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# From Rio to Romola: Morality and Didacticism in the English Appreciation of Early Italian Art 1836-1863

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**From Rio to Romola: Morality and Didacticism in the  
English Appreciation of Early Italian Art 1836-1863**

**Matthew T.W.Plampin**

**A Thesis submitted to the Courtauld Institute of Art  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**



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## Abstract of Thesis

This thesis takes as its starting point the marked rise in interest in the earlier schools of Italian painting in the English art world during the 1840s. Over the course of this decade, the study and collection of so-called 'primitive' painting was transformed from a marginal pursuit to an aspect of mainstream taste. The thesis defines the critical discourse formulated in order to rationalise the taste for artworks which failed to conform to the principles which had governed the appreciation of old master painting in previous decades. It also studies the ramifications of this discourse with regards to broader conceptions of art history, both in works of criticism and in spaces of display. The discussion focuses upon the writing of A.F.Rio, John Ruskin and Anna Jameson, and the displays of the National Gallery, British Institution and Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857. It is my contention that the taste for early Italian painting and the theories which supported it gave fresh impetus to the cause of popular education in art history; in terms of galleries at least, this manifested itself in a new concern with historiography in the composition and arrangement of public collections of ancient art. Acceptance of the discourse and the art it championed was far from universal, however. Objections and difficulties regarding religious denomination were persistent, due to the prominence of tensions relating to this issue in England during this period, and the fact that much 'primitive' art drew its iconography from Catholic dogma. In the 1850s, objections to the discourse on a conceptual level also mounted, and the revision of its tenets was widespread in works of criticism and literature. Particular attention is given to developments in the theories of Ruskin, the controversy which surrounded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and the positions taken in Robert Browning's *Men and Women* and George Eliot's *Romola*.

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## Introduction

This thesis takes as its starting point the marked rise in interest in the earlier schools of Italian painting in the English art world during the 1840s. Over the course of this decade, the study and collection of what was known as 'primitive' painting was transformed from a marginal pursuit to an aspect of mainstream taste. In 1847, for example, John Ruskin wrote to Joseph Severn of the 'violent current of feeling' that had developed in recent years, leading larger numbers of art lovers to Italian pictures produced in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> The thesis will define the critical discourse formulated in order to rationalise the taste for artworks which failed to conform to the principles which had governed the appreciation of old master painting in previous decades. It will also discuss the ramifications of this discourse with regards to broader conceptions of art history, both in works of criticism and in spaces of display. It is my contention that the taste for early Italian painting and the theories which supported it gave fresh impetus to the cause of popular education in art history; in terms of galleries at least, this manifested itself in a new concern with historiography in the composition and arrangement of public collections of ancient art. Acceptance of the discourse and the art it championed was far from universal, however, and both had their persistent critics. Even those who adopted them encountered a range of difficulties, of which the question of religious denomination was among the most tenacious, due to the prominence of tensions relating to this issue in England during this period, and the fact that much 'primitive' art drew its iconography from Catholic dogma. In the 1850s, there were many objections to the discourse on a conceptual level also, and the revision of its tenets was widespread.

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<sup>1</sup>E.T.Cook and A.Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete works of John Ruskin*, 36 vols., London and New York, George Allen, 1906, vol.36, p.68. Letter to Joseph Severn, from some time early in 1847 (precise date unknown).

Chapter one opens by establishing the background to the increase in interest in the earlier Italian schools, with attention initially given to the role played by the rise in travel to Italy during the late 1830s and early 1840s. The discussion then moves on to the recognition of the 'primitives' in works of formal criticism. This primarily involves the contrast between the minor position allotted to them by critics such as Franz Kugler, and the assertions of the French critic Alexis François Rio. Whereas Kugler characterised the early schools as an incipient stage in the development of Italian painting towards the High Renaissance, Rio regarded them as the purveyors of a spiritual and religious purity which was polluted and ultimately lost in the productions of painters who introduced naturalism into artistic practice. In Rio's *De la Poésie Chrétienne* of 1836, technical appreciation was rejected in favour of an explicitly moral approach to Italian painting. A polarity is established between the morally pure 'mystic school', and the degenerate 'naturalistic school', and the Renaissance interpreted not as an elevation of art, but as a fall into depraved sensuality, which perverted the religious subjects and scenes its painters continued to depict. Rio's theories and conclusions, which I have termed 'moral art history', proved influential among the major British art critics who emerged over the course of the 1840s; discussion in the chapter is focused on their utilisation by Ruskin, Anna Jameson and Alexander Crawford, Lord Lindsay in particular. The main characteristics of the discourse as it was developed in the works of these writers are defined, and their specific adaptations of Rio's principles identified, specifically with regards to the employment of artists' biographies to reinforce the moral dimension of painterly production. Initial problems encountered with the discourse by British critics are also discussed; these primarily involved the concerns of religious denomination, as mentioned above. The reactions of Roman Catholic critics such as Augustus Welby Pugin and Nicholas Wiseman to Rio are studied, both with regards to their responses to his theories, and their views on the adoption of these theories by Protestant authors. Other complications covered by the thesis involve the ramifications of the discourse regarding not only general conceptions

of art history, but also the progress and development of the modern British school of painting.

In chapter two, the focus of the thesis shifts to the effects of moral art history upon attitudes towards the private collection and public exhibition of old master paintings in England. I will argue that the influence of this discourse encouraged commentators to reassess the role of ancient art in society, and to question the traditional means by which the paintings themselves were controlled and appreciated. This argument will involve developments in the commercial art market following the intellectual legitimisation of 'primitive' painting, as well as reactions in the periodical press and elsewhere towards the acquisitions policy of the National Gallery, which are often clearly inflected by the principles expounded by Rio. Throughout the 1840s and early 1850s, frustration was repeatedly expressed with the continued purchase of later art, which was characterised as morally degenerate and sensual, and the failure of the trustees to invest in the early schools on behalf of the nation; corrective action was eventually taken by the Government in the mid-1850s following a series of official inquiries into the affairs of the Gallery by Parliamentary select committees. The discussion also encompasses the extent to which this discourse conditioned responses to the annual Summer Exhibition of old masters at the British Institution. Inadequacies in this display of loaned paintings led to a growing hostility among reviewers towards the figure of the private collector, who was characterised as an ignorant follower of fashion whose ill-informed endeavours were both inimical to the cause of art education, and an abuse of privilege. This concern with education is also discussed in relation to the National Gallery, which many thought had a duty to the public to present a historiographic illustration of the progress of painting, of which the early schools formed an essential part. There was a lack of consensus over the stance the Gallery should adopt, however, with opinion divided between the concerns of populism, and those of intellectual instruction.

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Chapter three continues this study of theories and practices relating to the art-historical education of the populace in a consideration of the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857. This event represents a concentration of all of the issues, debates and concerns of the previous chapter, in that it featured a display composed of loans from private collectors, which was exhaustive in scope and arranged in accordance with historiographic principles for the benefit of the population of England's foremost industrial town. The Exhibition inspired much idealism, and many critics predicted the moral elevation of the industrial working class through their experience with art, which, it was hoped, would school them in good citizenship and make them a more compliant and productive workforce. It was also intended as an exercise in social unity, with visions of the various classes harmoniously engaged in a common pursuit being frequently entertained in the press at the outset of the Exhibition. However, the undertaking was plagued with difficulties which prevented it from achieving these anticipated triumphs. Reviewers faulted the intellectual rigour of the system of arrangement adopted in the halls of the Exhibition, and also complained at length over the quality and authenticity of the works submitted to the display. This led to expressions of hostility towards the private collector that were even more vehement than those encountered in reviews of the British Institution, as the ignorance of the rich was here seen to deny the public at large a rare opportunity to improve themselves before genuine examples of great art. The lower classes were also seen to fail the occasion, either by not reacting to the display in an appropriate manner, or not attending the Exhibition at all, which earned them the contempt of a number of middle-class commentators. It was even suggested by some that rather than proving morally elevating, exposure of the multitude to the Catholic symbols and dogmas of the earlier schools could have an injurious effect, and encourage Papist sympathies. An attempted exercise in the consolidation of the social order, it will be argued, actually resulted in the revelation of the depths of the divisions in British society. This chapter ultimately concerns the failure of the educational attitudes inspired by moral art

history, due to the inflexible and limiting roles they imposed on the various strata of society.

The primary focus of chapter four is the rejection or revision of the discourse itself in works of criticism, art and literature during the 1850s and early 1860s. Moral art history came to be seen by many writers as too confining in its strict definition of good and evil, and too limited in the conclusions which could be drawn from the broad judgmental sweep of its theories. The chapter opens with a discussion of the contradictions and conflicts involved in the activities of collectors and art experts in Italy, and the publications of the Arundel Society in England. Attention is then given to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and the controversy that surrounded it, especially regarding the accusation of stylistic revivalism frequently made by its enemies. In the wake of the restoration of the Papal hierarchy in 1850, the movement was associated with both Catholic sympathy and the taste for 'primitive' art. Vicious attacks in the press on Ruskin, Rio and the early Italian painters, often informed by anti-Catholic sentiment, are interpreted as attempts to undermine Pre-Raphaelitism, as well as to discredit and ridicule moral art history. I will argue that the connection made by hostile commentators between the artistic movement and the critical discourse was a specious one. Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, in their concern with an artistic truth attained through the study of nature, actually represented a significant move away from the precepts of Rio, which prioritised the spiritual qualities of art. Ruskin's formal challenge to the binary opposition of mysticism and naturalism of moral art history found in 'The Nature of the Gothic' from the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1853) is then considered. He here established a new, more versatile system of evaluation, which identified three rather than two classes of painting, of which naturalism, the 'central' class, was the greatest; it is contended that Ruskin's notion of the 'imperfect' constituted an antithesis to moral art history. The similar conceptions encountered in the poetry of Robert Browning, particularly his 'painter poems' from *Men and Women* (1855), the short story 'Hand and Soul' by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

from the first issue of the Pre-Raphaelite journal the *Germ* (1850), and George Eliot's novel *Romola* (1863), are also studied. All these works, I will argue, sought to replace the divine ideal held by Rio and his followers with a more complex human version which celebrated the earthbound, and therefore sinful, aspects of both art and the mortal soul. These aspects were regarded as a vital factor in all great creative endeavour, and the means of achieving liberation from the perceived sterility of the religious perfection admired by moral art history.

There was still a pronounced moral dimension to these theories and conceptions, however; the evil was to be admitted, but it was ultimately subordinated to the good in the greatest works of art, or the noblest human characters. The conclusion of this thesis features a brief discussion of the origins of the Aesthetic movement, focusing on Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), which is interpreted as representing a total departure from the structures of moral art history. Pater removed the moral element from art criticism, and discarded the idea of obedience to the theories laid down in such writing by the reader or viewer. He instead stressed the importance of the concerns of the ego when before art, and the utilisation of the experience for the extraction of the utmost personal pleasure, rather than for a lesson in morality and self-improvement. The Renaissance can thus be regarded as signalling the final liberation of the art-loving public from deference to the rigid theories of earlier decades, of which moral art history was the prime example.

## **Chapter One**

### **The Appreciation of the Spiritual: The English Moral Art History of the 1840s**

The 1840s can be identified as the decade in which Italian paintings from the period before Raphael received their first real measure of critical attention in England. In earlier years such works had been viewed merely as curiosities, undeserving of any real recognition due to their perceived technical inadequacies, which were taken to signify ignorance and incompetence on the part of those who had produced them. The English appreciation of old master painting in general had been orientated around the twin concerns of private ownership and contemporary artistic practice. Pictures were estimated in terms of painterly accomplishment and financial value, the latter being dependent upon the former. Connoisseurial structures were in place which prevented the 'primitives', as they were known, from occupying anything more than an extremely marginal position in the established canon of ancient art. In this chapter I will argue that the rise in the taste for early Italian art, and the widespread assertion of its importance in various publications, was the primary manifestation of a new art historical discourse. This discourse was formulated as a direct polemical response to these existing critical structures and challenged the principles on which they were based. It found exponents among the most prominent art critics of the 1840s, including Anna Jameson and John Ruskin, whose works were instrumental in the creation of an independent intellectual discipline that related to the appreciation of paintings. The focus on early Italian art in their writing was grounded in a fundamental redefinition of excellence in painting; the motives of artists were valued above their aesthetic achievements, the critical emphasis being shifted from technical to more ethereal qualities. 'Primitive' art was seen to possess a spiritual and religious purity



said to be absent from the more naturalistic productions of later schools, and the appreciation of such art essentially became the appreciation of this unblemished moral state. Developed naturalism had long been the prerequisite of both authorities on art and the vast majority of picture collectors; the refutation of this fundamental principle by the new historical discourse constituted an open challenge to connoisseurial tradition. On an ideological and intellectual level, this contradiction can be viewed as the wresting of the control of ancient art from a stagnating establishment; this is certainly the role some of its practitioners regarded their work as playing.

#### 1. Early Italian Art Discovered: The English Abroad

An important factor in the growth of interest in early Italian art in Victorian England was the marked increase in travel to mainland Europe that occurred in the 1840s. The English flocked abroad in larger numbers than ever before, aided by expansions in the European rail system, and in the course of their tours encountered not only a multitude of 'primitives' in continental galleries, but also the fresco cycles that were to be found in the churches, chapels and convents of Italy. The guidebooks which were produced to cater for this new generation of tourists accordingly contain a wealth of information on the earlier schools and the sites of their principal works, in addition to accounts of artistic monuments of more established repute.

Murray's Handbook to Northern Italy of 1842 was perhaps the foremost example of such a text, commissioned by John Murray's publishing house from Francis Palgrave in order to supply the perceived deficiencies of earlier versions. The book was extremely popular, going through four editions in the ten years following its initial publication. It was intended primarily as a practical travel guide, listing specific hotels and prices, but also offered an entirely revised and updated account of the cultural and artistic attractions available to the traveller in each location. Palgrave announced in his introduction an intention to provide extended description and explanation of the



'allegorical and Scriptural pictures of the Middle Ages', including Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua, and the paintings of the Campo Santo in Pisa, 'in order to allow the traveller to understand and to set the proper value on those singular compositions'.<sup>1</sup> Given the extensive audience for which he was writing, Palgrave's inclusion of such early works is significant, but the promised explanation of the pictures amounts to little more than a basic assertion of their worth. Much praise is given to fresco as a medium, its luminosity and intelligibility making the works of Giotto 'as legible as Hogarth or Wilkie'; the painting of a little-known Italian artist from the fourteenth century was thus legitimated through a favourable comparison with English art.<sup>2</sup> Such a parallel would effectively nullify any possible objections by a reader, as it claimed common virtues for the superlative art of all eras. The language applied to the description of specific works is similarly guarded and vague. The Arena chapel, for example, is said to have a 'striking and intelligible manner', and is pronounced as 'possessing the very highest interest'.<sup>3</sup> Although pioneering in terms of inclusion, *Murray's Handbook to Northern Italy* lacked a developed critical approach through which the 'primitives' could be understood.

The largely utilitarian guidebook was not the only form of travel literature produced in the early to mid-1840s. Equally popular were more light-hearted travelogues such as Frances Trollope's *A Visit to Italy* of 1842, and Charles Dickens' *Pictures from Italy* of 1846. These books were far more anecdotal in nature than a standard guidebook, but although ostensibly more trivial, they contain a great deal of cultural commentary and observation that is less fettered by notions of usefulness and relevance. Both authors were already seasoned travellers, and published travel writers, by the time

<sup>1</sup> Francis Palgrave, *Murray's Handbook to Northern Italy*, London, John Murray, 1842, introduction p.xi.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p.xxv. A similar approach to legitimation is found elsewhere in the book, for example p.292. The allegorical figures in the Arena chapel are proclaimed to be 'exactly like those executed in mosaic upon the tomb of Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey'.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p.290.

their accounts of Italy appeared;<sup>4</sup> this perhaps explains their confident approach to their subject matter, which is nowhere more evident than when describing encounters with works of art. Throughout both texts, a degree of defiance is shown towards what Trollope refers to as 'learned opinion'. She boldly declares her intention to 'like or dislike, according to my own fancy, without troubling myself to discover what wiser folks thought about the matter',<sup>5</sup> and expresses a number of opinions that appear to have been formed not necessarily in ignorance, but rather in deliberate opposition to a notion of what an expert might think. The works of Michelangelo earned a particularly large measure of her disdain. Before the Holy Family in the Uffizi, for example, she stated that if admiration of the work:

be necessary to the establishing of a reputation for taste, then I must withdraw all claim to such a reputation, for if it were ten times Michael Angelo's (sic.). I should still be of the opinion that this Holy Family, independent of his name, would not be considered worth £5 by any collector in the world.<sup>6</sup>

Significantly, the connoisseur and the collector are here presented as acting entirely in each other's interests; the former assigns a name to a picture, and then the latter ascribes a financial value to it that matches this attribution, thus endorsing it. Trollope was entirely contemptuous of what she regarded as hollow name worship and was prepared to denounce even the mightiest of monuments; the Sistine Chapel ceiling, for example, is dismissed as a 'shower of arms and legs'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Jane Robinson, Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991, p.197. Trollope had already produced The Domestic Manners of the Americans (1832), Belgium and Western Germany in 1833 (1834), Paris and the Parisians in 1835 (1836), and Vienna and the Austrians (1838). Dickens had published American Notes for General Circulation (1842).

<sup>5</sup>Frances Trollope, A Visit to Italy, 2 vols., London, Richard Bentley, 1842, vol.1, p.2.

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, p.131.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*, vol.2, p.270; also vol.1, p.98. Florence is here described as generally disappointing visually, and the Duomo 'abominably ugly'.

Dickens displays similar views in *Pictures from Italy* when delivering judgement upon the widely acknowledged masterpieces of the High Renaissance, and even expresses them in similar language. Before Corregio's frescoes in Parma Cathedral, for instance, he remarks:

Connoisseurs fall into raptures with them now; but such a labyrinth of arms and legs; such heaps of foreshortened limbs, entangled and involved and jumbled together; no operative surgeon, gone mad, could imagine in his wildest delirium.<sup>8</sup>

The imagery employed by Dickens and Trollope suggests confusion and turmoil, a chaotic mess of limbs that 'connoisseurs' chose to consider the pinnacle of compositional harmony and pictorial beauty. The stance taken by both in relation to old master painting was founded in an evident belief in the inadequacy of established critical practice regarding it. Neither were prepared to feign admiration in order to conform with the dictates of 'learned opinion' and thus lay claim to 'a reputation for taste'. Their frequent iconoclasm can be understood as an attempt to expose what they regarded as the specious and pretentious nature of much of what was involved in the time-honoured connoisseurial appreciation of the Italian masters. Dickens was dismayed by how little was left of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* in Milan, remarking that only a broad notion of its composition could be determined, and that all trace of its original colouring, expression and finish had been obliterated. He noted, however, 'an English gentleman' before the picture, who was 'at great pains to fall into what I may describe as mild convulsions, at certain minute details of expression which are not left in it.'<sup>9</sup>

This informal style of travel writing had its opponents, of whom Nicholas Wiseman was a prominent example. In 1843 he wrote an article for the *Dublin Review* entitled 'Superficial Travelling', which scornfully identified Dickens and Trollope as belonging

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<sup>8</sup>Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, London, Bradbury and Evans, 1846, p.91.

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*, p.135.

to 'a very common class of travellers...who skim over the surface of the land, who see it out of carriage windows...who penetrate no further than the very shell and outside of things.' Wiseman declared that the two authors provided 'their own notion of things, but not the things themselves'<sup>10</sup> in their work; he judged that they had compromised their subject in order to make their accounts entertaining. The 'superficial traveller' was not interested in genuine cultural investigation and interpretation, Wiseman opined, but rather in the creation of an egocentric narrative full of frivolous sniping at various symbols of authority, which included the recognised masterpieces of Renaissance art. As perhaps the most prominent Catholic in England, Wiseman's primary concern regarding Trollope was her representation of the Roman Catholic church: this will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. It is sufficient here to state that he saw her religious attitudes as part of a general and all-pervading ignorance in *A Visit to Italy*; this ignorance was also judged to be strongly present in the travel writing of Dickens, thus making the work of both authors utterly devoid of intellectual worth in Wiseman's view.

This criticism could easily be applied to *Pictures from Italy*, which is formed from a series of vivid and diverse accounts, all clearly designed to amuse rather than to instruct. Unqualified approbation for painters or works of art is rare, but what little there is reveals that despite his evident aversion to the postures of the 'connoisseur', Dickens' taste was conservative to the point of being reactionary. High but vague praise is given in his chapter on Rome for the paintings of Correggio, Titian, Guido Reni, Carlo Dolci and Raphael;<sup>11</sup> the only paintings mentioned in the entire book which predate 1500 are Benozzo Gozzoli's frescoes in the Campo Santo, which are

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<sup>10</sup>Nicholas Wiseman, *Essays on Various Subjects*, 3 vols., London, Charles Dolman, 1853, vol.3, p.443. The essay entitled 'Superficial Travellers' originally appeared in the *Dublin Review*, February 1843; it was an extended review of Trollope's *A Visit to Italy* and Dickens' *American Notes for General Circulation*.

<sup>11</sup>Dickens, *Pictures*, p.211.

described simply as 'very curious'.<sup>12</sup> Dickens' apparent reluctance to embark on any lengthy consideration of artworks is perhaps explained by the opinion given in his introduction that there is 'not a famous picture or statue in all Italy but could be easily buried under a mountain of printed paper devoted to dissertations on it'.<sup>13</sup> *Pictures from Italy* clearly indicates that its author felt traditional connoisseurship, which induced people to ecstasize over shambolic Correggios and defaced Leonardos, and produce a surfeit of 'printed paper' to justify their hollow posturing, to be exhausted and redundant.

*A Visit to Italy* demonstrates a greater awareness of the newly extended scope of old master appreciation than *Pictures from Italy*. This aspect of Trollope's book was entirely overlooked by Wiseman in his derogatory characterisation of it in the *Dublin Review*, perhaps because the positive comments it contains on certain examples of 'primitive' painting at least partially undermine his accusations of ignorance and narrow-mindedness on the part of the author. Trollope was widely thought to belong to a class of 'lady-tourist', as the 1852 edition of Murray's handbook dismissively refers to them,<sup>14</sup> remarkable only for their limited engagement with the countries they visited and wrote about. The author herself declares at the outset of her volumes that they have been brought into existence by her 'longing to gossip a little about this Italy',<sup>15</sup> a comment which creates a misleadingly trivial initial impression of her project. As Sherman and Holcomb have indicated, travel literature was an important step for female writers into the male-dominated world of art criticism, and a number of

<sup>12</sup>*ibid.*, p.154. The possible artistic merits of the frescoes of the Campo Santo are left undiscussed in favour of the author's droll observation that any collection of painted heads in Italy, from any era and in whatever context, seem to contain a portrait of Napoleon.

<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>14</sup>Palgrave, *Murray's Handbook*, 4th.ed., 1852, Introduction p.ix. The editors state that their aim is to provide a practical guide: 'Reflections not seeming to contribute to this end have been excluded: those who desire remarks or reflections on Italy can find books containing them in plenty, from Forsyth down to the latest lady-tourist.'

<sup>15</sup>Trollope, *A Visit*, vol.1, p.2.

authors, notably Anna Jameson, established themselves in this field before producing works exclusively devoted to painting.<sup>16</sup> Although she would not take this additional step, there is an attempt in Trollope's book to establish a view of art that was not beholden to the time-honoured judgements of male English connoisseurs. Like Dickens, her experience of the most revered productions of the High Renaissance was coloured by a lack of faith in the authorities which had bestowed such a lofty status upon them. Unlike him, she did not seek to distance herself from the entire business of art appreciation as a result, but rather reserved her praise for the paintings of less widely adored schools.

The scope of Trollope's assessment, although not as broad as Palgrave's, nonetheless includes a number of major pre-Renaissance works, of which favourable accounts were often given. The frescoes of the Arena Chapel gratified her habitually sceptical eye; she lauded the 'chaste and beautiful simplicity' of the figures, and the 'power of conception' demonstrated in the cycle as a whole. This appreciation was enriched by a basic awareness of the art historical importance assigned to Giotto. Trollope remarked that it was 'impossible not to feel reverence, deep and sincere, for the hand which first led the way to results so conducive to the embellishment of life.'<sup>17</sup> This characterisation of Giotto as the originator of modern art in all its forms would be adopted and developed by many other commentators in the years to come. In amongst the many anecdotes of her adventures and asides on aspects of the Italian national character, Trollope's book therefore contains a denunciation of High Renaissance works of a grandiose and naturalistic character, and praise of earlier pictures for their simplicity and conceptual power. It can thus be regarded as a precedent of the moral art history which was to develop in England over the course of the 1840s. Her blunt

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<sup>16</sup>Clare Sherman and Adele Holcomb (eds.), *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts 1820-1979*, Westport, Connecticut, London, Greenwood Press, 1981, introduction, p.10.

<sup>17</sup>Trollope, *A Visit*, vol.2, p.61.



and opinionated style, however, was rejected by later writers in favour of a more considered and theoretical approach, which was primarily derived from the work of the French critic Alexis François Rio.

## II. Tragedy and Comedy: The Moral Art History

In his editorial preface to Franz Kugler's *Handbook of the History of the Italian Schools of Painting*, which was translated from the German and published in England in 1842, Charles Eastlake remarked that 'the want which it was intended to supply in Germany has long been felt by English lovers of Art'.<sup>18</sup> There was indeed a dearth of English attempts to provide an account of the various Italian schools prior to the 1840s, whilst continental historians and critics such as Kugler, Rio and Ernst Von Rumohr<sup>19</sup> produced erudite tomes on the subject. This lack of activity can be partly attributed to the judgements of Joshua Reynolds in his *Discourses*. He declared in Discourse eight that:

The Art in its infancy, like the first work of a student, was dry, hard and simple. But this kind of barbarous simplicity would be better named penury, as it proceeds from mere want, from want of knowledge, want of resources, want of abilities to be otherwise; their simplicity was the offspring not of choice, but necessity.<sup>20</sup>

This notion of infancy was adopted by many English commentators seeking to explain the importance of early art in the 1840s and 1850s, and the pervasive and enduring influence exerted by Reynolds' views is perhaps indicated by the repeated republication of the *Discourses* throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Franz Kugler, *A Handbook of the History of the Italian schools of Painting. Translated from the German by a Lady* (Mrs.M.Hutton), edited with notes by C.L.Eastlake, London, John Murray, 1842, Editor's Preface p.ix.

<sup>19</sup>Author of *Italienische Forschungen* of 1831.

<sup>20</sup>John Burnet (ed.), *The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, London, James Carpenter, 1842. 'Discourse Eight', delivered on the 10th December 1778.

<sup>21</sup>Editions were printed, for example, in 1820, 1826, 1837, 1838 and 1842 (above).

The level of Reynolds' analysis is purely stylistic, and he generally concentrates upon what he perceives to be the most admirable qualities of the most advanced schools in order to best guide the painters of the Royal Academy, to whom his *Discourses* were originally addressed. The recommendation of artists is usually made to direct the painterly studies of his audience; they are warned off those schools which do not exhibit the pinnacle of technical accomplishment. The first principle of Reynolds' instruction was idealisation, to which naturalism was to be subordinated, but the latter quality was still assigned considerable importance in the *Discourses*. In 'Discourse Two', for example, he advised the imitation of Raphael and the Caracci, but reminded his audience that 'you cannot do better than to have recourse to Nature herself.'<sup>22</sup> Many English amateurs accordingly accepted naturalistic effect as a significant component of artistic genius, thereby excluding all art prior to the late fifteenth century from their 'canon of greatness'.

Several critics attacked Reynolds in the decades following the initial publication of the *Discourses*, and directly challenged his considerable authority in their work. Foremost among these was William Hazlitt, described by Herschel Baker as 'a critic given to detraction'.<sup>23</sup> He deliberately set himself in opposition to Reynolds on a number of points, seeking to establish his own reputation through the dissection and attempted discrediting of the dominant authority of the previous era.<sup>24</sup> Hazlitt took issue with Reynolds over the extent to which the idealisation and generalisation of nature in art should be permitted, in the belief that the President of the Royal Academy had not been insistent enough upon the observation of the particulars of the actual world. In an entry written for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1817, for example, he described

<sup>22</sup>Burnett (ed.), *Discourses*, p.24. 'Discourse Two' delivered on the 11th December 1769.

<sup>23</sup>Herschel Baker, *William Hazlitt*. Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1962, p.270.

<sup>24</sup>See W.P.Albrecht, *Hazlitt and the Creative Imagination*, Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1965, pp.70-79 for a full discussion of Hazlitt's disagreements with the judgements of Reynolds.



perfection in painting as being the result of a combination of quality of execution and fidelity to nature, or 'the truth and identity of the imitation with the reality'.<sup>25</sup> If the writing of Hazlitt is to be viewed as any gauge of critical opinion, English taste in the first decades of the nineteenth century can be said to be even more approving of the naturalistic in painting than at the time of the *Discourses*.

It was not only an adherence to the aesthetic standards of earlier connoisseurial eras which had prevented major art historical investigation of the Italian schools from being undertaken in England. There was, as Eastlake had noted, a marked lack of precedence. Neither Reynolds nor Hazlitt had written anything approaching a cohesive history, and in the decade prior to the English publication of Kugler's *Handbook* the most popular texts to engage with old master painting on any level had not been considered historical works, but guides to the nation's private collections. The most notable of these was not even written by an English connoisseur; the director of the Berlin Gallery, Dr. Gustav Waagen, produced his exhaustive three-volume catalogue of the nation's collections in 1838, entitled *Works of Art and Artists in England*. This work revealed the enormous wealth of the English private collection, and also its social exclusivity, with the author reliant upon various letters of introduction to guarantee his admission to certain galleries.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, his preface includes a special expression of gratitude for 'the extreme liberality with which so many possessors of collections of works of art allowed me free access to them', and goes on to say that their willingness to submit their prized belongings to his scrutiny 'indicates a degree of intellectual culture as elevated as it is rare'.<sup>27</sup> Waagen's experience of the art was restricted by this need to consider its owners, and the conditions they placed

<sup>25</sup> William Hazlitt, *Criticisms on Art*, London, Saunders and Ottley, 1844, p.156. From 'On the Fine Arts', written originally for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1817.

<sup>26</sup> Gustav Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England*, 3 vols., London, John Murray, 1838, vol.2, p.301. Of the Grosvenor gallery: 'A letter from His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge to the Marquis of Westminster procured me access, which is otherwise very difficult to be obtained this year.'

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, vol.1, p.xiii.

upon the viewing of their possessions; the judgements he could draw were similarly fettered, and the occasional reattribution of a work is done with great care in terms of etiquette, rather than of connoisseurship. *Works of Art and Artists in England* is arranged in terms of collections, in order to give a sense of the collectors' tastes and respective statures. This prevents the formulation of any kind of art historical narrative, and gives the text the aspect of a connoisseurial record; this impression is reinforced by the often imprecise nature of the commentary provided.<sup>28</sup> English art historians had to look elsewhere for their scholarly exemplars.

The English translation of Kugler's *Handbook* provided its readership with a vast and highly detailed account of Italian art from the Roman catacombs to the Naturalistic school of the seventeenth century. Kugler exhaustively traces the careers not only of major artists, but also of their assistants, pupils and followers, in a painstaking attempt to plot the overarching patterns of the development of painting in Italy. He came from a historical rather than a connoisseurial background, and had already written works of royal and constitutional history.<sup>29</sup> His text accordingly bears evidence of the influence of continental historical theory, particularly that of Georg Hegel. Hegel asserted in his *Philosophy of History* (1830) that the history of mankind is a history of progressive development, and that an apparent chaos of facts not only has a form, but manifests a plan. In its diachronic aspect, this could be conceived as a transition from a lower condition to a higher one; in its synchronic aspect, as a coherent system of exchange between a principle of savagery and one of civilisation. An image of chaos was, in the words of Hayden White, 'replaced by a succession of forms or types of cultural

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 160. Criticism of individual works is often confined to vague approbation; for example, a *St. Cecilia* from the Wells collection attributed to Allori is simply described as 'very fine'.

<sup>29</sup>For example, he had produced the *Handbuch der Geschichte der Malerei* in 1837, and then the *Geschichte Friedrichs des Grössen* in 1840.

achievement'.<sup>30</sup> Kugler declares his allegiance to this Hegelian conception of historical evolution at the outset of his volume:

In the study of history in general, the circumstances which mark the periods of development - the first quickening of the germ, the gradual expansion and formation of the influences that check and disturb advancing growth, and the successful struggles through which they are overcome - have always a particular interest, and this is especially the case in the history of Christian art.<sup>31</sup>

The term 'Christian art' refers to the painting of the pre-Renaissance, which became the general appellation given to the earlier Italian schools. Kugler's adherence to Hegelian theory demanded a careful study of the 'primitives', as its central notions of the development of the human spirit emphasised the teleological importance of every epoch of history. History in general was to be interpreted as the development of this spirit in time, and the various achievements of a civilisation would realise this spiritual evolution; White argues that 'the actualisation of the spirit in time figures the growth of the principle of freedom'.<sup>32</sup> Every historical episode, therefore, could be seen to realise a limited freedom. Hegel stated in the *Philosophy of History* that it was the historian's duty not to proudly dismiss seemingly minor periods as unworthy of study, but to work hard in order to 'discern their real import and value'.<sup>33</sup>

Hugh Brigstocke has argued that Rio's *De la Poésie Chrétienne* of 1836 arose from an established trend in German criticism, whose exponents included William Heinrich Wackenroder, Friedrich Schlegel, von Ruhmor and Kugler.<sup>34</sup> It certainly shared a

<sup>30</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore and London, The John Hopkins University Press, 1975, p.112.

<sup>31</sup> Kugler, *Handbook*, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> White, *Metahistory*, p.105.

<sup>33</sup> Georg Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans.J.Sibree, New York, Dover Publications, 1956 (1830), p.36.

<sup>34</sup> Hugh Brigstocke, 'Lord Lindsay and the *Sketches of Christian Art*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University of Manchester*, vol.64, 1981-2, p.28. Rio acknowledged von Ruhmor in 1892 as 'mon véritable initiateur'.

number of features with Kugler's *Handbook* and its Hegelian principles. Both sought to instate early Italian art in the art-historical canon of Europe, and to establish a criticism of it that did not merely interpret it diachronically, as an infant stage of later schools. They argued that it also deserved to be considered synchronically, and its significance assessed in relation to the context for which it was originally produced. Rio in particular contended that the true meaning in Christian art had been lost as a result of the High Renaissance and the tradition of technical criticism it had generated. Of the frescoes of the Umbrian and Siennese schools of the fourteenth century he remarked:

We generally pass with supercilious disdain before these miraculous paintings, which have exercised the most soothing influence over a multitude of human souls.<sup>35</sup>

Religious works, he asserted, should be assessed in terms of religion as well as art; the former could even be more important than the latter. Kugler was not as radical, and his style more detached and scholarly. Both writers recognise a fundamental division in fifteenth-century art, but the language used by each testifies to the different nature of their projects. Kugler writes of the 'two principal tendencies' of the century: 'in one the intellect predominates, in the other the feelings'. The intellectual, or allegorical tendency is associated with Florence, and the emotive, or lyrical tendency with Sienna.<sup>36</sup> Rio, in contrast, describes a loss of unity in the Florentine school, due to the influence of paganism. Not only did painting become 'subservient to all the profane tendencies of the period', but artists began to strive for naturalism in their work, which Rio terms the 'great element of decadence'. Opposed to this trend were the painters of the mystic school, who 'persisted in drawing their inspiration from a higher source', 'far from the prosaic inspirations of paganism and naturalism', in pursuit of a

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<sup>35</sup>Alexis François Rio, *De la Poésie Chrétienne* (or, *The Poetry of Christian Art*), translated from the French, London, T.Bosworth, 1854 (1836), p.124.

<sup>36</sup>Kugler, *Handbook*, p.44.

'transcendental aim'.<sup>37</sup> Rio's narrative is the vehicle for his own enthusiasms, and his conclusions are deeply inflected by morality; *De la Poésie Chrétienne* can thus be regarded as the origin of the moral art history which was to exert a profound influence upon English art appreciation in the mid-Victorian era.

The most basic difference between the two histories concerns their respective narrative emplotments. Reference can again be made to the theories of Hegel; his apprehension of the historical process is defined by White as 'a sequence of tragedies', but this is incorporated into a broader philosophical mission to 'justify the transition from the comprehension of the Tragic nature of every specific civilisation to the Comic apprehension of the unfolding drama of the whole of history'.<sup>38</sup> Tragedy in history involved the end of a culture, but this was regarded as a necessary part of the inexorable business of development, which can only occur through change. In his *Philosophy of History* Hegel stated that:

while change imports dissolution, it involves at the same time the rise of a new life - that while death is the issue of life, life is also the issue of death. Spirit - consuming the envelope of its existence - does not merely pass into another envelope, nor rise rejuvenescent from the ashes of its previous form; it comes forth exalted, glorified, a purer spirit. It certainly makes war on itself - consumes its very own existence; but in this very destruction it works up that existence into a new form, and each successive phase becomes in its turn a material on which it exalts itself into a new grade.<sup>39</sup>

Life is thus ultimately affirmed by the historical process, as every 'death' makes possible the more superior incarnation of the spirit that inevitably follows it. The emplotment of Kugler's *Handbook*, predictably enough, closely follows this Hegelian paradigm. The 'Tragedy' of the narrative is that of the Renaissance as a whole; although Kugler had studied the earlier schools at length, his ultimate conclusion was

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<sup>37</sup>Rio, *De la*, p.76, p.111, p.179.

