on the Fine Arts by Michael Angelo Titmarsh, Esq.", Fraser's June 1839: 748.
- ¹⁷ [Thackeray] "On the French School of Painting: with appropriate Anecdotes, Illustrations, and Philosophical Disquisitions", Fraser's Dec. 1839: 683.
- ¹⁸ Peters refers to Thackeray's "first published 'book'", his Flore et Zephyr, by 'Theophile Wagstaff' (a collection of ballet caricatures), to show how he uses the stylised conventions of an art form to experiment with illusion and reality. The "backstage" cartoons in this collection which bring together the dancers and admirers from fashionable society furthermore highlight the way in which he employs the arts and artists to aid his "unwavering social realism" (63 - 66).
- ¹⁹ [Thackeray] "Parisian Caricatures", London and Westminster Review Apr. 1839: 282 - 305.
- ²⁰ [Thackeray] "Royal Academy", Punch 10 (1846): 214. The pictures are incorporated in a letter signed "Modest Merit", an unsuccessful painter whose own pictures have been rejected and who tries to overcome his mortification through his decision to "exhibit the Exhibitors" satirically.
- ²¹ [Thackeray] "Parisian Caricatures" 293 and 292.
- ²² [Thackeray] "Parisian Caricatures" 304.
- ²³ [Thackeray] "Strictures on Pictures" 761 - 762.
- ²⁴ [Thackeray] "A Second Lecture on the Fine Arts" 745.
- ²⁵ Edmund Wilson's much quoted phrase, originally from his Classics and Commercials (1951).
- ²⁶ See part II of Fisher's article (70 - 74) and Laura Fasick, "Thackeray's Treatment of Writing and Painting", Nineteenth-Century Literature 47 (1992): 80.
- ²⁷ [Thackeray] "Academy Exhibition", Punch 6 (1844): 200.
- ²⁸ [Thackeray] "A Pictorial Rhapsody" 731.
- ²⁹ [Thackeray] "Picture Gossip: in a Letter from Michael Angelo Titmarsh . . .", Fraser's June 1845: 720.
- ³⁰ [Thackeray] "The Exhibition of the Royal Academy [Second Notice]", The Morning Chronicle 7 May 1846: 5.
- ³¹ Once again Fisher over-simplifies when she asserts the following about his taste: "As Thackeray recoiled from the sensuality of nude models and of his fictional sirens, so he drew back from sensuality in painting" (73). Thackeray does censure nudity in Etty, but his criticism nonetheless suggests considerable (sensual) enjoyment of this painter's work.
- ³² [Thackeray] "A Pictorial Rhapsody" 732.
- ³³ [Thackeray] "On the French School" 687 - 688.
- ³⁴ [Thackeray] "On Men and Pictures", Fraser's July 1841: 101.
- ³⁵ Juliet McMaster, Thackeray: The Major Novels (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971) 29; Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954) 224, and Michael Wheeler, English Fiction of the Victorian Period 1830 - 1870 (New York: Longman, 1985) 22.
- ³⁶ Kathleen Tillotson, 227.
- ³⁷ [Thackeray] "A Word on the Annuals", Fraser's Dec. 1837: 760.
- ³⁸ See Geoffrey Tillotson's discussion of continuity in Thackeray's oeuvre in Thackeray the Novelist (1954; London: Methuen, 1963), chs. 1 - 3. Tillotson argues for instance that characteristic imagery "solidifies the Thackerayan unity" (36).
- ³⁹ [Thackeray] "Parisian Caricatures" 305.
- ⁴⁰ Thackeray, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, ed. C. B. Wheeler (Oxford: Clarendon, 1916) 173 and 177.

⁴¹ Thackeray, Pendennis, ed. George Saintsbury (1848-50; London: Oxford University Press, 1908) 12. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁴² Thackeray, Vanity Fair, ed. George Saintsbury (1848; London: Oxford University Press, 1908) 670. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁴³ John Carey, Thackeray: Prodigal Genius (London: Faber, 1977) 56 - 57.

⁴⁴ [Thackeray] "A Word on the Annuals" 762; 758, and 761.

⁴⁵ [Thackeray] "Picture Gossip" 719 - 720. This quotation again shows that Thackeray's art criticism incorporates more voices than Fisher and Fasick acknowledge.

⁴⁶ See for instance Geoffrey Tillotson on Thackeray's absence of "design" (49).

⁴⁷ Thackeray, The Newcomes (1853-5; London: 1896). All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁴⁸ [Thackeray] "Professor Byles's Opinion of The Westminster Hall Exhibition", Punch 13 (1847): 8 - 9.

⁴⁹ McMaster speaks of the cocoa-nut tree as an "emblem of prosperity"; it is a mark of her discussion of The Newcomes to foreground Thackeray's satirical treatment of "[m]oney, as a determinant of respectability" (155) at the expense of his shrewd satirical use of objects' aesthetic properties or characters' tastes to comment on society.

⁵⁰ Thackeray, English Humourists 174 - 175.

⁵¹ Thackeray, English Humourists 1.

⁵² Thackeray, English Humourists 172.

⁵³ [Eagles] "Thoughts upon the modes of ornamenting the New Houses of Parliament", Blackwood's March 1842: 390.

⁵⁴ Thackeray, The Adventures of Philip (London 1872) 148. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁵⁵ John Carey 36.

⁵⁶ McMaster sees J. J. as standing for "the truth of human ideals" which to a certain extent qualifies Thackeray's view in The Newcomes of "English society as a savage and predatory struggle for survival" (174). I doubt, however, whether this slight figure could really shoulder such structural weight.

Chapter Four

Charlotte Brontë and the Picture of Self-Expression

Years after they had been at school together, Mary Taylor recalled the intense concentration with which her friend, Charlotte Brontë, used to analyse any picture coming her way at Roe Head: "Whenever an opportunity offered of examining a picture or cut of any kind, she went over it piecemeal, with her eyes close to the paper, looking so long that we used to ask her 'what she saw in it'".¹ The children's puzzled curiosity is partly answered by Mary Taylor herself. She recognises an absorbing interest nurtured by her friend's skills as a draughtswoman and her superior knowledge of art: "She used to draw much better, and more quickly, than anything we had seen before, and knew much more about celebrated pictures and painters". The speaker's judgment might of course have been coloured by the mediocrities of the schoolroom or by Charlotte Brontë's subsequent literary fame, but this is a point of little relevance. Of more interest is the attention these reminiscences draw to the emotional and intellectual energy which Brontë so obviously expended in her dealings with the visual arts. "What she saw in it" may be a question born of ignorant simplicity, but it is certainly also one which prompts enquiry into a fundamental and tantalising relationship between two modes of experiencing and representing the world.

Mary Taylor's image of the short-sighted child wrapped up in her own interests proves particularly felicitous here. It is richly suggestive of the way in which Brontë's creative life was given scope through her habit of appropriating stimuli not only from the visual arts, but from any printed matter reaching her from the outside world. It is a practice which she developed from an early age with the other Brontë children, especially with Branwell, two years her junior. Life at Haworth was irksomely isolated at times, and despite the passion with which the children longed for the Parsonage when they were away from it, many of their activities at home were attempts at expanding their lives to include more than the daily round of household affairs and relationships. Their seemingly introverted self-sufficiency and intense absorption in imaginary worlds were in reality ways of assimilating experiences lying far outside their limited reach. Whether through mimicry or transformation, they energetically fabricated fantasies from and around a wide range of materials. So, for instance, the

adults' discussions of contemporary political events and the Rev. Brontë's gift of a set of toy soldiers to Branwell initiated an enactment of the conflict between Wellington and Napoleon, and, as fantasy took ever further flights, of twelve explorers' adventures on a mythical African continent which the children imaginatively re-colonised and re-settled according to their own fancies. An influx of newspapers, magazines, prints, library books, and other publications to the Parsonage shaped their conception of this colony. It developed a bustling printing industry in the shape of the hand-written and hand-sewn volumes of their Young Men's Magazine (closely based on Blackwood's Magazine) which appeared between 1829 and 1830. Together, Charlotte and Branwell recreated a multitude of voices from the real world in their fictional reports on political developments, their snippets of news, advertisements, literary items, and reviews of fictional publications and paintings. These disembodied voices acquired more substance in other genres. Branwell's "histories" placed fictional characters in a more extensive political framework; Charlotte's novelettes and story fragments expanded their emotional lives and realised their geographic surroundings in greater detail. Both children drew confidently, and right from the start they used writing and drawing as related activities. Like their writings, their pictures belong to a wide range of genres: portraits, domestic interiors, and landscapes (including cityscapes and topographical sketches) all figure in their "oeuvres" and give concrete shape to their imaginary world. These pictures are as derivative as the writings. So, Charlotte copied a Finden engraving illustrating Byron's "Maid of Saragoza" and named it after her own romance character, Mina Laury. Likewise, her shimmering visions of Glass Town took shape very much with the help of a John Martin cityscape known to her in print.²

In many ways, Charlotte Brontë's knowledge and vocabulary of painting depend as much as Thackeray's on developments surrounding the growing popular interest in the visual arts characterising the first few decades of the nineteenth century. It is essential, however, to keep in mind the radically different modes of appropriation at work in each case. While Brontë was poring over prints and the type of article on painting which appeared in magazines like Blackwood's, Thackeray, five years her senior, was desultorily courting an artistic career, copying paintings in the Louvre, taking part in studio life, and storing up a myriad of first hand impressions and experiences to be used later in his journalistic and fictional writings. Baxandall's

concept of “availability” becomes pertinent in a consideration of how Brontë’s inevitably limited and second hand approach to the visual arts differentiates the way in which she writes about painting from Thackeray’s confident and mostly light-hearted forays into painterly writing. Frequently her knowledge rests entirely on convention and formula, making her writing a pastiche of hearsay and half-allusion. In “The Swiss Artist”, the young peasant, Alexandre de Valence, is struck so forcibly during his first visit to the Louvre by “the vigorous sternness [sic] of Michael Angelo, the grace and beauty of Raphael and the glorious colouring of Titian”, that he “at length” exclaims (incongruously), “almost in the language of Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice, ‘These are not men but geni-gods who have imitated the magnificence of nature so truly’”.³ The reliance on formula in this early story becomes most obvious when she embroiders on Alexandre’s magnificent use of colour, a quality completely lacking from the kinds of pictures most commonly available to her as a child and young adult. Instead of tinting her detailed ekphrasis of a painting set in the Tyrolese Alps with colours known to her from first hand observation of the natural world around her, she tries to give the description a final stamp of authenticity, paradoxically, by taking recourse to derivative formula: “The rich, local tints on the young chestnuts, which stood in deep shadow, strongly resembled those of Titian in his martyr saint . . .” (vol. 1, 116).

In much of Charlotte Brontë’s juvenile writing, paintings primarily act as prompts to descriptive and highly emotional writing. The various “instalments” of the Young Men’s Magazine contain several reviews of pictures, whether ones attributed to imaginary artists like The Spirit of Cawdor Ravine by Dundee which strongly suggests the “sublimely awful” work of John Martin⁴ or ones reproduced in print, for instance the engraving, Campbell Castle, which she encountered in the Annual publication, Friendship’s Offering, (1829). Both these examples represent fairly straightforward attempts at transcribing visual effects and for this reason are highly substantive and deictic. Her discussion of Campbell Castle in particular illustrates her grasp of the principles of composition in pictorial art in that she effortlessly sketches out the spatial relationships among elements of landscape in words. For the rest, her criteria for judging pictures are understandably naïve at this stage. She requires pictures to be “natural” - a depicted stream should make “you fancy you hear the sound of its roaring” (vol. 1, 64). And they should in some way or other impress one, as becomes

evident in the abundance of strongly emotional words like “sublime majesty”, “dazzles”, “magnificent” (64 - 65), and “consummate genius” (vol. 1, 282). In selecting descriptive details to comment on, she always fixes on aspects of the subject-matter which have the ability to stimulate her imagination. At times this involves mere speculation, for instance when she imagines the colours of an engraving: the sky in Campbell Castle is “seemingly of a clear soft mauve”, she conjectures (vol. 1, 281). But usually more drastic effects busy her fancy. The spirit of Cawdor Ravine, shaped like a large hound with a “supernatural glare” in its eyes which “it is impossible not to be struck by” (vol. 1, 64), lives on in her imagination to resurface years later as Jane Eyre’s vision of the Gytrash during her first, eerily charged meeting with Rochester and his dog, Pilot. Other details from this early exercise in *ekphrasis* survive into her mature fiction, emphasising how strong and lasting the link is between pictorial and literary conception in her writing. The figure “standing on the summit of a high mountain” and “crowned with stars” in some respects anticipates Jane Eyre’s painting of the Evening Star, while the “scarred oak, with the green sapling twining round it” also reappears in this novel in Rochester’s self-denigrating description of himself as a “lightning-struck chestnut tree” with little “right” to “bid a budding woodbine cover its decay with freshness”.⁵

The influence of pictures on Brontë’s early fiction shows itself most clearly in the predominance of description, emotional meanderings of the imagination, and character analysis in her stories, with plot development remaining a submerged necessity which surfaces almost only when a change of scene needs to be effected or justified. The dense substantiality of her prose in these works aims at externalising and visualising the imaginary world which occupies her mind so persistently. Recreating the illusion of an autonomous world is a task which she shares with writers of historical and fantastical romance, and, to be more precise, it is Walter Scott’s concretely substantive prose which finds its way on to the pages of her juvenilia most often. Apart from being an avid reader of Scott, Brontë was always quick to absorb the cultural commonplaces of her day, and twice during the late twenties and early thirties *Blackwood’s* associated Scott with historical “particulars” and “correctness” in painting. In an article on Scottish painters, Francis Grant refers to pieces of armour decorating the studio of the historical painter, William Allan (1782 - 1850); he further links these to “the remote

and distant regions of romance, so interesting to the imagination of the poet or the painter”, and alludes to the similarity between Allan’s paintings and the “scenes and characters which Sir Walter, with his magic pen, has so vividly described to our imagination”.⁶ Five years later, John Eagles publishes a couple of old letters in which his father, Thomas Eagles, addresses an enquiry about fourteenth-century Scottish dress to the novelist on behalf of a friend painting a picture based on the Chevy Chase ballad. Scott’s reply refers him to various illustrations, scraps of literature, and collections in the Tower of London.⁷

Picturing situations and “writing out” pictures in substantive detail are undoubtedly the twin impulses of Brontë’s early creativity. Paradoxically, it is also these impulses which give her a free reign over her fictional world. Despite the urge to “fix” imaginary events through concrete description, at the same time she takes care to leave the boundaries of probability and causality wide open for her imagination to dwell in as it chooses. The same figures appear in story after story, sometimes without consistency of character. Chronology is a loose affair, and even “history” gets rewritten. Of far greater importance than any of these considerations is the artist’s authority as creator of imaginary events, and as long as her fiction “pictures” these clearly and emphatically, it seems to satisfy her aesthetic aims.

From Scott, then, she takes matter rather than manner. Scott usually has too much story to tell; the youthful Charlotte Brontë tends to pick a situation and embroider on it endlessly. Unfortunately, creative freedom often degenerates into literary self-indulgence in her early writing, and whereas many critics marvel at her precocious inventiveness, it is sobering to remember that some of these “juvenile” pieces were written in her twenties. The only “event” to emerge in the introductory pages of a novelette written in 1836 is an author in search of characters. The wavering narrator ends up apologising for the “story’s” lack of direction, but quite obviously she attaches greater importance to the almost magical powers of a free-floating imagination:

Reader, as yet I have written nothing, I would fain fall into some regular strain of composition, but I cannot, my mind is like a prism full of colours but not of forms. A thousand tints are there, brilliant & varied, & if they would resolve into the shade of some flower or bird or gem, I could picture before you. I feel I could. A Panorama is round me

whose scenes shift before I can at all fix their features. first a saloon in Ellrington-Hall with wide sash-windows through which flashes a gleam of the sea thundering in sunshine. the Countess by one open casement, seated & leaning thoughtfully back in an arm-chair, the breeze from a garden playing over her face & fluttering her sable plumes & tresses. an open letter lies on the carpet at her feet which has dropped unconsciously from her relaxed hand.⁸

Despite the increasing “clarity” of vision and the final invitation to the “viewer” to “read” the tantalising “picture” of woman and open letter, the clocks at Ellrington Hall chime midnight before the narrator finally manages to animate the solitary figure, and with her, the story.

This is not to say that Brontë’s juvenilia do not draw on her knowledge of paintings in other ways than as merely descriptive prompts. But the question whether she ever really manages to make painterly material function creatively in her early writing is not easy to answer. As mentioned before, she was fairly well acquainted with the basic categories and controversies governing her era’s language of painting and she frequently incorporated these in her writing. In many cases, however, her use of such material gives the impression that she is parading her grasp of painterly concepts rather than truly exploring their creative implications for her writing. This happens, for example, in the miscellaneous “Conversations” which take place among eminent Angrian characters, including the painter De Lisle, renowned for his depiction of “the beautiful”. The following eulogy addressed to the painter by the Marquis of Douro illustrates how vapid an automatic display of conventional aesthetic concepts can become in the early writing: “often have I seen your mind displayed in the peerless productions of your pencil, where the sublime and beautiful are set forth with a supreme mastery of execution and elevation of feeling” (vol. 1, 235). A later instalment of “Conversations” has De Lisle “lecture” Lord Charles Wellesley extensively on the categories and relative status of the “fine arts”, “Poetry, Painting and Statuary” (vol. 1, 266) in classical Greece. Throughout this “lecture”, which refers widely to commonplaces of ancient art history like Zeuxis’ deceptively realistic grapes and his ideally constructed image of Helen, one is aware not of the fictional painter’s individual

voice, but of a fourteen year old trying to show exactly how “much more” she knows “about celebrated pictures and painters” than her peers.

Mingled with such displays of “scholarship” appear completely uncritical borrowings from popular art forms like the highly sentimentalised pictures and verse of the *Annuals* so abhorred by Thackeray. In fact, Brontë may even have gleaned some serious snippets of information on the visual arts and aesthetic matters in general from the *Annuals*, since they sometimes offered vastly simplified and easily accessible versions of standard critical concepts or debates. James Montgomery’s “The First Leave of an Album” translates the whole Horatian *ut pictura poesis* tradition into lilting verse and pretty images which impart a bit of knowledge while really explaining how the album “works”:

Two lovely Sisters here unite
To blend improvement with delight;
Painting and Poetry engage
By turns to deck the Album’s page.⁹

De Lisle’s undemanding “lecture” likewise dishes up aesthetic tradition in digestible form. This set of “Conversations” furthermore describes a fancy portrait of an Angrian beauty (as Hebe) in terms well suited to the insipid reproductions of idealised femininity found in publications like *The Keepsake* or *Friendship’s Offering*: De Lisle feels that he has “touched off” Marian Hume’s “glossy brown hair” very well (vol. 1, 264). The ecstatic poem which the two men compose on the spot to celebrate the “effigy” (265) of beauty further reinforces the resemblance which this kind of writing bears towards the *Annuals*. The 1838 edition of *Friendship’s Offering*, for instance, shows Miss Louisa H. Sheridan in poetically inspired pose, looking over one shoulder with the light falling over her tresses and exposed neck. The accompanying poem, “The Fair Minstrel”, exactly echoes the picture’s exaggerated sentiment with the opening lines, “Favoured of Nature! thou to whom belong / The dangerous gifts of Beauty and of Song!” De Lisle’s painting and the two men’s poem depict Marian Hume in equally hackneyed pose and verse, “Holding the silver cup on high / Crowned with the dew wine of the sky”, while “The light of youth illumines her eye, / Cares seem before her smile to fly” (265). The later piece, “A Peep into a Picture Book”, which captures Lord Charles Wellesley’s impressions while he pages through *Tree’s Portrait*

Gallery of the Aristocracy of Africa is based on the same kind of publication, most probably the Books of Beauty which exhibited contemporary British nobility of the nineteenth century to middle class mortals. Although Wellesley's emotion-laden readings of character from physical appearance deviate somewhat from the manner of the Annuals, his descriptions of the various portraits, especially female ones, are heavily indebted to the endless pictures of large-eyed Honourable Misses in low-cut dresses and exquisitely turned coiffures. Marian, again, has "dark eyes full of wild and tender enthusiasm" and "beautiful nutty curls", Lady Maria Sneachie is "a real, dazzling, brilliant, smiling beauty" with a "magnificent neck and brow" and a head "haughtily" lifting "its weight of glancing black ringlets" (vol. 2, part 2, 91).

That the Annuals indeed played an important part in Brontë's early imagination can be seen from her own drawings and paintings done in the late 1820s and throughout the 1830s. Her female portraits generally display the formulaic features of three-quarter profile, abundant hair, soulful eyes, long necks, minute waists, and generous but coyly underdefined shoulders and breasts (see figs. 25 and 26). Portraits of men are far rarer and simpler (usually presented in clumsily executed profile), probably because the Annuals themselves offered few such models to copy. Another type of picture which Brontë gleans from these sources arranges figures together or depicts them against an atmospheric setting to suggest some sort of "story". Her Bessy Bell and Mary Gray (fig. 27) may be a straight copy from an Annual, or if not, in any case repeats the pictorial schemata employed in any number of pictures accompanying the snippets of fiction appearing in these publications. Friendship's Offering (1838) produces a picture and story with the enticing title "Winning the Gloves; or the Wizard Guest", the general composition of which follows the usual recipe of a stage-like setting, Claudian trees marking out the wings and a backdrop, and two young women in the foreground approaching a youth sleeping at the foot of an urn. Although Brontë's picture suggests a slightly different "story" (whatever it may be) involving two women and a flute-playing youth, the pictorial ingredients and their arrangement are basically the same.

Her landscapes, too, although generally the most accomplished of her drawings, are not for that reason less dependent on the Annuals (most of these publications included some picturesque "scenes", and some, like Jenning's Landscape and Finden's



Fig. 25. Charlotte Brontë, untitled (1832);
Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth.



Fig. 26. Charlotte Brontë, The Hon^{bl} Miss Janet... (1833); Brontë Parsonage Museum,
Haworth.



Fig. 27. Charlotte Brontë, water-colour, Bessy Bell and Mary Gray (1830); Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth.

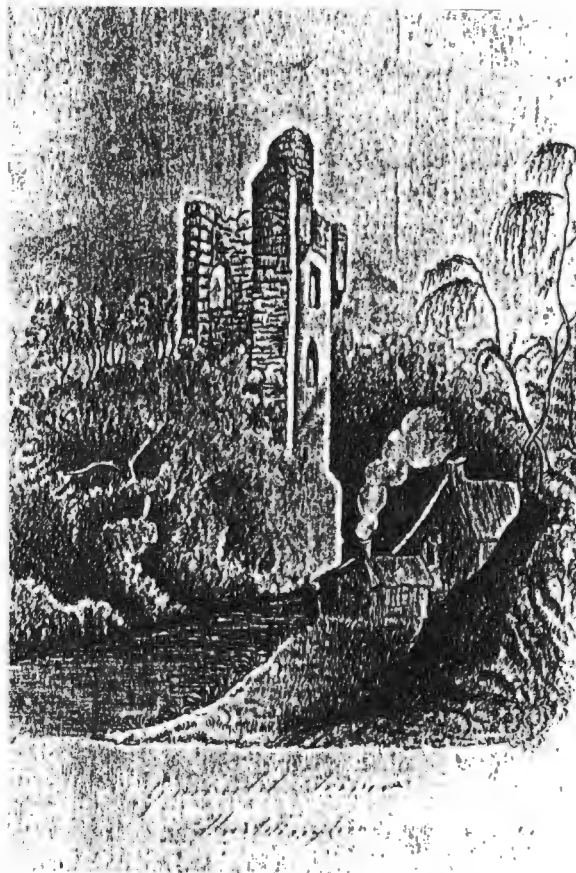


Fig. 28. Charlotte Brontë, Guwald(?) Tower, Haddington (1831); Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth.

Tableaux, specialised in these). Among her works there is little evidence of drawings done “from nature”, and an overwhelming number of pictures are obviously copied from engravings.¹⁰ In fact, her pencil frequently follows the techniques and devices of graphic art rather than those of free drawing. Leaves are crisply differentiated, shadows invariably cross-hatched and not shaded in, and in some cases the lower boundary of the picture is shaped in the curve used for printed vignettes (figs. 28 and 29). Compositional schemata abound - the *Annals* widely disseminated, in simplified form, the principles of ideal landscape painting and aesthetic concepts like the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque. Figure 30, for example, closely reproduces the general organisation of material in the Campbell Castle engraving from Friendship’s Offering (1829) which similarly places a man-made structure in the middle distance, flanks it in the foreground with vegetation, and introduces figures close to the lower right hand corner in the style of Claude and Wilson’s idealised landscapes.

On the whole, the most striking aspect of Brontë’s drawings is their reflection of pictorial formula and popular taste. Later works, especially landscapes, become technically more accomplished, but remain basically derivative. Copying mechanically seems to be her chief artistic activity, even when dealing with simple objects like birds and flowers. Instead of attempting original compositions, she copies a mountain sparrow from Bewick (figs. 31 and 32), and even a group of partridges, birds which must have been a very common sight on the moors, quite obviously find their way into her sketchbook not through first hand observation, but through a stylised copy of what looks like an illustration from a book on natural history (fig. 33). A sprig of wild briar comes across as more natural, but still does not display any originality (fig. 34).

The question to consider now is whether the derivative nature of Brontë’s visual art images a lack of creativity in her literary use of painterly material. There is of course no necessary correlation between the two - a conventional grasp of the principles of drawing and painting does not preclude more creative applications of such knowledge in writing. And although much of Brontë’s juvenilia and some of her mature work are deficient in their mechanical use of pictorial material, she is remarkably innovative in recognising, even before encountering Ruskin, the creative potential of treating paintings as powerful expressions of imaginative vision. There are weaknesses in her complete lack of ironic sense when dealing with questionable visual



Fig. 29. Charlotte Brontë, Muccross Abbey,
Lake of Kilarney (1831); Brontë Parsonage
Museum, Haworth.



Fig. 30. Charlotte Brontë, untitled and undated
drawing, Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth.

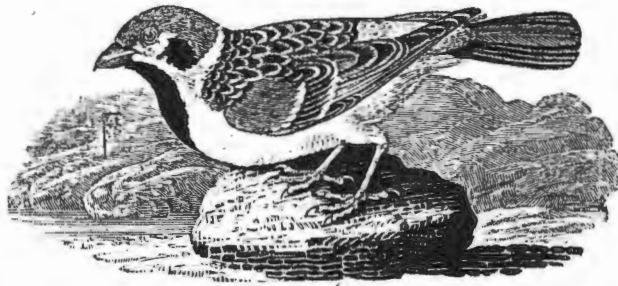


Fig. 31. Thomas Bewick, The Mountain Sparrow, A History of British Birds, vol. 1 (1797; Newcastle, 1821), 179.

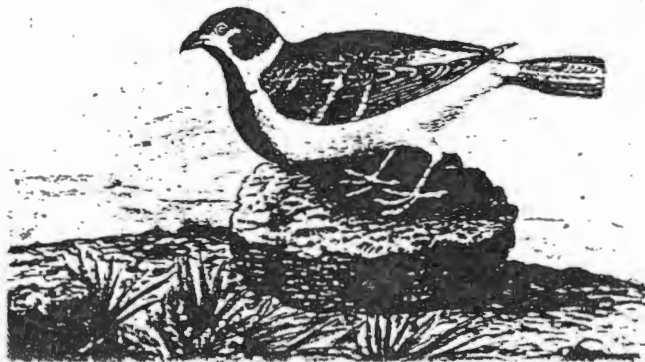


Fig. 32. Charlotte Bronte's copy of Bewick (1830); Bronte Parsonage Museum, Haworth.

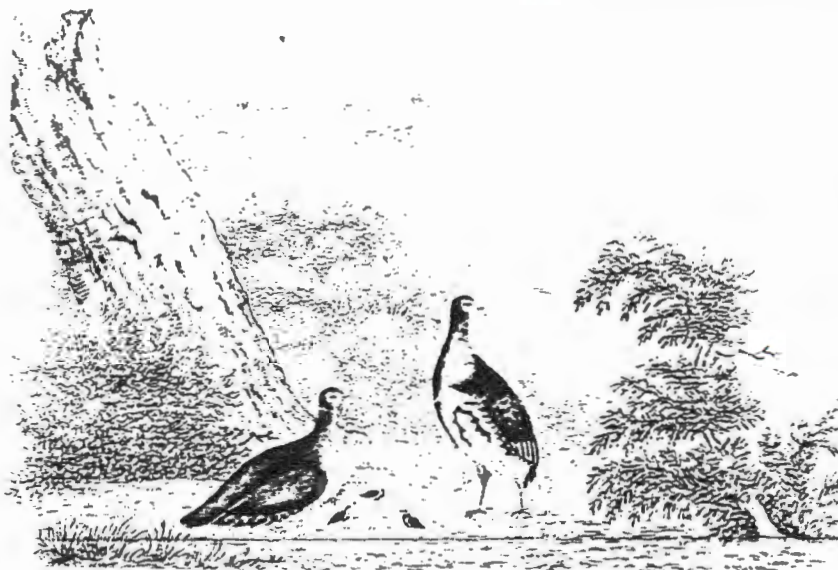


Fig. 33. Charlotte Bronte, partridges (1829); Bronte Parsonage Museum, Haworth.

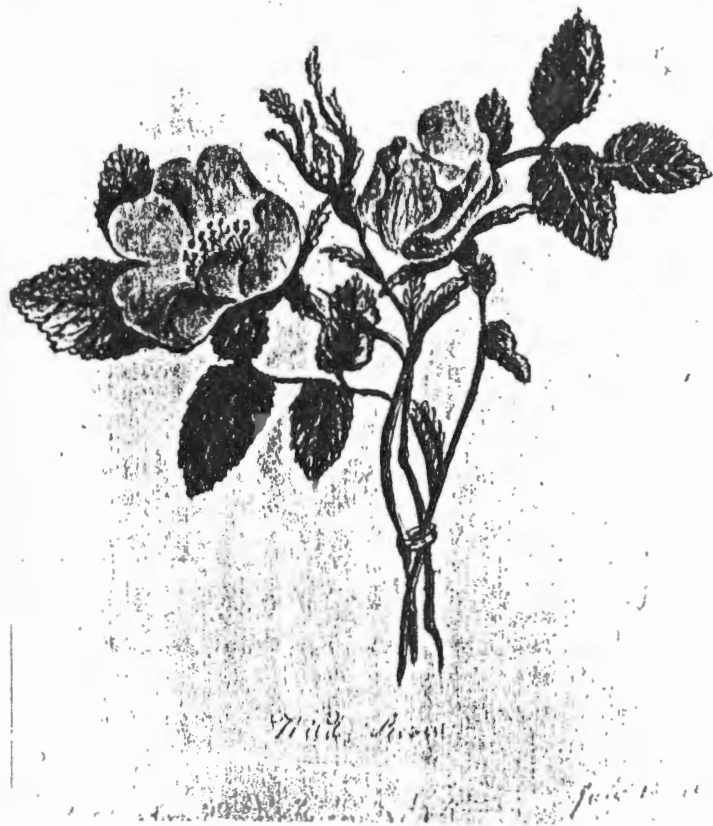


Fig. 34. Charlotte Bronte, Wild Roses
(1830); Bronte Parsonage Museum, Haworth.

material like the art of the *Annuals*, and in this respect Thackeray proves to be far more sensitive in his exploitation of the effects of specific pictorial form. But then, Brontë's wrapt intensity when writing about pictures, even the bad ones, takes her into new regions which Thackeray is unable to reach with his finely developed critical sense. She is the first major novelist really to forge a link between painterly vision and the Romantic imagination (as expressed in poetry). Linking the two is nothing new: the *Blackwood's* reviewer J. J. Hall describes how Fuseli "stamp[ed], as if by magic, on his paper, the wild visions of his imagination" and "furnished" his paintings "from the dark and mysterious stores of the Gothic Mythology".¹¹ What is new is her extensive exploration in fiction, more than any novelist before her, of pictorial images as "windows" onto emotional and psychological "mindscape[s]".

The reverential awe with which the painter's imagination is treated from early on in her work shows in an allusion to Wordsworth: De Lisle, in the "Conversations" with Lord Wellesley, sinks into a creative trance where "visions come fast on 'that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude'" (vol. 1, 266).¹² His "visions" for a double portrait of the two brothers prove to be rather ludicrous in their emotional intensity, but there is no indication that the youthful writer had any humorous intentions when composing this scene. At times the excesses of the poetic imagination come in for satirical treatment (usually at Branwell's expense), for instance when Young Soult has a "fainting fit" in mid-poem, causing Lord Wellesley to call out for "'hartshorn, cold water, vinegar, salvolatic . . . and sal everything else'" to save the poet from his "'inspiration dream'" (vol. 1, 237). The painter's imagination, to the contrary, is never mocked in this way, but always gives rise to truthful vision or remarkable insights in the juvenilia.

A final impression of the strengths and weaknesses of Brontë's early pictorial writing can be gleaned from the story, "A Leaf from an Unopened Volume". In one episode, she furnishes the studio of the Verdopolitan artist, conspicuously named after the Yorkshire painter William Etty, with "all the paraphernalia which usually characterizes the studio of an eminent artist". Further present are the painter himself, his work in progress, and an onlooker, the young prince (vol. 2, part 1, 327). The scene is constructed almost entirely of simple syntactic units (often composed around the verb "to be") which function rather like a set of linguistic building blocks - simple

clauses abound, each clause adding a single, independent item of information, and when clauses are linked, it is by parataxis (rather than the more complex grammatical process of subordination). The result is the worst kind of “pictorial” writing - a lifeless accumulation of details: “His hair and eyes were dark and his complexion somewhat swarthy”; “[a] broad belt confined his waist, and was fastened in the centre. . . . and discovered an inner garment”, and so forth. The only promising feature is a potentially interesting exchange of animate and inanimate qualities: the painter is said to resemble an “antique Greek cast”, the painting he is working on seems “from the freshness and vivid truth of its colouring [sic] absolutely to start from the inanimate canvas”, while the prince is framed by the window recess in which he is sitting (327). Unfortunately, this exchange seems to be quite haphazard and merely a by-product of the conflicting conventions she draws on here. Instead of generating some metaphorical complexity between art and reality, the interchange fuses the significant distance between tenor and vehicle, creating an amusingly tautologous relationship which comments implicitly on the mechanical way in which the young Charlotte Brontë yokes pictorial and verbal description in the common service of realising her imaginary worlds: in order to sharpen the features of her characters, she immobilises them in cast and frame, while the “truth” of the painting depends on its ability to leap from the canvas.

Despite this unpromising start, the studio scene does develop some stylistic and thematic momentum, particularly through a transition from pictorial scenes to windows, literal and figurative. The window near which the prince is seated frames not only his figure, but also the prospect without:

Immediately beneath lay a smooth green lawn, terminated by a row of the loftiest trees. . . . This verdant screen would have entirely concealed the view beyond had it not been for the artificial vista formed by restraining the too-luxuriant growth of their huge boughs in one part, which revealed a noble expanse of green sunny slopes stretching on further than the eye could follow like a magnificent sea of verdure, dotted here and there by trees. . . . Groups of deer reposed under the groves of foliage. . . . Hills long and low bounded the distance; to the right hand appeared a far-off glittering sweep of the Calabar, followed all along its banks by the domes and pillars of Adrianopolis, but dimly

seen through the golden haze flung over them by the declining sun.

(vol. 2, part 1, 328)

The linguistic and pictorial schemata imposed on this imaginary landscape are derived mainly from Gilpin. At times, in fact, she comes as close to tracing Gilpin's scenes "painted in syllables, words, and sentences"¹³ as she does when copying his drawings.¹⁴ His lessons on how to translate the picturesque sense of distance into language are particularly relevant. Unlike Dyer (in his Grongar-Hill poem), whom Gilpin criticises for mentioning objects at different distances in a confused order and for omitting "a complete, formed distance . . . that beautiful obscurity, which melts a variety of objects into one rich whole",¹⁵ Brontë divides the prince's prospect neatly into a series of shapes and lines, graded according to distance and interrelated stylistically by means of adverbs and subordinate clauses. Except for one instance, when the urge to realise objects too precisely betrays her into discerning "foliage" and "groups of deer" in the already hazy middle distance (lying "further than the eye could follow"), her description matches Gilpin's distant views "melting away from the eye, in one general azure tint; just, here and there, diversified with a few lines of light and shade; and dotted with a few indistinct objects".¹⁶

The Gilpinesque "melting" view does not serve a merely descriptive purpose in Brontë's story. Its chief function is to reach into the recesses of the viewer's mind which in this instance proves to be simultaneously Wordsworthian and Byronic. With "fire" kindling in his "dark eyes", the prince exclaims: "'this evening alone would have made a poet or painter of me. . . . who could see . . . hearken . . . or breathe . . . and not feel those sights, sounds and odours steal . . . through his senses to his inmost soul?'" (vol. 2, part 1, 328 - 329). The same direct progress from physical to mental sensation, from visual to visionary perception, marks one of the most intense moments of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey":

. . . I have owed to them [These beauteous forms],
 In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
 Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
 And passing even into my purer mind,
 With tranquil restoration. . . . (ll. 26 - 30)

Further symbolic application occurs when the prospect is weighed up against another scene of a very different kind. The “oriole window” on the opposite side of the studio reveals a scene which, according to the prince, affords “a palpable illustration of what is meant by the term ‘contrast’”:

a vast area appeared below, surrounded by tall and gloomy houses. . . .

In the midst of the area stood a black scaffold, spread partly with sawdust saturated with blood, and forming an elevated support for a lofty stake which rose from the centre, displaying on its summit the ghastly exhibition of a severed human head. (vol. 2, part 1, 329)

Although the opposing components of these two window prospects may not acquire the complexity of a Burkean enquiry into contrasting aesthetics, they nonetheless share some of its basic premises, in particular the process through which different categories of sense impressions (in this case visual elements) suggest an equivalent range of emotional and philosophical distinctions. In this manner the two windows provide insight into the prince’s emotional and moral life, and through his comments, their symbolic scope is expanded further to encompass a more complex view of human nature and ethics in general. His political and personal satisfaction at seeing the head of a rival displayed contrasts sharply with his previous lyrical reaction to beautiful scenery, prompting the following exchange between him and Sir William:

“Forgive the liberty I take, my lord, but . . . it appears strange to me that one possessing a mind so contemplative and studious, a genius so transcendent, and a soul so cultivated . . . should nourish feelings so, so-”

“So detestable you would say?” interrupted the young nobleman, smiling. (vol. 2, part 1, 330)

In this way, the “beautiful” and “ghastly” prospects observed from the studio windows are translated into emotional opposites which before long develop into allegorical landmarks mapping out the morally chequered “landscape” of the prince’s soul. Placid waters, lofty trees, and a distant golden haze give way to a discussion of “rills of knowledge”, “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”, “the grand source of celestial intelligence”, and their effect on human emotions like love and hate.

It would be unfair to compare the explicit symbolism of this early piece with Austen's more subtle use of a window prospect in Pride and Prejudice or her manipulation of the view over Bath in Northanger Abbey. Significant structural and thematic features nonetheless come to the foreground when these related situations are put side by side, distinctions which hold true also for Brontë's full-fledged writing. Elizabeth Bennet's prospect from a window at Pemberley House starts off a recognition process firmly controlled by the narrative voice and the plot structure which eventually put pride in perspective and arrest prejudice. The characters in the artist's studio, by contrast, strain away from plot and their specific fictional world in order to reach into the far distance of philosophical-lyrical observation. A comparison of these two novelists' writing is bound to be characterised by strong contrasts, both of temperament and cultural background. In this respect it is useful to return for a moment to Gilpin as a source common to both. Although Austen obviously admires Gilpin's analyses of landscape, she humorously undermines his authority to particularise her characters' behaviour. Brontë copies his style uncritically, mainly to endow it with her own emotional and symbolic properties. Within the context of the story above, the Gilpinesque fragment functions dually as an authoritative image or "picture" of a beautiful landscape and the "good" side of the prince's artistic and ethical sensibilities. The relationship between the prospect and the character's mind is unequivocal - the picturesque comes to reflect "true" emotion and thought - and in this most of Gilpin's value lies for her.

Picturing the course of a character's mental life by means of descriptions of natural prospects or portraits remains a standard device of Brontë's fiction, even once she has left the fanciful Angrian world behind her and has started grappling with the full scale novel. The device reappears rather crudely in The Professor when Crimsworth constructs an image of his life out of four pictures.¹⁷ The first, Eton of his childhood memories, comprises a beautiful green landscape in "far perspective, receding, diminutive", with a couple of "showery clouds" just hinting at "overcast", "cold", and "stormy hours". The months in the industrial town of X ____ against this present a type of sullied sublime, blighting the fresh greenery and distant promises of the first "picture" in being "huge, dingy; the canvass cracked and smoked" and depicting "a yellow sky, sooty clouds; no sun, no azure; the verdure . . . blighted. . . ."

For his third “picture” Crimsworth deviates from such straightforward pictorial symbolism, explaining how what might seem a “flat” and “dull” Belgian landscape, for him signifies rhapsodical memories of youthful energy, liberty, and personal enterprise. And after this subjective deviation, the fourth “picture” of Crimsworth’s painterly “autobiography” further reverts to the dilatory and dictatorial narrative mode frequently prompted by painting in the juvenilia: “As to the fourth, a curtain covers it, which I may hereafter withdraw, or may not, as suits my convenience and capacity. At any rate for the present it must hang undisturbed.

As far as the use of literary portraits is concerned, The Professor displays an uneven texture. At the beginning of the novel Brontë sets up a criss-crossing of pictorial effects, impressive in their visual complexity, but ultimately superficial in symbolic application. The pictures of Crimsworth’s parents directly quote the Gothic convention of genealogical portraiture. Accordingly, much of the novel’s thrust is bound up with Crimsworth’s realisation of his inherent aristocratic nature. His merchant father’s portrait, for example, is conveniently obscure and merits no further attention, whereas his mother’s sensitive features have “the benefit of a full beam from the softly shaded lamp” (14). In other deliberate pictorial comparisons the two Crimsworth brothers echo the parental types. William looks at Edward across the breakfast table, simultaneously catching a reflection of himself in a mirror over the mantelpiece (16). The juxtaposition proves Edward’s physical superiority, but in a later scene Hunsden identifies William, albeit mockingly, as “the aristocrat” of the family on the grounds of his resemblance to his mother’s portrait (26).

That Brontë is concerned in this novel with an aristocracy of spirit rather than of birth becomes evident in her unflattering portraits of the young women Crimsworth encounters as a teacher in Belgium. These are all presented as members of a pampered bourgeoisie or a cosy Continental aristocracy, whereas Crimsworth and Frances Henri reach their indisputable moral higher ground through constant application and mental superiority. In fact, The Professor to a large extent sets about pulling down the constructs of the amoral Angrian world. Beauty, wealth, titles, and exotic origins become automatically suspect as Brontë vengefully retraces portraits reminiscent of those taken from any number of Keepsakes and Books of Beauty in her juvenilia, now with the sole purpose of illustrating these women’s moral degeneracy. So, for instance,

she makes Crimsworth give detailed descriptions of the three belles of the school, then arranges a situation in which he triumphs over their provocative behaviour by humiliating them in front of the class (85 - 86, 88). Or she emphasises the morally questionable nature of their beauty by praising them through the highly unprincipled M. Pelet, whose language, by the way, mockingly mimics the effusiveness of the *Annals* and her own early writing:

“Lovely creatures all of them - heads for artists _ what a group they would make, taken together! Eulalie . . . with her smooth, braided hair and calm, ivory brow, Hortense with her rich chestnut locks so luxuriantly knotted, plaited, twisted, as if she did not know how to dispose of all their abundance. . . . And Caroline de Blémont! Ah there is beauty! beauty in perfection - what a cloud of sable curls about the face of a houri! . . . Your Byron would have worshipped her. . . .”

(95 - 96)

A further instance (which ironically echoes Charles Wellesley’s “Peep into a Picture Book”) occurs in chapter 12: Crimsworth presents the reader with his imaginary portfolio, containing an astonishing range of ill-natured, condescending, frequently racist, “portraits” of his female pupils. The observant “professor” repeatedly stresses the reliability of his “sketches” which, he says, have been “pencilled after nature” (97). And yet, what issues from this portfolio is a collection of wildly biased caricatures and grotesques. Nowhere does he show any moderation or compassion in his portrayal of adolescent girls, and not the slightest allowance is made for differences of nationality or religion which are automatically condemned as immoral. Thus he prefaces his portfolio with a general description of the “air of bold, impudent flirtation”, the “loose, silly leer” with which his pupils used to meet “the most ordinary glance from a masculine eye” and the suspicion that “the root of this precocious impurity, so obvious, so general in popish Countries, is to be found in the discipline, if not the doctrines of the Church of Rome” (97). Reasserting the truth of his observations with a confident “I record what I have seen”, he pronounces “the mass” of his pupils “mentally depraved”, before going on to a few “selected specimens” of whom he gives “full length” portraits (98). These abound in distasteful physical particulars, over-developed or ill-proportioned bodies mendaciously shaped by

“inhumanly braced” underwear, hair unnaturally “oiled” and “gummed to perfection” (98). For the sake of veracity, Crimsworth goes as far as depicting the grimy back of one pupil’s neck to illustrate how deceitfully she hides “slovenly” habits behind a “well attended to” exterior (99); and to capture the depravity of another, he calls to aid an historical model and phrenology:

She had precisely the same shape of skull as Pope Alexander the sixth; her organs of benevolence, veneration, conscientiousness, adhesiveness were singularly small, those of self-esteem, firmness, destructiveness, combativeness preposterously large. . . . (101)

Despite such detailed observation, the attempt to present specific portraits soon deteriorates again into crude generalisation. The girl in the portrait above is depicted against a background which Crimsworth paints in with a vengeance:

behind and below her were seated a band of very vulgar, inferior-looking Flamandes, including two or three examples of that deformity of person and imbecility of intellect whose frequency in the Low Countries would seem to furnish proof that the climate is such as to induce degeneracy of the human mind and body. . . . (101)

Whether such “pictures” constitute a personal exorcism of Brontë’s own unhappy encounter with Belgian school girls or a mocking revision of the ideal portraiture of her Angrian writings, their crudeness is symptomatic of this uneasy first novel with its baleful, morally righteous narrator, its frequently deficient narrative structure resting on over-explicit pictorial symbolism, and its obsessive thematic insistence on Protestant self-sufficiency and British wholesomeness as against Popish laxity and Continental degeneracy. This makes the forcefulness of her second novel, *Jane Eyre*, all the more surprising, since part of it relies heavily, both in structure and meaning, on the visual imagination of its narrator, an amateur painter. The full title of the novel announces that the book, *Jane Eyre*, is *An Autobiography. Edited by Currer Bell*. I shall argue that for a substantial part of the novel, Brontë creates a mature first person narrator who composes her life’s story with a visual imagination which perceives salient episodes and the development of the inner self mainly in pictorial and pictorially related forms. Given her derivative knowledge of painting and the awkward use she makes of

it in much of the juvenilia and The Professor, Jane Eyre proves particularly impressive in its deployment of narrative situations and events conceived of, at least to begin with, visually. In fact, the extent to which Brontë activates her painter-narrator's sensibility and absorbs it into her fiction's structural and thematic workings, especially in the first volume of Jane Eyre, makes this the novel of the nineteenth century which most impressively prefigures the twentieth century's künstlerroman like Joyce Carey's The Horse's Mouth or Patrick White's The Vivisector. Displaying more interest than Thackeray in the subjective stirrings of the individual mind and more faith than George Eliot in the power and validity of the painter's vision, she shapes a work which, despite serious limitations, fills a key position in the novel's history of interrelationship with pictorial art.

The first visually conceived situation occurs almost at the novel's start and will serve to illustrate the degree of complexity and suggestiveness with which Brontë invests such scenes. Having been excluded by Mrs Reed from the company of "contented, happy little children" (7), Jane withdraws into a window-seat, pulls the red curtains close, and finds herself "shrined in double retirement" from where she alternately looks out at the "aspect" of a stormy afternoon and "into" the illustrated book she has brought with her (8). In its characteristic manner, Brontë's prose is concretely visual, depicting in vivid detail the child's position, the texture and colour of the curtains, and the winter landscape outside. But more than this, the scene is constructed as an essentially static composition which derives its significance from pictorial principles. The description of the child bracketed between the curtains and the window expresses the precariousness of her immediate situation in the Reed household. This it does as in a picture, mainly through formal and spatial relationships. Thus "the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating" her from "the drear November day" have their direct counterpart in the "[f]olds of scarlet drapery", separating, but not protecting, her from her relatives (as Mrs Reed's recent accusations and John Reed's violent intrusion soon after demonstrate). At the same time, the composition of the scene, playing as it does with lucidity against opaqueness, establishes further oppositions which come to reflect the complex linking of introverted and expansive vision occurring again and again as a narrative topos in this novel.¹⁸ In this particular case, alienation from the Reed household leads first to withdrawal, then

to a projection of the self into other states of being which reflect, but also imaginatively sublimate, present suffering. The image of the bay window which literally projects the child into the dreary winter scenery of the outer world impressively coincides with a detailed allusion to the illustrated book absorbing her attention. Together, these two images open up vistas onto her inner life.

The allusive material through which Brontë departs into Jane Eyre's consciousness is the text and illustrations of Thomas Bewick's The History of British Birds. Quoting various early to mid-nineteenth-century periodicals as evidence, Joan Stevens indicates in her article on Bewick and Brontë, "A Sermon in Every Vignette", that the name of this naturalist was a "household word" at the time of Jane Eyre's composition. The same sources show how Bewick's work was lauded for being both realistic and moral.¹⁹ In order to judge the particular use Brontë makes of allusions to his work, the modern reader may find a convenient index to this author-engraver's aims and methods in extracts from the preface and introduction to the second volume of The History of British Birds (the one on water birds which Jane is reading, although some of the illustrations refer to the first volume on land birds).²⁰ So, for instance, Bewick clearly foregrounds his moralistic intentions in a passage which proves to be a pastiche of aesthetic commonplaces combined with what was to become a typical Victorian vacillation between a desire for knowledge and a fear of over-stepping conventional boundaries:

From these humble attempts - for every attempt to depict nature must fall short of the original - it is hoped that some useful instruction may be gathered, and at the same time a stimulus excited to further enquiry. But however this may prove, "innocently to amuse the imagination in this dream of life, is wisdom; and nothing is useless which, by furnishing mental employment, keeps us for a while in oblivion of those stronger appetites that lead to evil." To the rising generation these efforts to instruct and please are principally directed. . . .²¹

In producing his illustrated natural history, Bewick hopes to imitate, on a manageable scale, "a few lessons from the great book of Nature" which instructs "the contemplative mind" in interpreting "the varied objects of this beautiful world" as "the visible words of God".²² These professed aims also give significance to the puzzling

little wood-cuts used as tail-pieces after entries on individual bird species. In no way explicitly related to the actual natural historical material dealt with in the main body of the text, they introduce a morally edifying strain resembling that of emblem books or Victorian children's literature. His little landscapes bear admonitory inscriptions such as "vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas" or "Keep on this side"; he shows human endeavours wrecked against icebergs or rocky shores, or the human figure itself isolated and beset by natural and supernatural forces. At times his tone is grimly satirical, for example in a wood-cut which depicts fools playing among tottering tombstones. Although these vignettes (as Jane calls them) are hardly more than moralistic punctuation marks, they demand to be interpreted in conjunction with the natural history, setting up associative links between scientific matter and morality, nature and the human imagination.