<sup>38</sup>White, *Metahistory*, pp.116-117.

<sup>39</sup>Hegel, *Philosophy*, p.73.

that their importance was limited. He delivered a generally favourable account of the progress of art up to the time of the 'two principal tendencies' of the fifteenth century, but after the divergence of naturalism and spiritualism he lost patience with the latter. When writing of the Sienese school of the fifteenth century, so treasured by Rio as a last bastion of moral purity, he comments that 'Art seems to have retrograded in Sienna during this period in a striking degree'.<sup>40</sup> The major development of the century is later identified as 'the correct delineation of form, guided by the study of nature', and Masaccio is praised as 'the first who gave a decided impulse to the new direction of art'.<sup>41</sup> After the nomination of one 'tendency' as allied to the cause of art-historical progress, the other is discarded; the 'germ' of which Kugler wrote at the outset of his volume was that of naturalism, and the main object of his history was to provide an account of its development.

Over half the *Handbook* is devoted to sixteenth and seventeenth-century painting, with particular praise being lavished upon the works of the Roman High Renaissance. At the beginning of the sixteenth century all the qualities necessary to 'a consummate practice of art' were united; the 'most elevated subjects' were represented in 'the noblest form', 'with a depth of feeling never since equalled'.<sup>42</sup> Tragedy had struck by the end of the century however, when, following the brief flourishing of the Venetian school, all painting declined 'in a deplorable manner'.<sup>43</sup> There was something of a resurrection of the spirit in the first half of the seventeenth century in the hands of the Eclectic school, whose formidable discipline in matters of draughtsmanship was to 'counter the lawless caprice of the mannerists'.<sup>44</sup> They reportedly failed, however, to recapture the glory of the High Renaissance, the ultimate manifestation of the spirit

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<sup>40</sup>Kugler, *Handbook*, p.81.

<sup>41</sup>*ibid.*, pp.103-105.

<sup>42</sup>*ibid.*, p.173.

<sup>43</sup>*ibid.*, p.382.

<sup>44</sup>*ibid.*, p.390.



occurring elsewhere. This relocation was to be treated by Kugler in his next work, the *Handbook of the German, Flemish and Dutch Schools of Painting* of 1846.

Rio could entertain no such Comic conception of the historical process. Brigstocke has described the French critic as 'both simpler and more extreme' in his approach than the German writers on the Italian 'primitives' who had preceded him; his love for the early was accompanied by a revulsion for the late, and he made 'sharp moral distinctions'<sup>45</sup> between the two. He also spoke of the pullulation of the germ of naturalism in *De la Poésie Chrétienne*, but as a 'germ of decadence', which would 'develop itself slowly and almost imperceptibly, whilst in other respects painting will rapidly advance towards perfection'.<sup>46</sup> His narrative extends to the end of the fifteenth century, with many of the most esteemed works of the High Renaissance deliberately excluded. The Tragedy of his work was the gradual corruption of religious art, and the irrecoverable loss of the moral purity it embodied. Unlike the 'death' of the Renaissance, no Comic design could be read into the end of Christian art; it represented an almost biblical loss of innocence for Rio, and there could be no return to a prelapsarian state. Kugler's assessment of the denouement of his Tragedy was dispassionate and technical; by 1600, he states, 'Art was degraded to the lowest mechanical labour', capable only of hollow copies of the style of Michelangelo.<sup>47</sup> *De la Poésie Chrétienne* was relatively unconcerned with such analyses of the externals of painting, or indeed any conception of a grand human Comedy that could be imposed upon perceived cycles of rise and fall in art. The text presents a spiritual Tragedy, which is characterised by the passionate emotional identification displayed for what are believed to be the pure motives of the mystic school. In this sense, it is a Romantic account, founded in empathy; a noble and holy purity is revealed in all its exalted splendour, only to be gradually destroyed by an inexorable turpitude. Such an involved

<sup>45</sup> Brigstocke, 'Lord Lindsay', pp.28-29.

<sup>46</sup> Rio, *De la*, p.71.

<sup>47</sup> Kugler, *Handbook*, p.382.

approach presented critics with far more scope for imaginative interplay with their material, which perhaps explains its popularity among English writers of the 1840s. The detailed stylistic analysis found in the *Handbook* certainly deterred some, notably Lord Lindsay, who read Kugler's book whilst in Italy researching his *Sketches of the History of Christian Art* in 1842. He described the German critic as 'flowing on a continuous stream of criticism, unrelieved by break or rapid, anecdote or biography, criticism, criticism, criticism to the end.'<sup>48</sup>

Kugler's *Handbook* did have its supporters, however, most notably in Eastlake, who held the posts of Keeper and then Director of the National Gallery, and President of the Royal Academy at various times during the period covered by this thesis.<sup>49</sup> The German historian's detached style and concentration upon the technical issues of painting accorded with Eastlake's own approach; in 1840, for example, he had written in the *Quarterly Review* of 'the Christian painters who underrated the physical elements of the art',<sup>50</sup> As this quotation indicates, he had reservations concerning the value of the paintings of the mystic school. In his editor's preface to Kugler's *Handbook*, Eastlake even wrote reprovingly of the 'indulgence' with which the productions of the earlier artists were treated, which may 'perhaps convey too exalted an idea of their merit'. In order to mitigate this perceived error, he emphasises the transitional character of such painting, reminding a reader that they 'prepared the brightest era of Art', for which they are to be valued, if for nothing else.<sup>51</sup>

Eastlake's views were shared by the journalist Ralph Wornum, with whom Eastlake composed the first catalogue of the National Gallery in 1847.<sup>52</sup> In the same year,

<sup>48</sup> quoted Brigstocke, 'Lord Lindsay', p.44. From Lindsay's journal, April 1842.

<sup>49</sup> See chapter 2, section II, pp.101-7, section V 161-9.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Eastlake, 'Life of Raphael', in *Contributions to the Literature of the Fine Arts*, London, John Murray, 1848. The essay was originally published in the *Quarterly Review*, June 1840.

<sup>51</sup> Kugler, *Handbook*, Editor's Preface, p.ix.

<sup>52</sup> David Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World*, Princeton.



Wornum produced *The Epochs of Painting*, a volume which claimed to offer a general view of the history of art from the classical world to that of Victorian Britain. However, the great majority of the text is devoted to the Italian schools, and the influence of both Kugler and Eastlake can be detected. The overall scheme of the progress of painting which Wornum adopts is Hegelian in conception, conforming with notions of what White describes as 'the twofold nature of history as a cycle and a progression'.<sup>53</sup> The history of art is presented as a continual process of change, of the developing manifestation of human genius, but every artist is identified with a particular school, and, as Wornum states in his introduction, 'every school has had its rise and fall'.<sup>54</sup> Like Kugler, he is exhaustive in his plotting of the dissemination and evolution of schools and styles, and his analytical approach is primarily technical. His conclusions regarding early art are thus heavily qualified, in a manner akin to Eastlake's. Wornum was careful not to provide an overestimation of the painting of the pre-Renaissance, and concludes his account of it with the following judgement:

There was nothing definite or finite in the style of this period from Cimabue to Masaccio; it was essentially one of transition or passage, and did not even attain to a decided comprehension either of the crudest principles of objective representation or the simplest rules of dramatic composition.<sup>55</sup>

Such reasoned, dispassionate assessment of technical aptitude was entirely opposed to the more emotive attitude of Rio and his followers. Wornum identifies the zenith of art as occurring at the same point as Kugler, with the High Renaissance in Rome. His praise, like his criticism, is directed towards the outward aspect; the early sixteenth century is described as the time which saw 'the perfect development of painting in its essential principles'.<sup>56</sup> The decline of art is similarly said to begin at the same point as

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Princeton University Press, 1978, p.140. Wornum would be appointed secretary of the National Gallery in 1855.

<sup>53</sup>White, *Metahistory*, p.120.

<sup>54</sup>Ralph Wornum, *The Epochs of Painting*, London, C.Cox, 1847, p.11.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, p.184.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p.215.

in the *Handbook*, with the apex of the Venetian school. *Epochs of Painting* can be considered the representative text in England of a rational art history committed to the stylistic evaluation of paintings. Its priority was to relate the productions of various eras to one another in order to form a cogent narrative which would span the whole of modern history. The critical discourse inspired by *De la Poésie Chrétienne* was somewhat different in both intention and tone.

### III. A Spiritual Dissent: The Influence of Rio in England

The influence of Rio upon English criticism was more immediate and far-ranging than that of Kugler; Brigstocke states that the circulation of the French critic's works and ideas in England was 'surprisingly rapid'.<sup>57</sup> Among the first texts to demonstrate the impress of Rio's thought was the second edition of *Contrasts* by the architect Augustus Welby Pugin, published in 1841. The basic thesis of the first edition, which had appeared five years earlier, was also similar to *De la Poésie Chrétienne* in some basic ways, despite its exclusive concern with architecture. Pugin, like Rio, located a purity in the productions of the middle ages which had been besmirched and therefore lost during the Renaissance; he proclaims that all subsequent architecture has been 'utterly wanting in that sentiment and feeling' that distinguishes Gothic design.<sup>58</sup> The second edition openly admits the influence of Rio, whose 'admirable production...must produce many converts to ancient art'.<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, the text features some discussion of Christian painting as well as architecture, and many of the judgements made and concepts employed echo those found in *De la Poésie Chrétienne*. For example, Christian art is defined in the first chapter of the second edition by the

<sup>57</sup> Brigstocke, 'Lord Lindsay', p.28.

<sup>58</sup> Augustus Welby Pugin, *Contrasts; Or, a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages and Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day*. London, printed for the author and published by him at St. Mary's Grange, Wilts., 1836, pp.1-3.

<sup>59</sup> Augustus Welby Pugin, *Contrasts; Or, a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages and Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing the Present Decay of Taste*. London, Charles Dolman, 1841 (1836), p.18.

juxtaposition of its devotion to 'the spiritual and divine' with the 'sensual or human' bias of all other painting, which was inevitably tainted to some degree by paganism.<sup>60</sup> Pugin also identifies a fall in the history of painting which is akin to that described by Rio; it came about, he claims, due to 'the pestilential influence of pagan ideas and taste'<sup>61</sup> which spread through Europe at the time of the High Renaissance. Pugin, however, was not attempting to create a work of art history, but to rather mount a historically literate assault on the practices of the British cultural establishment, principally with regards to architecture; as the title of the book suggests, this was achieved by comparing degraded modern design with the pure and 'mystical' styles of the past. *Contrasts* is primarily concerned with the edifices and practices of Britain, and its author sought to instigate change, and even a stylistic revival, by means of his criticisms and comparisons. A pronounced religious agenda can be observed throughout the text also. Pugin, a Catholic convert, had much to say about the creativity of Catholicism, and the destructiveness of Protestantism: this will be discussed later in the chapter.

The effects of the ideas contained in *De la Poésie Chrétienne* can also be detected in two books of a genre which did not typically allow for any theoretical radicalism. Mary Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy* of 1844 is the work of a 'lady-tourist', similar in many ways to Trollope's *A Visit to Italy*. It shares the same casual tone and anecdotal style, and also contains disclaimers regarding any claim to connoisseurial authority on the part of the author with regards to the accounts of art provided.<sup>62</sup> Shelley inherited little of Trollope's defiant individuality, however, and rather than deliver personal judgements on art with a declared independence from any critical structure, she adopted the arguments of Rio. She actually met him in the course of the

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, 2 vols., London, Edward Moxon, 1844, vol. 2, p. 140: 'I have not the remotest pretension to being a connoisseur'.

journey which the book recounts, while in the Dresden Gallery, and she relates how they decided to travel down into Italy together. Shelley's willingness to accept critical guidance is clear; she comments that 'his knowledge and taste would inform my ignorance and correct my judgement'.<sup>63</sup> It could be argued that this acceptance of an inferior status in the presence of a figure of authority was due to inexperience.

*Rambles in Germany and Italy* was Shelley's first (and only) work of travel literature,<sup>64</sup> and it is possible that she purposefully sought out guidance as a result of this. Whatever the reasons for her adoption of moral art history, its precepts led her to several conclusions which were at variance with the rulings of Kugler and his English followers. Most prominent among these was an unqualified enthusiasm for earlier art: when in Florence, she wrote of how the fourteenth-century painters 'excelled in portraying the human countenance lighted up by the nobler passions'. Similarly, the frescoes of this era in Padua are proclaimed 'admirable for the artless gesture - the earnest rapt expression - the power of showing the soul breathing in the face'.<sup>65</sup> These judgements are informed not by technical appreciation, but by the perception of more intangible qualities which pertain to piety and sincerity on the part of the painters who had created them. That which is seen to be 'artless', yet morally pure and religiously motivated, is here valued above the painterly accomplishments of the later schools.

Anna Jameson's *Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art In and Around London* of 1842 was a project akin to Waagen's *Works of Art and Artists in England*, probably conceived as a result of the earlier book's success, but which avoided the restrictions of the private collection due to its confinement to collections which were open to all. There is a curious disjunction in the text between the lengthy introduction by the author and the catalogue itself. In the introduction, Jameson mentions both Kugler and

<sup>63</sup>*ibid.*, vol.1, p.245.

<sup>64</sup>Robinson, *Wayward Women*, p.245. A brief account of Shelley's literary career is provided here.

<sup>65</sup>Shelley, *Rambles*, vol.2, p.141 and p.132 respectively.

Rio, and devotes this entire section to a discussion of the merits of early Italian art, in the process making it clear that her own sympathies lie with the French critic rather than the German one. Jameson, like Mary Shelley, was personally familiar with Rio, who seems to have had something of a reputation among English readers even by 1841;<sup>66</sup> she was likewise receptive to his theories on Christian art. For example, at one point in the *Handbook*'s introduction, she uses the example of Bolognese painting in order to demonstrate the value of the earlier schools; the later works of the region, including those of the Caracci so admired by Kugler, are declared 'vulgar in comparison' with those of earlier epochs, such as the pictures of Francia. The reason for this preference, she explains, is the enormous moral difference between 'the mannered elegance and grandeur' of the first, and 'the pure, intense feeling, the simplicity, the solemnity' of the second.<sup>67</sup> An impatience with those hostile to the 'primitives' is expressed:

There are people who, because they do not see at once in a great work of art all that they are told is there, satisfy themselves that therefore it does not exist. Their perception of deficiency is transferred through predominant self-esteem, from themselves to the object they look on - very consolatory!<sup>68</sup>

The detractors of early art are accused of indolence, complacency and arrogance; Jameson here attacks the precepts of technical criticism, which she accuses of considering only the aesthetic qualities of painting, with no real explanation or investigation of original function and significance. The polemical potential of Rio's moral art history is here touched upon, its principles being turned into rhetorical weapons with which the authority of connoisseurial tradition can be challenged. In this

<sup>66</sup> Anna Jameson, *Letters and Friendships (1812-1860)*, Mrs. Stuart Erskine (ed.), London, T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1915, p. 263. In Autumn 1841, Jameson had been in Paris; a letter to her sister Charlotte Murphy of October 15th states that 'the great event of my life here has been meeting with Rio'.

<sup>67</sup> Anna Jameson, *Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art In and Near London*, London, John Murray, 1842, introduction p. xix.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

introduction to what was little more than an amalgam of catalogues. Jameson stated some of the art historical and theoretical concerns which would come to dominate her literary output. The handbook itself is something of an anticlimax, being generally similar in style and content to Waagen; the strangest aspect of the marriage of introduction and catalogue is the almost complete lack of early art in all of the collections listed.<sup>69</sup> A more general evolution in English attitudes towards the nature of old master appreciation and the literature that should support it can here be observed in the mismatched parts of a single text.

Over the course of the 1840s, several major art historical works were produced in England which bore the impress of Rio's theories and conclusions. Foremost among these were Jameson's *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* of 1845 and *Sacred and Legendary Art* of 1848, the second volume of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* of 1846, and Alexander Crawford, Lord Lindsay's *Sketches of the History of Christian Art* of 1847. Concepts and preferences derived from *De la Poésie Chrétienne* are displayed throughout all the above texts, and in several instances are of fundamental import to the structure and form of the arguments presented.<sup>70</sup> Problems were encountered with this utilisation of Rio's theories by these British writers, notably with regards to issues of religious denomination, which will be discussed later in the chapter. All, however, accept the definition of distinct mystic and naturalistic schools in the painting of the fifteenth century, and the basic dichotomy thus created. If anything, the presentation of this cleavage is more pronounced and dramatic in the English texts than in the French one. Jameson writes in *Memoirs* of 'the great schism of modern art' between those

<sup>69</sup>Jameson, *Handbook*, p.372. The oldest work mentioned is the *Triumph of Julius Caesar* by Andrea Mantegna, at Hampton Court, said to be in a 'defaced and dilapidated condition'. Jameson states that, in that particular collection, it is second only to Raphael's *Cartoons* in art historical interest.

<sup>70</sup>Brigstocke, 'Lord Lindsay', p.28. Brigstocke states that *De la Poésie Chrétienne* 'not only inspired (Lindsay's) own detailed survey of early Italian art, but also provides us with the central clue to the aesthetic and philosophical viewpoint which he would propound in *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*.'



who cultivated 'the mental and mechanical aids without any aspiration than the representation of beauty for its own sake', and others for whom art was a 'sacred vocation', with the representation of beauty 'a means, not an end'.<sup>71</sup> The language of Lord Lindsay is similarly emotive; he identifies the pre-Renaissance as a blissful era 'during which Spirit, or Christianity, ruled supreme', which stands in contrast with the fifteenth century 'during which Christianity battled with the pride and intellect of resuscitated paganism'.<sup>72</sup> Both conceived the conflict between these two schools as one between the decadent and the pious, and the empathy felt with the righteous side is evident.

Ruskin had read *De la Poésie Chrétienne* in the winter of 1844, and the experience inspired him to revisit Italy the following year. The second volume of *Modern Painters*, which he wrote upon his return to England, is accordingly saturated with Riosque sentiment. Many of Ruskin's rulings on the nature of painting demonstrate that he favoured mystical rather than naturalistic painting; when writing on ornament, for example, he describes how, in the pictures of spiritual artists:

the angel wings burn with transparent crimson, and purple, and amber, but they are not set forth with peacock's plumes, the golden civilets gleam with changeable light, but they are not beaded with pearls, nor set with sapphires.

In the naturalists the opposite applies, with their supposedly holy pictures suffering from 'the degrading effect of the realised decorations and imitated dress'.<sup>73</sup> The same argument can be found in Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art*, the first book in a series of four in which the author attempted to identify and explain the iconographic

<sup>71</sup> Anna Jameson, *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters*, 2 vols., London, Charles Knight and Co., 1845, vol.1, pp.110-111.

<sup>72</sup> Lord Lindsay, *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*, 2 vols, London, John Murray, 1847, vol.1, p.296.

<sup>73</sup> Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol.4, *Modern Painters II* (1846), p.324.

sources of religious painting in general. The drawing of distinctions between the depictions of the same scenes by artists of different schools, epochs and nationalities formed a central part of her project. When relating a history of angels in art, she declares the 'nondescript wings' given to these ethereal creatures by the earlier artists to be 'infinitely more beautiful' than anything produced later. The long, slender feathers and divine colours leave a viewer in no doubt that these are 'angel wings, not bird wings'.<sup>74</sup> She maintains that they were, in short, unearthly, a treatment that entirely befitted the subject matter. Like Ruskin, she contrasts the visions of loveliness found in the work of painters such as Fra Angelico with the more earthbound versions of later artists. In the pictures of Guido Reni and the Caracci, the figure of the angel is described as 'supremely elegant, nothing more', and the attempts of the sixteenth-century Italians as a whole are dismissed for exhibiting 'merely heathen grace and merely human sentiment'.<sup>75</sup> Judgements such as these litter *Modern Painters II* and *Sacred and Legendary Art*, both authors repeatedly emphasising that, like Rio, their admiration of art was independent of the technical conceptions of progress and a preference for naturalistic effect that had ultimately defined the history of Kugler.<sup>76</sup> The approbation quoted here for 'primitive' art displays the influence of another of Rio's ideas, that of the 'incomplete work' which has the 'treasures of Christian poetry' concealed beneath an unpromising exterior.<sup>77</sup> Ruskin characterises excellence in the painting of angels as being the extent to which they are unrealised; Jameson regards the most successful depictions as being those which are 'nondescript'. Early Italian art was thus seen to require considerable imaginative effort

<sup>74</sup> Anna Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, London and New York, Longmans, Green and Co., 1891 (1848), pp.55-56.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.82. Fra Angelico's 'conception of the Angelic creatures remains unapproached, unapproachable' (p.76).

<sup>76</sup> For example, *ibid.*, p.110. Writing of Rubens' *St. Michael*, Jameson declares the painting 'a perfect miracle of art: the fault is, that we feel inclined to applaud as we do at some astonishing *tour de force*: this is not a feeling appropriate to the subject.'

<sup>77</sup> Rio, *De Ja*, p.128.



as well as learning on the part of the viewer, in order to ensure arrival at a full apprehension of its value and interest.

The stimulation of both the imaginations and the intellects of her readers was the declared intention of Anna Jameson in *Sacred and Legendary Art*. She urged the exploration of the spiritual in art, expressing a desire to 'share the new-found pleasure, the yet unexplored region of delight'.<sup>78</sup> There is a general sense in the introduction to the book of a new critical discourse having been created, which was entirely different to all that had existed previously. This discourse would serve as a replacement, she believed, for the outdated views and practices of the connoisseur-collector. Jameson defines this older approach as one which was essentially frivolous; the criticism it engendered is described as engrossed in 'hands, masters, schools and tints', with questions of authenticity being the major concern. No thought was given to 'the spirit of the work', or how it was influenced by 'the faith and condition of the age which produced it'. The ultimate interest in old master painting for the new criticism is announced to be 'what was intended' by the artist,<sup>79</sup> a factor to be determined through careful study and imaginative engagement with the works themselves. The opening of *Sacred and Legendary Art* presents an expatiation of the polemic encountered in the introduction of Jameson's *Handbook*. She rails at length against the complacent attitudes of the English art world, and its disregard for the true significance of the religious art it purchases with such alacrity:

We have taken these works from their consecrated localities, in which they once held each their dedicated place, and we have hung them in our drawing-rooms and our dressing rooms, over our pianos and our sideboards - and now what do they say to us? That Magdalene, weeping amid her hair, who once spoke comfort to the soul of the fallen sinner, - that Sebastian, arrow-pierced, whose upward ardent glance spoke of courage and hope to the tyrant-ridden serf - that poor tortured slave, to whose aid St. Mark comes sweeping down from above - can they speak to us of nothing save flowing lines and correct drawing and

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<sup>78</sup>Jameson, *Sacred*, p.37.

<sup>79</sup>*ibid.*, p.8.

gorgeous colour? Must we be told that one is a Titian, the other a Guido, the third a Tintoret, before we dare melt in compassion or admiration? - or the moment we refer to their ancient religious signification, must it be with disdain or with pity?

Like Rio, Jameson expresses concern over a perceived loss of meaning in modern interpretations of religious art, and an underestimation of the importance of the Christian faith in the history of painting in Europe. The scope of her interest, however, was far wider than that of the French critic; she was not as quick to entirely dismiss the productions of later schools, as will be discussed later in the chapter. Jameson also finds solace in the growing strength of the new criticism, stating that there is more investigation than ever before into the 'deeper significance' of ancient art, and an 'awakening suspicion' that there is more to the old masters 'than has been dreamed by picture dealers and picture collectors, and even picture critics'.<sup>80</sup>

Ruskin formed the ideas on beauty that are presented in *Modern Painters* polemically, as George Landow notes,<sup>81</sup> in conscious opposition to concepts he wanted to refute or undermine. Unlike Jameson, however, his preferred tactic in the second volume of his series was not a direct attack on those against whom he was defining himself, but rather a savage iconoclasm towards their most revered exemplars of painterly excellence. Raphael was an obvious target, as English authorities had long granted him a near-divine status. The means for this particular denouncement could be found in *De la Poésie Chrétienne*. Raphael is assigned a singular position in the history of painting presented in the text; the final triumph of naturalism and paganism over the mystic school is identified as occurring halfway through his career. His oeuvre is thus divided in two, with the pre-Roman works having the power to transport the viewer to 'a region of innocence, serenity and eternal peace'; his transition in the employment of Pope Leo X to a more classical style is described as a 'defection', which had

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<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>81</sup>George P.Landow. *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971. p.14.

'deplorable consequences'. Rio's interpretation of the life and work of Raphael explains his lack of faith in the Hegelian conception of history as universal comedy. The contrast between the work up to and including the execution of the frescoes of Vatican stanze, and that which followed them, is declared 'so striking that it is impossible to regard the one as the development of the other...the former faith has been abjured, and a different creed embraced.'<sup>82</sup> In Rio's account, spiritual art does not undergo a fall as such, but a sudden extinction; its cessation is so swift and final as to dispel any hope in a comic reincarnation in a subsequent era. The progress of art directed it away from the ethos of the mystic school, as was proven by the sudden 'defection' of its last notable member.

Rio's estimation of Raphael's work was entirely contrary to the traditional perceptions of English connoisseurship. Reynolds had divided the painter's oeuvre in two, essentially before and after his arrival in Rome, but regarded these sections in a very different manner. Upon arrival in the Italian capital the artist had abandoned his 'dry, Gothic and even insipid manner', and taken up the 'grand style of painting'.<sup>83</sup> Later authors favoured a three part division of Raphael's career; in his 'Life of Raphael' of 1840, Charles Eastlake defined the 'three periods' in terms of the three geographical bases of Raphael's artistic activity. The first was that of Umbria and Perugia, the second that of Florence, and the third that of Rome; each period saw the painter's productions develop in a manner distinctive to the region in which he was working.<sup>84</sup> Eastlake was, however, keen to stress the incremental development of Raphael's works from period to period, perhaps in reaction to Rio's identification of sudden, almost unrecognisable change in his style. Of the final Roman period, Eastlake states that 'the original tendency of his mind and taste, however improved and aggrandised.

<sup>82</sup>Rio, *De la*, pp.225-226.

<sup>83</sup>Burnett (ed.), *Discourses*, p.9. From 'Discourse One', delivered on January 2nd., 1769.

<sup>84</sup>Eastlake, *Contributions*, p.207.

is again prominent'.<sup>85</sup> Kugler and Wornum both adopted the three-part division in their works, with the ultimate preference bestowed upon the final Roman period. The German historian described the transition from the first to the second period as Raphael's 'emancipation from the confined manner of Perugino's school', and judged the major Roman works to be those in which 'he reached the highest perfection'.<sup>86</sup> Wornum unsurprisingly concurs, stating that 'it is in the works of the last ten years of his life that he has established his claim to the title of the greatest of painters'.<sup>87</sup>

The opinions expressed in *De la Poésie Chrétienne* found acceptance elsewhere, however. Shelley declared herself 'a convert - entirely a convert' to the view that Raphael's early works were superior to his later ones, echoing the religious term used, significantly, by Pugin in his estimation of Rio's probable effect in the second edition of *Contrasts*. She compares an early *Adoration of the Magi* in Berlin, which is described as 'all harmony, all love', with the *Transfiguration*, held to be the final work of the artist; the later work is regarded as deficient, as it contains 'no face inspired by holy and absorbing passions'. The spiritual criterion for her judgements is carefully pointed out, as if to placate more traditionally minded readers. Shelly explains that 'it is not the art of the painter I admire - it is his pure, exalted soul, which he incarnated in these lovely forms'.<sup>88</sup> The adoption of this non-technical precept as a foundation for an appreciation of ancient art drew many critics into a similar identification of a loss of moral purpose in the late works of Raphael. In *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters*, Jameson rules that the paintings executed for Leo X in Rome 'become more and more allied with the antique, and less and less imbued with that pure religious spirit which we find in his earlier works'.<sup>89</sup> Despite the recognition of this division, and praise of the greater purity and piety of the earlier half of Raphael's career, Jameson does not

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p.243.

<sup>86</sup> Kugler, *Handbook*, pp.248-252.

<sup>87</sup> Wornum, *Epochs*, p.238.

<sup>88</sup> Shelley, *Rambles*, pp.221-223.

<sup>89</sup> Jameson, *Memoirs*, p.105.

condemn the Roman paintings as Rio and Shelley did, opting instead for a less controversial assessment. Her conclusion on the Hampton Court Cartoons, for example, is that they are 'as full of grandeur and grace as they are exquisitely fanciful and luxuriant'.<sup>90</sup> The approbation here is obvious; Jameson clearly wished to avoid the iconoclastic assertions demanded by complete adherence to the principles of Rio in the *Memoirs*, even at the expense of intellectual consistency. Ruskin, in contrast, did not balk at controversy; there is evidence to suggest that he actively courted it. When on his Italian tour of 1845, he wrote to his mother from Bologna of the difference between Raphael's *St. Cecilia* and Perugino's *Madonna and Four Saints*, both in the city's Accademia di Belle Arti. The comparison was:

So much the worse the Raffaele. I have been a long time hesitating, but I have given him up today before the *St. Cecilia*. I shall knock him down, and put up Perugino in his place.<sup>91</sup>

Accordingly, *Modern Painters II* reveals a complete acceptance of Rio's conception of Raphael's oeuvre, and a full utilisation of the polemical possibilities it allowed. The volume contains several comprehensive damnings of 'the corrupted Raffaele', who is classed in one instance as one of the 'men who looked at their models not with intellectual or loving penetration, but took the outside of them, or perhaps took the evil and left the good'.<sup>92</sup> Moral art history was entirely suited to Ruskin's revisionist purposes, as it enabled the theoretically justifiable demolition of several centuries of connoisseurial tradition; it rendered nothing as sacred but the sacred itself.

Such an approach negated the authority of virtually all established sources of knowledge and taste regarding old master painting, even for the critic who only partially accepted its qualifications. Alternative structures were thus erected, based

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>91</sup>Harold I. Shapiro (ed.), *Ruskin in Italy: Letters to his Parents 1845*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 140. From a letter of July 9th.

<sup>92</sup>Ruskin, *Modern Painters II*, p. 189.

upon the principles of *Rio*; this process required considerable imaginative effort on the part of the authors involved, and accordingly the work of moral art historians demonstrates a particularly overt fictionalisation in its construction of a new account of the progress of painting. The theories laid down by Hans Robert Jauss in his essay 'The Use of Fiction in the Perception and Representation of History' are pertinent here. Fiction, he maintains, is a vital and indeed ineluctable element of history; aestheticisation, or fictionalisation, are 'always at work in historical experience.'<sup>93</sup> The early nineteenth century is identified by Jauss as the point at which the classical separation that was believed to exist between the factual and the fictional was removed, and the two became openly and consciously commingled. This occurred most blatantly in the fictional literature of the bourgeois era: the historical novels of Walter Scott are cited as an obvious example of this phenomenon. Jauss states that an advanced employment of the techniques and modes of fiction is also detectable in the works of history produced in the period. This is certainly true of accounts of early Italian art produced during the 1840s, in which the few accepted facts that related to a then little-known episode of the history of painting were intertwined with fictions. The narratives created by Jameson, Lindsay and Ruskin are supplemented with a wealth of detail which originated in what Jauss terms 'the probable', or that which is fictional yet believable, thus mediating the difference between '*res fictae*' and '*res factae*'.<sup>94</sup>

A central contention of Jauss' work is that the presence of the fictive in historical texts has a very definite communicative function; its inclusion allows the historian to open up the experience of the past. This increase in accessibility was especially necessary in histories of early Italian art in England in the 1840s, when such painting was still relatively unfamiliar to any kind of wider public. The poor reputation given to it by the

<sup>93</sup>Hans Robert Jauss, 'The Use of Fiction in the Perception and Representation of History' (1969), in *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding*, ed. Michael Hays, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p.26.

<sup>94</sup>*ibid.*, p.27.

judgements of Reynolds and others also had to be countered; it was vital to present as interesting an account of the 'primitives' as possible, which stressed their distinctive and admirable character. The terms used by Jauss in his efforts to establish an aesthetics of reception are useful here. All cultural objects introduced into a given society, he maintained, are projected onto that society's transsubjective 'horizon of expectation', whose rules are automatically evoked when such a new work is encountered. This work can then be judged in terms of 'aesthetic distance', or the disparity between its appearance and the values of the horizon in question. This distance determines the artistic character of the work; the extent to which the distance decreases indicates the work's proximity to entertainment, or 'culinary' art, which does not demand any horizational change. By means of the challenges posed by works which fail to correspond with the horizon, the parameters of that horizon are gradually and constantly expanded; it is in a state of continual evolution, which explains the manner in which styles of art can move from the periphery to the mainstream, only later to fall from favour once more.<sup>95</sup> The 'aesthetic distance' between early Italian art and the 'horizon of expectation' existing for the appreciation of old master painting in Victorian England was considerable. The forms of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries fulfilled few of the established standards of excellence, as the opinions of Eastlake and Wornum quoted earlier demonstrate.

The attacks by moral art historians upon the established order of the collector connoisseur, and the paintings which occupied a central position in the 'horizon of expectation' it supported, were made in the light of what Dwight Culler terms a more widespread Victorian 'myth of medievalism'.<sup>96</sup> A central tenet of *De la Poésie Chrétienne* ruled that a work of art was a potent reflection of the spirit of the age that

<sup>95</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, eds. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, introduction by Paul de Man, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1982 (1970), p. 23.

<sup>96</sup> A. Dwight Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1985, p. 152.



had produced it. The decline of painting is declared by Rio to have been 'as much the result of a general corruption of morals as of the progress of erudition'.<sup>97</sup> This notion was accepted by Rio's admirers; Pugin, for example, stated in the 1841 edition of *Contrasts* that the appearance of 'pagan' elements in design during the Renaissance was evidence of 'the decay of faith and morals at the period of their introduction'.<sup>98</sup> The corollary of this assertion was that the time of mystic painting's predominance was one of dreamlike purity and harmony. Those influenced by the French critic in England seized upon this concept, and the results can be seen as a product of what Jauss terms the 'need for the perfect' in human culture. The power of the imaginary is the means by which this perfection is to be attained, he argues, and the experience of the perfect must always include a moment of unreality in order to set the imagination in motion. A characteristic of Jauss' notion of the unreal in images of perfection is its ability to invert its unreality, to appear as the actual real besides which a more problematic reality pales.<sup>99</sup> This can certainly be said to be true of Victorian medievalism in general. Recent accounts of the period repeatedly stress the self-reflective nature of the phenomenon; Charles Dellheim, for example, states that the Middle Ages were presented as 'an exemplar of spiritual certainty and religious piety that was profoundly appealing to those who craved both but often possessed neither'.<sup>100</sup> Pugin's *Contrasts* can be regarded as a prime example of Victorian medievalism, its author pining for a lost age of purity inhabited by 'holy men of old', for a time when 'mystical feeling and chaste execution' predominated in every field of human endeavour.<sup>101</sup> The specific art-based medievalism of moral art history was

<sup>97</sup>Rio, *De la*, p.119.

<sup>98</sup>Pugin, *Contrasts*, (2nd ed.), p.13.

<sup>99</sup>Jauss, 'The Communicative Role of the Fictive' (1967), in *Question and Answer*, pp.10-11.

<sup>100</sup>Charles Dellheim, *The Face of the Past: The Preservation of the Medieval Inheritance in Victorian England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.4. Another example: Culler, *The Victorian Mirror*, p.3. 'Their historical consciousness was a mode of self-consciousness, an awareness of the self by means of the other.'

<sup>101</sup>Pugin, *Contrasts*, (2nd.ed.), pp.16-17.



almost identical, with the unassailable and unattainable ideal of the mystic school serving as an unpleasant reminder of the imperfection of modern painting and art appreciation.

#### IV. Lives of the Artists: Moral Art History and Biography

Nowhere is the 'need for the perfect' made more clear in studies of early Italian art than in the creation of its heroes, or their equivalents. The critical discourse inspired by *De la Poésie Chrétienne* had a pronounced biographical emphasis, distinguishing it from the technical emphasis found in the work of Kugler and his English followers. Rio's volume set the precedent by approaching its subject matter primarily by means of artists' biographies, arranged in a roughly chronological order; both Lindsay's *Sketches* and Jameson's *Memoirs* followed this example, and even texts that only used examples from the early periods of art in the context of broader arguments, such as Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art* and Ruskin's *Modern Painters II* provided a measure of biographical comment in their evaluations and comparisons. The hero, or 'great man', was a popular concept in the wake of the Romantic era, encouraged by the formal considerations of established historians such as Thomas Carlyle, whose series of lectures *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* was delivered in 1840. Carlyle repeatedly stressed the centrality of heroic endeavour to the history of humanity as a whole, declaring that 'the history of the world was the biography of great men.'<sup>102</sup> The theories he expounded demonstrate a kinship with moral art history; he believed, for example, that superficial details should not be focused upon, and should only represent a means of accessing 'the soul of the history of a man or nation'. Such an attitude is analogous with attempts to look beyond the surface qualities of ancient art to the emotions underlying it. A vital quality in any hero,

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<sup>102</sup>Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History: Six Lectures*. London, James Fraser, 1841, p.21.

according to Carlyle, was sincerity, and the inner convictions of a great man were reflected in his works:

The thoughts they had were the parents of the actions they did; their feelings were the parents of their thoughts; it was the unseen spiritual in them that determined the outward and actual.<sup>103</sup>

The admirable qualities of a hero are ultimately decreed by Carlyle to be noble intent and an unshakeable belief in what they did, or wrote, or said; this enabled him to expound on the heroic status of figures unlikely to be popular in Victorian England, such as Mohammed and Cromwell.

The notion that a hero's sincerity was demonstrated by his work finds a parallel in the thinking of Rio. The logical extension of his theory that the onset of decadence in art was due to decadence in society was that a man's character and disposition crucially informed his religious painting, and were lucidly reflected in it. Of all the moral art historians, this principle was expressed most succinctly by Lindsay, whose comments on Kugler's *Handbook* quoted above indicate a recognition of the importance of biography to his study; he stated that 'the works of artists are their mind's mirror; they cannot express what they do not feel'.<sup>104</sup> In practice, this meant that the only reliable indicator of an artist's character was taken to be the paintings themselves; all sources, authorities and anecdotes were assessed in terms of their compatibility with the image that was believed to be reflected in the art.

The primary source to be confronted with regards to the biographies of early Italian artists was Giorgio Vasari, whose *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* contained accounts of the lives and works of all the figures who were of importance to Rio's discourse. Interest in these volumes had risen considerably in England since the

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<sup>103</sup>*ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>104</sup>Lindsay, *Sketches*, vol.2, p.67.

'discovery' of the early and pre-Renaissance, although the first English translation did not appear until that of Mrs. Forster in 1851. Nonetheless, many popular texts, such as Murray's Handbook to Northern Italy, recommended it to their readers. Palgrave, who, in common with all of the travel books discussed in this chapter, devoted little space to artists' biographies, described the Lives as 'entertaining and full of valuable information', but went on to criticise Vasari for being 'unmethodical and uncritical, and much prejudiced in favour of the Tuscan school'.<sup>105</sup> This qualified view was typical among Vasari's Victorian readers, and although his work was read with interest, the portraits of certain painters which it presented were regarded as being open to revision.

Several of the basic concepts of the Lives placed it in opposition to moral art history. Foremost among these was the notion of what Patricia Rubin terms the 'cumulative tradition';<sup>106</sup> the history of Italian painting is presented by Vasari as a triumphal progress from early innovation and emancipation from the Byzantine style, to godlike mastery in the form of Michelangelo. This evolution is devoid of any hint of Tragedy, and as Palgrave mentions above, very little criticism of any artist. Vasari, Rubin states, 'preferred praise to blame', and saw his account as partly a matter of paying back a debt of learning.<sup>107</sup> Virtually every painter had made a legitimate contribution to the progress of Italian art, and had provided lessons for a student to benefit from: condemnation is rarely encountered in the Lives. The ultimate aim of art is seen by Vasari as being the imitation of nature, and as a painter he did himself belong to a late mannerist manifestation of the naturalistic school, which failed even to be included in De la Poésie Chrétienne due to the extent of corruption it displayed. Accordingly, Rio himself demonstrated a high level of scepticism regarding Vasarian testimony, only

<sup>105</sup>Palgrave, Murray's Handbook, introduction p.xviii.

<sup>106</sup>Patricia Rubin, Giorgio Vasari and Art History, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995, p.175.

<sup>107</sup>ibid., p.231.

rarely accepting the veracity of assertions found in the *Lives*. Victorian moral art historians, however, display a greater openness to the book's anecdotal material, if not its facts, in the biographies they produced. Often, a tale is taken from Vasari and inflected in order to create a more dramatic and contemporary moral resonance, or simply to add interest and animation to the critique. The anecdote, according to Kris and Kurz, is linked to the legendary past, in which the image of the artist originated; it 'carries a wealth of imaginative material into recorded history'.<sup>108</sup> The fictional possibilities of the anecdote allowed for the enhancement of the communicative function of moral art history. The 'aesthetic distance' of early Italian art from the 'horizon of expectation' of an English audience led several writers carefully to manipulate biographical episodes from Vasari and elsewhere, in order to make the subject accessible and relevant to the intended readership.

This manipulation can be observed in the case of Giotto in particular; he was among the earliest artists to be widely considered, and posed a unique problem for the moral art historian. The Vasarian biography of this painter is littered with anecdote, and is described by Kris and Kurz as 'highly adorned'. They identify the origins, or lack of them, in several of the key episodes and incidents related in the *Lives*. Some are declared to be entirely free of any documentary evidence, such as the painter's early life as a shepherd, and his adoption and tuition by Cimabue, which is founded rather in 'an oral tradition that began to take shape in Florence about a century after the master's death'.<sup>109</sup> Such confabulation is declared to be a utilisation of heroic paradigms which find their origin in classical mythology; the hero starts his life in a poor and menial position, but due to a chance encounter which results in the recognition of his pedigree, is ultimately elevated to the highest possible station. The lofty esteem given to Giotto even by those of the greatest social rank is repeatedly

<sup>108</sup> Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 12.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

stressed by Vasari.<sup>110</sup> It is also claimed that his work brought him fortune as well as fame; the frescoes of the Arena chapel, for example, are said to have 'gained him much honour and profit'. The rich and renowned artist created in the *Lives* is also described as excelling in 'pleasant discourse', 'who had ever some jest on his tongue and some witty repartee in readiness'.<sup>111</sup> This aspect of the portrait conforms with what Kris and Kurz describe as the 'superiority of the artist', which was manifested in his personality as well as in his work.<sup>112</sup> Wit was a common trait claimed for a painter, as it emphasised his ability to place ordinary things in an unexpected light, and signalled his mastery of his environment. Several examples of drollery are provided by Vasari, some of which engage with a conception of Giotto's painterly abilities. A notable example is that of the young Giotto, whilst still in Cimabue's studio, painting a fly on the nose of a figure the elder painter was working on that was 'so true to nature that his master, returning to continue the work, set himself more than once to drive it away with his hand, thinking it was real, before he perceived the mistake.'<sup>113</sup> Stories such as this are traced back by Kris and Kurz to classical times, with the story of the rivalry between Zeuxis and the younger painter Parrhasios cited as an early example.<sup>114</sup> It has since been widely used in descriptions of young artists' precocious mastery over their craft, demonstrated in an ability to trick an elder master due to their ability, and the painted insect numbers among its variations. The binding of such anecdotes to the

<sup>110</sup>For example, Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. Gaston du Vere, ed. David Ekserdjian, 2 vols., London, Everyman, 1996 (1568), vol. 1, p. 107. Giotto is said to have been 'very dear' to the King of Naples, who wished to make him the 'first man' of that city.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 107-112.

<sup>112</sup>Kris and Kurz, *Legend*, p. 93.

<sup>113</sup>Vasari, *Lives*, vol. 1, p. 117.

<sup>114</sup>Kris and Kurz, *Legend*, p. 62. According to legend, Zeuxis painted a bunch of grapes so realistic that birds flew into his studio to peck at them. Parrhasios claimed he had bettered this achievement, and Zeuxis went to his studio to see the result. Zeuxis saw a curtain, behind which he presumed the work hung, and attempted to draw it back, only to discover that the curtain was the painting. He therefore had to acknowledge the other artist's superiority, as he had only fooled birds, yet had been fooled himself by the verisimilitude of Parrhasios' work.

figure of Giotto posed problems for the moral art historian, however; as Kris and Kurz point out, a fundamental purpose of the tale is 'to emphasise the naturalistic qualities of artistic achievement.'<sup>115</sup>

Vasari makes much of Giotto's role as the founder of naturalism in painting, stating that he 'became so good an imitator of nature that he banished completely that rude Greek manner and revived the modern and good art of painting'.<sup>116</sup> This position in the progress of art was also commonly assigned to him by technical art historians of the 1840s. Eastlake, for example, remarks in a note to Kugler's *Handbook* that Giotto was distinguished by:

the introduction of natural incidents and expressions, by an almost modern richness and depth of composition, by the dramatic interest of his groups, and by a general contempt for the formal and servile style of his predecessors.<sup>117</sup>

Such seemingly unavoidable conclusions about the manner of Giotto's artistic accomplishments and his place in any history of painting caused some difficulty for Rio. *De la Poésie Chrétienne* contains acknowledgement of Giotto's importance, characterising him as one who had the 'mission of regenerator', yet Rio engages in an open dispute with remarks attributed to Von Rumohr, which name Giotto as the man responsible for both the pagan direction art would take, and the predominantly human character it would adopt.<sup>118</sup> His art was not to be seen as morally corrupt, Rio asserts, but neither could the impulse it provided to naturalism be denied. The emphasis of Rio's biography is therefore placed upon the 'pleasant and joyous' character of the artist, and his 'clear and calm intellect', the latter qualification stressing the placidity of his painting, seen as absent from the naturalism of the centuries to come. Rio's choice of available anecdotes is significant. Although the discovery of Giotto by Cimabue in

<sup>115</sup>*ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>116</sup>Vasari, *Lives*, vol.1, p.97.

<sup>117</sup>Kugler, *Handbook*, p.45.

<sup>118</sup>Rio, *De la*, p.49.



the countryside around Florence is mentioned, no reference is made to any subsequent fame or fortune, or even to well-honed wit. The mature Giotto is presented as a simple peripatetic painter, guided across Italy by an unseen force on his mission to regenerate art. As was to become apparent over the course of his volume, modesty of lifestyle and humility of mind were essential elements of Rio's particular variant of the artist-hero.

The only friendship mentioned is not that with a monarch or pontiff, but the poet Dante Alighieri; mentioned by Vasari, this feature of the artist's life has also been doubted by recent commentators.<sup>119</sup> It was, nonetheless, extremely popular in nineteenth-century literature, and was used by Rio in order to indicate Giotto's personal calibre, as he was deemed a friend by one of the acknowledged masters of literature. Noticeable only by their absence are all the tales relating to displays of naturalistic or even general painterly skill, including both that of the fly and the more well-known story of Giotto's 'O'. Asked by Pope Benedict IX of Treviso for a demonstration of his skill, the painter sent a freehand drawing of a perfect circle; although misunderstood by an ignorant papal envoy, the Pope and his court, being versed in the arts, immediately recognised the immense talent of the artist. Related by Vasari as an instance of the acutely original mind of the artist, it is interpreted by Kris and Kurz as springing from a lengthy tradition of tales of 'virtuosity', ultimately derived from Pliny's story of the line of Appelles, in which the drawing of a perfectly straight line is presented as the ultimate display of ability. Anecdotes such as these assign the artist an almost superhuman level of distinction; they suggest that 'the artist creates like God, that he is an *alter deus*'. The method behind such creation is evident only to a few learned viewers, who form a virtual priesthood in their appreciation. To

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<sup>119</sup>Vasari, *Lives*, vol.1, p.97. Dante is mentioned as 'a contemporary and his very great friend'. Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, p.306. It is here pointed out that there is no evidence to support claims of a relationship of any kind between Giotto and Dante, and that Vasari accepted rather than challenged dubious stories of their intimacy as they suited the purposes of his laudatory account.

an ignorant eye, his abilities are miraculous, or 'magical', literally defying comprehension.<sup>120</sup> In Rio's moral art history, it is not the virtuosity of the artist which distinguishes him, but his piety, and what is admirable in art is its holiness rather than its 'magic': the painter is supposed to serve God, not imitate him.

Certain Victorian writers lacked this rigorous theoretical coherence, however. Jameson and Lindsay, elsewhere earnest adherents to the principles of moral art history, display an ambivalence regarding naturalism in their biographies of Giotto. Both also choose to include some of the anecdotes pointedly excluded by Rio, thereby creating a somewhat different portrait of the artist. This can be partly explained by the variations in overall character and intended function in the cases of both *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* and *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*. The two texts were produced with a primarily educational goal; neither can be said to have had pretensions to the status of formal criticism afforded to the work of Kugler, for example. Lindsay's advertisement at the outset of his text announces the pragmatic motivation behind his work; it was published, he declares, "in consequence of the interest newly awakened in the subject", and was addressed to the young artist or amateur 'presumed to have recently started for Italy'.<sup>121</sup> Although not a travel book as such, it was intended to provide art-loving tourists with information to direct and enlighten their experience of the paintings themselves. Jameson's *Memoirs* had a similarly defined purpose, albeit with regards to a different social echelon, being a compendium of articles written for the *Penny Magazine* between 1843 and 1845. This magazine was written for working people, although it enjoyed a large circulation which took it beyond the precincts of this intended readership.<sup>122</sup> Its reputation was such that it was singled out for praise in the report of a Government select committee

<sup>120</sup>Kris and Kurz, *Legend*, p.61.

<sup>121</sup>Lindsay, *Sketches*, vol.1, pp.ix-x.

<sup>122</sup>Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991, p.80. During the time of Jameson's articles, a circulation figure of around 200,000 was typical.



appointed in 1836 to investigate the connections between the arts and the manufacturing industries in England: the magazine was commended for the role it played in 'public instruction, and consequently public happiness'.<sup>123</sup> Contributors were thus aware that they were writing for a largely uninitiated readership, and accordingly had to present information in a manner that was educational, yet also interesting and imaginatively stimulating, in order to both gratify and improve their audience.

The influence of Rio and his ideals is still detectable in the biographies of Giotto produced by Lindsay and Jameson, despite the fact that some of the views to which they subscribe jar with the theoretical basis of *De la Poésie Chrétienne*. Lindsay, for instance, remarks that the time in which the artist was working was one of 'holy purity' and that he himself was 'no less excellent a Christian than a painter'.<sup>124</sup> Jameson's account even includes references to the questionable merit of Giotto's naturalistic innovation from a Rioresque viewpoint. He is said to have possessed 'a power of imitation, a truth in expression of natural actions and feelings, to which painting had never yet ascended or descended'.<sup>125</sup> Two possible interpretations of such a development are thus presented; by way of explanation, Jameson goes on to remind her readers that this leaning towards the actual would later become a subject of reproach in art. However, this does not prevent her from glorifying Giotto's achievement in being the first to 'hold the mirror up to nature':

<sup>123</sup>Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures; with the minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index', *Reports from Committees*, 15 vols., London, Ordered by the House of Commons to be Printed, vol.9, session 4th February-20th August 1836, report p.vi. The magazine is lauded for 'conveying intelligence and civilisation in so cheap a form to the remotest cottage in the kingdom.'

<sup>124</sup>Lindsay, *Sketches*, vol.2, pp.4-13.

<sup>125</sup>Jameson, *Memoirs*, vol.1, p.41.

No single human being of whom we have read has exercised, in any particular department of science or art, a more immediate, wide-ranging and lasting influence.<sup>126</sup>

Similar presentations are made in the *Sketches*, where the artist is described as 'a man of vast genius', due to his claim to be 'parent of the Naturalist'.<sup>127</sup> This apparent contradiction over what was to be perceived as admirable in Giotto's style was matched by a similar confusion regarding other aspects of his life and work, notably his faith. Despite the comments quoted above regarding its purity, Lindsay describes the Christianity of fourteenth-century Italy elsewhere in his biography as 'dim and corrupted'.<sup>128</sup> and subjects many of its dogmas to a harsh and very Protestant scrutiny. Before Giotto's more allegorical works, denominational difference became a primary concern for Lindsay, as will be discussed later in the chapter. Jameson also identified the forms of belief which the painter's works embodied to be primitive, and in her assertion of the greatness of the man, she attempts to divorce his personal sympathies from them; it is even suggested that the act of painting such scenes, and thus engaging in deep contemplation of them, revealed to Giotto their flawed theological nature.<sup>129</sup>

Giotto's works were extremely distant from the concerns of an English audience, both in terms of aesthetics and religion. The argument formulated by Rio to explain the worth of mystic works could not be applied to him, due to the complications described above. Hence, anecdotes omitted by Rio found their way into both *Sketches* and *Memoirs* for the sake of their communicative potential. They served to entertain

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<sup>126</sup>*ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>127</sup>Lindsay, *Sketches*, vol.2, pp.4-7.

<sup>128</sup>*ibid.*, p.68.

<sup>129</sup>Jameson, *Memoirs*, vol.1, p.52. Giotto is said to have been 'singularly free from the suspicious enthusiasm of the times in which he lived, although he lent his powers to embodying that very superstition. Perhaps the very circumstance of his being employed in painting the interiors of chapels and monasteries opened to his acute, discerning and independent mind reflections, which took away some of the respect for the mysteries they concealed.'

readers, and also emphasise the features of Giotto which were worthy of admiration. Both Jameson and Lindsay also embellished the tales they employed, in order to hone their versions of the artist to suit the specific function of their texts. This addition of nuance is especially evident in Jameson. Patricia Anderson notes how contributions to the *Penny Magazine* often deliberately 'incorporated one or more interwoven social and moral themes', and could be seen as having 'embodied a connotated message and served as exemplars for the nineteenth-century reader'.<sup>130</sup> This certainly appears to be true of Jameson's articles, there being an underlying lesson strongly present in the majority of them, the lives of Italian artists taking on a symbolic dimension and representing the more general figure of the productive individual in society. The biography of Giotto was no exception, and his efficacy as a positive exemplar for the readers of the *Penny Magazine* was fully utilised by Jameson. Her description of the marriage of 'extraordinary inventive and poetical genius' and 'sound, practical, energetic sense and untiring activity and energy'<sup>131</sup> corresponded closely with the educative theory upon which Charles Knight originally founded the magazine.<sup>132</sup> The encoded social virtues behind the factual instruction of the story of Giotto are clear, with the virtue of hard practical work as the means by which genius, or at least originality and invention, is realised being clearly espoused. Regardless of how good the idea is, or how refined the mind, it is nothing, Jameson's readers are told, without simple industry. The achievements of Giotto may be beyond their reach, but they can at least follow his example by working as hard as possible. In order to create a figure who would have some appeal to those lower down the social hierarchy, Jameson depicts Giotto as a rebel of sorts, a man whose painting was a conscious statement against all that had preceded him. His bold originality broke through the strictures of

<sup>130</sup> Anderson, *The Printed Image*, pp.54-61.

<sup>131</sup> Jameson, *Memoirs*, vol.1, p.52.

<sup>132</sup> Anderson, *The Printed Image*, p.54.

tradition; he was a hard-working free thinker who had 'little reverence for received opinions about anything'.<sup>133</sup>

This dynamic core was supplemented by several Vasarian anecdotes, related in an overtly Romantic manner. Cimabue, for example, is praised for his 'quick perception and generous protection of talent in the lowly shepherd boy' at the outset of Giotto's career; readers were also told of the artist's friendship with Dante, and his great wit and 'universal' celebrity. The story of the Pope's circle was also told, but Jameson was sceptical of this 'magical' tale, stating that 'we know not how or why' the pontiff was convinced of Giotto's ability after only such a minimal demonstration.<sup>134</sup> Lindsay's *Sketches*, lacking the utilitarian agenda of the *Memoirs*, was more concerned with making Giotto imaginatively appealing, and there is accordingly a heavy reliance on anecdotal material in the text. He includes the story of the painted fly, incidents where the artist clashed wittily with authority, and a particularly Romantic evocation of the friendship with Dante, given in reference to the poet's supposed contribution to the conceptual scheme of the frescoes of the Arena Chapel:

It is not difficult, gazing upon these silent but eloquent walls, to repeople them with the group once, as we know - five hundred years ago - assembled within them, - Giotto intent on his work, his wife Ciuta admiring his progress, and Dante with abstracted eye, alternately conversing with his friend and watching the gambols of the children - playing on the grass before the door.<sup>135</sup>

This constitutes an example of what Jauss, in 'The Communicative Role of the Fictive', terms 'secondary fictionalisation' in historical writing, in which invented details or statements are used to enhance the vividness of the portrayal. Such practice is distinct from 'primary fictionalisation', which is impossible without a fitting description of the accepted historical facts, and is firmly grounded in the 'probable' to

<sup>133</sup>Jameson, *Memoirs*, vol.1, p.52.

<sup>134</sup>*ibid.*, pp.29-40.

<sup>135</sup>Lindsay, *Sketches*, vol.2, p.27.

the extent that its fictional origin often goes unnoticed.<sup>136</sup> 'Secondary fictionalisation' can be said to have a far greater prominence in the versions of Giotto supplied by Lindsay and Jameson than in that found in *De la Poésie Chrétienne*. The inconsistencies created by the conflict between the position Giotto was seen to occupy in art history and the principles of Rio were effectively concealed beneath an anecdotal patina of fiction. Also, in their acceptance of many of the tales gathered by Vasari, they had recourse to the classical paradigm of the heroic artist. Ennobled by his naturalistic powers in painting, and his distinctive and superior personal qualities, his life is presented as, in the words of Lindsay, 'one continued triumph'.<sup>137</sup> Regardless of the distance involved, aesthetic or otherwise, the age-old status of such a character would have made him intelligible to all.

The situation was more straightforward with the treatment of later artists who could be identified as belonging exclusively to either the mystic or the naturalistic school of painting. Absolute conformity between those who can be called moral art historians was still rare, however. The case of Pietro Perugino is a revelatory example of the divergence of opinion that sometimes existed between them. Rio openly opposed the portrait of this artist given by Vasari, as it failed to correspond with his view of the Italian's painting, and therefore his character. The Perugino of the *Lives* is cruel, jealous, sarcastic and comically parsimonious, a man whose love of money was coupled with a stubborn and irreligious temperament.<sup>138</sup> In an account unusual for its critical attitude towards its subject, the painter is said to have been driven from both Rome and Florence due to patrons and fellow artists alike tiring of his practice of repeating figures in successive compositions in order to complete, and thus earn, as

<sup>136</sup>Jauss, 'The Communicative Role', p.48.

<sup>137</sup>Lindsay, *Sketches*, vol.2, p.65.

<sup>138</sup>Vasari, *Lives*, vol.1, pp.594-595. For example: 'Pietro was a man of very little religion, and he could never be made to believe in the immortality of the soul - nay, with words in keeping with his head of granite, he rejected most obstinately every good suggestion. He placed all his hopes in the goods of fortune, and he would have sold his soul for money.'

much as possible, and finally forced to return to his native Perugia at the end of his life. Rio, who regarded Perugino as among the great last lights of the mystic school, utterly refuted this version of his life, attributing it to the 'pitiful spite'<sup>139</sup> felt for him by Florentine artists in general, and the disciples of Michelangelo in particular, of whom Vasari was one. Discounting one partial, fictionalised account, he replaces it with another, initially dismissing the accusations of miserliness with an unattributed anecdote relating how Perugino allegedly frescoed an oratory annexed to the Confraternita di Santa-Maria dei Blanca and asked only an omelette for his efforts. Rio proceeds by retelling the story of the artist's life, this time casting him as a brave man working against the corrupt fashion of his time, producing superior, more spiritual paintings which inspired the piety of the people, and attracted the admiration of the Pope. When on the brink of the fortune and universal celebrity which formed a vital aspect of the image of the traditional artist-hero, Rio's Perugino rather relinquished his claim to such eminence in order to retreat to his homeland and devote himself to his art, without fear of interruption or contamination by the allure of naturalism and paganism. The charges of impiety are dismissed without discussion, his work being taken as obvious and incontrovertible testimony to the strength of his faith. Perugino is credited with having given 'his degraded contemporaries the example of a courage which they had not the resolution to imitate',<sup>140</sup> a stand which earned him their envious rancour. His departure from the artistic centres of Italy for good before becoming infected with the degeneracy of the naturalistic school is in a sense presented as a corrective to the life of Raphael, an illustration of what his pupil and successor should have done. Rather than the traditional robust and worldly artist-hero, Perugino is crafted into a kind of hermetic artist-saint, withdrawing from the temptation of secular influence and devoting himself to God.

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<sup>139</sup>Rio, *De la*, p.166.

<sup>140</sup>*ibid.*, p.167.



This particular assertion of the moral art historical ideal would not go unchallenged, however. Ruskin felt compelled to comment upon this clash of opinion concerning the merit of Perugino in the context of his discussion of purity and personality in art in *Modern Painters II*. He fails to concur with either side, being unconvinced by Rio's identification of the artist as an exceptional practitioner of the mystic school, noticing:

an absence of the full outpouring of the sacred spirit that there is in Angelico; traceable, I doubt not, to some deficiencies and avaricious flaws in his heart.

A direct correlation between character and work is identified, as in Rio, but here the theory is used to demonstrate that the mystic painter who fails does so due to some fault in himself. Just as Rio sought to discredit Vasari on the basis of Perugino's art, so here Ruskin uses the same art to argue that Rio himself cannot be correct, thus turning the French critic's principles against him. Ruskin goes on to describe Vasari's biography of the painter as 'lies',<sup>141</sup> that the author hoped would stick due to evidence of some underlying personal deficiency or venality in Perugino's work. By the rigid application of an approach derived from Rio, Ruskin manages to discredit both views of the artist, whilst remaining uncommitted himself. The polemical potential of Rio's theories was such that they could evidently be used to undermine the conclusions of the man who had formulated them.

There is a similar, albeit more involved version of this conflict of attitudes towards Perugino in Jameson's *Memoirs*. She interprets him as being the ultimate example of inconsistency, capable of the very best and worst in painting. At his best he is a religious painter of supreme ability, of whom she cannot easily accept Vasari's tales of irreligion:

There is such a divine beauty in some of the best pictures of Perugino, such exquisite tenderness in his Madonnas, such an expression of enthusiastic faith

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<sup>141</sup>Ruskin, *Modern Painters II*, p.212.

and devotion in some of the heads, that it would be painful to believe that there was no corresponding feeling in his heart.<sup>142</sup>

Unlike Ruskin, Jameson does seem to consider it possible that an artist could dissemble, and produce a picture that was untrue to their soul, as it would explain the enormous qualitative variance she observes within the oeuvre of this painter. Despite being capable of the occasional truly glorious painting, Perugino was not 'excited to labour by a spirit of piety or the generous ambition to excel, but by a base and insatiable thirst for gain',<sup>143</sup> which led to a lamentable and quite unspiritual monotony in his work. This supposed defect is given as much importance by her as it was by Vasari, Perugino again being portrayed as a miser, a ludicrous skinflint so suspicious of others that he carried all of his money upon his person at all times. Both Ruskin and Jameson were unconvinced by Rio's alternative version of Perugino's life and character, or at least they chose to be. The figure of the gifted artist whose creations were soiled by his own avaricious nature was of more use to their volumes than that of the perfect artist-saint created by Rio. Perugino's story is presented by them as a negative exemplar to their readers, as a warning against greed for both aspiring artists and society at large; the moral art history became rather moralistic in the hands of the Victorian critic.

Moral art history was a discourse defined by debate, both internally, as demonstrated above, and in relation to competing discourses such as the rational, technical one championed by Eastlake and Kugler.<sup>144</sup> It did, however, identify the status of certain artists as being above all dispute, and thus the subject of consensus among its

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<sup>142</sup>Jameson, *Memoirs*, vol.1, p.201.

<sup>143</sup>*ibid.*, p.198.

<sup>144</sup>Kugler, *Handbook*, pp.156-164. The contrast between this discourse and that of moral art history is ably illustrated by Kugler's treatment of Perugino. The artist's style is said to develop from works of 'surpassing beauty' to those of 'the greatest uniformity of design', with no mention made whatsoever of his character or personal traits in relation to this technical analysis.



adherents. The most notable example of such a painter was Fra Angelico. The most significant moment in the history of painting presented in *De la Poésie Chrétienne* is that of the fissure between the naturalistic and the mystic schools in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. Two artists are said to represent in their work and lives the philosophies of these schools at the time of their initial divergence from one another. Fra Angelico is identified as the purest exponent of the mystical school, and Filippo Lippi as the depraved originator of the naturalist school, in whom degeneracy first took absolute hold; they are set against each other at the heads of chapters on their respective schools in order to illustrate the absolute difference between them. Vasari actually offers a version of the life of Fra Angelico that was amenable to the philosophy of moral art history, stating that he was 'a man of great simplicity, and most holy in his ways',<sup>145</sup> who would pray before commencing a work and considered its result to be divinely inspired, a description in perfect harmony with the purity perceived in his painting; Rio even comments that Vasari, as a member of a later, corrupted school, underwent a 'temporary conversion'<sup>146</sup> when writing about this holiest of artists. Vasari's account of the life of Lippi, however, which is in no way connected or compared with that of Angelico, reveals where his true sympathies lay. Whilst admitting that Lippi was 'a slave' to his 'amorous - nay, beastly - passion', this is considered by Vasari to be more an eccentricity linked to the possession of genius than a portentous moral flaw, an element of his character that could coexist with his mastery of painting. His supposed seduction of the novice Lucrezia Buti whilst she posed for the figure of the Virgin in an altarpiece he was painting for the nuns of S. Margherita is portrayed more as a romance than a scandal. The impetuous Lippi is shown to have fallen madly in love with the 'very beautiful and graceful' girl as he painted her, and the pair subsequently eloped with little thought of the consequences. Much is made of Lippi's artistic ability, and the prominent place he can be said to

<sup>145</sup>Vasari, *Lives*, vol. 1, p.409.

<sup>146</sup>Rio, *De la*, p. 146.

occupy in the progress of painting. He is attributed with having introduced 'the method of giving grandeur to the manner of our own day', and having generally incited 'the minds of men to depart from that simplicity which should be called rather old-fashioned than ancient'. Vasari's indulgent interpretation of Lippi in the light of his artistic innovations is presented as the stance taken towards the artist by his contemporaries:

So greatly was he esteemed for his excellent gifts, that many circumstances in his life that were worthy of blame were passed over in consideration of the eminence of his great talents.<sup>147</sup>

It was also adopted in the 1840s by those art historians whose concerns were more generally with the technical side of painting. In a unique moment of involvement with artist biography, Kugler mentions the 'sensual feeling' of Lippi's art, and even writes of the way his corresponds with the 'external circumstances of his life', and the 'strongest contrast' that exists with his peer Angelico. There is a complete absence of moral condemnation in his account, however, with the scandalous and unlikely episodes of his life explained by the simple conclusion that 'his whole life was a romance.' The paintings themselves are highly praised, in that they 'display feeling and an impetuous, ardent mind', yet there is still 'grace and delicacy' among the sensuality.<sup>148</sup> Lippi's contribution to the progress of Italian art is identified as being the introduction of pictorial energy; Eastlake cites him as a major influence upon Raphael during the Florentine period of the 'divine painter'.<sup>149</sup>

Rio, although agreeing in terms of Lippi's influence, vigorously contested this positive estimation of it. Using noticeably religious language, he declared that regardless of any artistic merit that may be present in Lippi's pictures, it is 'impossible to pardon his

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<sup>147</sup>Vasari, *Lives*, vol.1, pp.437-441.

<sup>148</sup>Kugler, *Handbook*, p.110.

<sup>149</sup>Eastlake, 'Life of Raphael', p.217.

profanations.' Lucrezia is recast as a victim of a sinful deception; her seduction is depicted as a 'plot against the innocence of this poor girl...so skilfully contrived'. The events related by Vasari are subjected to a stringent moral evaluation, the result being the construction of a personality appropriate for one charged with having 'sown the first seeds of decadence in the Florentine school'. That his soul was so corrupt rendered a defence of it on the basis of his genius untenable for moral art history also, as the condition of one fatally inhibited the expression of the other:

With a soul so devoid of refinement and dignity, it was impossible that Lippi could raise himself to the level of those religious painters who had given such a high position to art.<sup>150</sup>

There is an implicit reference to Angelico in this declaration, and in the light of this damning of Lippi the artist monk is simply 'incomparable',<sup>151</sup> a figure of such purity that he almost eludes description altogether. Rio's account of his life is brief; the only anecdote offered being that of his prayers before painting, as also given in Vasari. As mentioned above, Rio discussed the two artists in separate chapters, placed in the contexts of the schools they respectively consummated and engendered. Jameson, in the *Memoirs*, dedicates a chapter solely to a comparison of the two, using them as symbols of the two factions that resulted from the 'schism' that rent Italian art apart. Within this chapter, she too deals with Lippi first, describing him as a 'libertine', whose actions concerning Lucrezia and behaviour in general were 'an offence against morals and religion.' Angelico, on the other hand, was 'as assiduous as he was devout', committed to charitable works and possessing such an 'excess of modesty' that he turned down the archbishopric of Florence when it was offered to him by an admiring Pope.<sup>152</sup> As Judith Johnston has pointed out, this chapter is a piece of careful teleological contrivance, the two artists being discussed in reverse order, the

<sup>150</sup>Rio, *De la*, pp.89-90.

<sup>151</sup>*ibid.*, p.146.

<sup>152</sup>Jameson, *Memoirs*, vol.1, pp.112-118.

older Angelico coming after Lippi, or the sinful being criticised before the lauding of the pure.<sup>153</sup> The same fictive rearrangement is made by Rio, the naturalists' chapter coming before that of the mystic school, and this reversal has a deliberate poetic effect, a reader being shown the false path and 'threatened' by the licentious behaviour of Lippi before experiencing the righteousness and purity of Angelico. The archetype of the moralistic religious painter is thus briefly endangered in both texts, before being gloriously reaffirmed.

In *Modern Painters II*, Ruskin seems to have entirely accepted the characterisation of Lippi that was created by Rio and Jameson; although, as mentioned, there is little actual engagement with specific artist biographies in the volume as a whole, the theories and evaluations laid down indicate a shared basis. When theorising upon the perception of 'typical beauty', for example, Ruskin concludes that it is in part an appreciation of its 'moral meaning', and a faculty that is instinctive. When those in whom this faculty is manifested are:

unfortunately men of impious or unreflecting spirit, it is very possible that the perception of beauty should be by them cultivated on principles merely æsthetic, and so lose their hallowing power.

Artists who do not have a devout mind will thus inevitably produce only superficial art. Lippi is clearly considered to be among such ignoble painters. Ruskin consigns him to the company of those 'men of debased mind who used models such as and where they ought not',<sup>154</sup> a criticism which echoes Rio's condemnation of the artist's 'impudence'<sup>155</sup> in casting his amours as Virgins, and Jameson's naming of him as the

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<sup>153</sup>Judith Johnston, *Anna Jameson: Victorian Feminist, Woman of Letters*, Aldershot, Scholar Press, 1997, p. 165. Angelico is believed to have been born in 1387, Lippi in 1406. Johnston maintains that this was an 'editorial choice', made in order to impose 'Victorian mores' upon the lives of her subjects.

<sup>154</sup>Ruskin, *Modern Painters II*, p. 189.

<sup>155</sup>Rio, *De la*, p. 89.

first who 'desecrated'<sup>156</sup> such subjects by making sacred figures portraits of mortal women. An ideal aim of art, Ruskin wrote elsewhere in his volume, is the representation of 'the ideal of the good and perfect soul, as it is seen in the features'. In order to do this, the human soul of the artist 'must first know sweetness and goodness in itself, before it can much desire, or rightly find, the signs of it in others'.<sup>157</sup> The painter of saints, in order to be truly successful, must be a saint himself.

As much of the language used in the quotations given above demonstrates, the appreciation of early Italian art became for certain commentators an involved metaphor for religion, the admiration of art on the basis of its spiritual content leading to words such as 'sacred' being employed as terms of approbation, and 'sinfulness' or 'degeneracy' being the ultimate crime a work or artist could commit. A letter from Ruskin to his father from Parma during his Italian trip of 1845, whilst he was preparing *Modern Painters II* and was clearly in thrall of Rio, provides an example of this phenomenon. During the course of a moral survey of the history of art, Ruskin harshly condemns the 'lower body of men' in whom there is either 'marked sensuality and impurity', such as Correggio and Guido, 'coarse types of feature and form' such as Rubens and Titian, or finally, and most despicably, those in whose work there are 'definite signs of evil', who are ultimately 'feeding upon horror and ugliness, and the filthiness of sin', such as Salvator, Caravaggio and the lower Dutch schools.<sup>158</sup> At the opposite extreme was Fra Angelico, the champion of the moral art historian, whose character and life took on a fantastically pure aspect. Lord Lindsay, for instance, relates in the *Sketches* how:

<sup>156</sup>Jameson, *Memoirs*, vol.1, p.114.

<sup>157</sup>Ruskin, *Modern Painters II*, p.177.

<sup>158</sup>Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol.4, letter provided in the editor's introduction, p.xxxiv. Letter to his father, Parma, 10th July.

love to God and love to man were his sole inspiration as an artist...his every picture was a hymn of praise, and all that he gained from his pencil he gave to the poor.<sup>159</sup>

Ruskin took this idea to its ultimate conclusion, placing Angelico at the head of a scale of painters, the foremost painter of the foremost class of art, that of 'Pure Religious Art: the School of Love', and declaring that 'he is not an artist, properly so-called, but an inspired saint.'<sup>160</sup> Jauss argues in 'The Communicative Role of the Fictive' that the 'need for the perfect' was at first satisfied over the course of human history by 'religious or mystic experience', or an encounter with divine perfection. However, the figures and signifying structures of 'the perfect' were progressively appropriated by aesthetic experience over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and art slowly became mankind's primary means of attempting to transcend the boundaries of its existence. The Victorian response to the Italian 'primitives' in the 1840s seems an early example of transcendental perfection being found in art, but this perfection was still being conceived of in explicitly religious terms.

The figure of the artist-hero, with its roots in the classical era, was thus replaced in moral art history by that of the Christian artist-saint, whose qualities and attributes can be seen as a deliberate revision of the more traditional, secular heroic profile. In the place of the naturalistic 'magic' performed by men such as Zeuxis, Parrhasios and Giotto is an unimpeachable holiness, the purpose of which is the revelation of Christian truth rather than the achievement of visual deception. The artist-saint also varies from the more general conceptions of the hero found in the works of Hegel and Carlyle, who both stress, in their different ways, the isolation of the hero in history. For Carlyle, this is the isolation of meritocratic distinction. He states in *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* that 'they dwell apart, in a kind of royal

<sup>159</sup>Lindsay, *Sketches*, vol.2, p.224.