Jane Eyre's fictional life is launched within the boundaries of Bewick's edifying framework, although the child starts her process of enquiry in a rather idiosyncratic fashion, and definitely not in the way Bewick intended "the rising generation" to react to his work. Where he warns of a "barrier" to "further enquiry, beyond which the prying eye of man must not look",²³ Jane is quick to take up a peripheral suggestion that the imagination could overleap obstacles. It is significant that Bewick emphasises the "unknowable" in his description of the Arctic Zone by using italics,²⁴ while Brontë's (mis-)quotation of the passage omits the word, and subsequently adds a description of the child's own imaginative reconstruction of "those forlorn regions of dreary space": "Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own; shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive" (8).

Filling in the gaps left by Bewick seems to be one of Jane's chief pleasures in "reading" the book, also when she embarks on interpretations of the tail-pieces. Instead of paying due attention to the moral clues presented in the pictures, her grasp of their significance is immediate, subjective, and physical rather than rational or moral. Each picture is described concisely, first with reference to Bewick's moralising intentions, but soon increasingly outside the range of edifying connections suggested by him:

The words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking.

I cannot tell what sentiment haunted the quite solitary church-yard with its inscribed headstone; its gate, its two trees, its low horizon, girdled by a broken wall, and its newly-risen crescent, attesting the hour of even-tide.

The two ships becalmed on a torpid sea, I believed to be marine phantoms.

The fiend pinning down the thief's pack behind him, I passed over quickly: it was an object of terror.

So was the black, horned thing seated aloof on a rock, surveying a distant crowd surrounding a gallows. (8 - 9)

The pictures alluded to are on the whole clearly identifiable, as can be seen from figures 35 to 39 from Bewick.²⁵ More striking than their "availability", however, is the distinctive resonance which these "pictures" develop translated into the visual experience and language of a particular viewer and embedded in a fictional context. Apart from the fact that the child Jane imposes her "individual interpretation"²⁶ on Bewick's text and engravings, the mature narrator of this "autobiography" further places the child's sensations in the larger context of an emergent self discovering its social and private surroundings. Thus, when the narrator states that "[e]ach picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting", the kind of "story" implied is far removed from the tangle of plot developments which pictures introduce in the Gothic novel. Unless taken in a self-reflective sense (like Wordsworth's "story of myself" in *The Prelude*), "story" is hardly the right word for the writing stimulated by these pictorial allusions in *Jane Eyre*. In her usual way, the modes and purposes of Brontë's fiction have all but consumed the allusive material introduced into it. And yet, exactly because of Jane's subjective treatment of this natural history, the emotive and symbolic scope of the source is broadened, so that Bewick's influence lingers on in various ways in this

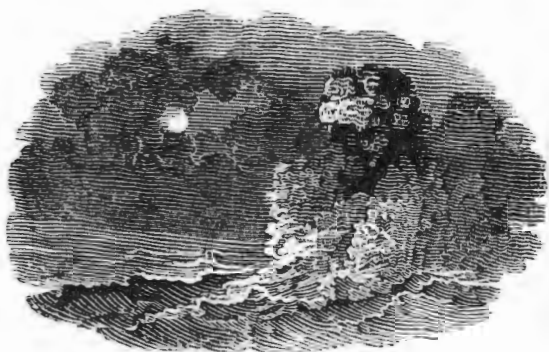


Fig. 35. Bewick, British Birds, vol. 2 (1804; Newcastle, 1821) 122.

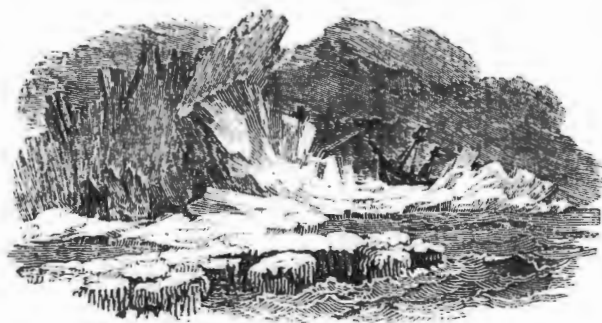


Fig. 36. Bewick, British Birds, vol. 2, 156.



Fig. 37. Bewick, British Birds, vol. 2, 237.

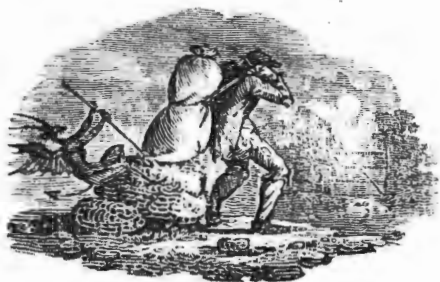


Fig. 38. Bewick, British Birds, vol. 1, supplement, 20.



Fig. 39. Bewick, British Birds, vol. 1, 318.

novel: as part of the fictional mind which he impresses so “strangely” and profoundly that his visual and verbal images resurface at later stages, for instance in the Lowood paintings; or, more fundamentally, as an integral part of the narrative strategy which presents self-discovery as a complex process of alternately consolidating and expanding vision.

That the flow of Jane’s life is patterned by the use of pictorial material can again be seen in the images and narrative sequences representing her experiences at school. Lowood initially gives her the opportunity to shake off the oppressive influence of the Reeds. Once “cleared from every imputation” made by Mrs Reed and Mr Brocklehurst, Jane feels “relieved of a grievous load”, free “to work afresh”, and resolute “to pioneer” her “way through every difficulty” (75). In describing the rewards of these efforts, the narrator pointedly relates new experience to pictorial material:

in a few weeks I was promoted to a higher class; in less than two months I was allowed to commence French and drawing. I learned the first two tenses of the verb Etre, and sketched my first cottage (whose walls, by-the-by, outrivalled in slope those of the leaning tower of Pisa), on the same day. (75)

Both the foreign language and the drawing lessons offer ways of defining and expressing the self, and in keeping with the narrative pattern set up at the beginning of the novel, the French exercise involves a reaching into the unknown, whereas the picture is a dwelling-place created by the imagination. These newly acquired abilities furthermore spark off a train of thought which, significantly, expresses Jane’s hopes for future contentment in pictorial terms. In the following passage images of beauty and peaceful pastoral existence replace those of want and deprivation which have so far dominated the novel:

That night, on going to bed, I forgot to prepare in imagination the Barmecide supper . . . with which I was wont to amuse my inward cravings: I feasted instead on the spectacle of ideal drawings, which I saw in the dark; all the work of my own hands: freely pencilled houses and trees, picturesque rocks and ruins, Cuyp-like groups of cattle, sweet paintings of butterflies hovering over unblown roses, of birds

pecking at ripe cherries, of wrens' nests enclosing pearl-like eggs, wreathed about with young ivy sprays. (75)

Though a seemingly straightforward expression of childish hopes, this collection of imaginary paintings reveals the mature narrator's subtle rearrangement of Jane's life in pictorial terms. A child who has just received her first drawing lesson would hardly fantasise about drawing "Cuyp-like groups of cattle". Instead of giving direct access to the child's experience, the narrator filters it through the adult's knowledge of particular kinds of painting, Cuyp's luminous cows, for certain, and possibly "Birdnest" Hunt's - or any similar painter's - beautiful little compositions of natural historical objects (see fig. 40).²⁷ In fact, the main function of these imaginary pictures, filled as they are with expectations of idealised and innocent contentment, is not to express the tenor of Jane's life or mind, but to set up a language of painting against which the narrator reacts later. It is exactly through a critique of such ideally beautiful renditions of nature that the narrator presents further phases of Jane's life. The beginning of chapter 9 describes the spring and summer landscape surrounding Lowood in vivid images which echo Jane's imaginary paintings at the end of the previous chapter: it is a place "bosomed in hill and wood, and rising from the verge of a stream", "unnumbered varieties of moss" fill "its hollows", making "a strange ground-sunshine out of the wealth of its wild primrose plants", and so forth (76 - 77). That such beauty could be deceptive becomes immediately evident when a devastating typhus epidemic strikes Lowood on the very same page. And in the next chapter a "picture" of Lowood, this time a window prospect organising the landscape into "foregrounds, distances and second distances - side-screens and perspectives" (to use Austen's quick catalogue) expresses Jane's dissatisfaction with this uneventfully harmonious environment:

I went to my window, opened it, and looked out. There were the two wings of the building; there was the garden; there were the skirts of Lowood; there was the hilly horizon. My eye passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks: it was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile limits. I traced the white road winding round the base of one mountain, and vanishing in a gorge between the two: how I longed to follow it further! (85 - 86)



Fig. 40. William Henry Hunt, Primrose and Birds' Nest, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

In this passage the narrator lists the well-known features of the landscape with deictic boredom - all sections of the "picture" bear equal status through the repeated adverbial pointer, "there". The only element of real interest is the road which leads beyond the "picture", symbolising Jane's yearning to explore the unknown, and at the same time functioning as a narrative ficelle extending into the next episode of this "autobiography".

Following the road does not immediately satisfy Jane's wish for novelty and excitement. Thornfield initially presents a prospect as peacefully unexceptional as Lowood. Surveying the new landscape "laid out like a map" from the battlements, Jane sees another harmonious "scene" in which "[n]o feature . . . was extraordinary, but all was pleasing" (107); and, as at Lowood, she comes to long for "a power of vision which might overpass" the limitations of her surroundings (110). In keeping with the novel's recurring pattern of introversion and expansion, Jane withdraws from actuality to find "relief" in the self-nurturing powers of "the mind's eye" (110). The withdrawal is accompanied by a descent from the battlements and their "pleasing" vista into the dark and secluded third story of the house where she indulges in "bright visions" and a never-ending "tale", created by the imagination and "quicken[ed] with all of incident, life, fire, feeling" which she longs for but does not have in her "actual existence" (110).

Whatever these visions are, they are far removed from Bewick's pictures aimed at the suppression of "those stronger appetites that lead to evil"; and they are likewise quite different from the imaginary paintings of birds and butterflies depicting the young Jane's childish hopes. It is furthermore significant that Jane's yearning for incident is soon after answered by Rochester's arrival, and that this arrival is presented through an extended and complex pictorial metaphor which in itself marks an overthrow of "pleasing" but unexceptional scenery. On her way to post a letter in the nearby village, Jane sits down to survey a tranquil winter scene and to "analyse", in her usual manner, "the species of pleasure brooding . . . in the hour and situation" (112). Apart from the visual impression of hill-top, rising moon, and distant village, she also picks up the sound of many currents, "the tinkle of the nearest streams, the sough of the most remote" (112). Rochester's approach takes place against this tranquil background, and through a curious synaesthetic transformation of sound into vision, the hoof beats of

his galloping horse are registered pictorially as a disruptive visual feature which suddenly obliterates the pleasantly picturesque scenery:

A rude noise broke on these fine rippings and whisperings, at once so far away and so clear: a positive tramp, tramp; a metallic clatter, which effaced the soft wave-wanderings; as, in a picture, the solid mass of a crag, or the rough boles of a great oak, drawn in dark and strong on the foreground, efface the aërial distance of azure hill, sunny horizon and blended clouds, where tint melts into tint. (112 - 113)

The shift from Gilpinesque “aërial distance” to boldly depicted “foreground” marks a redirection of Jane’s energies to the outward world and a transition to a new narrative phase, the most intense of the novel, and one in which Rochester’s presence predominates. Both the solid cliff face and the rough tree recur later as images associated with him. In this passage they precede the historical Jane’s actual knowledge of his looks and nature, thus providing another striking example of Jane the narrator’s reshaping of events in pictorial form. The practice of turning incidents into pictures is further reinforced during the rest of her walk to and from Hay, when she fashions an imaginary portrait of Rochester, presumably for use in the daydreams with which she has started relieving her boredom at Thornfield:

The new face . . . was like a new picture introduced to the gallery of memory; and it was dissimilar to all the others hanging there: firstly, because it was masculine; and secondly, because it was dark, strong and stern. I had it still before me when I entered Hay, and slipped the letter into the post-office; I saw it as I walked fast down hill all the way home. (117)

This “portrait” heralds a period of greater social involvement in Jane’s development, as well as her introduction to sexuality, a heretofore unknown chapter in her life’s story. Studying Rochester’s face and demeanour becomes an all-consuming pastime. At the same time, interaction with him forces Jane to disclose more about herself than has been the case up to this point. Instead of vague longings represented by distant views, she now for the first time exhibits her paintings which, baffling as they are, provide concrete evidence of her extraordinary mental life.

Jane's three paintings indeed flash upon the tranquil fireside scene with unexpected force, especially against the background of Brontë's own highly derivative knowledge and practice of painting. There is, however, nothing derivative about the way in which she conceives and incorporates these paintings into the novel. Quite unlike any of her predecessors, she inserts them into the text without providing any clues as to how they should be read. Although the paintings acquire considerable concreteness through detailed *ekphrasis*, they yet remain completely imaginary, mainly because they do not allude to any recognisable school or "language" of art. To use Baxandall's concept of "availability" again, historical examples of real paintings or traditions conforming to her descriptions seem entirely "unavailable". Jane's paintings involve a daring grafting of symbolic forms onto landscape in a manner which anachronistically suggests the Surrealists. Among contemporary painters one might think of John Martin or Fuseli, but neither case can be substantiated convincingly enough to justify such a link. Ultimately, these paintings seem to be wholly fictional constructs, both in the sense of being imaginary, and, more impressively, in the sense of inventing a new form of signification for painting in fiction.²⁸

Jane's paintings are undeniably but obscurely linked to the story of her life. As static forms of art, their introduction into the narrative momentarily arrests the flow of events. The switch from a temporal to a descriptive mode is clearly sign-posted by the narrator's self-conscious break from the historical narrative. Leaving Rochester to page through Jane's portfolio, she addresses an aside directly to the reader: "While he is so occupied, I will tell you, reader, what they are" (126). Once the narrative resumes, Rochester admits the drawings' artistic merits, pronounces them "'elfish'" in thought and "'for a school girl, peculiar'" (127), and after that they cease to be actively functional as elements of the plot in, say, the Gothic manner. They function, however, in a different way, as composite psychological and emotional records, filling in the intensity of mental life which has all along been partly obscured under the disciplined exterior of Jane, the diligent pupil and competent governess. In range they furthermore reach back to Bewick and the lively imagination displayed by the child at Gateshead, while their presentation at this point of the narrative picks up and expands references to the passionate inner longings for adventure and experience hinted at both at

Lowood and at Thornfield. The fact that the paintings date from the Lowood era but come to light only at Thornfield reinforces their range of signification.

The multiple but obscure links between pictorial and narrative text discussed in the paragraph above should make it clear why Jane's paintings, despite their obvious symbolic nature, simultaneously invite and defy interpretation. Each picture tells its "story"; not, however, by imaging, connecting or anticipating a particular series of events in the narrative proper, but by enriching it generally on a symbolic and emotional level. Together the pictures amount to a vast reservoir of images which circulate widely through the novel. For this very reason it would be a mistake to attempt too exact an interpretation of imagery, since the pictures function mainly as atmospheric wholes, each one representing a dominant mood governing the narrative at various points.

The cormorant gloating over wrecked aspirations in the first picture, for instance, clearly relates to Bewick's moralistic tail-pieces (126). As a child, Brontë herself copied one of his little scenes containing a stormy shore-line and a cormorant (see figs. 41 and 42). The spirit of Jane's picture furthermore closely reflects the tenor of Bewick's entry on cormorants:

they are of a stern sullen character, with a remarkably keen penetrating eye, and a vigorous body; and their whole deportment carries along with it the appearance of the wary circumspect plunderer, the unrelenting tyrant, and the greedy insatiate glutton, rendered lazy only when the appetite is palled. . . . Such is their portrait . . . and Milton seems to have put the finishing hand to it, by making Satan personate the Cormorant, while he surveys, undelighted, the beauties of Paradise.²⁹

Jane Eyre abounds in examples of insatiable or frustrated appetites: the gluttonous John Reed, the unredeemed Rochester of the West Indies, Mason's attempts to feed off others' wrecked desires, Bertha Mason's mad vengefulness, or maybe even Rochester's sexual insistence after the interrupted wedding ceremony. To claim, however, that the picture stands for any one of these would be absurd, but surprisingly not because the interpretation would be irrelevant. The absurdity would lie in forging too direct a link between, on the one hand, a symbolic pictorial mode which is to a

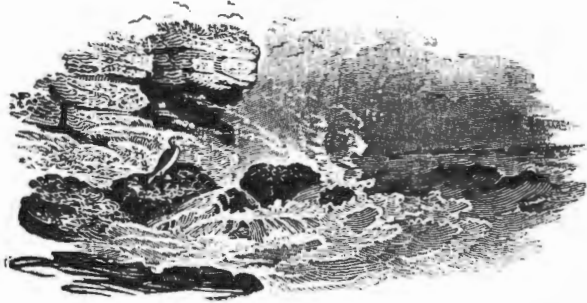


Fig. 41. Bewick, British Birds,
vol. 2, 218.

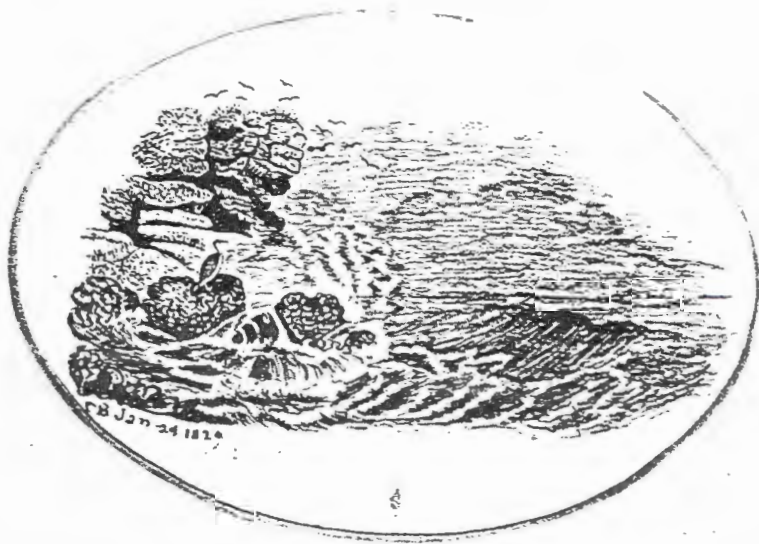


Fig. 42. Charlotte Brontë's copy of Bewick-
(1829).

large extent self-contained, and, on the other, the narrative in which it is embedded. Despite this modal difference, the same emotional and thematic strains occur in both, and it is at this level that picture and narrative reinforce each other's "stories".

The second and third pictures likewise indicate dominant moods which can be related to the emotional and thematic material of the narrative and which make them as encompassing in their suggestive range. The "vision of the Evening Star" with its conflicts between light and dark, wild, restless movement and immutability, presents a perplexing psychological portrait of a woman who (like Jane Eyre) appears at the same time agitated and subdued (127). In the third painting a polar landscape obviously inspired by Bewick's arctic wastes has imposed on it a colossal human head (identified by the narrator as Milton's figure of Death in Paradise Lost). In each of the three pictures the human figure and nature are closely associated, jointly reflecting the dominant mood. Especially in the last two pictures the human figure can be seen organically materialising from its surroundings: "rising into the sky, was a woman's shape . . . pourtrayed [sic] in tints as dusk and soft as I could combine" and "[t]hrowing these [the pinnacle of an iceberg and a muster of northern lights] into distance, rose, in the foreground, a head, - a colossal head, inclined towards the iceberg, and resting against it. . . . a brow quite bloodless, white as bone, and an eye hollow and fixed, blank of meaning but for the glassiness of despair, alone were visible" (126 - 127). Linked to Jane's painterly arrangement of her life's stages, the pictures stress her desire during the Lowood phase to explore the human psyche beyond the limited examples offered by a school environment, a desire which obviously and literally overshadows the business of producing accurate landscapes. In this respect, Rochester's arrival occasions a shift from the abstract, personified figures peopling her drawings as manifestations of insatiability, death, despair or wild restlessness to the expressions of a real, tantalisingly unfamiliar (and masculine) human face. At the same time, the description of Rochester's approach as an object rising in the foreground and obliterating the landscape, as well as the massive masculine face hovering before her during the rest of her walk, shows the same organisation of visual material as the Lowood paintings, thus imposing another reiterative pattern onto the narrator's presentation of past experience.

The relationship with Rochester calls up other previously established visual and narrative patterns. Studying the expressions of his face, his intense emotions, and incidents from his life abroad amounts to a "new interest" which, like Bewick's pictures and the new activities at Lowood, stimulates and nurtures Jane's inner life. So, a series of physical descriptions which repeatedly involves a scanning of his features for the emotional and psychological information they may communicate (121, 132, 143) culminates in a passage revealing the expansive influence of Rochester's friendship on Jane's vision:

he liked to open to a mind unacquainted with the world, glimpses of its scenes and ways. . . . and I had a keen delight in receiving the ideas he offered, in imaging the new pictures he portrayed, and following him in thought through the new regions he disclosed. . . .

. . . .So happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred: my thin crescent-destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up; my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength. (147)

When the arrival of the party of aristocratic revellers cuts Jane off from Rochester's society, she has to rely mostly on vision for information about his mental state and moods. The narrator chooses this phase of separation to reveal Jane's love for Rochester, and, significantly, the intensity of this love appears from a visual description which strangely inverts the principles underlying the personified landscapes of the Lowood era. Her obsessive analyses of his facial features climax in a desire to enter into his consciousness, but instead of exploring the human psyche by projecting it onto natural scenery as she does in the Lowood paintings, she now constructs a surreal landscape in Rochester's mind which she longs to enter and explore:

And as for the vague something . . . that opened upon a careful observer, now and then, in his eye, and closed again before one could fathom the strange depth partially disclosed; that something which used to make me fear and shrink, as if I had been wandering amongst volcanic-looking hills. . . . that something, I, at intervals, beheld still; and with throbbing heart, but not with palsied nerves. Instead of

wishing to shun, I longed only to dare - to divine it; and I thought Miss Ingram happy, because one day she might look into the abyss at her leisure, explore its secrets and analyze their nature. (190)

What the foregoing discussion attempts to make clear is that art confers power on Jane, both in her position as historical character yearning for knowledge and experience, and as narrator arranging and presenting the episodes of this emergent life with hindsight. The dual force invested in pictorial imagery comes across again in the pictures which Jane draws of herself and the imaginary Blanche Ingram. On the level of historical narrative, the decision to draw these portraits represents an act of self-discipline on Jane's part; at the same time, however, the juxtaposition of the two pictures offers the narrator yet another opportunity of graphically expressing and stylising the forces shaping Jane's inner life. The realistic and hastily chalked "Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain", drawn "without softening one defect", is meant to capture, conclusively, her lack of prospect in actual life, whereas "Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank" (163) issues straight from the imaginary world "quicken[ed]" with "incident, life, fire, feeling" which she creates to dispel boredom before Rochester's arrival (110). Thus, despite being an exercise in self-control, the artistic project gives vent to Jane's desires as much as it contains them. Put side by side, the two contrasting portraits function as a concrete image of her resolution not to indulge fantastic hopes and to come to terms with her uneventful life - they give "force and fixedness to the new impressions" which she wants to "stamp indelibly" on her "heart" (164). But they simultaneously reiterate the supremacy of fantasy and the imagination in Jane's life - the "real head" is dashed off in a couple of hours, whereas she lavishes loving attention on planning and executing the imaginary portrait of a lady, initially even straying into projecting Rochester's features onto her potential rival's:

' . . . take a piece of smooth ivory. . . . mix your freshest, finest, clearest tints; choose your most delicate camel-hair pencils; delineate carefully the loveliest face you can imagine; paint it in your softest shades and sweetest hues, according to the description given by Mrs. Fairfax of Blanche Ingram: remember the raven ringlets, the oriental eye; - what! you revert to Mr. Rochester's as a model! Order! No snivel! - no

sentiment! - no regret! I will endure only sense and resolution. Recall
the august yet harmonious lineaments, the Grecian neck and bust. . . .'

(163)

The historical Jane interprets the exercise of drawing these portraits as a "course of wholesome discipline" to which she has "forced" her "feelings to submit" (164). The narrator, by contrast, uses the two pictures to suggest, once again, that an ordinary or "plain" exterior could stand side by side with extraordinary powers of transcendence. It is therefore fitting that the artistic project ultimately functions as a tantalising narrative prompt which implicitly gainsays the assumption that "a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain" could not have an eventful life: at the end of the chapter the narrator hints at extraordinary developments to come by announcing that the discipline imposed by the two contrasting pictures gives Jane the ability "to meet subsequent occurrences with a decent calm" (164).

Ironically, it is these "subsequent occurrences" which to a large extent displace the centrality of Jane's vision and the narrator's carefully organised account of her developing inner life, causing the novel to lose much of its pioneering force as a painterly autobiography. Brontë's greater reliance on unexpected events and discoveries in volumes two and three causes an inevitable shift away from the largely a-temporal visual images and schemata shaping her narrative so innovatively in volume one, towards a more conventional dependence on temporal structures of plot development from the end of this volume onwards. The arrival of Rochester in volume one and later the party of revellers in volume two forces Jane more and more into the position of passive spectator observing the course of others' lives instead of being, as before, the active visionary bringing to bear extraordinary imaginative powers on her environment and own experience. As Rochester's "story" takes over from Jane's, her mind is subjected increasingly to images issuing principally from his experiences and imagination. Although his accounts of the "scenes and ways" of the world initially stimulate "new pictures" (147) in Jane's mind, she ultimately becomes a mere interpreter, at times even a passive recorder, of his enigmatic representations of his past life, present interests, and future prospects. So, for instance, she reconstructs in minute descriptive detail the tableaux vivants through which Rochester calls up a complex but as yet completely secret vision of his situation in life: the two charades

representing the marriage ceremony and the business of identifying and engaging the bride through a third party (the Eliezer and Rebecca tableau) add up to the last, a scene of imprisonment. On the level of narrative, they symbolically spell out the implications of Rochester's arranged marriage and the shackles which matrimony has placed on him; they furthermore amount to a rather cynical private joke which he is playing against Blanche Ingram and the assembled company who all expect an imminent betrothal. Jane, like the rest of the company oblivious of these private significances, becomes a passive transmitter of Rochester's visual schemes. She interprets only the obvious way in which Rochester uses the charades to pair himself off with Blanche (in her role as bride and betrothed), so that apart from being an observer, she is also subjected to his manipulation of visual symbols.

The main thrust of the novel up to Rochester's appearance is Jane's yearning for spiritual independence and self-fulfilment. Rochester's domination of the narrative in volume two threatens to suspend this thematic strain, although, as before, Jane's pre-occupation with him frequently nourishes her sense of self. This is the case when she returns to Gateshead, where she counters Mrs Reed's continued resentment and her cousins' cold superiority by invoking, through her art, a "friend's face" (236). The ease with which she shapes Rochester's portrait, the way in which his features seem to materialise effortlessly under her "fingers" and "gaze" (235 - 236), communicates both the intimacy of the relationship and the measure of comfort she draws from it. At the same time, the portrait does illustrate the extent to which the image of Rochester dominates her artistic imagination, since Jane abandons her usual form of art, the "fanciful" vignette which shapes itself "in the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of imagination" (235), to paint Rochester's portrait. The narrator here reverts to the image of Rochester's face hovering above the landscape and obliterating all else, an image which is called up again towards the end of volume two, this time loaded with strongly disquieting connotations: "My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and, more than the world: almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun" (277).

In the end, however, Brontë fails to write a painter's autobiography, not really because Jane's pre-occupation with Rochester eclipses her talent in volume two, but

mainly because a whole range of social and moral considerations comes into play in the third volume which totally usurps the place reserved in earlier episodes for her individuality of vision. In fleeing from Rochester, Jane follows another unknown road, but instead of transcending hardship through her own imaginative powers, she becomes absorbed into a comfortable domesticity invented for her through machinations of plot. Her formerly extraordinary artistic talent now serves the purposes of conventional domesticity: she draws a keepsake portrait of the beautiful Rosamond Oliver, showing her "radiant" model with bare neck and arms, her "chestnut tresses" waving "over her shoulders with all the wild grace of natural curls" (373). With this portrait as aid, she turns match-maker, trying to persuade St. John to "take" to himself "the original" (377), even though she knows that in order to do that, he would have to renounce "his wild field of mission warfare for the parlours and the peace of Vale Hall" (372). It is as if Brontë is trying to justify a transition by first arguing it through her main character, for in the course of the third volume she makes Jane herself give up a wide field of vision for the comforts of domesticity and family life, first at Moor-House, and later at Ferndean. In fact, St. John's voice takes over completely from Jane's in representing the potential frustration which may lie in too comfortable and uneventful an environment. Once Jane's inheritance has secured her cousins' home, St. John disapproves of the "disproportionate fervour" with which she intends throwing herself "into commonplace home pleasures" (395). And although she laughs away his censure, his view certainly has ironic relevance to her own past experiences. Brontë certainly does not manage to dispel the sense of incongruity created by Jane's flippant answers to St. John's urgent questions about "[w]hat aim, what purpose, what ambition in life" she now will have. Her professed "aim" to "clean down Moor-House from chamber to cellar" and the vivid pleasure with which she describes the business of dusting, polishing, and baking (394 - 395) cannot but come as an ironic anti-climax after her intense and repeated yearning for expanded horizons and extraordinary experiences in the first volume. Likewise, there is something incongruously comical about the fact that her innovative visual imagination shows itself towards the end of the novel only in interior decoration and the effort of turning Moor-House into "a model of bright modest snugness" (396).

The interlude at Moor-House prepares for the compromised ending of the novel. Although some of Jane's visionary power is restored when she becomes aware of Rochester's agony, it is telling that she experiences an "inward dimness of vision" at the time and that she perceives his need through the sense of hearing (424). The Jane Eyre with which the novel ends clearly has done with "peculiar" and "elfish" vision. As at Moor-House, her creative energies are mostly channelled into achieving domestic comfort at Ferndean: some of her first undertakings are to "re-humanize" Rochester by combing his hair and to build a new fire in the hearth (441).

Moments after arriving at Ferndean, Jane announces to Rochester "I am an independent woman now" (439); their subsequent marriage brings the main thematic strain of the novel to fruition. But this attainment of independence and self-fulfilment seems to require a sacrifice of Jane's visionary powers and imaginative abilities, just as Rochester's Byronic qualities have to be quenched before he can be made into a socially acceptable husband. Switching into the present and blending the historical Jane with the narrative agency, Brontë makes her main character deliver a eulogy on married bliss: "I hold myself supremely blest - blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine" (456). Curiously, however, this abstract celebration of happiness finds its most convincing concrete manifestation in Rochester's disfigurement and physical dependency on Jane:

Mr. Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union. . . . I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was . . . the apple of his eye. He saw nature - he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam. . . . He loved me so truly, that he knew no reluctance in profiting by my attendance: he felt I loved him so fondly, that to yield that attendance was to indulge my sweetest wishes. (456)

Ultimately, the image of perfect symbiotic intertwinement with which Brontë resolves the narrative also signals the unsustainable nature of this novel as an artist's autobiography: the narrator ascribes the closeness of their union to the fact that Jane's eyes were constantly at her partner's disposal, a situation which must have tied her

strictly to a realist aesthetic and which could have left little time for independent vision, private desire, or the creative imagination.

Marianna Torgovnick describes Brontë's use of pictorial material in Jane Eyre as "decorative",³⁰ a category indicating a limited "degree of involvement" with the visual arts which has few (if any) implications for the shape and meaning of the relevant novel.³¹ This she bases on a cursory discussion of Jane's detailed descriptions of people and places, her portraits of various characters which rely on recognisable Victorian "types", and the occurrence of scenes, tableaux vivants or "repetitions with a strong visual component" in the novel.³² Torgovnick, however, pays very little specific attention to the individual quality of Jane's vision as portrayed in her Lowood paintings, her attitude to Bewick, and her perception of landscape prospects. She furthermore focuses only on visual repetitions or "rhyming" pictures which show Rochester leaning on Jane for support,³³ whereas she overlooks the numerous repetitions of scenes specifically conceived of pictorially, such as the frustratingly harmonious prospects prompting Jane into fantastic landscapes with human faces or figures superimposed on them. These repetitions form visual and narrative patterns which are "vital"³⁴ part of the novel's structure and meaning, even though Brontë fails to sustain the power of her painter-narrator's visual imagination convincingly beyond, say, the first few chapters of volume two. The failure, moreover, does not detract from the originality and consistency with which she recreates a life's story in pictorial terms in this first volume. Instead, it is a weakness attributable to the structure of the novel as a whole, in particular to her inability to follow through the implications of character and viewpoint which materialise so forcibly in the first part of this novel.

In 1848, not long after the publication of Jane Eyre, Brontë for the first time had access to Ruskin's writing. William Smith Williams, the reader at Smith & Elder, sent her a volume of Selections from the Writings of John Ruskin. Her response in a letter to Williams provides a final comment on her literary use of painting and the pictorial:

it made me feel how ignorant I had previously been on the subject which it treats. Hitherto I have only had instinct to guide me in judging of art; I feel more as if I had been walking blindfold - this book seems to give me eyes. I do wish I had pictures within reach by which to test the new sense.³⁵

The letter succinctly reiterates the searching quality of imagination which pushes against the restrictive conditions governing her writing. It also identifies "instinct" as the main source for the type of language of painting materialising in Jane Eyre, an instinct, however, nurtured by access to engravings, drawing lessons, and the varied reading of periodicals, Annals, and other works containing information about the visual arts. Trips to galleries in London and Brussels must further have expanded her knowledge of painting. Despite these activities and opportunities, "availability" remains a serious problem in Brontë's development of a language of painting. This drawback is indeed noticeable in Jane Eyre, for although much of the force of Jane's vision (and Brontë's innovative use of painting in the novel) relies on its originality, the fact that her painterly language is largely unrelated to recognisable art forms makes it difficult to sustain, since it cannot tap into the resonance and richness of the actual art world. In terms of contemporary currents, Jane's art exists mainly negatively, that is, in reaction against a vaguely Gilpinesque idea of ordered landscape harmoniously melting away into graduated distance. For the rest, her art is, like Brontë's appreciation of art, entirely instinctive and idiosyncratic, qualities which are impossible to sustain on a purely literary level and which inevitably deteriorate into the light of common day as Jane gradually loses her visionary faculty and settles for domesticity.

Brontë created one opportunity for herself in fiction to use the "eyes" given to her by Ruskin and to "test the new sense" against a number of pictures "within reach", if not of Haworth Parsonage, then at least of her memory. In Villette she places Lucy Snowe in front of some pictures which she herself saw in 1842 at the Salon de Bruxelles. Lucy's language exactly echoes Ruskin's, although she is another of Brontë's highly individualistic viewers, "happy, not always in admiring, but in examining, questioning, and forming conclusions" according to her own criteria and not by paying tribute to "that which it was considered orthodox to admire".³⁶ Her unorthodoxy of taste, however, is in itself derivative, for it is from Ruskin that she borrows the confidence to question works widely sanctioned by public opinion³⁷. When it comes to singling particular works out for praise, she decides, like Ruskin, "that an original and good picture" is rarely found, that many so-called "chef d'oeuvres" are "not a whit like nature", and that "[m]any scores of marvelously-finished little Flemish pictures" give "evidence of laudable industry whimsically

applied" (284).³⁸ Ruskin's influence is furthermore unmistakable when she declares that, among these insincerities, she valued the few "fragments of truth which satisfied the conscience" and that she grew to love them as dearly "as friends" (284). Like Ruskin, Lucy expends much energy on detailed satirical ekphrasis when she encounters a painting that she finds particularly dishonest, like the much-admired Cleopatra (285). It is through this painting that Brontë animates her use of painterly material in the gallery scene. The Ruskinian aesthetic which makes Lucy reject the painting comes to signify her Protestant discipline, her British empiricism, sincerity, and honesty (for this novel is at times every bit as partisan as The Professor), as opposed to M. Paul's stark and repressive Catholic dogmatism on the one hand, and Colonel de Hamal's effete Continental degeneracy on the other.

Unlike Jane Eyre's, Lucy's aesthetic is firmly grounded in an existing language of painting, but this does not mean that Brontë's use of painterly material in Villette surpasses that of Jane Eyre. The scene in the art gallery has no structural function in the novel as a whole; it merely offers additional illustration of Lucy's solid good sense and it minimally advances the main development of plot - the explosive relationship evolving between Lucy and M. Paul. Ruskin's moral vision of art, shrunk and simplified, represents but a fraction of a fictional character's attitude to the world in Villette. In Jane Eyre, by contrast, an almost entirely imaginary aesthetic controls the narrator's vision for a good third of the novel, and influences its meaning and structure far beyond that. What Brontë's appropriation of pictorial material in the end illustrates most clearly is the idiosyncrasy of her talent which gives pride of place to the workings of the individual imagination (her own and her characters') while Ruskin, whose language of painting only a few years later forms the foundation of George Eliot's early novelistic aesthetic, is wholly absorbed into a character's subjective consciousness.

Notes and References to Chapter Four

¹ "Mary Taylor's Narrative", The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence, eds. Thomas J. Wise and John Alexander Symington, vol. 1 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1932) 90.

² See Christine Alexander, The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë (New York: Prometheus, 1983) 94 and 168.

³ Christine Alexander (ed.), An Edition of the Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë: 1826 - 1832, vol. 1 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 116. Unless indicated otherwise, all further references to the juvenilia will be to this two volume edition and will be cited in the text as volume, part (where

applicable), and page numbers. The other volume, in two parts, is vol. 2, part 1: 1833 - 1835 (1991) and part 2: 1834 - 1835 (1991).

⁴ In some of her later writing Dundee becomes Sir John Martin Dundee. See Alexander (ed.), vol. 1, 64n.

⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Margaret Smith (1847; London: Oxford University Press, 1973) 449. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁶ [Francis Grant] signed "An Amateur", "The Fine Arts", *Blackwood's Magazine* Apr. 1827: 405.

⁷ [John Eagles] "Mr Bird's Picture - Chevy Chase", *Blackwood's* Jan. 1833: 62 - 65.

⁸ Charlotte Brontë, "Passing Events", ed. Winifred Gérin, *Charlotte Brontë: Five Novellas* (London: Folio, 1971) 38 - 39.

⁹ James Montgomery, "The First Leave of an Album", *Friendship's Offering*, 1829.

¹⁰ See the picture of Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head in Alexander, *Early Writings* 73.

¹¹ [J. J. Hall] "Memoir of the Late Henry Fuseli, Esq. R. A.", *Blackwood's* May 1828: 578.

¹² The allusion is to "I wandered lonely as a cloud", 21 - 22.

¹³ Gilpin, *Observations* 82.

¹⁴ See Alexander's chapter, "A Visual Imagination" in *Early Writings* 234 - 243, particularly the reference to her imitation of Gilpin's "Cross of Rivaulx" which also reappears as a "verbal picture" in "Passing Events" (234).

¹⁵ Gilpin, *Observations* 59 - 61.

¹⁶ Gilpin, *Observations* 82.

¹⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor*, ed. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (1857; Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 55 - 56. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

¹⁸ See Joan Stevens, "'A Sermon in Every Vignette': Bewick and Brontë", *Turnbull Library Record* (1968) 14 - 15, for a discussion of the "leit-motifs" accompanying the "contrast of within and without" in the novel.

¹⁹ Stevens 12 - 13 and 15.

²⁰ See Stevens (16 - 17) for the bibliographical history of Thomas Bewick's *A History of British Birds*. The edition used for this thesis is the Newcastle re-issue of 1821. Volume 2 carries the sub-title, "Containing the History and Description of Water Birds".

²¹ Bewick, Preface, vol. 2, v.

²² Bewick, Preface, vol. 2, v.

²³ Bewick, Introduction, vol. 2, xiv.

²⁴ The passage from Bewick reads as follows: "In these forlorn regions of unknowable dreary space, this reservoir of frost and snow . . . even here . . . there appears to subsist an abundance of animals" (xv).

²⁵ Most of the illustrations I include are obvious candidates. I could not find a satisfying picture of becalmed ships, and when it came to choosing an illustration of the sinking wreck, I decided on a picture which includes an example of Bewick's arctic scenery. See Stevens's article for variations on these possibilities.

²⁶ Stevens 21.

²⁷ William Henry Hunt (1790 - 1867) was known for compositions of hedgerow plants and birds' nests.

²⁸ There is, however, a clearly demonstrable link between Jane's paintings and literature. See Alan Bacon, "Jane Eyre's Paintings and Milton's *Paradise Lost*", *Notes and Queries* 229 (1984): 64 - 65. What Bacon does not mention is that the Miltonic link was probably in the first place suggested to Brontë by Bewick. See Bewick's entry on cormorants on my page 163.

²⁹ Bewick 348.

³⁰ Torgovnick 85 - 89.

³¹ Torgovnick 17.

³² Torgovnick 85 - 89.

³³ Torgovnick 87.

³⁴ Torgovnick 89.

³⁵ Charlotte Brontë, "To William Smith Williams", 31 July 1848, letter 384 (301) of *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence*, eds. Thomas J. Wise and John Alexander Symington, vol. 2 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1932) 240.

³⁶ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, eds. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (1853; Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) 283. All further references to this novel will be cited in the text as page numbers.

³⁷ John Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1, The Works of John Ruskin, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 3 (London: George Allen, 1903) 80. Ruskin rejects public opinion, unless it is shaped by the informed "few".

³⁸ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1, 90.

Chapter Five

Towards a British Madonna: George Eliot and the "naturalist ideal"

Tourists and journalists share the habit of capturing experience in concrete form. The Marian Evans of July 1854, newly embarked on her Continental journey with George Lewes, belongs to both these categories. Her journal entry describing their approach to Antwerp arrests what must have been an experience of mixed impressions into an "unforgettable picture" which not only particularises the "jet-black" river traffic "painted" on the "reddish gold of the sky and water", but also reflects the personal significance of this dawn.¹ For the next eight months of travel she arranges her experiences of foreign people and places in prose which often borrows descriptive structure and concreteness from the language of the visual arts.² So she composes the Belvedere grounds in Weimar along the well-known lines of picturesque landscape appreciation: a foreground irregularly broken up, a sweep through a fairly uniform middle distance, and an indistinct wooded hill in the background.³ The description does at times suggest the couple's awareness of seasonal change, but temporal flux usually gives way to visual stasis, for instance when a set of glass globes positioned on a rock freezes the gardens in pictorial form, evoking not picturesque formula, but a new visual language associated with the recently formed school of naturalist painting in Britain: "It is wonderful to see with what minute perfection the scenery around is painted in these globes. Each is like a pre-Raphaelite picture".⁴

The vignettes from the Belvedere gardens illustrate the fluency with which George Eliot moves through pictorial modes to focus and enrich her descriptive writing. But more importantly, descriptions like these cast light on some of the forces at work in her intellectual and emotional responses to observed reality and her search for a medium expressive of these. Moreover, her observation of German life not only draws structural support, but also essential meaning from her use of pictorial material. In Weimar, at first sight a "dull, lifeless village" marked by "nothing but the most arid prosaism", she discovers a whole collection of portraits commemorating German artists who, for her, impart meaning and lustre to the mundane streets of this provincial town.⁵

The practice of finding meaning through art indicates an ambivalent approach to observed reality. On the one hand she implies that the most valuable moments of human experience should be looked for in the fabric of everyday existence; on the other she suggests that only extraordinary beings (like artists) are really capable of investing their surroundings with such value. Her writing is at this stage a compound of the realist's meticulous pursuit of detail and the hagiographer's search for icons and relics. The way in which these contradictory aims converge and actually reinforce each other can be seen in numerous descriptions of artists' memorabilia and likenesses, where attention to ordinary, even trifling, aspects of concrete reality leads to powerful emotional and spiritual climaxes. Goethe's pin-cushion, preserved "just as he left it, with visiting-cards suspended on threads", inspires reverence (and a rush of tears).⁶ The very plainness of objects in his rooms creates a kind of "sympathy" which reminds the viewer that "the being who has bequeathed to us immortal thought . . . had to endure the daily struggle with the petty details . . . of this working-day world".⁷

Artistic association here ennobles mundane reality, which in its turn acts as a vehicle for transcendence in offering the "ordinary" human being access to artistic experience. Similarly, when she looks at the many likenesses of German artists adorning the parks and historic houses in and around Weimar, she idealises the significance which artistic existence draws from and imparts to ordinary life. She engages in an intense scanning of artists' features, speculating on the truth of likenesses. Her perceptions are again rooted in a mixture of realist and religious fervour: portraits which pass her scrutiny as true representations acquire a quasi-iconographical status in that they form powerful nuclei focusing her responses. Since physical features are the primary stimulus, it is of utmost importance to find true likenesses - not an easy task in Weimar where examples of "classical idealising in portrait sculpture" abound.⁸ Her frustration when this style of portraiture interferes with primary observation is expressed vehemently, for instance when she encounters a statue of Goethe "represented as a naked Apollo, with a Psyche at his knee!" Against this, she hails Houdon's bust of Gluck as "a striking specimen of the real in art", revelling in the precision with which the sculptor has retained "every scar made by the small-pox". The main value of such unsparing realism lies in the idea it gives of the

genius which may dwell in mundane exteriors: "he has made one feel in those coarsely-cut features the presence of the genius qui divinise la laideur".⁹

This example, with its incongruous coupling of crude realism and idealistic artist worship, points to a basic tension in Eliot's thinking on art and reality. No matter how meticulously she glosses the effects of realistic presentation, the actual process through which she reaches her idealistic view of what the artist may contribute to human life remains far from empirical. The irradiation of genius which she perceives in Gluck's ugly features is in no way explicable in terms of either Houdon's plastic realism or her own descriptive techniques. Instead, it derives from a presupposition that the artist is elevated above ordinary existence and therefore worthy of veneration. At this stage of her career she expends much energy on canonising artists as beings somehow in touch with truth and grand experience. Her method of trying to realise the elusive idea of artistic genius is to turn to empirical data, not so much of artists' actual works as of their appearance and lives, and often with a disproportionate fascination for minute detail, which suggests that she wishes to justify the idealistic premises of her reverence. The urge to promote the presupposed idea through minute particularity of observation is nowhere as strikingly illustrated as in an encounter, among artistic paraphernalia, with an object which is a curious blend of relic and icon - a china cup bearing Goethe's portrait in miniature:

There is one likeness of Goethe that is really startling and thrilling from the idea it gives one of perfect resemblance. It is painted on a cup, and is a tiny miniature, but the execution is so perfect that, on applying a magnifying glass, every minute stroke has as natural an appearance as the texture of a flower or the parts of an insect under the microscope.¹⁰

Like a perfectly preserved pincushion, a painted cup is an unlikely object to convey the "idea" of Goethe to the mind. But far from grasping the humorous side of object worship as Austen might have done, Eliot calls on the discipline of empirical science to justify her perception of the portrait's "truth". Functioning with the unexpected intricacy of a conceit, the painted cup draws into momentary relation her ideas on artistic and scientific truth, iconography and realism. Tenuous though these links are, and forged by a desire to revere, they nonetheless image the complex configurations of primary observation, emotional response, rational thought, and

symbolic ideal which from the start are functions of her writing and which are to undergo extensive working out in her fiction.

The importance attached in the Weimar reminiscences to “real” and “true” images reveals a central concern with the processes by which identities, concepts or experiences become concrete in art. It is a concern which engages Eliot’s attention in much of the private and public writing immediately preceding her own first attempts at becoming an artist. The tension between preconceived idea and concrete manifestation extends throughout her oeuvre as a basic aesthetic problem. When Henry James identifies a preponderance of ideas and a lack of “plastic” sense in her art,¹¹ he may be giving too simplistic an account of her work as a whole, and yet it cannot be denied that her highly intellectual bent often occasions an urgent casting around for efficient forms in which to incarnate ideas.¹² Despite various kinds of protestation throughout her career that the physical reality comes to her first, and only afterwards yields further significance, all her novels consciously or unconsciously wrestle with the problem of “realisation”, suggesting that she is far from sure about the priority of “plastic” values in her writing. Each of her novels furthermore pursues what can be called, again at the risk of over-simplification, an aesthetic policy, or sets itself a particular type of artistic project. In *Adam Bede*, for instance, the very urge to consecrate the ordinary and everyday through a realist aesthetic forms part of a pervasive abstract policy, whereas *Romola* materialises as an ambitious cultural-historical project aiming at identifying the symbolic codes at the heart of historical reality.

The language of the visual arts plays a vital role in Eliot’s development of ideas on the processes of artistic realisation. Images and conventions gleaned from painting in particular enrich her thinking about the techniques and effects of literary art, although, as I shall argue, she gradually seems to lose faith in the expressive ability of pictorial art. More than any of the three principal novelists looked at so far, she evolves an elaborate, at times protean, language of painting from her first-hand experiences of works of art, as well as from her extensive reading in the field. Right from the start, painterly material provides her with the imagery and language necessary for exploring the tensions between the ideals and realities of human experience. In fact, her very first work in print reveals the force of the pre-conceived idea in her writing, and does so by linking idealism with painting. She creates an impossibly idealistic persona whose

nobility and genius render him quite unfit for life. So unworthy is the world of this ideal spokesman that his thoughts make it into the world only after his death, selected and edited by an anonymous friend "From the Notebook of an Eccentric". The first sketch, "How to Avoid Disappointment", is arranged around probably the best-known topos of painterly discourse - the painting as powerful image of immutability.¹³ In this instance the image is made to symbolise the ideals of perfection in art as well as of transcendence in life. Eliot's spokesman, Macarthy, admires the work of a painter friend for the way in which it realises a preconceived idea and offers an image of fulfilment:

I love to think how the perfect whole exists in the imagination of the artist, before his pencil has marked the canvass. . . . I love to watch the artist's eye . . . scrupulously attentive to the details of his actual labour, yet keeping ever in view the idea which that labour is to fulfil. . . . this is an image of what our life should be, - a series of efforts directed to the production of a contemplated whole. . . . (17 - 18)

Representing the artist's idea exactly realised in visible form, the painting provides the disconsolately provincial Marian Evans with a vivid image of how life should be led: "not for any individual, any specific form; but for something which, while it dwells in these, has an existence beyond them".