<sup>160</sup>Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol.4, letter provided in the editor's introduction, p.xxxiv. Letter to his father, Parma, 10th July 1845.

solitude; none equal, none second to them'.<sup>161</sup> Hegel's conception is more negative, with the hero in history being portrayed as an essentially Tragic figure. They are characters who seek the change of societal order in line with their private aims and ambitions, and the main events of history are seen to be constituted of what White terms 'the great conflicts between an individual will, adequately endowed for its task, and the received social order'.<sup>162</sup> From the perspective of its heroes, who are confined to a single, Tragic historical phase, history therefore takes on the aspect of a Tragic drama:

If we cast a look at the fate of world historical personalities, we shall find it to have been no happy one. They attained no calm enjoyment; their whole life was labour and trouble; their whole nature was nothing but their master passion.<sup>163</sup>

There is considerable contrast between the struggle here described and the blissful tranquillity of the life of Angelico. This artist, as even his most ardent supporters recognised, did not seek to bring about change in art, a fact that was often used against him by his Victorian detractors.<sup>164</sup> His position was an isolated one of sorts, as he was removed from society by both his monastic vows and his piety, but rather than being above the people, like Carlyle's hero, or in conflict with them, like Hegel's, Angelico existed for them, motivated, as Lindsay declared, by 'love for God and love for man'. As a pure religious painter, he was unconcerned with personal glory or the progress of art; his sole aim was to produce works, mostly in fresco, that would glorify God and edify the populace. The moral art historians' ideal of the artist-saint was therefore a democratic one, which placed the 'hero' not in some inaccessible realm of mighty worldly accomplishment, but in the service of the people, and made their spiritual enrichment one of his primary concerns.

<sup>161</sup> Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.138.

<sup>162</sup> White, *Metahistory*, p.110.

<sup>163</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p.31.

<sup>164</sup> For example, Kugler, *Handbook*, p.90. Angelico is described as 'the most perfect example of his style, but in him likewise it appears in all its restrictiveness'.



## V. Denominational Divisions: The Religious History of Art

A significant obstacle faced the majority of British writers who attempted to engender an interest in early Italian art in England during the 1840s. Unlike Rio, they had to consider not only the 'aesthetic distance' between their subject and their audience, but also the religious difference involved. This problem regarding the appeal of moral art history in England was perceived soon after the publication of *De la Poésie Chrétienne*, in a review of the book in the *Athenaeum*, which remarked upon:

the light wherein our countrymen view the superstitious tenets, traditions, forms and practices, of what is called Catholicism. They hold image worship in mixed ridicule and horror; a feeling which they generalise from the idolaters to the innocuous pictures. Super-sanctification of the Virgin, apocryphal miracles, legendary martyrdoms, are condemned by their purer creed and scouted by their common sense; yet these figments supply a great portion of its subject matter to mystical art, which must therefore lay stronger claims to our English antipathies than affections.<sup>165</sup>

Rio was certainly seeking to reclaim the Catholic heritage that he saw to be contained within early art, and neglected by the connoisseurial mind; his text is described by Culler as 'a work of Catholic reaction'.<sup>166</sup> As mentioned above, the appreciation of the works of the mystic school was described by Rio as being dependent upon the exercise of a particular faculty different from that by which works of art were usually, or traditionally, judged; it was necessary 'to associate ourselves by a strong and profound sympathy to certain religious ideas'.<sup>167</sup> Being a Roman Catholic, he had no difficulty in summoning up this sympathy; the pictures which he was examining were essentially addressing his own faith, albeit in a more ancient and rudimentary form.

<sup>165</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 495, 22nd April 1837, p. 274.

<sup>166</sup> Culler, *The Victorian Mirror*, p. 161.

<sup>167</sup> Rio, *De la*, p. 123.

English Catholic authors also found this process of sympathetic association with Christian art straightforward. Pugin and Wiseman both sought to claim the more spiritual works of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as part of an exclusively Catholic heritage, which was at least partially inaccessible to the Protestant mind. In *Contrasts*, Pugin stressed that Gothic architecture in all its 'wonderful superiority'<sup>168</sup> issued from the Catholic period of England's history; the fundamental 'contrast' in his book was between the purity of ancient Catholic design, and the degraded nature of modern Protestant efforts. The death knell for the age of the mystic artist or architect for Pugin came not with the advent of the Italian High Renaissance, but with Henry VIII's break with Rome, and the establishment of the Church of England. *Contrasts* provides a detailed and embittered account of both the destruction wreaked upon noble Catholic edifices during the centuries between Henry's reign and the time of writing, and the appalling inadequacies of all new buildings erected in this period. Wiseman's essay 'Christian Art', which appeared in the *Dublin Review* in 1847, was concerned with painting, having been written in response to Lindsay's *Sketches*. He defines his subject in explicitly denominational terms, instructing the student interested in Christian art to study 'the great Catholic masters of every country, particularly of Italy.'<sup>169</sup> This distinction between Catholic and non-Catholic was applied to viewers as well as artists. Wiseman states that more people in England than ever before are 'alive to that holy, calm and quiet beauty' that pervades Christian art, but goes on to remark that:

It may be said that these observations apply only to Catholics, and afford no indication of a similar taste springing up in the country in general. Perhaps not; although at the same time we sincerely believe that symptoms of it are appearing among the people in general.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>168</sup>Pugin, *Contrasts*, (2nd ed.), p.1.

<sup>169</sup>Wiseman, *Essays*, vol.3, 'Christian Art', p.365. This article originally appeared in the *Dublin Review*, June 1847.

<sup>170</sup>*ibid.*, p.359.

Despite this allowance of the possibility of a Protestant being able to appreciate Christian art, the denominational difference is portrayed as an impediment, which denied the ease with which a Catholic could fall into raptures before such productions. This lack of direct or complete sympathy identified by Wiseman, coupled with the continued prevalence of anti-Catholic sentiment such as that described above by the *Athenaeum*, proved problematic for the Protestant critics of early Italian art.

Following her utilisation of Rio's principles in her articles for the *Penny Magazine*, religious concerns came to dominate the work of Jameson. As discussed above, she saw herself as supplying a deficiency in modern criticism in a similar way to Rio himself, but her approach in her later writing, notably in *Sacred and Legendary Art*, was different in some crucial respects. Most striking initially is her arrangement of art as it relates to religion, rather than the other way around; chapters are devoted to the elucidation of religious events, scenes, and personages, such the section on angels quoted earlier. Artistic examples are employed to illustrate the iconographic complexities involved, and although her judgements often display the influence of Rio, she does not allow herself to be bound by his rulings regarding the unquestionable supremacy of the mystic school. Her declaration in her introduction of an intention to consider how old master painting was informed by 'the religious spirit of the time' suggests a detached agenda that is belied by a number of her other comments and evaluations. She elsewhere identifies a direct link between the faith of past epochs as found in ancient art and that of Victorian England, commenting that the traditions and dogmas embodied in it are 'but two or three centuries behind us, and closely connected with the faith of our forefathers'.<sup>171</sup> This dichotomy between sympathy with an earlier religion and a realisation of its connection with modern theology, and a keen appreciation of the distance and difference involved, is detectable in much of *Sacred and Legendary Art*. An example is her chapter on the treatment of Judas

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<sup>171</sup>Jameson, *Sacred*, p. 1.

Iscariot. Jameson identifies him as 'an eternal type of impiety, treachery and ingratitude', a constant figure of unrivalled villainy whose reputation has endured throughout the centuries. Even in the nineteenth century, she states, 'we shudder at the associations called up by his memory'. This memory, however, is formed entirely by reference to the 'sole and unequalled crime recorded of him'; having established the fundamental religious urgings that cause all ages to revile Judas, she explains the important differences in the form this disgust has taken. In the middle ages, he was regarded with horror, and seen as more wicked and malevolent than the Devil since Judas, being human, had not the excuse that he was following his infernal nature. His life was accordingly made a catalogue of stygian iniquity, embellished with a plethora of gruesome tales relating the incidents of his earlier life, and the details of his suicide and descent to Hell. Jameson describes these tales as one of the many instances when the people of the middle ages 'filled up the omissions of Scripture after their own fancy';<sup>172</sup> despite her empathy with the underlying devotional impulse behind them, she rejects the apocrypha themselves as the improbable contrivances of a less developed society.

Writing in praise of Lindsay's *Sketches*, Ruskin expressed particular admiration for the manner in which the author 'is never contracted in to the bigot, nor enflamed into the enthusiast; he never loses his memory of the outside world, never quits nor compromises his severe and reflective Protestantism.'<sup>173</sup> This comment raises an issue vital to the consideration of a religious history of any kind, that of the attitude of the writer towards a religious culture that is not their own. Ruskin saw Lindsay as balanced, but still rooted in a sense of what he was before the Catholic 'other'. The role commonly adopted by those writing on early Italian art was that of interpreter,

<sup>172</sup>*ibid.*, p.253.

<sup>173</sup>Ruskin, 'The History of Christian Art' (1847 review of Lindsay, originally published in the *Quarterly Review*). in Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol.12, p.174.

who could translate the symbols and obscure traditions of earlier ages into something comprehensible to a nineteenth-century audience. The Protestant authors of England had to therefore mediate between the concerns of their general historical system, based in the Catholic principles of *De la Poésie Chrétienne*, and an allegiance to their own religious denomination with its particular standards and prejudices. This was, of course, an impossible task, and Ruskin's approbation is paradoxical; Lindsay could not have been continually aware of his own faith and yet give an unbigoted view of Catholic art. His and Jameson's religious histories demonstrate a valiant but doomed attempt to relate the significance of early art to Victorian society without detracting from either the spiritual value they wished to assign their subject, or offending the religious sensibilities of their readership.

These sensibilities were diverse, and by the 1840s there was considerable tension between the various sects and denominations which coexisted at all levels of British society. The majority were Protestants, but there was little uniformity in thought or practice. Anti-Catholic feeling ran high during this period, mostly due to a sense that Catholics were insidiously creeping back into Britain and gaining themselves power and influence at the expense of the Church of England.<sup>174</sup> Those entertaining such animosities would be unlikely to be sympathetic to artistic productions that were presented as relating unambiguously to any period of the Catholic church.

*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* commented in its review of *Sacred and Legendary Art* that in 1849 the 'Protestant mind' has 'an undue contempt of histories of saints and martyrs of the Romish church', which had the dire consequence that 'the treasures of art of the best period are rarely understood, and still more rarely felt, in the spirit in which they were conceived.'<sup>175</sup> At the opposite extreme, English Catholics were hostile to Protestant denunciation of the iconographic traditions of their church; the

<sup>174</sup>R.J.Helmstadter and P.T.Phillips (eds.), *Religion in Victorian Society*. Lanham, New York, London, University Press of America, 1985, p.309.

<sup>175</sup>*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, vol.65, Jan.-June 1849, p.175.

rise in interest in early art inspired pride and a certain territorialism amongst some Catholics, as the journalism of Wiseman demonstrates. Also, certain Protestant sectarian movements, most notably the Oxford Movement or Tractarians, promoted a view of church history that called attention to these Catholic traditions and the major role they had played in the spiritual foundation of Christianity.<sup>176</sup> Such movements enjoyed considerable influence, and would have opened many minds to the potential significance of early religious art: they are perhaps one of the 'symptoms' of a taste for religious art amongst the wider English public referred to by Wiseman in the above quote. Against this background, the denominational stances of the *Sketches* and *Sacred and Legendary Art* are accordingly complex and contradictory.

Lindsay's acceptance of many of Rio's theories has already been discussed; however, his attempts to appreciate the religious purity of early Italian art in accordance with the rulings of *De la Poésie Chrétienne* coexist with the expression of some very modern, very Protestant attitudes, which are certainly 'severe' but hardly 'reflective'.

Brigstocke states that Lindsay was consumed with anxiety over the question of denomination when writing the *Sketches*. Lindsay assumed that his readership would be entirely Church of England, and had, as Brigstocke puts it, a 'staunch determination'<sup>177</sup> not to be taken for a Catholic or Catholic sympathiser as a result of his choice of subject matter. In the text, this determination occasionally takes the form of anger with what Catholic art presents to a viewer. Writing on an allegorical representation of Chastity by Giotto, he remarks that the virtue 'thus recommended brands our wives and mothers with a slur', and is a 'fatal and most unscriptural restriction', a 'delusion of most ancient date' - 'May God in his mercies shield us from such horrors in England!'<sup>178</sup> All attempts at intellectual composure cease abruptly, and a moral art historian seems to be voicing the views which the discourse was

<sup>176</sup>Helmstadter and Philips (eds.), *Religion*, p.71.

<sup>177</sup>Brigstocke, 'Lord Lindsay', p.51.

<sup>178</sup>Lindsay, *Sketches*, vol.2, p.43.



conceived to combat. This occurs elsewhere in the text, although the tone changes from fury to intense scepticism. Considering a depiction of *St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, also by Giotto, he wryly comments 'that the wounds actually existed during St. Francis' lifetime there can be no question, although Catholics and Protestants will account for their infliction very differently'.<sup>179</sup>

Notable among Lindsay's efforts to distance himself from the specific religious sympathies embodied in early Italian art is his treatment of the iconography of much of it as fiction, in much the same way as Jameson described many tales of the life of Judas Iscariot as being the product of the 'fancy' of the Middle Ages. At the very beginning of Lindsay's volumes is an iconographical section entitled 'Christian Mythology, Legends of the Saints', in which a dispassionate historical approach is taken to aspects of Catholic belief, with the author drawing parallels with the mythologies of ancient Greece. This aspect of the *Sketches* outraged Wiseman, who proclaimed in the *Dublin Review* that it was 'blasphemously irreverent',<sup>180</sup> and led to 'serious faults' in the text as a whole which made it 'painful to a Catholic reader'.<sup>181</sup> Lindsay's agonising over the best way to mollify a Protestant readership when writing his book thus resulted in it causing grievous offence to English Catholics.

Wiseman's 'Christian Art' displays an evident awareness of *Rio*, and has much in common with the English moral art historians. 'The Blessed Giovanni, or, as he is oftener called, Angelico da Fiesole' is cited as the foremost painter of the mystic school, on the basis that the connection 'between perfection in virtue (where abilities are not deficient) and perfection in Christian art' are best exhibited in his life and works.<sup>182</sup> The 'succession of great artists in Italy' was interrupted, he states, by 'a

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>180</sup> Wiseman, *Essays*, vol.3, p.384.

<sup>181</sup> *ibid.*, p.389.

<sup>182</sup> *ibid.*, p.367. Elsewhere, on the connection between an artist and his paintings, Wiseman remarks on the necessity on the part of the religious artist for 'holiness of



school of religious naturalists', who thought they could depict saints 'by combining natural beauty with studied attitude.'<sup>183</sup> Wiseman even seeks to explain early Italian art by referring to its original function, arguing that the formal compositions which dominated the productions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were due to the fact that they were painted 'for the people', and thus had to be immediately comprehensible in order to serve as effective aids to popular devotion.<sup>184</sup> Despite these shared ideas, however, Wiseman found the attempts made by Lindsay to interpret sacred Catholic history as mythology to be unacceptable, not only because they were sacrilegious, but also because they pointed to a contradiction at the heart of Lindsay's project. After mentioning with some incredulity Lindsay's comparisons of Mariolatry with the worship of Diana or Isis, Wiseman marvels that 'the enthusiastic admirer of early Christian art can this think of all that inspired it'; he is one who 'looks upon it with the irreverent eyes, and speaks of it with the flippant tongue, wherewith he might approach the abominations of heathen fable.'<sup>185</sup> The Catholic critic could not reconcile Lindsay's intellectual deconstruction of the creed which gave issue to the Italian 'primitives' with his marvelling elsewhere in his volumes at their pure Christian spirituality. The effusive admiration in the *Sketches* for the Virgins and Saints painted by the masters of the mystic school, found in the chapters following the savage attack on Giotto's allegorical figure of Chastity quoted above, is described contemptuously by Wiseman as an attempt on the part of the author 'to put forth the lily, after he has scorned its whiteness.'<sup>186</sup>

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life, and the attempt, at least, to realise in himself the character that he wishes to depict" (p.366).

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p.370. Works of Christian art could not 'disturb the habitual train of thought, and consequently the devotion of those who came to be edified and to pray before them.'

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p.384.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p.386.

Although it failed to draw a similar riposte from Catholic commentators, Jameson's stance on this issue in her writing was no less contradictory. Much is made in recent studies of her of the way she 'maintained a historical distance from the religious art about which she wrote',<sup>187</sup> of the 'historical and objective view she took of her subject matter',<sup>188</sup> Contemporary commentators held the same opinion; the *Athenaeum* declared in its review of *Sacred and Legendary Art* that the author had taken 'the aesthetical rather than the religious view'.<sup>189</sup> Jameson herself describes her approach as one which was 'critical not credulous',<sup>190</sup> but as with Lindsay her commixture of detached intellectualism, and emotional religious enthusiasms inspired by her subject matter, creates a somewhat inconsistent end product. She maintained that an understanding of the beauty of early religious images was an act of imaginative reconstruction, since the gulf between the cultures they were produced for and modern England prevented any real sympathy. Much of Jameson's analysis contradicts this principle, however, her engagement with both the art and the sources which inspired it often depending directly on the response that her clearly strong faith elicits from her. The title of her book, as with that of Lindsay's section on 'Christian Mythology', is significant, as it makes the immediate initial distinction between that which is based on the Bible and therefore sacred, and that which is apocryphal, invariably Catholic, and consigned to the realm of fiction or allegory. Writing on subjects that still had religious relevance to Victorian society, and obviously to her personally, her piety occasionally overcomes her; angels, for example, are described as being:

gladly placed between their humanity and the awful supremacy of an unseen God, the ministering spirits who were the agents of His will, the witnesses of His glory, the partakers of His bliss, and who in their preternatural attributes of love

<sup>187</sup>Hilary Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy*, Oxford and Cambridge Mass., Blackwell, 1992, p.99.

<sup>188</sup>Sherman and Holcomb (ed.), *Women as Interpreters*, introduction by the editors, p.12.

<sup>189</sup>*Athenaeum*, No.1105, 30th December 1848, p.1335.

<sup>190</sup>Jameson, *Sacred*, p.6.

and knowledge filled up that vast space in the created universe, which intervened between mortal man and the infinite omnipotent LORD OF ALL.<sup>191</sup>

Although imparting information, the devout, sermonising tone is unmistakable. Neither can Jameson resist commenting upon the interpretations of the Bible presented in pictures of sacred episodes, evidently having an absolute faith in scripture and very particular ideas about how it was to be visually portrayed in art. When discussing representations of the *Agony in the Garden*, for example, she takes issue with the artistic convention of actually depicting an angel presenting the cup of bitterness to Christ; the reference to the cup in the pages of the Bible is metaphorical, she opines, and the angel is sent to comfort Him, not 'announce to Him the decree He knew full well'. It is still less appropriate to introduce the instruments of the passion, 'as in so many pictures'.<sup>192</sup> Having established the great difference between modern and early religion as basically that between refined reason and credulous (though imaginative) simplicity, she then criticises paintings for bearing evidence of less sophisticated Bible interpretation.

A measure of resolution to these inner conflicts was achieved, however, through the elevation of early Italian art and the religious doctrines from which it drew its iconography to an ethereal level where denominational discord was irrelevant. Such painting was presented as belonging to a purer realm, which was beyond the divisions and complexities of the modern age. Jameson, writing on the Virgin Patronesses in *Sacred and Legendary Art*, stresses that they are not to be seen as ludicrous embodiments of a superstition which makes a mockery of profound and serious Christian belief, but rather as 'lovely allegories to which the world listened in its dreamy childhood'.<sup>193</sup> The unreality of the 'perfect' is again evoked in the idyllic simplicity of the 'myth of the medieval'. The art of this era is significantly presented by

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*, vol.2, pp.465-466.

Lindsay as being beyond the concerns of creed, in a clear attempt to establish some kind of internal consistency; he argued that mystic painting, and in particular that of Angelico, was 'so unlike anything else' that 'no exclusive partisan, neither Catholic or Protestant in the absolute sense of the terms, can fairly appreciate Fra Angelico'.<sup>194</sup> Both here draw upon a conception popular amongst Victorian medievalists, that of the 'Church Eternal'. It was asserted that before the Reformation the Church had enjoyed a utopian period of unity; the schism that was to come caused both sides to suffer, and caused the death of profound religious art.<sup>195</sup> The history of the pre-Reformation thus became a region of purity which Protestants as well as Catholics could lay claim to; in a time of unity, the fundamental binary opposition of modern denominational difference was nonsensical. Pugin was a significant early exponent of this notion, arguing in his *Contrasts* that the Reformation had both unleashed the destructive forces of Protestantism, and sent Catholicism on a lamentable path to decadence and corruption.<sup>196</sup> Wiseman, perhaps due to his more formal connections with the Roman Catholic church, did not subscribe either to the concept of the 'Church Eternal', which is noticeably absent from his writing, or Pugin's low opinion of modern Catholicism. He zealously defended his church from the criticisms of Trollope in 'Superficial Travellers', charging her with a basic ignorance and prejudice towards that which she mocks and deprecates.<sup>197</sup> With regards to the 'Church Eternal', Wiseman was clearly not prepared to allow Protestants any claim to what he considered exclusively Catholic

<sup>194</sup>Lindsay, *Sketches*, p.245.

<sup>195</sup>Culler, *The Victorian Mirror*, p.170.

<sup>196</sup>Pugin, *Contrasts*, (2nd ed.), p.51. He wrote of 'the most lamentable contrast between the ancient spirit and modern practices of Catholicism, setting forth at one view the summit of excellence, and the lowest depth of degradation.'

<sup>197</sup>Typical of Trollope's approach is her comment that the Christmas Mass in St.Peters, although a magnificent spectacle, is 'essentially ludicrous' (Trollope, *A Visit*, vol.2, p.364). Wiseman's response was to state that her tone was 'light and supercilious', and that she spoke of Catholicism 'at once with ignorance and with flippancy', passing judgement on a religious system 'which she certainly never investigated' (Wiseman, *Essays*, vol.3, pp.451-454). Dickens' *Pictures of Italy* also contained numerous anti-Catholic observations: see chapter 4, section V, p.336, note 165.

heritage; his views on the fundamental incompatibility of Protestantism and Christian art of any era will be discussed at greater length below.

#### VI. Hopes of Regeneration: The Denial of Rio's Tragedy

The evocation of the 'Church Eternal' in *Sacred and Legendary Art* prompted a longing for the past in *Blackwood's*; the magazine's reviewer wrote of the legends of the Patron Saints of Christendom that 'we read these now with some regret at our abated faith'. The commonality of the supposedly alien, despite its crude form, is accepted also, with the journalist declaring that 'the memory of Christian heroism should never be lost sight of in a Christian country'.<sup>198</sup> The expression of such sentiments in the press could well be one of the 'symptoms' of a new receptiveness to religious art among the general public mentioned by Wiseman. However, periodical reviews also reveal that the emphasis placed by Jameson on the non-literal or unreal nature of medieval legend led to readers being unable to consider it seriously at all. Of the legend of St. George of Cappadocia, the *Spectator* remarked that 'to us it reads marvellously like some of the sanctimonious swindlings recorded by the earlier Italian novelists'.<sup>199</sup> Despite this reservation concerning some of the material, the magazine was full of praise for the text as a whole; the central point about the neglect of the moral significance of ancient art is recognised as valid, and Jameson herself is lauded as the popular force behind a new era of criticism. *Sacred and Legendary Art* garnered many positive reviews; Lindsay's *Sketches* was not so fortunate. The criticisms of the *Athenaeum* and the *Spectator* focus upon the same perceived aspects of the book; the former comments that 'the fervid zeal of our author induces him to indulge in the pulpit style', the latter attributes the very existence of the book to 'ardent feeling, more akin to love or devotion than to enthusiasm'. The result is a volume which is

<sup>198</sup>*Blackwood's*, vol.65, Jan.-June 1849, pp.175-186.

<sup>199</sup>*Spectator*, vol.21, 1848, p.1141.

'dreamy and mysterious',<sup>200</sup> or 'hazy and transcendental', which needs to be 'bound down by the tangible in order to be clear'.<sup>201</sup> The text is here identified so closely with its subject that it appears to take on mystic qualities itself, as does its author; these judgements are difficult to rationalise given the angry and sceptical Protestant interjections present in the *Sketches*, and stand in complete contrast to Wiseman's harsh criticism of Lindsay's excessive intellectualism regarding his subject. The dichotomous nature of the text is thus revealed through various reviewers' attacks on its conflicting parts; Protestants found the praise of the mystic school it contained to be too vague and spiritual, whereas Catholics thought that its occasionally interrogative tone was both dispassionate and irreverent.

The offence of the *Sketches* was seen by Protestant critics to be essentially one of limitation in scope and judgement, which was held to confound any historical purpose the book may have aspired to. Lindsay's investigation, the *Spectator* maintained, was basically myopic:

Lord Lindsay holds that Giotto, not Cimabue, was the true founder of modern art; though we should rather incline to Leonardo, as exhibiting no traces of the trammels of the older school, and even now, after so many centuries and such vast changes in manners and opinions, requiring no allowances for his style.<sup>202</sup>

The magazine was not attempting to deny the importance of the earlier schools, but sought rather to emphasise that they should not be admired at the expense of later masters whose accomplishments could be considered to be greater. This argument was, of course, open to retaliation from the standpoint of moral art history, but it indicates a current of opinion which was partly responsible for halting the growth of Rio's influence at the end of the 1840s. English critics generally display a marked unwillingness to accept the peculiar Tragedy of *De la Poésie Chrétienne*. This is

<sup>200</sup> *Athenaeum*. No. 1011, 11th March 1847, p. 290.

<sup>201</sup> *Spectator*, vol. 20, 1847, p. 14.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.



particularly evident with regards to Raphael; Hilary Fraser notes that he was commonly regarded as the culminating genius of the Renaissance in mid-Victorian England.<sup>203</sup> Reactions to those who dared criticise him were vehemently defensive, as a hostile review of *Modern Painters II* in the *Athenaeum* demonstrates. Ruskin's critical style is said to be characterised by 'extreme irreverence and indiscriminate abuse', with the author's bilious approach even leading him 'to spit foul epithets at Il Divino himself'. The most striking thing about the volume is claimed to be its blatant hypocrisy, with Ruskin lecturing on ignorance in art and then demonstrating it in his own work; the journal advises him also to 'spare his seraphical discourses about the holiness and loveliness of a reverential spirit, until he has imbibed its real essence himself', otherwise his writing can resemble nothing but 'those meeting house homilies preached through the nose, whilst the lips mutter hatred, malice and uncharitableness'.<sup>204</sup> That dissent from the ideal of 'Il Divino' earned such a crushing rebuke testifies to the strength of feeling that existed concerning the unquestionable nature of the artist's status in England.

This sentiment regarding the greatness of Raphael was shared by Jameson; as discussed earlier, she deliberately avoided the controversial conclusions regarding the latter half of his career that were demanded by absolute adherence to the theories of Rio in the *Memoirs*. Raphael seems to have acted as an ultimate ideal for her and others, with the character constructed for him combining the worldly sophistication and eminence of the artist-hero with the purity of soul of the artist-saint, to form a figure who was entirely perfect in every conceivable respect. As with the critic from the *Athenaeum*, Jameson defended this somewhat overburdened composite vigorously in the face of disparagement; in the course of the biography of Raphael in the *Memoirs*, she mentions:

<sup>203</sup> Fraser, *The Victorians*, p.44.

<sup>204</sup> *Athenaeum*, No.978, July 25th 1846, p.766.



a vulgar idea at one time prevalent that Raphael was a man of vicious and dissipated habits, and even died a victim to his excesses; this slander has been silenced forever by indisputable evidence to the contrary, and now we may reflect with pleasure that nothing rests on surer evidence than the admirable qualities of Raphael; that no earthly renown was ever so unsullied by reproach, so justified by merit, so confirmed by concurrent opinion, so established by time.<sup>205</sup>

This 'indisputable evidence' may well be a letter from Raphael to Fabius of Ravenna, which alluded, it was claimed, to Raphael's benevolent care of this old and infirm man; it is cited by Eastlake in his 'Life of Raphael' as 'a certificate of the great artist's moral virtues'.<sup>206</sup> Despite the wide variance between both their critical style and general historical concerns, Eastlake and Jameson were in complete concordance in their wish to establish the moral purity of Raphael as being beyond doubt. It could be argued that Jameson sought to craft a simplistic portrait of the artist for the *Memoirs*, in order not to challenge the limited learning of her intended readership, and present them with an image of complete perfection in the visual arts. She was, however, entirely consistent in her endorsement of all the stages of Raphael's career, continuing to supply glowingly positive estimates of him in later, more sophisticated texts such as *Sacred and Legendary Art*, and seldom conceding any comparative inferiority on the part of the Roman paintings.<sup>207</sup>

Another area of later art which even the English moral art historians would not relinquish was that of the sixteenth-century Venetian school. Rio regarded the progress of art in Venice as identical to that in the rest of Italy, albeit slightly delayed and on a far smaller scale. Giovanni Bellini was held up by him as the supreme mystical painter of the city, and is exalted for his 'purity of expression'. Those who

<sup>205</sup> Jameson, *Memoirs*, vol.2, p.85.

<sup>206</sup> Eastlake, 'Life of Raphael', p.255.

<sup>207</sup> Jameson, *Sacred*, p.225. For example, the cartoon of *St. Paul Preaching at Athens* is praised as 'the sublimest ideal of embodied eloquence that was ever expressed in Art.'

followed him, such as Giorgione and Titian, are said to have totally departed from his pious example and 'exercised an almost Satanic influence on art'.<sup>208</sup> Naturalism and sensuality are once more the corrupters, and ultimately destroyers, of true religious art. Few English commentators, no matter how receptive they were to the ideas of Rio elsewhere, could concur with him regarding these artists. Mary Shelley, for instance, when before the Titians in the sacristy of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, declared their beauty and power to be such that 'they ought to convert the exclusive admirer of the mystic school'.<sup>209</sup> This comment, like that of the *Spectator* regarding Lindsay's determination of the founder of modern art, identifies strictly-observed moral art history to be wilfully confined in its outlook, thus denying excellence in art for no justifiable reason.<sup>210</sup> Later exponents of Riosque thought were similarly defiant in their praise of sixteenth-century Venetians; Ruskin, ironically enough given the wrath his moral judgement of Raphael incited, was prominent among these. In *Modern Painters II*, in the section entitled 'Of Imagination Penetrative', he writes of an *Entombment* by Tintoretto at Parma, 'whose sublimity of conception and grandeur of colour are seen in the highest perfection, by their opposition to the morbid and vulgar sentimentalism of Correggio'.<sup>211</sup> Although still formulating notions of beauty polemically in elevating one style through the damning of another, the object of his admiration here could never be recommended by a strict adherent to the principles of moral art history.

Of *Modern Painters II*, *Sketches of the History of Christian Art and Sacred and Legendary Art*, Jameson's volumes were the most successful, both commercially and

<sup>208</sup>Rio, *De la*, pp.365-395.

<sup>209</sup>Shelley, *Rambles*, vol.2, p.95.

<sup>210</sup>Brigstocke, 'Lord Lindsay', p.50. This was certainly thought by some to apply to the discourse's originator; a letter from Anne Lindsay, Alexander's sister-in-law, is here reprinted in which she declares that Rio's taste 'appears to me incorrect or rather so full of prepossession that he will go into raptures at any daub of the early times and can find no beauty in the best pictures painted after a certain date.'

<sup>211</sup>Ruskin, *Modern Painters II*, p.262.

critically.<sup>212</sup> The author and her work became quite celebrated in genteel society; Henry Reeve remarked in a letter of December 1848 to Jameson, who was then in Paris, that if she 'had not cut the vanities of London, as you have done, for too long, you would hear our admiration in every drawing-room.'<sup>213</sup> There appear to have been two principal reasons for this universal popularity. One was the intelligibility of her style, described as 'never obtrusive, always intelligent and pertinent',<sup>214</sup> and 'fascinating, forcible and graceful';<sup>215</sup> such praise stands in complete contrast to the accusations levelled at Ruskin and Lindsay, and the deficiencies subsequently identified in both. The other reason, I would argue, was the comparative lack of controversy in her text. Although she often praised early painting and criticised the efforts of later schools in a manner clearly indebted to Rio, Jameson is never drawn to the exclusive admiration of mystic art found in Lindsay, and indeed makes positive and negative judgements on a wide range of artists in the course of her exegesis.<sup>216</sup> The worth of the early is asserted, but not at the expense of attention to the late. The purposeful iconoclasm found in Ruskin is also avoided; despite her attacks on the nature of established connoisseurial practice, Jameson makes few contentious statements regarding the canon of artists on which this practice was based, seeking to expand rather than replace it. It is interesting to note, however, that Wiseman did not subject *Sacred and Legendary Art* to the same excoriating scrutiny he gave Lindsay's *Sketches*, although it featured a similar redefinition of sacred Catholic history as legend or allegory. It is possible that Jameson's gender and humble origins led to her being taken less seriously by Wiseman as a threat to the honour of the Roman Catholic faith, and the integrity of its traditions.<sup>217</sup>

<sup>212</sup> Johnston, *Anna Jameson*, p.181. *Sacred and Legendary Art* ran into ten editions, and enjoyed enormous popular success.

<sup>213</sup> Jameson, *Letters*, p.238, letter from Henry Reeve, London, 5th Dec.1848.

<sup>214</sup> *Spectator*, vol.21, 1848, p.1141.

<sup>215</sup> *Blackwood's*, vol.65, Jan.-June 1849, p.189.

<sup>216</sup> Jameson, *Sacred*, p.229. For example, Murillo's *Crucifixion of St. Andrew* is praised at length for its 'power and pathos'.

<sup>217</sup> See chapter 4, section III, pp.303-5, and section V, p.342, for dismissiveness.

An important element in the denial of the absolute Tragedy of painting presented in *De la Poésie Chrétienne* by Victorian critics was the widespread hope that a grand revival of English painting was imminent. This enabled a Comic emplotment of art history to be made; despite the Tragedy that had befallen religious painting during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, its excellencies were to be recaptured by the English school of the mid-nineteenth century. Lindsay imagined this process to be a straightforward revival of the mystic school in modern England. He urged the study of early art, stating that it was vital for any improvement to come about in modern painting; without its example English artists 'will not repent, they will not forsake their idols and their evil ways - they will not abandon sense for spirit, oils for fresco'.<sup>218</sup> There is perhaps an implicit reference being made here to the modern German school, or Nazarenes, of whom Lindsay was an enthusiastic admirer. Whilst visiting Germany in 1839, he had remarked in his journal that the work of Overbeck was 'quite in the spirit of the *école mystique*', and had been amazed by the frescoes of Cornelius in Munich.<sup>219</sup> These opinions regarding the revival of art, and the glowing example set for English painters by the Nazarenes, were shared by Pugin, who referred to Overbeck in the 1841 edition of *Contrasts* as 'that prince of Christian painters', whose 'school of mystical and religious artists' were 'fast putting to shame the natural and sensual school of art'.<sup>220</sup> Both favoured the idea of a resurrection of Christian art, with Pugin stating that it was 'only by communing with the spirit of past ages' that the modern age 'can arrive at a just appreciation of the glories we have lost, or adopt the necessary means for their recovery'.<sup>221</sup>

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towards Jameson in the critical community.

<sup>218</sup>Lindsay, *Sketches*, p.390.

<sup>219</sup>Brigstocke, 'Lord Lindsay', pp.32-33. From Lindsay's journal, entry dated 20th May 1839.

<sup>220</sup>Pugin, *Contrasts*, (2nd ed.) p.18.

<sup>221</sup>*ibid.*, p.16.

Wiseman sought to qualify this assessment in 'Christian Art', arguing that modern religious painting must not rest upon 'mere reproduction' of the works of previous ages, but must rather be creative and inventive, permitted to 'imitate, but not transcribe'.<sup>222</sup> His esteem for the Nazarenes was as great, if not greater, than that of Lindsay and Pugin; the 'older Italian and modern German masters' are described as constituting the first rank of Christian art, with Overbeck being placed on an equal footing with the 'Blessed Angelico'. They were considered by Wiseman to have the vital, and Roesque, quality of devout sincerity. He declared that:

no-one can know them without seeing at once that they believe in all they express, that their hearts go with their hands in their work, that they are impressed with the feeling that what they are doing is a holy thing.<sup>223</sup>

This approbation did not, however, rest upon a perception of the Nazarenes as a reincarnation of the mystical school of fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italy. Wiseman felt that the German painters had reinvented the notion of Christian art to suit the different context for which it was produced. Despite his defence of the historical status of all elements of Catholic iconography, and the formal compositional types of early Italian art, he praises the Nazarenes, and Overbeck in particular, for making their pictures direct, untrammelled by any complexities of subject or arrangement which could detract from the religious potency of the end product. To bind modern Christian art to the representational conventions of the past, would be, Wiseman opines, a 'groundless tyranny'.<sup>224</sup>

Like Lindsay and Pugin, Wiseman was an ardent supporter of the idea of a modern English religious school. He even regarded the primary significance of the new taste for the Italian 'primitives' in England to be that it marked a 'first step' towards the

<sup>222</sup> Wiseman, *Essays*, vol.3, p.364.

<sup>223</sup> *ibid.*, p.366.

<sup>224</sup> *ibid.*, p.372.

creation of such a school.<sup>225</sup> Both Pugin and Wiseman defined the qualities of the religious art they championed against those of another creed, which was effectively designated the enemy or antithesis of their particular conceptions of mysticism. In Pugin's case this enemy was Paganism; in the course of *Contrasts* he defines the revival of Christian art as the rallying of artists and critics to 'break the chains of Paganism', and shrug off the connoisseurship that for centuries has proclaimed its supremacy.<sup>226</sup> Wiseman, however, saw Protestantism as embodying the opposite values to those which he sought to encourage and support in order to instigate an English school of Christian art. Although Pugin was unequivocal in his identification of Protestant crimes against the cause of religious art in England, his book contains an implicit argument for an inclusive revival of art and architecture. The evocation of the 'Church Eternal' in *Contrasts* suggests that the author wished for unity among Christians, in order to vanquish the common foe of Paganism.

Wiseman could countenance no such denominational inclusivity, and sought rather to claim Christian art from all eras for Catholicism alone. He states that:

without presumption it may really be said, that the blessing of genius for Christian art is not one which it has pleased the Almighty to give out of the Catholic church.

The fact that every Catholic country had managed to produce a school of religious art, whereas the Protestant countries had all conspicuously failed to, is taken by him to indicate that some sort of divine preference is in action. Protestantism is described as 'barren' in artistic terms, and the reasons for this are considered by Wiseman to be given ample illustration in the *Sketches*. Lindsay's hopes for the birth of an English mystic school are dismissed with a flourish, in the light of his treatment of Catholic history as mythology. Wiseman incredulously remarks:

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<sup>225</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>226</sup>Pugin, *Contrasts*, (2nd ed.), p. 16.



Imagine the possibility of a school of art springing up among a sect, who, while they pretend to copy or rival old art, consider its materials - a mythology!<sup>227</sup>

A religious school cannot exist without belief, Wiseman declared, and the beliefs on which Christian art rested were fundamentally Catholic in nature. Deprived of the rich subject matter available to their Catholic counterparts, Protestant artists could not hope to aspire to their 'creative vigour'. Wiseman's identification of the issue of religious painting and his denomination is so strong that by the conclusion of his essay the term 'Christian art' has significantly evolved into 'Catholic art', which is ready to 'spring into life' at the hands of an unnamed body of young artists who are 'full of confidence, because full of faith.'<sup>228</sup> There can be little doubt that Wiseman was here using religious art as metaphor for Catholicism as a whole, turning an essay on painting into an allegory of the Catholic situation in England towards the end of the 1840s: 'Christian Art' can thus be understood as an attempt to embolden the Catholic readership of the Dublin Review in preparation for the actions their church would take in the 1850s, which will be discussed later in the thesis.<sup>229</sup>

Despite this firm loyalty to the church of Rome, which had a deep influence on Wiseman's thought, some of his proclamations regarding the practices of modern religious artists have much in common with those made by certain Protestant critics. Jameson and Ruskin certainly concurred with Wiseman's opinion that modern religious artists should not simply transcribe the art of earlier epochs, and bind themselves to the 'groundless tyranny' of pictorial and iconographic conventions which had little relevance to mid-nineteenth century Britain. All three can be said to have entertained more Hegelian notions concerning the creation of an English school

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<sup>227</sup> Wiseman, *Essays*, vol.3, pp.382-384.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p.388.

<sup>229</sup> See chapter 3, section VII, pp.271-2. In the preface to his *Essays*, Wiseman describes the Dublin Review as 'the organ and promoter of Catholic progress' (vol.1, preface p.ix).



of Christian art. Jameson declared in a letter to Lady Byron of March 1847 that her book, in contradistinction to Lindsay's, was going to be 'against the revival of a style of art'.<sup>230</sup> Accordingly, in *Sacred and Legendary Art*, she stresses the necessity of both the study of mystic painting, and the maintenance of a certain distance; it cannot be allowed 'to fetter us', and Victorian society must 'trust in the progressive spirit of Christianity to furnish us with new impersonations of the good - new combinations of the beautiful'.<sup>231</sup> Ruskin also regarded the case of early art as a lesson that must be learnt, but with some qualification. Its resurrection was simply impossible, he believed, commenting in his review of the *Sketches* that:

The visions of the cloister must depart with its superstitious peace - the quick, apprehensive symbolism of early Faith must yield to the abstract teaching of disciplined Reform.<sup>232</sup>

In short, these two critics argue that art can no sooner return to a mystical state than an adult can return to childhood; the period that produced it had an innocence which, once lost, cannot be reclaimed. In correspondence with Hegel's determination of historical emplotment, the revived 'progressive spirit' must learn from the lessons of past tragedies, but determine its own particular manifestation, which will inevitably prove to be superior to all that have preceded it. Ruskin appears to be claiming in the above quote that the simple, superstitious representations of the Catholic past must be replaced by an iconographic system that can do justice to the complexities of modern Protestantism. His vision of the change that must occur was thus at complete variance with Wiseman's favour for the direct, powerful image designed primarily to inspire a viewer's (Catholic) faith. Ruskin's views on the production of Christian art in the mid nineteenth century will be discussed at greater length in chapter four, in relation to the

<sup>230</sup> quoted Johnston, *Anna Jameson*, p.182.

<sup>231</sup> Jameson, *Sacred*, p.7.

<sup>232</sup> Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol.12, p.247.

debate that raged during the early 1850s over the productions and proclamations of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.<sup>233</sup>

This 'progressive spirit' was not, of course, limited to the practice of art alone. An assumption underlying all the texts of moral art history discussed in this chapter is that early Italian art, if properly presented and interpreted, has the potential to enhance the whole of Victorian society. There was a pronounced political dimension to the development in taste that occurred during the 1840s; the frescoes towards which the attention of England was turned were relics of a time when Italy was free, which were now being neglected by her oppressors. As Fraser points out, the love of Italian culture encouraged Liberal politics in England, and to campaign, as many did, for the preservation and restoration of ancient art was to effectively support the cause of Italian independence.<sup>234</sup> Such feelings also applied to the politics of modern Britain; the fresco was widely interpreted as a democratic symbol, as it was a truly public form of art. This was the reasoning behind the decision made in the early 1840s to decorate the Houses of Parliament with frescoes, and an essay by Henry Clarke, published in connection with an exhibition at Westminster Hall that related to the project, made an explicit connection between fresco and democracy in the history of Italy. Clarke argued that fresco had flourished in 'the Tuscan republics' of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, being used to execute public artworks in municipal buildings, but had declined with the establishment of autocracies such as that of the Medici in Florence during the sixteenth century.<sup>235</sup> The promotion of a love and understanding

<sup>233</sup>See chapter 4, section VI.

<sup>234</sup>Fraser, *The Victorians*, p.95.

<sup>235</sup>H.G.Clarke, *A Critical Examination of the Cartoons, Frescoes and Sculpture Exhibited at Westminster Hall, to which is added The History and Practice of Fresco Painting*, London, H.G.Clarke and Co., 1844, pp.55-56. With the dominance of Florence by the Medici, Clarke states that the concerns of the rich and despotic individual came to outweigh those of the populace and 'the fresco, so long supported on municipal rights, declined, and a softer and more luscious style grew, like a parasitical plant on a withered stump.'

of fresco in mid-nineteenth century Britain effectively signalled a wish among commentators to see art, both ancient and modern, given back to the people. The taste for the 'primitives' thus became a means of assaulting the extremely undemocratic practice of private ownership.

## Chapter Two

### 'Art is No Longer a Plaything': Early Italian Art and the Space of the Gallery

In this chapter the focus of discussion will be shifted from the critical discourse formulated to allow the intellectual legitimization of 'primitive' painting, to the art objects themselves as they were encountered in England during the 1840s and 1850s. As critical interest in earlier Italian art rose, both private collectors and public galleries became eager to obtain examples of the foremost painters of the era. Works from the fifteenth, fourteenth and even thirteenth centuries became a regular feature at public exhibitions of old masters, a prominent example of which was the annual summer display mounted at the British Institution on Pall Mall. A number of early pictures were admitted to the National Gallery, having been either expressly purchased by the government, or donated by private individuals. Much of the commentary on these occasions provided in magazines and newspapers demonstrates a clear awareness of the moral art history developed from Rio's *De la Poésie Chrétienne*, and its principles were regularly employed in order to praise, defend or simply explain 'Christian' art to their readerships. I will argue, however, that moral art history played a more profound role in the evolution of Victorian attitudes towards old master paintings, and conceptions of their proper function within society. The polemical aspects of the discourse led critics who adopted it to question the traditional modes of control and display dominant in the gallery and exhibition hall, and demand change in the established structures erected around the appreciation of ancient art, in a manner similar to writers like Anna Jameson and John Ruskin. It can be asserted that the direct involvement of art objects and the general public lent the invectives of exhibition reviewers an immediacy lacking in the more general attacks found in formal works of

art history. Their subject had more obvious social relevance, as art was being literally laid before the people. In the case of the British Institution, this art was largely privately owned, the possessions of a privileged few which were being made temporarily accessible to a wider audience. This situation was charged with class issues, and encouraged commentators to interrogate notions of the practical purpose of art exhibitions, and the benefits they were supposed to convey to the visitor, who could no longer be assumed to possess a degree of connoisseurial experience. Displays were often perceived to have failed due to the shortcomings of the works which comprised them, the responsibility for which could be attributed to the poor judgement of the collectors involved. Even the shortcomings detected in the policies and purchases of the National Gallery were assigned by many critics to the culture of acquisition which they regarded as exerting a pernicious dominance over the English appreciation of old master painting.

In 1854, Gustav Waagen's *Treasures of Art in Great Britain* was published by John Murray. The project of the three-volume work, as explained in a lengthy introduction, was similar to that of the author's *Works of Art and Artists in England* of 1836. The titles of both suggest a broad inclusiveness which neither possessed; Waagen's attention was confined almost exclusively to the cataloguing of private and public collections of old master paintings. His justification for producing another book with such similar aims to the first was the extent of the development he believed had occurred in the English art world during the intervening time. There was, he claimed, an 'incomparably greater Catholicism of taste, and a growing conviction of the high importance of the arts' in England in the 1850s. Waagen identifies the primary manifestation of this 'conviction' to be an abandonment of the limited preferences of the pre-Victorian era for an interest in the 'entire development of painting'.<sup>1</sup> The proof

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<sup>1</sup>Gustav Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*. 3 vols., London, John Murray, 1854, vol.1, pp.28-33.

of this claim is taken to be the sudden rise in the number of early Italian and Netherlandish paintings encountered in both private collections and public galleries. Public galleries were of far less significance in his volumes, as only a small percentage of the nation's art reserves were contained within them. The majority of *Treasures* was devoted to accounts of the pictures hanging in the country mansions and town houses of the nobility and gentry; the work of Waagen, as Frank Hermann states, presented England quite unequivocally as 'the land of the private collector'.<sup>2</sup>

### I. Italian 'Primitives' and the Identity of the Private Collector

Although the collecting of early art increased markedly during the 1840s and 1850s, as Waagen claims, it was not unknown prior to these decades. William Beckford is a notable example of a wealthy art enthusiast who developed and indulged a taste for fifteenth-century Italian paintings over the course of the first forty years of the nineteenth century. From a family of long-established wealth which could allegedly trace its genealogy back to the time of Richard III,<sup>3</sup> Beckford's collection included paintings attributed to Francia, Masolino, Giovanni Bellini and Marcello Venusti at the time of his death in 1844.<sup>4</sup> Described by Ellis Roberts in his memoir of the poet Samuel Rogers as 'a man of sinister reputation',<sup>5</sup> Beckford himself seems to have been regarded with a commixture of fascination and horror by his contemporaries. He had secured himself enduring fame as the author of the romantic novel *Yathek*, a tale of princes, castles and doomed love, which was originally published in 1786; accounts of

<sup>2</sup>Frank Hermann, *The English as Collectors: A Documentary Chrestomathy*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1972, p.3.

<sup>3</sup>*Athenaeum*, No.864, 18th May 1844, p.456. It is here claimed that his great-great uncle had died at the Battle of Bosworth fighting for the King.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, No.1084, 5th August 1848, p.780. At the Beckford sale four years after his death, the lots included a Francia *Baptism*, a Masolino *Woman Taken in Adultery*, a Venusti *Adoration of the Magi* and a Bellini *Marriage of St.Catharine*.

<sup>5</sup>R.Ellis Roberts, *Samuel Rogers and his Circle*, London, Methuen and Co., 1910, p.102.

his life at Fonthill Abbey near Bath accordingly attempt to cast the reality of his existence in as romantic a light as possible. Much is made of his reclusive habits, and the 276 foot high tower he had built in the Abbey's grounds, which rose from the midst of a walled garden. It was in this tower that the picture collection was housed, the structure being, in the words of the *Athenaeum*, 'crowded with the choicest productions of the easel'.<sup>6</sup> The official obituary printed in the magazine offered the following portrait of Beckford the connoisseur, describing him as:

a remarkable man, whose taste was cultivated to the highest possible point of refinement to which it could be carried by the assistance of great wealth, which he seems to have sacrificed willingly for the most exquisite sensations that could be attained from the elegant enjoyment of letters and virtù.

There is a suggestion of degeneracy here, of a morally suspect self-gratification on Beckford's part; the magazine goes on to call his life one of 'luxurious selfishness', in which art treasures that were of interest to all were locked away in a place 'exclusively consecrated to his own private benefit'.<sup>7</sup> A supplement to this obituary which appeared in the next issue went even further, describing Beckford's tower as a 'temple in dedication to grandeur, solitariness and the arts', alleging that 'here he often came without attendant, entered the gloomy pillar, and became wrapped in his own meditations'.<sup>8</sup>

There is an insinuation in these quotations that there was an idolatrous aspect to Beckford's private intimacy with his pictures in the tower at Fonthill. The obituary supplement mentioned that within the tower was a chapel, which was filled with devotional art. Allusions to a possible clandestine Roman Catholicism in the proprietor of Fonthill can be found elsewhere. Samuel Rogers recalled that when visiting Beckford, he noticed that the lights in one of the galleries were kept burning all night:

<sup>6</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 864, 18th May 1844, p. 455.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 863, 11th May 1844, p. 430.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 864, 18th May 1844, p. 456.



'in that gallery was a picture of St. Anthony, to which it was said that Beckford would sometimes steal and pay his devotions.' Such unconventional behaviour was understood by Rogers to be part of the makeup of a corrupt personality. Taken in conjunction with several of Beckford's unpublished stories, which Rogers found 'extremely fine, but rendered very objectionable on account of their subjects', the poet concluded that the mind of their author was 'to a certain degree diseased'.<sup>9</sup> The collection of early Italian devotional painting was seen, in the case of Beckford, as an implicit part of an arcane and superstitious eccentricity, with a further intimation of the possibility of heretical belief.

A complete contrast to this mysterious figure was that of William Wells of Redleaf, whose collecting career was contemporary with Beckford's, but was conducted along far more orthodox lines. A country gentleman whose family had made their massive fortune in shipbuilding, Wells purchased the productions of many different schools, but none from earlier than the sixteenth century. His particular favour had been reserved for seventeenth-century Dutch painting, and the *Athenaeum*, in its report of the sale of his pictures held after his death in 1848, thought it entirely understandable that as one who lived 'among his tenantry in the country, he should sympathise rather with the records of rural life rather than with the abstractions and speculations of higher art'.<sup>10</sup> A picture collection was taken to be a reflection of a man's character and experience. In the years before the legitimization of earlier Italian art by moral art history, the ownership of such paintings could be construed as somehow suspicious, as it was in the case of Beckford, evidence of a perverted spirit as well as an unusual connoisseurial interest.

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<sup>9</sup> A. Dyce (ed.), *Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers*, London, Edward Moxon, 1856, p. 215.

<sup>10</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 1073, 20th May 1848, p. 514.

Others besides Beckford did collect 'primitives' in the early nineteenth century and managed to escape the characterisation that was grafted onto him; men such as William Roscoe and William Young Ottley amassed considerable numbers of such works during these years, whilst remaining eminently respectable.<sup>11</sup> These collectors were operating outside the perimeters of accepted taste, however, and tended to adopt the status of scholars or specialists in a little-known field. Roscoe, for example, was a prominent historian of the Medici family in fifteenth-century Florence, and Ottley had spent over ten years living in Italy, during which time he reputedly acquired enormous first-hand knowledge of the art of the quattrocento and earlier,<sup>12</sup> as well as a clutch of earlier paintings, including Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity*.<sup>13</sup> However, in the early nineteenth century, the absence of any explicatory texts on 'primitive' painting, or examples in the major galleries and collections of England, made it seem inaccessibly esoteric and alien to the majority of connoisseurs. This sense of 'otherness' was entirely dispelled over the course of the 1840s and 1850s. The texts discussed in chapter one prompted a surge in interest and acquisition, and the paintings of the earlier epochs of Italian painting were entirely normalised for a Victorian audience. They still provoked debate and disagreement, but the ownership of examples came to signify intellectual awareness and modern thinking on the part of collectors, rather than the sybaritic idolatry assigned to Beckford, or a recondite knowledge which was possessed only by a small body of experts.

<sup>11</sup> See Michael Compton, 'William Roscoe and Early Collectors of Italian Primitives', *Liverpool Bulletin*, Liverpool, Liverpool Corporation, vol.9, 1960-61, pp.27-48. Roscoe had a collection of over 200 pictures in 1816, 32 of which were Italian primitives.

<sup>12</sup> Dyce (ed.), *Recollections*, p.158. Rogers, who was acquainted with Ottley, described his knowledge of Italian fifteenth-century painting as 'astonishing'.

<sup>13</sup> Compton, 'William Roscoe', p.42. Another notable work purchased by Ottley in Italy was a *Last Supper* attributed to Masaccio; Compton notes that it has since been identified as the work of Ercole da Ferrara.

The collectors of early Italian art who were active prior to the advent of moral art history were fairly uniform in terms of background and status. Even Beckford, despite the more colourful behavioural traits reported of him, was untitled yet wealthy, with a pronounced scholarly disposition. The Victorian collectors of 'primitives', however, were remarkable for their social diversity; their only unifying feature was sufficient financial means to pursue a costly interest. Of those identified by Waagen in *Treasures* as having a pronounced interest in the earlier schools, some were of the highest rank and social distinction, such as Lord Ward and Lord Elcho. Ward in particular is presented as one of a new generation of collectors who eagerly seek examples of the painting recently exalted by Rio and his followers. Waagen demonstrates a clear belief that Ward's taste was founded in the principles expounded in this criticism. His collection is described as:

an important acquisition to England, containing a number of pictures of the Italian school, chiefly of sacred subjects, of that intensity of feeling, and that exclusively earnest and enthusiastic character, which afford the highest enjoyment to those connoisseurs with whom the moral significance of a work of art constitutes the essential merit.<sup>14</sup>

Waagen's own dissent from this critical approach is here implied, the reader being left in little doubt that he is talking of the taste of others, rather than himself; he goes on to note approvingly that despite the preponderance of early works in his collection, Ward has also acquired specimens from 'the most perfect period of art, the first forty years of the sixteenth century'. Lord Ward is characterised by Waagen as a youthful connoisseur, whose collection is incipient rather than complete. He needs, Waagen states, to exercise 'perseverance and discrimination' in order to make his assembly of pictures one of the nation's greatest; the German critic perceived deficiency in the

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<sup>14</sup>Waagen, *Treasures*, vol.2, p.229. Notable examples from Ward's collection were a *Last Supper* attributed to Giotto, a *Last Judgement* and a *Virgin and Child Enthroned* attributed to Fra Angelico, a *Virgin and Child* attributed to Ghirlandaio, a *Virgin and Child with Joseph* and *St. John the Baptist* attributed to Botticelli, a *Crucifixion* attributed to Perugino, and an early *Crucifixion* attributed to Raphael.

examples of later art the nobleman had thus far acquired.<sup>15</sup> This was not a criticism he would make of other collections amassed by untitled purchasers which demonstrated a preference for the 'primitives', and indicates certain positive preconceptions on Waagen's part concerning the motives behind the accumulation of paintings by aristocratic connoisseurs.

Others who became known as owners of 'primitives' were men of leisure and erudition, similar in many ways to earlier collectors such as Roscoe and Ottley. Samuel Rogers and Robert Holford can be taken as examples of this group. Rogers perhaps properly belongs amongst the likes of Ottley and Beckford, who were his contemporaries,<sup>16</sup> but his longevity meant that his collection remained intact well into the reign of Victoria, and continued to attract attention throughout this time. As with Roscoe and Beckford, early art formed only a proportion of his acquisitions; works attributed to Giotto and Fra Angelico hung alongside canvases by Titian, Poussin, Rubens and Rembrandt.<sup>17</sup> Rogers saw an extreme minority interest shared by himself and a handful of others move considerably closer to the mainstream of taste in the final two decades of his life, and there is evidence to suggest that he attempted to keep abreast of critical developments; his library at the time of his death in 1856 contained both Ruskin's *Modern Painters II* and Lindsay's *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*.<sup>18</sup> The collection of Robert Holford, described since as 'his life's work',<sup>19</sup> was

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p.236. Waagen remarks, for example, that in his efforts to acquire examples of the Caracci school Ward 'has not been very fortunate'.

<sup>16</sup>L. Stephen and S. Lee (eds.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973, vol.xvii, p.139. Rogers inherited his share in the family banking fortune in 1793, when he was thirty years old. This provided an annual income of over £5000 per annum, which enabled him to devote himself to matters of high society and the arts for the rest of his life.

<sup>17</sup>Waagen, *Treasures*, vol.2, pp.74-80. Waagen remarked that in the collection 'the visitor is at a loss whether to most admire the diversity or the purity of his taste'.

<sup>18</sup>*Sales Catalogue: Christie and Manson. The Collection of Samuel Rogers*. London. Christies, Mon. 28th April 1856, pp.157-168.

<sup>19</sup>R.H. Benson (ed.), *The Holford Collection*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1927, p.xvi (editor's introduction).

similar in makeup to that of Rogers, despite having been formed in a later era. A man of immense wealth due to his family's majority share in the New River Company, which dated back to the seventeenth century, Holford began collecting in the 1840s, installing his collection in Dorchester House in 1849. The presence of early Italian art in his collection, however, is best described as token, with only a small number of pieces by later fifteenth-century painters such as Perugino and Bellini gaining admission, which were vastly outnumbered by the productions of later schools.<sup>20</sup> The level of erudition that lay behind Holford's desire to collect pictures in general, and the works of earlier Italian masters in particular, was openly denigrated by some. In 1841, at the outset of his collecting career, he attempted to acquire a *Virgin and Child with St. John* by Perugino, and the *Portrait of Doge Loredan* by Bellini, which were offered for sale by Beckford. A strong preference was expressed by Beckford in a letter to his friend Edmund English that the paintings go anywhere but to 'some upstart or refurbished mansion of Mr. Holford'. He continues:

That poor rich man has nothing in him but money - Nature has not endowed him with taste - and as he most resolutely chooses to be his own teacher he will never acquire knowledge - it is mortifying such a shallow-pated, half-witted, but thoroughly conceited, false connoisseur should be admitted even to the sight of a picture he is far too prosaic to comprehend or value.<sup>21</sup>

Beckford's acerbic comments contain views that would become increasingly common amongst arts commentators over the course of the following two decades. He demonstrates a belief in the importance of study in order to develop one's appreciation of old master painting, and characterises Holford's alleged refusal to recognise this as an example of his arrogant stupidity. A problem with private collecting that would

<sup>20</sup> Waagen, *Treasures*, vol.2, pp.193-199. The only early pictures mentioned by Waagen are a Perugino *Virgin and Child* and a Bellini *Portrait of a Boy*, in a collection otherwise dominated by the sixteenth-century Venetian and Bolognese, and seventeenth-century Dutch schools.

<sup>21</sup> William Beckford, Letter to Edmund English, May 1841, *National Gallery Picture File No.181*.

give rise to frequent complaints from critics in the years to come is also identified; Beckford's remarks are based in an awareness that ownership was dependent upon economic rather than cultural capital, as collectors did not have to demonstrate any knowledge or sophistication in order to buy. He assumes that pictures bought up by 'false connoisseurs' would vanish into their galleries and effectively be lost to the discerning art lovers of England, subsequently being seen by only a few, and properly appreciated by no-one. These paintings did not ultimately enter the Holford collection, however, with both going to the National Gallery instead: the Perugino was purchased by the Trustees that year, the Bellini three years later.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the most striking development in the overall progress of English private collecting in the years between Waagen's *Works* and his *Treasures* was the emergence of collections which were devoted to the epoch of true 'Christian' painting in Italy, as it had been designated by Rio and those influenced by him, to the exclusion of all later art. These collections tended to be non-aristocratic, and formed by politicians, members of the clergy and businessmen, who had risen to professional distinction from a privileged background. The prominent Whig politician Henry Labouchere<sup>23</sup> was one of those singled out by Waagen in the introduction to *Treasures* whose purchasing choices represented the new direction in English taste. His collection featured works attributed to Fra Angelico, Gentile da Fabriano, Ghirlandaio and Perugino; only a small number of sixteenth and seventeenth-century works appear, thus inverting the proportions in which the schools of painting were more typically found in English

<sup>22</sup>Martin Davies, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Earlier Italian Schools*, London, National Gallery Publications, 1986 (1951), p.401, cat.no.181 (Perugino). For details on the *Portrait of Doge Loredan*, see section II, ps.105, 108.

<sup>23</sup>Stephen and Lee (eds.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol.XI, p.368. Labouchere was President of the Board of Trade in Melbourne's second ministry (1839-41); Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (1846-7), and then President of the Board of Trade in Russell's first ministry (1847-52); then Secretary of State for the Colonies under Palmerston (1855-58). He was from a wealthy family; his mother, Dorothy Elizabeth, was the third daughter of Francis Baring.



houses.<sup>24</sup> Others do not even appear to have made this minor concession to more traditional tastes; according to the notices of Waagen, the collections of the Reverend John Fuller-Russell, William Davenport-Bromley and William Fuller-Maitland all excluded paintings dating from after 1500 altogether. All were also prepared to extend their interest in the 'primitives' further into the past than many of the collectors discussed so far. Unlike Holford and even Labouchere, they bought and displayed works from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as well as from the fifteenth.<sup>25</sup>

Modern texts have repeatedly identified the 1840s as the decade in which the middle-class nouveaux riches emerged as a significant presence in the world of art collecting. Hermann, for example, states that after 1840 it was a new generation of merchants and industrialists who had the ready capital available to purchase works of art.<sup>26</sup> More recently, Diane Macleod has traced the role which the acquisition of artworks played in the 'emerging identity' of the middle class, and how such activity enabled them to 'clarify their place in the social order'.<sup>27</sup> Although her argument chiefly applies to Victorian art, the same can be said of the smaller number of those who applied their freshly obtained fortunes to assembling a collection of old masters. Some sought simply to consolidate their new-found status as members of England's rich elite with a collection which was almost indistinguishable from a typical aristocratic collection. Wynne Ellis was a conspicuous example of such a person. He was trained as a haberdasher, hosier and mercer, yet went on to create over the course of his professional life the largest silk business in London; his company went from

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<sup>24</sup> Waagen, *Treasures*, vol.2, pp.417-21. Labouchere also owned, for example, landscapes by Titian and Claude.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.3, p.461. Fuller-Russell's works included examples by Ugolino da Siena and Duccio; (vol.3, pp.1-6) Fuller-Maitland owned works from the Byzantine school thought to pre-date Cimabue, as well as pictures by Taddeo Gaddi and Giotto; (vol.3, pp.371-73) Davenport-Bromley possessed Giotto's and Orcagna's.

<sup>26</sup> Hermann, *The English*, p.40.

<sup>27</sup> Diane Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.44-5.



retail to wholesale in 1831. The financial freedom this brought enabled him to pursue a low-key political career and amass an enormous gallery of pictures.<sup>28</sup> The vast majority of these were from the Dutch, Spanish and English schools of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Waagen described him as one who had adhered largely to 'the taste of the preceding period'.<sup>29</sup> Much as he had faulted the lack of later specimens in the collection of Lord Ward, he here criticised Ellis for failing, in the course of his many purchases, to acquire any decent examples of the Italian school. Waagen's belief was that in order to be of any great value, a collection should present a viewer with a complete historiography of painting. He arranged and embellished the Berlin Gallery, of which he was director, in accordance with this principle, which was to prove extremely influential in debates concerning the organisation of public displays of art in England during this period, as will be discussed later in the chapter. The suggestion that it should also be adopted by private collectors demonstrates an optimism concerning their priorities on Waagen's part that was not shared by many English commentators.

Alexander Barker, although not quite the entirely self-made man Wynne Ellis was, had also risen through the social hierarchy over the course of his life by a rapid increase in financial fortune. From a family of shoemakers, he was able to retire from this business and devote himself to the collection of art;<sup>30</sup> unlike Ellis, he confined his purchases solely to the 'primitive' schools.<sup>31</sup> Rather than emulate the tastes of the aristocracy, Barker chose to proclaim membership of a more recent and select collecting group through his choice of paintings. The concentration upon earlier art, and exclusion of all

<sup>28</sup>Stephen and Lee (eds.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol.6, p.716. Ellis was elected M.P. for Leicester in 1831.

<sup>29</sup>Waagen, *Treasures*, vol.1, p.36.

<sup>30</sup>See F.M. Redgrave, *Richard Redgrave: A Memoir compiled from his Diary*, London, Paris, Melbourne, Cassell and Company, 1891, p.189.

<sup>31</sup>Waagen, *Treasures*, vol.2, pp.125-9. Waagen provides a catalogue entirely composed of works from the fifteenth-century Italian schools, including pictures attributed to Benozzo Gozzoli, Signorelli, Botticelli and Perugino.

later productions, associated him with men such as Fuller-Maitland, Fuller-Russell and Davenport-Bromley. Although far more common than in previous decades, the taste for early Italian art was not universal, and still claimed some of the esoteric status it had enjoyed when collected by men like Roscoe and Rogers. Waagen repeatedly emphasises its unusual nature over the course of *Treasures*, remarking that Fuller-Maitland, for example, takes 'a leading part among the yet small number of those connoisseurs in England whose taste is particularly directed to the art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries'.<sup>32</sup> Barker's efforts earn him a similar comment, with Waagen naming him 'one of those comparatively few Englishmen who possess a lively taste for the deep moral enthusiasm which distinguishes the works of art of the fifteenth century'.<sup>33</sup> It would seem that Barker did not aspire to the condition of the aristocracy, but rather to that of a more intellectual cadre. Much as moral art history offered an alternative method for the interpretation of old master painting, the 'primitives' provided middle-class collectors with a viable alternative to more traditional purchasing trends. They allowed men like Barker to demonstrate their sophistication and refinement through the collection of ancient art, but in a manner that was not beholden to the example of the nobility. This was one of the ways in which the taste for early Italian art, and the critical discourse which supported it, served to undermine the domination of the old masters in England by the aristocratic private collector.

A common feature of those collections which were especially devoted to early Italian art was the rapidity with which they grew over the course of the 1840s and 1850s. In 1857, Waagen published a supplement to *Treasures* entitled *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain*, in which he attempted to document the enormous number of additions that had been made to British collections in the intervening time. Barker,

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<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, vol.3, p.1.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, vol.2, p.125.

Fuller-Russell and Davenport-Bromley all feature prominently in this volume, and there is little evidence of deviation from the taste that had made them notable three years earlier.<sup>34</sup> Despite Waagen's claim that the pre-Renaissance remained a minority interest, early works appear to have been both readily available and in considerable demand. The means by which these collectors came by their 'primitives' is worth consideration. Compton establishes that a number of prominent art dealers, including Michael Bryan and Samuel Woodburn, maintained a limited trade in such works in the earlier years of the century.<sup>35</sup> There is, however, little evidence of such activity on the part of English dealers in the early Victorian era. The favoured mode of acquisition was the same as that by which the moral art historians of the 1840s gained their knowledge of 'Christian' painting; the collectors who sought to specialise in the earlier schools often travelled to Italy in order to purchase works for themselves rather than relying on dealers.

Men such as Ottley served as the precedent for such behaviour, which allowed a buyer to feel as if he were demonstrating his personal expertise not only in the purchase, but also the discovery of early works in the remote chapels and warehouses of an indifferent modern Italy.<sup>36</sup> In his account of Davenport-Bromley's collection in *Treasures*, Waagen informs his readers that it has been formed by the proprietor 'himself, during his travels',<sup>37</sup> in order to stress the specialised nature of early Italian art as a collecting pursuit. Barker was also renowned for acting as his own agent,

<sup>34</sup> Waagen, *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain*, London, John Murray, 1857, (pp.71-7) Barker had continued to acquire fifteenth-century works at a considerable rate, gaining fourteen new paintings and over fifty drawings; (pp.166-7) Davenport-Bromley had eleven more Italian works, some of which were attributed to Duccio and his school; (pp.284-6) Fuller-Russell had bought three works from the thirteenth and fourteenth-century Italian schools, as well as four pictures from the fifteenth-century Netherlandish school.

<sup>35</sup> Compton, 'William Roscoe', p.36. Roscoe bought at least one early picture, a *St. Bernardino Preaching* by the studio of Vecchietta, from Woodburn.

<sup>36</sup> See chapter 4, section III, pp.291-8 for discussion of private collecting in Italy.

<sup>37</sup> Waagen, *Treasures*, vol.3, p.37., p.291.

travelling to Florence and acquiring the majority of his works without any additional expert assistance.<sup>38</sup> The collector of early Italian art, it would seem, was characterised by his intellectual self-reliance, and confidence in his own art-historical judgement, in contrast to the popular stereotype amongst middle-class critics of the indolent and ignorant aristocrat, who merely purchased in accordance with the dictates of fashion, and a shallow appreciation of aesthetics.

## II. Early Italian Art, the National Gallery and the Sale-Room

Waagen adds that Davenport-Bromley had also made some 'fortunate purchases in England',<sup>39</sup> and indeed the other main means by which 'primitives' entered Victorian galleries in the 1840s and 1850s was through the sale of existing English collections, as well as those from the continent. *Treasures* in fact reveals that several of the major assemblages of earlier art were formed in part by the collections of others. Many of Fuller-Maitland's early pictures, for example, had been brought from Italy to hang in the collections of Ottley, and William Coningham, a widely esteemed collector active in the 1830s and 1840s,<sup>40</sup> who sold a number of his paintings in 1848. Labouchere also acquired many works at this sale,<sup>41</sup> which was one of a number staged over the course of the decade where early works were made available to buyers. The Edward Solly sale, held at Christie's on the 8th May 1847, was another example; as with the Coningham sale, the array of works up for purchase was largely from the Italian

<sup>38</sup>Michael Levy, 'Botticelli in Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol.23, 1960, p.300.

<sup>39</sup>Waagen, *Treasures*, vol.3, p.37.

<sup>40</sup>Hugh Brigstocke, *Lord Lindsay as a Collector*, Manchester, The John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 1982, p.292. Coningham is here described as 'one of the most acute and selective picture buyers in Britain in the mid nineteenth century.'

<sup>41</sup>Waagen, *Treasures*, vol.3, pp.3-7; Fuller-Maitland owned, among others, a Lippi *Adoration of the Magi* and an early Raphael *Christ on the Mount of Olives* from the Coningham collection, and a Botticelli *Nativity* from the Ottley collection; (vol.2, pp.417-21) Labouchere's purchases from the Coningham collection included a Perugino *St John*, a Mantegna *Three Maries*, a Francia *Baptism* and a Signorelli *Martyrdom of St. Catharine*.

schools of the early and pre-Renaissance. This feature earned it lengthy notices in *The Times* and the *Athenaeum*, both of whom remarked upon the irregularity of such collections appearing in the sale-rooms. Paintings attributed to Crivelli and Masolino fetched respectable prices,<sup>42</sup> but *The Times* felt compelled to point out that the sums given were considerably lower than those paid for Flemish, Dutch and Spanish pictures on the English market.<sup>43</sup> The general veracity of this observation can be demonstrated by a comparison of the sales of the Wells and Beckford collections, which were held within three months of each other in the summer of 1848. At the former, a wealth of Dutch and Spanish pictures went for enormous sums; the highest price of the day was attained by Murillo's *St. Thomas of Villanueva Distributing Alms*, sold to the Marquis of Hertford for £2,992.10s, and the final total raised was in excess of £30,000.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, many of Beckford's paintings failed to even reach the £100 mark: a *Francia Baptism* was sold for £70, and a Bellini *Marriage of St. Catharine* for £88.4s. Some of his other 'primitive' pictures fared better, reaching prices similar to those paid at the Solly sale, but the largest figure given was for a *Virgin in a Landscape* by Gaspar Poussin, which fetched £750.<sup>45</sup>

In its notice of the Solly sale, *The Times* claimed that the situation regarding prices was due to 'the limited knowledge of Italian art of the period [previous to Raphael] which exists in this country'.<sup>46</sup> By this reasoning, the exchange value of such art could be expected to rise over the course of the following decade, as familiarity with it in English society increased. This does not appear to have been the case, however,

<sup>42</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 1021, 22nd May 1847, p. 551. An *Annunciation* given to Crivelli sold for 310 guineas; A *Passage of the Red Sea* given to Masolino sold for 230 guineas.

<sup>43</sup> *The Times*, 11th May 1847, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 1073, 20th May 1848, p. 514.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 1084, 5th August 1848, p. 780. An *Adoration of the Magi* by Marcello Venusti was sold for £178.10s; A *Woman Taken in Adultery* by Masolino was sold for £199.10s.