The main drive of this sketch, as in the later Weimar writings, originates in the meaning which art, perceived as ideal vision, imparts to reality. But even in this idealistic context, she does not present the concept of art as a completely undifferentiated whole, but divides it into the categories of genre and sub-genre. The life resembling a work of art could be "a home scene, after Wilkie", or an historical painting, a "Paul preaching at Athens", a "Brutus passing sentence on his son" (18). This inclusion of genre painting among historical titles is an early sign of the potential for grandeur and nobility which Eliot discerns (or hopes to find) in a domestic environment. Although the reference to Wilkie may seem merely part of the general wistfulness with which she at this stage expresses the desire to live for "the good, the true, the beautiful" (18) despite and even by leading her ordinary provincial existence, it certainly projects a far more hopeful vision than the disconsolate image of life evoked by a previous reference to this painter's genre pieces. Several years before she

can be found complaining that her "world" is "too often" one "such as Wilkie can so well paint, a walled-in world, furnished with all the details which he remembers so accurately".¹⁴

The Wilkie reference in the Macarthy essay also more simply stands for local art and "low" subject-matter (as opposed to Continental art and the "old masters"). These two areas of interest separately and together dominate Eliot's attention in the 1850s. Her remarks on literature are shot through with concepts derived from the language of genre painting, as for instance her comment that Elizabeth Gaskell relies too often on "sharp contrasts" and "'dramatic' effects" when she should be "contented" with the "subdued colouring - the half tints of real life".¹⁵ But mingled with this desire for realism appears always the belief that it is for the artist to sanctify ordinary experience through moral vision.¹⁶ Eliot puts considerable intellectual force into trying to design an aesthetic which would represent a moral ideal in the material of the real. For this endeavour she takes from German and early English Romanticism the concept of organic unity and casts it in a Positivist mould. Thus she includes morality among the physical processes of nature which can be observed and analysed empirically. Accordingly she praises the artist whose work realises moral influences naturally rather than in the abstract - like Goethe, who "is in no haste to alarm readers into virtue by melodramatic consequences", but "quietly follows the stream of fact and of life; and waits patiently for the moral processes of nature as we all do for her material processes".¹⁷ An artist who fails in this respect is Kingsley. Eliot laments his inability to "trust to the impression that scene itself will make on you".¹⁸ An earlier article portrays pictorially what she here describes as his "perpetual hortative tendency".¹⁹ Resorting to caricature, she translates Kingsley's moralising "scenes" into cartoon-strips: "It is as if a painter in colour were to write 'Oh, you villain!' under his Jesuits or murderers; or to have a strip flowing from a hero's mouth, with 'Imitate me, my man!' on it".²⁰

The type of organic unity between artistic form and idea which Eliot looks for extends to the effect she expects art to have on the reader. Contrary to Kingsley, Browning impresses her with the way in which he involves the reader organically in discovering the moral contents of his work. In Men and Women she finds that there is "no didactic laying-out of a subject, but dramatic indication, which requires the reader to trace . . . the underground stream of thought that jets out in elliptical and pithy

verse".²¹ The workings of Browning's art significantly come to resemble a painterly mode of realising character and psychological motive in that the cryptic indications and ellipses of his poetic method function for her like metaphorical brushstrokes which communicate meaning by calling up a whole picture in the reader's mind. When Browning sets about revealing "the secrets of human character", he does so "not by a process of dissection, but by dramatic painting". The two art forms, drama and painting, both confront the spectator directly, without the intervention of authorial commentary. As such they aptly simulate the method of the Browning dramatic monologue, in that this art form, too, presents its readers with "outward" signs which they themselves have to connect and interpret. The efforts required to follow the "racy conversational vigour of a brawny genius" as he mixes his life's story with a type of "instinctive Art-criticism" brings the reader into immediate contact with Browning's Fra Lippo Lippi - not the historically mediated personage on Vasari's pages, but a psychological identity encountered as it were first hand.²²

When Eliot associates Browning's poetry with "dramatic painting", the word "painting" calls up a conventional range of qualities (like immediacy of appeal and descriptive vividness). More specifically, the painterly label images an organic fusion of concrete form and implied meaning. Linked to the word "dramatic", the association reaches even further, beyond Browning's work in particular, to invoke the ever-increasing popularity of dramatic narrative in British painting of the nineteenth century. Whether in genre or domestic crisis scenes, classical or contemporary history paintings, it is the dramatically charged look, gesture or even stage prop more than any particularly painterly tradition of emblem or symbol which communicates the "story" of a picture to the viewer in Victorian Britain. Whereas the viewer of a Hogarth series would do well to remember the involved conventional and private symbolism which informs the representation of, for instance, pets in this painter's work,²³ the viewer of Victorian narrative painting principally needs a responsive heart and an eye for the emotionally laden "story-lines" radiating from any number of doleful dog figures (see figs. 43 and 44). This example in no way aims at reinforcing stereotypical views of Victorian art as excessively sentimental. It intends to draw attention to the affective and moral dimension surrounding narrative painting in Victorian Britain which to a



Fig. 43. Hogarth, The Bruiser (1763); rpt. in Hogarth: Complete Engravings, plate 264. In this engraving, Hogarth's dog, Trump, functions both as "cynic-dog" and signature.



Fig. 44. Edwin Landseer, The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

large extent relies on the viewer's sympathetic deciphering of the narrative content of a painting.

It is mainly to Ruskin that Eliot owes her recognition of painting as a form of moral and sympathetic narrative. In the section enumerating the writers on the visual arts from whom she drew her basic vocabulary and ideas, Hugh Witemeyer singles Ruskin out as by far the most influential.²⁴ His analysis of Eliot's pictorial taste and personal interpretation of the *ut pictura poesis* question takes places very much in terms of characteristically Ruskinian elements such as his insistence on the primarily expressive (rather than mimetic) function of painting, his emphasis on moral instead of purely aesthetic criteria when judging art, and the contribution he makes to the ideal-real controversy by adjusting Reynolds's traditional hierarchy of genres. Comprehensive as Witemeyer's analysis is, it does not quite explain how and why these particular modes of thinking about painting developed such fertile off-shoots in Eliot's writing. I shall attempt to find some answers to these questions, first by examining Ruskin's view of painting as a form of communication which speaks concretely (through the senses and emotions) to the viewer's imagination, intellect and moral awareness; secondly, I shall link the aesthetic compromises he institutes between the categories of ideal and real to Eliot's developing aesthetic.

In Volume 1 of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin describes painting, "or art generally . . . with all its technicalities, difficulties, and particular ends", as "nothing but a noble and expressive language, invaluable as the vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing".²⁵ Continuing the tradition of umpiring the contest between the arts, this linguistic analogy firmly places painting and poetry on a par. Each art form has its own medium or language, but the merit of both is determined by the quality of thought conveyed by their respective languages. The visual and tactile concreteness of painting's language may give it "more power of delighting the sense, while it speaks to the intellect" than that of literature, but occasioning such superficial delight is far from the true function of painting and it in no way disqualifies the painter from being a serious, thought-provoking artist. Ruskin collapses the surface differences between painting and literature by reserving the term "poet" for great practitioners in either art. Whether they excel in "the language of lines" or "the language of words", their artistic status is warranted not by technical expertise, but "by the character of the images or thoughts"

which their language conveys.²⁶ To illustrate this, he chooses, tellingly, a painting which lends itself principally to narrative explication, Edwin Landseer's The Old Shepherd's Chief-mourner (fig. 44).²⁷ In an exercise which amounts to translating a number of pictorial clues into a story, Ruskin comes to the conclusion that this picture outranks many others of equal technical merit through the nature of the thoughts it formulates. These thoughts are of a highly emotive kind, and mainly literary in so far as the viewer has to extrapolate a story of the old shepherd's solitary life and death. The only way the viewer can gain insight into the value of this life is by entering into the details of grief expressed by the shepherd's dog and by grasping the emotional and moral significance of various objects depicted in the "gloom of the chamber". Through these thoughts, Ruskin decides, the picture "ranks as a work of high art, and stamps its author, not as the neat imitator of the texture of a skin, or the fold of a drapery, but as the Man of Mind".²⁸

Whether such an assessment illustrates an instance of bathos or "poetic thought" is not the question here. What is important is Ruskin's method of reading painting as a highly formalised language of representation which at its best not merely renders outward form accurately, but realises, even reveals, inherent truths about the operations of nature and the human mind. The aesthetic is essentially Wordsworthian, giving the true artist the power to see "into the life of things",²⁹ but with certain Ruskinian additions such as an emphasis on the actual physical processes of realising sight in paint and a more formal religious interpretation of natural form and moral sentiment as manifestations of divinity. The choice of the Landseer to show how the language and thought of painting operate is an astute one, since the narrative elements of the picture facilitate the passage from depicted form to moral and emotional truth implied, from the vision realised by the "Man of Mind" to its reception in the minds of men.

Ruskin's emphasis on the way in which paintings "talk" to viewers takes him to the prime moral duty of artists: to communicate the truth through personal but self-forgetful vision.³⁰ Artists who fail in this respect elicit strong indignation and many an exercise in satirical ekphrasis. In particular, he has it against "the old school of art" which draws on automatic formulas of landscape painting instead of on personal observation of nature. A viewer "accustomed to the grace and infinity of nature's

foliage, with every vista a cathedral, and every bough a revelation", would "be angered" by Poussin's formula for trees: "a black round mass of impenetrable paint, diverging into feathers instead of leaves, and supported on a stick instead of a trunk". Ruskin's measured religious metaphors and Romantic impulses when speaking of nature represent in language the type of approach he expects landscape painters to have towards the natural world, just as his feather duster imagery makes fun of what he regards as facile in the "old school". There is "one thing wanting in all the doing" of painters like Claude and Poussin, he sums up,

and that is the very virtue by which the work of human mind chiefly rises above that of the daguerreotype or calotype, or any other mechanical means that ever have been or may be invented, Love. There is no evidence of their ever having gone to nature with any thirst, or received from her such emotion as could make them, even for an instant, lose sight of themselves. . . .³¹

It is in the nature of Ruskin's treatise to review the works of modern British artists against a background of "old masters", usually with the aim of criticising mechanical vision in either old or new painting and of acknowledging glimpses of truth and sincerity whenever they occur. So, Clarkson Stanfield, "the leader of the English Realists" is found slightly wanting in feeling, even though his "look of common sense and rationality" is accompanied by an "acquaintance with, and affection for, the steep hills and the deep sea"; but, Ruskin hastens to add, "this healthy and rational regard of things is incomparably preferable to the dramatic absurdities" of weaker marine artists. His style accordingly modulates to accommodate the full range from absurdity to rationality, "from copper-coloured sunsets on green waves sixty feet high, with cauliflower breakers and ninepin rocks . . . to a surge of Stanfield's true salt, serviceable, unsentimental sea". In describing the "feeling" he misses in Stanfield's seascapes, Ruskin returns to the type of quality he earlier defined as historical "talkativeness". Stanfield's boats are too new to talk to the viewer; they lack the "rusty, dusty, tar-trickled, fishy, phosphorescent brown" which makes old vessels so expressive.³²

The pleasure of encountering pictorially eloquent objects does not arise from "a mere love of the picturesque", Ruskin is quick to point out elsewhere (neatly avoiding

association with visual crazes and over-charged sensibilities), but from “a deeper moral”, the urge to discover inherent “truth”.³³ Painters of human life should likewise remember the expressive power of detail. Dirt, too, talks. In Ruskin’s language of painting “cottage children” in “freshly got-up caps and aprons, and white-handed beggars” in “unexceptionable rags” are lexical errors, since “[i]n reality, almost all the colours of things associated with human life derive something of their expression and value from the tones of impurity”.³⁴

As an eye for such inherent details comes only through “early and long” association with a particular kind of subject-matter, Ruskin furthermore argues that painters can only do justice to the “[e]xpression, character, types of countenance, costume, colour, and accessories” of an environment to which they are “native”. With this statement, he expresses his reservations about various contemporary trends (involving historical or exotic settings) which, he believes, force painters to rely on convention and formula instead of own experience. This robs them of their “birthright”, loses them “their power over the human heart” and prevents them from “teaching or benefiting others”. As examples he compares the largely unsuccessful crop of “middle-age cartoons” considered in 1844 for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament with Hogarth’s homegrown talent; and furthermore, “the sickly modern German imitations of the great Italians” with the healthy produce of native craftsmen like Dürer and Holbein. Through this reference to the German Nazarenes, Ruskin is shaking a finger at British painters tempted by large historical projects. Humility and simplicity paradoxically mark the way to grandeur for Ruskin, as he states in a passage which Eliot must have found enormously compelling, both in her days as a journalist and as the author of works as distinct in time and vision as Adam Bede and Middlemarch:

All classicality, all middle-aged patent-reviving, is utterly vain and absurd; if we are now to do anything great, good, awful, religious, it must be got out of our own little island, and out of these very times, railroads and all; if a British painter . . . cannot make historical characters out of the British House of Peers, he cannot paint history; and if he cannot make a Madonna of a British girl of the nineteenth century, he cannot paint one at all.³⁵

Ruskin's suggestion that the "great" and "good" in British art should emerge from the supposedly insignificant material of "our own little island" and his fictitious example of a modern British Madonna directly challenge the language of idealism culminating in Sir Joshua Reynolds's writings and at this stage still colouring the official discourse of the Royal Academy as well as the individual utterances of many a commentator on art. A quick glance at Blackwood's Magazine of the two decades preceding the publication of Volume 1 of Modern Painters reveals a plethora of judgments and ideas based on Reynolds's authority.³⁶ Most reviews and surveys of this period only grudgingly recognise admirable aspects in British art, such as its strength in portraiture or its ability to capture feeling and tell a good story in domestic genre and paintings inspired by works of literature (both of which they in any case regard as poor relatives of history painting). Dotted among these disparaging commentaries appear solidly informative historical essays like David Scott's series "on the great artists of Italy" which provide a sobering impression of how far British artists still have to develop before they can make a claim to greatness.³⁷

Whereas Reynolds and his followers have to deviate pragmatically from their artistic ideals even to mention the British School (or otherwise end up using these ideals merely to illustrate local shortcomings), Ruskin continues his 1843 defence of modern painters. In 1856 he refreshingly treats the works of a variety of mid-nineteenth-century British painters as explorations in a new cultural direction, that of Naturalism, which according to him use truth and beauty not as extraneous ideals to be striven for, but as organic properties of the real world. With daring inventiveness which draws Neoclassical idealism right into the heart of an empiricist approach, Ruskin coins the phrase "the naturalist ideal" to deal with the painting of his own country and time, a class of painting which "has always in it, to the full, the power expressed by those two words. It is naturalist, because studied from nature, and ideal, because it is mentally arranged in a certain manner".³⁸

This shift of focus towards naturalism is what strikes Eliot most in her review of Modern Painters, Volume 3:

The truth of infinite value that he teaches is realism - the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of

nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality.³⁹

The “doctrine” of realism signifies for her (as for Ruskin) a new cultural departure and she consequently proclaims him “a prophet for his generation”.⁴⁰ But beyond highlighting these aspects she reviews the volume rather hurriedly, barely sketching out the stages by which Ruskin moves from a rejection of Reynolds’s “grand style”⁴¹ to his own differentiated formulation of false and true ideals in art. Although Eliot rushes over this aspect, Ruskin’s volume clearly enacts a process - refuting the false and refining an understanding of the true - which is very similar to the one she undergoes in her own thinking about art at the outset of her fictional career. Ruskin has little respect for Reynolds’s carefully established hierarchy of genres descending from idealistic historical art to realistic portraiture, genre, and still life. In the place of this system he puts an open-ended principle of “greatness” derived entirely from an assessment of the noble aims a painter manages to incorporate in his work. According to Ruskin a painter is “great” if

he has laid open noble truths, or aroused noble emotions. It does not matter whether he paint the petal of a rose, or the chasms of a precipice, so that Love and Admiration attend him as he labours. . . . And it does not matter whether he seek for his subjects among peasants or nobles, among the heroic or the simple. . . .⁴²

Finally, to bring in a concept which becomes vital in Eliot’s aesthetic, Ruskin displays as a fundamental criterion a Romantic reliance on the judgments of the human heart - “true criticism of art” is “just” “only when it is founded on a quick sympathy with the innumerable instincts and changeful efforts of human nature”.⁴³

Ruskin’s adherence to scientific empiricism and the feelings of common humanity drastically influences Eliot’s perception of artists and the world reflected in their art. Canonisation of artists, as practised in Weimar, gives way to what A. S. Byatt calls “a kind of ferocious, witty and energetic rejection” of “her own earlier religious and literary enthusiasms”, as well as of conventional social assumptions about “female virtues and the nature of marriage” and works of art displaying a fatuous view of the world.⁴⁴ Her sprightly exposure of Young’s worldliness in life as opposed to his other-

worldliness in art involves judging the artist in terms of his works and not as formally in terms of the worldly objects which commemorate him.⁴⁵ Instead of revering the concrete world for its specific associations with famous men, she starts praising those artists who render the world they live in truthfully and with sympathy. Towards the end of the Young essay she prescribes, in pure Ruskinian vein, the comforting concreteness of Cowper's "The Task" as an antidote to the insistent abstractions of the "Night Thoughts": "Where is the poem that surpasses the 'Task' in the genuine love it breathes, at once towards inanimate and animate existence - in truthfulness of perception and sincerity of presentation . . . ?"⁴⁶

It is exactly this quality of rendering earthly attachment concrete that she misses in Young's art. She shows how a couple of his elaborately abstract emblems could be more effectively replaced by a realistic domestic picture of human affection:

He sees Virtue sitting on a mount serene . . . he sees Religion coming down from the skies . . . but we never find him dwelling on virtue or religion as it really exists - in the emotions of a man dressed in an ordinary coat, and seated by his fire-side of an evening, with his hand resting on the head of his little daughter. . . .⁴⁷

It is important to note that Eliot translates the words "virtue" and "religion" into pictures in order to differentiate between her own and Young's interpretations of these concepts. Her juxtaposition of allegorical emblem and domestic interior operates along essentially pictorial lines, as does much of her aesthetic theory of the time.

The image of "a man dressed in an ordinary coat" displays her own attraction to concrete and earthly pictures of humanity as vehicles for thought, partly because they graphically illustrate her opinions about the didactic force of art. Eliot believes that artists can gain a certain control over the mind's "picture-writing".⁴⁸ A concrete "picture of human life such as a great artist can give" may evoke a particular emotional or moral response.⁴⁹ As in Ruskin's writing, then, the artist's picture is valued more for the moral influence which it exerts than for its mimetic properties; and, far from projecting art and the world it deals with into religious spheres to gain significance from extraneous doctrine as Young does, she identifies human experience in its various facets as the main region from which art should draw its meaning. Whereas in her earliest writing life draws meaning from art, she has now reversed the process, and

wishes to illustrate how art draws its main sustenance from life. The works of art she singles out for praise all present their material directly "from life", without the mediation of a mythical or symbolic ideal. This catalogue includes studies of popular life by Teniers and Murillo, as well as a "group of chimney sweepers" by Hornung.⁵⁰

From the predominance of pictorial imagery in her formulation of an aesthetic it seems that Eliot is particularly drawn to painting for the concrete vividness with which it illustrates ideas. This quality also makes painting an apt metaphor for conveying clarity into her thoughts about fiction and its means of representation. The first "Clerical Scene" reveals some of the levels at which her picture theory applies to her own art. At its most obvious (and limited) it refers to the pictorial vividness she aims at in descriptive passages. Related to this is the emotional power which she hopes to generate with her pictures of human life, extending her readers' field of experience, awakening their sympathies, and most importantly, serving the interests of the brand of didactic realism she has come to believe in. But pictures and the language of painting also operate in her writings outside the scope of these considerations, sometimes even working against them by hinting at a hidden idealistic strain in her art which is not accounted for or even acknowledged by the realist aesthetic spelt out in the months immediately preceding the appearance of her first fictional work.

Various critics have recently commented on the basic paradox inherent in invoking works of art to establish a realist aesthetic. Daniel P. Gunn, for instance, suggests that "[i]t may seem ironic that Eliot should use a collection of works of art - Dutch paintings [in Adam Bede]- to argue for the importance of fidelity to simple nature rather than to the complicated conventions of art". He shows how "Dutch painting implies for her an aesthetic of simplicity, in which representation is seen as unmediated by the artificial conventions of art and thus untroubled by superimposed meanings".⁵¹ I want to go a step further and suggest that throughout her oeuvre Eliot introduces a range of non-realist elements into her fiction under the guise of pictorial allusions apparently aiming at making her fiction more realistic, "vivid" or concretely imaginable. Her choice of pictorial material, even Dutch genre, is frequently intimately connected with her meliorist vision of humanity's development, a process which she hopes both to reflect and to promote through her writing, without seriously or openly distorting the realist medium, which, after all, remains her main vehicle of artistic

communication. Exploring the tension between these conflicting impulses has proven an exceptionally fertile critical pastime which one can start surveying with James's insight (as quoted by Leavis) that for Eliot "the novel 'was not primarily a picture of life . . . but a moralized fable, the last word of a philosophy endeavouring to teach by example'"⁵² In the last two decades, then, critics have looked at elements such as her use of pictorial symbolism for the evidence they give of thematic strains or "fables" in some way or other at variance with an uncomplicated "picture of human life".⁵³

In "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton"⁵⁴ a slight reference to religious painting influences the way in which Milly is portrayed. At first it seems a purely descriptive piece of information, but the reference gathers thematic force until it becomes representative of an ideal not in keeping with the intention to present the unexceptional and commonplace. Milly is described as "a large, fair, gentle Madonna"; her figure makes "the limpest dress look graceful", and the "heavy and hideous" caps she wears become "miracles of successful millinery" surmounting her beautiful neck and chestnut curls (19). The miraculous sartorial transfiguration which takes place in this description, while not without humorous implications, serves to establish the mundane level at which Milly's saintly attributes operate. The rest of the story develops this theme, throughout presenting Milly's influence on the world around her as a consecration of the ordinary: she sheds a "loving light" on her commonplace, rather unattractive husband, which eventually spreads to the community at large in that the pathos of her death turns gossips into compassionate neighbours. In keeping with the religious terminology which introduces Milly, her memory after death is said to hallow her husband "as of old the place was hallowed on which an angel from God had alighted" (68). The Madonna reference remains a slight one, and yet it carries with it an iconic value which immediately identifies Milly as an exceptional presence. Subsequent views show her immersed in ordinary domestic life, putting a child to sleep, darning socks, and eventually dying surrounded by loved ones; but although she forms part of all these domestic scenes, she throughout retains an immutability which on the one hand elevates her above her surroundings and on the other infuses the world around her with spiritual energy.⁵⁵

Eliot's pictorial presentation of Milly as a Madonna ultimately does more than create a vivid impression or command sympathy. It imposes, from the outside, a

symbolic ideal on the virtues of a woman in an ordinary dress, so to speak. In the process, the same unresolved tension between ideal and real occurs which marks her treatment of the visual arts in the Weimar writings. The business of creating a Madonna out of a modern British woman, of realising the ideal in the fabric of the real, poses a conundrum at the core of her oeuvre. Frequently it involves a complex intertwining of different pictorial languages, as when the reference to sacred art in "Amos Barton" clashes with the work's realist aesthetic but at the same time fulfils its structural and thematic expectations. When considering the "four principal genres" that Eliot "loved to re-create" - "portraiture, sacred and heroic history painting, genre painting, and landscape" - Witemeyer assigns a chapter to each, discussing the fictional works in the light of the particular genres which influence them most.⁵⁶ I have found, however, that painterly images, genres, and the discursive material that they carry with them collide and come together in such a way in Eliot's fiction as to reveal vital tensions in her writing. An essential part of my method, therefore, will be to trace the development of the ideal-real dichotomy by analysing the interaction rather than the separate influence of these pictorial genres.

Before starting this discussion, I need to point out that pictorial material also functions in some of the other ways previously discussed in this thesis. The tangibility of Eliot's descriptive technique largely depends on principles which underlie the concepts of *ekphrasis* and *enargeia* like frequent visual orientation (usually effected by means of adverbs of place and relational prepositions), substantive concreteness, and vividness of expression. But apart from this, she avails herself of various conventional narrative and thematic strategies which rely on pictorial imagery. These can be identified most clearly in another of her *Clerical Scenes*, "Mr Gilfil's Love-Story", which uses a veritable scaffolding of pictorial props.

The story presents several temporal frames, starting with a relatively recent past which opens out into a distant past, in its turn leading to yet a remoter past. Among the narrative clues which make it possible for the reader to travel in and out of these frames are pictorial images of various kinds. Initially Eliot calls up a descriptive picture of an aged Mr Gilfil which belongs to the type of domestic interior praised in her periodical writings as fraught with narrative and emotional interest. Aged facial features in this description function very much like Ruskin's "talkative facts",

recording in "shrunken remnant" a "drama of hope and love which has long ago reached its catastrophe" (83). But despite the preamble stressing the narrative possibilities of old age, Mr Gilfil's story does not evolve organically from this scene of an old man by his fire. Relying on a device of Gothic fiction, Eliot unexpectedly opens up another branch of narrative by drawing aside the curtains of a mysterious chamber in the Shepperton Vicarage. Still according to Gothic convention, the room contains among other relics a pair of miniatures. The narrative sets out to reconstruct, from these relics, the psychological complexity of thwarted aspirations; but instead of truly discovering the essence of past experience through these relics, the narrator handles them so self-consciously that they end up freezing the past as a distant fiction which can be depicted in great detail but never be re-experienced as a reality.

"Mr Gilfil's Love-Story" in many ways illustrates the dangers which Lessing identifies in a too self-conscious habit of pictorial writing. Thus, in the second chapter the narrator's wilful clinging to pictorial detail immobilises the flashback into the past. The chapter repeats a number of phrases from chapter 1 to identify the girl wandering about the grounds of Cheverel Manor as the subject of the mysterious miniature in Shepperton Vicarage. This detailed process of visual identification immobilises the scene instead of having the animating effect of setting the remote sub-plot into motion. Ensuing descriptions of the two characters on the lawn take the form of imaginary paintings which postpone a more dramatic depiction of life at the Manor. The two women do not start talking or acting, but sit down and become "a few little dabs of red and white and blue" (88) in the "charming picture Cheverel Manor would have made that evening, if some English Watteau had been there to paint it" (87).

The postponement of action through description is a feature which Eliot's early writing has in common with Charlotte Brontë's. Another is a heavy reliance on derivative techniques. The Gothic device opening up the past towards the end of chapter 1 is a case in point. So is the way in which pictorial images are used as elaborate and rather obvious symbolic manifestations of how characters are situated, what their mental condition is, and what their motives for action are. Frequent reference to family portraits represents the force of the genealogical tradition which Sir Christopher seeks to perpetuate through his Gothic renovation project and his well-meaning but inflexible matrimonial policies for the young people in his care. On the

other hand, it stresses Caterina's undefined position in a household controlled by hereditary issues. She appears as a collector's item, another of the oddities and curiosities which Sir Christopher has brought back from his foreign travels. The dangers residing in both these characters' situations, one socially empowered, the other powerless, untutored, and volatile, are likewise expressed through pictorial symbolism. In drawing-room banter which does not quite dispel obvious echoes from Gothic literature, Sir Christopher reserves pride of place for his own portrait while threatening to turn his heir's with its face to the wall (93 - 94); and adhering to Gothic derivations, Eliot expresses Caterina's jealousy of her lover by making her smash a treasured miniature depicting his perfect features on a piece of ivory (150).

This action constitutes a murder in miniature, and yet there are none of Austen's comic overtones in this scene to temper the emotional extravagance of symbolic violence. In fact, the symbolic act is followed by real murderous intent, and although Caterina in the end only manages to worry (rather than stab) Anthony to death, the authorial commentator again deals heavy-handedly with pictorial symbolism, finding it necessary to spell out literal implications in case they should be overlooked or an opportunity be lost to provide the story-line with yet another structural support. On the whole, the way in which pictures are incorporated in this tale comes to suggest a lack of authorial confidence, in that they form part of a set of concrete mechanisms designed to increase control over the fictional world. These include several back-up systems like the double device for introducing the past or the intrusive narrator who draws far too much attention to the story's framework by explaining and commenting on the symbolism of pictorial traditions which are, if anything, too obvious and derivative.

Description and an attempt to instil narrative confidence go hand in hand also in Eliot's first novel, Adam Bede. The narrator claims the power of recreating the image of the past with as much accuracy as if it were reflected in a magic mirror. The simile comes from Ruskin who treats such imitative accuracy as an impossible ideal: "such art as this might, indeed, be the highest possible" for it would capture sacred events "as if some silver mirror . . . had been miraculously commanded to retain for ever the colours that had flashed upon it for an instant".⁵⁷ But, Ruskin adds, "imitative art" in such "perfection" is "so utterly beyond all human power that we have difficulty even in

conceiving its nature or results".⁵⁸ Not so the narrator of *Adam Bede* who undertakes to reveal "[w]ith a single drop of ink for a mirror . . . far-reaching visions of the past".⁵⁹ After so hyperbolic a claim, it comes as a bit of a surprise when the first scene turns out to be a genre scene, a carpenter's workshop.

Assessing the reason for Eliot's hyperbole is not easy. It most likely resembles the function and effect of the Madonna image in "Amos Barton", in that it may be an attempt to consecrate the commonplace, this time by lifting the medium of representation itself - and thereby also its subject-matter - onto an ideal plane. Interpreted in this way, the claim of having mastered imitative art to perfection anticipates (albeit preposterously) the main theoretical tenor of this novel, that the commonplace and awkward should be granted a place in art alongside the ideally beautiful; in fact, that art, through faithful representation, should reveal "beauty in these commonplace things" and "delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them" (197). The workshop description certainly seems to fit into this theoretical plan. Of particular significance is the way in which the sunlight falls on the men's work and materials, glorifying the everyday activities of rural people right from the start.

With its confident grounding of imitative ideals in the world of ordinary experience, this novel represents Eliot's most disciplined attempt at adhering to the aesthetic of moral realism and social didacticism formulated in her critical writings. As far as her didactic impulse is concerned, she associates the higher classes with the "more artificial aspects of life";⁶⁰ the lower classes by implication still live in closer accord with what Wordsworth calls "the primary laws of our nature".⁶¹ But whereas Wordsworth focuses on peasants mainly to rediscover the natural condition of humanity and his own better self, Eliot thinks more deliberately of their didactic value as a group towards whom the more leisured upper classes (her reading public, for the most part) should learn to extend their "social sympathies" as part of an organic process of social and political amelioration.⁶² But despite the strong theoretical drive towards didactic realism and the meticulous care with which she creates word-pictures realising this aesthetic, her narrative again contains elements straining against the predominant thrust of the novel. As in "Amos Barton", these again become evident in pictorial images which are in some way or other at variance with the novel's central aesthetic policy. In this section, I shall first analyse the pictorial language which Eliot

uses to establish her realist aesthetic in Adam Bede, and then pick out the elements complicating and working against this policy.

Descriptive scenes, framed pictorially, consistently precede the development of action in this novel. Sometimes a metaphor establishes the pictorial status of a description, as in the case of the mirroring drop of ink at the beginning. At other times she directly labels a scene a picture: Hayslope church and its surroundings make such a "picture"; and although she is here talking about the scenery encountered by an anonymous traveller and not a painting as such, her vocabulary places the description firmly in the picturesque tradition of arranging landscapes into pictures. Deixis and adverbs of place guide the implicit eye from feature to feature, starting with dark and uniform masses "[h]igh up against the horizon" and finishing with details of vegetation in the foreground (15). Pictorial allusions are furthermore created by the use of framing devices like doors and windows or the practice of addressing an implied viewer. The description of Broxton Parsonage and its inhabitants uses both of these methods. The narrator leads an undefined "you" into the open doorway of the parsonage dining-room, and from there calls up a domestic interior. As in looking at a painting, the viewers themselves have to give verbal meaning to visual signs (in Ruskin's terms, "talkative facts"): the mixture of threadbare cloth and conspicuous silverware for instance suggests that "the inhabitants of this room have inherited more blood than wealth" (57).

Of importance is the degree to which Eliot relies on these word-pictures to give a trustworthy impression of her fictional world and the close attention she pays to different levels of social existence. There is never any question about whether the narrator reads the signs of this pictured world correctly. She simply goes about substituting verbal signs for pictorial ones, and where such interpretation concerns human figures, the commentary confidently records marks of social differentiation in appearance and behaviour. The "living groups" (16) dotted around Hayslope Green on the evening of Dinah's preaching offer ample scope for sociological observation. A certain arrangement of figures for instance leads the narrator to confident conclusions on the behaviour of "[y]our true rustic" (17).

The fictional world of Hayslope village and its surrounding countryside affords Eliot a wide spectrum of social representatives and environments: labourers and

peasant artisans, farmers and their workers, the school teacher, the inhabitants of Broxton Parsonage, and lastly, the Squire and his descendants at Donnithorne Chase. What is striking here is that although the last group is most potent socially, it is present only in a peripheral way. Despite the fact that Arthur plays a key role in the narrative, his home environment remains pictorially vague. Only when the other social groups are actively present at the Chase (during the coming of age celebrations), does this environment acquire pictorial vividness, and even then the most important aspect portrayed is the communal nature of the festival (22 - 26). Long before her theoretical chapter "In which the story pauses a little", Eliot makes it clear that this novel's social focus falls mainly on "low life" and domestic genre scenery. So, the series of word-paintings through which the Hall Farm materialises at the beginning of chapter 5 involves a deliberate social shift. Seen from the front, the "fine old" house looks long deserted (75); the narrator surmises that its "heavy, handsome door" is no longer opened, although it "must once have been in the habit of shutting with a sonorous bang behind a liveried lackey" (76). Approached from the opposite side, however, the place reveals an aspect which tells quite a different story, not of imagined grandeur in the past, but of a humble, bustling existence in the present. The two radically different pictures resulting from this shift in perspective, time, and social scale announce the subject-matter and the aesthetic selected for this novel: "The history of the house is plain now. . . . It was once the Hall; it is now the Hall Farm. . . . the life at the Hall has changed its focus, and no longer radiates from the parlour, but from the kitchen and the farmyard" (77).

In order to capture this "life" radiating from kitchens and farmyards, Eliot avails herself of a particular language of painting. Probably the most commonly discussed element of *Adam Bede* is her attempt in chapter 17 to demonstrate an alliance between her writing and the art of seventeenth-century Netherlandish genre painters.⁶³ The attractions of paintings belonging to this category are obvious: they are realistic and they depict everyday events, mostly those experienced by the lower and middle classes, with a fondness for minute detail. To these basic characteristics she adds a number of personal associations, familiar through the frequency with which they appear in her periodical writings. According to Eliot genre painting offers the viewer "a source of delicious sympathy" (195) with fellow human beings (especially ones who are less well

off) and therefore also fulfils her requirements for socially didactic art - an expansion of feeling towards "old women scraping carrots" and "heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house" (197) also constitutes a reminder of these people's conditions of life. "It is so needful", Eliot explains, that "we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy" (197).

Clearly, what Eliot adopts in chapter 17 as a concrete metaphor for her novelistic aesthetic is not Netherlandish genre painting as such, but a narrowing down of the genre. Her own associations and preoccupations furthermore so enter into the way in which she deals with the types of painting she selects as representative of the genre that she often misjudges or misrepresents the spirit of this school of painting. As I have indicated, the principles at work in chapter 17 largely rest on theoretical foundations established some years before. But for a clearer idea of what exactly is involved when she forges the aesthetic policy of *Adam Bede* on her own idiosyncratic reading of Netherlandish genre painting, one should turn to a number of paintings prominently in evidence at this stage of the novel's conception - those she encountered during frequent visits to the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. These visits coincide (give or take a few weeks) with the writing of chapter 17.⁶⁴ The gallery is particularly rich in Netherlandish art due to the special interest which several of the Wittelsbach rulers showed in collecting Dutch and Flemish painting.⁶⁵ Among these, seventeenth-century genre pieces find fair representation, ranging from Adriaen van Ostade's rough scenes of peasant revelry to refined celebrations of middle class prosperity by painters like Jan Steen.

Eliot's first extended description of one of these paintings is, significantly, of Gerard Dou's *The Spinner's Grace before Meat* (fig. 45). Although she claims that this piece shows how faithful rendition in art can engender sympathy and appreciation for commonplace, even "low" or ugly, scenes of reality, the particular type of genre painting she chooses here to illustrate her argument can hardly be regarded as an example of faithful or neutral representation. As one of the main Leyden *fijnschilders*, Dou transforms domestic scenes, however humble, into small, meticulously executed panels in glowing colours and with enamelled surfaces, so that the high finish itself speaks of gem-like precision rather than of unstudied realism. Furthermore, the aspect which Eliot pays most attention to in her description of *The Spinner's Grace* is the



Fig. 45. Gerard Dou, The Spinner's Grace Before Meat (c1645); Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



Fig. 46. Adriaen van Ostade, Peasants Making Merry in a Tavern (c1635); Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

effect of “the noonday light” (195) falling through an open window. As in the workshop scene, light signifies a moral, spiritual quality which ennobles reality, especially since in this picture of a woman giving thanks amidst the signs of her frugal life, it equally illuminates (and therefore interlinks) an act of worship and ordinary materiality.

In the first place, then, Eliot selects a pictorial example which idealises ordinary existence and which adds to it a moral dimension. While doing so, and this is where misjudgment or misrepresentation sets in, she insists that a painter like Dou paints the real, that “idealistic” viewers would reject such “vulgar details” and that they would question “all these pains” taken over giving “an exact likeness of old women” (196). On the contrary, Dou’s diligence has quite the opposite effect - of refining rather than vulgarising the real, a quality of the *fijnschilders* which had long been realised by the time that Eliot alluded to the painting in *Adam Bede*. Dou’s painstaking technique for instance makes him a satirical target in Beckford’s *Biographical Memoirs*, and in an extension of his painting-as-talk metaphor, Ruskin portrays the high finish of such Dutch painting as a needless display of eloquence at the expense of expressing substantial truths about reality.⁶⁶

In the second place, Eliot strengthens her fallacious interpretation of this painting as an unadorned and truthful piece of realist art by teaming it up with a rougher type of genre painting, the peasant revelry scene. In this respect, her descriptions and references are fairly generalised, and therefore not traceable to any particular paintings. This in itself gives her scope to manipulate effects and associations not specifically in keeping with the spirit of Netherlandish revelry painting. Among the paintings on this topic in the Alte Pinakothek one finds Adriaen van Ostade’s *Peasants Making Merry in a Tavern* (fig. 46), Pieter de Bloot’s *Peasant Revelry*, and, passing into the Flemish school, Adriaen Brouwer’s *Peasants Smoking and Drinking*. As her first example she describes a village wedding “kept between four brown walls” with an “awkward bridegroom”, a less than graceful bride, and various “elderly and middle-aged friends” with “irregular noses and lips”. These features add up to “an expression of unmistakable contentment and goodwill” (195 - 196). It is significant that she here chooses a family festival rather than a scene of unbridled peasant revelry. Admittedly, she does elsewhere allude to more boisterous revelries, “heavy clowns taking holiday

in a dingy pot-house”, which approach Van Ostade’s and Brouwer’s portrayals of carousing peasants, but even in these cases she beautifies the paintings by adding a moral reminder of how “those rounded backs and stupid weather-beaten faces” have “bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world” (197).

In her effort to find a way of slotting these paintings into her theory of sympathetic realist art, Eliot completely overlooks the almost callous distance which usually exists between painter and subject-matter in peasant revelry scenes. Far from wanting to draw the viewer into a sentimental bond with boisterous rural figures, this tradition presents them to an urban public as curiosities, even as grotesques, partly to entertain sophisticated burghers, but also at least in part to bring them into satirical confrontation with their own primitive selves. Roland Barthes accurately captures this aspect of the tradition when he speaks of the “abortive, shapeless faces” of Van Ostade’s peasants and their appearance as “unfinished creatures, rough drafts of men, arrested at an earlier stage of human development”.⁶⁷ The distance is there between Eliot’s implied viewer and her own version of the revelry picture, but it is a distance which she fills in with moral sentiment and an appeal to common humanity.

The other method she uses to strengthen the realist status of a beautiful cottage interior like Dou’s involves placing it not with paintings a degree rougher in their realism, but against ones which are not at all realistic. Here the choice falls on religious painting, in fact, on religious painting of the ornate Italian Baroque which she, like Ruskin, finds far from sincere. Her double imperative,

Paint us an angel, if you can, with a floating violet robe, and a face
paled by the celestial light; paint us yet oftener a Madonna, turning her
mild face upward and opening her arms to welcome the divine glory

(197)

does not communicate the heartfelt admiration and reverence which religious painting elsewhere inspires in her writings. This is possibly due to the informal challenge contained in “if you can” and the catalogue of features quoted for the representation of angels and Madonnas which give the feeling that she is not here referring to the kind of religious painting that filled her in Dresden with “a sort of awe” as if she were “suddenly in the living presence of some glorious being”.⁶⁸ Witemeyer identifies the Madonna in chapter 17 as the one appearing in Titian’s The Assumption of the

Virgin,⁶⁹ a painting which she saw, however, only years later and which she then greatly admired for the “thoroughly rapt expression” of the Virgin.⁷⁰ This is hardly the impact of the Adam Bede Madonna, which materialises through an anaphoric device evoking the idea of repetitive rather than inspired art. Tellingly, when describing the force of the Titian Madonna’s expression, Eliot uses *paraleipsis* to emphasise the absence of “the usual devices to express spiritual ecstasy, such as delicacy of feature and temperament or pale meagreness”.⁷¹ These negatives are exactly the features which appear in the pale mild faces of the Adam Bede angel and Madonna. Add to this the probability that she encountered a daily irritant in the Alte Pinakothek in the form of Guido Reni’s The Ascension of the Virgin (fig. 47) which displays Mary with the usual sentimental insipidity of this painter’s late religious style, and a much more likely candidate for allusion presents itself than Titian’s Assumption.⁷² Against the vapid glory of a seventeenth-century Bolognese Madonna, Dou’s Spinner indeed appears admirably real, an ordinary woman praying in the light of common day. By the same sleight of hand, Eliot presents her aesthetic policy as exclusively realist. In her urgency, however, to bring home the solidity of her realism, she tends to overlook the extent to which she does beautify and moralise the central rural world of this novel.

Eliot herself would probably have argued that what symbolism there is in this novel belongs to Ruskin’s category of the “naturalist ideal”. A letter written from Munich round about this time describes the simple but evocative organic symbolism at work in realist art and juxtaposes it with the extravagant idealism of modern German art which is “for the most part elaborate lifelessness”. The “huge charades” of Kaulbach in particular come under fire - he wastes his “great faculty” “concocting” symbolic pictures “instead of taking a single moment of reality and trusting to the infinite symbolism that belongs to all nature”.⁷³ When speaking of symbolism in this context, she really means little more than densely packed or telling scenes like Landseer’s Chief-mourner, or the kind of description which again and again introduces new developments in Adam Bede. To put it simply, any clearly realised scene (or “moment of reality”) is for her, as later for James, pregnant with narrative possibilities and therefore also with symbolic potential. Some of the significance of such scenes will rely, as in painting, on the style and arrangement of detail: a pair of spectacles marking



Fig. 47. Guido Reni, The Ascension of the Virgin (1631/32); Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

a place in a Bible no longer to be read, a shaft of light falling on a group of peasant artisans at work.

And indeed, most of the word-pictures in Adam Bede show a closer kinship with nineteenth-century British conversation and problem pictures than with Netherlandish genre.⁷⁴ Though not invariably, the Dutch and Flemish tradition makes habitual states of existence or communal action its primary subject-matter, while Victorian genre painting uses the quotidian and communal as settings for individual action or particular incident. Even when the same type of subject is tackled in these respective traditions, there are marked differences of tone. Vermeer's Woman Reading a Letter (fig. 48) stimulates some narrative questions about the identity and whereabouts of the writer, but the sheer stillness of the scene places speculation in suspense and nowhere does narrative interest override the painting's primary appeal as a superbly controlled arrangement of essentially simple surfaces and forms, space and light. Victorian painters, by contrast, find it hard to resist the strong affective appeal of an object like a letter. Frederick Goodall's A Letter from Papa (fig. 49) elaborates on the theme of absence, vulnerability, and longing by showing the various attitudes of a mother and her three small daughters: the eldest shares the reading mother's expression of suppressed concern, the second child clings to the mother's arm with an openly agitated look, and the smallest seems oblivious of what is happening, except that she is clutching a doll in a way which reinforces the general sense of insecurity. Some Netherlandish genre paintings are similarly arranged around particular incidents, but usually they spell out well established situations, often ones based on proverbs and consequently satirical or comical in tone. "In medicine lies no gain, for love causes the pain"⁷⁵ reads a piece of paper held in the languid hand of Jan Steen's Love-Sick Girl (fig. 50). An obsequious apothecary uses the opportunity to hang on to her other hand, while further sexual innuendo hovers in a distant courtyard where a young man can be dimly seen delivering a note to a servant. The narrative clues are as numerous as in a Victorian problem picture, and yet no Victorian painting would deal so irreverently with moral misdemeanour or the difficulties of courtship.

The process of reading the language of word-picture and aesthetic policy in Adam Bede is far more complicated than Eliot's open alliance with Netherlandish genre suggests. Not only does she limit and idealise the subject-matter of Netherlandish genre



Fig. 48. Jan Vermeer, Woman Reading a Letter, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Fig. 49. Frederick Goodall, A Letter from Papa (1855); Tunbridge Wells Museum, Tunbridge Wells.



Fig. 50. Jan Steen, The Love-sick Girl
(c 1660); Alte Pinakothek, Munich

painting, but she also imposes on it tonal and structural elements of Victorian domestic narrative. A Ruskinian strain of organic, naturalist symbolism enters into this language, but at the same time an idealistic counter-strain carries forward the moral impetus of the novel. When at the beginning of chapter 17 the narrator repeats the mirror image summoned so confidently at the outset of the novel, it becomes evident that some doubts have crept in as to the efficacy of its representational powers. It is no longer a magic mirror, but like Hetty's looking-glass fixed in a single position, a flawed one:

my strongest effort is . . . to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused. . . . (193)

Eliot's hybridised language of painting and the mixed pictorial imagery originating from it register some of these "disturbances" or "confusions" which occur when she attempts to make a novel out of everyday rural experience.

The reference to Hetty and her flawed mirror is relevant here, since it is mainly in the widely divergent treatment of this character and her almost diametrical opposite, Dinah, that most of these representational "disturbances" occur.⁷⁶ More specifically, instead of really trusting to the "infinite symbolism that belongs to all nature", Eliot devises an elaborate system of pictorial symbols in terms of which she shapes her fictional world. These apply to the novel's moral dimension as well, for far from depicting only the simple "moment of reality" and the moral symbolism which she and Ruskin see as organically inherent in such a scene, she also introduces a range of traditional painterly images and their connotations either to censure or to idealise individual action. The novel posits at its centre a world of rural and domestic harmony, of workshop, kitchen and farmyard nostalgically remembered and associated with an idealised form of Netherlandish genre painting (and its early nineteenth-century British off-shoots). Deviations from the rural code likewise take shape through references to pictorial traditions which the narrator uses to establish the moral position of various characters in relation to the central rural world. Characters as different as the Poyzers and Adam are portrayed as sharing a simple but solid moral code ruled by piety and dignity which makes them exactly fit and in fact reinforce, the rural picture encompassing them. Hetty, against this, though adorning and herself drawing fresh

beauty from the dairies, orchards, and hedgerows among which she is depicted, comes across as fundamentally out of sympathy with this world. In a novel which celebrates solid, humble materiality, Hetty's aspiration towards the world of the fashionable parlour, if not through marriage, then by becoming a lady's maid (372), is a sin against rural society, its moral code for individual behaviour, and, not the least, the novel's dominant aesthetic.

Her failure to engage harmoniously with this world becomes immediately apparent in her self-conscious butter-making display before Arthur which, contrary to the pictorial tradition Eliot has in mind for the novel, distracts attention from the individual substantiality of everyday objects like cheese presses and earthenware vessels to draw attention to her own charms. "And they are the prettiest attitudes and movements into which a pretty girl is thrown in making up butter", the narrator remarks with wry amusement and more than a touch of moral displeasure (91). The extent to which both Hetty and Arthur deny her inevitable attachment to a rural background is furthermore registered in a number of references to aristocratic portraiture. Instead of seeing a dairy with butter-maker in the Dutch style, Arthur mentally composes a fancy portrait in the style of Reynolds with Hetty as a "perfect Hebe" (110), a conveniently minor and subservient deity for the operation of his fantasies.⁷⁷ (Hebe is the goddess of youth, cupbearer to the gods and prize to the deified Hercules.) Arthur's imaginary fancy portrait acts as a double metaphor signifying his misconception (he literally dresses Hetty up to suit his social station and fancies), as well as his disguise of the attraction he feels: "if I were an artist I would paint her", he says to Mr Irwine, justifying his lengthy visit to the dairy by putting it in an "artistic light" (110 - 111).

Hetty's own aspirations later find shape in a comparable pictorial simile which perfectly captures her frustration with her own social milieu. In the chapter, "The Two Bed-Chambers", she is again "composing" her looks to best advantage, this time in front of the mirror and for her own benefit (ch. 15). Her aim is to make herself look like "that picture of a lady in Miss Lydia Donnithorne's dressing-room" (164). The narrator is openly critical of Hetty's association with aristocratic portraiture, which is made to reveal the purely materialistic nature of her fantasies: "of every picture she is the central figure in fine clothes" (169). More seriously, the "picture of a lady" looming

obsessively in all her views of the future completely displaces the rural world which the narrator represents in this novel with such loving care.

For this reason, the narrator's sympathetic focus moves past Hetty to rest on the rural world which she rejects; and yet she remains the character who provides the plot with its most dynamic material. The novel as a whole rather suffers from the fact that Hetty is treated neither as a complex character psychologically nor as one who provokes any real sympathy beyond pity. Time and again the narrator points out that hers is not a character capable of feeling deep discomfort, while the plot shows her acting more and more desperately as she feels herself increasingly alienated from society. The final alienation occurs when the narrative itself parts company with Hetty just before she commits her ultimate crime against society, an event dealt with only indirectly through court evidence and her confession in jail. By circumventing the climax of the plot in this way, Eliot refuses to face up to a very real dilemma in her aesthetic thinking of the time: that although the communal life of a rural people may offer the novelist a great deal of basic background material to work with, it does not in itself contain enough of specific incident or individual action to sustain plot or theme. Hetty to a large extent proves to be a casualty of Eliot's aesthetic, ironically so, for very much like the youthful Marian Evans she may well complain that hers is "a walled-in world", like a painting by Wilkie. Down to her thick-soled shoes she has been grounded in the world of kitchen and farmyard, and whereas other of Eliot's characters gain at least spiritual insight and authorial respect through aspiring beyond their immediate surroundings, Hetty's rebellion, represented as a fanciful longing for frippery, brings her only loss and damnation.

On the one hand, then, Eliot argues for "the faithful representing of commonplace things" (197); on the other she tacitly recognises their lack of novelistic interest by disrupting their harmony. This opens up the further possibility of making the redemption of this world and the return of harmony the main narrative business of the novel. To effect this she again uses painterly symbolism, and again her symbols lie outside the field of Netherlandish and British genre painting. Just as references to aristocratic portraiture reflect Hetty's betrayal of the novel's rural code, a series of religious images identifies Dinah as the redeemer of the everyday. Her visits to the world of Hayslope from early on have a supernatural quality. Lisbeth associates her

appearance with “the face o’ one as is a-sittin’ on the grave i’ Adam’s new Bible” (120). Dinah restores the harmony disrupted by Hetty and reintegrates the sorrowful past with the community’s continued daily existence. This sense of sanctified reintegration comes across clearly in Adam’s assessment of his newly realised love as “a resurrection of his dead joy” (554).

In many ways, however, this idealised figure disturbs the novel’s central aesthetic as much as Hetty’s lack of feeling for this world does. On the level of pure narrative the characters are complementary - the resolution of Dinah’s love story provides a much needed impetus once Hetty’s sentence has transported her beyond the novel’s mechanisms for direct representation. In other ways, too, Hetty and Dinah stand in a binary relationship which cuts across the central aesthetic of “representing commonplace things” and which polarises the novel’s thematic interests into egotistic materialism on one side and self-effacing spirituality on the other. In the chapter, “The Two Bed-Chambers”, Eliot presents them in what amounts to a Victorian Sacred and Profane Love.⁷⁸ Dinah is shown looking out of her window at the peaceful fields while she is committing her “yearning anxieties for others” to the “Love and Sympathy” of the “Divine Presence” (173); Hetty is looking into her mirror in rapt admiration of what a pair of coloured glass earrings can do for her charms (165 - 166).

The explicit arrangement of the two characters as moral opposites works against the notion of relying on the organic symbolism inherent in a “moment of reality”. Although it may look as if Eliot has done nothing more than arrange her observations from nature mentally in the manner of Ruskin’s “naturalist ideal”, the strict body-soul division reveals an excessive reliance on a moral scheme imposed from the outside. Admittedly, some of the pictorial symbols contributing to the moral scheme originate organically. Lisbeth’s naïve perception of Dinah as an angel stems from an illustration concretely present in two narrative scenes. But instead of “trusting to the infinite symbolism” of such scenes, Eliot complements them on an authorial level by means of moral commentary, schematic arrangements, and extraneous symbols. At Arthur’s birthday celebrations, the staunch Methodist, Seth, imagines Dinah “more vividly after looking at the thoughtless faces and gay-coloured dresses of the young women - just as one feels the beauty and the greatness of a pictured Madonna the more, when it has been for a moment screened from us by a vulgar head in a bonnet” (311). Eliot’s

symbolic ideal breaks spectacularly through the texture of her realism here, in that this pictorial image could never have originated in Seth's mind and furthermore clashes with Dinah's image as it has been portrayed up to this point.