<sup>46</sup> *The Times*, 11th May 1847, p. 7.

with prices stabilising rather than increasing. At the Rogers sale in 1856, for example, the poet's early paintings sold for similar figures to those found at the Solly sale nine years previously, and were entirely overshadowed financially by Bassano, Rubens and Reynolds, among others.<sup>47</sup> Yet despite these lower prices, competition for ownership remained stiff; the publication of several texts devoted to the earlier Italian schools over the course of the 1840s can only have increased the demand for specimens of these schools on the art market. Lord Lindsay, who was trying with very limited success to obtain 'primitives' for his small collection in the late 1840s, remarked in 1849 that 'I have been my own enemy in this through my book on Christian Art.'<sup>48</sup> The appearance of specimens of earlier art on the English art market was comparatively rare, as illustrated by the reactions to the Solly sale mentioned above. Also, although fewer people sought to obtain them, many of these people, such as Barker, Fuller-Russell and Davenport-Bromley, were devotees who displayed their enthusiasm for 'primitive' art through the rate at which they sought to enlarge their collections, thus ensuring a competitive atmosphere.

This atmosphere contributed towards the failure of the administration of the National Gallery to make a significant response to the developments in taste which occurred during the 1840s, despite urgings from various quarters for it to do so. Assertions of the need for the gallery to broaden the scope of its acquisitions began as early as 1836, when the Government appointed a select committee to investigate connections between the arts and manufacturing industries in Britain. The National Gallery was

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 3rd May 1856, p.12. For example, a *Portrait of a Lady* by Verrocchio went for 185 guineas, and a fresco fragment attributed to Giotto depicting *The Virgin Enthroned* went for 310 guineas. Reynolds' *Strawberry Girl* fetched 2,100 guineas; two days later (5th May 1848, p.12) a Bassano *Portrait of Don Balthasar, Son of Charles IV of Spain* was sold for 1,210 guineas, and Rubens' *Triumph of Julius Caesar* fetched 1050 guineas.

<sup>48</sup> quoted Brigstocke, *Lord Lindsay as a Collector*, p.300. From a letter to his father-in-law, James Crawford, 12th April 1849. For discussion of Lindsay's collecting career, see chapter 4, section III, p.293, and section VII, p.362, note 238.



thoroughly examined by this committee, because of its near unique role as a purveyor of high culture to the public at large, from all social backgrounds and classes. The report which was submitted recognised the need to expand the collection, and recommended that the trustees commence this process as soon as possible, for the further benefit of the British people. In terms of the identification of specific schools or masters to be collected in order to bring about this enhancement, ultimate favour was predictably granted by the committee to works from 'the era of Raphael'. Following examples from this period, however, the report ruled that attention should be devoted to pictures from 'the times just antecedent to it; such works being of a purer and more elevated style than the eminent works of the Caracci'.<sup>49</sup> This judgement appears largely to be based on the evidence given to the committee by Waagen, who stated that although the finest paintings already in the collection were those by Sebastiano del Piombo, Correggio and Titian, 'in order to understand and still better appreciate the great masters, you must commence with those who immediately preceded them and who taught them'.<sup>50</sup>

In apparent obedience to the dictates of this report, several fifteenth-century pictures were acquired by the trustees from English private collectors during the eight years which followed it. In 1841 they bought a *Virgin and Child with St. Anne and Saints* and a *Pieta* by Francia from E.G. Flint, and a *Virgin and Child with St. John* by Perugino from Beckford. A further purchase from Beckford was made in 1844, when the *Portrait of Doge Loredan* by Giovanni Bellini entered the national collection.<sup>51</sup> Little, however, was done in the years that immediately followed to build upon this foundation. The minutes taken at the trustees' board meetings during the 1840s testify

<sup>49</sup> Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures', report p.x.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* minutes p.11, q. no.82.

<sup>51</sup> Davies, *National Gallery Catalogue*, p.200, nos.179 (Francia, *Virgin and Child with St. Anne and Saints*) and 180 (Francia, *Pieta*), p.401, no.181 (Perugino, *Virgin and Child with St. John*), p.55, no.189 (Bellini, *Portrait of Doge Loredan*).



to their vigilance regarding the various opportunities that arose for the acquisition of early Italian paintings; they also reveal the extreme caution, excessive selectivity and poor financial management which prevented them from successfully procuring any further specimens during the remainder of the decade.

In 1844, the dealer Samuel Woodburn was instructed to attend the Cardinal Fesch sale in Rome on their behalf, and was given a very specific list of works to bid for at auction, with the maximum price to be paid attached to each one. Top of this list was the early Crucifixion by Raphael, and Woodburn was also told, if he had time, to deliver opinions on the best pictures in the rest of the collection, 'particularly of the Italian school'.<sup>52</sup> The sale was postponed until the following year, but when it did take place the rigidity of the restrictions imposed upon Woodburn meant that he failed to secure any of the pictures on his list. Significantly, English private collectors were prominent at the Fesch sale, and were prepared to outbid their government in order to obtain early pictures for their galleries. The Raphael Crucifixion was obtained by Lord Ward, who was presumably operating without the monetary constraints which inhibited Woodburn. The limitations of the list meant that Woodburn was also prevented from directing his efforts towards the other notable quattrocento works which were up for purchase. Among these were a Last Judgement by Fra Angelico, which went to the Earl of Dudley, a Death of the Virgin by Giotto and a Coronation of the Virgin by Lorenzo Monaco, both of which were sold to Davenport-Bromley for low prices.<sup>53</sup> David Robertson attributes the inactivity of the trustees at this sale to

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<sup>52</sup>National Gallery: Minutes of Board Meetings, hand-written by G.W.Thwaites, sub-keeper and secretary, vol.1, 7.2.1828 - 2.12.1847, pp.233-234. At a meeting of the 19th February 1844, Woodburn was allotted £2000 for the Raphael Crucifixion, £600 for Christ Preaching by Rembrandt, £1000 for The Madonna Enthroned by Pordenone, and £250 for some fresco fragments by Sebastiano del Piombo. Woodburn was told 'the picture which the trustees are most anxious to secure is the Raphael.'

<sup>53</sup>Brigstocke, Lord Lindsay as a Collector, p.291. Davenport-Bromley bought over forty Italian pictures from the fourteenth, fifteenth and early sixteenth century at the Fesch sale, at a cost of 5000 scudi.

their having made insufficient financial allowance for it, following the purchase of *Susannah and the Elders* by Guido Reni earlier that year.<sup>54</sup> Guido, who represented for many the artistic antithesis of the 'primitive' schools, was to become a reviled figure among those campaigning for the expansion of the historical and stylistic scope of the national collection during the 1840s.

The operations of the trustees with regards to the opportunities which arose in England during the decade are even harder to explain. In March 1845, the minutes record the receipt of a letter from William Warner Ottley, offering for sale the collection of early Italian pictures purchased in Italy by the late William Young Ottley, and therefore sparing them a contest with England's wealthiest collectors. It was resolved that Eastlake, then keeper of the gallery, should go and inspect the paintings, and 'furnish the trustees with a list of such of them as he may deem eligible for this gallery.'<sup>55</sup> More than a year later, the offer was finally declined,<sup>56</sup> for reasons which are not explained; it can only be surmised that the works on offer were not deemed to be of a sufficient quality, despite the esteem Young Ottley had enjoyed as a collector of art from the early Italian schools, as discussed earlier in the chapter. The following year, Woodburn offered the gallery for sale a collection of seventy pictures, all of which were 'the works of early Italian masters'.<sup>57</sup> The trustees were not interested in the bulk of the paintings, and negotiations ensued in which Woodburn attempted to sell seven of the most desirable ones to them for £6000. The response from the trustees was to offer him £1000 for two works, a pair of scenes of Troy by Pintoricchio.<sup>58</sup> Woodburn unsurprisingly rejected this attempt by the gallery to take what they considered to be the two best pictures from his collection for a disproportionately small fraction of the price he was asking, and took his 'primitives'

<sup>54</sup>Robertson, *Eastlake*, p.87. The Guido cost the gallery £945.

<sup>55</sup>*National Gallery Minutes*, vol.1, p.291. From a meeting on 2nd March 1845.

<sup>56</sup>*ibid.*, p.302. The decision was made at a meeting on 5th June 1846.

<sup>57</sup>*ibid.*, p.345. From a meeting on 8th March 1847.

<sup>58</sup>*ibid.*, p.346. From a meeting on 12th April 1847.

elsewhere.<sup>59</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that the trustees of the National Gallery gained a reputation for parsimony during the 1840s. In 1844, for example, Beckford, who by then had experience of selling works to the Gallery, sent the trustees a terse note regarding the sale of his *Portrait of Doge Loredan* by Bellini, in which he insisted upon them paying the 'exact sum' he asked for, and threatened in no uncertain terms to call off the sale completely if they did not comply.<sup>60</sup>

The report of the 1836 select committee questioned not only the scope of the national collection, but also the qualifications of those charged with embellishing it. The trustees, the report judged, were 'chosen rather on account of their elevated rank and their possession of pictures than for any peculiar professional ability'.<sup>61</sup> Many of the trustees were indeed aristocrats with large private galleries;<sup>62</sup> this was not, the report concluded, sufficient preparation in itself for the task of formulating the National Gallery. A distinction is made between the 'comprehensive knowledge required in the choice of a national collection', and the lower levels of expertise needed to form a gallery of 'cabinet paintings'.<sup>63</sup> The report's rulings are based on a recognition of the emergence of the arts professional, whose knowledge of old master painting far outstripped that of the traditional figure of the connoisseur-collector. These were the

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.350. From a meeting on 7th June 1847.

<sup>60</sup> William Beckford, note supplied to the trustees, May 1844, *National Gallery File No.189*. Beckford states: 'My price is 600 guineas - should the smallest objection arise to the prompt payment of that exact sum, I shall most willingly take back this picture, having at length arranged in my own mind a situation in which it can be placed advantageously.' *National Gallery Minutes*, vol.1, p.135. Other pictures sold by Beckford to the gallery include a Raphael (cat.no,168), a Garoffalo (cat.no.170) and a Mazzolino (cat.no.169) - it was recorded in the minutes of a meeting on 2nd March 1839 that the three works had been purchased from the Beckford collection for 7000 guineas.

<sup>61</sup> Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures', report p.x.

<sup>62</sup> Robertson, *Eastlake*, p.61. Their number included the Duke of Sutherland, the Marquis of Lansdowne, the Earl of Aberdeen, Lord Colbourne and Lord Ashburton.

<sup>63</sup> Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures', report p.x.

people, it is implicitly argued, who should be deciding where the nation's art funds should be invested; they are conspicuous only by their absence among the trustees of the 1840s.

Dissatisfaction with the procurement policies of the national collection's administrators grew steadily as the taste for early art in England became more established. This began to find expression in books, newspapers and magazines, an early example of which is *The National Gallery: Its Pictures and their Painters* of 1844 by George Foggo, secretary of the National Monuments Society. Although ostensibly written to promote the Gallery, Foggo's volume included an introductory essay in which he complained that 'there are no specimens of Giotto, Masaccio, Signorelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Daniel da Volterra, and other of the greatest Italian masters' in its rooms. In addition to this campaigning for the inclusion of art as early as that of Giotto, Foggo demonstrates the influence of Rio in both his general criticism of the collection in his introduction, and his commentary upon specific works. The majority of the paintings of the Gallery, he states, are merely 'calculated to charm the eye', and several may even 'be censured for their vicious tendency'.<sup>64</sup> The connoisseurial arguments which support the taste for such art are dismissed as 'a jumble of quackery and nonsense', which make their adherents incapable of fully appreciating the 'deep mental powers' of 'the great Florentine painters'.<sup>65</sup> As with comments on the National Gallery in the report of the 1836 select committee, it is here asserted that old master criticism is undergoing an intellectual development, away from decadent amateurism, and towards pure and cerebral professionalism. The National Gallery, with its neglect of the earlier Italian schools and continued purchase of examples from those of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, appeared to be allied with the past, the blame for which could only be laid with the trustees. Foggo's impatience with the lack of consistency in

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<sup>64</sup>George Foggo, *The National Gallery: Its Pictures, their Painters*, London, John Murray, 1849 (1844), introduction pp.ii-iii.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p.v.

the quality of the trustees' purchases can be seen in his denunciation of Lot and His Daughters by Guido, their most recent acquisition at his time of writing. The painting was, he stated, 'a vulgar subject boldly but coarsely treated', displaying to the viewer 'a debasement of the pencil'.<sup>66</sup> This damning notice stands in complete contrast to his intense admiration for Francia's Picta; he directly compares the two paintings, and declares the 'simplicity' of the earlier artist's religious figures to be utterly superior to 'Guido's affectation'.<sup>67</sup>

In 1847 there were a number of open attacks on what was considered to be nothing less than an abuse of power, and a neglect of responsibility on the part of the trustees. The acquisition of the Vision of a Knight attributed to Raphael in the March of that year, described by the Athenaeum as being 'in his Peruginesque style - simple and sweet', served to exacerbate rather than assuage discontent. The magazine went on to state the hope that this addition signalled 'enlarged views' on the part of the trustees:

Surely, we have of Bolognese, Flemish and Dutch art enough to depress and sensualise the tastes of both professor and connoisseur; and we rejoice at a purchase like the present, which has a tendency to produce a healthy reaction on public taste.<sup>68</sup>

Several significant points are broached here. Evident is the frustration concerning the gallery's recent purchase record, which was shared by many critics. Ruskin, for example, wrote a lengthy letter to The Times later in the year in which similar sentiments were expressed in a more forceful manner. He damned the principles of picture selection which were being acted upon, calling them 'as extraordinary as unjustifiable'. His wrath was directed towards two recent acquisitions in particular, the Lot and his Daughters by Guido which had earned Foggo's opprobrium three years earlier, and a Judgement of Paris by Rubens. The latter had cost the nation the

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p.56.

<sup>68</sup> Athenaeum, No.1012, 20th March 1847, p.314.

enormous sum of 5000 guineas, yet it was in Ruskin's judgement both 'coarse and unnecessary', as it was to be placed in 'a room half filled with Rubens before' in a gallery that had no examples of Fra Angelico, Ghirlandaio or Verrocchio, to name but a few.<sup>69</sup> It represented the investment of a considerable proportion of limited government funds, Ruskin continued, and was therefore particularly galling to the serious student of art, as far more deserving works had been passed over in its favour. Outstanding among such missed opportunities was a 'mighty and perfect' *Last Judgement* by Fra Angelico, bought by the Earl of Dudley at the Fesch sale, as mentioned above. Like the *Athenaeum*, Ruskin was not appeased by the earlier works the gallery had thus far managed to acquire. He dismissed the *Vision of a Night* as 'wretched', and asserted that the 'mighty' Bellini was 'poorly represented by a single head'.<sup>70</sup>

These criticisms were based in a desire properly to define the role and purpose of the National Gallery. Sir Robert Peel, who was both a trustee and the Prime Minister, gave the following explanation in 1844 for the government's failure to go to sufficient lengths to secure specimens of early Italian art:

It seems to me that we should give preference to works of sterling merit that may serve as examples to the artists of this country, rather than purchase curiosities in painting valuable certainly as illustrating the progress of art, but surely less valuable than works approaching perfection.<sup>71</sup>

This, it could be argued, was the attitude of a traditional private collector, who sought to create a gallery of excellence rather than one of art-historical instruction. In 1853, when giving evidence to the select committee appointed by the House of Commons to investigate the National Gallery, Eastlake described the opposition of Peel to the

<sup>69</sup>Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol. 12, pp. 403-6. Originally published in *The Times*, 7th January 1847.

<sup>70</sup>Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol. 12, p. 405.

<sup>71</sup>quoted Robertson, *Eastlake*, p. 81. The painting was priced at £2,625 by Farrer; the trustees offered £2000.



purchase of any Italian 'primitives' whatsoever; the influence he wielded among the trustees, Eastlake claimed, inhibited all attempts to acquire such works. Peel's object with regards to the national collection was identified as being 'to get the finest works of art, without reference to history'.<sup>72</sup>

Foggo did not subscribe to this approach to structuring the growth of the National Gallery. He observed 'a crisis in matters of art' as having occurred in his National Gallery, the result of which was that the pleasures of pictures could no longer be considered 'the exclusive enjoyment of the few'. The fine arts, he ruled, 'must be made subservient to general education, to the moral and intellectual instruction and recreation of the people'; in practical terms, this entailed the creation of an exhaustive and rigorously historical gallery, in which 'the comparative claims of genius' could be fairly assessed.<sup>73</sup> Ruskin vigorously challenged the assumption that contemporary painters could only learn from specimens of the later schools in his letter to The Times. It was, he believed, a deeply flawed conception, especially as it legitimised the surfeit of Bolognese and Flemish works on the walls at Trafalgar Square. He stated that:

If we are to have a Buonaroti or a Titian of our own, we shall with more wisdom learn of those of whom Buonaroti and Titian learned, and at whose knees they were brought up, and whom to their day of death they ever revered and worshipped, than of those wretched pupils and partisans who sunk every high function of art into a form and a faction, betrayed her trusts, darkened her traditions, overthrew her throne, and left us where we are now, stumbling amongst its fragments.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup>'National Gallery: Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery; with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index', Reports from Committees, 32 vols., London, Ordered by the House of Commons to be Printed, vol.28, session 4th November 1852 - 20th August 1853, p.421, q.no.6028. In q.no.6023 Eastlake stated that 'Sir Robert Peel rather opposed the purchase of works by early Italian masters; his expression always was, 'I think we should not collect curiosities.'

<sup>73</sup>Foggo, The National Gallery, introduction, p.viii.

<sup>74</sup>Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), The Complete Works, vol.12, p.404.



The visualisation of a dramatic fall of painting is heavily influenced by Rio, and the revisionism expressed here, and in the complaints of the *Athenaeum* quoted above, is clearly based in the precepts of moral art history. The later, post-Renaissance schools so favoured by the trustees were seen not merely as a waste of money, but as beacons of sensuality and depravity which threatened to corrupt anyone drawn to them. Earlier art was accordingly held to have the opposite effect, both on artists and the public at large. Whereas Peel's ideal vision of the National Gallery was one formed by the rich connoisseurial elite for the benefit and improvement of painters who were effectively in the service of that elite, that of those influenced by moral art history would be fully democratic, compiled and arranged by educated experts and designed to exercise a 'healthy reaction on public taste'.

It would, however, be some years before anything approaching this ideal was achieved. The *Athenaeum* maintained its campaign against the later Italian and northern European schools at the National Gallery in its coverage of additions made to the collection. An illustrative comparison can be made between notices of the hanging of two donations to the gallery in 1848. In March, a *Coronation of the Virgin* by Guido, which had been bequeathed to the nation by William Wells, was unveiled. The magazine was nonplussed; the picture, it stated, 'cannot not be considered a very great acquisition', as numerous other Guidos already hung in the gallery, some of which were superior to this latest example. Its contours were considered 'too florid', its ensemble overly 'theatrical and incongruous', its colours and contrasts 'too obvious and exaggerated'; the final verdict of the account is that 'for a spiritual subject it has too much of substantiality',<sup>75</sup> a judgement which again reveals critical allegiance to moral art history. A gift from the Coningham collection in October of two side panels depicting Saints from a larger dismantled altarpiece attributed to Taddeo Gaddi<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 1064, 18th March 1848, p. 298.

<sup>76</sup> Davies, *National Gallery Catalogue*, pp. 307-308, cat. nos. 215 and 216. The panels are now attributed to Lorenzo Monaco.

received a quite different response, which was also founded in the principles expounded by Rio. The earliest pictures in the national collection by 150 years, they were highly praised in the *Athenaeum* despite the 'hard and dry method of rendering' employed, due to their 'strong and impassioned sentiment, undisturbed by mere conventions of beauty'.<sup>77</sup> As with Rio, Ruskin and Lindsay, aesthetic concerns are here judged to be superficial, and of secondary importance to the spiritual qualities of an artwork.

Other publications had more difficulty explaining the significance of the panels to their readerships. The *Illustrated London News*, for example, recognised their significance, and even commissioned an engraving of one of them (figure 1); however, the text accompanying this image reveals a lack of the critical certainty present in the notice of the *Athenaeum*. This can be partly explained by the less specialised nature of the former paper; whereas the *Athenaeum* was a literary magazine devoted purely to science and the arts, the *Illustrated London News* also covered news and current affairs. Its general tone can also be considered more popular, and the notice printed in conjunction with its engraving of the Gaddi panel has more of the explanatory and prescriptive register of Jameson's *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters*, than the sophisticated critical commentary found in the *Athenaeum* or *Spectator*. The paper undertakes to explain in basic terms why early art should be studied, relying on a characterisation of them as 'fathers of an heroic race', in whose productions could be observed 'the germ of all the light and life and loveliness which was so refulgent under Raphael and Titian'.<sup>78</sup> Although they are favourable, the assumptions underpinning these comments are essentially the same as those detected in both the general remarks of Peel, and the evidence given by Waagen to the 1836 select committee, in that the implied preference is ultimately for the later painters mentioned, to whom early artists

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<sup>77</sup>*ibid.*, No. 1096, 28th October 1848, p. 1081.

<sup>78</sup>*Illustrated London News*, 11th November 1848, p. 300.

are entirely subordinated by notions of progress. Ruskin was committed to combating this manner of conceiving art history, despite the fact that it recognised a measure of importance in the early schools, as it ultimately led to the conclusion 'that the works of Perugino were of no value but as they taught Raphael, that John Bellini is altogether absorbed and overmastered by Titian, that Pisano was utterly superseded by Bandinelli or Cellini, and Ghirlandaio sunk in the shadow of Buonaroti'.<sup>79</sup> The priority of the Illustrated London News was lucidity, and the arguments of moral art history were presumably considered too complex and esoteric for a popular exegesis. It is mentioned that the panel chosen for reproduction is 'perhaps the more artistic of the two', and therefore the more acceptable to a broad audience. The notice concludes with another comment reminiscent of Peel; the panels are declared to be a 'valuable, if not an absolutely necessary, acquisition' to the National Gallery.<sup>80</sup> The gallery of excellence was easier to explain and justify to the uninitiated than the gallery as a school of art history. Ironically, this commentary intended for the lower echelons of the middle class reinforces the very aesthetic ideology which the democratic would-be reformers of the national collection were seeking to dislodge for the benefit of the populace. This situation would recur later in the period of this study on other occasions when the old masters were brought to the attention of the public at large.

Coningham's gift earned him a letter of gratitude from the trustees for his 'handsome donation',<sup>81</sup> and was praised for its 'liberality' in both the Illustrated London News and the Athenaeum. A letter from Coningham to the prominent trustee Lord Lansdowne suggests that the contribution was made as a pointed reference to the sizeable gaps that existed in the National Gallery's display. He wrote that the panels might be 'worth the acceptance of the Trustees' as they were 'of a much earlier period

<sup>79</sup>Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), The Complete Works, vol.12, p.404.

<sup>80</sup>Illustrated London News, 11th November 1848, p.300.

<sup>81</sup>National Gallery: Minutes of Board Meetings, hand-written by G.W.Thwaites, sub-keeper and secretary, vol.2, 11.12.1847 - 18.12.1854, p.36. From a meeting on 31st July 1848.

than any of the pictures now in the gallery'.<sup>82</sup> By donating pictures from the early fourteenth century to a gallery whose earliest picture was the Perugino *Virgin and Child and St. John* from the Beckford collection, which was painted in 1500,<sup>83</sup> Coningham effectively created an anomaly upon its walls. This could only be normalised by the acquisition of intermediate Italian works, which would essentially mean the adoption of the historical collecting agenda advised by the 1836 select committee report, and campaigned for by Ruskin, Foggo and others. Coningham was certainly determined that the panels would not be hung in a disadvantageous situation. After the paintings had been received at Trafalgar Square, the trustees consulted him regarding their placing, mentioning a plan to hang them by the stair-case. Unsurprisingly, their former owner was not in favour of this proposal, and stated that in his view the middle room was 'a far better place', as 'pictures of that religious character are hardly calculated for the gangway into a public building', pointing out that they were 'the wings of an altar'.<sup>84</sup> Their value was enhanced for Coningham, as for the practitioners of moral art history, by a consideration of their unblemished spiritual state, and their devout original purpose; that he feels he must clearly indicate this to the trustees perhaps indicates a lack of faith in their ability to properly assess or understand 'primitive' works.

Despite Coningham's efforts, however, no further paintings from this era were purchased until 1854. Eastlake resigned as keeper in 1847, and was completely uninvolved in its administration until 1850, during which time nothing was purchased. The keeper's role had been mainly an advisory one, ultimately subservient to the trustees and devoid of any executive power, yet Eastlake was held responsible by the gallery's critics for its perceived failings. The most tenacious and savage of these was

<sup>82</sup> William Coningham, letter to Lord Lansdowne, 11th July 1848, 7 Clifford Street, London, National Gallery Picture File Nos.215, 216.

<sup>83</sup> Davies, *National Gallery Catalogue*, p.402, cat.no.181.

<sup>84</sup> William Coningham, letter to the trustees of the National Gallery, 14th October 1848, Ceddar House, Glasgow, National Gallery Picture File Nos.215, 216.

the connoisseur and dealer John Morris Moore, or 'Verax' as he often signed himself in his letters to *The Times*. In 1846, for example, he blamed the exhaustion of the government's funds acquiring Guidos and Rubenses on 'the notorious incapacity of Mr. Eastlake, whose only guides in estimating a picture are "eminent German friends", German handbooks, German twaddle of every description'.<sup>85</sup> Xenophobia aside, this comment identifies Eastlake as an art historian from the same mould as Kugler, as argued in chapter one, which would locate him in a third category in the debate over the composition of the National Gallery, occupying the mid-ground between moral art historians attempting to revise purchasing priorities, and conservatives insistent on the primacy of a traditional notion of excellence.

During Eastlake's final year as keeper, the trustees allowed the Solly sale to pass without attempting to make a single purchase. When giving evidence to the 1853 select committee, Eastlake claimed that there were 'periods of inaction from a certain indisposition in Parliament to sanction the purchase of pictures', which were catalysed by poor acquisitions by the trustees; the Solly sale happened to fall during one of these, as it occurred in the year that followed the disastrous purchase of the inauthentic Holbein *Portrait of a Man*.<sup>86</sup> The only painting bought for the National Gallery between 1847 and 1851 was the *Vision of a Knight* by Raphael, bought shortly before Eastlake's departure as Keeper, which was permissible due to its solid attribution to 'the divine painter'. No risks, such as the earlier pictures at the Solly sale, were permitted by Parliament, a restriction which Eastlake criticised in 1853. He commented to the select committee that he would have obtained a number of the Solly pictures for the gallery, as the acquisition of 'fine pictures is annually becoming more difficult', and no opportunity to do so should therefore be missed.<sup>87</sup> Eastlake identified the bureaucratic financial arrangements as being fundamentally responsible

<sup>85</sup> *The Times*, 31st December 1846, p.8.

<sup>86</sup> Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery, p.422, q.no.6034.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p.424, q.no.6070.

for the missed purchases of the 1840s; Parliament had to vote the required funds to the trustees before anything could be bought, a system whose complications resulted in many estimable works being lost to private collectors. He proposed an annual fund of £10,000 which the trustees could draw upon at any time, which he claimed would enormously facilitate the effective embellishment of the National Gallery.<sup>88</sup>

Among the other problems confronting the trustees besides the inaccessibility of funds was the spirit of competition that prevailed in the art market, which meant that sellers, such as Woodburn in 1847, could confidently reject low offers by the trustees, in the certainty of being given their asking price by a private collector. Another example of this is Mrs. Bonar, who in 1845 had offered a Holy Family attributed to Ghirlandaio to the gallery; the trustees would not authorise payment of more than £250 for the picture, causing the owner immediately to call off all negotiations. She held onto the work for four more years, exhibiting it at the British Institution in 1847 in order to establish its renown, and then sold it to Henry Labouchere for £525.<sup>89</sup> Questioned about this decision on the part of the National Gallery when before the select committee in 1853, Eastlake described how he had raised the possibility of purchase again in 1846, but that the trustees had remained adamant in their refusal to provide the figure asked for the work by the owner. Another major problem for those seeking to enlarge the scope of the collection is apparent in his explanation of the trustees' continued reluctance to act regarding this Holy Family. Eastlake stated that 'Sir Martin Shee was decidedly against the purchase of that picture; and the trustees could not but be influenced by his judgement.'<sup>90</sup> As with the objections of Peel to the acquisition of 'curiosities', the assertion of a traditional opinion on the value of quattrocento painting by a prominent individual who clearly had no sympathy with the

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.433, q.nos.6194-6195.

<sup>89</sup> Robertson, Eastlake, pp.84.

<sup>90</sup> Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery', p.432, q.no.6178.



new generation of old master criticism influenced the choice of art purchased (or rather not purchased) for the nation.

In 1857, when reviewing the Art Treasures Exhibition in Manchester to which Labouchere had loaned the painting, Austen Layard looked back with astonishment on what he judged to be an instance of deplorable lethargy on the part of those charged with filling the rooms at Trafalgar Square. Writing in the *Quarterly Review*, to which he was a regular contributor in the late 1850s, he told how Eastlake managed to convince the seller to accept just £300, but of all those at the trustees meeting held to discuss the picture, only himself and Rogers (who had been a trustee since 1841) voted to buy it, and 'one of the wiseacres on the board declared "that he should feel ashamed if any student of the Academy could not draw better"!'<sup>91</sup> This mention of the Royal Academy could even be a reference to Shee himself, who was then its president. Layard's presentation of ignorance and narrow-minded traditionalism in a position of authority at the National Gallery during the 1840s is significant. As mentioned above, the majority of the trustees were from the most privileged strata of society, and many were aristocratic; Eastlake's difficulties as keeper in getting them to approve the acquisition of earlier works was being presented as a struggle between an outdated old order and an incipient new one.

For the first few years of the 1850s, the successes of the gallery's administrators were few and far between. No effort was made to obtain anything at the King of Holland's sale, and the trustees' attempt to acquire an *Immaculate Conception* by Murillo at the Soult sale in 1852 was remarkable only in the extent to which they underestimated the competitiveness of purchase conditions, and the enormous prices this could entail.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>91</sup>Austen Layard, 'The Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition', *Quarterly Review*, vol. 102, July-October 1857, p. 176.

<sup>92</sup>Robertson, *Eastlake*, p. 125. The trustees granted Samuel Woodburn, who acted as their agent at the sale, the sum of £10,000 to purchase the Murillo and a *Tribute Money* by Titian, expecting the Murillo to cost around £4000. After a fierce contest



Their performance improved somewhat after the 1853 select committee report. There is much criticism in the minutes of evidence of both the apparent apathy of the trustees, and the arbitrary manner in which they selected the works they did manage to buy. Lord Overstone, for example, attacked what he perceived as name-worship among the trustees, claiming that little attention was paid by them to 'the real character of the work'. He also observed a deeper problem with the collection: it had not, in his opinion, been formed 'on any principle whatever', which gave it a chaotic aspect.<sup>93</sup> Overstone was also one of many who advised the pursuit of examples of early Italian art, chiding the trustees for the opportunities missed at the Solly sale, and concluding his evidence by stating that the Italian 'primitives' had been 'overlooked'.<sup>94</sup> Coningham was another, describing the possibility of a collection of early Italian art in the National Gallery as 'highly desirable'.<sup>95</sup> The report itself concludes that:

A just appreciation of Italian painting can as little be obtained from an exclusive study of the works of Raphael, Titian or Correggio, as a critical knowledge of English poetry from the perusal of a few of its masterpieces. What Chaucer and Spenser are to Shakespeare and Milton, Giotto and Masaccio are to the great masters of the Florentine school; and a National Gallery would be as defective without adequate specimens of both styles of painting, as a National Library without specimens of both styles of poetry.<sup>96</sup>

Early Italian painting dating from as far back as the time of Giotto was thus identified by the 1853 report as a necessary, if not vital, component of the National Gallery. The library comparison is significant, as it is an institution founded upon a systematic and knowledgeable arrangement of materials, which provides education and instruction for

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between Louis Napoleon and the Czar of Russia it was finally secured for the Louvre for £24,600, the highest price yet paid for a work at open auction.

<sup>93</sup> 'Report of the Select Committee on the National Gallery', p.368, q.no.5402.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.393, q.no.5732. Overstone remarks that the Solly sale was 'very cheap', singling out a Botticelli bought by Davenport-Bromley for just £50, and stating that 'these pictures would now sell for a good deal more than they did at the time' (pp.388-389, q.nos.5642-5672).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.490, q.no.6947.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, report p.xvi.

the noviciate, as well as a well-ordered and comprehensive body of reference for the expert. This was clearly the condition to which the select committee decided the National Gallery should aspire.

Many of the report's recommendations were acted upon by the trustees and the government in the years which immediately followed it. A Treasury minute from March 1855 entitled 'Reconstituting the National Gallery' outlined the practical measures which would be taken. It was decreed that 'as a general rule, preference should be given to good specimens of the Italian schools, including those of the earlier masters.'<sup>97</sup> The trustees had already acted in accordance with this rule; at the sale of the Marquis Joly de Bammerville in 1854, five early works were bought, two for prices under £100. The *Spectator* expressed satisfaction with the trustees' performance. Some good purchases had been missed, but those which had been made signalled a welcome expansion of the National Gallery's scope of acquisition:

Let us be happy to possess works of the noble ages of painting, at a low price, instead of what the trustees had hitherto been more partial to, a single work of the base ages, at a monstrous outlay of money and bad taste.<sup>98</sup>

The influence of moral art history is once more apparent in the polemic against the later schools and the traditional connoisseurial attitudes which promoted an exclusive preference for them; it is also clearly visible in the approbation of the most feted of the new additions, a *Vision of St. Bernard* attributed to Masaccio.<sup>99</sup> Upon its hanging in August 1854, the magazine marvelled at the 'mystic suspense and solemn thought of

<sup>97</sup> 'Reconstituting the National Gallery', *Copy of a Treasury Minute*, London, Ordered by the House of Commons to be Printed, 27th March 1855, p.4.

<sup>98</sup> *Spectator*, vol.24, 1854, p.682.

<sup>99</sup> *National Gallery Minutes*, vol.2, p.300. The other works purchased were a *Senator* by Durer (£147), a *Madonna* by Pachierotto (£92.8s), a *Head of Christ* by Niccolo Alunno (£55.13s) and a *Madonna* by Lorenzo di San Severino (£393.15s). The 'Masaccio' was the most expensive, costing £400.

things heavenly' which it radiated, and declared that if truly a Masaccio, it was 'an invaluable acquisition' for the national collection.<sup>100</sup>

Foremost among the missed opportunities at the Bammerville sale mentioned by the *Spectator* was Botticelli's *Madonna and Child with the Infant St. John the Baptist*. The trustees set a limit on their agent of £500, only to be outbid by Barker, who gave £546 for the painting.<sup>101</sup> This is another instance of the National Gallery losing a picture due to the limits which continued to be set on its representatives, preventing any adaptation to the specific climate of a sale-room. Such restrictions did not, of course, apply to private collectors like Barker; their independence, combined in many cases with seemingly unlimited funds, made them far more effective at public auctions than the government. Macleod states that in their pursuit of contemporary works, middle-class collectors were aided by their backgrounds, which enabled them to conduct transactions and deals in a cool and essentially businesslike manner.<sup>102</sup> Many of those whose interests lay instead with old master painting, and especially those who concentrated upon the Italian 'primitives', would have benefited from similar professionally-based skills, which could be easily applied to the arts marketplace. This partly explains the intensification of competitive conditions in the English art world that seems to have occurred during this time.

It was an arena in which the trustees were ill-equipped to succeed, due to the continued restrictiveness of their buying procedure into the mid-1850s. There was, however, increasing pressure upon them from the press to produce results. At the commencement of the King of Holland's sale, *The Times* remarked that there were

<sup>100</sup>*Spectator*, vol.24, 1854, p.863. Davies, *National Gallery Catalogue*, p.292, cat.no.248. The painting is now attributed to Filippo Lippi.

<sup>101</sup>Robertson, *Eastlake*, p.137. Brigstocke, *Lord Lindsay as a Collector*, p.303. Also missed was a *Crucifixion* by Duccio, which was bought by Davenport-Bromley for £278.5s.

<sup>102</sup>Macleod, *Art*, p.40.

among the lots, which totalled in excess of 200 paintings, some fifteen or twenty 'of such rarity and excellence that the opportunity may never again occur of procuring such examples'; for the trustees to let such an opportunity pass would be a 'perpetual disgrace' to England.<sup>103</sup> As mentioned above, no action was taken at this sale by the government, and it was left to representatives of immensely wealthy private collectors such as the Marquis of Hertford, operating without any inhibiting financial limitations, to represent indirectly the English interest at the event.<sup>104</sup> The Rogers sale inspired similar sentiments, with the *Spectator* declaring that 'it is a duty of the National Gallery authorities to bid, and bid high, for some of the lots'.<sup>105</sup> The collection was identified as especially significant for the early works it contained, and Rogers himself was praised as a pioneer, who was prepared to invest in works which would, as the *Saturday Review* put it, 'until twenty or thirty years ago have been looked at with derisive wonder'.<sup>106</sup> Both these journals offered advice to the trustees regarding the purchase choices that should be made, but approached the topic in opposite ways. The *Spectator* recommended that bids be made for the early pictures on offer, in particular the works attributed to Giotto, Angelico, Cimabue, Lorenzo di Credi and Pollaiuolo; the *Saturday Review* instead listed names whose works they should avoid, mentioning Rembrandt, Claude, Rubens and even Raphael as masters who should be allowed to go elsewhere due to the existence of representative examples in the gallery already. The 'duty' of the trustees was conceived as being not only to buy, but to buy responsibly, to think of the collection as a whole in its historiographical aspect rather than the individual glories of a work or name in isolation. Their performance at the sale was a qualified success, demonstrating the development in the gallery's approach

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<sup>103</sup>*The Times*, 17th August 1850, p.6.