Whether conceived organically or at an authorial level, Dinah's pictorial image is at odds with the novel's rural setting. Similar to Hetty in this respect, she at the same time proves to be her diagrammatic opposite, for whereas Hetty's worldliness leads to her expulsion from the narrative, Dinah's other-worldliness is gradually blended into the Hayslope environment, so that she appears in the epilogue at the centre of a domestic scene, still illuminated, as before, by the "very dazzling" rays of the sun, but now also firmly bound to the rural world by her "more matronly figure" and family of children (593).

The epilogue's "picture" of a domesticated Dinah is a superficial attempt at combining the character's extraordinary spirituality with the very ordinary surroundings celebrated in this novel. As such it contrasts sharply with an earlier scene which draws on pictorial convention to give a more complex and satisfying view of the tensions generated between ideal and real, spiritual and domestic calling. This scene is set against the background of the Hall Farm kitchen, an environment which materialises in chapter 6 with all the substantive solidity of a Dutch genre interior. Amidst the play of light on pewter dishes, brass candle-sticks, and a "mellow oak" table, Dinah's ephemeral features reflect, as always, a shining spirituality. Her calm industry is balanced against the restless physical activity of the committed matron, Mrs Poyser, whose "keen glance" furthermore carries the implied viewer's eye into the architectural recesses of the dairy, where Hetty is making up butter, and the back-kitchen, where Nancy is taking pies out of the oven (78 - 79). But despite the overtly Dutch "feel" of the scene, Eliot identifies the description with religious painting: the "family likeness" between the two women, with "the contrast" between Mrs Poyser's "keenness" and Dinah's "seraphic gentleness of expression", might have served a painter as an excellent suggestion for a Martha and Mary" (79). The specific religious subject-matter referred to is no coincidence, for apart from graphically balancing the choice between spiritual and domestic vocation, Mary and Martha paintings are frequently of a mixed genre, combining the religious idealism of sacred history painting with the everyday realism of conversation pieces and domestic interiors. Martha's

preoccupation with things domestic gives the painter of sacred history the opportunity to stray away from a spiritual (often iconographically conventional) emphasis, and into the reality of a kitchen environment. Paintings dealing with the Mary and Martha subject for this reason often display what may be called generic zones. Tintoretto's painting of the subject foregrounds Christ and Mary locked in conversation, the angles of their bodies with Christ bending forward and Mary backward forming a parallelogram in the lower half of the canvas (fig. 51). Leaning over this space, and half-intruding into it with an extended arm, Martha sets up a conflicting oblique line which spans the space between fore- and background and furthermore gives the illusion of three dimensionality in the form of a figure apparently tilting forward, out of the canvas. Significant here (temptingly so, given that Eliot could see this painting every day in the Alte Pinakothek while working on Adam Bede) is the little back-kitchen, framed by a doorway in the upper right hand corner and connected by the transverse line of Martha's body to the foreground zone containing the figures in sacred conversation. The kitchen miniature, complete with pewter plates on shelves, shining copper, and serving-woman busied at the hearth, becomes something of a generic incongruity interjected by Martha and interrupting the foreground conversation. At the same time this little inset is kept in place in the background, as much by Tintoretto's illusionist techniques as by the closed formation of the foreground figures which exactly bears out Christ's ruling that Mary, who has "chosen" the "good part", should not be troubled with Martha's domestic cares (St. Luke 10 : 42).

A curious anomaly made Martha's presence increasingly secure in the history of art (despite Christ's dismissal of her claim) as painters tended to turn more and more to the everyday world for their subject-matter. Velasquez, with his naturalist's eye for low life scenery, places a coarsely-featured Martha, a peasant cook, in the foreground (fig. 52). Arrayed on her kitchen table are ingredients in their unrefined state: a platter of uncooked fish, cloves of garlic and a plateful of eggs. These crude details completely upstage a small religious inset in the top right hand corner showing Mary at Christ's feet. R. H. Fuchs mentions a comparable version of the subject by the Dutch painter Pieter Aertsen in which two flirting figures and a table laden with a sumptuous feast predominate in the foreground. According to Fuchs "[t]he point of the picture

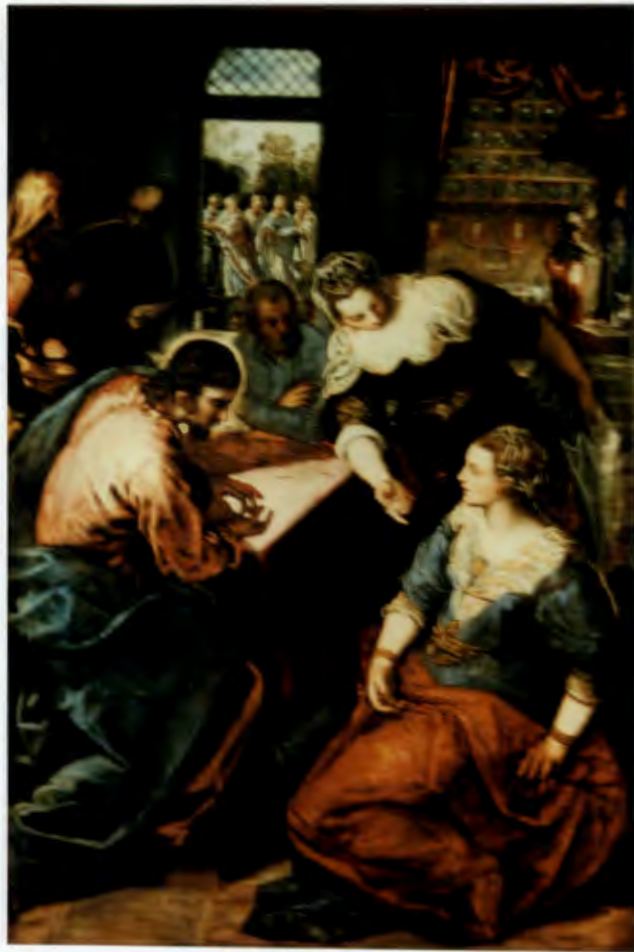


Fig. 51. Tintoretto, Christ at the House of Mary and Martha (c1580); Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



Fig. 52. Diego Velázquez, Christ in the House of Martha and Mary (c1618); National Gallery, London; rpt. in The World of Velázquez, ed. Dale Brown (New York: Time, 1969) 48 and 49.

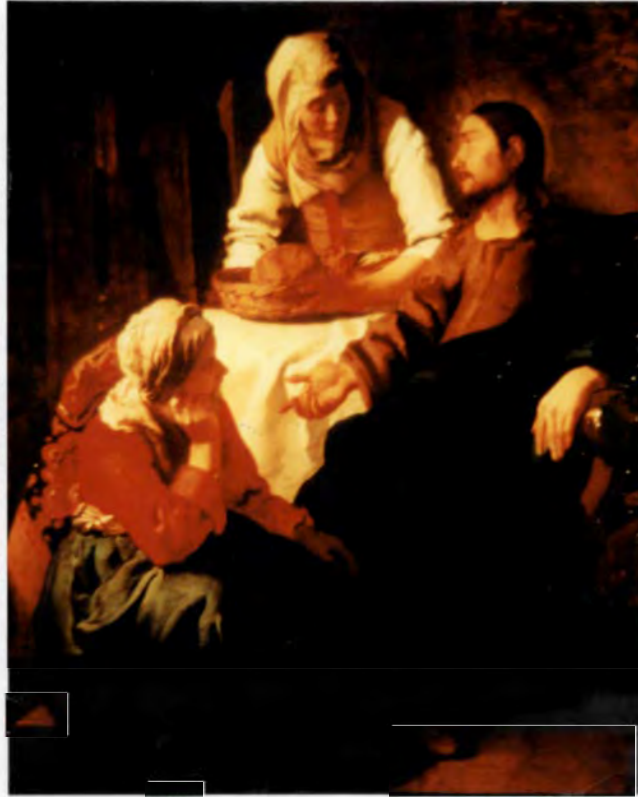


Fig. 53. Vermeer, Christ in the House of Mary and Martha, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.

was that contemplation of the dissolute kitchen scene, in relation to the biblical exemplum in the background, would remind people to lead a virtuous life".⁷⁹ A less radical inversion is Vermeer's painting on the theme (fig. 53). Like Tintoretto, he has Martha intervening between Christ and Mary from the background, but through a painstaking modulation of light and texture he gives this figure and her homely basket of bread the crisp simplicity and quiet presence which characterise his self-sufficient peasant women at work. In this painting it is really only the zone containing Martha which conveys the essence of Vermeer's art. The range of earthy textures and colours, her poise, and her intricately swathed three quarter profile, half lit-up, half-shaded, are impressive vehicles for his particular kind of art. In comparison, Mary's fully shaded and Christ's luminous profile, their more conventional robes, and their relaxed positions carry far less of this painter's characteristic lucidity.

Painters of the everyday world, then, find more of aesthetic interest in Martha's situation than in Mary's. And so, in her way, does Eliot when she gradually transforms Dinah from a figure with a spiritual vocation into one who settles for domesticity as her calling. The Mary and Martha allusion in chapter 6 places ideal and real in a relation of dynamic tension, whereas the narrative process which incorporates Dinah into the Hayslope community involves a less satisfying attempt at resolving the conflict between ideal and real in Eliot's early aesthetic. No matter how emphatically chapter 17 argues for the validity of the commonplace, Dinah's idealised spirituality (like Hetty's materialism) calls this argument into question. With Dinah's metamorphosis from Mary to Martha at the end of the novel, Eliot tries to redress this fallacy, but as in the case of Hetty she does it again at the expense of a character's individual aspirations. Dinah has to lose her sense of vocation before she can become a housewife in Hayslope. And even as she is wrapping up the narrative, Eliot makes sure to bring in an historical reference which further robs Dinah of her individuality - the Wesleyan Conference which forbade preaching by women. With Adam's measured approval of his wife's submission to this decree (596), the novel strikes a final note of compromised idealism.

In the light of the problems which beset Eliot's depiction of individual action in Adam Bede, it is not surprising to find that The Mill on the Floss to a large extent abandons the theoretical position of the early writing.⁸⁰ Maggie is oppressed and

thwarted by both her immediate domestic and her wider social environment, and yet she becomes the prime object of the narrator's sympathies. Moreover, especially towards the end of the novel, this character is unreservedly idealised, so that her actions become saintly even though she has been expelled from society.

The effect of this shift of perception can be seen most clearly in the altered nature of description in this novel. Instead of the exaggerated confidence characterising the word-pictures appearing at the outset of Adam Bede, an uneasiness can be detected in the descriptions establishing the physical world of the later novel. Finding herself unable to treat the social world of St Ogg's with the same reverence and sympathy as that of Hayslope, Eliot ends up devising a cult of childhood and early memory within which homely existence and everyday experience are consecrated almost in isolation from the actual events of the novel.⁸¹ This goes for the happy morning which Maggie and Tom spend fishing.⁸² The episode does not aim at awakening social sympathies, but strives to draw attention to the existence of a psychological common-ground within which individual perceptions and experience acquire meaning.

Next to these personalised nostalgic pictures of life on the river Floss and its tributaries, the narrator puts sharply delineated views of the Tulliver household and the larger social environment of St Ogg's. In this case, too, the type of word-picture found in Adam Bede proves unsuitable for depicting the sense of oppressive materialism permeating the later novel. Eliot frequently exposes characters' ridiculous and morbid attachment to material objects in The Mill by foregrounding satirical details which disrupt the pictorial wholes so important in the composition of Adam Bede. This is the case in the scene which shows Mrs Tulliver weeping over her possessions after the family's downfall:

Mrs Tulliver was seated there with all her laid-up treasures. . . . spoons and skewers and ladles were spread in rows on the shelves; and the poor woman was shaking her head and weeping, with a bitter tension of the mouth, over the mark, "Elizabeth Dodson", on the corner of some table-cloths she held in her lap. (177)

The description draws cryptically on pictorial characteristics of a well-established branch of British genre painting from Hogarth onwards - the family in crisis.⁸³ This type of painting often shows the natural order of a domestic interior rearranged to



Fig. 54. R.B. Martineau, The Last Day in the Old Home (1860); Tate Gallery, London.

become suggestive of dissolution. Conspicuously labelled or unnaturally grouped objects may communicate the disruption of homely qualities, suggesting the way in which impersonal legal forces break in on domestic comforts and securities (see fig. 54). Although the store-room scene glosses such conventional pictorial clues, its main impact lies in the satiric focus on the obsolete name label and the material properties of various household objects which dominate Mrs Tulliver's sense of loss so incongruously. With her husband lying in "a sort of living death" nearby, she fusses endlessly about her "spotted" and checked cloths, the "chany" with the "small gold sprig all over 'em, between flowers" and "the things wi' my name on 'em" (178 - 179). Instead of composing a scene of pathos or admonition as so often found in Victorian family in crisis paintings, Eliot here aims at a particular exposure of petty and cloying materialism, a quality of St. Ogg's society which is contrasted with Maggie's more generous sentiments. Neatly inverting Mrs Tulliver's misplaced sorrow, the narrator shows how in Maggie the "implied reproaches against her father . . . neutralized all her pity for griefs about table-cloths and china" (179).

As I have tried to indicate, Eliot's ambivalent mixture of idealised nostalgia and sharply delineated social satire in The Mill causes her to deviate from the practice of arranging material details into pictorial wholes from which the action and thematic development of the narrative flow. Whereas the aesthetic and thematic "arguments" tackled in Adam Bede are shaped (sometimes distorted) by her personal language of painting, those evolving during the course of the second novel depend far more on allusions which are predominantly literary, and on the analytic, abstract powers (rather than the concretely descriptive) qualities of language. Using this medium, the narrator closely follows Maggie's progress through life, stopping frequently to assess the effect of external circumstances in her family and wider social environment on her mental state, and marking out the stages of her journey with abstract concepts like guilt, atonement, rebellion, and renunciation. At the same time, however, this novel does make greater use than Adam Bede of pictures which occur as concrete objects in the narrative. Barring the portrait of a lady at Donnithorne Chase and the angel in the illustrated Bible, pictorial allusions in Adam Bede are all imposed from the outside, representing varying degrees of authorial control, intervention or compromise. In The

Mill the situation is more complex in that most pictorial references are built organically into the narrative.

The book illustrations which delight Maggie as a little girl are credible as objects likely to occur in a lower middle class setting. But apart from helping to establish the concrete world of Dorlcote Mill, they conveniently illustrate aspects of Maggie's character and the society within which her character takes on form. When she offers Luke her Pug's Tour of Europe with its coloured illustrations of "the different sorts of people in the world" (26), it is to show off her cleverness. The type of illustration - both Pug's Tour and Animated Nature offer views of foreign cultures and creatures - has implications beyond this. If one puts all the illustrations which Maggie encounters in Book 1 side by side, their subject-matter and symbolism, Maggie's response as a viewer, and other characters' reactions to her together initiate themes and structures which extend throughout the novel. On the one hand appears Maggie's passionate yearning for experience and knowledge, a type of idealism which sets her apart from the materialist society surrounding her; on the other hand the restrictions and censures which a traditionalist society imposes on more imaginative individuals emerge. Maggie's enthusiasm for pictures of witches and devils discomfort the two adults in her company. Mr Riley suggests the reading of "prettier books" (16), and when Maggie retorts that his idea of a "beautiful book", The Pilgrim's Progress, contains "a great deal about the devil", including a striking picture, her father sends her off to "see after" her thoroughly domesticated mother (17). Maggie's abilities upset her society's norms. Her father comments on the "topsy-turvy" state of a world in which "lads" are "stupid" and "wenches" "'cute'" (17). That such incongruities may hold dangers in repressive societies is suggested by the nature of the pictures in the scenes above. Maggie's thirst for knowledge and the references to the devil turn her into a miniature Faustus. Moreover, in a society which adheres strictly to rules, individuals deviating from the norm often end up in dilemmas as preposterous as that of the witch in Maggie's exposition of another picture: "they've put her in [the water] to find out whether she's a witch or no, and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned . . . she's innocent. . . . But what good would it do her then . . .?" (16).

Despite the differences between Adam Bede and The Mill, it is important to note that the later novel in many ways rephrases rather than rejects thematic elements of the

first. The same goes for the basic aesthetic underlying the respective novels. The main thrust of The Mill is to exhibit the inevitable conflict between the “outward fact” of commonplace existence and the “inward impulse” felt by extraordinary individuals (241). The Rhône-Rhine chapter introducing Book 4 sets about justifying the depiction of the “outward”. The family life of the Tullivers and Dodsons, she admits, is “a sordid life” “irradiated by no sublime principles, no romantic visions” and furthermore “without that primitive rough simplicity of wants . . . which gives its poetry to peasant life” (238). Instead of concluding as in Adam Bede that such average lives form part of a common humanity and therefore demand a place in art, she argues, circuitously, that it is necessary that art should depict “this sense of oppressive narrowness” and that “we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie” (238). The focus, therefore, has shifted to individual lives, and since Tom largely shares the “religious and moral ideas of the Dodsons and Tullivers” (238) discussed in detail in the rest of the chapter, it follows that Maggie’s frustrated desires elicit most of the narrator’s sympathy in this novel.

In The Mill Eliot openly admits the conflict between ideal and real. The novel openly abandons references to earthy genre painting and turns to pictures and painterly vision for the idea they give of characters’ spiritual yearnings. It is significant that the novel relies heavily on the vision of Philip, an amateur artist, to contradict the negatives describing the regions in which Maggie’s behaviour fails her family’s and society’s norms. Philip from the first recognises her “unsatisfied intelligence, and unsatisfied, beseeching affection” (156). Eyes are conventional gateways to the soul, and it is through Maggie’s eyes that Philip builds up his conception of her character. Her questioning gaze as a little girl communicates a sense of mysterious nobility, evoking an Ovidian image of “princesses” metamorphosed into “animals” (156). Elsewhere Philip remarks on her eyes’ eloquence: ““They seem trying to speak - trying to speak kindly”” (161); and when he eventually captures his view in paint, he shows Maggie “looking into space with strange, dreamy eyes” (264). In planning his second portrait, he likewise focuses on spirituality and natural nobility: ““You will look like a tall Hamadryad, dark and strong and noble, just issued from one of the fir-trees”” (287).

The relationship between Maggie and Philip reintroduces the idea (first explored in the sketch, "How to Avoid Disappointment") that art can give meaning to life. According to Philip, Maggie's effect on him equals his experience of great works of art - both kinds of experience represent "the strongest effects our natures are susceptible of" and the force of both is inexplicable: "The greatest of painters only once painted a mysteriously divine child" (268). Through Philip's idealisation of love and art, Eliot places a powerful image of divinity (identified convincingly by Witemeyer as the Christ child in Raphael's Sistine Madonna)⁸⁴ against the imagery of witches and devils signifying Maggie's precarious position in society.

Although Philip liberates Maggie's image from the constrictions of society by formulating, in a Ruskinian way, the "truth" about her character, he also intensifies the basic thematic conflict between "outward fact" and "inward impulse". Like Macarthy in the early sketch, Philip believes that the artist should live "for the good, the true, the beautiful"⁸⁵ - but what such idealism amounts to in The Mill is not an easy theoretical avoidance of disappointment as in the sketch, but the novel's full realisation that the conditions of ordinary existence more often than not frustrate ideals. With Philip's appearance in the Red Deeps, the thematic conflict between ideal and real increases in force and complexity. His insight into Maggie's character, the highly individualistic, even visionary, nature of his observations which enables him to pierce through the dense conventionality of existence in St Ogg's, elevates her sense of yearning and her suffering onto a higher plane.

But he also uses his insight to serve his own interests. When he berates Maggie for renouncing "the highest powers" of her nature (288), he is as concerned about the possibility that she might renounce him as he is about her habit of "benumbing and cramping" her spirit (289). The way in which he idealises her is limiting exactly because it makes him equate Maggie's "effect" on him with that of a work of art: either might "make life worth the purchase-money of pain" by lifting him "above the dead level of provincial existence" and the limitations of his deformity (287). Although Philip is by no means a sinister character, the association of people with works of art has demonstrably sinister overtones. Given his knowledge of Maggie's quick sympathies, sense of devotion, and crippling family life, it is inevitable that he should gain undue power over her emotions. The result is a relationship full of

ambiguities in which Maggie has to subdue sexual passion to a sense of superior spirituality and gratitude, and which eventually puts her in yet another insoluble dilemma.

In her relationship with Stephen, Maggie discovers the sexual element said to be lacking in Philip's love. But in a curious thematic parallel Eliot makes the force of physical love as mysterious and inexplicable as the spirituality governing Philip's experience of love. An allusion to religious painting lifts Philip's love onto an ideal plane while a couple of references to ancient classical sculpture place Maggie and Stephen's relationship equally outside the bounds of ordinary provincial life. This can be seen most clearly in a comparison of the pretty charms and playful attentions characterising the socially acceptable love scene between Lucy and Stephen with the archetypically charged images of pure passion at work outside the boundaries of social behaviour between Maggie and Stephen. The choice of sculpture to suggest the latter force is particularly significant, in that the plasticity and momentous poise of three-dimensional art create a sense of focused power not easily achieved on the flat surface of a canvas. Wrestling with his illicit passion, Stephen bears a frown "which would not have been beneath the occasion if he had been slaying 'the giant Python'" (381). The reference associates Stephen with Apollo, therefore also with idealised masculinity and heroism. Only a few pages later, during the ball at Park House, Eliot justifies Stephen's loss of control by calling on the emotive appeal of "the beauty of a woman's arm" (388). Her reference is to one of the statues of the Parthenon. The tenor of the justification is that since "[a] woman's arm touched the soul of a great sculptor two thousand years ago, so that he wrought an image of it for the Parthenon which moves us still" it is small wonder that Stephen is "seized" by a "mad impulse" to kiss it (388). Maggie's reaction, "like a wounded war-goddess" (388), fits in with the allusion to the Parthenon sculpture, since the building is a temple sacred to Athena Parthenos, and contained a massive cult statue by Phidias of this most impressive of goddesses.

The inclusion of images from classical statuary significantly expands the range of symbols in *The Mill* and again reveals Eliot's tendency to exert a strict control over her writing. At this stage she still regards her aesthetic as primarily realist.⁸⁶ But with *The Mill* she also starts exploring the use of mythology in conjunction with social realism. The classical and Christian symbolism introduced into the narrative by means of

references to various visual art forms thus provides something of a parallel commentary on the cultural and natural forces which underlie social existence in Western society.

Against this background, it is important to note that the final resolution of this novel takes place not outside society but at the heart of it. For this to happen, it is essential that the conflict between spiritual and physical passion and the clash of both of these with the conditions of social reality in St Ogg's remain unresolved. Philip and Stephen, who each in his own way wishes to remove Maggie from society, are consequently side-lined towards the end of the novel. The ideals they represent separately are reintegrated by Maggie's suffering in society, as well as by her act of rescue.

Maggie is Eliot's most uncompromised main character and through the depiction of her situation an essentially tragic view of human life emerges. The variety of symbolic strains threaded into this depiction reveals a complex and ambivalent picture of individual and social existence, with the extraordinary individual playing the role of both witch and divinity, sinner and saint. In her essay, "The Antigone and its Moral", Eliot defines the tragically mixed nature of all action born from "elemental tendencies" clashing with "established laws". No matter how strong the "intellect, or moral sense, or affection" bringing individuals "into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned", it inevitably also places them "in opposition to a good - to a valid principle which cannot be infringed without harm". In this philosophy there are no pure martyrs or victims; nor villains: "the society" (that which has been opposed or defied) can in no way be "branded as a hypocritical tyrant".⁸⁷ In The Mill Eliot carries this scheme uncompromisingly to the end. Like the witch in her childhood book, Maggie has to drown to prove her social worth. The "inner impulse" placing her in social ostracism is also the quality which gives her life its moments of divinity - whether of Christ child, saint or classical goddess. This quality also redeems provincial society, in that Maggie's death provides an inspiring example of unquestioning love similar to that consecrated in the legend of the town's patron saint who "didst not question and wrangle with the heart's need, but wast smitten with pity, and didst straightway relieve the same" (102 - 103). Maggie's attempt to save her brother is presented in the light of

this legend, marking the moment when society (here represented by Tom) finally recognises the passionate life which Philip captured years before in his portraits:

it was such a new revelation to his spirit, of the depths in life, that had lain beyond his vision. . . . They sat mutely gazing at each other: Maggie with eyes of intense life looking out from a weary, beaten face. . . . and though he could ask no question, he guessed a story of almost miraculous divinely-protected effort. (458)

The Mill, then, ends with an event which weaves the extraordinary action of an individual into the texture of society and so embodies the ideal in the real. Symbols drawn from the visual arts are instrumental in this. They register the conflict between ideal and real and make it quite clear that Maggie's aspirations, feelings, nobility, and even errors lie on an ideal plane. Society's recognition of this superiority at the end of the novel vindicates the truth of painterly vision (Philip's artistic sensibility makes him the only person capable of seeing the true Maggie). The later novel Romola continues this use of pictorial symbolism to examine the individual's place in society. Like The Mill, this novel also has as one of its characters a painter figure with remarkable abilities to read characters and situations. Set in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century, it contains more references to the visual arts than any of Eliot's other novels. And yet it is also this novel which marks a crisis in her attitude to the visual arts and their use in fiction. My discussion of Romola will first investigate the role of pictorial symbolism in the depiction of individual characters and their historical context, then move on to criticise Eliot's use of painterly material in this novel.

In The Mill Eliot justifies her depiction of narrow provincial existence with a quick explanation of how a study of reality reveals examples of "[t]he suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind" (238). The historical process itself becomes the central concern in Romola, at least in theory, for this novel is also constructed more perceptibly than any of the others around a pre-conceived idea - an idea, derived from Comtean Positivism, that society is slowly advancing towards a new, better order. History is a process recording this slow advance and should therefore be scrutinised for patterns of progress. For Eliot, Florence of the late fifteenth century provides such an example, specifically the turbulent transitional years after the death of Lorenzo de Medici in 1492 until shortly

after the expiry of Savonarola's brief period of influence in 1498. As in *The Mill*, Eliot studies history to assess its effects on individual lives, but in *Romola* she also reverses the process to evaluate the way in which certain individuals contribute to the general advance of humanity. (This idea is pursued only on a symbolic level in *The Mill*, with the consecration of Maggie's love as an example of the best a human being is capable of.)

Works of art play a role in both symbolising the historical process and portraying aspects of individual lives in *Romola*. Although the novel focuses on a relatively short period (the epilogue extends the basic period by another eleven years), cultural strains from pagan and classical antiquity onwards are represented in Florentine society by references to works of art. Fragments of Greek and better preserved pieces of Roman art appear in the concrete world of the novel to suggest various influences. Icons give a sense of early and medieval Christian traditions still extant in the everyday life of fifteenth-century Florentine society. More specifically, these icons also symbolise the return to a starker form of religious and moral life advocated by Savonarola in opposition to the spirit of the Florentine Renaissance. This period of massive innovation is itself comprehensively represented in the novel through wide-ranging references to heralds like Ghiberti and Masaccio, as well as to artists firmly established in Renaissance traditions like Ghirlandaio.⁸⁸ What this mass of references amounts to is a telescoping of important phases in the development of Western culture, making *Romola* more of a cultural-historical epic than an historical novel.

The fictional sketch (attributed to Piero di Cosimo) which Nello shows off at the beginning seems to be a conscious attempt at drawing together and ordering the main cultural strains appearing in the novel. The sketch represents three masks, "a drunken laughing Satyr", "a sorrowing Magdalen", and between them, "the rigid, cold face of a Stoic" (36). They rest on the lap of a child "whose cherub features rose above them with something of the supernal promise in the gaze which painters had by that time learned to give to the Divine Infant" (33). In her chapter, "The Greek, Roman, and Christian World", Felicia Bonaparte interprets this sketch as "a pictorial synopsis of the history of Western civilization on which the remainder of the book will elaborate".⁸⁹ The sketch also forms a convincing basis for her exposition of the cultural traditions operative in this novel, the way in which they "represent different visions of life", how

“these visions are associated with individual characters”, and how they at the same time mark different stages of development in Romola’s life.⁸⁸ The exposition is compelling and thorough, leaving little room for further comment, except on the status and symbolism of the child. Bonaparte stresses the symbolic importance of the child, but does so in a way which on the one hand obscures, on the other oversimplifies its significance. The three masks, of course, symbolise joyful but potentially degenerate Greek paganism (mainly embodied in Tito), Roman stoicism (as manifested in the old men Bardo and Bernardo), and a form of Christianity emphasising sin, chastisement, and atonement (practised by Dino and Savonarola). The child, as Bonaparte recognises, is qualitatively different - it represents “the subtler, living flesh beneath” symbolic forms - but it is not clear what she means when she says that “it is this deeper, more elusive substance that Romola will touch in her final phase when she confronts at last the ultimate, inarticulate, empirical fact”. Furthermore, Bonaparte’s subsequent equation of this figure with “the Christ child who guides the last steps of Romola’s pilgrimage”⁸⁹ makes the symbol an exclusively Christian one, whereas the description in the novel contains hints suggesting that it is one of Eliot’s powerful syntheses of the ideal and the real in a single image. In the novel the child is said to be depicted realistically, but its gaze transcends the real, and in the history of art, it is associated with the works of artists who “had by that time learned” to inject religious convention with the spirit of enlightened humanism”.⁹⁰

As such, then, the child figure (whose “features” after all “rise above” the other images) becomes a complex symbol of cultural advance. The child is essentially a humanist image which retains the strong mediatory symbolism of the Christ figure, especially if one keeps in mind the status of Christ in the Higher Criticism of Strauss and Feuerbach. Strauss’s thinking in particular is relevant here, since he sees Christ as a symbolic ideal which realises itself in humanity’s progress through history from a “natural” state to the attainment of the “true spiritual life”.⁹¹ In the place of episodes from Christ’s life, Strauss puts examples of how humanity is in the process of perfecting itself.⁹² Feuerbach is more specific in defining the spiritual powers which Strauss sees evolving. Wit, imagination, feeling, and reason are for him “powers of humanity not of man as an individual; they are products of culture, products of human society”.⁹³ The idea of Christ or the myth of the mediator explains why individuals

have to renounce their sense of self to transcend their own limitations and to enter the process of spiritual evolution of which the theoretical endpoint is an ideal state of existence.

In Piero di Cosimo's sketch the child literally and symbolically holds together the different "faces" of Western culture. This is also Romola's role in the narrative. Eliot nowhere rejects any of these cultural forces; on the contrary, in *Romola* she creates a figure who in the first place passes through all three phases, in the second combines elements from each of these in her psychological make-up, and in the third emerges as a symbolic ideal exactly as a product of her varied experiences and mental constitution. But although the progress of humanity is in the end embodied in the figure of Romola, the main substance of the novel involves the depiction of figures and cultural tendencies which are far from ideal. Even Romola's ultimate transcendence is part of a process in which conflicting forces play a vital role. Different cultural influences, usually as typified by individual characters, vie for supremacy in her life (as in Florentine society), while a multitude of perceptions and prejudices are generated, some of them validated by the narrator or by their place in the overall symbolic framework, others obviously remaining the limited vision of mistaken individuals. In keeping with Feuerbachian thought, the main limitation of the characters earlier associated with the three masks is their inability to see beyond their individual cultural identities.⁹⁶ Romola's strength, against this, lies in the relations she builds up with all three systems of belief (and, therefore, within the Western parameters of this novel, with "all humanity").⁹⁷

Cultural objects, including pieces of sculpture, paintings, and religious icons, express both the limitations of individual points of view and Romola's gradual transcendence of self to serve humanity's progress. Tito, the arch-egotist, is the first to reject a vision other than his own. He speaks of "hideous smoked Madonnas; fleshless saints in mosaic, staring down idiotic astonishment and rebuke from the apse . . . women and monks with heads aside in perpetual lamentation" (31). The description is aimed at early Christian iconography which through its starkness communicates the message of the Christian agony. But even the religious art of the Renaissance, with its synthesis of Christian and humanist vision, is not acceptable to Tito. Although the figures in high relief on Ghiberti's bronze Baptistry doors "speak" to Tito "of a

human mind within them”, his final judgment is dismissive, conveying his complete lack of sympathy with Christian concepts like self-sacrifice and compassion:

“I have heard that your Tuscan sculptors and painters have been studying the antique a little. But with monks for models, and the legends of mad hermits and martyrs for subjects, the vision of Olympus itself would be of small use to them.” (31 - 32)

Tito's self-centred and pleasure-loving nature shudders at the sight of Christian devotion. It also shrinks from the Stoic sense of duty. In the process of always serving his own interests first, his loyalties shift from cause to cause, bringing also a perpetual shift in identity. Nello's glib list of pictorial roles for Tito as St Sebastian, Bacchus, and Apollo (43) foreshadows the way in which he later makes himself useful to different political factions. Piero di Cosimo, however, has already noticed the one face underlying all the expressions of Tito's beautiful features: his beauty gives him the face of a “perfect traitor” (43). Tito chooses Nello's image of the youthful Bacchus, god of joy, revelry and new life, to represent himself. The scene in which he explains to Piero di Cosimo how he wants the double miniature of himself and Romola executed brims with triumphant egotism. His prescriptions for the figure of Bacchus are minutely detailed, while Ariadne is an adjunct only meant to increase his glory: “I want to have the fair-haired Ariadne with him, made immortal with her golden crown - that is not in Ovid's story, but no matter, you will conceive it all” (195). What the picture ends up reflecting most clearly is Tito's conception of himself and of his relationship with Romola. His role is throughout dominant, while Ariadne's is passive. He is the rescuer who consoles the deserted Ariadne, the god who bestows immortality. As before, however, Piero di Cosimo's conception of Tito deviates sharply from the chosen image. He has already started on a portrait which does indeed show Tito as a Bacchic reveller holding his wine-cup “in the attitude of triumphant joy”, but a cowardly one whose face is “turned away from the cup” and bears “an expression” of “intense fear in the dilated eyes and pallid lips” (197).

When Piero di Cosimo later paints in an image of Tito's adopted father, Baldassare, as the “ghost” who has frightened him, the picture comes to record a denial of filial duty. This is soon after reinforced by a similar betrayal, the sale of Bardo's library and collection of antiquities placed in his trust. Before informing

Romola of the sale, he tries to persuade her that it would be best for them to leave Florence. The language which he uses directly echoes his association with Bacchus: he claims that he wants to rescue Romola from the harsh realities of Florentine life and the "false stress" which her imagination places on concepts like duty; that she needs "to see a new life", and, finally, that he wishes "to dip her a little in the soft waters of forgetfulness", a strikingly Bacchic image symbolising the ease with which Tito loosens himself from responsibilities that do not benefit his interests (295). This characteristic puts him in direct opposition to the Stoic adherence to duty practised by Bardo, Bernardo, and Romola. The contrast is captured by juxtaposing Tito with a work of art. Having locked Romola in to prevent her from cancelling the sale, he settles "in the easiest attitude possible against a pedestal under the bust of a grim old Roman" (299).

Eliot is obviously critical of the way in which Tito ignores other points of view. This is not to say that she rejects the elemental pagan force *per se*, or that she does not criticise the individual representatives of the other two cultural strains. Bardo's terminology is as scornful as Tito's when it comes to dismissing Christian practices - he bitterly resents the way in which Dino has rejected "all liberal pursuits that he might lash himself and howl at midnight with besotted friars" (55). Furthermore, the Stoic acceptance of the "sustained zeal and unconquerable patience demanded from those who would tread the unbeaten paths of knowledge" (53) has led this prototype of Casaubon into a place completely devoid of humanity. Romola is pictured in her father's library "with a sad dreariness in her young face at the lifeless objects around her - the parchment backs, the unchanging mutilated marble, the bits of obsolete bronze and clay" (54). Bardo himself admits that he has all along preferred to live "with the great dead" of his researches rather than with his fellow Florentines who seem to him mere "shadows dispossessed of true feeling and intelligence" (53).

When one turns to Dino, Savonarola's disciple, one finds that his narrow vision fails to acknowledge both the dedicated life of the scholar and the elemental passion of Tito's paganism. To make concrete Dino's rejection of "the vain philosophy and corrupt thoughts of the heathens", as well as their "unclean gods" (168), Eliot once again draws on the library and collection of antiquities. In an elaborate vision he sees his father and Romola deserted in "a stony place" with "men of bronze and marble springing up and crowding round" them (167). The nightmarish vision strengthens

Dino's charge that Bardo's studies lead away from the reality of human joy and suffering. But then, Dino himself has spent his life away from the world since he believes that God has not chosen him "as he chose Saint Dominic and Saint Francis, to wrestle with evil . . . in the world" but has called upon him to "flee" and live "the life of a hermit" (164 - 165). His image of Bardo as someone "picking shining stones in a mine, while there was a world dying of plague above him" (163) therefore applies as much to his own type of narrow egotism as to Bardo's or Tito's.

It remains to show how the individual limitation of these three men are resolved in the figure of Romola. When Tito first encounters her, she is indeed an Ariadne in need of rescue, confined in her father's dreary library and life of scholarship. After experiencing the "pale images of sorrow and death" at Dino's death bed, Romola herself welcomes Tito's appearance with rhapsodic Bacchic imagery. She associates him with "all images of joy - purple vines . . . round limbs beating the earth in gladness with cymbals held aloft . . . all objects and all sounds that tell of Nature revelling in her force" (189). From the start, however, other forces have a hold over her imagination and actions. She never deviates from her sense of duty, first towards her father and later towards Bernardo, her godfather; and while witnessing Dino's last moments, she has engraved on her consciousness the image of the Christian agony. For each of these forces Eliot once again devises a concrete cultural object: Tito's invention, the Bacchus and Ariadne triptych, picturing the period of joyful sexual awakening, Piero di Cosimo's conception of Romola's Stoic resistance in the Oedipus and Antigone painting, and Dino's simple wooden crucifix. The symbolism of each object dominates a specific phase in Romola's development, but there is also a latent symbolism which always keeps alive the implications of the other two images at any particular time. The result is that Romola comes across as a realistically portrayed individual capable of psychological change and adaptation, with the symbolic elements which together make up the ideal figure at the end present throughout the novel. An impression of both the temporal process and the a-temporal ideal can be gained from the way in which Eliot constantly shifts and rearranges these pictorial labels attached to Romola.

Her first pictorial identity, that of Ariadne, is dominant for a very short while and is from the start beset by conflicts and ironies. Although Tito "rescues" her from the library, her moral consciousness and personal pride are too firmly established for her to

submit truly to Bacchic “forgetfulness”. Piero di Cosimo’s two paintings of Romola are after all contemporaneous: Antigone co-exists with Ariadne. Furthermore, her early capacity for love and sympathy represents in germ the compassionate Madonna, the role she takes on first among the Florentine people and later in the plague-stricken village (the Christian identity latent in the Ariadne phase is symbolised by the crucifix which Tito locks away in the triptych).

Apart from these conflicting forces, the Ariadne image develops further complexities of meaning. Contrary to the general tendency in Victorian classical-subject painting to see Ariadne as female helplessness passively awaiting the Bacchic rescue,⁹⁸ Eliot’s Ariadne proves to be resiliently independent, capable of the same impetuous energy as Bacchus, and indomitable in her quest for new beginnings. Early disappointment in marriage brings out Antigone’s pride and resistance to adversity; the Antigone part of her character is also dominant in her loyalty to her father’s last wish. But Tito’s betrayal of this wish causes the “natural impetuosity” associated with Ariadne’s Bacchic phase to resurface, this time as “repulsion”, not love (335). Her recoil from Tito is “in proportion to the energy of that young belief and love which he had disappointed” (335). Checked in her flight by Savonarola, she returns to Florence to begin a new phase which intertwines the identities of Antigone and the Madonna. In doing her social duty in the famished city, she renounces her individual will and finds new purpose in “the diminishing of sorrow” (403). But it is with Ariadne’s energy that she makes this transition to Madonna Antigone (Piero di Cosimo’s name for her). In classical mythology Ariadne helps Theseus solve the labyrinth, and this is also one of her roles in the novel, as a hidden reference to the particular myth shows: after her first return to Florence, Romola feels desolate, but courageous: “She was going to thread life by a fresh clue” (382).

It is in the nature of Eliot’s intellectual practice to align different mythological systems in an attempt to combine wide-ranging human experiences and cultural conditions into an organic whole. The fusion of the Madonna and Antigone is an example of such an alignment. It pre-empted her surprising interpretation in the “Notes on ‘The Spanish Gypsy’” of the Madonna’s situation as in the same class as “those used by the Greek dramatists”.⁹⁹ This “insight” comes from contemplating an Annunciation by Titian in the Scuola di San Rocco in Venice. Eliot’s reading of this

painting characteristically searches for in treating the subject "as a symbol of the part which is played in the general human lot by hereditary conditions in the largest sense, and of the fact that what we call duty is entirely made up of such conditions". Hereditary conditions here seem to mean the individual's specific role in a general historical context. The Madonna, like Iphigenia (or, say, Antigone) is "full of young hope" and "about to share in the ordinary lot of womanhood" through marriage when she "has suddenly announced to her that she is chosen to fulfil a great destiny, entailing a terribly different experience from that of ordinary womanhood". In *Romola* the figures of the Madonna and Antigone both symbolise such a destiny which involves the painful renunciation of her own desires to serve the social requirements. Eliot retains the separate figures, however, to symbolise their fulfilment of different social needs. The Madonna serves society in the capacity of the "Pitying Mother" who offers comfort in time of suffering. Chapters 43 and 44, "The Unseen Madonna" and "The Visible Madonna", establish Romola's role as the Madonna of Mercy, a role reinforced in chapter 68 when the inhabitants of the plague-stricken village associate her with the "mild-faced Mother" of Invisible Mercy" (577). Antigone, a sterner figure, stands for moral resistance, which, significantly, she has to practise within the ranks of Christianity. In her conflict with Savonarola over his refusal to intervene in the unjust treatment of the Medici conspirators (her godfather in particular), Romola becomes Antigone to the full; but it is as the Madonna of Mercy that she pleads with Savonarola for a Christianity based on human love and pity rather than on abstractions like "the cause of God's kingdom upon earth" (510).

The breach with Savonarola over this matter marks a new beginning. With Romola's passionate conclusion, "God's kingdom is something wider - else, let me stand outside it with the beings that I love" (512), Eliot rings in a final phase of development in which she detaches her main figure from her dependence on the vision of other characters (Tito, Bardo, Dino, and Savonarola). Again Romola's three identities work together. It is as Ariadne that she drifts away on the Mediterranean, feeling herself as in her first flight from Tito "without bonds, without motive" (581). Initially, it is also with Ariadne's energy that she embarks on her new life in the green valley. But her labour in the plague-stricken village is that of the Madonna of Mercy, and through this labour Antigone's sense of social responsibility is restored, so that

once her work is done, she returns to Florence to take up her final station in life - as guardian of Tito's abandoned family.

Bonaparte suggests that Romola's "second flight from Florence marks the end of the Christian epoch in history and the beginning of the modern age, the age that Comte called the Positive (scientific and secular) period of history".¹⁰⁰ She then goes on to illustrate through a complex analysis of symbols how the conclusion of the novel represents not only a Comtean "Birth of Modern Man", but also an embodiment of the Christian myth of "Resurrection" with Romola assuming the role of saviour.¹⁰¹ As is usually the case, Bonaparte's interpretation is compelling, especially in the light of a letter written by Eliot in July 1863 which exactly formulates the schematic idea underlying the presentation of Romola in the last few chapters: "It seems to me the soul of Christianity lies not at all in the facts of an individual life [the life of Christ], but in the ideas of which that life was the meeting-point and the new starting-point" (my emphasis).¹⁰² Like the life of Christ in Eliot's thinking, Romola's life is both a "meeting-point" of diverse cultural forces and a "new starting-point". In this respect, she fulfils Piero di Cosimo's enigmatic vision of the child and masks.

For all the care with which Eliot ties up symbolic strands towards the end of the novel, the last phase remains too calculated an attempt to fulfil the exalted aims of this historical "project".¹⁰³ What an analysis of the work's symbolic structure really brings to the fore is the enormous amount of scholarship and diligence which went into this novel - at a price, however. This becomes particularly evident in her use of painterly vision and pictorial imagery which, although extensive and tied into an impressive symbolic structure, are peculiarly superficial. The painter, Piero di Cosimo, is given the ability to see hidden realities, but to a large extent his vision is merely a convenient way of propping up the development of plot and symbolic structure. For this reason, his paintings have merely a content value. Eliot does not begin to consider elements like individual style, the technical processes involved in realising an image in paint, or the implications of genre, all of which are potentially rich in meaning. The authorial control exercised over this novel borders on the dictatorial and nowhere does this become more visible than in the way Piero's vision is yoked to a carefully worked-out plan. His works never speak for themselves, they never say more (or less) than what Eliot has conspicuously put into them, and they never breathe the slightest shade of authenticity.

In fact, they are nothing but heavily outlined pictures, the symbolism of which becomes apparent in scene after scene of mechanically spelt out implications. It is not enough that Piero di Cosimo should realise Tito's fundamental cowardice. This realisation also has to serve as the basis for two recognition scenes and underline the importance of two further moments in the narrative.¹⁰⁴ Far from adding suggestive richness, the picture of the fearful reveller is nothing but a stencilled outline of a basic situation stamped at intervals on the narrative to keep things going or to reinforce themes just in case the reader should lose sight of them.

I agree with Bonaparte that Piero di Cosimo's vision does not provide a "moral touchstone".¹⁰⁵ He comes across as a superficially shrewd character, not as one with remarkable insights. Unlike Bonaparte, however, I want to argue that the "serious limitations" of Piero's vision are not so much part of Eliot's critical treatment of various individual points of view in this novel (like Bardo's, for instance), as of limitations present in her own writing and in her view of painting. According to Bonaparte, "Piero's vision defines a middle ground" between strict empiricism and a moral view of human life: "Although he never rises to a synthetic moral understanding, he never falls into the error of living . . . on the level of strictly empirical, sensory stimuli."¹⁰⁶ But in a statement which somewhat differs from the above perception of a "middle ground", Bonaparte shifts the marker towards the region of sensory experience: "To the degree that characters like Piero . . . embody the aesthetic passion, they are necessarily dissociated from the moral one." Eliot, she argues, "insisted on the moral responsibility of art" because she understood "the amoral nature of the aesthetic experience" "all too well".¹⁰⁷

There are some indications in the novel that Eliot wanted to endow Piero di Cosimo with an "aesthetic passion". At the festival day of San Giovanni he lies "in wait for the secrets of colour that were sometimes to be caught from the floating of banners and the chance grouping of the multitude" (90). His reasons for wanting to paint Baldassare at first also seem to rest on an idiosyncratic branch of the picturesque, the physiognomical sublime and beautiful: his painter's instinct tells him that Baldassare's ugliness and his deeply lined face would present a "fine contrast" to the "bland and smiling Messer Greco", the "Bacco trionfante, who has married the fair Antigone in contradiction to all history and fitness" (242 - 243). In this remark, however, there are

counter-indications that Piero di Cosimo has at least some moral awareness, but the problem with this figure is that his moral vision is lightweight, and presented as inferior to Romola's, Savonarola's, and Eliot's own encompassing moral vision for this novel. Why Piero di Cosimo's vision should be limited in this way is not clear, but I suspect that it is to a large extent because of a failure on Eliot's part to assimilate a richly meaningful language of painting in her writing, and not at all because she understands the amoral nature of the aesthetic experience.

She intentionally chooses an artist which she perceives as minor. This makes it easier for her to manipulate the painter's vision and to tie his paintings into the general symbolic scheme of the novel, which is the sum total of Piero di Cosimo's importance for Eliot. In a move which contradicts her previous remarks about the painter, Bonaparte tries to add weight to the moral stature of Piero di Cosimo's vision by fleshing out the importance of the humanist tradition in his art. She links him with Leonardo and his school who "were instrumental in bringing art out of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, and so in contributing to the progress of civilization", and then attempts to show how "this contribution to progress" was "a subject that very much concerned" Piero di Cosimo.¹⁰⁸ The material she uses to illustrate these points does not form part of the fictional world itself. Her discussion of how Piero di Cosimo traces "the history of mankind, from a humanistic perspective, from its primitive beginnings to the more civilized present of his own age" is based completely on external evidence.¹⁰⁹ Nowhere in *Romola* does Piero di Cosimo ever display such comprehensive vision. In the process of trying to load his importance, Bonaparte oversimplifies the relationship between individual figures in the history of art. Sometimes she even bases her assessment of figures' historical position on faulty information. Thus she claims that "Ghirlandajo, like Piero di Cosimo, was one of the first painters to break with the Middle Ages and to enter the Renaissance" whereas in reality both these painters worked within firmly established Renaissance traditions and neither can really be called an innovator in this sense.

Piero di Cosimo's role in *Romola* is indeed only functional. His works have substance only in as far they serve the development of plot or symbolic structures; and his eccentric behaviour and overall approach to the world contribute not much more than colour to Eliot's historical reconstruction of the Florentine pageant. His vision

lacks force exactly because she does not seem to recognise that individual painters' vision may have the power to symbolise the progress of civilization. Painters as different in vision and accomplishment as Masaccio, the innovator par excellence, and Ghirlandaio, the skillful imitator, are lumped together solely for the colourful illustration they give of the garb and characteristic faces of Florence (243). The only painter to achieve real power of vision is Giotto, and significantly, he does so not as a painter, but as an architect: his campanile seems "a prophetic symbol, telling that human life must somehow and some time shape itself into accord with that pure aspiring beauty" (33).

This is not to deny that there are undeniable advantages to choosing an artist generally perceived as minor, but Eliot could certainly have given Piero di Cosimo a more individual voice. Most striking in her presentation of this painter are the missed opportunities. He remains a distant figure because of Eliot's failure to animate him imaginatively and the strict authorial control she exerts over this novel. It is stated again and again that he is an eccentric, entertaining, and crotchety character, but these qualities seldom strike the reader directly. Part of the problem, of course, is that Piero di Cosimo has been copied from a source-book. Eliot's painter is heavily derived from Vasari's account, sometimes even in as far as the order in which qualities are mentioned are concerned. Vasari speaks of "the strangeness of Piero's mind",¹¹⁰ Nello first mentions him as "a strange freakish painter" (36). An example of his strangeness in Vasari is his fascination with accidental effects which would make him "stop to contemplate a wall at which sick people had for ages been aiming their spittle".¹¹¹ Nello mentions exactly this habit, but sanitises it for inclusion in a Victorianised Florence: Piero "saw" the sketch of the masks "by long looking at a mouldy wall" (36). The first scene in which Piero di Cosimo himself appears parades many of his eccentricities with the same lack of spontaneity. After an impossibly inflated exposition of the qualities which make Tito's face express treachery, he conspicuously trots out another detail from Vasari: "And now I'm going to put the tow in my ears, for thy chatter and the bells together are more than I can endure" (44).

On the other hand, Eliot fails to take up suggestions from Vasari which could have enriched both her view of the painter and the thematic range of her novel considerably. Vasari shows real appreciation for the intricacies of Piero di Cosimo's aesthetic

sensibility. He describes a panel in a church which “counterfeited . . . some spheres for St Nicholas gleaming with highlights, and casting reflections of light one to another”.¹¹⁰ Just this simple reference to technical complexity is far more effective than any of Nello’s verbose elaborations on the painter’s freakishness or the ultimately rather transparent symbolism of the “perplexing” mask sketch. Indeed, Vasari’s comment that Piero di Cosimo “was content to see everything run wild, like his own nature, asserting that nature’s own things should be left to her to look after”¹¹¹ could have offered an interesting counterfoil to the highly cultured symbolism of the novel. Instead, Eliot uses the “garden, or rather thicket” merely as a picturesque background to a crowded and slightly patronising word-picture of the painter’s studio (196). The wildness of character alluded to in Vasari is toned down, particularly through Romola, to the kindly gruffness of a slightly eccentric Victorian uncle. Eliot does not anywhere capture a spark of the creative energy, the rough independence, and the aesthetic self-sufficiency which speak from Vasari’s pages (let alone Piero di Cosimo’s unconventional canvasses):

Indeed, in everything that is seen of his can be discerned a spirit set apart and very different from other painters [pace Bonaparte], and with a penetrating subtlety in the investigation of certain subtle secrets hidden deep in Nature, without regard to time or effort, but only for his own delight and for pleasure in the art.¹¹²

Put against the impassioned dramatic voices of Browning’s “Pictor Ignotus”, “Fra Lippo Lippi”, and “Andrea del Sarto” (poems which also make frequent use of Vasari), Piero di Cosimo is indeed a lifeless pastiche of borrowed biographical anecdote and externally enforced symbolism. I shall come back to the haunting voice of “Pictor Ignoto” in my chapter on James. For the moment it suffices to recall how Browning overcomes the historical distance between himself and his creations by allowing them a passionate intensity of individual voice which displays (sometimes betrays) psychological motive at the same time as it discourses on matters like moral vision and aesthetics. Although critics often stress that Browning’s main focus is men, their morals, and motives, the dramatic monologues mentioned above unobtrusively address their fair share of aesthetic issues.¹¹³ Fra Lippo Lippi’s touching dedication of art to humanity, “God uses us to help each other so, / Lending our minds out”,

introduces a strong moral strain in Browning's artistic "argument", and yet irritation with church control at times makes him head in the direction of pure aesthetics or "art for art's sake". Likewise, Browning's depiction of Andrea del Sarto, the painter "free from errors", leads to quite a Jamesian investigation of the flaws inherent in flawlessness, an enquiry which certainly suggests that Browning was more aware of the aesthetic implications of painterly form than critics give him credit for. In any case, he penetrates the artistic mind in a way which Eliot is incapable of with her external approach.

In a few scenes of Romola Piero di Cosimo just misses developing an individual voice, but each time Eliot embeds his views so firmly in a frame of authorial commentary and established symbolism that the tenor of his thought is all but lost. As a final example of how his vision is constrained, I turn to one such scene which involves Savonarola's "Pyramid of Vanities" (ch. 49). Jumbled together on the pyre are "tapestries and brocades", "pictures and sculptures held too likely to incite to vice", boards for playing-cards, "all the implements of feminine vanity - rouge-pots, false hair" (435) and so forth. What Eliot seems to claim with this heap of mismatched objects (and in fact with this scene as a whole) is that it may be necessary for works of art to be destroyed (together with the rouge-pots) for mankind to advance spiritually. A counter-argument which can be raised here is that the sacrifices "necessary" may impoverish life to such an extent that they will cancel out moral progress. Filled with "discontent and scorn" (435) at the sight of the pyramid, Piero di Cosimo represents the second argument. He complains to Romola that he notices even painters among Savonarola's piagnoni who are "'helping to burn colour out of life'" (438). Romola, of course, shares the first point of view, that good things may have to be lost in order to get rid of bad ones. The argument is unresolved. When Piero di Cosimo asks about a specific sacrifice, the stories of Boccaccio, Romola admits that "'[t]here are some things in them I do not want ever to forget'", but she immediately retraces her steps with "'a great many of those stories are only about low deceit for the lowest ends. . . . And I cannot blame Fra Girolamo for teaching that we owe our time to something better'" (438). Piero di Cosimo's bitter, "'Yes, yes, it's very well to say so now you've read them'", for once strikes an authentic note, soon stifled, however, by the authorial commentary which frames the incident. Romola walks on with a patronising simper of

“tenderness towards the old painter’s anger” (439). And Eliot is quick to justify her heroine’s unquestioning acceptance of such a “sombre view of pleasure” (439). Justification follows upon justification, completely smothering the painter’s anguish, until his needs are presented as somehow artificial, whereas Romola’s are real: “That subtle result of culture which we call Taste was subdued [in Romola] by the need for deeper motive; just as the nicer demands of the palate are annihilated by urgent hunger” (439).

The reader is prepared for this conclusion by Eliot’s idealistic apology for Savonarola’s youthful band of piagnoni who in the novel (as in history) go around terrorising Florentine citizens into giving up their valuables to be burnt. “Nevertheless”, she starts, “as the long stream of white-robed youthfulness . . . had gone to the Duomo . . . to receive the communion from the hands of Savonarola, it was a sight of beauty”; and “doubtless”, she continues, “many of those young souls were laying up memories of hope and awe” which might later save them from having a “merely vulgar view” of their own lives as “men and citizens”. Then she delivers a confident maxim which naïvely sanctions any destructive action governed by discipline and idealism: “There is no kind of conscious obedience that is not an advance on lawlessness”, and she promptly illustrates this maxim with an historical example at hand: “these boys became the generation of men who fought greatly and endured greatly in the last struggle of their Republic” (437). (The age which has seen the “piagnoni” of a Mao may hesitate to accept this sentiment.) That Savonarola’s political schemes might have contributed to the demise of the Republic does not for a moment enter into her clamorous celebration of discipline and patriotism. No wonder the lonely painter’s voice is quashed as Eliot effectively rejects the free vision of the Florentine Renaissance to put at its pinnacle Savonarola (whose reign also heralded the end of Florence’s artistic leadership in Italy). Maybe it is also not insignificant that Eliot highlights only the loss of literature (Boccaccio) during Piero di Cosimo’s quarrel with Romola, while paintings burn unnoticed and unlamented on the Pyramid of Vanities.

The subservience of painting to Eliot’s own art comes across in one more way - the return of word-paintings (and with them, obsessive authorial control) to Romola. Because of the geographical and historical remoteness of the novel’s setting, she relies heavily on word-paintings to realise her fictional world. To overcome the tendency of

the narrative to stall under the weight of word-pictures, Eliot tries to make her scenes as “talkative” as possible, for instance, she builds in all sorts of visual clues and mysteries (Tito’s sea-stained clothes, his sumptuous ring) which are supposed to keep the plot going. In a letter to a reader somewhat critical of what he regarded an excess of details, she wrote as follows: “I believe there is scarcely a phrase, an incident, an allusion, that did not gather its value to me from its supposed subservience to my main artistic objects”.¹¹⁶ It is possibly as a result of such strict calculation that Eliot’s Florence fails to carry conviction as a dynamic fictional world. Another letter contains her frequently quoted reference to the “severe effort of trying to make certain ideas thoroughly incarnate, as if they had revealed themselves to me first in the flesh and not in the spirit”.¹¹⁷ What critics do not always note is that this letter really admits that the idea does come first in Eliot’s art (as James had all along suspected). The letter further gives a sense of the scale of her undertaking:

consider the sort of agonizing labour to an English-fed imagination to make art a sufficiently real back-ground, for the desired picture, to get breathing, individual forms, and group them in the needful relations, so that the presentation will lay hold on the emotions as human experience - will . . . “flash” conviction on the world by means of aroused sympathy.¹¹⁸

In many cases, however, Eliot does not rely on the expressiveness of “breathing individual forms” or “needful relations”, nor on the “impression that scene itself will make”.¹¹⁹ As in the incident when Piero di Cosimo opposes Romola next to the Pyramid of Vanities, she allows the authorial presence to draw aside the “clothing of the past”, revealing the ideal premises shaping her vision of fifteenth-century Florence.

The extent to which cultural-historical symbols predominate in Romola is finally called into question by developments in Eliot’s own fiction. Her satirical treatment of Naumann’s vast symbolic schemes for his paintings in Middlemarch reflects parodically on the extensive and many-layered cultural symbolism of Romola (although I doubt whether Eliot could sufficiently distance herself from the earlier work to make such parody in any way intentional). There is real comedy in the way that Naumann runs through a range of symbolic personae to locate Dorothea’s cultural significance. Having finally settled her Christian identity, he is rather undecided about the particular

type of Christianity he has in mind. He sees her as a nun, a Quaker, a young Madonna, and “a sort of Christian Antigone”.¹²⁰ Eventually, Dorothea finds her way into his sketchbook as Santa Clara (211).

Ladislaw’s jealous resistance to this casting around for symbolic roles repeats Eliot’s own criticism of works of art dominated by symbolic idealism. Representative of such art in this novel are the German Nazarenes who worked in Rome during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and their followers (like Kaulbach) who later continued the tradition on a monumental scale in Germany and Austria. Her objection years before to Kaulbach’s “regular child’s puzzle of symbolism” is pertinent here. Ladislaw accuses Naumann of thinking that his painting Dorothea is “the chief outcome of her existence”, a thought in keeping with Naumann’s belief (still according to Ladislaw) that “all the universe is straining towards the obscure significance” of his pictures (185).

Moreover, Ladislaw’s invented project, Tamburlaine Driving the Conquered Kings in his Chariot, directly parodies Naumann’s work in progress of “the Saints drawing the Car of the Church” (207). With his pretended objective of capturing “the tremendous course of the world’s physical history” in the single image of Tamburlaine in his chariot (208), Ladislaw mocks Naumann’s “excess of meaning”. As before in her criticism of Kaulbach, Eliot is finding fault with the extensive symbolism of Nazarene art. Ladislaw’s imaginary painting is a secularised parody of a particular Nazarene painting, Josef van Führich’s The Triumph of Christ which shows Christ and Mary drawn in a chariot by the four evangelists.¹²¹ The painting into which Naumann incorporates Casaubon as Aquinas is likewise based on an existing Nazarene work and presented as an object of manifold satire. Eliot avails herself of Friedrich Overbeck’s highly symbolic The Triumph of Religion in the Arts which depicts the Madonna and Christ child surrounded by Biblical figures, at the apex of tiers of figures involved in artistic activities and learned disputes (see fig. 55).¹²² In the first place Eliot satirises the way in which Naumann’s pragmatic opportunism clashes with the highly idealistic nature of his art. He is quite ready to turn a basic aesthetic premise of his art into flattery and subterfuge. Casaubon is told that a sketch of his head “would be invaluable” for a study of Aquinas, since his physiognomy represents what is “so seldom” seen - “the idealistic in the real” (209). Naumann’s use of aesthetic



Fig. 55. Johann Friedrich Overbeck, The Triumph of Christianity in the Arts (1840); Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt.

language is decidedly glib here and a mere cover-up for his ploy to steal a sketch of Dorothea. Instead of an example of high art, the picture represents no more than a practical joke cracked at Casaubon's expense.

But Eliot also uses this picture, in which Aquinas is shown seated "among the doctors of the Church in a disputation too abstract to be represented, but listened to with more or less attention by an audience above" (212), as a satirical image of vanity, limited vision, wasted effort, and conceit. These are qualities pertaining to both Naumann, his art, and his sitter, qualities which Eliot objects to in Nazarene art, and the effects of which she portrays meticulously in the individual consciousness of her characters. Thus Naumann's picture functions as a simple concrete symbol and a more complex moral and psychological one. On a basic level the painting comically immobilises Casaubon; on a more advanced level, Eliot's views of Nazarene art come into play, so that Casaubon is portrayed as part of an enormous, self-referential symbolic scheme, a veritable "puzzle of symbolism" exactly reflecting his entrapment in both a scholarly maze and a psychological labyrinth of frustrated selfhood. Casaubon's increasing obsession with his failure to find and formulate the "Key to all Mythologies" isolates him from primary response and human company, just as Naumann's idealism leads away from nature and direct observation.

In Middlemarch, then, Eliot introduces a school of painting with which she is not in sympathy. Far from representing truth or perspicacity of vision, the Nazarene school signifies false idealism and self-absorption, two elements constantly in evidence in this novel as obstacles to understanding, whether of the self or of the world perceived outside the self. The language which Ladislaw uses to criticise Naumann is a more playful version of Ruskin's serious condemnation of "modern German art".¹²³ Eliot certainly does not share Ruskin's abhorrence of the Catholic tendencies of the school,¹²⁴ but the particular features of Naumann's vision of art which she incorporates and develops symbolically largely resemble Ruskin's adverse reading of Nazarene art. He sees Overbeck as an example of a painter who over-reaches himself by focusing exclusively on "high art subjects" while his "intellect" is not strong enough "to enter into the minds of truly great men, or to imagine great events as they really happened".¹²⁵ Ladislaw who despite his satiric bent and sporadic irritation also admires Naumann, presents the painter to the Casaubons as

one of the chief renovators of Christian art, one of those who had not only revived but expanded that grand conception of supreme events as mysteries at which the successive ages were spectators, and in relation to which the great souls of all periods became as it were contemporaries. (207)

Although this description does not reflect Ruskin's value judgments, it equally draws attention to the basic idealistic premises of this type of art, with Ruskin's "great men" and "great events" becoming Ladislaw's "supreme events" and "great souls". As I have pointed out, Naumann's indecision when he tries to find a symbolic role (or "great soul") for Dorothea, and the easy opportunism with which he later slips Casaubon into one of his large works, square ill with Ladislaw's description of his idealism and high seriousness. This discrepancy reveals Naumann as an intellectual and artistic lightweight, satirised mildly by Eliot on grounds very similar to Ruskin's criticism of Overbeck. Apart from its overblown idealism and lack of sincerity, Naumann's art displays a self-centredness which fits in well with another "form of error" identified by Ruskin in Nazarene art - that of "[s]uperseding technical excellence by expression" (meaning breadth of expression as in Ladislaw's complaint about "excess of meaning").¹²⁶ Ruskin sees the reason for falling into this error as "vanity", a quality with which Ladislaw taxes Naumann. According to Ruskin, the vain artist "contemplates with separated egotism the course of his own imaginations or sensations, and refuses to look at the real facts round about him, in order that he may adore at leisure the shadow of himself" (added emphases). "A large range of modern German art comes under this head", he adds.¹²⁷

Middlemarch is a novel about flawed and fragmented vision. It is significant (if not surprising after *Romola*) that Eliot includes the painter's perceptions among the limited ways of seeing set down in this work. Naumann's lack of vision reinforces that of characters as different as Rosamund and Casaubon. In each of these cases moral limitations like Ruskin's "separated egotism", worship of the "shadow" of selfhood, and "small self-conceit"¹²⁸ prohibit clear seeing. Most of the types of visual art which Eliot incorporates in Middlemarch consequently fail to reach or touch her fictional viewers in a truly significant way, and although she indicates that at least some of the reasons for this failure can be found in the ignorance or insensitivity of her viewers, she

more frequently questions the validity of the vision which these works of art offer. This becomes particularly apparent in the chapters dealing with Rome where works of art and artists are important for the links they provide in a cultural-historical chain. The only viewers capable of drawing spiritual sustenance from the art of Rome are those who, like Ladislaw, already possess "the quickening power of a knowledge which breathes a growing soul into all historic shapes, and traces out the suppressed transitions which unite all contrasts" (188). Small wonder that ordinary viewers, like Dorothea, fail to see the relevance of art to life.

This academic approach to art also explains Eliot's ambivalence to Naumann. His painterly vision, as a fictional character partaking in the novel's day to day events, is treated lightly. It is satirised as heavy-handedly symbolical, self-centred, vain, even false. Its main contribution lies in the moral flaws it symbolises graphically and in the comic aptness of the Aquinas painting which resurfaces later as a concrete symbol of learned lumber - the enormous picture arrives at Lowick tied to the top of Brooke's carriage. But despite trivialising Naumann's vision in this way, Eliot does grant his school a place, albeit a low one, in her theoretical overview of the progress of culture. Treated academically, Naumann has his worth as renovator of Christian art; but his art, like most of the other works of art mentioned in *Middlemarch*, has nothing to offer the individual in search of truth and self-fulfilment. In fact, these works (or characters' reactions to them) often signal as warnings of limited vision.

Dorothea's idealistic hopes and desires receive a serious blow in Rome, traditionally "the city of visible history" and cultural chronology (187). She expects a revelation of unity and truth to help her in her quest for "a binding theory which could bring her own life and doctrine into strict connexion" with the past and "give the remotest sources of knowledge some bearing on her actions" (84). To the contrary, she experiences "stupendous fragmentariness" (187) and the full "weight of unintelligible Rome" (188). In keeping with earlier satirical views of Dorothea's simple notions of truth, knowledge, duty, and fulfilment, Eliot uses the cultural complexity and density of Rome to off-set her character's over-eager idealism and narrow Protestant vision. But the presentation of the disastrous wedding journey marks a deviation from the humorous tone with which she has so far laughed at Dorothea's naïveté. Instead of exploiting this side of cultural confusion, she gives the incongruous

impact of Rome on Dorothea's untutored consciousness an altogether grotesque dimension which registers Dorothea's agony at discovering that the wider worlds of both knowledge and matrimony are far from compatible with her passionate idealism. The Roman fiasco further highlights two abstract questions, the first mainly asked by Dorothea herself (but dating from *Adam Bede*) about the place of idealistic art in an ordinary life; the second a related, Positivist question (also posed in *Romola*), about the role of art in the assumed progress of humanity. Throughout this section of the novel, Rome, unlike Florence, is an ambivalent symbol, signifying failure as much as transcendence, fragmentariness as well as continuity.

As substitute for her simple notions of devotion and accomplishment Dorothea receives a bewildering vision of human endeavour which involves not obvious triumphs of inspiration and insight, but tortuous struggle, false starts, and failure. Art, in Rome, is not represented as at the Grange by a limited collection of casts and pictures, Brooke's "severe classical nudities and smirking Renaissance-Correggiosities" (72), but by an overwhelming mass of visual stimuli proclaiming a vast history of questionable ideals and passions. At the Grange she could dismiss the few imported samples of art and quell the discomfort they caused by concentrating on the practical business of drawing house plans for the poor; in Rome art and reality seem inextricably and distressingly intertwined in their expression of, respectively, spiritual and physical poverty. In a psychological extension of the basic Gothic *topos* of curiously (often grotesquely) animated works of art, Eliot presents the effect of visual art on Dorothea's naïve consciousness as a physical threat or an invasion which inflicts pain, disease, and paralysis. Works of art do the "staring" and "gazing", frequently overlooking the actual viewer, who is reduced to passive victimhood. Again Rome drastically intensifies experiences first encountered at the Grange. Mr Brooke's pictures and casts are "painfully inexplicable, staring into the midst of her Puritanic conceptions" since she has "never been taught how she could bring them into any sort of relevance with her life" (72). In Rome the "eager Titanic life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings" and "the long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world" add up to her vision of Rome as a "vast wreck of ambitious ideals" which "jarred her as with an electric shock" and "urged themselves on her" like "an ache" (188). The sequence of distress and illness

culminates in an image which carries Rome's contorted visual aspect right into the innocent eye. The distance between viewer and object viewed completely collapses, with Dorothea's consciousness absorbing the glut of colour and form in St. Peter's so immediately that the external visual image becomes equated with internal physiological disorder, a "disease of the retina" (188).

Rome's impact is so oppressive partly because of Casaubon's inability to lighten it, and Dorothea's aesthetic bewilderment hangs closely together with a growing suspicion that Casaubon's mind is not as ideal a source of illumination as it has promised to be. Far from guiding Dorothea in reconstructing the past or assisting in giving the spectacle of "that amazing past" some "bearing" on their lives (84), he completely stifles any spontaneity of thought or feeling under "a lifeless embalment of knowledge" (191). A striking instance of such failure is his utterly unimaginative explication of "celebrated frescoes designed or painted by Raphael", some of which represent "the fable of Cupid and Psyche" (191).¹²⁹ One would think that a scholar on his honeymoon could breathe some relevance into a myth of love, restriction, transgression, and discovery, a joke at his own expense maybe, or a moralistic explanation at the very least. In Casaubon's case, however, the myth functions altogether ironically, with Dorothea indeed making fateful discoveries about the true identity of her lover. His approach, as always, is purely academic, complete with footnotes referring to "the opinion of conosciuti". In keeping with his general method (a search for original forms) he declares the myth a "romantic invention of a literary period" and not "a genuine mythical product" (191).

In this respect, Casaubon's inauthentic response to art resembles Brooke's. Although their respective identities as dry scholar and flighty dilettante separate them widely, they are equally inadequate in tutoring the uninitiated or championing the relevance of art to life. Both base their response to art not on individual perception and personal feeling, but on academic considerations and a taste formed "by what is called a 'liberal education'". The quotation is from Ruskin and again his thinking on art and society firmly underpins Eliot's. Brooke's vapid use of aesthetic jargon ("this . . . has what we used to call *brio*" and "you don't understand *morbidezza*, and that kind of thing" on pages 77 and 78) and Casaubon's strict adherence to "the opinion of conosciuti" exemplify the less fortunate workings of educated taste. Ruskin mentions

how this “higher education” may have “a tendency to narrow the sympathies and harden the heart, diminishing the interest of all beautiful things by familiarity”.¹³⁰ After Casaubon’s attempt at explaining the fresco, Eliot describes his mind as one “in which years full of knowledge seem to have issued in a blank absence of interest or sympathy” (191). According to Ruskin, a higher education in some cases “leads people to prefer gracefulness of dress, manner, and aspect, to value of substance and heart, liking a well said thing better than a true thing”. This applies to Brooke’s aesthetic flightiness and superficiality which are usually based on a vague general standard of how things should be done. Lastly, Ruskin’s opinion that a taste acquired through fashionable education may instil “a sense of inherent distinction between class and class” touches upon Dorothea’s chief reservation about the relevance of the art that she sees at the Grange and in Rome.

Even Ladislav, the character most capable of illustrating the importance of visual art for the good of both the individual and the human race at large, fails to rescue painting from the questionable status which Eliot gives it in Middlemarch. In accordance with her mainly theoretical evaluation of painting in this novel, Ladislav’s defence is in the first place not humanistic, but academic. Like Casaubon and Brooke’s (though with a keener personal sensibility), Ladislav’s explanation of the value of art relies on cultural history and a taste acquired through Ruskin’s “higher education”. He describes the extent to which a feeling for art has to be learnt, how “[a]rt is an old language with a great many artificial affected styles” and how “sometimes the chief pleasure one gets out of knowing them is the mere sense of knowing” (200). He goes on to counter Dorothea’s moral objection to the “immense expense of art” which fails to make the world a better place (214) by forwarding a vague aesthetic argument, bordering on the dilettantish: “The best piety is to enjoy - when you can. . . . It is of no use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of when you feel delight - in art or in anything else” (214 - 215).

Finally, Ladislav himself highlights some of the limitations and frustrations which Eliot holds against the art of painting in this novel. When he announces to Naumann that “[l]anguage is a finer medium” than the “poor stuff” of “painting and Plastik” (186), he is speaking jealously, but also in keeping with major aesthetic premise of this novel which seeks to objectify the inner life of characters through the medium of

language, in particular the language of wide-ranging and cumulatively suggestive metaphor. According to Ladislav, paintings fix single moments and are therefore limited. Instead of using facile catchwords like morbidezza (the delicate gradation of colour and tone which is meant to capture objects in their sensuous fulness), Ladislav dwells on the temporality, subtlety, and inwardness of language which give this medium the power to move beyond the single moment and the potentially deceptive surface of outward appearance.

The effect of this basic aesthetic judgment, which to a great extent coincides with Eliot's, can be seen again and again. The controlling imagery of her discourse involves process, not fixed moments or states. Thus, she illustrates the limitations of views based on outward appearance in the figure of the newcomer, Lydgate, who is known in Middlemarch society "merely as a cluster of signs for his neighbours' false suppositions" (139) - regarded as potential ally, rival, tool, or lover, depending on each particular "viewer's" interpretation of his position, looks, and manners. Against such superficial "seeing", Eliot places Ladislav's "true seeing" from "within" (186). In Lydgate's case she deploys related imagery of "true" vision, the imagery of gradual discovery belonging to this character's scientific discipline. Applying such imagery to him as a subject of study, she reveals how complex a business it is to follow the development of human personality, "for character too is a process and an unfolding" (146). Through such complex authorial analysis, Eliot strives to overcome the limited or distorted "pictures" which characters build up of one another. She aims at achieving what may be called the morbidezza of individual consciousness, as in the following passage which captures both the gradations of Dorothea's altering awareness as a wife, as well as an image of Casaubon's sense of self:

it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive . . . that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a difference. (205)

A further consequence of Eliot's reliance on temporality and process is that the carefully composed word-pictures of Adam Bede and Romola do not appear in Middlemarch. In fact, external descriptions frequently belie the narrative processes connected to them. The fine "picture" of Dorothea dreaming beautifully next to the

Ariadne sculpture which so impresses Naumann and Ladislav gives no inkling of how she experiences her honeymoon. For an understanding of her sense of desolation in Rome the reader has to follow her to the next chapter and into her "inner room" (187), where Eliot concentrates not on outward appearance, but on the complex and elusive processes at work in Dorothea's mind. Eliot's tools are again linguistic ones of temporality, abstraction, and approximating metaphor: Dorothea has "no distinctly shapen grievance" (187); the distressing change from ideal to real in her "view of Mr Casaubon and her wifely relation" occurs gradually "with the secret motion of a watch-hand" (189), and so forth.

On the whole, then, Eliot presents the language of painting as a severely limited and limiting medium of expression in Middlemarch. Just as she represents Naumann's art as failing to communicate any sense of powerful, authentic vision, she treats the language associated with painting or the aesthetic sensibility as an inadequate medium for realising characters' moral and psychological awareness or their individual quests for self-fulfilment. This becomes particularly apparent in Ladislav's case. Eliot places this character, with his highly developed aesthetic sensibility, thorough knowledge of the language of art, vivid imagination, and quick sympathies directly in opposition to Casaubon and his mental habits. For Dorothea, Ladislav brings to life what Casaubon has stifled. He effortlessly sketches "a half-enthusiastic half-playful picture of the enjoyment" one can get "out of the very miscellaneousness of Rome" which makes the mind "flexible with constant comparison" and saves one "from seeing the world's ages as a set of box-like partitions without vital connexion" (206). These faculties and this facility redress serious shortcomings in both Casaubon's and Dorothea's views of Rome, but they remain suspect and are frequently satirised by Eliot as self-indulgently dilettantish as long as Ladislav applies himself to the arts. Only once he turns to politics and accepts "his bit of work" (453), do these qualities start to signify devotion, accomplishment, and real growth of character. Whereas Ladislav's interest in the arts amounts for Eliot to nothing more than "self-culture", his talents, particularly his connective imagination, when applied to politics, answer to what she calls "[o]ur sense of duty" (453).¹³¹ This presumably contributes to the progress of human culture at large or "the growing good of the world" (825), a Positivist ideal no less central to this novel than to Romola.

Related to this is Eliot's choice of metaphor in presenting another individual quest, Lydgate's pursuit of science. What is striking in her presentation of his search for truth is the use of principally painterly language to ridicule the opposite, false vision and invention. Satirical *ekphrasis*, of the derisory kind used by Ruskin against artists like "poor fumigatory Fuseli, with an art composed of the tinsel of the stage and the panics of the nursery",¹³² conveys her contempt for the "[m]any men" who "have been praised as vividly imaginative on the strength of their profuseness in indifferent drawing", for instance in "portraits of Lucifer coming down on his bad errands as a large ugly man with bat's wings and spurts of phosphorescence; or exaggerations of wantonness that seem to reflect life in diseased dream" (161). Eliot is of course drawing on her reaction to what she considers *bad* painting and not on the effect of painting as an art form in general. But it is nonetheless telling that she chooses to illustrate the most spectacular failures of the imagination from painting. By contrast, when she goes on to illustrate the workings of a truly imaginative mind like Lydgate's, she adopts visual metaphors with an essentially processional nature which implicitly challenges and criticises the basic static nature of painting:

He [Lydgate] for his part had tossed away all cheap inventions where ignorance finds itself able and at ease: he was enamoured of that arduous invention which is the very eye of research, provisionally framing its object and correcting it to more and more exactness of relation; he wanted to pierce the obscurity of those minute processes which prepare human misery and joy, those invisible thoroughfares which are the first lurking-places of anguish, mania, and crime, that delicate poise and transition which determine the growth of happy or unhappy consciousness. (162)

This passage quite obviously applies to the way in which Eliot conceives of her own aesthetic method in *Middlemarch*, down to her focus on the processes governing human consciousness. It furthermore shows that at this stage of her career she would be far from satisfied with seeing her fiction and its aims simply in terms of "a picture of human life" as she does in her early writing. The "frame" of observation is still there; but the "picture" has been discarded for perpetually unfolding process, so that the

frame becomes the eye-piece of a microscope, or, more abstractly, the framework of scientific hypothesis.

In one respect, however, the art of painting continues to function with unaltered force in *Middlemarch*. The painting as icon, whether with personal or wider cultural implications, appears as strikingly in this novel as in earlier ones, and again it endorses a strain of symbolic idealism on one level of the narrative which Eliot takes pains to question and downplay at other levels. In the first place, the miniature of Ladislaw's grandmother which demands Dorothea's attention from the start and punctuates the narrative at intervals is initially a Gothic device prompting enquiry, but it soon develops into a powerful personal icon symbolising the force of human sympathy, particularly the bond between Dorothea and Ladislaw. Unlike the works of art at the Grange and in Rome which gaze and stare obliviously, the portrait invites "companionship . . . as if it had an ear for her and could see how she was looking at it" (269). The bond originates from Dorothea's realisation in the midst of marital disappointment that "[h]ere was a woman who had known some difficulty about marriage" (269). The portrait's kinship to Ladislaw suggests a further bond, and through a curious imaginary metamorphosis the "delicate woman's face" changes into Ladislaw's "full gaze which tells her on whom it falls that she is too interesting for the slightest movement of her eyelid to pass unnoticed and uninterpreted" (269). Apart from conveying the quality of being "humanly interested" (363), the miniature develops a further related iconic significance for Dorothea - a sense of the wrong suffered by the Ladislaw branch of the family and her own sense of responsibility towards those wronged. Like a religious icon, "the presence of that delicate miniature, so like a living face that she knew", is said to be "helping to concentrate her feelings" (363). The portrait continues to gather around it powerful associations of love, commiseration, and responsibility towards fellow human beings. After Mr Casaubon's codicil has placed a barrier between Dorothea and Ladislaw, she again contemplates the miniature with quasi-religious intensity, "liking to blend the woman who had been too hardly judged with the grandson whom her own heart and judgment defended" (534). A final reference to the picture shows Dorothea resting her cheek on it "as if that would soothe the creatures who had suffered unjust condemnation" (535).

In capturing Dorothea's care for others and her passionate search for a cause to devote herself to, the miniature links up with a second set of iconographic references, this time ones with far-reaching cultural implications. References to the Madonna reinforce Dorothea's capacity for sympathy, love, and devotion, turning her into a figure who is revered by other fictional characters and who fulfils an ideal symbolic role in the narrative. The very first paragraph of the novel associates her appearance with the simplicity of "the Blessed Virgin" as she "appeared to Italian painters" (7). Such a reference may seem superficially imposed, as do Naumann's views of Dorothea as "the most perfect young Madonna" (185). But as the novel progresses, more substantial images occur which belong inherently to Dorothea's spiritual beliefs and psychological motivation. The creed she professes to Ladislav, "[t]hat by desiring what is perfectly good . . . we are . . . widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower" (382), directly invokes the iconographic tradition of the Madonna della Misericordia which depicts suppliants kneeling under the protection of the Madonna's spread cloak (see fig. 56). The reference fits in well with Dorothea's attempt to intercede for the wronged Ladislav branch and with the immense sympathy which she extends to suffering creatures in general. This image is repeated in slightly altered form by Lydgate after she has promised him her support: he associates her with "the Virgin Mary" and elaborates on the way in which she "thinks nothing of her own future, and would pledge away half her income at once, as if she wanted nothing for herself but a chair to sit in from which she can look down . . . at the poor mortals who pray to her" (758).

Another version of the image occurs after her catastrophic interruption of what she thinks a love scene between Ladislav and Rosamund. In this instance, Dorothea's creed of self-forgetful devotion undergoes its severest trial in that she has to "clutch" her own pain about Ladislav's deemed faithlessness and "compel it to silence" (777) in order to care for the "three lives whose contact with hers laid an obligation on her as if they had been suppliants bearing the sacred branch" (776). Dorothea's struggle to master her own suffering internalises the icon of the enthroned Madonna of Mercy: "The objects of her rescue were not to be sought out by her fancy: they were chosen for her. She yearned towards the perfect Right, that it might make a throne within her,



Fig. 56. Piero della Francesca,
Madonna della Misericordia, San-
sepulcro Pinacoteca, Sansepolcro.

and rule her errant will" (776 - 777). A few paragraphs later mention is made of Dorothea's face which bears the aspect of a "mater dolorosa" (777).

Through these iconographic references Dorothea's experience in everyday English society is placed in the far broader cultural context of Christian civilisation. One could go a step further and include the classical world into this cultural scheme by pointing to a third complex of symbols, a number of classical-subject references prevalent in mid to late nineteenth-century painting. These link Dorothea directly or obliquely to Ariadne, (183), Antigone (185 and 825), Andromeda (203 and 461), and a virgin sacrifice to the Minotaur (215 and 351). Many of these associations are character-specific and arguably reflect subjective viewpoints rather than true symbolic roles. For instance, does Ladislaw's repeated notion of Dorothea as a shackled, endangered creature or sacrificial victim give her that symbolic status in the narrative? Or does it merely reflect his own jealousy and sense of desperation? The latter covers the way in which I have interpreted Naumann's view of Dorothea as Antigone. And yet one should not overlook the fact that some of these references are endorsed by the authorial voice itself. There is no need (apart from historical fastidiousness maybe) for the narrator to identify the piece of sculpture in the Vatican as "the reclining Ariadne" - at the time of the Casaubons' wedding journey it was called "the Cleopatra" (183) the narrator informs us. But Eliot obviously gives the later title too because she regards it as symbolically more relevant. Dorothea is after all an abandoned bride while Casaubon busies himself with his studies, and a little later Eliot describes her struggling through the "anterooms and winding passages" (190) of her husband's labyrinthine mind. Likewise, Naumann's lightweight remark gains sudden weight right at the end of the novel when the narrator relates Dorothea's obscure life to the hypothetically ordinary lives which a "new Theresa" or a "new Antigone" (825) might have in a milieu unsupportive of heroism. In her energy and passion Dorothea assumes a role akin to the Ariadne role in Romola. Like that Ariadne she furthermore appears to be a victim but proves to be a rescuer in offering various characters an escape from moral dilemmas. And in her devotion to "the perfect Right" (777) she indeed becomes the Antigone envisaged by Naumann. Witemeyer states that "[u]ltimately Dorothea eludes all of the analogies that attempt to characterize her".¹³³ I should like to claim that she embraces quite a few symbolic roles and that Eliot at times comes perilously close in

Middlemarch to repeating the elaborate symbolic idealism cranking forward her Positivist vision of "the growing good of the world" in Romola.

Seen in isolation, Eliot's use of pictorial symbols to vindicate the value of an ordinary woman's existence raises all sorts of issues such as whether the idealistic nature of this symbolism does not undermine claims on Eliot's part of giving a realistic portrayal of ordinary experience. Or one might probe the extent to which she is prepared to shoulder the responsibilities brought on by such extensive symbolism. For instance, does her idealisation of Dorothea invest real power in this character's creed (and women's contribution to society) or does it suggest that the only role open to a woman in this type of society is a largely passive, symbolic one (that is, that even in her role as Madonna Dorothea is a victim of the narrow existence afforded to a gentlewoman of her time)? A question more pertinent to the chief focus of this thesis concerns the undeniable irony involved in Eliot's choice of pictorial iconography to convey the novels' main thematic thrust while she at the same time voices serious doubts about the fulness of expression which the medium of painting is capable of.¹³⁴

These are all very real issues which should be pursued far more extensively than I have scope for here. It is, however, important to remember that there are other aspects at work in this novel which affect, if not resolve, the issues surrounding Eliot's symbolic idealism. Middlemarch is widely considered her most impressive work, which is to a large extent attributable to the psychological immediacy with which she realises an intricate cross-section of midland society and the satirical touch which frequently enlivens her presentation of this variegated material. With these two qualities she manages to alleviate at least some of the tension between ideal and real, more so than in any of her other novels. One thinks for instance of the schematic moral divisions and forced incorporation of Dinah's idealism into the rural world of Hayslope or the grandiose symbolic systems permeating the lives of ordinary individuals in Romola, Eliot's own "huge charade" or Triumph of Humanity, which at any time equals the most elaborate Nazarene project. Terms like "renunciation" or "devotion" never develop the full tragic ring which they acquire in The Mill through Maggie's idealistic yearning for a better world. In Middlemarch such terms receive serious and satirical attention. Frequently the satire revolves around a mock-heroic undermining of exactly such terms, for example in the following description of Dorothea's passion for horse-

riding: "Riding was an indulgence which she allowed herself in spite of conscientious qualms; she felt that she enjoyed it in a pagan sensuous way, and always looked forward to renouncing it" (10).

Eliot's criticism of Nazarene art and her ambivalent presentation of Rome as an acknowledged "spiritual centre" (188) of the world for an enlightened few but a source of bewilderment for the untutored are part of her design in this novel to redirect attention to the value of ordinary human experience. Unlike *Romola*, Dorothea fits ill into a milieu of world-stirring events and Titanic deeds, but this is not to say that her experience is lost to "the growing good of the world" (825). My main reservation, therefore, lies not with Eliot's satirical use of painting to illustrate limitations of character and vision or with the doubts she raises about the educational impact of great art, but with the one-sidedness of her attitude which all but excludes painting from her vision of cultural progression. Her incorporation of paintings as icons into the narrative and thematic structure of *Middlemarch* does little to make up for this deficiency, since it represents a very simple way of viewing painterly material - as symbolic objects at the service of literature's signifying systems, not as independent works of art with an expressive language of their own. At the end of her career, Eliot's interest in what painting has to offer her own novelistic aesthetic dwindles to a repetition of well-trying devices and a rather superficial focus on subject-matter and symbolic impact rather than on stylistic and formal elements more exclusively characteristic of painting.

Her last work, *Daniel Deronda*, does not offer any innovative approaches to painting itself, although it challenges Eliot's novelistic skills in other ways. A marked sense of exhaustion creeps into her presentation of painterly material, for instance the survey of paintings at Offendene. Far from representing instances of artistic vision, these pictures function as rather ludicrous furnishings: looking over the house, the Harleth girls find "the dining-room all dark oak and worn red satin damask, with a copy of snarling, worrying dogs from Snyders over the sideboard, and a Christ breaking bread over the mantelpiece".¹³⁵ Equally worn-out are word-pictures like the one spelling out Grandcourt's inhumanity in obvious canine symbols. He torments a devoted spaniel at the breakfast-table by ostentatiously fondling a Maltese dog on his lap (110 -111). Word-pictures appear frequently in this novel, twice introduced by the

clumsy and self-conscious imperative "Imagine . . ." followed by minute description (311 and 343 - 344).

Eliot's most creative use of painting in this novel involves a type of pictorial classification system of characters, a device which appears throughout her oeuvre, but which is sustained most impressively in Daniel Deronda. Witemeyer writes comprehensively on the "two distinctive and antithetical modes of literary portraiture" representing the "English and Jewish parts of the novel". Whereas Gwendolen and some other English characters are visualised "in terms of the English portrait tradition" (especially the sub-genre of fancy portraits), Eliot realises "Daniel and other Jewish characters in terms of Italian Renaissance painting, especially that of Titian and the Venetian school".¹³⁶ A moral contrast accompanies her use of these two schools. Aristocratic English portraiture frequently displays affected poses, fanciful abstraction or plain flattery (the painter of Sir Hugo's portrait slightly lengthens his nose to fit a conception of aristocratic proportions - 151). These qualities support the frequent ironic treatment of English society in Daniel Deronda, particularly as manifested in Gwendolen's aspirations, fancies, and misconceptions. Like Hetty in Adam Bede, she imagines herself in all sorts of flattering pictorial poses (as St Cecilia and Hermione for instance), all of which reflect her own and her family's assumption that her role in society will be a distinguished or even regal one because of her talents and physical desirability. Reserving heroic poses for herself, she casts others in ridiculous roles, revealing a cynical attitude which not only communicates her intense self-interest, but also the extent of her social misconceptions. While she regards herself the heroine of the chase, she ridicules Rex's devotion in the language of a sporting caricature: "it is so droll to fancy the figure he and Primrose would cut. . . . It would make a capital caricature of 'Following the hounds'" (69). Her satirical depiction of Miss Arrowpoint's appearance at the Archery Meeting, "a little too symbolical - too much like the figure of Wealth in an allegory" (93), overlooks the true distinction and moral integrity of this character who in the end manages her life so much better than the socially ambitious Gwendolen. Contrary to these pictures of misconception and self-interest, Eliot uses the dignified forcefulness of Titian's male portraiture (170 and 462) and the rich colouring of the Venetian school in general to distinguish the nobility of Jewish characters like Daniel and Mordecai, as well as to create a sense of awe at the

strength of Jewish devotion to racial and religious traditions. By these means even the garrulous and exploitative Cohens are transformed into an impressive picture of family unity and dignified worship (365).

Together with the Jewish characters, Daniel and Mordecai, a number of artists are singled out as exceptional beings. In fact, Eliot comes very close in this novel to the type of artist- veneration characterising the early Weimar writings. Characters like Klesmer and to a lesser extent Miss Arrowpoint and Mirah are exalted as true artists in their ability to turn talent and a sense of “inward vocation” to achievement through “arduous, unceasing work” (236). This type of dedication completely displaces Eliot’s previous focus on ordinary characters’ yearnings for something to devote their energies to. Dorothea’s idealistic struggle against the strictures of pampered social existence gives *Middlemarch* its main meaning. In *Daniel Deronda*, only the artist or the fervid nationalist can transcend social existence and demonstrate what human beings are ideally capable of. Again, however, the painter and his art are strikingly missing from this distinguished band. The superhuman feats of exertion and vision characterising Klesmer’s art make Hans Meyrick, the novel’s painter, appear goalless and opportunistic. Music has real power in this novel. Klesmer speaks of the “cries of deep, mysterious passion” inherent in great music, the “sense of the universal” which “makes men small as they listen to it” (43). Against this, Meyrick’s huge historical projects seem utterly uninspired, his language and gestures those of a comic actor who plays at being a great artist, a desperate lover, and so forth. Whereas Klesmer’s playing has the force to make even Gwendolen forget herself and her own interests (43), Meyrick’s art expresses his obsession with Mirah, even to the extent that he fabricates a new ending for the Berenice story to trick her into sitting for him. Such insincerity links up with other references to painting’s basically delusionary nature, for instance the following ironic remark about the treacherousness of the picturesque: “Perspective, as its inventor remarked, is a beautiful thing. What horrors of damp huts, where human beings languish, may not become picturesque through aerial distance!” (140).

Meyrick, of course, does not see himself as a great artist and for this reason does not draw Eliot’s moral indignation. He remains a comic character, providing a light-hearted commentary on art and English society. In one such instance he comments on

the ludicrousness of popular taste by envisaging “a public rushing after my pictures as if they were a railway series including nurses, babies, and bonnet-boxes” (429). Elsewhere he satirises English patronage which extends solely to family portraiture and the depiction of possessions: Sir Hugo proposes “a picture of his three daughters sitting on a bank . . . in the Gainsborough style” (600).

Painters, then, have limited vision in Daniel Deronda, as they have in Romola and Middlemarch. It is no coincidence that Mordecai, the poet and mystic, more fully possesses a visual imagination than any of Eliot’s painter figures - final proof of the limited value she attaches to the expressiveness of painting as an art form. She depicts Mordecai searching for examples of “grave and noble types of the human form” among the paintings in the National Gallery and the galleries of Europe and finding that “instances are scattered but thinly” (440). His own mind “wrought” so constantly in images” (441) that he acquires a kind of “second-sight” (439) which enables him to anticipate the appearance of Daniel with visionary intensity. But this remarkable visual imagination finds expression not in painting, but in patriotic poetry and religious mysticism, both of which inspire the more practical Deronda to dedicate his life to Jewish nationalism. The painter’s art, by contrast, is put in amusing perspective, as for instance in the following letter from Meyrick to Daniel which mimics Sir Hugo’s derogatory attitude:

“My good fellow, your attempts at the historic and poetic are simply pitiable. Your brush is just that of a successful portrait-painter - it has a little truth and a great facility in falsehood - your idealism will never do for gods and goddesses and heroic story, but it may fetch a high price as flattery.” (600)

Although these are words of self-mockery, they aptly define the status of the painter in Eliot’s last novel. Far from being the inspired conveyer of true pictures of human life as in her early writing, the painter has become a comic trickster, capable of adapting art to social demands and own interests. Ultimately, Eliot seems to put passion and a sense of the universal beyond the grasp of the painter. These qualities belong to the musician, just as history, poetry, and truth are the domain of the religious visionary and political reformer.

Notes and References to Chapter Five

¹ J. W. Cross, ed., George Eliot's Life (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, n.d.) 171. The journal entry is for 20 July 1854.

² See her journal entries, "Weimar, Description Aug. - Oct." and "Berlin, Recollections, Nov. 1854 to March 1855" in Cross 171 - 185. The essays, "Three Months in Weimar" and "Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar", furthermore appeared in two numbers of Fraser's Magazine, (June and July 1855). These essays have been edited by Thomas Pinney in Essays of George Eliot (London: Routledge, 1963) 82 - 95 and 96 - 122.

³ Pinney, "Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar" 118 - 119.

⁴ Pinney, "Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar" 119.

⁵ Pinney, "Three Months in Weimar" 84.

⁶ Cross 175.

⁷ Pinney, "Three Months in Weimar" 92.

⁸ Pinney, "Three Months in Weimar" 86.

⁹ Pinney, "Three Months in Weimar" 86 and 88.

¹⁰ Cross 175.

¹¹ Henry James, "The Life of George Eliot" (1855), Partial Portraits (1888; University of Michigan Press, 1970) 37 - 62. Particularly relevant here, is a remark such as "We feel in her, always, that she proceeds from the abstract to the concrete" (51).

¹² James's observation about the preponderance of moral and didactic ideas in Eliot's fiction, coupled with the sibylline image increasingly associated with her from the 1870s onwards, goes a long way towards explaining her critical decline in the first decades of the twentieth century. (See Dorothea Barrett, Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) 1 - 13 for an explanation of "the origins and elaboration of the sibyl image".) This in turn explains why F. R. Leavis so frequently invokes James's view as representative of general conceptions about her fiction when he sets about re-establishing her critical status in The Great Tradition (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948 rpt. 1962). Although fiercely dismissive of the way in which she lifts certain characters onto an ideal plane, Leavis salvages the value of Eliot's intellectual tendency from James's criticism by focusing on the mature and sharply delineated vision produced by what he calls "knowledge alive with understanding" (61), or "intelligence lighted by compassion" (70). Barbara Hardy practises a different kind of salvaging in The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form (London: Athlone, 1959), exactly by stressing the formal efficiency of Eliot's fiction, which, she argues, obscures its controlling presence behind the moral, realistic, and philosophical content of her fiction: "It is because her organization, though complex and sustained, is so embedded in her narrative that it has usually passed unpraised" (11).

¹³ "Poetry and Prose, From the Notebook of an Eccentric" appeared in the Coventry Herald and Observer from December 1846 to February 1847. "How to Avoid Disappointment" appeared on 15 January 1847 and is reprinted in Pinney 17 - 19.

¹⁴ George Eliot, "To Maria Lewis", 27 Oct. 1840, The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon S. Haight, vol. 1 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and Oxford University Press, 1954) 71.

¹⁵ George Eliot, "To Mrs Peter Alfred Taylor", 1 Febr. 1853, ed. Haight, vol. 2 (1954) 86.

¹⁶ For some of her ideas on morality and art, see her essay, "The Morality of Wilhelm Meister", which appeared in the Leader, 21 July 1855 (Pinney 143 - 147).

¹⁷ Pinney, "Morality of Wilhelm Meister" 146 - 147.

¹⁸ George Eliot's review, "Westward Ho! And Constance Herbert", appeared in the Westminster Review, July 1855 (Pinney 123 - 126).

¹⁹ Pinney, "Westward" 126.

²⁰ George Eliot's first review of Charles Kingsley appeared in the Leader, 19 May 1855 (see Pinney 123).

²¹ George Eliot wrote the review, "Robert Browning's Men and Women", for the Westminster Review, Jan. 1856. It is reprinted in George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings eds. A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 349 - 357. This quotation occurs on page 349.

²² Byatt and Warren, "Browning" 351 and 355.

²³ See Roland Paulson, Popular and Polite Art in the Age of Hogarth and Fielding (Notre Dame (Indiana): University of Notre Dame Press, 1979) 53 - 63, for an illuminating exposition of canine iconography in British painting and literature. The Victorian dog usually signifies faithfulness unto death, whereas Paulson identifies six categories of meaning in Hogarth's work: the dog as friend, as emblem of sexual license, as emblem of sordidness, the underdog, the "cynic-dog" which comments ironically on the action from an outsider's position, and Hogarth's own dog, Trump, who functions both as "cynic-dog" and "a kind of artist's signature" (53 - 55).

²⁴ Hugh Witemeyer, George Eliot and the Visual Arts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 16 - 19. For a concentrated discussion of the Ruskinian ideas which influenced her writings, see pages 24 - 27.

²⁵ John Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1 (1843), The Works of John Ruskin, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 3 (London: George Allen, 1903) 87.

²⁶ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1, 88.

²⁷ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1, 88 - 89.

²⁸ Some of the "thoughts" singled out by Ruskin are "the close pressure of the dog's breast against the wood, the convulsive clinging of the paws . . . the total powerlessness of the head . . . the fixed and tearful fall of the eye in its utter hopelessness", as well as "the spectacles marking the place where the Bible was last closed, indicating how lonely has been the life, how unwatched the departure" of the old shepherd (Modern Painters, vol. 1, 89).

²⁹ William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey. . . ." Neil Roberts argues in George Eliot: Her Beliefs and Her Art (London: Elek, 1975) that Eliot acquired the concept of "sympathy" from Wordsworth "before she found it confirmed in Comte and Feuerbach" (23).

³⁰ Ruskin's concept of "talk" is developed later in Modern Painters, vol. 1. Speaking about landscape, he states that "[t]alkative facts are always more interesting and more important than silent ones". Thus, "the lines in a crag which mark its stratification, and how it has been washed and rounded by water . . . are more important, because they tell more than the stains of the lichens which change year by year" (163).

³¹ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1, 168 - 169.

³² The discussion of Stanfield occurs in Modern Painters, vol. 1, 226 - 228.

³³ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1, 217.

³⁴ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1, 228.

³⁵ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1, 229 - 231.