<sup>104</sup>*Athenaeum*, No.1191, 17th August 1850, p.902. The magazine reported that 'the English government was not represented at this spirited contest; but the Marquis of Hertford took its place for England, - and wrung many lots from the Czar at any price'. The sale raised £108,000 in total, of which Hertford's purchases accounted for £15,500.

<sup>105</sup>*Spectator*, vol.29, 1856, p.490.

<sup>106</sup>*Saturday Review*, vol.1, 1856, p.519.

to acquisition which had been catalysed by the 1853 select committee report. The triumph of the sale for the trustees was the acquisition of a fresco fragment depicting Two Haloed Mourners, which was attributed to Giotto, for a very reasonable price. The Saturday Review stated that 'nothing in the far-famed Arena Chapel is of equal grandeur and grace',<sup>107</sup> the Spectator that of all the works available it was 'peculiarly eligible for purchase'.<sup>108</sup> Several other less desirable pictures accompanied it, however, including a Good Samaritan by Bassano and a copy of Mantegna's Triumph of Julius Caesar by Rubens, for which much higher sums were paid.<sup>109</sup> The Spectator considered these 'well worth having', but thought Bassano to be 'already better represented in our gallery than some of his betters', and the value of the Rubens to be lessened by the fact that there was 'almost a glut' of his works at Trafalgar Square.<sup>110</sup> Needless to say, the early works which the trustees failed to purchase had no difficulty finding buyers, and many resurfaced in the specialised collections discussed above.<sup>111</sup>

In his letter to The Times of 1847, Ruskin asks in the name of 'the earnest students of England' that the funds of the National Gallery 'may no longer be played with like pebbles in London auction-rooms'.<sup>112</sup> His request, echoed by journals and papers in the years to follow, was basically for a new scholarly seriousness to be brought to the governance of the national collection. The rise in the taste for early Italian art catalysed a more general reappraisal of the function of old master painting in Victorian society, and the gradual deposition of the old administrative order in public galleries, in favour of one which was fully aware of its responsibility to both a newly

<sup>107</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>108</sup>Spectator, vol.29, 1856, p.512.

<sup>109</sup>Robertson, Eastlake, p.156. The 'Giotto' cost £78.15s, the Bassano £241.10s, and the Rubens £1,102.10s. Davies, National Gallery Catalogue, p.499, cat.no.276. The fragment depicting the Two Haloed Mourners has since been reattributed to Spinello Aretino.

<sup>110</sup>Spectator, vol.29, p.512.

<sup>111</sup>Waagen, Galleries, p.167. Davenport-Bromley, for example, bought a Profile Portrait of a Woman by Pollaiuolo at the Rogers sale.

<sup>112</sup>Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), The Complete Works, vol.12, p.406.

reconceived art history, and the populace it was supposed to benefit. This evolution can be observed in commentary on other public displays of ancient art, of which the most notable was the annual Summer Exhibition at the British Institution on Pall Mall.

### III. The Faltering of a New Era: The Failure of the 'Primitives' at the British Institution

The loan exhibitions mounted at the British Institution can be regarded as representing, in many ways, the old connoisseurial order which those inspired by moral art history sought to combat. Ann Pullan states that by the time of its closure in 1867 the Institution had not 'featured prominently in British cultural and artistic life for many decades, perhaps since the foundation of the National Gallery in 1824'. I would argue that its significance did not necessarily decline, but rather underwent an alteration. There was a wealth of coverage, comment and debate centred upon the Institution in the 1840s and 1850s, the greater part of which sought to question the ideological structures and assumptions on which the British Institution was founded; its prominence was due to the negative exemplar it was seen to constitute, as a supposedly public display which was subject to the quite different priorities of private interest. Pullan describes how, in the first two decades of the century, the Institution's exhibitions 'functioned as visible and symbolic reminders of patrician and royal authority', and how, after idealistic initial declarations of intent on the part of the administrators, they came to serve the vested interests of the largely aristocratic contributors through the protection of the value of their property.<sup>113</sup> Much of the hostile commentary of the Victorian era is based in an awareness of this; even in the late 1830s, however, several of the publications which would become the Institution's

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<sup>113</sup> Ann Pullan, 'Public Goods or Private Interest? The British Institution in the Early Nineteenth Century', in Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan (eds.), *Art in Bourgeois Society 1790-1850*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.27-34.



bitterest critics were expressing strong support for its Summer Exhibition of old master paintings. In 1837, for example, the *Spectator* declared it to be 'the last and greatest exhibition of the season - the grand climax of picture sights', going on to describe the paintings of private collectors as 'trophies of the conquests achieved by veterans in the splendid and peaceful field of art'.<sup>114</sup> Such men are conceived as national representatives, waging their 'war' for the benefit of the country at large. Similar patriotic sentiment was expressed in other periodicals; *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* called the summer display of 1839 'the best exhibition in London', praising its variety, which was made possible by the richness of the English private collection.<sup>115</sup> Just over a decade later, in 1850, *The Times*' reviewer found himself incapable of such unalloyed enthusiasm. Whilst recognising the 'zeal' of the directors, and the 'liberality' of the owners, he noticed 'a considerable falling off in the character and class of the works exhibited'. The problem, he maintained, lay with the transferral of works from:

the dignified seclusion of a country mansion, and the admiration of a few indulgent guests, to face the sharp eyes and unsparing judgement of a London exhibition room.<sup>116</sup>

The conditions and standards of the modern critical world, and those of the traditional private collection, are presented as fundamentally opposed, and what is acceptable to the latter is entirely unsatisfactory to the former; the compilation of an exhibition which would be admired by the metropolitan art expert from such corrupted reserves is regarded as being impossible. I will argue that, much as it inflected responses to the acquisitions of the National Gallery, moral art history proved a significant factor in this

<sup>114</sup>*Spectator*, vol.10, 1837, p.522.

<sup>115</sup>*Blackwood's*, vol.46, July-December 1839, p.472. The singularity of the English art world in this respect was acknowledged elsewhere. Waagen, *Works*, vol.1, p.158. Waagen concludes a description of the old master exhibition at the Institution by remarking that the annual composition of an entirely different display out of loans from private collections 'can be done nowhere in the world besides England'.

<sup>116</sup>*The Times*, 10th June 1850, p.5.



development of critical attitudes towards the British Institution and the means by which its old master exhibitions were staged.

During the 1830s, the Summer Exhibitions at the British Institution were dominated by the tastes of the Georgian era, named the 'Orleans generation' by Francis Haskell in reference to one of the major continental sales of the late eighteenth century at which several British collections acquired their core of artworks.<sup>117</sup> The exhibition of 1831, for example, consisted of works from eighteenth-century England, seventeenth-century Holland, France and Spain, and sixteenth-century Italy.<sup>118</sup>

Although contemporaries of the mature Raphael, such as Fra Bartolomeo and Andrea del Sarto, were present at the exhibitions from the beginning, until 1839 the only earlier pictures admitted were those attributed to Leonardo da Vinci.<sup>119</sup> In that year, however, the standard array of paintings was accompanied by a small number of 'primitives', which included a *Virgin and Child* attributed to Giotto, which had been lent by the MP William Cartwright, and a *Coronation of the Virgin* given to Gentile da Fabriano, from the collection of the clergyman John Sandford.<sup>120</sup> From this point, early Italian art became an occasional element of this display, as more collectors came into ownership of examples, and the general level of interest in such painting rose. Notable specialist collectors began to lend their pictures; Labouchere, for example, provided the directors with a *Dead Christ* by Perugino in 1842. After a hiatus mid-decade,<sup>121</sup> a concerted effort appears to have been made in 1847, and particularly

<sup>117</sup> Francis Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art*, New York, Phaidon, 1976, p.96. The sale of the Duc d'Orleans was held in 1798. See also Reitlinger, *The Economics*, pp.28-48.

<sup>118</sup> *British Institution: Catalogue of Pictures of Italian, Spanish, French, Dutch and English Masters*, London, William Nichol, 1831. The display included works attributed to Reynolds, Claude, Poussin, Rubens, Raphael, Titian, Van Dyck, Murillo, Teniers and Ruysdael.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, 1836. Present this year, for example, were Sarto's *Portrait of Signora Niccolini*, and an unnamed *Female Portrait* attributed to Leonardo.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*, 1839. Stephen and Lee (eds.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol.17, p.765. Sandford was then chaplain of Longacre; he became Archdeacon of Coventry in 1851.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, 1843, 1844, 1845, 1846. No works prior to Raphael were shown in these

1848, to represent the earlier schools on the walls at Pall Mall. The 1847 show featured paintings given to Francia, Crivelli, Ghirlandaio and Fra Angelico, all for the first time;<sup>122</sup> in 1848, however, the large proportion of early works included suggests a deliberate dedication of the exhibition to them.

The directors' minutes reveal that this was indeed the case; at a meeting held on the 7th June, a note was made of 'a novelty on the present occasion, namely, a series of pictures from the time of Giotto and Van Eyck'.<sup>123</sup> This remark was later included as an introduction to the official catalogue for that year. Thomas Smith also remarks in his retrospective of the Institution, published in 1860, that the display of 1848 was 'an exception', which he viewed as having 'the highest curiosity and interest'.<sup>124</sup> The middle room, the largest of the three available, was entirely given over to the 'primitives', and featured more than sixty paintings. Contrary to the directors' comment quoted above, this included examples from the full range of early schools, and the vast majority were Italian rather than Netherlandish. The collections they came from were diverse, in keeping with the patterns discussed earlier in the chapter; the largest aristocratic galleries submitted works, as did several of the specialist collectors. Specimens of Fra Angelico belonging to Fuller-Maitland and Rogers, for example, hung on the same walls as Lorenzo di Credis and Verrocchios from the Grosvenor Gallery.<sup>125</sup>

years.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 1847. The Crivelli, an *Annunciation*, was from Labouchere's collection.

<sup>123</sup>*Minutes of the British Institution*, RC.V.16, hand-written by Charles Belae, secretary of the Institution, 7th June 1848, p.71.

<sup>124</sup>Thomas Smith, *Recollections of the British Institution 1805-59*, London, Westminster, 1860, p.195.

<sup>125</sup>*British Institution Catalogue*, 1848. Fuller-Maitland lent an *Ascension of the Virgin*, Rogers his *Salome before Herod*. The Marquis of Westminster lent a *Virgin and Child* by Verrocchio, and a *Nativity* by Lorenzo di Credi.

Despite the involvement of men of the highest social station and greatest wealth in its administration, the British Institution remained a commercial concern throughout its existence. Its costs were met partly by means of subscriptions, but mostly by the standard shilling entrance fee and the sale of catalogues. Its survival was ultimately dependent upon the staging of popular exhibitions which would appeal to a broader public. Pullan states that in its early years, the Institution's success 'depended upon its ability to accommodate a range of interest groups and classes',<sup>126</sup> and the situation does not appear to have changed in its later years. The efforts of the directors in 1848 can be seen as an attempt to reflect current developments in the criticism and appreciation of old masters; it was the year in which Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art* was published, the two panels attributed to Taddeo Gaddi were donated to the National Gallery by Coningham, and the Arundel Society was formed in order to heighten familiarity with the earlier masters in English society. As an exercise in improving attendance, however, the 1848 Summer Exhibition was something of a failure, with the Institution's takings falling by over £150 on the previous year.<sup>127</sup> Such a dramatic decline ensured that the quantities of early art were cut back considerably the following year,<sup>128</sup> and at all subsequent exhibitions the number of 'primitives' remained low, always safely outnumbered by the less challenging productions of the later schools.

The changes made year to year in the selection of paintings for the British Institution Summer Exhibition were closely monitored by the periodical press, which seized upon an opportunity to deliver judgement on the condition of the British private collection through a review of what was, in theory at least, a selection of its finest works. The

<sup>126</sup>Pullan, 'Public Goods', p.37.

<sup>127</sup>*British Institution Minutes*, RC.V.16, 28th July 1849, p.80. In 1847, the Summer Exhibition took £452.7s; in 1848, it took £287.17s.

<sup>128</sup>*British Institution Catalogue*, 1849. Only three early works were included, a Pollaiuolo *St. John*, a Bellini *Virgin and Child* and a fresco fragment of the *Coronation of the Virgin* by Taddeo Gaddi.

most regular and consistent coverage can be found in the *Athenaeum* and the *Spectator*. The *Athenaeum* was the most popular weekly paper throughout the 1840s and 1850s, with an average circulation of 18,000; its subject matter was eclectic, including science, music, literature and art. The *Spectator* was more news-based, and had a far smaller circulation of around 3000, but this readership consisted of, according to Alvin Sullivan, 'the influential members of the upper middle class'.<sup>129</sup> Despite the *Athenaeum*'s indisputable dominance of the market, the two can be said to have been rivals, competing for their share of the same audience. That this audience was growing is testified to by the appearance of several other weeklies with a similarly broad cultural agenda over the course of the period here studied, such as the *Saturday Review*.<sup>130</sup> they too offered notices of the British Institution old master displays, as did monthlies like *Blackwood's*. All these publications were addressed to an educated and metropolitan middle-class readership, to people of some prosperity and learning; the small circulations these papers enjoyed in comparison with those of more populist organs like the *Penny Magazine*<sup>131</sup> illustrate the relatively rarefied readership they attracted. In terms of British Institution reviews, this meant that a certain degree of familiarity with the major figures and schools of painting on the part of their readers was taken for granted by critics. It was also often assumed that the review was being written to be read by someone who would actually be attending the exhibition at some point during its run.<sup>132</sup> The acerbic attacks launched against the British Institution in the pages of these journals can be thus seen as an attempt to instil discontent in its audience, which would in turn, it was hoped, lead to change.

<sup>129</sup> Alvin Sullivan, *British Literary Magazines*, Westport, Connecticut, London, Greenwood Press, 1983, p.21 (*Athenaeum*), p.391 (*Spectator*).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p.379. The *Saturday Review* was founded in 1855. Another example is *Notes and Queries* (p.281), which was founded in 1849.

<sup>131</sup> See chapter 1, section IV, p.48, note 122.

<sup>132</sup> For example, *Athenaeum*, No.449, 4th June 1836. The magazine's critic here refrains from offering a lengthy description of the narrative elements of Murillo's *Return of the Prodigal Son*, lent that year from the Sutherland collection, 'because every visitor can discover it himself'.

Initial responses in such publications to early art as it began to appear on the walls of the British Institution were positive. The correspondent from *Blackwood's*, encountering a scene from the *History of Joseph* by Francesco Ubertini, a pupil of Perugino, in the exhibition of 1839, was surprised by the strength of its appeal:

At first glance one is inclined to turn from these pictures, as eccentricities of art rather than pictures; but they are much more, and contain many exquisite beauties of form, of expression, and of colour.<sup>133</sup>

The emphasis is placed upon that which eludes the casual observer, yet becomes apparent to one prepared to spend time and effort on their evaluation. This introduction of a work ethic to the business of art appreciation extended beyond aesthetic issues to questions of historiography, much as it did at the National Gallery. *Blackwood's* went on to state in its account of the Ubertini picture that it was not difficult 'to trace the peculiarities which Raphael brought to so great a perfection'.<sup>134</sup> This seems close to the devaluing of early art through comparison with the productions of later schools that was so censured by Ruskin in 1847; commentary from later exhibitions demonstrates a greater sophistication in the expression of this concept. At the 1848 exhibition, with its unprecedented numbers of 'primitives' from a variety of centuries and schools, the *Athenaeum* remarked that, taken in conjunction with the later art in the other two rooms, the Institution's display of that year:

presents something like a history of the practice of art in all its successive phases...The progress of the general idea rather than the individual thinker is the true subject of philosophical inquiry.<sup>135</sup>

This teleological conception is akin to the Comic emplotment of art history made by Kugler, Eastlake and Wornum, as discussed in chapter one. The *Spectator*, in

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<sup>133</sup>*Blackwood's*, vol.46, July-December 1839, p.472. *British Institution Catalogue*, 1839: the painting was lent by the Rev. John Sandford.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup>*Athenaeum*, No.1076, 10th June 1848, p.608.

particular, offers an overview in its account of the 1848 display which is similar to Kugler's in his *Handbook of the History of the Italian Schools of Painting*. Angelico and his peers are praised for the 'intellectual idea' which lay at the core of their work, but are identified as belonging to 'the crude ages', representing only the 'imperfect germ' of art; they can only be assessed, the magazine states, as forefathers of the period of painting's 'full maturity, when the intellectual idea was embodied in perfect execution'.<sup>136</sup>

The *Athenaeum*, however, despite its concern with the importance of a 'connected view'<sup>137</sup> of painting provided by a discursive display of the schools of ancient art, expressed admiration for the 'primitives' at the British Institution in terms which, like its criticism of the acquisitions of the National Gallery, reveal the influence of Rio's *De la Poésie Chrétienne*. Of an *Assumption of the Virgin* by Angelico which was lent to the exhibition by Sandford in 1848, for example, it exclaimed that:

The grace in action, beauty in countenance, heavenliness of expression, and suavity of colour inspired by the painter's holiness of purpose are here. The moral of the man is visible through his works.<sup>138</sup>

The *Athenaeum* was the journal which subscribed to the philosophies of moral art history in the largest measure. As well as being the only one of all those mentioned to feature a review of *De la Poésie Chrétienne* prior to its translation into English in 1854, it also serialised the chapters of Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art* as they were being written.<sup>139</sup> Despite the magazine's animosity towards the moral art historical pronouncements of Ruskin, made evident in its reviews of *Modern Painters* II,<sup>140</sup> it seized upon the polemical potential of the discourse, and used its principles as

<sup>136</sup>*Spectator*, vol.21, 1848, p.591. See chapter 1, section II, pp.21-2.

<sup>137</sup>*Athenaeum*, No.1076, 10th June 1848, p.608.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*, No.1025, 10th June 1847, p.649. See chapter 1, section IV, p.42.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.* The book was serialised throughout 1845 and 1846.

<sup>140</sup>See chapter 1, section VI, p.77.



much to denounce the later as to laud the earlier schools. In 1841, a *Madonna and Child* by Rubens was singled out as an example of supposedly religious works which present 'travesties of sacred subjects' to a viewer, serving to 'sensualize and degrade' that which they ought to glorify. The Madonnas of the Flemish painter are said to be 'creaming over at the bosom like Dutch dairymaids', the naturalistic impulse corrupting images that should be the product of 'inspired, not intoxicated enthusiasm'.<sup>141</sup> The use of potently sexualised rustic imagery here strengthens a semiotic bond created between naturalistic painting and unsophistication; enjoyment of such art is effectively presented as an immoral and purely sensual indulgence. To partake of this indulgence, it was feared, was to partake in the intoxication that had produced it, and have one's faculties of judgement similarly impaired. In 1850, the journal was dismayed to find the display dominated once more by the Flemish, Dutch and sixteenth-century Italian schools. As with the Guidos at Trafalgar Square, it was thought that such works would somehow infect the tastes of the public, and cause the nation's art students to become 'imperfectly excited'. The temptation offered by sensual art, like that offered by sex or by other more tangible intoxicants, was easy to submit to and difficult to resist; if given no opportunity for improvement, the paper warned, the student will turn 'to the lower schools, which tax his thinking powers less'.<sup>142</sup> Moral art history here appears akin to stringent religious morality, based in the denial of earthly pleasure, or naturalistic beauty in art, through devotion to the contemplation of the unearthly and spiritual. It is implied that students, both of art and art history, and the general public at large, must be guided like a flock by critics and gallery administrators, in order to keep them from straying into degeneracy.

By the 1850s, similar attitudes were being expressed in other journals as the Summer Exhibition became steadily more conservative in content. In 1857, for example, the

<sup>141</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 715, 10th July 1841, p. 525.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*, No. 1181, 15th June 1850, p. 641.



*Saturday Review* remarked that Rubens' *Diana and Nymphs* was 'of course freely drawn and gorgeously coloured; but there is no kind of decency or moral restraint in this coarse licentiousness of design'.<sup>143</sup> The Flemish painter is once more identified as a moral transgressor by a Victorian critic, this time independently of any question of the treatment of sacred iconography. Even the *Spectator*, despite its reluctance to confer a Roesque measure of acclaim onto pre-Renaissance art, still dismissed the plethora of landscapes hung in the rooms at Pall Mall in 1854 as 'misapplied Dutch labour', in which unimaginative industry 'preponderates over anything worth being treated by art'.<sup>144</sup> The staple diet of ancient art served by the British Institution during the majority of this decade seems to have been viewed as either spiritually corrupt, or devoid of any spirituality at all.

From the mid-1840s, the *Athenaeum* had been championing early Italian art as an antidote to the stagnancy it felt threatened the British Institution, just as it had applauded the (albeit slow) arrival of specimens of such painting at the National Gallery. Its description of the *Virgin and Child with Saints* by Francia that was shown in 1843, called it a work in which 'expression and feeling triumph over all the faults of mechanism', and was issued as a defiant challenge to the existing connoisseurial order, indeed the English art world as a whole:

Tell us, ye critics and connoisseurs, ye picture-makers and picture-mongers, how much "brilliant effect" - "fine dash of pencil" - "delicious flesh tint" - how much glaze, varnish and scumble work, ever so adroit, would outweigh the moral and intellectual qualities just mentioned?<sup>145</sup>

The belief among moral art historians that the dominant critical discourse of the early 1840s was based in a superficial revelling in sensuality is here forcibly expressed. The imaginary quotations from a typical expert contain in their references to "delicious

<sup>143</sup> *Saturday Review*, vol.4, 1857, p.157.

<sup>144</sup> *Spectator*, vol.27, 1854, p.623.

<sup>145</sup> *Athenaeum*, No.815, 10th June 1843, p.550.

flesh tint'" the same implication of sexual deviance as the comments on the bosoms of Rubens' 'Dutch dairymaid' Madonnas quoted earlier. This approach is presented as being pitifully shallow, little more than the morally suspect worship of paint, which was devoid of any higher mental aspect whatsoever. Art appreciation, the *Athenaeum* ruled, should be a profound, cerebral and chaste pursuit, and the study of the 'primitives' was the best way to ensure that it became so. Their possible role as a corrective to the sinful ways of the English art world, and harbingers of a purer, uncorrupted taste was seized upon by the journal, particularly with regards to the British Institution Summer Exhibition. In March 1845, after the display of the previous year which had contained no paintings predating 1500, the *Athenaeum* ran an article entitled 'Hints to the Pall Mall Committee of Taste', in which it complained at the monotony of the works that had been put up for show: 'apocryphal Titians, genuine besmudged "Madonnas" of the Bolognese style, black and green Poussinesque landscapes &c., &c.'. The solution to such an uninspiring situation was the admission of 'one antique picture, one alone' into every annual exhibition. The paper declared:

Place it anywhere, but somewhere - thrust it into the lumber saloon, among the miscellaneous articles, but give it a scrap of wall, give it a chance, after ages of oblivion, to attract the vacant look of a passing visitor, though perhaps not the homage of a single votarist.<sup>146</sup>

This seems a deliberate exaggeration of the under-representation of early art at the British Institution, and the *Athenaeum* was surely campaigning for a larger showing of 'primitive' painting than a single work a year. The magazine's somewhat melodramatic remarks can be interpreted as a more general plea for the standardised inclusion of such pictures in the display; it was a plea the directors endeavoured to answer in the years that followed, as discussed above. What could not be guaranteed, though, was that the Summer Exhibition's audience would react to it in the correct manner, as the *Athenaeum* acknowledges. They may respond with 'homage', and become 'votarists',

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<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, No.909, 29th March 1845, p.314.

which was regarded as entirely appropriate before true Christian art; the suggestion in the extract above, however, is that their state of vacancy will nullify any of the ameliorative influence such painting could possibly have upon them.

#### IV. The British Institution and the Preservation of Privilege

This attitude towards the crowd which attended the old master exhibitions at the British Institution was rooted in deeper issues concerning the Institution as a whole, and what it was held to represent by the middle-class periodical press. For the reviewers of these papers, an essential aspect of the displays arranged at 53 Pall Mall was the source of their components. The quality of the Summer Exhibition was believed to be largely dependent upon the private collectors to whom the directors appealed for loans. A poor year was often judged to be the responsibility of these collectors, and they were frequently the primary focus of grievances. Private interests were seen to be having an unreasonable impact upon the public's opportunity for study and self-improvement by means of a profound experience of old master painting. In 1840, for example, the *Athenaeum* stated the opinion that the owners of art were becoming 'more jealous and illiberal each year', as if they were consciously trying to deprive the populace of 'pleasure and profit from private collections'. The Marquis of Westminster is criticised for the minuscule size of his contribution, and the Grosvenor gallery likened to a 'miser's hoard'. The magazine's critic saw only two reasonable options for the proprietors of such collections: they must either make their personal galleries more accessible to any who take an intellectual interest in their contents, or they must lend more freely to the British Institution. A riposte is given in anticipation to an expected response from these collectors:

their countercharge of "barbarianism" against the public (is not) a sufficient defence, as it should be their business to debarbarise that public by all the means

in their power, not the least efficacious of which would prove the one we mention.<sup>147</sup>

The responsibility for the art education of the English people at large, and the subsequent improvement in national taste, is here laid with the private collector; it is their 'business', just as it was deemed the 'duty' of the trustees of the National Gallery to ensure that the display at Trafalgar Square was as edifying as possible. The *Athenaeum* here challenges the undemocratic elitism which it regards as fundamental to the mentality of the private collector; effectively, the very right to own artworks is being questioned. A decade later, however, the situation as reported in the press had not changed; the *Spectator* blamed the dismal 1850 show, which it called 'the least felicitous' of all the Summer Exhibitions, on the 'increasing indifference' shown by owners of art to the Institution's need for high-quality loans.<sup>148</sup> *The Times* also felt compelled to remark in 1850 in one of its infrequent reviews of the Summer Exhibition that the British Institution should annually host 'the flower of the picture galleries of England', but 'this year it certainly has no claims to such a distinction'. The paper went on to list the major galleries which had failed to contribute, the majority of which were aristocratic; Westminster's was among them, despite the censure of the *Athenaeum* ten years earlier. Also present was Lord Ward's and Robert Holford's, indicating that a taste for early Italian art did not necessarily signify sympathy for the cause of art education amongst collectors, as it seemed to amongst critics.<sup>149</sup>

It can be argued that the primary role of the private collection was the consolidation of its proprietor's identity as a member of the uppermost echelon of society; when under the control of the aristocracy and gentry of England, fine paintings were absorbed into

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, No. 649, 13th June 1840, p. 481.

<sup>148</sup>*Spectator*, vol. 23, 1850, p. 572.

<sup>149</sup>*The Times*, 10th June 1850, p. 5. The other collections listed were those of Lord Ellesmere, Lord Lansdowne, Sir Robert Peel and the Marquis of Hertford. *The Times* printed reviews of the British Institution Summer Exhibition seemingly at random; accounts are found in 1837, 1838, 1846, 1850, 1854, 1855 and 1859, but in none of the intervening years.

a discourse of luxury, and were seen as one of a series of signifiers of rank, wealth and importance. Contemporary accounts reveal them to have been a component of the splendour which defined the experience of the patrician domicile for those fortunate enough to be granted access. Waagen obviously experienced many of these spaces, and his volumes are full of references to their opulence. For him, artworks were something of a centrepiece amidst the more general grandeur of such environments. In Stafford House, for example, he comments on the commanding position of the Marquis' residence, and the wonderful view its rooms offer of St. James' Park and Westminster:

Yet the eye always returns to the interior of the apartments, where it is attracted by a variety of objects; for besides the riches and splendour which the hangings, curtains and furniture everywhere display, the more noble and refined enjoyment which works of art alone can afford is nowhere failing.<sup>150</sup>

The 'riches and splendour' of an aristocratic dwelling were, for Waagen, an entirely appropriate setting for old master paintings, but in other accounts these paintings were forced into the background by gatherings of Victorian high society. During the late 1840s and early 1850s, Lady Eastlake accompanied her husband to a multitude of social engagements held in the foremost houses of London, and the records she made of these events in her journals reveal a lesser concern with the artworks present. In a description of a banquet at Devonshire House on the 10th of May 1853, they are subsumed into a 'perfect fairyland' of unreal magnificence, composed of 'marble, gilding, mirrors, pictures and flowers'. Paintings were but one in a range of sensual attractions on offer, and despite the expert knowledge of art which she demonstrated in her journalism, they receive no more than a mention by Lady Eastlake in her account of the evening. Attention is rather devoted to the lavish refreshments, the musical performances that took place, and the extravagant dresses of the ladies; she

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<sup>150</sup>Waagen, *Treasures*, vol.2, p.57.

concludes with the comment that 'there was so much to look at that the hours fled'.<sup>151</sup>

Evidence of a wider popular fascination with aristocratic ostentation can be found in the pages of the *Illustrated London News*. In July 1856, for example, an engraving (figure 2) and a lengthy account of a royal ball at Grosvenor House were published by the paper. The primary purpose of the image is clearly to emphasise the grandeur of the occasion. The role played by art in this scene is that of a backdrop, the Marquis' collection occupying a shadowed and indistinct area between the lofty brilliance of the highly detailed cornice, and the sartorial splendour of the prestigious assembly below. It is attendant upon the Lord and his guests, awaiting either their enjoyment or their indifference; in terms of the visual representation of the event, it is necessary to indicate its presence, but not make any more than the vaguest of attempts at the specific depiction of works. The paintings were a subsidiary element of the evening; this is also stressed by the fact that, as the paper pointed out, 'the famed picture gallery was made the supper-room'.<sup>152</sup> This was done in order to accommodate the large number of guests, and demonstrates how the private gallery was essentially a malleable space, onto which the needs of its proprietor could be projected, and the priorities which governed it accordingly adjusted.

This feature in the *Illustrated London News* was essentially a royal lifestyle piece, intended to provide the middle to lower-middle echelons of society with an insight into the life of their monarch. Pains were clearly taken to ensure its magnificent aspect, and the inclusion of art as an integral part of this vision of splendour, which was beyond

<sup>151</sup> Charles Eastlake Smith (ed.), *The Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, London. John Murray, 1895, pp.245-6. She marvelled at the music of the 'masterly instrumental performers', and remarked that the 'many beautiful dresses' were 'so fantastic that they would have passed for fancy dress a few years ago, being worn very much tucked up, and with long flowing ribbons - head dresses with long creepers of flowers interwoven with diamonds hanging as low as the dress behind'.

<sup>152</sup> *Illustrated London News*, vol.29, July-December 1856, p.2.



the experience of the majority of readers, was unquestioned. A similar conception of art as the province of the super-rich, to which the populace can only gain access with the express permission of this select body, is found in Waagen. He states that:

nobody enjoys life in so noble and varied a manner as Englishmen of the higher classes of society, who rejoice not only in greater wealth, but in a more general intellectual cultivation, than their fellow creatures.

This is accepted as an immutable situation, with the less privileged able only to consider enviously the advantages enjoyed by the wealthy; as Waagen remarks to his readers, 'you will agree with me that they have not much left to wish for'.<sup>153</sup> The ownership of art is presented by Waagen, Lady Eastlake and the *Illustrated London News* as one of a range of signifiers of an exclusive world, reserved for those of rank and privilege. This connotation was transferred to the Summer Exhibitions at the British Institution, along with the artworks themselves.

A measure of exclusivity was immediately imposed at the British Institution by the shilling entrance fee, the basic outlay of which placed it beyond the means of the humble masses of London society. It is likely that less affluent members of the middle class who could perhaps nonetheless manage the odd shilling would be put off by the small scale of the event; in exhibition terms, during the age that produced the Crystal Palace, the annual British Institution display of between 150 and 200 old masters did not constitute value for money. No provision was made for the uninformed, and the Institution has been characterised by modern writers as 'little more than a collectors' club, designed to allow owners to show their prized, and often only recently acquired, possessions to one another in a central metropolitan environment'.<sup>154</sup> However, such a characterisation does not allow for the undeniably public nature of the Summer Exhibition, despite its lack of populist appeal. In fact, it could be argued that the

<sup>153</sup> Waagen, *Treasures*, vol.2, p.153.

<sup>154</sup> Hermann, *The English*, p.227.



director's singular failure to make the British Institution generally appealing to the population at large explained the favour it found with a select and fashionable few. Andrew Hemingway has argued that the fashionable status of the Institution was guaranteed from its inception in 1806 by royal patronage, and the substantial number of nobles in its directorate. Along with the Royal Academy, it is said to have had the highest social tone of any exhibition in London during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, and was renowned for its opulent surroundings. It was 'socially mixed', though; Hemingway states that 'aristocracy, gentry and different ranks of the bourgeoisie came together in the crowds'.<sup>155</sup> This limited admission of the middle class, which was a feature of the British Institution throughout its existence, was due to the concern with profitability, as it could not be economically maintained by the attendance of the upper echelons alone. The resultant social compound was largely composed of those who belonged to the privileged classes, those who aspired to their condition, and those who were simply curious to experience their pursuits and an aspect of their lifestyle.

Various social filters were put in place to allow the separation and definition of these groups on certain occasions. Special events were staged over the course of a typical run of the Summer Exhibition, the most notable of which were the gaslit evening views, held only six times per season. Waagen attended one in 1836, whilst writing *Works*, and remarked that it was considered the 'most fashionable time' for viewing the gallery.<sup>156</sup> This was due to the difficulty involved in gaining admission, which was only granted with the presentation of a ticket issued on a personal basis by a governor of the Institution; Waagen had been given his by the Duke of Sutherland, who was then President. Attendance was effectively a declaration of membership of an 'inner

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<sup>155</sup>Andrew Hemingway, 'Art Exhibitions as Leisure-Class Rituals in Early Nineteenth-Century London', in Brian Allen (ed.), *Towards a Modern Art World*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995, p.99.

<sup>156</sup>Waagen, *Works*, vol.1, p.157.

circle' of the British Institution, and of personal intimacy with the esteemed collectors who ran the exhibition. The codes of high society were made to apply to the select space created at these gaslit viewings. In 1844, for example, at a directors' meeting, it was ruled that evening dress was to be uniformly worn, and a stipulation to this effect was accordingly printed on the back of all tickets from then on.<sup>157</sup> Waagen's description of the interior stresses the calibre of those present:

A very numerous and elegant assemblage of gentlemen and ladies were viewing the pictures, which covered all the walls. The most eminent artists and connoisseurs meet here and communicate their observations to one another.<sup>158</sup>

The audience of the Summer Exhibition is here unified by its interest in art, as well as by its social privilege; although the elegant and the intellectual are distinguished from one another, their pursuit is the same, allowing a comfortable coexistence within the walls of the Institution.

As mentioned above, the directorate of the Institution reflected its socially exclusive nature. It perpetuated a formal internal hierarchy which supported the involvement of those of wealth and privilege, and enabled degrees of acceptance into the 'inner circle' of the Institution to be discerned. This directorate was a body of sixteen to twenty men (including a president and vice-president) who effectively ran the Institution, maintaining its accounts, properties and employees as well as arranging its exhibitions. The directors were elected individually from the Institution's governors, of which there were roughly 120, by the existing directorate, and three were to stand down annually by rotation, although they could be re-elected. Becoming a life governor was dependent on two things; the approval of an application to the directorate, and the payment of a sizeable subscription fee. It was laid down in 1834 that fifty guineas would purchase life governorship, as well as personal admission with two guests to the

<sup>157</sup>British Institution Minutes. RC.V.16, 5th June 1844, p.50.

<sup>158</sup>Waagen, *Works*, vol.1, p.157.

morning exhibition, and two tickets to the evening exhibition. A subscription of 100 guineas bought all these privileges, but with four rather than two tickets to the evening exhibition; the majority of those present at the gaslit shows would thus be the personal guests of the richest governors.<sup>159</sup> Several of the notable collectors of early art had official connections with the British Institution, and became involved in its administration.<sup>160</sup> Involvement, and especially directorship, was prestigious and advantageous, and would have meant a collector could play an active role in the selection of works for the Summer Exhibition. It is likely that the interests and specialist areas of the men who made up the board of directors would be reflected to an extent in the exhibitions they staged. Directors seem to have been chosen for their knowledge of the art world and their connections within it, enabling them to recommend certain collections as a source for loans, and even appeal on a personal level to their proprietors.<sup>161</sup> Collectors of early art, as well as wishing to champion its cause, would also know of who to apply to for the choicest selection of such works; it is surely no coincidence that Rogers sat on the directorial board in 1848, along with the Marquis of Westminster and Lord Northwick, two nobles who demonstrated an interest in 'primitive' painting through their purchases and loans.

As with the board of trustees of the National Gallery, there was a prevalence of the titled among the Institution's directorate; in 1848, for example, the Duke of Sutherland was president, the Earl of Ellesmere vice-president, and amongst the

<sup>159</sup> *British Institution Catalogue*, 1834.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* 1848-55. For example, Holford became a life governor in 1852, and then a director in 1854; the scholar Beriah Botfield, who lent a *Virgin and Child* by Perugino in 1851, became a governor in 1848 and then a director in 1850; the MP Charles Townely, who had supplied a fresco fragment given to Giotto in 1848, became a governor the following year and then a director in 1855; and Fuller-Maitland was a life governor from 1848.