³⁶ Reviewers like J. J. Halls (in the 1820s) and John Eagles (thereafter) clearly express their reverence for the ideal visions of the "old masters", frequently at the expense of the modern British school. Halls tends to include some constructive advice to young painters, for instance in prescribing Poussin's classicism as a safe guide to follow, or in reiterating Reynolds's authority (see [J. J. Halls] "Graham's Memoirs of Poussin", Apr. 1821: 23 - 26 and "The British Gallery", June 1821: 340 - 343). Eagles's criticism judges modern British art mainly negatively, for not concentrating on history, for instance, or for omitting lofty ideals and noble "poetry" from landscape, giving the impression that the English are "a nation of pig-butchers, and breeders of asses" ([John Eagles] "The National Gallery", Aug. 1836: 207 - 218; the quotation occurs on page 211). Other writers follow Reynolds's recipe for cultivating the minds of young painters in the right manner. In a satirical attack on the lack of patronage in Britain, P. G. Patmore glosses the steps a young artist should follow, from copying ancient statues in the schools of the Royal Academy, to travelling on the Continent to experience ideal nature in the "grandeur of mountain scenery", ideal art in the Sistine Chapel and the works of the "divine Raphael", and a subsequent test of judgment in the Lowlands, where, "his taste having been purified in the higher schools he will know at once how to separate what is of an exquisite quality from what is base" ([P. G. Patmore] signed A. Z., "On the Cultivation and Patronage of British Art", Letter First, Apr. 1821: 27 - 28). Somewhat later Archibald Alison ascribes the lack of really great painters in Britain to a problem of tuition, and, more specifically, to the inability of British patronage to "place the works of Raphael and Titian and Velasquez in every schoolboy's hands, to form the mind by the study of things that are excellent" ([Alison Archibald] "The British School of Painting", July 1836: 84).

³⁷ Unsigned articles by David Scott appeared in Blackwood's Magazine on Michelangelo (Feb. 1839), Raphael (June 1839), Titian and the Venetians (Jan. 1840), Leonardo da Vinci and Correggio (Aug. 1840), amongst others.

³⁸ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 3 (1856), Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 5, 113.

³⁹ "John Ruskin's Modern Painters, Vol. III" appeared in the Westminster Review in April 1856 (Byatt and Warren, "Ruskin" 368).

⁴⁰ Byatt and Warren, "Ruskin" 368.

⁴¹ Seen by Reynolds in the last two Idler letters as the only style capable of expressing invariable poetic truth.

⁴² Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 3, 42.

⁴³ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 3, 43.

⁴⁴ Byatt, Introduction, George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings xiii.

⁴⁵ The essay "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: the Poet Young" appeared in the Westminster Review, Jan. 1857 (Pinney 335 - 385).

⁴⁶ Pinney, "Worldliness" 381.

⁴⁷ Pinney, "Worldliness" 371.

⁴⁸ A concept explaining the associations called up in the mind by particular words. The term occurs in "The Natural History of German Life", an essay written for the Westminster Review, July 1856 (Pinney 267).

⁴⁹ Pinney, "German Life" 270.

⁵⁰ Pinney, "German Life" 270.

⁵¹ Daniel P. Gunn, "Dutch Painting and the Simple Truth in Adam Bede", Studies in the Novel 24 (1992): 375 and 372. See also Alison Ruth Byerly, "Realism at risk: The representation of the arts in Victorian fiction", DAI 51 (1990): 167A (University of Pennsylvania).

⁵² Leavis is quoting from the essay on George Eliot in James's Partial Portraits (The Great Tradition 28).

⁵³ Most notable are a number of feminist interpretations of her work. See for instance the chapters on Eliot in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). More recently, Dorothea Barrett has commented on the "imbrication" of visual images describing Eliot's heroines which (intentionally or unintentionally) has the effect of qualifying and modifying stereotypical "feminine" characteristics to ones not specifically limited by gender (25 - 26). Such readings, among which I count my own, work against seeing Eliot as an exponent of the "classic realist text". See chapter 2 of Colin MacCabe's James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word (London: Macmillan, 1978), which argues that the discourse of the omniscient narrator in Eliot's works dominates and makes sense of all the other discourses represented in her writing. Much recent criticism, in fact, illustrates how "other discourses" do hold their own against or may even undermine what is perceived as the dominant discourse. See also Leo Bersani, A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), who argues that "[r]ealistic fiction serves nineteenth-century society by providing it with strategies for containing (and repressing) its disorder within significantly structured stories about itself" (63). Eliot tends to use "structured" stories - like the Madonna cult - but it is debatable whether she necessarily serves nineteenth-century society and the status quo with such "stories". One could argue, for example with Gilbert and Gubar, that she adopts a "rhetoric of renunciation" both to criticise nineteenth-century masculine values and to illustrate the strength of submerged femininity. (498 - 499).

⁵⁴ George Eliot, Scenes of Clerical Life, ed. Thomas A. Noble (1857; Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). All further references to the individual Clerical Scenes will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁵⁵ Gilbert and Gubar see the Madonna image differently, as an end-product of the process of "[h]aving 'killed themselves into ladylike docility' undergone by all three heroines of the Clerical Scenes. The "angelic purity" attained by a character like Milly (for these critics) marks a release of Eliot's authorial Nemesis: Milly's Madonna role "provides her with the only possible escape from a life of domestic drudgery, even as it punishes her husband for his neglect of her" (490).

⁵⁶ Witemeyer 8.

⁵⁷ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 3, 38 - 39.

⁵⁸ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 3, 41.

⁵⁹ George Eliot, Adam Bede (1859; London: Oxford University Press, 1904 rpt. 1931), 1. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁶⁰ Pinney, "German Life" 271.

⁶¹ William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of the . . . 'Lyrical Ballads', Poetical Works, revised ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1936) 734. See Simon

Dentith, George Eliot (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), for a discussion of her "Wordsworthian egalitarian impulse" (34).

⁶² Pinney, "German Life" 271.

⁶³ For an overview of what visually literate nineteenth-century readers would have inferred from this alliance, see Monica Brown, "Dutch Painters and British Novel-Readers: Adam Bede in the Context of Victorian Cultural Literacy", Victorians Institute Journal 18 (1990): 113 - 133. See also Daniel P. Gunn, "Dutch Painting and the Simple Truth in Adam Bede".

⁶⁴ In Cross's Life, the following references give an impression of Eliot's occupations and progress while writing Adam Bede. Her journal entry for 28 February 1858 mentions her handing over the manuscript of the "new novel" up to "the end of the second scene in the wood" to John Blackwood (243). In May 1858 she speaks of writing steadily in Munich, with frequent visits to artists' studios and art galleries. Gerard Dou's art in particular receives a favourable mention (248). The journal entry for 13 May records a visit to the Pinakothek to look at Flemish pictures and two days later she is reading chapter 18 of Adam Bede to George Lewes (249).

⁶⁵ See Erich Steingraber, ed., The Alte Pinakothek Munich, trans. Elsie Callander (London: Philip Wilson, 1985) 48 - 50; 70 - 72.

⁶⁶ Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1, 90: "Most pictures of the Dutch school, for instance, excepting always those of Rubens, Vandyke, and Rembrandt, are ostentatious exhibitions of the artist's power of speech, the clear and vigorous elocution of useless and senseless words. . . ."

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, "The World as Object", Critical Essays, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972) 8.

⁶⁸ Cross 252. The quotation records her reaction in July 1858 to Raphael's Sistine Madonna in the Dresden Gemäldegalerie.

⁶⁹ Witemeyer 25, 188 (n. 12), and 190 (n. 18).

⁷⁰ Quoted in Witemeyer 27. Eliot probably saw the Titian (in the Church of the Frari) when she went to Venice in June 1860.

⁷¹ Quoted in Witemeyer 27.

⁷² Both Ruskin and Eliot pick out Guido Reni to illustrate the shortcomings of the Bolognese Baroque. In a letter to his father (14 May 1845), Ruskin complains about the large amount spent by the British Government on a "rascally Guido not worth sixpence" (the National Gallery bought Lot and His Daughters Leaving Sodom and Susannah and the Elders in 1844 for £2,940). A subsequent letter (31 May 1845) finds the "Guido and Caracci school" wanting in "quality and tone of individual colour", and on 10 July 1845 he writes: "I have pretty well now arranged my scale of painters". Guido is number 3 in "Class 4th. School of Errors and vices" (Ruskin In Italy: Letters to His Parents (1845), ed. Harold I. Shapiro (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 63, 91, and 144 - 145. As far as Eliot's attitude is concerned, in a journal entry (9 May 1859) she refers to the "usual 'petty prettiness' of Guido's conceptions" after a visit to the Dulwich Gallery (Cross 274).

⁷³ George Eliot, "To Sara Sophia Hennell", 10 - 13 May 1858, ed. Haight, vol. 2, 454 - 455.

⁷⁴ See Witemeyer's general discussion of conversation and problem pictures as off-shoots of the Netherlandish tradition (107 - 108).

⁷⁵ Own translation of the original, which reads, "Daar baat geen medesyn, want het is minnepyn".

⁷⁶ See Dorothea Barrett for a psychoanalytic, biographical, and impressively close textual approach to the "conflicting elements" which "struggle together" in Eliot's fiction (13). Rejecting MacCabe's idea of an authoritarian narrator firmly in control of a "hierarchy of discourses" (MacCabe 16), Barrett speaks of multiple narrative voices "genuinely self-divided and polyphonic" (32). Her first lengthy analysis of such division is of Adam Bede, in which she recognises a "battle of predominance" between Hetty and Dinah. Although I do not always agree with the detail of Barrett's analysis, for instance her view of the presentation of Hetty's suffering as a possibly (unintentional) subversive celebration of "desire, nature, anarchy, and physicality" (48), her treatment of the way in which Eliot ultimately suppresses both Hetty's sexuality and Dinah's vocational desires in many respects coincides with my reading of the novel's conflicting visual codes.

⁷⁷ See Reynolds's The Hon. Mrs. Masters as Hebe in the collection of John Masters.

⁷⁸ Titian, Sacred and Profane Love, Borgnese Gallery, Rome.

⁷⁹ R. H. Fuchs, Dutch Painting (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 28.

⁸⁰ Dentith regards the realism of Adam Bede as "fundamental": in this novel Eliot "can trace the outlines of human progress in the details of ordinary life" (47). Although I feel that Dentith does not recognise the extent to which Eliot has to edit and manipulate reality in order to make her realism

"fundamental", I agree that reality in *The Mill* is of quite a different quality - "mundane" instead of "fundamental" (48), and therefore problematic for Eliot's early aesthetic.

⁸¹ In her tribute to Eliot in the *Times Literary Supplement* (Nov. 1919), Virginia Woolf interprets this nostalgic impulse to turn "her mind to the past, to the country village, to the quiet and beauty and simplicity of childish memories" as a reaction to the difficulties caused by her unconventional social position as Lewes's companion. In *The Mill* this nostalgic impulse offers escapes of various kinds: right from the start the narrator sets up a hallowed period of childhood experience to which Tom and Maggie finally return. Eliot thus vindicates both the almost archetypal importance of everyday experience in human life and the drastic turn the plot takes at the end of this novel.

⁸² George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (1860; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) bk. 1, ch. 5. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁸³ For a discussion of frequent themes in Victorian domestic narrative painting, see Melvin Waldfoegel, "Narrative Painting", ed. Altholz 169 - 173. A discussion of the dissolution of the family occurs on page 169.

⁸⁴ Witemeyer 187 (n. 4). Witemeyer also quotes the following extract from Lewes's "Realism in Art" which is echoed in Philip's words and which further suggests that Maggie is a Feuerbachian incarnation of "human nature" at its best:

In the never-to-be-forgotten divine babe, we have at once the intensest realism of presentation, with the highest idealism of conception . . . the face is that of a child, but the child is divine . . . we feel that humanity in its highest conceivable form is before us. . . . Here is a picture which from the first has enchained the hearts of men. . . .

⁸⁵ Pinney 18.

⁸⁶ In a letter to François D'Albert-Durade (18 October 1859) she describes her books as "close and detailed pictures of English life", ed. Haight, vol. 3 (1954) 187.

⁸⁷ "The Antigone and its Moral" appeared in the *Leader* on 29 March 1856 (Pinney 261 - 265). The specific quotations occur on 264 - 265.

⁸⁸ George Eliot, *Romola* (1862 - 3; rpt. Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1901) 34, 227, 21, and 243. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁸⁹ Felicia Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot's Poetic Imagination* (Brighton: Harvester, 1979) 37.

⁹⁰ Bonaparte 36.

⁹¹ Bonaparte 37.

⁹² Probably artists like Lippi, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Leonardo, and Raphael.

⁹³ George Eliot's translation of David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* (1835) appeared as *The Life of Jesus* in 1846. Byatt and Warren 454.

⁹⁴ See for instance the following extract:

Humanity is the union of the two natures - God become man, the infinite manifesting itself in the finite. . . . it is the child of the visible Mother and the invisible Father, Nature and Spirit; it is the worker of miracles, in so far as in the course of human history the spirit more and more completely subjugates nature. . . . It is humanity that dies, rises, and ascends to heaven. For from the negation of its phenomenal life there ever proceeds a higher spiritual life. . . . (Byatt and Warren 454)

⁹⁵ George Eliot's translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841) appeared as *The essence of Christianity* in 1854. Byatt and Warren 462.

⁹⁶ See the following extract from Feuerbach: "In isolation human power is limited, in combination it is infinite. The knowledge of a single man is limited, but reason, science, is unlimited, for it is a common act of mankind. . . ." (Byatt and Warren 462).

⁹⁷ Hardy regards "human egoism which may be damned or redeemed" as one of the unobtrusive general principles of organisation in Eliot's fiction (12). See also Hardy's chapter 5, "Character and Form" (78 - 114), for a discussion of the way in which characters either proceed towards altruism ("Daniel Deronda's 'transmutation of self'") or "a slowly hardening egoism which blinds the imagination" (78). One could argue that characters' own limited pictorial perceptions of themselves (eg. Hetty's portrait of a lady, Tito's view of himself as a liberating Bacchus, Gwendolen's pictorial fantasies) represent graphic instances of "hardening egoism".

⁹⁸ See Joseph A. Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny: The Social Discourse of Nineteenth-Century British Classical-Subject Painting* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). Kestner refers to various paintings of Ariadne awaiting rescue at Naxos, but also to the writings and attitudes of a political and social reformer like William Thomas Stead who conducted investigations into the brothels of England and the Continent. According to Kestner, Stead not only associates his own endeavours with the myth of Theseus, the rescuer of threatened maidenhood (as opposed to Theseus, the deserter), but also "reflects his own culture in neglecting to mention the role of Ariadne. . . . Stead manipulates the classical legend, reading it in male terms, omitting aid by a woman to enforce cultural 'rescue' prerogatives" (13 - 14). See also 89.

⁹⁹ George Eliot, "Notes on 'The Spanish Gypsy'" (1868), Cross 424 - 425.

¹⁰⁰ Bonaparte 232.

¹⁰¹ These are Bonaparte's headings for chapters 9 and 10.

¹⁰² George Eliot, "To Mrs Peter Taylor", 30 July 1863, ed. Haight, vol. 4 (1954) 95.

¹⁰³ Her own word for the novel. George Eliot, "To John Blackwood", 23 June 1860, ed. Haight, vol. 3, 307.

¹⁰⁴ In Piero di Cosimo's painting of the reveller overcome by fear, Tito witnesses his own bad conscience made concrete (ch. 18, "The Portrait"). Four chapters later ("The Prisoners"), Piero di Cosimo happens to be in exactly the right spot to see this painting reproduced in reality and to find in Baldassare's look an exact answer to the question of whether the "ghost" in the painting should look "like a dead man come to life" or "half transparent, like a mist" (198). Romola by coincidence notices Baldassare in the cathedral (235), by further coincidence discovers the painting a bit later in Piero di Cosimo's studio - and immediately recognises Baldassare's likeness which has been painted in the meantime. The painting resurfaces here to give Romola yet another mysterious clue to her husband's muddled affairs (a mystery known to the reader, which entirely spoils the point of using a painting as an object of suspense). Lastly, at the supper in the Rucellai Gardens (ch. 39), Eliot once again dredges up the painting. Again the painted scene reproduces itself in reality, with Baldassare surprising a socially triumphant Tito. To make sure nothing is lost on the reader, Eliot has Tito sing some "low notes of triumph" from a "Maenad-chorus" at the moment of interruption (363).

¹⁰⁵ Bonaparte 50.

¹⁰⁶ Bonaparte 50.

¹⁰⁷ Bonaparte 51.

¹⁰⁸ Bonaparte 51.

¹⁰⁹ Bonaparte 51.

¹¹⁰ Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, vol. 2, trans. George Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin Book, 1987) 106.

¹¹¹ Vasari 107.

¹¹² Vasari 106.

¹¹³ Vasari 107.

¹¹⁴ Vasari 114.

¹¹⁵ Barbara Melchiori's essay, "Browning in Italy", regards Browning's interest in painting as "almost exclusively psychological, moral and sociological" (*Writers and their Background: Robert Browning*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: G. Bell, 1974) 181), whereas Leonée Ormond discusses his historical and human emphasis in "Browning and Painting" 197, 201, and 208.

¹¹⁶ George Eliot, "To Richard Holt Hutton", 8 Aug. 1863, ed. Haight, vol. 4 (1955) 97.

¹¹⁷ George Eliot, "To Frederic Harrison", 15 Aug. 1866, ed. Haight, vol. 4, 300.

¹¹⁸ George Eliot, "To Frederic Harrison" 300 - 301.

¹¹⁹ See my earlier reference to Eliot's review of Kingsley (n. 17).

¹²⁰ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll (1871 - 72; Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) 184 - 185.

All further references to this novel will be quoted in the text as page numbers.

¹²¹ Josef von Führich, *The Triumph of Christ*, Museum Narodowe, Poznan. Witemeyer convincingly identifies this painting from a description in Eliot's "Recollections of Berlin" (80 and 207).

¹²² Johann Friedrich Overbeck, *The triumph of Christianity in the Arts*, Städelches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt. For a discussion of the painting's extensive symbolic arrangement of religious figures as well as the artists and patrons who "according to Overbeck, furthered the Arts as a glorification of God", see Keith Andrews, *The Nazarenes: A Brotherhood of German Painters in Rome* (1964; New York: Hacker Art Books, 1988) 126 - 127.

¹²³ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, 54.

¹²⁴ See, for instance, his assessment of the way in which "weaker Christianity suffered" Raphael's "false system to retain influence over them" so that "to this day, the clear and tasteless poison of the art of Raphael infects with sleep of infidelity the hearts of millions of Christians" (*Modern Painters*, vol. 3, 83). Ruskin is referring here to the Raphael Cartoons (presently in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London) depicting the acts of Peter and Paul.

¹²⁵ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, 50.

¹²⁶ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, 53.

¹²⁷ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, 53 - 54.

¹²⁸ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, 109.

¹²⁹ These frescoes appear in the Loggia of Psyche in the Farnesina, Rome.

¹³⁰ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, 95 - 96.

¹³¹ In this respect I find Joseph Wiesenfarth over-optimistic when he concludes that Ladislav and Dorothea's moral and aesthetic sensibilities have become ideally unified by the end of the novel. Dorothea does not seem much more interested in art, and Ladislav turns his mind to more dutiful occupations, suggesting that the gain is all on the "moral" side. See "Middlemarch: The Language of Art", *PMLA* 97 (1982): 373.

¹³² Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, 108.

¹³³ Witemeyer 87.

¹³⁴ See Jill A. Matus, "The Iconography of Motherhood: Word and Image in Middlemarch", *English Studies in Canada* 17 (1991): 283 - 300, for a fuller consideration of these issues. Matus argues that Dorothea's growing aesthetic awareness signifies a coming to terms with feeling and her own sexuality (291-292). She furthermore explores the ambiguities surrounding the Madonna image, and comes to the conclusion that "[d]espite the narrator's dynamic frame for Dorothea as Madonna-like mother, and despite the attempt to raise the "broad world" of female sexuality and emotionality to respected heights, the possibilities that George Eliot can envisage for her heroine are constrained by the oppositions that rigid gender ascriptions generate" (297).

¹³⁵ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley (1876; Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) 22. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.

¹³⁶ Witemeyer 92.

Chapter Six

The Art of Life - The Life of Art in Henry James's Fiction

Towards the end of 1860, after a stay of five and a half years in Europe, Henry James senior herded his family back to America for the next eccentric period in his children's education. The main objective for the move from Paris to Newport was, incongruously, to settle William, the eldest, in his chosen career as painter. Reflecting on the change years later, Henry James junior remembers the reluctance and embarrassment with which he confessed to serious acquaintances that they were going "home to learn to paint".¹ The experiment was not a success: William realised that, after all, he did not want to paint, Henry, that he could not. But failure did not mean waste, at least not in the father's scheme of thought which finds preservation in the cumulative layers of memory and metaphor constituting his literary son's reminiscences:

we breathed somehow an air in which waste, for us at least, couldn't and didn't live, so certain were aberrations and discussions, adventures, excursions and alarms of whatever sort, to wind up in a "transformation scene" or, if the term be not profane, happy harlequinade; a figuration of each involved issue and item before the footlights of a familiar idealism, the most socialised and ironised, the most amusedly generalised, that possibly could be.²

Though ascribed to the father's philosophy here, the practice of arranging experience into "scenes" which can be observed and analysed over a slightly ironic distance as firmly underlies James's own thinking and method of composition. The discovery that he could not make a career of painting characteristically materialises from two vividly opposed scenes which portray the self at a distance and with a certain amount of dry humour.

In the first of these he depicts a serious seventeen year old "sitting quite in solitude" in one of the lesser rooms of William Hunt's Newport studio, "thinking" that he "really might get to copy casts rather well" and that he might be particularly "congratulated" on his "sympathetic rendering of the sublime uplifted face of Michael

Angelo's 'Captive' in the Louvre".³ The situation expands with hopeful idealism: "I had a chamber of the temple all to myself, with immortal forms and curves, with shadows beautiful and right, waiting there on blank-eyed faces for me to prove myself not helpless". The second scene involves the shattering of this happy illusion when, one morning, the young James finds the pupils of "the larger, the serious studio" at work on "the real thing" - a magnificent male figure posing in the nude.⁴ His reaction is a mixture of shock, admiration and disappointment:

This was my first personal vision of the "life," on a pedestal and in a pose, that had half gleamed and half gloomed through the chiaroscuro of our old friend Haydon; and I well recall the crash, at the sight, of all my inward emulation - so forced was I to recognise on the spot that I might niggle for months over plaster casts and not come within miles of any such point of attack.⁵

Dazzled by this encounter with the "living truth" as much as by his brother's "bravery" in attempting to render it James decides to pocket his pencil.

The incident sees him flushed from his comfortable corner in the temple of art and recoiling from the act of direct representation. The reference to Haydon is in itself revealing, since it echoes boyhood assumptions about art which have suddenly become untenable. During their early "daubing" days in London, the two elder James boys preferred this painter, whose work they frequently went to see at the Pantheon in Oxford, to any of the "masters commended as 'old'" in the National Gallery.⁶ Apart from striking them as "shiningly new", his pictures gave some hope that "perhaps in some happy future" it would not be impossible for them to "emulate his big bravery", whereas Rubens and Titian completely repelled such friendly overtures. In Hunt's studio, James had to come to grips with a model literally fresh and vital instead of already-cast into the comfortable lights and shades of Haydon's formulaic chiaroscuro. At this point the episode reaches its full momentum as a "transformation scene", for in the light of his experience the young James relinquishes the idea of becoming a painter and turns to literature as an activity more suited to his abilities and temperament. Within this newly adopted art form, painters and paintings survive, not only as frequent subjects, but more essentially as elements which determine the very shape and mechanism of his writing.

It should become clear at this stage that I use the two autobiographical scenes more to illustrate the way in which the visual arts impinge on James's writing than to trace his early development as an artist. Like all autobiography, James's presents a reorganised and stylised version of immediate experience. The principles according to which the self is placed in an organised framework differ of course from autobiography to autobiography and depend to a large extent on the particular reasons, personal or otherwise, for which such a work has been undertaken. As George Gusdorf points out, the literary search for the self can never be a truly "objective and disinterested pursuit", but always contains some element of "personal justification".⁷ In trying to establish "identity across time", autobiographers inevitably undertake a selective reconstruction of those aspects which they regard as most representative of their existence;⁸ or, in Gusdorf's terms, they single out all the "acts", "faces" and "places" in which they recognise "signs and witness" of their own "destiny".⁹ The process involves an "unavoidable optical illusion" whereby the writing, structuring self is endlessly projected "back to the style of the event itself".¹⁰ Gusdorf's metaphors here come conveniently close to James's own description of autobiographical reflection as a dramatic performance during which a knowing observer watches a former self act out a "happy harlequinade". In the studio scenes, James, the autobiographer, rediscovers and defines his past self in and through an artistic environment and the practices of painting.¹¹ Since the two situations encompass both experience and reflection on experience, both the young writer coming into being and the old one recording the process, they offer a tantalisingly comprehensive metaphor for the wide field in which the visual arts operate in James's writing.¹² As in George Eliot's early aesthetic, pictorial imagery provides a way of capturing situations in their concrete immediacy; but James goes further (and in so doing displays infinitely more confidence in the compatibility of painting and the novel, their means and aims, than any of his predecessors): painting offers him an approach to representation and writing which allows his creative, analytic mind to step back into self-consciously contemplating the workings and effects of art itself, whether visual or literary. Between these poles, the complexities and ambiguities inherent in James's attitude to the visual arts in his extensive career as a writer proliferate endlessly. His fiction constantly weighs up spontaneity of experience against artistic control, the real against the ideal, action

against contemplation, and so on, without ever really settling the bias in either direction. It is tempting to extend this set of oppositions to James's cultural and historical situation in its entirety, suspended as he finds himself between New World spontaneity and Old World cultural self-consciousness, nineteenth-century moral realism and turn of the century Aestheticism.¹³

To return briefly to the incidents in Hunt's studio: it would be preposterous to imply that James turns to literature because he regards it as an art form which circumvents the need for direct observation, or that writing at any stage equals for him the copying of lifeless casts. But it is worth pointing out that writing does offer him a way of regaining confidence in his own creativity. Significantly, his first attempts at writing are reviews and short stories, forms of composition which each in their own way lend the unaccustomed author some support. The critical work comments on others' creativity, whereas the short story by its very nature sets up physical boundaries within which narrative skills are to be deployed. Art criticism in particular strengthens the young James's confidence and practises his expressive faculties by giving him the opportunity to experiment with imaginative translations of visual effects into words. On the whole he has remarkable confidence in an intelligent and eloquent observer's ability to act as a mediator between painter and their public. His early reviews consequently converse on artistic matters with an ease and authority which at times make his remarks broad rather than penetrating. This facility, at least in part attributable to the fact that he writes for an American reading public which is relatively unpractised in such matters, also explains his over-confident and simplistic reliance on pictorial structures in some of his early fiction, for example in a story like "Travelling Companions" written two years after his debut as an art critic. At the same time, however, his criticism does explore creative issues which in various ways influence his practices as a writer and his ideas about fiction as an art form. He starts grappling right from the beginning with ways of formulating the imaginative control which the artist exerts over his material. It becomes a subject which he returns to again and again between 1868 and 1882, taking him right up to his own expert handling of pictorial models in The Portrait of a Lady. In trying to portray an "impression" of the "genius in actual, visible contact - and conflict - with the ever-reluctant possibilities of the subject in hand",¹⁴ James draws heavily on a Romantic vocabulary, for example in the

following description of Delacroix's transformative powers: "It is not that . . . he selects grotesque or exceptional subjects; but that he sees them in a ray of that light that never was on land or sea - which is simply the light of the mind".¹⁵ Distinct Wordsworthian echoes permeate an assessment of four small water-colour landscapes by Turner which James encounters in 1873 in the newly assembled Wallace Collection. The painter's pigments appear to him "dissolved in the unconscious fluid of a faculty more spontaneous even than thought - something closely akin to deep-welling spiritual emotion. Imagination is the common name for it".¹⁶ Five years later in a review of Ruskin's Turner collection, the early "English drawings" signify for James a blend of "transfiguring vision" and "solidity of execution",¹⁷ two elements which impressively balance each other in his own early novel, *The Europeans*, published in the same year. A similar quality, artistic unity wrought by a powerful imagination, becomes the main grounds for comparison two years later between Delacroix and Tintoretto. Like the latter, Delacroix "saw his subject as a whole; not as the portrait of a group of selected and isolated objects, but as an incident in the continuity of things and the passage of human life".¹⁸

The phrase, "the continuity of things", offers a convenient point of transition between James's early emphasis on the artist as a highly gifted but basically solitary individual, and his later views which engage more solidly in mid- and late-Victorian discourses about the place of art in society or which flirt with the *fin-de-siècle* belief in "art for art's sake". Delacroix and Tintoretto assist him in developing these ideas, for not only does he revere the organic unity of vision displayed individually by these painters, but also the connections which they forge for him between distinctive periods of human history, as well as between art and life. James throughout adopts a rather mixed approach: on the one hand he grants the aesthetic viewpoint widely prevalent in the eighties that a painter "has no business with a moral tone or a sentimental opinion" and that "every artist's first and bounden duty is to be an artist"; on the other hand he confesses to liking Delacroix partly for the way in which his painting reflects upon human life, thus acquiring a "moral and psychological" dimension beyond the inherently plastic and technical qualities of the painter's vision. James restates this position emphatically, in the process adopting a slightly reactionary stance: "the artist we value is the artist who tells us most about human life" and, "[i]t is the presence of

heart, and soul, and reason, of something that touches mortalia corda, which constitutes half the charm of Delacroix. For the rest, he is a magnificent executant".¹⁹ A similar emphasis on the basic referential function of art dominates his appreciation of Tintoretto's "Crucifixion" at the Scuola di San Rocco in Venice: "Surely, no single picture in the world contains more of human life; there is everything in it, including the most exquisite beauty".²⁰

Although James's satisfaction with Delacroix's "moral tone" and his focus on the "human interest" in art seem to lend a strong Ruskinian slant to his views, his position remains essentially unresolved. The Delacroix essay itself starts off by announcing the subjective nature of its basic premises with quite a Pateresque flair:

a person whose sole relation to pictures is a disposition to enjoy them can rest upon his personal impressions; and in the case of the writer of these lines such an impression has been conscious of no chilling responsibilities. I have felt no obligation to determine . . . Delacroix's place in the hierarchy of painters, or to ascertain the figure he would present if he should be made to constitute the apex of a pyramid of prostrate rivals.²¹

This remark is probably aimed directly at Ruskin's "heaven-pointing pyramid" of truthful painters and paintings;²² James's method of luxuriously and selectively savouring Delacroix's work in his mind until "a vivid sense of the rare quality of his genius comes back" to him at any rate approaches Pater rather than Ruskin.²³ The former enquires with equal leisure into "the peculiar sensation" which a particular artist "has the property of exciting in us"²⁴, whereas the latter pursues truths in nature and art in densely informative and rigorously analytical prose. The "moral tone", moreover, which James detects and admires in Delacroix remains largely unexpressed - he regards it as "beside the mark to try and give a name to this metaphysical emanation".

It is quite conceivable that a casual critic (like James) would be less precise in thought and expression than a committed professional (like Ruskin), but this difference set aside, James at times courts a deliberate vagueness and relativity in his criticism with the aim of keeping it light, spontaneous, and suggestive. He is furthermore quite outspoken in his criticism of Ruskin, mischievously so in "Italy Revisited" (1877) in which he personifies this author's austere style of commentary (in publications like

Mornings in Florence) as a pedagogue who “pushes and pulls his unhappy pupils about, jerking their heads towards this, rapping their knuckles for that”.²⁵ Against this, James presents his own peaceful meanderings which treats the world of art as a place where “we may take our ease”, a “garden of delight” with plentiful sweet fruit for the picking, not Ruskin’s “assize-court, in perpetual session”.²⁶ The degree of “charm” displayed by a painter becomes a common criterion in his criticism, especially when his concern is with minor or contemporary works. At the same time, however, the artist’s control over his medium and subject, his ability to transform “base fact”, remains important to James in even the slightest productions.²⁷ Thus, he praises Decamps’s luminous versions of Middle Eastern scenery in the Wallace Collection on the grounds that the painter has given his subject “that fanciful turn which makes it a picture” even though such artistic practice involves “a certain happy compromise with reality”.²⁸ The key word here is “happy”: as long as the painter’s pictorial vision (as expressed through his power of execution) strikes a felicitous bargain with reality, James seems prepared to waive all charges of insincerity or unreality brought against the artist.

The same criteria, applied with quite the opposite effect, dominate his assessment of the second Impressionist exhibition at Durand-Ruel in 1876. Unlike Decamps, who paints “not the thing regarded, but the thing remembered, imagined, desired - in some degree or other intellectualized”, this group of painters deal “simply” with “the actual” and aim at giving “a vivid impression of how a thing happens to look, at a particular moment”.²⁹ James’s prejudices in favour of an artist with a strong controlling presence are evident here, for instead of finding Decamps frustratingly indirect, he praises aspects such as his “immeasurable vivacity” exactly within the framework of his overall imaginative vision.³⁰ The “vivid impression” aimed at in Impressionist painting, by contrast, fails according to James because it belongs to “unadorned reality” and is the work of painters who are “absolute foes to arrangement, embellishment, selection”.³¹

On the whole, this encounter with the Impressionists reveals a deep-seated dogmatism not always apparent under the graceful flourishes which James performs in his art criticism when he is touched or charmed by a work. Although he shows a fair understanding of Impressionist intentions (they were after all, widely publicised) he gags on the implications which they seem to hold for the status of art, the artist, and maybe even the type of critic he envisages himself to be. I am far from suggesting that

a critic is necessarily dogmatic for not appreciating the Impressionists. What does become apparent, however, from James's treatment of them is the way in which they send him scrambling back to the most general and generalising components of any art critic's vocabulary.³² He appeals to "all the good old rules which decree that beauty is beauty and ugliness ugliness" and suggests rather ill-humouredly that only second-rate talents would embrace Impressionist doctrines since they require "a plentiful absence of imagination".³³ It is curious, given the sense of lightness and irresponsibility which he often cultivates with such care in his criticism, that James does not respond to purely painterly effects such as colour or movement in these paintings. In this respect, his slight preference for the Pre-Raphaelites of "twenty years ago" as a group having "something in common" with the Impressionists, although they are more "interesting", is telling, especially in the light of the "moral differences" which he detects between them: while the "English realists" also represent "hard truth and stern fact", they try to "purchase forgiveness for their infidelity to the old more or less moral proprieties and conventionalities, by an exquisite, patient, virtuous manipulation; the Impressionists, against this, "abjure virtue altogether, and declare that a subject which has been crudely chosen shall be loosely treated". The English are "pedants", the French "cynics"; although neither group charms him, he uses words like "exquisite" and "virtuous" to describe the former, and "crudely" for the latter, which suggests some bias towards pedantry and at least a touch of hypocrisy in, for instance, the sarcasms directed against Ruskin's moral seriousness.

One of James's main problems with the Impressionists is undoubtedly that they do not suggest anything for his particular type of criticism to expound on: "crudely chosen" impressions do not prompt beautifully turned phrases, and an "absence of imagination" leaves his own stone cold. At a first glance, this complete misfit is surprising. James often claims a kind of "impressionism" for his writing which one would expect to be compatible, in some way or other, with the practices of Impressionist painting. But then, his "impressions", however subjective or fleeting, are carefully toned into his writing so that one is always aware of a meticulous literary "composition" or arrangement of effects, whereas he does not recognise or give credit to the formal principles which often underlie Impressionist works under their guise of informality.

An excellent opportunity for summarising the general tendencies of James's art criticism, both its strengths and weaknesses, can be found in the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in London. In May 1877 Sir Coutts Lindsay opened this private gallery in New Bond Street. His intention was to escape the conservatism of Royal Academy hanging committees, notorious for promoting the same well-trying favourites year after year at the expense of more daring artists. This select exhibition contained a high proportion of innovative works which challenged and in some cases perplexed the band of reviewers covering the event. Among their voices sound the usual reactionary tones of an Art Journal reviewer who likes a "capital piece of realistic painting" (like Legros's Le Chaudronnier) and finds Whistler's Nocturnes "simply too subtle".³⁴ H. Heathcote Stratham's of Macmillan's Magazine wonders whether the Grosvenor does not undermine the health and native robustness typical of British art exhibitions. On the whole, he expresses doubt about the basic soundness of Sir Coutts's venture, sensing among exhibitors "an element of eccentricity" and a cultural spirit hostile to his belief that all "robust human genius" should seek "the light of day". He concludes:

if the Grosvenor Gallery is to . . . exercise the healthy influence on contemporary painting which has been professed and hoped for, it must be by promoting the art which appeals to the widest sympathies and culture of the educated world, rather than by enabling certain limited circles of dilettanti to indulge each in its favourite flavour of caviar.³⁵

Exclusivity and trendiness were indeed features of this opening. The plaintive Stratham might have missed James, that budding exponent of exclusivity who contributed a review to the American journal, The Galaxy. More conspicuous must have been the reviewer for the Dublin University Magazine - the aspiring art critic, Oscar Wilde, making his London debut in a cello-shaped coat.

A comparison of James and Wilde's impressions of the Grosvenor Gallery is bound to be unfair in various ways.³⁶ Even though his article appears in an Irish rather than an English magazine, Wilde has the advantage of being more immediately relevant to his public, whereas James has to communicate the event across the Atlantic and over some cultural barriers; James, on the other hand, has behind him a decade's experience, whereas Wilde is launching himself rather over-ambitiously on a career. The exercise nonetheless yields some interesting results.

James regards Burne-Jones as “quite the lion of the exhibition” and although he states firmly that he is “not at all in sympathy” with this “school of art” which tends “to look at things after that morbidly ingenious fashion”, the section dealing with this painter contains by far the best writing of the review.³⁷ So articulate is James on Burne-Jones, that one suspects a greater kinship between their types of art than he would be prepared to acknowledge. His description of the painter’s indirect mirroring of life in art could be as easily applied to a number of his own artistic “fables” written from 1866 onwards. In his tales, characters fall in love with statues, plunge daggers into portraits, or expire through sheer aesthetic misconception; in the criticism, James expresses guarded reservations about Burne-Jones’s

art of culture, of reflection, of intellectual luxury, of aesthetic refinement, of people who look at the world and at life not directly, as it were, and in all its accidental reality, but in the reflection and ornamental portrait of it furnished by art itself in other manifestations; furnished by literature, by poetry, by history, by erudition.³⁸

Imagining critics’ irritation with such features, he defends Burne-Jones against charges of introversion, élitism, of merely “thinking” instead of “looking” by pointing out that a painting like *The Beguiling of Merlin* is “a brilliant piece of simple rendering” and that “the strictly plastic side” of the painting “never really lapses” although “the brilliantly suggestive side of his work holds a perpetual revel of its own”.³⁹

An interesting side-effect of James’s defence is that it incorporates, if not unwittingly, then most certainly unwillingly, the type of sensibility coming across in Wilde’s review. One of the objections which James imagines lodged against Burne-Jones is that his art smacks of “superior education, a reminiscence of Oxford, a luxury of culture”. These are all features which Wilde hastens to praise in others’ works and to display in his own (he wrote his review while rusticated from Oxford for lingering too long in Italy and Greece over his Easter vacation). Wilde often judges artistic performance in terms of the artist’s knowledge of literary or other sources (which gives him the opportunity to show off his own). He furthermore singles out elements such as colour or decorative design which offer him ample scope for exhibiting his own descriptive and expressive talents. Twice quoting Pater as saying that colour is “a spirit” upon natural objects “by which they become expressive to the spirit”, he

enthusiastically embarks upon the tautologous and entirely subjective activity of duplicating in writing the effects produced on him by Burne-Jones's "Merlin" painting: the delicate tones evoke in Wilde "the idea of languid sleep", "hawthorn blossoms", "the pale moonlight to which Shelley compared them".⁴⁰ Art indeed reflects art at all levels of his criticism: painted forget-me-nots resemble scattered gem stones; a Walter Crane "Renaissance of Venus" gives a "vapid" reinterpretation of the "beauty and passion" which Botticelli and Swinburne put into this scene; and, to illustrate how completely subjective and amusingly self-indulgent Wilde's system of cultural cross-reference can be, a minor painting by Stanhope with the title "Love and the Maiden" sends him off on a long eulogy of the allegorical figure's "boyish beauty" which begins with real boys on the Greek islands, moves on to Plato's Charmides, Guido's "St. Sebastian", and Perugino's "Ganymede", and arrives ecstatically at Correggio's "lily-bearer in the Cathedral at Parma" and his "wild-eyed, open-mouthed St Johns in the Incoronata Madonna of St. Giovanni Evangelist".⁴¹

Such breathtaking loss of control is inconceivable in James, even at his most "delighted" or "charmed". His writing remains carefully disciplined, his effects studied, his views moderate. It is maybe partly because of this moderation that he disposes firmly of Whistler before he turns to Burne-Jones. Like the latter, Whistler is a painter firmly associated with the launching of the Grosvenor Gallery, but whereas James justifies and praises Burne-Jones's indirect way of dealing with life, he clearly shows his distaste for what he regards as Whistler's non-representational and self-referential art. In this he is as dogmatic as when dealing with the French Impressionists. Wilde, by contrast, responds to Whistler with the irresponsible lightness which James himself advocates at times: he treats this painter jocularly by saying that his rocket studies are "certainly worth looking at for about as long as one looks at a real rocket". At the same time, he is obviously intrigued by the eccentric "Great Dark Master", the sheer artistic energy of his nocturnal colour-bursts, and the smudgy yet "ridiculously like portrait of the actor, Henry Irving".⁴²

Although the styles of criticism practised by James and Wilde are temperamentally quite distinct, Whistler is the only painter who draws radically different responses from them. For the rest, they appreciate more or less the same works and sometimes even dislike paintings for remarkably similar reasons. Both mention the highly "accurate"

realism of the contemporary Belgian painter Tissot in terms of disagreeable harshness, vulgarity and superficiality, and each in his own way singles out the seventeenth-century Dutch realists as painters with a more durable and attractive conception of the real: James laments the passage of "soft" and "delightful" realism in general, while Wilde, quite in character, focuses on an object of beauty and luxury which he remembers from a Dutch painting - an "exquisite Venetian glass a-glow with light and wine".⁴³

During the five years following the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery, the paths of these two reviewers separated widely. Wilde experienced a spectacular rise to fame as one of the most popular exponents of the Aesthetic movement. Although he produced very little writing during this period, his flamboyant presence in London alone seemed enough to provide ample material for other artists, satirists in particular. George du Maurier's caricatures of Aesthetes in Punch received fresh impetus from Wilde's sayings and doings in the late seventies and early eighties; F.C. Burnand's farce, The Colonel, enacting the triumph of a cavalry officer over a Professor of Aesthetics, became a London hit in February 1881; and in April 1881 Gilbert and Sullivan staged their comic opera, Patience, in which rival Aesthetes, Bunthorne and Grosvenor, patter out the characteristic Aesthetic idiom. So closely was the last work associated with Wilde personally that the producer of the opera in New York invited him across the Atlantic to exhibit to American audiences as a living example of the Aesthetic species. James, in the meantime, committed to his life as a foreigner and an outsider, was working away at several novels while continuing to publish tales, novellas, and critical essays. Maybe the discrepancy between his own and Wilde's fortunes intensified his irritation with the Aesthetes, whom he ended up regarding as symptomatic of a general lack of real aesthetic sense in Britain.

In typical fashion, James stayed out of the main fray, tackling these issues not directly, but under the guise of an essay on Du Maurier, and only in 1883, by which time the craze for Aesthetic satires had somewhat died down.⁴⁴ The essay as a whole deals with Du Maurier as a satirist of social manners who converts "scenes" of English life into satirical pictures. James refers several times to the cartoonist's "detached mind" as the faculty which most enables him to "catch" the "postures" of people in society. "His is the detached mind - he takes refuge in the divine independence of art",

James reiterates, then demonstrates how Du Maurier's "scenes" contain within themselves hidden relations, "incongruities" "pressed beneath the surface so that the picture has need of a certain amount of explanation".⁴⁵ Towards the end of the essay he recognises in these pictures a type of irony which is essentially also his own - "the irony of the thorough-going artist and of the observer who has a strain of foreign blood in his veins".⁴⁶

James's sense of kinship with Du Maurier, however, sometimes makes him misjudge his tone, in that he transfers his own annoyance with the Aesthetes to the cartoonist. The latter's attitude is on the whole one of amused tolerance. The "blue china" series, for instance (appearing between 1874 and 1877, with one stray cartoon on the topic in 1880)⁴⁷ captures the simultaneous inertia and intensity of Aesthetic object worship with beautifully poised humour. Later creations like Mrs. Cimabue Brown with her haggard Pre-Raphaelite looks, the languidly vain Postlethwaite, the prurient Maudle and their anaemic followers Prigsby and Milkington Sopley sometimes receive harsher treatment, but the artist throughout seems to keep in mind that hostility would chill his type of humour (see figs. 57 - 59). He often refracts his satire through a good-natured "Philistine" character whose reactions to Aesthetic behaviour range from astonishment to exasperation, but hardly ever become more violent. Du Maurier's laughter, at times quite daring, is never spiteful. But although James himself refers to his "good-natured 'chaff' of the eccentricities of the plastic sense so newly and so strangely awakened in England", he responds to the cartoons with a peculiar lack of joy.⁴⁸ There is a touch of censorious outrage in his attitude which makes him miss all the fun as he transforms Du Maurier's leisurely deployed humour into an organised "crusade against the 'aesthetic' movement" and his, if anything, ephemeral figures into physiognomic monsters. "Du Maurier can see ugliness . . . when he has a strong motive for looking for it", James says approvingly, then embroiders enthusiastically on this type of "ugliness":

Who could be uglier than Maudle and Postlethwaite and all the other apparitions from "passionate Brompton"? Who could have more bulging foreheads, more protuberant eyes, more retreating jaws, more sloping shoulders, more objectionable hair, more of the signs generally of personal debility?⁴⁹



REFINEMENTS OF MODERN SPEECH.

SCENE—A Drawing-room in "Passionate Brompton."

Fair Aesthetic (suddenly, and in deepest tones, to Smith, who has just been introduced to her in to Dinner). "ARE YOU INTERESTED?"

Fig. 57. George du Maurier, Punch (1879).



NINCOMPOPIANA.

Young Milkington Sopley (a follower of Postlethwaite's). "A—YOU WERE NOT AT THE CIMABUE BROWN'S LAST NIGHT, MISS DIANA!"

Miss Diana (who does not like Esthetes). "NO. WERE YOU!"

Sopley. "OH YES, INDEED."

Miss Diana. "AND WAS IT A PLEASANT PARTY?"

Sopley. "MOST CONSUMMATELY SO!"

Miss Diana. "AND WERE YOU VERY MUCH ADMIRER?"

Fig. 58. George du Maurier, Punch (1880).



POSTLETHWAITE ON "REFRACTION."

Grigsby. "HULLO, MY JELLABY, YOU HERE! COME AND TAKE A DIP IN THE BRINY, OLD MAN. I'M SURE YOU LOOK AS IF YOU WANTED IT!"

Postlethwaite. "THANKS, NO. I NEVER BATHE. I ALWAYS SEE MYSELF SO DREADFULLY FORESHORTENED IN THE WATER, YOU KNOW!"

Fig. 59. George du Maurier, Punch (1881).

What the essay ultimately illustrates most clearly is James's position as an outsider and his way of adopting opposing stances. His views veer uneasily from a vague desire for a "moral tone" to an insistence on the supremacy of "plastic sense" and subjective experience in art. The ambivalence extends into his literary criticism, which often reaches conclusions only by stressing one of these qualities at the expense of the other. Swinburne strikes James as a writer whose "genius is for style simply, and not in the least for thought, not for real analysis".⁵⁰ "Style" becomes positively obstructive in this case: James remarks that Swinburne "quite loses sight of the subject in the entertainment he finds in his own word-spinning". In keeping with the predominantly pictorial metaphors which James uses to make distinctions in his literary criticism, he classifies Swinburne as a dabbler with an eye for clever, but superficial, picturesque effects, whose idea of "the moral realm" is consequently "simply a brilliant chiaroscuro of costume and posture".⁵¹ George Eliot, by contrast, shows an "absence of spontaneity" and an "excess of reflection",⁵² with the result that "her figures and situations are evolved . . . from her moral consciousness, and are only indirectly the products of observation. . . . they are not seen, in the irresponsible plastic way".⁵³ And thirdly, to return to an artist with an overdeveloped "plastic sense", Flaubert represents for James an extreme. He is the "man of style" who, bound by his own idealism, "should" (or, could, as James implies) "never stoop to action".⁵⁴ So caught up in his own aesthetic does James find Flaubert, that he presents him as "one of the martyrs of the plastic idea", or, again borrowing a striking metaphor from the visual arts, as an artist petrified by his own stylistic demands: he envisages the novelist forever "upright as a sentinel and shapely as a statue", but for ever excluded from "the chamber of the soul".⁵⁵

In each of these cases the ambivalence of James's own position is hidden by the fact that his criticism redresses an imbalance which he perceives in specific writers' works. A more demanding situation occurs in the essay, "The Art of Fiction" (1884), which sets itself the task of formulating a theoretical framework for the novel in general - and does so, with James performing a dazzling egg-dance, weaving around exact statements with shifting qualifiers and compromising counter-statements. He starts this display quite straightforwardly by establishing a basic link between the novel and life: "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to

represent life".⁵⁶ To clarify this statement even further, he attaches to it a pictorial analogue: "as the picture is reality, so the novel is history".⁵⁷ Like the painter, the novelist seeks to represent the "truth" of observation; and at this point one runs into the first qualifier, tucked away in parentheses: "(the truth, of course I mean, that he [the novelist] assumes, the premises that we must grant him, whatever they may be)";⁵⁸ which leads, surreptitiously, to another basic premise, somewhat at variance with the first: that the artist should be "perfectly free" to exercise his art completely according to "a personal direct impression of life". Not only his impressions, but also his execution of these in language should belong to "the author alone"; which prompts another pictorial analogue: "there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant - no limit to his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes. Here it is especially that he works, step by step, like his brother of the brush".⁵⁹

After this step in the direction of subjectivity and plastic autonomy, James skips back to his first premise of art as representation: unless the novelist possesses "the sense of reality" he will not write good works; but this statement is immediately qualified to open up the concept: "reality", after all, "has a myriad forms".⁶⁰ In the same way, personal experience expands to become an extensive system of observation which co-ordinates sensory impressions with imaginative inference:

Experience is never limited, and is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every airborne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative . . . it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations.⁶¹

It is important to note here that James translates these "hints of life" or "glimpses" into pictures, the structure of which suggests various further relations and possibilities, just as Du Maurier's social cartoons imply a wealth of potential meaning "pressed beneath the surface". The static but endlessly suggestive scene, therefore, lies at the heart of this essay as it does of all James's writing. It represents, simultaneously, a fragment of life and of art, immediate observation and meticulous reconstruction. James sees the work of art as both artificial and alive, as construction and as organism. It is mainly this ambivalence which enables him to regard writing as a predominantly stylistic craft in

the manner of Pater and Wilde, and at the same time to retain certain Ruskinian ideas, especially about the link between art and morality.⁶² The inconclusive juxtaposition of critical concepts in his writing can be both ingenious and exasperating. Continual shifts of viewpoint and emphasis at times deepen the suggestive dimensions of his ideas; at other times the same elements cause oppressive vagueness and lead to endless prevarication. The main set of oppositions to emerge involves the relations which he perceives between art and life; but these relations themselves shift and change depending on James's particular point of view. To simplify: his criticism mainly stresses the dependence of art on personal observation and experience, whereas his fiction, autobiographical volumes, and travel sketches often reverse this situation by using works of art (real or imaginary) to regulate, analyse, and interpret experience. Sometimes he imposes art rigidly on life, at other times life on art. An essay on Niagara contains a preposterous passage discussing the "perfect taste" of the waterfall and claiming that it "beats" Michelangelo's sculpture "[i]n the matter of line".⁶³ In A Small Boy and Others, against this, he confesses to having preferred Delaroche's paintings to Delacroix's purely because of their more obvious historical and emotional connotations.⁶⁴ In a few cases, James experiences a merging together of art and life in an ideally equivalent relationship. These occasions give rise to some of his best writing, as he suddenly senses himself free of puzzling, conflicting categories. Such epiphanies (for they have the force of religious revelations) occur in his reminiscences of boyhood visits to the Louvre when "the house of life and the palace of art became so mixed and interchangeable - the Louvre being . . . the most peopled of all scenes not less than the most hushed of all temples";⁶⁵ or they happen in Venice, during a quickening moment in May when "[e]very patch of colour, every yard of weather-stained stucco, every glimpse of nestling garden or daub of sky above a calle, began to shine and sparkle - began, as the painters say, to "compose".⁶⁶ Elsewhere he exactly captures, in beautifully balanced repetitions and inversions, the sense of unity which for him permeates this city:

Nowhere . . . do art and life seem so interfused and, as it were, so consanguineous. All the splendour of light and colour, all the Venetian air and the Venetian history, are on the walls and ceilings of the palaces; and all the genius of the masters, all the images and visions they have

left upon canvas, seem to tremble in the sunbeams and dance upon the waves. That is the perpetual interest of the place - that you live in a certain sort of knowledge as in a rosy cloud.⁶⁷

James enters the world of fiction through essays and short stories. The material which he explores in his criticism and travel sketches finds simultaneous, if somewhat altered, expression in his first attempts at fictional writing. His stories pose the same antitheses which riddle his critical views, but whereas oppositions in theoretical arguments mainly reflect a manner of thinking, those occurring in fiction become structurally and thematically significant. Their specific appearance in a work of art, their position in a fictional context, becomes pertinently relevant to any attempt at determining their meaning.⁶⁸ In one of his earliest stories, "A Landscape Painter" (1866), James draws impressively on the unresolved tensions which he perceives between art and life, idealism and realism. His main character, an amateur painter, sets himself the task of representing an unspoilt coastline in all its delicate and subtly variable "moods and tenses"; he ends up projecting the qualities of his landscape aesthetic on a young woman, expecting her to be "honest", "simple" and self-sufficiently whole in keeping with the beautiful scenery surrounding her.⁶⁹ Miriam complements and completes his artistic vision: at one point he remarks that his natural "prospect is ever more or less like a picture which lacks its final process, its reduction to unity"; immediately afterwards the girl steps into view and animates "the whole scene" (127). The narrator characterises Locksley, the painter, from the start as a young man "capable of doing battle for an 'idea'" and relates how he ended a previous engagement because he discovered his fiancée to be "mercenary" (100). But this idealism, coupled with his finely tuned aesthetic sensibility, makes him fail to notice Miriam's deceitfulness, so that the story finally comments ironically on his realist aesthetic and unrealistic expectations, his imagined circumstances and real situation.

In this case, unresolved tension is a narrative gain. A later story, "Travelling Companions" (1870), addresses an impossibly wide range of such polarities, and sacrifices the narrative completely to the business of reconciling these. The story jerks ahead uneasily, interrupted by long passages of travel sketch and art criticism which emanate from the mind of the voluble (and self-important) first person narrator, Mr Brooke.⁷⁰ While falling in love with an American girl travelling in Italy, he goes about

his sight-seeing endlessly weighing up categories such as direct "Observation" and the "Imagination", beauty and morality, the real and the ideal, the painter's vision and his basic subject-matter. The conclusions which he reaches through these deliberate balancing acts are forced in a fictional context (although the joyful discovery that he can feel the intellect and live through art in Italy resembles James's own celebration of unity in Venice). The main problem is that narrative events are overtly manipulated to conform to theoretical exercises. So, for instance, Miss Evans scolds Mr Brooke for making love to her in a country where "beauty and delight" overpower reason and reality (vol. 2, 203). She repeats the lesson from different premises in Padua, after they have been admiring the "essential", "masculine" art of Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel: "we ought to learn from all this to be real; real even as Giotto is real; to discriminate between genuine and factitious sentiment" (210). But Mr. Brooke eventually persuades her in front of Titian's Sacred and Profane Love in Rome, a picture which for him "unites the charm of an air of latent symbolism with a steadfast splendor and solid perfection of design", that their love is indeed powerful enough to work a synthesis between knowledge and experience (224).

Apart from showing that long descriptions of art obstruct the progress of narrative, "Travelling Companions" also illustrates how specific (and wholly unironical) references to actual works can end up dictating meaning mechanically. James generally has more success when he creates imaginary art works which can be specifically moulded to suit the concentrated nature of short story narrative, or when he turns his attention to strikingly subjective (even deranged) reactions caused by paintings (real or imaginary) in characters' minds. James's art best generates meaning through inference and glancing intersection, not through direct statement. This is also why the critic's main activity should not lie in hunting down particular references (although this exercise is always gratifying, and essential in most cases), but in carefully observing the ways in which paintings, whether concretely realised or merely approximated through schemata, operate in their specific narrative contexts. In this respect, Viola Hopkins Winner's study on James and the visual arts produces more sensitive critical insights than Adeline Tintner's recent encyclopaedic reconstruction of James's "Museum World" which, though a thorough reference work, frequently stops short of interpretation or oversimplifies interrelated issues.⁷¹ Both of these critics

associate "Travelling Companions" with "A Passionate Pilgrim" (1871), Winner commenting on the fact that the later story is equally "overloaded with art description" and Tintner cataloguing the public art collections that are "systematically traversed" in this slightly "more sophisticated travelogue".⁷² But neither looks at these artistic references in the more complex narrative context of the later story which allows an exploration of aesthetic sensibility, both as it manifests itself in the balanced, detached mind of the observer-narrator, and through the havoc it wreaks in Searle's obsessed mind. Paintings (amongst other cultural objects ranging from a majolica vase to Oxford colleges), function in this story as powerful psychological catalysts which precipitate Searle's mental breakdown. He assumes the identity of an eighteenth-century ancestor represented in a Reynolds portrait and imposes the image of a previous Miss Searle, a rebel who married against the wishes of the family, on his placid cousin, the present Miss Searle. Family history, as recorded in portraits in the Gothic manner, starts determining his perceptions of reality.⁷³ In "Travelling Companions" Mr Brooke perceives an equally direct link between art and life; but in "A Passionate Pilgrim" James provides a narrative framework within which such an equation becomes a sign of psychosis.

The practice of studying characters' psychological make-up by their reaction to works of art occurs in several other stories. It appears for the first time in "The Story of a Master-piece" (1868) which anticipates Wilde's *Dorian Gray* with impressive economy, and later in three tales produced in quick succession: "The Madonna of the Future" (1873), "The Sweetheart of M. Briseux" (1873), and "The Last of the Valerii" (1874). These stories all grow from the complex relationship which James senses between art and life, or to be more precise, between the artist and his basic material on the one hand, the work of art and the viewer on the other. As the product of the artist's cultural circumstances and transformative vision, the work of art contains in itself various conflicts and energies at work in both history and the individual mind; and because of the emphasis which James places on the sensitive viewer's susceptibilities to art, these conflicts and energies set up a resonance in receptive minds. This response, however, is once again transformed (to a greater or lesser extent) by the subjectivity which governs all individual impressions, whether of life directly, or of life through art.

Like Brontë in Jane Eyre, therefore, James uses paintings to probe and record mental processes. But, whereas the earlier novelist plots the consecutive stages of the character's psychological development in pictorial imagery, James experiments with multiple viewpoints and subjective deviations which reverberate within a fairly static and strictly controlled narrative framework. His fascination with subjective mental states furthermore suggests, incongruous as it may seem, a kinship with the Browning dramatic monologue. Although the Jamesian short story differs from the dramatic monologue in that it usually provides a stable narrative viewpoint against which subjective deviations can be measured, it nonetheless follows Browning's lead in presenting situations which can never be wholly resolved. Distortions do not go unchecked as in the dramatic monologue, and yet James allows his markedly subjective speakers to develop an individuality and urgency of voice which usually wins the narrator's sympathy and therefore lingers on as valid in at least some ways, no matter how disturbed or impractical it may seem in others.

James became acquainted with Browning's Men and Women in the early 1860s through his painter friend, John La Farge. In two of the early "painting" stories he alludes to Browning, each time to reinforce the autonomy of the individual voice in the overall narrative set-up and to comment indirectly on the psychological condition of such a solitary voice. "The Story of a Master-piece" (1868) contains a fanciful portrait called "My Last Duchess" which appears at the beginning and towards the end of the tale, bracketing the mental change undergone by the main character during the course of the story. The rich widower, Lennox, initially a happy and devoted lover, gradually becomes disillusioned with his fiancée, until his condition loosely approximates that of the Duke in Browning's poem. Whereas the allusion neatly punctuates the beginning and end of this development, the actual process of disillusionment is closely linked with another painting, a work in progress commissioned by Lennox (a portrait of his fiancée). James handles his material with great skill, developing the interdependent and highly suggestive relationships between painter, portrait, sitter, and patron. The narrative focus swivels from character to character, presenting their observations in turn. The work in progress is relevant to each of these shifts: while it is chiefly operative in Lennox's disenchantment, it also reflects the controlled equanimity of Baxter's artistic nature, and comments with ironic precision on Marian's insensitive

behaviour. Lennox initially formulates his doubts about the portrait in the language of art appreciation: the picture presents “too frank a reality”, is too “actual”, and instead of treating its subject’s beauty with classical deference, it turns the girl into a “study” as if she were a “professional model” (vol. 1, 282 - 283). But these aesthetic doubts gradually become suspicions about Marian’s character: the “firm yet passionate lines” of the painting by their elegant lightness suggest to him that the chief characteristic of her “soul” might be “levity too” (285). As far as Baxter’s attitude towards the portrait (and sitter) is concerned, he displays the “detached mind” of the true Jamesian artist in that he turns personal loss and discomfort into disinterested artistic gain. And Marian, exactly “like” her portrait, continues “to smile and smile” throughout this critical period without any real care for either her own “moral dinginess” or Lennox’s uncertainty (292).

Whereas the work in progress bears the main thematic and structural weight, the “Last Duchess” painting provides the final twist in typical short story fashion. Towards the end of the tale James engages in lively pictorial play which first focuses on Marian’s portrait, presenting Lennox’s disillusionment with visual opportunism from yet another angle, then tracks to the “Last Duchess” for the denouement. Lennox encounters Baxter’s fiancée (who has lively “irregular features” and is “evidently an excellent person”) before Marion’s finished portrait (293), her head next to the painted face, resulting in the following superimposition of images:

for a moment, the freshness and the strong animation which bloomed upon her features seemed to obliterate the lines and colors on the canvas. But the next moment, as Lennox looked, the roseate circle of Marian’s face blazed into remorseless distinctness, and her careless blue eyes looked with cynical familiarity into his own. (294)

The visual effect is highly artificial, but nonetheless powerful. At this point James reintroduces the fanciful “Last Duchess” portrait which is no longer associated with Lennox’s initial view of Marian as an exponent of beautiful and gentle womanhood, but with his own obsessed mind. Although the parallel with the Duke of Ferrara should be treated very loosely (Lennox, after all, is sensitive and humane), the story ends with a tortured main character trapped in the type of situation that Browning’s dramatic monologues are made of: after a brief moment of “angry despair” during which he

plunges a poniard into "the lovely face of the image", hacking "a long fissure in the living canvas", Lennox resigns himself to a lifetime of urbane devotion to a heartless wife (295).

Inconclusiveness and moral relativity are constant features of James's fiction, just as unresolved antithetical categories are the trademark of his criticism. A slight allusion to Browning in "The Madonna of the Future" (1873) again alerts one to the fact that viewpoints are essentially subjective and therefore "suspect" in his writing. The tale receives extensive critical treatment from both Winner and Tintner, but neither seems to appreciate the brilliance with which it defies conclusive interpretation. In fact, its various elements can be arranged in so many possible configurations that the story ends up projecting a perplexing and unsettling sense of irresolution which exactly captures the tragic ambivalence surrounding Theobald's position as a failed artist. Winner calls the story "parable-like" and describes it as a work which impresses on the artist the need for striking a balance between idealism and realism.⁷⁴ More literal-minded in her interpretation, Tintner finds it "above all a tale in praise of Raphael and a warning of the dangers that occur when an ill-equipped and poorly endowed artist . . . attempts to imitate his magical paintings".⁷⁵ The terms "fable" and "parable" indeed crop up almost instinctively when one encounters James's striking depiction of an artist paralysed by his aesthetic idealism (one also recalls his vivid portrayal of Flaubert's stylistic petrification). But, at the same time, one should not forget that James again and again stresses that art should reflect life, and not merely itself. His "Madonna of the Future" is not so much a cryptic recipe for artistic success as an in depth exploration of the complex cultural and psychological conditions which underlie personal failure and waste.

In this story, James draws together, by means of an observer-narrator, several individual viewpoints which jar with increasing harshness. The most compelling and eloquent voice belongs to Theobald who, however, shows signs of emotional and mental instability from the beginning. Explaining his aesthetic perfectionism which involves reabsorbing "[t]he good in every performance into the generative force of new creations" and destroying "the bad" "religiously", he quotes a line from Browning's "Pictor Ignotus" to illustrate how completely he has distanced himself from "superficial, feverish, mercenary work" (vol. 3, 16). The allusion is profoundly and

ironically significant, for it calls up one of Browning's painfully depressed and perplexingly ambivalent voices - an anonymous Florentine painter who claims (either truthfully or wishfully) that he has deliberately chosen to paint monotonous frescoes in obscure cloisters although he is considerably gifted as an artist, since in this way he manages to escape mercenary art dealers and protects his work from the "daily pettiness" of owners.⁷⁶ Theobald's situation is as ambivalent as this painter's: the narrator is "impressed" with his "prodigious singleness of purpose", but cannot tell whether he is "genius" or "monomaniac" (24). He discovers the extent of Theobald's delusion step by step, first surmising it from his rhapsodic aesthetic talk, then encountering his ageing model, and finally finding him in a stupor in front of a canvas which, instead of bearing the definitive Madonna, is a "mere dead blank, cracked and discolored by time" (47). Theobald emerges from his delusion calling himself a "dawdler" and "failure", who has wasted his life "in preparation", whereas an artist like Michelangelo "did his best at a venture, and his venture is immortal" (47).

But although the reasons for Theobald's failure seem clear enough, they are far from simple in the context of the tale as a whole. In the end it remains impossible to decide whether he is a madman - or a potential genius. Once, in the urgency of the moment, he manages to execute "with singular freedom and power" a sketch of an infant dying in its mother's arms. The connoisseur-narrator puts this picture on a par with the drawings in the Uffizi (35). Furthermore, the painter's nationality and the cultural age in which he lives may or may not pose real obstacles to the development of his native talent: early in the tale Theobald argues that "[a]n American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European" (15), and the narrator himself comments that Raphael "was happy" in that "there was . . . a demand for the Blessed Virgin, visible and adorable, which must have given firmness to the artist's hand" (22). That these obstacles are not merely fictitious excuses for failure is suggested by James's use of subsidiary voices which embody exactly the qualities most in conflict with Theobald's idealism. Mrs Coventry, an American who enjoys "the dignity of a sort of high-priestess of the arts" among compatriots in Florence, mocks his aspirations, both with her unsympathetic words and with the "huge miniature copy of the Madonna della Seggiola" (Theobald's muse and model in the Pitti Palace) which she wears on her bosom (26). A second character, the clever craftsman who moulds statuettes of

humanised monkeys and cats in a durable plastic compound, comes to represent Theobald's direct opposite: he is a productive, realistic, and maliciously cynical artist. James concludes this story with a master stroke of composition which finally suspends Theobald's idealistic viewpoint in inconclusive juxtaposition with vulgarly obstructive ones. The caricaturist's voice lingers on as a disturbing refrain which intermingles with the narrator's impressions of the failed painter, resulting in a last note of unsettling discord:

whenever I was seized among the ruins of triumphant Rome with some peculiarly poignant memory of Theobald's transcendent illusions and deplorable failure, I seemed to hear a fantastic, impertinent murmur, "Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats; all human life is there!" (52)

Throughout his career James continues to shape striking situations out of materials drawn from the visual arts. As should be apparent from a tale like "The Madonna of the Future", such situations suit the short story format and his own aesthetic preferences excellently, presenting as they do perplexing states of affairs to be probed systematically by a firmly controlled (and controlling) narrative voice. Examples of these tantalising situations abound: Count Valerio's puzzling relationship with an ancient statue, the intent old woman before Monsieur Briseux's famous "Lady in a Yellow Shawl", the elegant couple offering their services as models to an illustrator in "The Real Thing", Lady Beldonald who uses plain companions to off-set her beauty, but makes the mistake of engaging a retiring woman whose Holbeinesque appearance steals all the attention. One would expect the full length novel to be less suited to this kind of composition which relies so totally on the visual arts for theme and structure. But Roderick Hudson, his first attempt at a novel, develops in very much the same way from a basic situation which contains within itself a wealth of material and relations requiring a "certain amount of explanation". In later years James remembers how he regarded the writing of this novel as a new launch:

I had but hugged the shore on sundry previous occasions; bumping about, to acquire skill, in the shallow waters and sandy coves of the "short story" and master as yet of no vessel constructed to carry a sail.

The subject of "Roderick" figured to me vividly this employment of canvas. . . .⁷⁷

The artistic self-consciousness which James recalls in connection with writing this novel may of course have become apparent to him only at a distance as he passes, in the preface, "over his old sunk canvas the wet sponge" which projects him into "living back" a lifetime's works for the New York Edition.⁷⁸ But whether or not he thus self-consciously thought of Roderick Hudson as a new venture, the work itself certainly suggests that James clung firmly to navigational experience picked up close to shore when he finally put out to sea. Because of the larger freight and greater distance covered by the novel, he seems even more intent on controlling the direction of his art. The preface, again with hindsight, reflects the fear of false developments, of losing one's way among a multitude of related elements. Significantly, it introduces images of mapping and drawing to reflect the way in which the novelist should boost his confidence with structural discipline: "Where, for the complete expression of one's subject, does a particular relation stop . . . ?" James asks tremulously, then offers a formal solution: "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so."⁷⁹

The "circle" in Roderick Hudson circumscribes artist figures, their works, aesthetic ideas, and their public; but even more importantly, it locates its centre in Rowland's consciousness. James sees this as the "lucky state" of the novel's composition:

My subject, all blissfully, in face of difficulties, had defined itself . . . as not directly, in the least, my young sculptor's adventure. This it had been indirectly, being all the while in essence and in final effect another man's, his friend's and patron's, view and experience of him. One's luck was to have felt one's subject right. . . . From this centre the subject has been treated, from this centre the interest has spread, and so, whatever else it may or may not do, the thing has acknowledged a principle of composition and contrives at least to hang together.⁸⁰

Winner translates this insight into painterly terms:

The centre of consciousness character . . . resembles the painter in relation to his subject and the painting's viewers: like the painter, he provides a "frame" which organizes and brings into focus the otherwise inchoate [sic] external world. By transforming it with the imagination . . . he makes it available to the reader.⁸¹

This interpretation outlines James's ideas with tempting clarity; but it associates Rowland too closely with the category of relatively uninvolved observer-narrators so prevalent in the short stories, whereas he is himself a character revealed, rather than revealing; transformed, rather than transforming. Most of the novel's emotional appeal lies in the vulnerability and disappointment of Rowland's own ventures. This appeal is further strengthened by the fact that "the external world" often contradicts his sensitive observations and evades his self-effacing attempts at control, while at the same time compelling him, against his will, to watch and supervise the destruction of his schemes. Although he never shares Theobald's idealistic intensity or suffers his delusions, Rowland complains poignantly enough about his numbing inability to shape his own prospects:

" . . . Do you know I sometimes think that I am a man of genius, half finished? The genius has been left out, the faculty of expression is wanting; but the need for expression remains, and I spend my days groping for the latch of a closed door!"⁸²

Unlike Theobald, he shows himself prepared to undertake something "at a venture", albeit in the role of patron rather than of artist. His offer to sponsor Roderick is an unsentimental, pragmatic attempt at complementing himself. James throughout casts these characters as opposing halves: Roderick's artistic sensibility enables him to synthesise his new European impressions with a vivacity which makes Rowland appear a "halting dilettante" (83); in Rome Roderick establishes himself in a picturesque studio whereas Rowland finds "a convenient corner in a stately old palace" (89); Roderick creates, Rowland collects. Thus, James's description of this novel as a circle with a clearly defined centre should not make one overlook its basically dual structure, nor the multiplicity of further viewpoints not directly related to Rowland's own

consciousness, which constitute a world virtually indifferent to his perceptive and transformative powers.

But not to James's own. In this novel he unravels situations and mixes voices with a strong, sometimes heavy hand. His writing at times reconstructs complex experiences monotonously, repeating simple grammatical units insensitively until they tend to blunt, rather than sharpen, the expressiveness of his prose. Rowland's awakening interest in Mary, for instance, does not prompt delicately turned writing, but a series of weighty conjectures equipped with unwieldy syntactic handles like "He wondered . . .", "It seemed . . .", or "He asked himself . . ." (68). Likewise, Gloriani's aesthetic sensibility, which is supposed to be "unlimitedly intelligent and consummately clever", materialises in the novel as a long list of qualities bound together in a single grammatical construction producing eight "thats" in succession:

It was the artist's opinion that there is no essential difference between beauty and ugliness; that they overlap and intermingle . . . that there is no saying where one begins and the other ends; that hideousness grimaces at you suddenly from out of the very bosom of loveliness . . . that it is a waste of wit to nurse metaphysical distinctions. . . . (95)

Bold authorial control also marks the way in which James invests the various types of artists and aesthetic viewpoints in this novel with symbolic significance. Winner points out that "[t]he theme of character and creativity is carried out almost diagrammatically", so that Gloriani, the "contriver of clever, sophisticated, unconventional art", is himself "highly intelligent, frank, worldly"; little Sam Singleton practises water-colour painting, a "minor" art form, which suggests that "James placed intrinsic limitations on his achievements".⁸³ There is much validity in noting this as a general tendency, although I do not always agree with Winner's specific interpretations. James's treatment of Singleton (discussed in more detail later) does not quite invite the automatic equation of water-colours with personal insignificance and a "minor although true talent".⁸⁴ The clear aesthetic categories which James tries to delineate in this novel do not prevent his characters from developing at least some suggestive dimension of their own. The cynical Gloriani softens before Roderick's "perfectly unflattered and yet admirably tender" bust of his mother (278 - 279). In fact,

he finds it deeply perplexing that such a work should come from what he suspects to be an immoral mind, a reaction at variance with his own cynicism:

“I give up!” said the sculptor at last. “I don’t understand it”

“But you like it?” said Rowland.

“Like it? It’s a pearl of pearls. Tell me this,” he added, “is he very fond of his mother - is he a very good son?” And he gave Rowland a sharp look. (278 - 289)

Gloriani calls Roderick “very strong” on this occasion, obviously referring to his ability to produce idealistic works while living a less than pure life. For once he is mistaken (Roderick’s “strength” fails him soon enough), but it is a lack of perception which adds an element to his character.

When it comes to Roderick himself, Winner feels that James’s sculptor “could equally well have been a painter or a poet”.⁸⁵ It is true that little is said about Roderick at work, and his statues hardly become impressive plastic presences in language, but given this, the art of sculpture does bear certain connotations which function in the boldly symbolical way characteristic of this novel. Practising as a sculptor, and one set on reviving classical principles of composition at that, Roderick makes his entrance into this novel with the promise of an archetypal artist. Carving marble to discover underlying form requires a boldness of vision, a “singleness of purpose” which does not allow the artist the chance to regain lost opportunities. The task is physically demanding (“manly”, as Mary calls it approvingly - 346), its results immediately spectacular, making up for lack of colour and intricate design by monumental stature and three-dimensional presence. To accomplish all this, the artist indeed has to be “very strong”. In making Roderick a sculptor of classically proportioned and idealised, yet realistic, works, James sets him up for enormous success, or failure. At the same time he hints at the rigidity of Roderick’s aesthetic code. The strengths and weaknesses of his sculptural aesthetic, his pure idealism as well as his rigid inflexibility, define the contours of his character as much as of his statues. Exclusivity and egoism together present a single stumbling-block to his creativity; the obsessed mind, whether ruled by an artistic ideal or an inaccessible lover (here united in Christina Light), risks alienation from all other experience, a condition which stunts both creative and personal development. In this respect, Roderick is contrasted with several other characters

whose emotional and aesthetic faculties show far greater signs of vitality and allow more scope for growth: Rowland, with his catholic taste and searching contemplative mind, Mary, who slowly relinquishes a Puritan consciousness and allows new "amenities" to shape her "with a divinely intelligent touch" (265), and, of course, Singleton, whom James pictures "delving deep into the picturesque heart of the lovely land", and "feasting on local colour, rioting on chiaroscuro" (120 - 121). These contrasts are arranged quite deliberately: Singleton's frenetically productive summer is Roderick's corrupt one; Alpine scenery stimulates in Mary a vivacious interest in plants and rocks, in Roderick a morbidly introverted elegy for his dead talent which re-enacts within itself the complete process of dissociation he is complaining about. In this case his extreme self-consciousness subjects his immediate impressions of external beauty to a nightmarish vision of being buried alive which sends him spiralling into ever more intense self-indulgence until his initial observations of freshness and beauty come completely under the control of his obsessive fancy:

"Something in my heart seems suddenly to open and let in a flood of beauty and desire. I know what I have lost. . . . Remember that hereafter. Don't say that he was stupefied and senseless; that his perception was dulled and his aspiration dead. Say that he trembled in every nerve with a sense of the beauty and sweetness of life . . . that he was buried alive, with his eyes open and his heart beating to madness; that he clung to every blade of grass and every wayside thorn as he passed; that it was the most pitiful spectacle you ever beheld; that it was a scandal, an outrage, a murder!" (354 - 355)

Roderick here displays a single-minded perversion of sensibility which is nonetheless one of his most intensely realised moments. On the whole, however, James subsumes his history of the failed artist under his psychological study of the suffering bystander. Towards the end of the novel, Rowland commands much interest independent from his role as patron, as he becomes increasingly involved in Mary's aesthetic awakening, a process which eventually absorbs his mind at least as much as Roderick's decline. Thus, James's fictional treatment of art and aesthetic sensibilities in this novel is an aid towards penetrating consciousness in general, rather than the artistic consciousness in particular; he succeeds in capturing life through art, rather

than the life of art.⁸⁶ It is a tendency also prevalent in Thackeray's The Newcomes, a work which suggested various basic situations to James when he came to write his artist novel. As in Thackeray's novel, some of the most perceptive images in Roderick Hudson have a quick satirical impact which impresses far more than many elaborately evolved themes and structures. Miss Blanchard's flower-pieces, for instance, "with the dew-drops very highly finished", or her wayside shrines with peasants shown from behind since she does "backs very well" but is "a little weak in faces", offer delightfully economical comments on character and the compatriot community in which Roderick has to operate (97). James's lively treatment of Miss Blanchard for once lends true animation to his sculptor as well: her "wonderful manipulation of petals" makes Roderick complain (through Tennyson) that there is such an obvious "moral" shut in the "bosom" of her roses that "if you go to smell the flower it scratches your nose" (155). Her friend, Mr Leavenworth, a prosperous owner of Corax mines, affords both James and Roderick further opportunities for honing their satirical skills: Leavenworth orders a statue to suit the interior of his library:

"Do you think you could do something for my library? It is to be filled with well-selected authors, and I think a pure white image in this style" - pointing to one of Roderick's statues - "standing out against the morocco and gilt, would have a noble effect. The subject I have already fixed upon. I desire an allegorical representation of Culture. Do you think now," asked Mr. Leavenworth, encouragingly, "you could rise to the conception?" (156)

Roderick promptly suggests a full length statue of Miss Blanchard, equipped with a scroll, to "do for the allegory".

Other similarities between Thackeray and James include the femme fatale (Ethel and Christina) who inspires and dissipates creative energy, and the apparently insignificant fellow-artist (J.J. and Singleton) who shows up his failure. Although these resemblances may seem superficial, they reach beyond the surface into the very structure of the respective novels (sometimes with equally detrimental effect). Like J.J., Singleton barely materialises as a character. James endows him with a few diligent traits, then rings the changes on them. Towards the end of the novel one is hardly surprised to recover in Singleton one of J.J.'s most characteristic features: in the midst

of a gathering storm, Rowland finds the "little painter" "still at his post, profiting by the last of the rapid-failing light to finish his study" (392). Singleton's constant diligence and hero-worship become as monotonous as J.J.'s, and yet, like Thackeray in The Adventures of Philip, James finds in this figure the material for at least one impressive visual effect (365 - 367). Through some trick of lighting the painter appears as a "gigantic" and "colossal" figure on a Swiss mountain top, while Roderick, at the bottom of the valley, reminisces about the days when Christina called him "a great man". As the figure descends, Roderick refers to him as "a mighty man" who should not come down upon "small people", and when Rowland, ever rational, points out that the illusion of greatness will pass away with the effect of the light, Roderick associates lugubriously with this condition: "He is like me . . . for ten minutes he will have passed for a great man". As predicted, the figure soon resumes normal proportions: "it stepped into the circle of light projected from the door and windows, and they beheld little Sam Singleton stopping to stare at them". The immediate irony causes "a fit of intense hilarity" in Roderick. But the true irony of the scene lies of course in James's own hands, as he composes its various elements to reflect, through direct and indirect interrelation, the entire course of Roderick's rise and fall.

The most significant difference between Thackeray and James's artist novels is the extent to which each associates artistic failure with moral shortcomings. Thackeray creates a strong Ruskinian link between artistic achievement and moral diligence in J.J., but he shies away from pursuing this association in Clive's case. The closest he gets to chastising Clive in terms of his art is equating his superficial facility for sketching with his fast social life. James clinches the positive side of Ruskin's argument as decisively as Thackeray with the introduction of the wholesomely creative Singleton. On the negative side he is far more explicit (if not always consistent) about the reasons for his main artist figure's downfall. The shortcomings of Roderick's art are to a large extent also those of his character. Although James has fears of placing him completely beyond "our understanding and our sympathy",⁸⁷ he does not scruple to show the destructive elements of his nature at work (particularly in their agonising effect on other characters). Some of Roderick's characteristics and actions, such as his Hellenistic beauty worship, his self-indulgence, and, more specifically, the hysterical gesture of taking to his bed in a darkened room scattered with roses and violets to celebrate the

news of Christina's broken engagement (301 - 302) suggest an early reaction on James's part to Aestheticism, and anticipate his later apathy, even hostility, towards someone like Wilde. This very gesture of Roderick's, however, elicits a remark from Rowland which implies that James, maybe unwillingly, has to concede that artistic genius may not necessarily have anything to do with morality: "You mean to lie here then, smelling your roses and nursing your visions and leaving your mother and Miss Garland to eat their hearts out?" (303). Gloriani notices a similar callousness when he tries to fathom the relationship between Roderick's pious bust of his mother and his dubious filial piety. And Rowland, earlier, in a disconsolate letter to Cecilia, withdraws his previous expression of faith in the "salubrity of genius" (228). In fact, his very first remark upon encountering an example of Roderick's art, the "exquisitely rendered" "Waterdrinker", is ironically charged: "We ugly mortals, what beautiful creatures we are!" (31). James allows Roderick to produce beautiful works well into his ugly decline. At the same time, he associates his failure directly with his personal degeneration. Ultimately, therefore, despite his conscious efforts at precisely delineating the structural and thematic design of this novel, he remains as adept as ever at leaving the various sides of an argument in inconclusive suspension (it is, for instance, impossible to decide whether Roderick might not have undergone a true aesthetic reawakening should he have followed Christina to Interlaken as he proposes to do before his death).

If Roderick Hudson carefully, at times laboriously, retraces steps first taken in the early short stories, The American travels over the same territory with a sure-footedness which in parts amounts to self-parody. Christopher Newman's cultural naïveté and leisurely ways in Europe turn him into a victim towards the end of the novel, but not until James has thoroughly disported himself with the satirical possibilities residing in the situation. The humorous laterality which characterises parodic art finds concrete pictorial expression at the beginning in James's gliding shift from Murillo's "beautiful moon-borne Madonna" in the Salon Carré to "the squinting Madonna" coming into being next to it on the easel of a young copyist.⁸⁸ Comprehended in this shift is the observer of these parallel pictures, Newman, the pragmatic American, who sits before them nursing an "aesthetic headache" brought on by the "new kind of arithmetic" which "Raphael and Titian and Rubens" represent for him (1 - 2). Following upon a

whole series of passionately sensitive observers of art in James's writing, Newman starts out as a distinctly parodic figure. His offer to provide a dowry for Noémie in return for six or eight copies from the Louvre, "as pretty" as the Madonna (46), traces a comic parallel between him and Rowland. Newman's travels, too, give James the opportunity to treat light-heartedly his usual theme of the gradually unfolding aesthetic sensibility.⁸⁹ In this respect, he resorts to an equally usual technique, arranging his material into antithetical relationships: Newman's travelling companion, the young Unitarian minister, Babcock, who couples a distrust of all things European with an "exquisite sense of beauty", off-sets the former character's leisurely attitude towards experiencing art (64). But, as always, James's practice of defining through opposites does not result in easy categories, but opens up multiple viewpoints and shifting angles. Newman comes under focus as both Aesthete and moralist: he complains to Mrs Tristram that whereas Babcock regards him as "low-minded, immoral, a devotee of 'art for art'", another companion, a London newspaper correspondent, thinks him "too virtuous by half" and "too stern a moralist" (72).

It is partly through such a shading into one another of qualities in conflict that James attempts to make the transition from the light-hearted first section of the novel to the painfully oppressive conclusion. The mock artist Noémie and her atrocious paintings likewise contribute towards transforming free-flowing comedy of manners into cloistered tragedy. Newman's previously relaxed courtship runs into the blank wall of Bellegarde pride at the same time as his inquisitive but naïve interest in Noémie reaches its climax in Valentin's duel and death. The coquette copyist initially seems merely a comical version of the completely egotistic artist figure. It takes Valentin, a European equally knowing about life and art, to interpret the full extent of her "talent" to Newman:

"She is an artist, - outside of her painting, which obviously is exe-crable.

...

"She has taken the measure of life, and she has determined to be something. . . . Her painting, of course, is a mere trick to gain time. . . . I am very sure that in the way of resolution and capacity she is a rarity. And in one gift - perfect heartlessness - I will warrant she is unsurpassed.

(144 - 145)

Valentin approaches Noémie through the language of art, giving a sprightly satirical turn to his reading of her character. At a different level of the narrative, James, always sensitive to the potential overlay of meaning which can be achieved with pictorial imagery, arranges the meeting between these two characters around a strikingly suggestive "painting": realising that Valentin (unlike Newman) cannot be taken in by either her "art" or her feigned innocence, Noémie ostentatiously scraps both of these categories by "dipping a brush into a clot of red paint" and crossing out the unpromising picture on her easel. Whereas Newman objects to such wilful waste, Valentin enters into the significance of the spoiled picture with fatal alacrity: "I like it better that way than as it was before. . . . Now it is more interesting. It tells a story. Is it for sale?" (143).

Although the incident clearly belongs to the light-hearted comedy of manners section, Noémie's crossed-out picture constitutes the first in a series of frustrating negatives which confront Newman in Europe. Valentin does not take up his offers of personal assistance and commercial sponsorship, Claire de Cintré completely withdraws from his love and protection. Each of these negatives finds embodiment in powerful images which, echoing the red cross announcing Noémie's rejection of patronage, bar Newman from intervening or partaking in Europeans' lives. A small Swiss graveyard with "awkward", "sordid", and "hideous" tombstones signifying "nothing but the hardness and coldness of death" (258) reflects Newman's impotence before Valentin's approaching death and the Bellegarde's unshakeable pride; the iron screen in the Carmelite chapel repeats the image with sinister intensity as Newman tries to make out Claire's voice "from behind the inexorable grating", until he realises that the nun's chant, "mechanical and monotonous", "hideous" and "horrible", is all that he "should ever hear of the voice he had found so sweet" (321).

Despite the boldness with which James links pictorial images and themes from the first part with later developments, relating Newman's painful arrest before European forms of conduct directly to his earlier comic perplexity with new aesthetic experiences, the tonal change remains rather drastic. In the appropriate preface James addresses this problem, acknowledging that it might have been more consistent to deal with the Bellegardes' pride "in the light of comedy and of irony"⁹⁰ (instead, he sets into motion the heavy machinery of Gothic horror). It is an insight which he seems to have

kept in mind while writing The Europeans. This novel also articulates the theme of transcultural experience, but approaches its material from an opposite direction in more ways than one. The obvious geographical inversion whereby James makes Europeans encounter America to some extent accounts for the lighter tone and more consistent form of the later novel. Because of his lively interest in European culture, such an environment will always be more assertive symbolically than an American one in James's writing. Whereas Newman's relaxed ways fail in a demanding and even obstructive social atmosphere, America offers little resistance to Felix's light-hearted conquest which makes easy inroads even into the strict Puritan ethic governing the Wentworth household. But these obvious differences set aside, Felix's triumph in The Europeans is mainly attributable to a triumph of composition on James's part, for this novel displays a spontaneity and lightness of touch unsurpassed in his oeuvre. In The American James tries to make comedy and tragedy gel in the person of Newman. His preface, like much of his late writing an attempt to exert final control over recalcitrant earlier work, minimises the unevenness of this novel by emphasising, in bold visual images, the structural importance of Newman's central vision: "He was to be the lighted figure, the others . . . were to be obscured"; "at the window of his wide . . . consciousness we are seated. . . . all the rest matters only as he feels it, treats it; meets it".⁹¹ The first and final principle of unity in The American is therefore, for James, a "moral necessity" - the "practical, but quite unappreciated, magnanimity" which governs Newman's behaviour.⁹² The "moral" is a relaxed one, in keeping with the character's psychological make-up, but a moral nonetheless. Against this, James achieves in The Europeans a true and seemingly effortless tragicomic fusion of material, and does so, significantly, while highlighting irresponsibility and playfulness, not only in Felix's joyful aesthetic and moral vision, but also in the buoyant cadences of his own writing. The only moral proviso to appear concerns egotism, as illustrated in Eugenia's behaviour and in her ultimate sense of failure and loss. For the rest, Felix manages to steal into American civilisation and Puritan pre-conceptions alike with no further moral aids than a generally kind disposition. The main reasons for his success lie in irresponsible gaiety coupled with a lively "pictorial sense" which enables him to transform new experience into graceful comedy.

The brother-sister combination lends a more natural duality to this exploration of transcultural experience than the explicit parallels of The American. That success and failure are inextricably bound up with style and point of view in the later novel is clear right from the start. "Did you ever see anything so hideous as that fire?" is one of Eugenia's first exclamations in America. The same anthracite fire becomes attractive when it has passed through Felix's pictorial sensibility, the workings of which James associates with a transformative process: "Those little blue tongues, dancing on top of the crimson embers, are extremely picturesque. They are like a fire in an alchemist's laboratory."⁹³ With equal suggestive skill, James reflects a similar duality of experience in the first sketch which Felix produces in America:

It was a bold expressive sketch of a group of miserable people on the deck of a steamer, clinging together and clutching at each other, while the vessel lurched downward, at a terrific angle, into the hollow of a wave. It was extremely clever, and full of a sort of tragi-comical power.

(11)

The picture gives immediate proof of Felix's ability to transcend discomfort through dextrous draughtsmanship and light-hearted vision. At the same time, materialising as it does against the background of Eugenia's disgruntled wish to return directly to Europe and Felix's reminder that she was miserable during the crossing too, the sketch also refers pertinently to her self-indulgent temperament which tends to make discomfort more acute.

Throughout the novel Felix's optimistic nature continues to quicken whatever he comes into contact with. While dashing off flattering portraits or bold landscapes he imparts his light-hearted credo to other characters: Gertrude's "sittings", for example, produce a gentle critique of the "painful" Puritan view which prevents you from getting "all the pleasure out of life that you might" (66); Mr Wentworth's elicited sly advice on how to humanise Clifford by making him fall in love with an older woman (Eugenia, of course). James's aims are quite deliberate in making Felix's talent a light-weight one and some of his views and methods slightly suspect (his "gaily trenchant way of judging human actions" is on one occasion likened to the action of "a house thief" who can open any door "adroitly" "with a single turn of the wrist" (86 - 87). His decision to make Felix himself a comical figure even while he focalises much of the

novel's material through this character's transformative viewpoint adds further dimension to the work's overall comical vision. Much of the novel's charm depends on the extent to which its issues stay as light as Felix's view of them. At the same time, James's perfect but unobtrusive control over his material prevents issues from becoming trivial. Mr Brand and Felix's meeting in the studio, for instance, displays James's comic control at its best. Amidst ebbs and flows of light, both natural and metaphoric, he pitches his painter's sly brilliance against the Puritan's lingering sexual obtuseness, producing writing which is light and spontaneous, but also carefully composed. While Felix rhapsodises about pink flushes and rosy lights at the western window, the dusky studio offers Mr Brand only "the gleam of three or four pictures" which look "fantastic and surprising" due to their seeming nakedness; but once informed of Charlotte's "hidden flame", he starts blushing himself as he falls under the influence of a "train of memories" "kindled" by Felix - "a retrospective illumination which soon makes "a very pretty blaze" to "Mr Brand's astonished eyes" (137 - 139).

In this episode James improvises on a few basic elements - a sunset, a studio, and two characters - to produce a meticulously fashioned comical situation. The ironic detachment which makes such comic control possible looks forward to the "happy harlequinade" passage in the autobiographical writings, or recalls his reaction to Dutch genre painting of the seventeenth century, a school which always draws from him keen admiration on a small scale. Of Teniers he wrote in 1872:

The painter is very far from partaking of the naïveté of his figures; he is a humourist, and he observes them from without; and while he pulls the strings which set them dancing, he keeps an eye on the spectator, and cunningly modulates and qualifies his realism.⁹⁴

The rich collection of Dutch painters in the Wallace Collection makes him remark on the "deep satisfaction" which he derives "from these delectable realists - the satisfaction produced by the sight of a perfect accord between the aim and the result".⁹⁵ This is not to claim any direct relationship between Dutch genre painting and The Europeans; but as far as James's impressions of these paintings and painters are concerned, they offer strikingly fitting comments on his performance in this minor but highly accomplished novel. In none of his other works does he match aims and results with such confidence; and although the novel is limited in scope, it achieves a balance

between spontaneity and control. In fact, for the first time as a novelist James seems truly free to appreciate and pursue the workings of a playfully irresponsible aesthetic in both art and life without being hampered by moral reserves or discordant voices. Eugenia's refrain "Was she to have gained nothing - was she to have gained nothing?" just lingers in the background as a reminder of her self-wounding egotism (151), but against this James sounds Gertrude and Felix's "mingled" "echo of gaiety" which reaches Mr Wentworth's Puritan household from afar, and which he starts "listening for" "at last" (173).

The Europeans represents a euphoric moment in James's creative career, when art and life come together in a brief expression of joy. But the fusion proves to be short-lived indeed, for in The Portrait of a Lady, started in 1879, he again explores the sad, even sinister, consequences of taking one's measures for life from art. Approached more subtly than in Roderick Hudson, the practice of pursuing or regarding life as a form of art comes under scrutiny from various angles. In the first place there is Ralph, forced into a position of detached observer by ill-health and ensconced behind an habitual ironic light-heartedness which finds striking embodiment in two art forms: dance music and the eighteenth-century fête galante. The metaphorical "band of music" which Ralph imagines playing non-stop in his "ante-room", keeping "the sounds of the world" from his "private apartments" and making "the world think that dancing's going on within" is neatly reinforced by "a small Lancret" which he points out to the pragmatic and conscientious Henrietta Stackpole as an image of his life-style.⁹⁶ The painting represents, characteristically, a scene of perpetual charm and grace: "a gentleman in a pink doublet and hose and a ruff, leaning against the pedestal of the statue of a nymph in a garden and playing the guitar to two ladies seated on the grass". Aesthetic considerations also shape his view of Isabel: while she examines the paintings in his private gallery, she strikes him as "better worth looking at than most works of art" (vol. 1, 61) and later as "an entertainment of a high order" - "a real little passionate force to see at play" which to him seems "finer than the finest work of art - than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral" (vol. 1, 86). Ralph's aesthetic interest in Isabel's nature prompts him to "sponsor" her indirectly. His "gift" casts him in the well-known Jamesian role of patron-artist, for while the money enables her to "meet the requirements" of her "imagination" (vol.

1, 261), it also launches her on a new imaginative venture (and the novel on its exploration of ambition and unfulfilled potential).

In Ralph's light-hearted views James captures various nuances traceable to Aestheticism, and with these, he introduces his own conflicting and ambivalent attitudes towards a movement which has by this stage become sufficiently demarcated to draw considerable attention to itself. To Isabel's question as to why she should have inherited so much, Ralph replies, "as a kind of compliment. . . . On your so beautifully existing" (vol. 1, 318) which is the punch line, give or take a few words, of a Du Maurier cartoon aimed at Wilde in 1881, one of the only ones with a clearly recognisable target and a nasty sting (fig. 60). Discrepant dates preclude the possibility of a direct echo, but the general tenor and style of Ralph's words nonetheless suggest the passionate injunction to self-fulfilment and the sensuous symbolical flourishes of Aesthetic talk.

" . . . Take things more easily. Don't ask yourself so much whether this or that is good for you. Don't question your conscience so much - it will get out of tune like a strummed piano. . . . Don't try so much to form your character - it's like trying to pull open a tight, tender young rose. . . . Put back your watch. Diet your fever. Spread your wings; rise above the ground. It's never wrong to do that." (vol. 1, 319)⁹⁷

These nuances, together with the lively debate between characters on the advisability of a huge inheritance for Isabel, cast at least some suspicion on the detached dilettantism apparent in Ralph's particular decision and in the general aesthetic criteria which he imposes on life. On the other hand, the voice of this "apostle of freedom" (vol. 2, 245) sounds with increasing poignancy as he sees the subject of his "venture" trapped in Osmond's comparable aesthetic which insists with equal force that "one ought to make one's life a work of art", but does so without allowing scope for further experiment (vol. 2, 15). James, then, uses artistic imagery both as keys to and as bolts against life. Ralph's well-practised sensibility affords him penetrating psychological insights, but also gives him too much faith in the creative mind's ability to shape itself and its circumstances according to artistic principles. In this respect, he shows some tendency towards Osmond's condition of living "by himself, in a sorted, sifted, arranged world, thinking about art and beauty and history" (vol. 1, 377). But



MAUDLE ON THE CHOICE OF A PROFESSION.

Maudle. "How CONSUMMATELY LOVELY YOUR SON IS, MRS. BROWN!"

Mrs. Brown (a Philistine from the country). "WHAT! HE'S A NICE, MANLY BOY, IF YOU MEAN THAT, MR. MAUDLE. HE HAS JUST LEFT SCHOOL, YOU KNOW, AND WISHES TO BE AN ARTIST."

Maudle. "WHY SHOULD HE BE AN ARTIST?"

Mrs. Brown. "WELL, HE MUST BE SOMETHING!"

Maudle. "WHY SHOULD HE BE ANYTHING? WHY NOT LET HIM REMAIN FOR EVER CONTENT TO EXIST BEAUTIFULLY!"

[*Mrs. Brown determines that at all events her Son shall not study Art under Maudle.*

Fig. 60. George du Maurier, Punch (1881).

whereas Ralph has the breadth of vision to realise that Isabel is ““meant for something better than to keep guard over the sensibilities of a sterile dilettante”” (vol. 2, 71), Osmond views her with chilling single-mindedness as a collector’s item with its distinctive qualities completely at his disposal:

this lady’s intelligence was to be a silver plate, not an earthen one - a plate that he might heap up with ripe fruits, to which it would give a decorative value, so that talk might become for him a sort of served dessert. He found the silver quality in this perfection in Isabel; he could tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring. (vol. 2, 79)

Although Ralph’s dilettantish streak taints Isabel’s future in that it gives her the power to exert her will before she has developed the discrimination to judge figures like Madame Merle and Osmond, James carefully modulates the tone in which he deals with the shortcomings of these various sets of characters by associating them with different kinds of pictorial art.⁹⁸ Thus, he links Madame Merle and Osmond with the more obvious and widely satirised traits of Aestheticism, for instance Du Maurier’s “chinamania” cartoons (figs. 61 - 63), or the displaced semantic emphases of Wilde-speak. The elaborate symbolism of one of Madame Merle’s early confessions sets reverberating many verbal and visual allusions of this kind which create ironic undertones extending far beyond the range of her attempt at humorous self-satire:

“if I must tell the truth I’ve been shockingly chipped and cracked. I do very well for service yet, because I’ve been cleverly mended; and I try to remain in the cupboard - the quiet, dusky cupboard where there’s an odour of stale spices - as much as I can. But when I’ve to come out and into a strong light - then, my dear, I’m a horror! (vol. 1, 275)

Instead of composure and cleverness, Madame Merle’s metaphoric display amusingly reflects the rhetorical extravagance as well as the self-obsession and moral degeneracy popularly associated with Aesthetic tastes. Later in the novel both she and Osmond “live up” to their china quite in the manner of caricatured Aesthetes - they interrupt a serious discussion of their tangled relationship to comment, with complete lack of self-awareness, on the state of a porcelain cup:



THE PASSION FOR OLD CHINA.

Husband. "I THINK YOU MIGHT LET ME NURSE THAT TEAPOT A LITTLE NOW, MARGERY! YOU'VE HAD IT TO YOURSELF ALL THE MORNING, YOU KNOW!"

Fig. 61. George du Maurier, Punch (1874).



ACUTE CHINAMANIA.

Boy. "MAMMA! MAMMA! DON'T GO ON LIKE THIS, PRAE!!"
Mamma (who has smashed a favourite pot). "WHAT HAVE I GOT LEFT TO LIVE FOR?"
Boy. "HAVEN'T YOU GOT M. MAMMA?"
Mamma. "YOU, CHILD! YOU'RE NOT UNIQUE!! THERE ARE SIX OF YOU—A COMPLETE SET!!"

Fig. 62. George du Maurier, Punch (1875).



THE SIX-MARK TEA-POT.

Aesthetic Bridegroom. "IT IS QUITE CONSUMMATE, IS IT NOT?"

Intense Bride. "IT IS, INDEED! OH, ALGERNON, LET US LIVE UP TO IT!"

Fig. 63. George du Maurier, Punch (1880).

“ . . . I’ve seen better what you have been to your wife than I ever saw what you were for me. Please be very careful of that precious object.”

“It already has a wee bit of a tiny crack,” said Osmond. . . . “If you didn’t understand me before I married it was cruelly rash of you to put me into such a box.” (vol. 2, 337).

Against this, James selects pictorial imagery rich with a tone of regret to comment on Ralph and Isabel’s condition towards the end of the novel. Just before Ralph’s death, Isabel revisits the gallery at Gardencourt where he first voiced many of his views about life and art. The passage restates, in elegiac mode, a painful commonplace not provided for in Ralph’s philosophy: that life changes unpredictably, whereas paintings (or works of art in general) are potent symbols of immutability; it ends with Isabel in front of a touching pictorial image of lost promise, a painting done by an artist of works uniquely fresh and fluent, who died, however, in his mid-twenties:

She . . . strolled into the library along the gallery of pictures, where, in the deep silence, her footsteps made an echo. Nothing was changed; she recognised everything she had seen years before. . . . She envied the security of valuable “pieces” which change by no hair’s breadth, only grow in value, while their owners lose inch by inch youth, happiness, beauty. . . . It suddenly struck her that if her Aunt Lydia had not come that day . . . everything might have been different. She might have had another life and she might have been a woman more blest. She stopped in the gallery in front of a small picture - a charming and precious Bonington - upon which her eyes rested a long time. (vol. 2, 403 - 404)

In both “The Art of Fiction” and the preface later affixed to this novel James locates the “life” of art (pictorial as well as literary) in experimentation, growth, and new discovery. The same qualities operate metaphorically in Ralph’s efforts at formulating the “art” of life. Although his particular experiment runs into difficulty, his vision of life as an activity which, like art, should be pursued with imagination, freedom, and gaiety remains compelling. It is against the background of this ideal possibility that James defines Isabel’s erratic choice and subsequent suffering, as well as the oppressive aesthetic codes which first mislead, then stifle her. Pictorial material

functions in this novel with a range and versatility which significantly broadens the scope of James's art, capturing as it does both the "amount of felt life"⁹⁹ in truly imaginative sensibilities and the anguish of threatened life caused by sterile or self-centred ones. The extent to which he uses paintings and other pictorial traditions to plot the structure and destiny of individual minds again gives evidence of his firm belief in an organic reciprocity between art and life (although this relationship becomes tragically strained in various ways and for various reasons in this novel). The multiplicity which marks James's use of pictorial material in part accounts for important artistic gains in his imaginative vision and novelistic technique in The Portrait of a Lady. He comments on this aspect of his art (albeit impersonally) in the preface, again drawing attention to the rival, but essentially interdependent, conditions of creativity which always underlie his writing:

Here we get exactly the high price of the novel as a literary form - its power not only, while preserving that form with closeness, to range through all the differences of the individual relation to its general subject-matter, all the varieties of outlook on life, of disposition to reflect and project, created by conditions that are never the same from man to man . . . but positively to appear more true to its character in proportion as it strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mould.¹⁰⁰

Given James's success in The Portrait of a Lady at daringly, but consistently, transforming the basic art-life relation to embody a variety of viewpoints, dispositions, and circumstances, each defined through a characteristic pictorial code, it comes as a surprise that his "artist" novel, The Tragic Muse, which deliberately intends to "do something about art' - art, that is, as a human complication and a social stumbling-block"¹⁰¹ is curiously bankrupt, both thematically and technically. In the earlier novel multiple levels of consciousness, overlapping and clashing, gradually enfold the essentially simple central conception of a stray, unattached girl, James's "image en disponibilité"¹⁰², until they constitute a carefully built up and profoundly suggestive "portrait" of this figure, which is in the end created and refracted as much by introspection and external viewpoints as by circumstances. The Tragic Muse presents an inverted case: its basic situations are many, its method of depicting and developing

them fixed and inflexible.¹⁰³ Even more surprising is the fact that James fails to see these qualities as limitations. He remarks on the “infinity of situations” which the “conflict between art and ‘the world’”¹⁰⁴ begets in this novel, and proudly regards the “consistent, the sustained, preserved tone” of The Tragic Muse as “its principal merit - the inner harmony that I perhaps presumptuously permit myself to compare to an unevaporated scent”.¹⁰⁵ His simile, however, develops an ironic tang, for far from ranging the open air so important to his creativity, this novel smacks of closeted interests and stale effects. James approaches his material as a critic rather than as an artist, presenting endless theoretical and polemical discussions which are stage managed by a gauche and highly obtrusive narrator. There is always the rumble of thematic and structural machinery as he moves from art exhibitions to aesthetic table talk, from studio life to the individual artistic consciousness. In none of these “scenes” does art reflect a life of its own or capture the essence of an external reality.

At its most successful the novel presents a number of social pictures in the manner of Du Maurier (or, by implication, of Daumier in his influential “Salon” cartoons). The opening scene sketches the Englishman abroad, a frequent Du Maurier subject and one which James particularly admires in his essay on the cartoonist. Placed against the backdrop of the annual Salon exhibition in Paris, the Dormer family group constitutes for the narrator “a successful plastic fact”, the hidden relations of which he proceeds to point out and explain to an implied reader or fellow-observer.¹⁰⁶ These visual clues include national characteristics, facial expressions, and the figures’ spatial interrelationships (towards one another and their environment). The situation contains some material for explicit social comedy, for instance the juxtaposition of a disapproving British matron with a marble group depicting “a man, with the skin of a beast round his loins, tussling with a naked woman in some primitive effort of courtship or capture” (10-11). This basic “picture” leads to further elaboration, pursued through dialogue and narratorial comment, which at times achieves true comic dash, but more often underlines themes with blunt directness. In the following passage only a few quick polyphonic exchanges at the end survive the conventional art exhibition humour, the narrator’s laborious assessment of characters’ emotional states, and Nick’s wordy sermons on the joys of an artistic life:

“What we’ve been through this morning in this place and what you’ve paraded before our eyes - the murders, the tortures, all kinds of disease and indecency!”

Nick looked at his mother as if this sudden protest surprised him, but as if also there were lurking explanations of it which he quickly guessed. . .

. . . “Ah, dear mother, don’t do the British matron!” he exclaimed, good-humouredly.

“British matron is soon said! I don’t know what they are coming to.”

“How odd that you should have been struck only with the disagreeable things, when, for myself, I have felt it to be the most interesting, the most suggestive morning I have passed for ever so many months!”

“I like them better in London - they are much less unpleasant,” said Grace Dormer.

“They are things you can look at,” her ladyship went on. “We certainly make the better show.”

“The subject doesn’t matter; it’s the treatment, the treatment!” Biddy announced, in a voice like the tinkle of a silver bell.

Talk, probably the most substantial ingredient of this novel, hardly ever rises above the level indicated above. Even the supposedly fascinating Gabriel Nash, for all his eccentricity, fails to develop a truly individual voice and vision. Winner regards him as a complete and explicit satire of the “Wildean aesthete”,¹⁰⁷ but although James refers to Aestheticism obviously enough in relation to Gabriel, most of this character’s squibs are damp. When Biddy asks pertly, “Are you an aesthete?”, her naïve pluck is more concisely humorous than Gabriel’s pompous reply:

“Ah, there’s one of the formulas! That’s walking in one’s hat! I’ve no profession, my dear young lady. I’ve no état civil. These things are a part of the complicated, ingenious machinery. As I say, I keep to the simplest way. I find that gives one enough to do. Merely to be is such a métier; to live is such an art; to feel is such a career!” (31)

If James is here trying to mimic the aphoristic speech attributed to the Wilde circle, an ideolect satirised so amusingly in the captions to Du Maurier's Aesthetic cartoons, he is lamentably off-key. Only once does Gabriel approximate brilliance (and James, satirical acumen): amidst the fuss of ordering a meal (still with the Salon in the background) and the Dormer family's single-minded interest in politics, Gabriel fleetingly becomes the witty Aesthete who plays up the others' pragmatic Philistinism while languidly hinting at his own reliance on higher matters for sustenance: upon being offered some asparagus-tips, he observes, "I have an impression I have breakfasted - I am not sure" (45; see fig. 64). For the rest Gabriel's talk is so bloated with bland antitheses and repetition that one suspects James of apologising for a failed creation when he causes Nick to comment on this character's lost "freshness" and to refer to the "real genius for suggestive paradox" which he used to display in their Oxford days (65).

Another argument against Winner's view of Gabriel as "completely and explicitly" satirical can be found in the structural importance with which James invests him. He is not only instrumental in launching each of the artist figures on a successful career, but also in organising the meeting between them at which the central Tragic Muse portrait takes shape, fusing the disparate painterly and theatrical strains into one "story".¹⁰⁸ James furthermore uses Gabriel to extrapolate, in the pretentious theoretical language so typical of this work, the implications of portraiture as a genre for both Nick's art and the novel's thematic development. His talk, recorded indirectly and therefore stripped even further of individuality, mechanically adds up the features of the genre, "its reach, its range, its fascination," the "windows" it opens into "history" and "psychology", its way of revealing "two realities" (the artist's and the sitter's) and the "double vision" which it offers: "the strongest dose of life that art could give, the strongest dose of art that life could give" (328). The final paradox, with its deliberate inversion of art and life, in particular illustrates how James's inflexible style deadens suggestive meaning rather than stimulating it in this novel. In the same way, despite his elaborate emphasis on the penetrating insights produced by portraiture, his intention of creating a "dramatic picture of the artist-life",¹⁰⁹ whether of the painter or of the actress, never really becomes concrete in the pictorial imagery of this novel. Nick's artistic consciousness consists of a sympathetic ability (stated, not shown in operation)



AN ÆSTHETIC MIDDAY MEAL.

At the Luncheon hour, Jellaby Postlethwaite enters a Pastrycook's and calls for a glass of Water, into which he puts a freshly-cut Li^l, and loses himself in contemplation thereof.

Waiter. "SHALL I BRING YOU ANYTHING ELSE, SIR?"

Jellaby Postlethwaite. "THANKS, NO! I HAVE ALL I REQUIRE, AND SHALL SOON HAVE DONE!"

Fig. 64. George du Maurier, Punch (1880).

to see into the lives of others; his art barely defines itself beyond a list of boldly general characteristics and long undifferentiated descriptions of subject-matter. The central Tragic Muse portrait, for instance, is “[u]nfinished, simplified and in some portions merely suggested”, “strong, brilliant and vivid” with “the look of life and the air of an original thing” (375).

James acknowledges later in his preface that, for all the “ingenious touches” lavished on Nick, he “has insisted . . . on looking . . . simple and flat”.¹¹⁰ The reason he hits upon for this failure is ingenious, but not quite satisfactory. “Any presentation of the artist in triumph”, James contends,

must be flat in proportion as it really sticks to its subject - it can only smuggle in relief and variety. For, to put the matter in an image, all we then - in his triumph - see of the charm-compeller is the back he turns to us as he bends over his work.¹¹¹

But, to repeat one of Bidley’s simple catch-phrases which nonetheless reflects a firmly held belief of James himself: “The subject doesn’t matter; it’s the treatment”. The successful painter at work after all becomes a frequent figure, often carrying much innovative force, in the twentieth-century novel.¹¹² Even James’s portrait of the artist with his back turned in the preface makes more vivid and imaginative use of the painter figure than many a descriptive or conversational attempt in the novel at turning Nick and his art into thematic issues or structural metaphors. Which brings one to James’s real problem with this figure: the difficulty he experiences, given the interdependence of art-life imagery in his writing, to find economic but suggestive “metaphors” for Nick’s conflicts, mental states, and creative abilities. Politics oppose painting diametrically in Nick’s mind, and therefore lend little subtlety to his portrayal; Miriam’s meteoric success in the theatre poses an ideal, rather than an alternative in terms of which the painter’s situation can be defined; and, under the circumstances, painterly images themselves become unrelievedly tautologous so that art ends up reflecting art in this novel in a manner which short-circuits James’s usual fruitful linking of the visual arts, the novel, and represented life in a relationship where they can “each from each contract new strength and light”.

It is therefore no coincidence that it is not Nick, but Bidley, a relatively minor figure and a slighter artist, who inspires some of this novel’s most inventive pictorial

images. Her naïve use of artistic catch-phrases off-sets her helplessness as she gradually realises her insignificance, both as an aspiring artist and in Peter's affections. Her pathos reaches a climax in a studio scene in which James manipulates painterly accessories and aesthetic talk to give a sense of her docility and her desire to assert artistic independence, her love for Peter and her attempt to hide this dependence. In discussing Nick's decision to abandon politics for painting, Bidy makes her usual enthusiastic remarks: "Surely you must be in favour of art", "I care for art" and "Yes, I'm on the side of art!", which pathetically echo the conflicts and commitments of real artist figures like Nick and Miriam (370 - 371). In Bidy's case such ardent faith merely overlays vulnerability and jealousy. James reflects this state of mind in a composite pictorial "scene" which eventually captures not only Bidy's individual consciousness, but the entire complex of relationships evolving among the four central characters. Bidy insists on holding Miriam's portrait for Peter to look at:

She wouldn't let him take it; she bade him stand off and allow her to place it in the right position. In this position she carefully presented it, supporting it, at the proper angle, from behind and showing her head and shoulders above it. From the moment his eyes rested on the picture Sherringham accepted this service without protest. . . . Miriam was represented in three-quarters, seated, almost down to her feet. She leaned forward. . . . Her beautiful head was bent a little, broodingly, and her splendid face seemed to look down at life. . . . Peter wondered where his kinsman had learned to paint like that. He almost gasped at the composition of the thing, at the drawing of the moulded arms. Bidy Dormer abstained from looking round the corner of the canvas as she held it; she only watched, in Peter's eyes, for his impression of it. This she easily caught, and he could see that she had done so when after a few minutes he went to relieve her. (374 - 5)

The interrelated "impressions" gleaned by the two characters from each other, as well as from their primary focus, the painted canvas which in turn introduces yet further centres of awareness and interrelations in representing Nick, the artist, and Miriam, his subject, concisely illustrate James's way of reflecting and commenting on multiple realities by employing composite but vivid pictorial images. Despite its many

facets, the example above remains relatively simple. Both characters' views and reactions are painstakingly related to the narrator's fixed vantage-point of observation, so that even when impressions start ricocheting towards the end of the passage, bouncing from Peter's watching the portrait to Biddy's watching Peter and vice versa, there is no doubt as to who is thinking or seeing what within this carefully constructed framework. The same clarity, achieved through different (mostly superior), methods of composition, marks the pictorial imagery and traditions evoked in The Portrait of a Lady. In the late works, too, James continues to complicate and shape his representation of situations and fictional minds, as well as his own novelistic procedures, through structures and devices drawn from painting. Generally speaking, his late writing follows the direction set in The Portrait of a Lady towards creating strong principles of internal cohesion rather than practising overt narratorial control from the outside (as in The Tragic Muse). In fact, James increasingly cuts down on external narratorial pointers, fashioning his fiction more and more out of subjective impressions which he leaves virtually uninterpreted but meshes intricately according to the workings of internal design. The result is writing which, at its best, manages to capture evanescent nuances, at its worst, loses all definition amidst a mass of opaque sensations; which at some times achieves triumphs of composition as variegated materials fuse coherently, at others remains exasperatingly amorphous no matter how ingenious (or rigid) the structural designs invented to give it form or substance.

James's greater self-consciousness as a literary artist towards the end of the century makes him more intent than ever on the delicate relationship which he has always perceived between spontaneity of representation and authorial control. The nineties see him make a brief return to art criticism, and although his views more or less conform to previous ones, they tend either to focus on the artist's grasp of the elusive and mysterious, or on the supreme effects of an artist's self-confidence on his creative expressiveness. The portrait becomes for him the art form which most successfully combines design with endlessly suggestive vision. Sargent's "Impressionist" portraits, for example, embody for James an ideal fusion of consummate artistic skill and vibrantly represented life. This artist also gives him the opportunity to slip in a guarded reappraisal of Impressionist painting in general: he particularly admires Sargent's "lucid" and "responsible" aims which crystallise in his

paintings in such a way that “the object seen” and “the object pictured” appear one and the same, and painting becomes “pure tact of vision, a simple manner of feeling”.¹¹³ James is therefore quite happy to call Sargent’s art “Impressionistic”, provided that “this addition always be made to it”: his “impressions happen to be worthy of record” whereas the “school” in general tends to seek “the solution of their problem exclusively in simplification”. Seen in this light, the individual impression becomes valuable to James in proportion as it grapples with the inexpressible on the one hand, and on the other as it emanates from and finds expression in a confident, well-defined artistic vision.¹¹⁴ The conflict between these two requirements is reconciled in Sargent’s works as far as James is concerned. In his own late writing the tension becomes a major concern, and, not infrequently, a serious drawback when he tries to work a reconciliation of conflicting elements at a purely technical level.

Given James’s faith in the “concrete” subject which inevitably lies at the heart of the portrait,¹¹⁵ and his own success with such metaphoric material in The Portrait of a Lady, his choice of “centres” in late novels like The Spoils of Poynton and The Wings of the Dove seems unfortunate. He arranges the former around an inanimate centre, the “grouped objects” of Poynton themselves,¹¹⁶ the latter around a human figure, but one kept intentionally vague and wrapped in mystic symbolism. Both novels are vastly accomplished, but in each case remarkable strengths and weaknesses seem to stem equally from the very foundation of James’s conceived structures for these works. Mrs Gereth’s meticulous arrangement of “spoils” at Poynton forms a “picture” of perfection which also becomes James’s ingenious touchstone for testing all the other characters’ sensibilities and actions. As long as the novel sustains a light satirical tone, these inanimate objects (as symbols of artistic perfection) function as successful comic devices, drawing from James a highly flexible style which simultaneously deploys, in the modulating tones of free indirect speech, the basic structural premises of the novel, individual characters’ immediate impressions, and his own humorous detachment. Mrs Gereth, for instance, sets the standard of aesthetic excellence against which all else is measured; but her excessive behaviour nonetheless provides James with much scope for satirical comment: badly chosen wall paper, amongst other atrocities of interior decoration, causes her such “esthetic misery” that she lies awake at night and has to flee the house at dawn.¹¹⁷ Her soulmate, Fleda Vetch, adds an important moral

dimension by showing up the extent to which Mrs Gereth's "ruling passion" for artistic perfection has "despoiled her of her humanity" (37). This does not prevent James from having much light-hearted fun with the girl's extreme sensitivities. He makes her arm herself for the battle of life in an Impressionist studio, then illustrates how her intense "impressions" of her surroundings and other characters' mental lives render her completely unfit for action (apart from bursting into tears).¹¹⁸ Later in the novel James abandons this primarily comical viewpoint to concentrate on characters' psychological motivations, their moral prevarications and turn-about. In such a context the "spoils" become something of a dead weight about which there is much ado with little further structural or thematic effect beyond that achieved so economically and amusingly in the first few chapters.

In *The Wings of the Dove* a human figure returns to the centre of narrative, but in this novel James also encounters compositional problems which are intimately linked with his basic structural conception. Suspended in a world of plotting and counter-plotting, Milly makes an independent bid for life: her aim, if it is anything so deliberate, seems in line with the wish formulated for Isabel in *The Portrait of a Lady*: to exist beautifully. The static nature of this urge, hemmed around as it is by Milly's pending death, has an enervating effect on the novel as a whole.¹¹⁹ Defined almost exclusively in relation to her, other characters' motives and actions remain peculiarly vague even though most of them are ruled by self-seeking pragmatism. The novel finally deals in transitory effects, not causes or results. Impressions are always in the process of being formed, but hardly ever materialise conclusively, either in terms of origin or outcome.

The most concrete (or solidly specified) writing to emerge pertains to particular environments, some of which involve pictorial associations ranging from fairly general to very specific. It is tempting to see in these environments, the English country house and the Venetian *palazzo*, the complete "plan" of a reading experience which at times becomes downright labyrinthine. They certainly offer striking thematic summaries and bring recurrent designs to bolder relief. But they also complicate matters by adding criss-crossing lines and suggestive shades of their own so that one often gets the impression that James obscures images and designs while setting about to clarify them. This tendency is closely related to a general Sisyphean principle which seems to govern this novel: construction and demolition seem to take place simultaneously as James

dismantles objects, environments, and states of mind in the very process of building them up. The pictorial images associated with Matcham, for instance, glide through a spectrum of meanings, acquiring new connotations, often conflicting ones, with each descriptive or interpretative detail added. The initial Watteau reference decides the basic tone for the section, but it is qualified and complicated in various ways right from the start:

The great historic house had, for Milly, beyond terrace and garden, as the centre of an almost extravagantly grand Watteau-composition, a tone as of old gold kept 'down' by the quality of the air, summer full-flushed, but attuned to the general perfect taste.¹²⁰

In the first place, there is some ambiguity as to whether the Watteau association proceeds from Milly herself, or from an unspecified authorial source. The second possibility seems more likely, since James later makes a point of Milly's ignorance (like Newman she ends up watching the copyists at work in the National Gallery, sensing herself "too weak" for the "Turners and Titians" which join "hands about her in a circle too vast" - 188). The reference is in any case introduced in an adverbial phrase not necessarily linked syntactically to the consciousness indicator ("for Milly") which governs the rest of the description (such differentiation is common enough in James's free indirect style). If one accepts the second possibility, the whole description falls apart into Milly's "most agreeably inward response to the scene" (136), which registers itself in generally vague and confused sensations of well-being, and the implied narrator's commentary on these, which includes subtle allusive structures like the Watteau reference. Milly finds herself pleasurably immersed in the general "largeness of style" which constitutes Matcham. Images of fusion, infusion, and absorption abound as the American girl takes in (at times, literally) this new social and cultural environment, and is simultaneously drawn in by it:

The largeness of style was the great containing vessel, while everything else . . . became but this or that element of the infusion. The elements melted together and seasoned the draught, the essence of which might have struck the girl as distilled into the small cup of iced coffee she had vaguely accepted from somebody, while a fuller flood, somehow, kept

bearing her up - all the freshness of response of her young life, the freshness of the first and only prime. (136)

The language of fluent synthesis recording Milly's sense of belonging implicitly keeps alive the "old gold" tones of the earlier Watteau reference, until James restates its symbolical importance as an image of artistic unity:

Everything was great, of course, in great pictures, and it was doubtless precisely a part of the brilliant life - since the brilliant life, as one had faintly figured it, clearly was humanly led - that all impressions within its area partook of its brilliancy. . . . (136)

This passage, however, animates doubts and ambiguities in direct conflict with its self-assured tone. These are closely related to the illusionary qualities which James elsewhere attributes to Watteau's fêtes galantes. It is difficult to trace the self-assurance emanating from particles like "of course", "doubtless", "precisely", and "clearly" conclusively to a particular mind. The impersonal pronoun and general tone of "the brilliant life, as one had faintly figured it" obviously belong to a naïve speaker, therefore to Milly. Consequently, the realisation that it is humanly possible to live brilliantly as long as one forms part of a brilliant society also belongs to Milly, so that the entire passage seems to reflect the steps whereby she arrives at her agreeable, even triumphant, conception of personal and social reciprocity. But there are other elements at work in the passage which undermine her pleasant revelation of social beneficence and self-worth. Even if "everything" is "great" as a matter of course in "great pictures", as the passage states so confidently, this assumption hardly holds up for life, especially not in a society where, in Lord Mark's words, "[n]obody . . . does anything for nothing" (106). Furthermore, exquisite taste and elegance are their own justification in a work of art (as The Spoils of Poynton clearly illustrates), but not in life, where harmonies, however perfect, may be merely apparent. In his art criticism James reflects in elegiac strains on the idealism and poignant unreality of Watteau's time-toned canvases:

It almost brings tears to one's eyes to think that a scheme of life so delicious and so distinctly conceivable by a beautiful mind on behalf of the dull average of conjecture, should be on the whole, as things go, so

extremely impracticable: a scheme of lounging through endless summer days in grassy glades in a company always select . . . and in a condition of temper personally, in which satisfaction should never be satiety.¹²¹

In The Wings of the Dove the same ideas, cryptically implied, produce a faint ironic undertone to the brilliant promise which English society (as represented by Matcham) seems to hold for Milly, and Milly for society. The irony is strengthened considerably by the close involvement of Aunt Maud, the novel's arch schemer, in Milly's glorious absorption of and into Matcham, reminding one throughout that there are more ways of being "taken in" than one.

The Bronzino portrait which forms the other focus-point of the Matcham section continues this process of undermining apparent securities and harmonies. Although probably the most concrete entity in the entire novel, the picture is nonetheless veiled in a multitude of conflicting impressions and possible meanings. At its most basic, the resemblance which Lord Mark, Kate, and various others see between Milly and the portrait is a sign that, like Aunt Maud, they recognise and accept her as a promising social addition. Through this resemblance, Milly literally finds a place at Matcham. But the portrait also emits ominous undertones. James's description is completely static, avoiding active verbs and piling on simple nouns, adjectives, and past participles:

the face of a young woman, all magnificently drawn, down to the hands, and magnificently dressed; a face almost livid in hue, yet handsome in sadness and crowned with a mass of hair rolled back and high. . . . The lady in question, at all events, with her slightly Michaelangelesque squareness, her eyes of other days, her full lips, her long neck, her recorded jewels, her brocaded and wasted reds, was a very great personality. . . . (144)

This description directly prepares the way for Milly's disturbing impression that the depicted woman is "unaccompanied by a joy" and "dead, dead, dead" (144).

The choice of Bronzino as a painter is significant. Milly's response stems from the stark modelling characteristic of his portraits which depicts faces and figures in flat surfaces and using hard, sometimes elongated, lines, usually against uniform backgrounds (see fig. 65, the portrait generally accepted as the one which James is



Fig. 65. Bronzino, Lucrezia Panciatichi,
Uffizi, Florence.

alluding to here).¹²² Apart from the fact that the static and impressive starkness produced by these means obviously refers to Milly's precarious health, it also reflects more generally on her status as another of James's images *en disponibilité* - this time one which is literally disposed of by other characters' plans for her wealth. Their focus on Milly's material resources again features sharply in Bronzino's style: he shows a particular technical interest in the effects of jewellery and fabrics, while his faces remain relatively blank and inexpressive. Thus, despite Milly's wish to engage passionately in life and despite her apparent success at merging with a new social milieu, she ends up trapped in the materially splendid but physically awkward pose of a Mannerist portrait.

But this ironic interpretation highlights only a few of the portrait's many implications. For instance: Milly not only responds to the picture's starkness, but also to its beauty, so that apart from anguish, it captures a moment of perfection which, she feels, "will never be so right again" (144). The earlier Watteau reference contributes to this mingled sense of pain and beauty. The portrait potentially signifies transcendence as well as transitoriness, fusion and detachment, power and vulnerability (Milly is recognised as a "great personage", but also as one who can be exploited). James provides no guidelines to help one sort "valid" readings from "invalid" ones (if such a distinction is at all relevant here).

He complicates matters further by later cancelling or ignoring previous implications. The section of the novel which takes place in Milly's Venetian *palazzo* for instance revives some of the Matcham issues, but develops them in quite a different key. At the party which she gives in honour of Sir Luke, Milly appears even more entangled in her companions' selfish schemes, and yet James emphasises, again through pictorial imagery, her power to transcend corruption and to redeem others. He seems to suggest, however, (and this accounts for the absence of irony), that such transcendence and redemption can only take place in and through art (just as truly graceful living and beautiful existence are tragically confined to a Lancret or Watteau canvas, and not to be expected in "real" worlds like Gardencourt and Matcham). Whereas his focus at Matcham is at least in part on the dangers which may lurk in applying the criteria of art to life, Venice fittingly (but nonetheless artificially) resolves this conflict for him¹²³ so that he here treats his dying and exploited heroine's social triumph unreservedly as a

purely symbolical one. Instead of the plaintive ironies produced by Watteau's "impracticable" vision, James now employs Veronese's uncomplicated and brightly festive imagery to describe, through the devoted Susan, Milly's ability to bring out "all the glory" of her environment: "It's a Veronese picture, as near as can be - with me as the inevitable dwarf, the small blackamoor, put into a corner of the foreground for effect" (329). It is part of the completely unironical and straightforwardly celebratory appeal which Veronese holds for James that the "inevitable dwarf" or "small blackamoor", a pictorial device often hinting at some form of detachment or exclusion in painting of social activity, in this case merely adds flourish to Susan's imaginary scene of opulence (see for instance the ironic commentary which Hogarth by contrast imports into figure 66 with such a presence).¹²⁴ At another level, her naïve use of potentially ironic figures as mere fantastic decorations gives evidence of her innocence and disinterested devotion towards Milly. Against this, Densher, the reluctant conspirator, experiences distinct discomfort at being invited into Susan's "picture": his "private and particular shabby realities" (330), both as regards his material means and his duplicity towards Milly, make him feel unsuited for the role which Susan good-humoredly reserves for him as "the grand young man who surpasses the others and holds up his head and the wine-cup" (330). Despite Densher's frustration with Susan's pictorial fancies, the Veronese image resurfaces in his consciousness, this time no longer associated with his own embarrassments, but reinstated as a triumphant symbol of Milly's redemptive powers: he marvels at the influence which she exercises over her vulgar guests,

people who during the day had fingered their Baedekers, gaped at their frescoes and differed, over fractions of francs, with their gondoliers. But Milly, let loose among them in a wonderful white dress, brought them somehow into relation with something that made them more finely genial; so that if the Veronese picture of which he had talked with Mrs Stringham was not quite constituted, the comparative prose of the previous hours, the traces of insensibility . . . were at last almost nobly disowned. (334)

Densher's "vision" of Milly in the passage above is touchingly vivid and tempered with realism: the artistic harmonies of the Veronese are "not quite" realised. He



Fig. 66. Hogarth, Industry and Idleness, detail from plate VIII; rpt. in Hogarth: The Complete Engravings, plate 210.

furthermore recognises that Milly “almost” obliterates “traces of insensibility”, and that her wonderful impact on her environment is more a visual effect than a reality. His appreciation of her impact at this stage prepares the way for the very real place which Milly ultimately takes up in his consciousness. At the same time, however, James encourages a largely idealistic view of her transcendent and redemptive powers, just as he endows her with a pair of symbolical “wings” which enable her to rise above her environment (the “wings” represent a type of wishful symbolism drawn from two Psalms, one expressing David’s desire for “wings like a dove” with which to “fly away, and be at rest”, the other envisaging fantastically decorated “wings of a dove covered with silver, and [her] feathers with yellow gold” which are interpreted as a sign of divine preference.¹²⁵)

By means of such idealistic symbolism, James circumvents Milly’s suffering, both from disease and betrayal. Pictorial material forms a substantial part of the structures which he builds around this figure, systematically concealing the realities of her condition. The preface affixed to this novel suggests that James deliberately courted this effect. He speaks of “merciful indirection” and elaborates on the way in which he tried to keep “the pressure all round her” “easy”, “the sounds, the movements regulated, the forms and ambiguities” “charming”. “Tenderness of imagination” is the closest approach he allows himself to the dying girl.¹²⁶ But what James reveals most of all here is a basic confusion of art and life which, in this case, leads to a preposterous equation of artistic composition and nursing. The same type of confusion seems to reign in the novel itself. In this representative late work, James at times employs artistic metaphors as substitutes for life; or resolves conflicts at a purely technical level with ingenious structural and symbolic displays which omit basic representation. The result is usually ambiguity and vagueness, a condition perhaps best described in a passage from the novel which, by ironic coincidence, contains a final pictorial image. The following reflections made by Densher on Milly apply fully to the compositional problems surrounding James’s absent heroine and to the general tendencies of his late work to banish life from art:

He had not only never been near the facts of her condition - which had been such a blessing for him; he had not only, with all the world, hovered outside an impenetrable ring fence, within which there reigned

a kind of expensive vagueness, made up of smiles and silences and beautiful fictions and priceless arrangements, all strained to breaking; but he had also, with everyone else, as he now felt, actively fostered suppressions which were in the direct interest of everyone's good manner, everyone's pity, everyone's really quite generous ideal. It was a conspiracy of silence, as the cliché went, to which no one had made an exception, the great smudge of mortality across the picture, the shadow of pain and horror, finding in no quarter a surface of spirit or of speech that consented to reflect it. 'The mere aesthetic instinct of mankind - !' our young man had more than once, in the connexion, said to himself; letting the rest of the proposition drop, but touching again thus sufficiently on the outrage even to taste involved in one's having to see. So then it had been - a general conscious fool's paradise, from which the specified had been chased like a dangerous animal. (388)

As a vision of isolation or the peculiar evasiveness surrounding human beings' sense of mortality, this passage is immensely rich and powerful. As a reflection of James's art in the late novels, however, it indeed suggests an obscured picture. In The Wings of the Dove the novelist looks upon his heroine with something of the fearfulness which the boy in Hunt's studio experienced at his first life class almost forty years earlier. But whereas the young artist pocketed his pencil and started on a new venture, the ageing James takes refuge behind his vast experience as a literary craftsman, interposing between himself and his primary focus of attention innumerable "supersubtleties" and "other arch-refinements, of tact and taste, of design and instinct" which leave the congested canvas none the clearer.¹²⁷

This thesis seems to end on an ironic note, with the juxtaposition of painting's "ostensivity" and the indeterminacy of response which it generates in James's late work. But in this James looks back to Austen as much as he prefigures the Modernists (and after). The array of viewpoints radiating inconclusively from the starkly delineated Mannerist portrait at Matcham recalls the ripples of response running through the Hartfield circle when Emma exhibits her portrait of Harriet. On the other hand, the design of subjective viewpoints and policies into which James works Milly also brings

to mind that unfocused focal point, Lily Briscoe, whose painting, "with all its green and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something", for all its obscurity is the object which signifies "shape" in "the midst of chaos", the object by means of which Woolf's conception of "eternal passing and flowing" is "struck into stability".¹²⁸ The transcendent figure of Milly brings disparate characters "somehow in relation" so that they almost constitute a Veronese (334). This is Lily's function too when she returns to the Ramsay's holiday house after ten years. She sets about consolidating past and present by trying to find "some relation between those masses" (170). The search for form involves not only the concrete shapes of wall and hedge and tree, but also the masses of seemingly unrelated moments of consciousness and memory which pour in upon characters (and the reader) in this novel.

In its dual capacity as vivid moment of perception and ambiguous sign around which discourses proliferate the pictorial image has much to offer twentieth-century fiction. In To the Lighthouse it functions as a metaphor for Woolf's novelistic aesthetic and in the same capacity it communicates a powerful instance of epiphanic vision. Also in more recent novels painter figures appear in the meta-literary position of structuring the fictional worlds and novelistic aesthetic through which they themselves are represented. Alf Dubbo's vision in Riders in the Chariot (1961) literally draws Patrick White's four fictional worlds into symbolic relation in a Deposition scene.

But apart from capturing moments of insight, paintings also record processes - of creation and perception - governed by indeterminacy and multiple meanings. Far from being simple images of ideal vision, paintings signal transitions to contiguous meaning. As Lily, for instance, "dipped into the blue paint" to realise her vision, "she dipped too into the past" (199), a link which sparks off a train of memories and associations which in turn affects her vision. More comprehensively, David Malouf establishes his painter figure in Harland's Half Acre (1984) in a short section at the start of the novel, then turns him into a Postmodern mechanism for slipping into the separate but overlapping experience of a range of other characters.

Finally, as a concrete sign "about" which people think and talk, the painting marks off a space in fiction particularly productive of interpretations. Even Lily's abstract and largely unviewed painting (the first version) stimulates a discussion of Madonna and child iconography which contributes to the way in which the second version pays

elegiac tribute to Mrs Ramsay and restores her presence to the novel. This is also an obvious structural gain, since by means of Lily's revision Woolf relates the first part of the novel to the third across the impersonal temporal flux of the middle section. An ordinary woman and child cannot escape iconographic implications when they have become part of a painting (even an abstract one). Like Alexander Wedderburn (and Byatt), Lily realises the impossibility of innocent seeing and recognises painting as an emblem of composite and accumulative meaning:

One must hold the scene - so - in a vice and let nothing come in and spoil it. One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy. (234)

Notes and references to Chapter Six

¹ Henry James, *Notes of a Son & Brother*, (London: Macmillan, 1914.) 59.

² James, *Notes* 105 - 106.

³ James, *Notes* 75.

⁴ James, *Notes* 89.

⁵ James, *Notes* 89 - 90.

⁶ Henry James, *A Small Boy and Others*. (London: Macmillan, 1913.) 326 - 7.

⁷ George Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography", trans. James Olney, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 39.

⁸ Gusdorf, "Autobiography" 35.

⁹ Gusdorf "Autobiography" 38.

¹⁰ Gusdorf "Autobiography" 41.

¹¹ See Charles R. Anderson, *Person, Place, and Thing in Henry James's Novels* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1977). Anderson analyses characters' relations with one another through their orientation within fictional space and their attitude towards objects (4, 81). Speaking about scene and picture in *The Wings of the Dove*, he considers the way in which James's narrative "scenes provide an understanding of the characters, both in themselves and in their relations to each other". Apart from this, he comments on how "the picture elements either carry the narrative forward or are themselves . . . dramatized and become 'scene-settings'", presumably with the same function as the "scenes" mentioned earlier (177). The autobiographical writings, as part of the late period, make frequent use of both these means to construct and analyse James's past self.

¹² James himself is acutely sensitive to the simultaneous presence of the young and the old in all experience. Upon re-reading Balzac in 1902 he writes the following:

The beauty of this adventure, that of seeing the dust blown off a relation that had been put away as on a shelf, almost out of reach, at the back of one's mind, consists in finding the precious object not only fresh and intact, but with its firm lacquer still further figured, gilded and enriched. It is all overscored with traces and impressions - vivid, definite, almost as valuable as itself - of the recognitions and agitations it originally produced in us. Our old - that is our young - feelings are very nearly what page after page most gives us. The case has become a case of authority plus association.

"Honoré de Balzac", *Notes and Novelists with Some Other Notes*. (London: J. M. Dent, 1914) 87.

¹³ This unresolved quality extending throughout James's oeuvre renders suspect critical approaches which classify his novelistic method confidently as either this or that. See for instance H. Peter Stowell, *Literary Impressionism, James and Chekov* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), a

study which admirably captures James's impact on Modernism, but at the cost of leaving out at least half the picture. A statement such as the following strangely overlooks the tight structural control which James exercises over his fictional world, if anything, with an ever-increasing faith in the sheer craftsmanship involved in writing novels:

James's formalism and traditionalism probably forced him to temper the intuitive impressionism of his technique and thought. Finally, however, his impressionistic tendencies overwhelmed the formal structures of his novels and his cautious attitudes toward his artistic progression. (172).

¹⁴ James, "An English Critic of French Painting" (1868), The Painter's Eye: Notes and Essays on the Pictorial Arts, ed. John L. Sweeney (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1956) 40.

¹⁵ James, "French Pictures in Boston" (1872), Painter's Eye 47.

¹⁶ James, "The Wallace Collection in Bethnal Green", (1873), Painter's Eye 72.

¹⁷ James, "Ruskin's Collection of Drawings of Turner" (1878), Painter's Eye 159.

¹⁸ James, "The Letters of Eugène Delacroix" (1880), Painter's Eye 184.

¹⁹ James, "Eugène Delacroix" 185 - 186.

²⁰ James, "Venice" (1882), Portraits of Places (London: Macmillan, 1883) 27.

²¹ James, "Eugène Delacroix", 184.

²² Ruskin, Modern Painters, vol. 1, eds. Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 3, 173.

²³ James, "Eugène Delacroix" 184.

²⁴ Walter Pater, "Sandro Botticelli" (1870), The Renaissance (London: Macmillan, 1912.) 53.

²⁵ James, "Italy Revisited" (1877), Portraits of Places 67.

²⁶ James, "Italy Revisited" 68.

²⁷ James, "The Metropolitan Museum's '1871 Purchase'" (1872), Painter's Eye 61.

²⁸ James, "The Wallace Collection" 74. See also his "Arts and Letters in Paris" (1876), Parisian Sketches: Letters to the New York Tribune, eds. Leon Edel and Ilse Duso Lind (New York: New York University Press, 1957) in which he refers to "charming Decamps" (105).

²⁹ James, "The Impressionists" (1876), Painter's Eye 114.

³⁰ James, "The Wallace Collection" 74.

³¹ James, "The Impressionists" 114.

³² This is in keeping with Torgovnick's statement that "[i]n many ways . . . James's tastes in the visual arts typified those of his adopted country and especially those of the educated high bourgeois of his day" (38). Tintner, by contrast, views his taste as "avant-garde" in "Rococo Venice, Pietro Longhi, and Henry James", The Sweetest Impression of Life: The James Family and Italy, eds. James W. Tuttleton and Agostino Lombardo (New York: New York University Press, 1990) 107 - 127. From Tintner's essay, however, it appears that James is "avant-garde" more frequently in rediscovering neglected figures from the past than in appreciating contemporary art (Burne-Jones excepted).

³³ James, "The Impressionists" 114.

³⁴ Anonymous review, "The Grosvenor Gallery", Art Journal (New Series, 1877): 244.

³⁵ H. Heathcote Stratham, "The Grosvenor Gallery", Macmillan's Magazine June 1877: 118.

³⁶ In his biography, Oscar Wilde, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987) Richard Ellman undertakes a similar comparison of the two reviewers' impressions. He touches only tangentially on James, however, and for the most part he draws attention to superficial, or even spurious, differences between them. So, for instance, he claims that James's "fastidious eye" objects to the way in which "the savage red" lining the walls distracts the viewer's attention from the paintings, while Wilde rejoices in "the lavishness of the spectacle" (75). But in his article Wilde himself complains that "the delicacy of colour" in a Millais portrait is "being rather injured by the red damask background" (Wilde, "The Grosvenor Gallery", Dublin University Magazine, July 1877: 119). Elsewhere Ellman says that James qualifies his praise of Burne-Jones because he detects "a want of 'manliness'" in the painter (76), obviously a remark which would clash sharply with Wilde's sensuous enjoyment of the painter's works. But far from making such a remark *in propria persona*, James addresses the charge of "unmanliness" only as part of the complaints which he imagines critics in general might lodge against Burne-Jones. He himself speaks of the "enchancing purity" of this artist's figures and the "perfection with which the painter has mastered the type that seems to say so much to his imagination" (James, "The Picture Season in London", Painter's Eye 147).

³⁷ James, "The Picture Season", 144.

³⁸ James, "The Picture Season" 145.

³⁹ James, "The Picture Season" 145.

- ⁴⁰ Wilde, "The Grosvenor Gallery", 119, and 122-3.
- ⁴¹ Wilde 121.
- ⁴² Wilde 124.
- ⁴³ James, "The Picture Season" 141; Wilde 125.
- ⁴⁴ James, "George du Maurier" (1883), Partial Portraits (1888; Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1970) 327 - 372.
- ⁴⁵ James, "George du Maurier" 360.
- ⁴⁶ James, "George du Maurier" 371.
- ⁴⁷ Leonée Ormond, George du Maurier, (London: Routledge, 1969) gives a list of these chinamania cartoons (290-3).
- ⁴⁸ James, "George du Maurier" 368.
- ⁴⁹ James, "George du Maurier" 347.
- ⁵⁰ James, "Swinburne's Essays" (1875), Selected Literary Criticism, ed. Morris Shapiro (London: Heineman, 1963) 23.
- ⁵¹ James, "Swinburne's Essays" 25.
- ⁵² James, "The Life of George Eliot" (1855), Partial Portraits 46.
- ⁵³ James, "Eliot" 51.
- ⁵⁴ James, "Gustave Flaubert" (1893), Selected Literary Criticism, 150.
- ⁵⁵ James "Flaubert" 154.
- ⁵⁶ James, "The Art of Fiction" (1884), Partial Portraits 378.
- ⁵⁷ James, "The Art of Fiction" 379.
- ⁵⁸ James, "The Art of Fiction" 379.
- ⁵⁹ James, "The Art of Fiction" 384 - 385.
- ⁶⁰ James, "The Art of Fiction" 387 - 388.
- ⁶¹ James, "The Art of Fiction" 388.
- ⁶² In Modern Painters, vol. 1, Ruskin says the following: ". . . I call an idea great in proportion as it is received by a higher faculty of the mind, and as it more fully occupies, and in occupying, exercises and exalts, the faculty by which it is received" (92). James comes close to this in "The Art of Fiction":
- There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough. No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground. (406 - 407)
- ⁶³ James, "Niagara" (1871), Portraits of Places 370.
- ⁶⁴ James, A Small Boy 358 - 359.
- ⁶⁵ James, A Small Boy 366.
- ⁶⁶ James, "Venice" 18.
- ⁶⁷ James, "Venice" 24.
- ⁶⁸ Here my view of James's use of the visual arts differs intrinsically from Torgovnick's. Whereas she places James's early pictorialism at the lowest end of her continuum (the merely "decorative"), I regard pictorialism as an essential part of his way of perceiving and realising his fictional worlds. Pictorial references and descriptions come replete with meaning, derived from James's highly developed language of painting. See Torgovnick 70 and 74.
- ⁶⁹ The Complete Tales of Henry James, ed. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1962) vol. 1, 102 and 110. Further references to the tales will be cited in the text as page and (where necessary) volume numbers.
- ⁷⁰ But as travel sketch too this story is unsatisfactory. For no apparent reason, James's description of Tintoretto's San Cassiano Crucifixion diverges from reality. See W. R. Martin and Warren U. Ober, "Henry James's 'Travelling Companions': Did the Master Nod?", Notes and Queries 232 (1987): 46 - 47.
- ⁷¹ Viola Hopkins Winner, Henry James and the Visual Arts, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970) and Adeline R. Tintner, The Museum World of Henry James (Michigan: UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, 1986).
- ⁷² Winner 78 and Tintner 25.

⁷³ As in the Gothic tradition, the Searle family portraits introduce past events into the present narrative, The Reynolds portrait furthermore functions as a recognition device. Searle becomes part of the family through his resemblance to this portrait. The housekeeper's exclamation, "Heaven preserve us, Miss! It's your great-uncle's picture come to life" is pure Gothic (vol. 2, 257).

⁷⁴ Winner 96 - 97.

⁷⁵ Tintner, *Museum World* 30.

⁷⁶ Robert Browning "Pictor Ignotus", 54.

⁷⁷ James, Preface to 'Roderick Hudson', *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James*, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934) 4.

⁷⁸ James, Preface to 'Roderick Hudson' 11.

⁷⁹ James, Preface to 'Roderick Hudson' 5.

⁸⁰ James, Preface to 'Roderick Hudson' 15.

⁸¹ Winner 65. Should "inchoate" read "chaotic"?

⁸² James, *Roderick Hudson*, ed. Leon Edel (1875; London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1961) 23. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers. When referring to the novels, I have as far as possible tried to find editions based on unrevised texts. In a number of cases, however, only revised editions were obtainable. In these cases I availed myself of the revised New York Edition.

⁸³ Winner 105.

⁸⁴ Winner 106.

⁸⁵ Winner 107. For a similar viewpoint, see also Torgovnick 72.

⁸⁶ Refreshing, in this respect, is Kenneth Graham's attempt "towards reappropriating the novels to our sympathetic imagination and our full sense of life" in Henry James: *The Drama of Fulfilment: An Approach to the Novels* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) ix. Graham consequently relates James's portrayal of various characters' aesthetic capacity in this novel to a basic psychological "drama of fulfilment": "Something essential to life depends on the possession of an individualizing talent, and on the finding of someone who will confirm that talent" (34).

⁸⁷ James, Preface to 'Roderick Hudson' 12.

⁸⁸ James, *The American* (1877; New York: Holt, 1949) 1 and 3. All further references to this novel will be cited in the text as page references.

⁸⁹ In two articles Lynne P. Shackelford focuses respectively on a painting chosen and another rejected by Newman. In both cases she relates Newman's taste to his attitude to women and marriage (and James's indictment of this attitude). Although these interpretations are illuminating additions to the study of Henry James and the visual arts, they also illustrate, once again, that criticism which relies mainly on identifying and interpreting source material frequently overlooks further interactions between fictional worlds and pictorial allusions. In the first article, "James's *The American*", *Explicator* 28 (1990): 254 - 257, Shackelford's reading does not take into consideration James's sense of humour. The second article, "Forsaking the Bridal Veil: Henry James's Allusion to Correggio's *The Marriage of St. Catherine* in *The American*", *Henry James Review* 13 (1992): 78 - 81, ignores the extent to which Claire de Cintré's decision to become a nun is influenced by her family's bullying tactics. It is therefore reductive to argue that Newman's rejection of the Correggio "represents the theologically indifferent protagonist's attempt to repudiate the threat he feels from the Roman Catholic Church, or, to be more precise, from Claire's devotion to her faith" (79).

⁹⁰ James, Preface to 'The American' 36.

⁹¹ James, Preface to 'The American' 37.

⁹² James, Preface to 'The American' 22.

⁹³ James, *The Europeans* (1878; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964) 7 - 8. All further references to this novel will be cited in the text as page numbers.

⁹⁴ James, "The '1871 Purchase", *Painter's Eye* 60.

⁹⁵ James, "The Wallace Collection", *Painter's Eye* 77.

⁹⁶ James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, vols. 1 and 2, *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, vols. 3 and 4 (1880 - 81; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908, re-issued Augustus M. Kelly, 1976) vol. 1, 82 and 124 - 125. All further references will be cited in the text as volume and page numbers.

⁹⁷ See James's own injunctions to the young artist in "The Art of Fiction" to "enjoy", "take possession", "explore" and "rejoice in" the freedom of a creative life (407 - 408).

⁹⁸ See Anderson's useful distinction between these two types of connoisseur: Ralph is an "appreciator", Osmond (and presumably also Madame Merle) an "exploiter" (114).

⁹⁹ James, Preface to 'The Portrait of a Lady', 45.

- ¹⁰⁰ James, Preface to 'The Portrait of a Lady' 46.
- ¹⁰¹ James, Preface to 'The Tragic Muse' 79.
- ¹⁰² James, Preface to 'The Portrait of a Lady' 44.
- ¹⁰³ Here I differ from Graham who finds the security of tone in The Tragic Muse a sign of maturity and of "an author at ease with himself and totally in command of many of his characteristic powers" (79).
- ¹⁰⁴ James, Preface to 'The Tragic Muse' 79 - 80.
- ¹⁰⁵ James, Preface to 'The Tragic Muse' 81.
- ¹⁰⁶ James, The Tragic Muse (1890; London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1948) 7. All further references to this novel will be cited in the text as page numbers.
- ¹⁰⁷ Winner, 46.
- ¹⁰⁸ James, Preface to 'The Tragic Muse' 84.
- ¹⁰⁹ James, Preface to 'The Tragic Muse' 79.
- ¹¹⁰ James, Preface to 'The Tragic Muse' 97.
- ¹¹¹ James, Preface to 'The Tragic Muse' 96.
- ¹¹² See for instance the painter figures at work in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse, Patrick White's The Riders in the Chariot and The Vivisector, and David Malouf's Harland's Half Acre.
- ¹¹³ James, "John S. Sargent" (1893), Painter's Eye 217.
- ¹¹⁴ James changes his mind about Whistler along the same lines. He recognises in Whistler's work "one of the finest of all distillations of the artistic intelligence". His portrait of Henry Irving (singled out by Wilde twenty years earlier) comes to exist for James in a "world of distinction, of perception, of beauty and mystery and perpetuity" ("The Grafton Galleries" (1897), Painter's Eye 258 - 259).
- ¹¹⁵ James, "The New Gallery" (1897), Painter's Eye 244.
- ¹¹⁶ James, Preface to 'The Spoils of Poynton' 123.
- ¹¹⁷ James, The Spoils of Poynton, The Novels and Tales of Henry James, vol. 10 (1897; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908, re-issued Augustus M. Kelley, 1976) 3 - 4. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.
- ¹¹⁸ Such satirical exploitation of Impressionism, as well as James's continued criticism of the movement in his essay on Sargent, calls into doubt Stowell's statement that James's attitude towards the Impressionists "grew into an enthusiastic, sensual embrace" (171).
- ¹¹⁹ I am not convinced by Graham's statement that "Milly is thoroughly endowed with flesh and blood and knowledge" (162).
- ¹²⁰ James, The Wings of the Dove (1902; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) 136. All further references will be cited in the text as page numbers.
- ¹²¹ James, "The Wallace Collection", Painter's Eye 76.
- ¹²² Miriam Allott identified the portrait in Modern Language Notes 68 (1953): 23 - 25. See also Winner 81 - 85 and Anderson 186 - 188. The latter adds the detail that the depicted figure holds a book containing a hymn to the Virgin.
- ¹²³ If one keeps in mind the type of epiphany Venice gives rise to in the travel writing.
- ¹²⁴ See for instance the way in which both Watteau and Hogarth use this type of excluded figure for ironic comment on the social groups depicted in their paintings.
- ¹²⁵ Psalms 55:6 and 68:13.
- ¹²⁶ James, Preface to 'The Wings of the Dove', 306.
- ¹²⁷ James, Preface to 'The Wings of the Dove', 306.
- ¹²⁸ Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse, (1927; London: J. M. Dent, 1978) 242 and 186. All further references will be cited in the text.

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