<sup>161</sup> *British Institution Minutes*, RC.V.16, 9th April 1853, p.101. In 1853, prior to his election as a director, Townely was visited by the director C.B. Wall, with whom he was acquainted, who came in the company of the keeper John Seguer to convince Townely to lend the Institution a work in his possession by Julio Clovio.

remaining sixteen directors were four Earls, two Marquises, two Lords and a Duke. Appointment was until death, and the annual rotation of directors mentioned earlier was an empty ritual, as a director whose term was up never failed to be immediately re-elected by the other members of the board. To gain access even to the body of governors seems to have required some effort on the part of collectors, however, in the form of a large or especially significant contribution to the exhibition.<sup>162</sup> If enormous loans were a means of currying favour among the directors in order to ensure election to governorship, some notable attempts went unrewarded. Both Barker and Ellis opened their doors to the directors in the late 1850s, yet remained outside the Institution's official structures. In 1858, for example, these self-made men lent in excess of twenty works apiece.<sup>163</sup> It is possible that they were unwilling to become formally involved in the Institution, but this seems unlikely; the social advantages of holding a position in such a prestigious body would have been considerable. I would argue that their absence was rather due to a conscious exclusion of men of lowly origin by the directorate.

Barker was an enthusiastic member of other cultural societies, particularly the Burlington Fine Arts Club. Formed over the course of the 1850s, it is presented in recent criticism as the first truly democratic arts organisation, in which the class requirement so long attendant on picture collecting, and still strongly felt at the British Institution, was removed. Haskell, for example, describes how at its events 'connoisseurs from all social classes, from hereditary peers to nouveaux-riches, would

<sup>162</sup> *British Institution Catalogue*, 1851. In this year, for example, the one prior to his appointment as a governor, Holford made a particularly large contribution to the exhibition, lending a diverse selection of works which included a *Magdalen* by Domenichino, a *Madonna* by Murillo, a *Virgin and Child* by Perugino, a *Girl with a Dove* by Greuze and a *Landscape* by Ruysdael.

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*, 1858. The selections in either case reflected their collections; Ellis lent mostly eighteenth-century English, seventeenth-century Dutch and Spanish, and sixteenth-century Italian, Barker fifteenth-century Italian. Barker's loans included five paintings attributed to Crivelli, as well as alleged examples of Botticelli, Piero della Francesca and Filippo Lippi.

meet to discuss their latest purchases'.<sup>164</sup> Robertson also depicts the club as one which placed more emphasis on a new breed of middle-class collector, and contained fewer vestiges of the old aristocratic order.<sup>165</sup> However, an account of a morning meeting of the club held at Barker's house at 103 Piccadilly on the second of July 1858 by Richard Redgrave suggests the need for a modification of this view.

Redgrave's description of the event is inflected throughout by his awareness of his host's humble origins. Barker is said to have provided:

everything, indeed, that could feast the eye or the palette. All was certainly in the best taste, strange to say, though our host was bred a shoemaker.

Barker's origins in the more menial provinces of the lower-middle class are characterised by one of the gentry as indelible, a part of him that no amount of ostensible refinement can disguise. The reputed quality of Barker's stable is mentioned, and the observation offered that its owner's appearance accordingly 'has a touch of the old groom about it' as a result;<sup>166</sup> all sophistication was thus stripped from the figure of the middle-class picture buyer, and he is made the recipient of mockery rather than respect. Redgrave also relates the comments of the collector and occasional British Institution contributor C.S.Bale,<sup>167</sup> who remarked that he did not think that Barker cared to see him among the guests, as he used to deliver and fit the young Bale's boots after his father had finished making them. The pictures themselves are judged to be above any criticism, being of 'rarity and excellence', but the man responsible for their accumulation is identified as a socially inferior 'other'. Although the middle classes were admitted to the world of private collecting during this period, vestiges of the exclusive patrician-based systems that had structured preceding eras

<sup>164</sup>Haskell, *Rediscoveries*, p.73.

<sup>165</sup>Robertson, *Eastlake*, p.184. At the Burlington Fine Arts Club, the important issue was not expert knowledge, Robertson states, as anyone could find information on any school by the second half of the 1850s: 'The question was, who had the money?'

<sup>166</sup>Redgrave, *A Memoir*, p.189.

<sup>167</sup>British Institution Catalogue, 1858. He lent a Gozzoli *Virgin and Child* in this year.

still exerted a powerful influence at both the Burlington Fine Arts Club and the British Institution.

#### V. The Iniquities of Fashion: Early Italian Art and the Self-Definition of the Professional Critic

Many commentators upon the British Institution Summer Exhibitions found the ideal view of the proceedings presented by Waagen impossible to subscribe to. The *Art-Journal* disputed his claim that artists assembled at Pall Mall to be creatively enriched by the display, and the 'observations' they shared before it; the magazine repeatedly asserted that for whatever reason, very few painters actually attended at all, which from a certain point of view made the entire affair a waste of time.<sup>168</sup> The *Athenaeum* emerged as a consistently harsh critic of almost every aspect of the British Institution, not least the disparity between the supposed refinement of its largely upper-class contributors and their collections, and the quality of the resulting display. In 1845 it declared that the selection on offer would have done 'a set of country squires great credit to get up, but the aristocracy of England very little'. As with its comments on Rubens' Madonnas in 1841, rusticity is here linked by the magazine to a lack of sophistication, made especially scandalous as it occurs in a place where sophistication was particularly required, and its absence would prove injurious. The 'wretched outcasts' on the walls are considered particularly offensive as their poor quality goes unremarked and even unnoticed, being 'mental provender choice enough to regale the amateurs and the artists of the metropolis who feed their eyes at that fashionable manger'. The situation is presented as one where the ignorance of the collectors was matched and therefore perpetuated by the ignorance of the crowd. The additional factor of fashion and its observance meant that an image of expertise had to

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<sup>168</sup>for example, *Art-Journal*, vol.12, 1850, p.298. The magazine remarks that 'no practical use' is made of the Summer Exhibition.



be maintained on both sides, and no admission of inexperience or unfamiliarity could be permitted. That year, the display was dominated by a *Virgin and Child* by Raphael, lent by Lady Garvagh. The *Athenaeum* observed 'some respect paid to our artist's superlative merits, and a vast deal to his name', disdainfully noting the crowds of visitors who 'slid by the picture...grin a sort of semi-intelligence, or express a grotesque animation half-mechanical', but whose 'engrossing object is the atmosphere before them, not what they stare at so vacantly'.<sup>169</sup> Their response is judged to be partial, as much due to automatic and empty deference to the name of Raphael as any personal engagement with great art. This accusation is akin to that levelled at the purchase record of National Gallery trustees by Lord Overstone in the 1853 select committee minutes, and is based in a similar desire to see the appreciation of old master painting treated as an intellectual discipline, rather than as an occasion for empty posturing. The once again 'vacant' attempt made to assume the guise of connoisseurs is clearly considered revolting, or 'grotesque', an opinion which was only strengthened by the belief here voiced that art appreciation, or the mimicry of it, was not the true reason for such visitors' attendance.

Hemingway argues that 'most of those who visited exhibitions approached the display with an attitude neither reflective nor profound', which concurs with the damning words of the *Athenaeum*. He also writes of the 'figure of the ignorant visitor', a critical stereotype developed in order to licence the function of criticism, and enable the mass characterisation of the crowds that formed around renowned works, whilst more deserving art was neglected and misunderstood.<sup>170</sup> The identity of this ignorant visitor was based in fashion. They attended because the uppermost classes of society attended; they may even have had some claim to belong to these classes themselves. The British Institution was a place in which the modish wished to be seen, and the

<sup>169</sup> *Athenaeum*. No.921, 21st June 1845, pp.619-20.

<sup>170</sup> Hemingway, 'Art Exhibitions', pp.97-102.



attendant experience with art was important only insofar as it improved their reputations as people of taste and discernment. Magazine critics had nothing but contempt for this all-too-prevalent kind of visitor; the *Athenaeum* described the majority of the people attracted to the 'wretched' 1845 exhibition as 'flippant sight-seers and gossip-gathers'.<sup>171</sup> They were seen to lack the intellectual seriousness that came to be regarded by critics as the requisite demeanour in an art exhibition, and indeed undermined the opportunities of the exhibition for all present with their frivolity. In 1852, the *Spectator* remarked disapprovingly upon the 'general tone of holiday-making' in the Institution's rooms.<sup>172</sup> Although neither periodical here makes a direct reference to class origin, it is heavily implied that the disruptive and basically worthless visitors issue from the lower social echelons represented among the audience. Sight-seeing and holiday-making were activities which an educated critic from the established ranks of the professional middle class would associate with the *petite-bourgeoisie*. The appropriation of a place that should rightfully be devoted to study and cerebral contemplation for the purposes of leisure was thus rendered yet more despicable in the view of these journals by the fact that it was the vulgar leisure of their social inferiors.

The faults found with those at the opposite ends of both the social spectrum of the British Institution and its organisational processes were fundamentally similar. Both were accused in the periodical press of masquerading as people of taste when their real motivation was fashion, or the concerns of image. Much as the majority of middle-class visitors were seen to be attending in order to be able to claim the identity of a sophisticated member of the gentry or nobility capable of art appreciation, the contributors (who were often also governors or directors) were often suspected of purchasing and lending old master paintings in order to appear a great and active

<sup>171</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 921, 21st June 1845, p. 620.

<sup>172</sup> *Spectator*, vol. 25, 1852, p. 567.

collector, rather than because of any genuine fascination with art. The poor foundations of this pretence were revealed in the quality of the works they provided for the display, which largely involved questions of attribution. In its review of the 1850 exhibition *The Times* commented upon the 'considerable number of paintings of extremely doubtful rank and authenticity'.<sup>173</sup> Eagerness among collectors to own examples of the most famous painters seems to have most frequently led them to acquire suspect works; alleged pictures by Leonardo da Vinci were questioned on the most regular basis by reviewers of the Summer Exhibition. In 1849, for instance, the *Athenaeum* was singularly unimpressed with a *Virgin and Child and St. Anne* from the collection of the Earl of Yarborough which was supposedly by da Vinci, naming it an example of:

those indifferent versions made by scholars or bad imitators, which, in a spirit of trade, are imported into this country, and bought up by the uninformed - in whose possession they perpetuate error, while they offer further incentive to the artful and the dishonest.<sup>174</sup>

The ignorant collector of old master paintings was himself taken advantage of in the arts marketplace, the magazine believed, and every successful sale by a dishonest dealer only provided such personages with reward and encouragement. This corruption of the commercial trade in paintings was the lesser concern, however; the truly injurious result was seen to be the presentation of substandard displays to the public which bore the names of the most revered figures in art history. Such misinformation, the journal declared at the Summer Exhibition two years later, was 'fatal to the growth of true taste';<sup>175</sup> it would have appeared particularly malign in an environment where unthinking admiration was paid by ignorant visitors attempting to seem informed.

<sup>173</sup> *The Times*, 10th June 1850, p.5.

<sup>174</sup> *Athenaeum*, No.1130, 23rd June 1849, p.647.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 14th June 1851, p.638.

At the British Institution, artwork and owner were closely bound to one another. The catalogue listed the owner's name next to his contribution, and his attribution of the picture was accepted. These would tend towards the optimistic, as the question of financial value was involved; it was in a collector's economic interests to campaign for the authenticity of his possessions in the face of any scholarly scepticism.<sup>176</sup>

Blackwood's complained in 1851 that the element of ownership was coming to overshadow the art itself:

Few pictures stand on their own merits - they acquire a virtue from the hands or houses they have passed through, more than from the hands that worked them.<sup>177</sup>

Such was the emphasis placed on picture collecting as an accoutrement of the noble and rich, it was stated, that the actual appreciation of paintings was secondary. The responsibility for this lamentable state of affairs was ultimately assigned to the British Institution in reviews of its Summer Exhibitions. Its infrastructure, display conditions and loans procedure all served to emphasise that paintings were the province of the upper classes. The consequences of this were twofold. Firstly, the display itself suffered due to the element of personal interest inhibiting the academic rigour with which it could be composed and viewed. Secondly, the strength of the connection between ancient art and the aristocracy at the gallery on Pall Mall meant that many visitors came as 'sight-seers' rather than potential pupils, hoping for a fleeting glimpse

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<sup>176</sup>British Institution Minutes, RC.V.17, 22nd May 1867, pp.54-6. The Minutes here record a complaint made by the Earl of Charlemont that the attributions of some of his pictures had been changed in the official catalogue of the British Institution Summer Exhibition, from those given in the private catalogue of his collection, notably the assigning of Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver to Leuven rather than Rembrandt. The Earl threatened the directors with legal action, and stated in an attached letter that 'though my pictures are not likely to be for sale, they must not be depreciated'. The directorate drafted a letter of formal apology, and it was resolved that the catalogue be withdrawn and reprinted forthwith.

<sup>177</sup>Blackwood's, vol.70, Jan-June 1851, p.311.

of a lifestyle of unattainable opulence and glamour, instead of a lesson in the history of art.

As early Italian art became gradually more prevalent in the Summer Exhibitions, it was repeatedly identified as an antidote to the abuses which were predominant at the British Institution. Confronted with a crowd which appeared largely thoughtless in its demeanour, the periodical press continually stressed the importance of work and learning in the space of the gallery. The *Athenaeum* declared in 1841 that the presumption of 'the million' was that 'no training was required for the appreciation of painting', which led only to 'a superficial habit of dogmatising'. This was considered entirely inadequate as a basis for art appreciation: the magazine unequivocally declared that 'the admiration of him who will not learn is a crude, idealess prejudice'.<sup>178</sup>

'Primitive' art was felt to offer a corrective influence to this indolent tendency, as the appreciation of it required a deeper level of concentration and intellectual awareness on the part of a viewer. Furthermore, the principles of moral art history provided a conceptual means by which an understanding of the perceived value of such productions could be arrived at. At the Summer Exhibition of 1852, for example, the *Spectator* was impressed by the five panels by Perugino from the Barker collection which were included in the display. Its reviewer marvelled at their 'potent effect, between the ideal and the symbolic', and stated that:

they must be looked at fully and with earnestness by him who would penetrate beneath that husk of archaism to that inner life they possess, which is not old, or young, or local, but eternal and universal.<sup>179</sup>

This praise complements criticism of later schools made in an earlier review, where it was declared that all that could be gained from the Dutch was 'a familiarity with executive details', an object 'scarcely worth accomplishing'.<sup>180</sup> Rather than disguise

<sup>178</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 746, 12th Feb 1842, p. 139.

<sup>179</sup> *Spectator*, vol. 25, 1852, p. 567.

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 14, 1841, p. 620.

an absence of meaning, or an internal corruption as in the case of Rubens and the Italian mannerists, beneath a technically proficient and aesthetically alluring exterior, earlier art was seen to contain profound and 'universal' truth just beneath its unattractive surface. Its presence on the walls of the Institution thus became in places a metaphor for the new era in art criticism which these reviewers felt themselves to be a part of. The ignorant and the fashionable were implicitly equated with later art, in that they were gaudy and without substance, concerned with meretricious beauty rather than spiritual or intellectual profundity. In contrast, early painting, and moral art historical criticism, were held to be uninterested in appearance, attempting rather to communicate a veracious and ameliorative idea to their viewers or readers. The *Spectator* review of the 1852 exhibition demonstrates this in its lauding of a *Baptism* by Francia belonging to Labouchere on the grounds that it was 'more expressive, less impressive'.<sup>181</sup>

Italian paintings from the quattrocento and earlier also required the implementation of specialist knowledge with regards to their original function and iconographic significance. In the wake of Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art*, such issues came to be widely regarded as a major explicatory area for instructive criticism. In its comments on the five Barker Peruginos at the Summer Exhibition of 1852, for example, the *Spectator* expounded a theory that the panels had originally been predellas on a disassembled altarpiece.<sup>182</sup> This brandishing of expert status can be regarded as an instance of a critic asserting his professional identity as the general familiarity with ancient art of all eras rose in English society, due to the increase in the span and frequency of public exhibitions, and availability of art-historical texts. A need for such demonstration can be observed across the periodical reviews of the British Institution Summer Exhibitions, but is especially obvious in accounts of early Italian

<sup>181</sup> *ibid.*, vol.25, 1852, p.567.

<sup>182</sup> *ibid.* The subjects of the panels were a *Nativity*, a *Baptism*, an *Our Saviour and the Woman of Samaria*, a *Resurrection* and an *Agony in the Garden*.

art, which lent itself to the purpose because of its retention of a certain esoteric status throughout the period covered by this thesis. A tactic often resorted to was reference to the extent to which 'primitive' painting was essentially beyond ownership, due to its major examples having been executed on the walls of Italian churches. In 1848, the *Athenaeum* approved of the attempt made by the directorate to include the earlier schools, but expressed ultimate disappointment with the selection they had procured.

It cannot be said that every style has found here its most complete representative. The power of fresco, for instance, will not be adequately made known to those who have not travelled.<sup>183</sup>

An elitism of social class and background was thus deposed by these critics, and one of knowledge and experience established in its place. The days of William Roscoe, who was considered an authority on early Italian art despite never having left England,<sup>184</sup> were over; by 1848, specialist status could only be claimed by those who had not only travelled to Italy, but also toured the country with a rigorous cultural agenda, visiting the sites of all the major fresco cycles. It was possible to remove these frescos from the walls they adorned and install them in private collections; Rogers owned two examples of such fragments, which have already been referred to. These were included in the 1848 display, and the *Athenaeum* stated then to be of interest 'as remains of the art of the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century', but stressed that 'they must not be considered as offering specimens of Giotto's powers'.<sup>185</sup> Other articles featured in the magazine made similar efforts to disparage any claim to significance on the part of the 'primitives' encountered in England. An article of 1848 entitled 'Foreign Correspondence', for example, which had been sent from a journalist in Florence, argued that generally speaking the frescos showed the strengths, and the panel pictures the weaknesses, of the early painters. The Rogers fragments were an exception rather than the rule in terms of the format of early works

<sup>183</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 1076, 10th June 1848, p. 608.

<sup>184</sup> Levy, 'Botticelli', p. 298.

<sup>185</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 1076, 10th June 1848, p. 608.



in England, with the majority having been executed on portable panels, which permitted their peripatetic provenances. It was therefore considered 'impossible to form a correct judgement of the early masters from the few specimens of their easel pictures that are to be found in England'.<sup>186</sup>

In 1859, the *Athenaeum* delivered a searing invective against the British Institution and the collecting conventions it was taken to represent in the course of its review of the Summer Exhibition. The magazine pronounced that 'art is no longer a plaything', going on to criticise the 'dull eclecticism' of the display, and claim that 'the exhibition represents the Tory or conservative school in art'.<sup>187</sup> This can be regarded as a perspicuous declaration of the new seriousness deemed necessary in order for the appreciation of ancient art in England to develop. The Institution was not ultimately considered to be a viable part of this new critical era, due to the strength of its association with a decadent old order that had to be abolished for any progress to be made. This view had been expressed four years earlier by William Michael Rossetti, in the context of an article on the annual exhibitions of London written for the American arts journal the *Crayon*. The Institution was here described as entirely outdated, 'a body altogether less active and prominent than of old', which was 'governed by amateur noblemen and gentlemen, the details of whose management excite yearly protest'.<sup>188</sup> Rossetti's comments were no doubt provoked in part by the conservatism of the Spring Exhibition of modern paintings, which had failed to include any Pre-Raphaelite works. A parallel exists with the content of the Summer Exhibition, as the number of 'primitive' paintings displayed decreased significantly during the 1850s. It seems likely that the directors' decision regarding the eras and masters they would favour for inclusion was influenced not only by the financial failure of the 1848

<sup>186</sup>*Ibid.*, No.1080, 8th July 1848, p.684.

<sup>187</sup>*Athenaeum*, No.1650, 11th June 1859, p.782.

<sup>188</sup>William Michael Rossetti, 'Correspondence: Art News from London', *Crayon*, vol.1, Jan-June 1855, p.328.



exhibition, but also by the controversy surrounding the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which involved its relationship with early Italian art: this will be discussed in chapter four.<sup>189</sup>

The alignment of the Institution with the Tories by the *Athenaeum* is significant. As mentioned at the conclusion of the previous chapter, Fraser has argued that there was a pronounced political dimension to the rise in taste for pre-Renaissance art in England, which coincided with a widespread increase in both Chartist agitation and revolutionary activity in Europe.<sup>190</sup> The love of Italian culture is said to have encouraged liberal politics in England, as well as fostering support for the cause of Italian independence. A number of the figures discussed earlier in the chapter for their interest in early Italian art were indeed also prominent Whigs.<sup>191</sup> It could also be argued that moral art history was a broadly liberal discourse, which promoted the democratic cause of art education, and sought to remove the factor of social rank, and the abuses of fashion which accompanied it, from the exhibition and appreciation of the paintings themselves. The exponents of the discourse wished to install an educative system whereby all society could be trained in the appreciation of such painting, with themselves as teachers and an obedient and compliant public as their pupils.

There was a fundamental difficulty involved with the adoption of early Italian art and the critical discourse which supported it as a corrective to the corruptions and superficialities of fashion which were perceived by the periodical press at the British Institution Summer Exhibition. It was asserted by several commentators that the

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<sup>189</sup>See chapter 4, section V, pp.321-6.

<sup>190</sup>Fraser, *The Victorians*, p.95.

<sup>191</sup>For example, Ellis Roberts, Samuel Rogers, p.7. Rogers was a lifelong Whig - Stephen and Lee (eds.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol.XVII, p.765; Sandford was also a committed liberal; vol.2, p.905 - Botfield was the Whig MP for Ludlow between 1840 and 1847; vol.XI, p.368 - Labouchere served in a variety of posts in four Whig governments (see section I, note 23); vol.6, p.716 - Ellis was elected MP for Leicester in 1831. He was an 'advanced Liberal'.

appearance of 'primitive' art on the walls at Pall Mall meant that it was thus included in the scope of the fashion it was elsewhere taken to contradict. Certain collectors of early art were noted for their voracity, and their supposed intellectualism; even Redgrave, after his derogatory characterisation of Barker at the meeting of the Burlington Fine Arts Club, conceded that 'he must have had much taste and judgement, or, however assisted, he would not have chosen so well, and collected so wisely'.<sup>192</sup> There is evidence, however, to suggest that this perceived correlation between the acquisition of 'primitives' and connoisseurial sagacity was far from uniform. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the notion of the specialist collector who purchased independently in Italy was a romantic ideal to which men aspired, which will be discussed further in chapter four.<sup>193</sup> However, the results of their activities often revealed a less perfect reality.

Barker's collection appears to have been relatively free from serious authenticity problems, doubtlessly due in part to his tendency to travel personally to Italy, and attempt to acquire his artworks from direct descendants of the patrons or artists involved in the original commission.<sup>194</sup> He can be considered exceptional in this respect. Compton and Levy both stress the arbitrary nature of the attribution of pre-Renaissance pictures in the arts trade during the early nineteenth century,<sup>195</sup> and

<sup>192</sup>Redgrave, *A Memoir*, p.190.

<sup>193</sup>See chapter 4, section III, pp.291-8.

<sup>194</sup>Christie, Manson and Woods, *Catalogue of the Renowned Collection of Works of Art Formed by that Distinguished Connoisseur Alexander Barker Esq., Deceased*, 6th June and 8th June 1874, pp.7-19. For example, Barker owned a *Virgin and Child with Saints* by Bellini (no.37) which he had bought from the Manfrini family, whose ancestors had commissioned it; a *Madonna in Ecstasy* by Crivelli (no.64) which had been purchased from the Chapel of Malatesta in the Church of San Francesco at Rimini, for which it had been painted; four illustrations to Boccaccio by Botticelli, originally painted for the Casa Pucci, and purchased by Barker from the head of the Pucci family; and a *Nativity* by Piero della Francesca, obtained from the Manni Franchesci family, who could trace their lineage back to the artist himself. This last work was bought by the National Gallery, and the attribution to Piero della Francesca has remained unquestioned.

<sup>195</sup>Compton, 'William Roscoe', p.38. Compton remarks that many collections in the

the situation was regarded by some commentators as having changed little by the 1840s, even as critical knowledge of the period increased dramatically. At the Solly sale, for example, the *Athenaeum* was unimpressed with the array of works available for purchase, especially because they had been amassed in their country of origin:

From the reputation of the late Mr. Edward Solly, who collected them in Italy, we expected to have met with better specimens of the different hands. The difficulty, however, must be admitted of obtaining any genuine pictures in Italy - even for money.<sup>196</sup>

Authenticity questions may explain the massive variation in the prices paid for works given to the earlier masters. This is particularly evident in the case of Bellini; as mentioned earlier, Beckford sold the *Portrait of Doge Loredan* to the National Gallery in 1844, the same year in which he died and the remainder of his pictures were sold. The portrait went for 600 guineas, whereas Beckford's other supposed Bellini, *The Marriage of St. Catharine*, was sold for less than £100.<sup>197</sup> Similarly dubious authenticity may account for the Perugino sold for thirty-seven guineas at the Rogers sale,<sup>198</sup> whilst the Fra Angelico *Last Judgement* bought by the Earl of Dudley at the Fesch sale, widely considered to be authentic, cost him 1500 guineas.<sup>199</sup>

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early nineteenth century contained examples of "Perugino", "Bellini", "Mantegna", and especially "Masaccio"; 'almost any fifteenth-century Tuscan picture was called a Masaccio'. Levy, 'Botticelli', p.296. Levy states that during the first three decades of the century 'the name Botticelli might be applied to anything really old and odd-looking.' Problems with Botticelli in particular seem to have persisted: the sale catalogue of the Barker collection reattributes one of the supposed Botticellis, a *Venus* (no.89), to Sellaio (p.16).

<sup>196</sup> *Athenaeum*, No.1019, 8th May 1847, p.498.

<sup>197</sup> Gerald Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste*, London, Barrie and Rockcliffe, 1961, p.122.

<sup>198</sup> *The Times*, 3rd May 1856, p.565.

<sup>199</sup> Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol.12, p.405. Ruskin was convinced of the picture's authenticity. The effect of doubts regarding attribution upon the sums given for pictures was noted by the *Art-Journal* at the sale of Lord Northwick's collection in 1859 (vol.5): the magazine remarked that Northwick 'was not infrequently the victim of the unprincipled seller' (p.258), and that the low prices paid for many of his paintings was due to the fact that 'their originality was doubted' (p.286).

It is curious that in these, and a multitude of other cases, it was considered preferable to attach the name of a revered artist, as Perugino surely was by the 1850s, to a work deemed unworthy of significant expenditure, rather than attempt reattribution to a lesser figure, or the exposure of a forgery. It can be surmised that the priority for many more casual collectors was the name rather than the artwork itself. Austen Layard stated in 1859 that the presence of many risible specimens in English collections which were held up as authentic examples of the great figures of the early and pre-Renaissance was due to 'a thoughtless demand for them rising out of the fashion of the day, and our own super-abundant wealth'. He claimed that this had encouraged dishonesty among dealers in Italy and elsewhere, to the point where 'much wariness and discrimination' had to be employed by anyone seeking a genuine picture from the early schools.<sup>200</sup> It also meant that despite many pictures attributed to the 'primitives' appearing in English private collections and the British Institution Summer Exhibitions, visitors to Italy found themselves astonished at the gulf in quality between what they had previously experienced and the examples, especially in fresco, that could be encountered in Italy. Lady Eastlake, for instance, found herself amazed by a *Last Supper* by Giotto, executed in fresco on the wall of an ancient refectory, which she viewed whilst touring Italy in 1858. She remarked in a letter to H. Jane Gifford that it was 'a glorious specimen, the first by Giotto I have really admired, probably because it is, perhaps, the only true one I have seen; for every horror is called Giotto'.<sup>201</sup>

Layard's accusation of thoughtlessness on the part of those who bought early pictures is significant. Like many of the commentators discussed here, he emphasised the more esoteric nature of the taste for early Italian pictures, and the critical discourse in which

<sup>200</sup> Austen Layard, 'The National Gallery', *Quarterly Review*, vol. 105, January and April 1859, p. 355.

<sup>201</sup> Eastlake Smith (ed.), *Journals*, vol. 2, p. 103. From a letter of 7th September 1858.

it was founded, but also recognised that it would be subsumed by fashion rather than acting as a corrective to the trivialising tendencies assigned to it. He wrote that:

it requires something more than the eye to appreciate their beauties and to interpret their signification. Few can feel true sympathy, although sympathy may be affected, for what are somewhat contemptuously called 'pre-Raphaelite pictures'.<sup>202</sup>

Many of those who might ostensibly seem to be devotees of the 'primitives' were thus identified as empty vessels who would assume whatever guise necessary in order to appear abreast with current thinking on the relative values of the schools of painting. Art remained their 'plaything', it was asserted; it was only the nature of the game which had changed, with the modish now attempting to feign expertise and faculties of spiritual insight. Eastlake, whose views on the art itself were more qualified than those of Layard, was accordingly more sceptical about the mass favour apparently enjoyed by earlier art. Whilst under examination by the select committee investigating the National Gallery in 1853, he spoke of the widespread 'rage for very early works of art' in England and on the continent, which:

as it at present exists, will not endure. I think there is a great deal of fashion in it; and a large proportion of those early pictures are full of affectation and grimace; and many persons who have, or fancy they have, a taste for those pictures are insensible to the essential elements of painting.<sup>203</sup>

Eastlake was particularly suspicious of the sudden nature of the rise in knowledge and awareness of the 'primitives', stating to the select committee that the means by which it had been achieved had been available to 'English travellers, had they been disposed to look for it, any time within the last forty years'.<sup>204</sup> For him, this gave the recent emergence of a predilection for the 'primitives' in English society the appearance of an

<sup>202</sup> Austen Layard, 'The Publications of the Arundel Society. Fresco Painting', *Quarterly Review*, vol. 104, July-October 1858, p. 300.

<sup>203</sup> Report of the Select Committee on the National Gallery, minutes p. 455, q. nos. 6466-6472.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, q. no. 6471.

evanescent vogue, the followers of which had no true appreciation of the artworks they professed to find so affecting. It should also be noted here that certain modern critics, including Haskell, have interpreted his reservations regarding early Italian art in 1853 as part of a stance against the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; this will be discussed further in chapter four.<sup>205</sup> Nonetheless, with regards to the purchase of pictures for the National Gallery, Eastlake was in favour of an inclusive approach, in which the importance of all schools and eras was recognised, and the best examples of each sought out. He agreed that the attentions of a director should be focus upon the schools which had been neglected up to that point, of whom the early Italians were universally considered to be the most prominent example. Despite his misgivings concerning the 'rage' for the 'primitives', Eastlake declared that the collection of their works was 'most desirable', but also that it must be done 'with discretion and discrimination', rather than with a fervent and ultimately blinkered admiration for anything which issued from the pre-Renaissance period.<sup>206</sup>

Eastlake thus recognised the worth of the earlier schools in a discursive account of art, but did not attempt a re-evaluation of what was admirable and excellent in painting as a result of his studies, unlike Rio in his *De la Poésie Chrétienne*. There is a hostility in his remarks which is directed not so much towards the art itself (although it is criticised in passing), but towards the vacuous posturing of its new admirers. An essentially liberal, democratic and intellectual discourse was thus damaged in terms of its influence among the Victorian arts cognoscenti by what they regarded as its pretentious adoption by some of the richest and most privileged in society. Although it offered the expert unprecedented opportunities to demonstrate specialist knowledge and experience, it also allowed the ignorant to pretend to this knowledge through the

<sup>205</sup> See chapter 4, section V, p.329, and section VI, pp.357-8.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p.458, q.no.6480. Eastlake states that were he director, he would collect as much as possible from the Venetian and Flemish schools (q.no.6476), and describes the work of Rembrandt and Rubens as 'invaluable' (q.no.6468).



ministry of the expert's taste. The expert's position was at once established and compromised. Any democratic aspect that was implied in the criticism was effectively negated by the fact that it encouraged the rich to buy, thereby perpetuating the ultimate control of old master painting in England by the private collector, and inhibiting the development of art history as an intellectual discipline.

#### VI. Eastlake's Directorship of the National Gallery: The Acquisition of 'Primitives' in Italy and the Issue of Arrangement

The 1853 select committee report made several recommendations regarding the alteration of the National Gallery's administration, which the Government subsequently acted upon. Hence, before the end of 1855, the Trustees were provided with an annual picture budget, obviating the need for them to make an application to Parliament every time an opportunity for purchase arose.<sup>207</sup> The number of Trustees was gradually reduced, and it was resolved that they should be, in the words of the Treasury minute entitled 'Reconstituting the Establishment of the National Gallery', 'cultivated lovers of art'.<sup>208</sup> Their role was also redefined in the light of the appointment of the first director of the Gallery, which was perhaps the most significant revision made to the administrative structure of the institution as a result of the 1853 report. This director would take on many of the less menial duties of the old position of keeper, but would have greater power, notably with regards to the acquisition of paintings for the collection.<sup>209</sup> The trustees were effectively reduced to a supporting

<sup>207</sup> This move is advised in the report ('Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery', report p.xv), and confirmed in the Treasury minute 'Reconstituting the Establishment of the National Gallery' (p.4), where it is ruled that every year 'a sum expressly for the purchase of pictures' is to be inserted into the National Gallery estimate, which would enable 'greater flexibility', and which would be allowed to accumulate.

<sup>208</sup> 'Reconstituting', p.1. It is stated here that the number of trustees should never exceed six, but that this rule will only be enforced as positions become vacant.

<sup>209</sup> *National Gallery: Minutes of Board Meetings*, vol.4, hand-written by Ralph Wornum, keeper and secretary, 12.11.1855 - 11.2.1871, p.1. From a meeting on 12th



position, mediating between the Gallery and the Government, offering 'counsel and advice'<sup>210</sup> to the director, but no longer holding any real authority. All purchase recommendations were to come from the director,<sup>211</sup> which they could either sanction or reject, but rejections would no longer result in a work being turned away; the question of whether the disputed work should be bought would then go before Parliament.<sup>212</sup>

The result of these attempts to appoint an arts professional who could run the National Gallery in a manner as free as possible from interference or obstruction by the board of trustees was the creation of a post of which extremely high expectations were held by all commentators. On the 2nd July, Eastlake was formally instated as director of the National Gallery, and he was placed under almost immediate pressure to address the failings of the collection. The Treasury minute, which appeared just over two months before his appointment, asserted that 'as a general rule, preference should be given to fine pictures for sale abroad', as it was assumed (perhaps too confidently) that artworks already in the country would not ever leave, but the introduction of foreign pictures will constitute 'a positive addition to the treasures of art in England'.<sup>213</sup> By the sixth of August, Eastlake had accordingly submitted plans for a lengthy continental journey in pursuit of five paintings by Leonardo, Perugino and Ghirlandaio to the trustees; he would embark upon such missions in 1855, 1856 and 1857.<sup>214</sup> This

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November 1855. The appointment of Ralph Wornum as keeper and secretary, on the same day Eastlake was made director, is here recorded. The new keeper was primarily concerned with practical questions relating to the Gallery, and acted essentially as a custodian.

<sup>210</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup>Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery', report p.xv. It is concluded that 'every recommendation for the purchase of a picture should originate with the director'.

<sup>212</sup>'Reconstituting', p.3.

<sup>213</sup>*Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>214</sup>For complete details of all the artworks purchased for the Gallery under the directorship of Eastlake during the 1850s, see *Returns of all the Pictures Purchased for the National Gallery during the Administration of Sir Charles Eastlake*, London,

probably signifies an awareness on the part of Eastlake and others involved with the Gallery of the success enjoyed by private collectors who ventured abroad in order to obtain their 'primitives'. The need for such action had long been recognised by commentators on the gallery such as Ruskin, who had suggested the sending of agents to Italy in his letter to *The Times* of 1847. All purchases on the first trip were to be made from £10,000 voted to the Gallery by Parliament, and Eastlake's reports to the trustees attempt to meticulously plan and rationalise his expenditure of large sums of public money.<sup>215</sup>

Upon arrival on the continent, Eastlake discovered that several of the works he had intended to invest this public money in were not of the calibre he had anticipated. His first stop was in Paris, where he had intended to buy a *St. Sebastian* by Leonardo da Vinci from the Parisian dealer M. Moreau, setting aside £1,500 for that purpose. When before the picture, however, Eastlake recorded in his travelling notebook that it was 'certainly not by Leonardo',<sup>216</sup> and no offer was made. Significantly, similar problems were to plague him in Italy, notwithstanding the success private individuals claimed to have had there. The other 'Leonardo' on his list, a *Madonna and Child* from the collection of Duke Litta at Milan, was also found to be falsely attributed; despite claims to authenticity that had induced the new director to prepare an offer of £3000, he reported to the trustees that he was 'now persuaded (it is) not by the hand of that master'.<sup>217</sup> Problems were also created by the efforts of the Italian authorities to restrict the sale and export of their nation's art treasures. Eastlake had intended to

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Ordered by the House of Commons to be Printed, 1860. This pamphlet lists the titles, prices and dates of purchase for every picture bought between 1844, when Eastlake was appointed keeper, and 1860.

<sup>215</sup> *National Gallery Minutes*, vol.3, p.32. From a meeting on 6th August 1855.

Eastlake's initial report here details the five works he sought, and neatly divides the £10,000 between them.

<sup>216</sup> Charles Eastlake, *Travelling Notebook*, 1855, 2 vols., hand-written, 1855, vol.1, p.2. Eastlake hazards a reattribution to Beltraffio.

<sup>217</sup> *National Gallery Minutes*, vol.4, p.4. From a meeting on 12th November 1855. The quote is from a letter from Eastlake to the trustees.

purchase an altarpiece depicting *The Madonna and Child Enthroned* by Ghirlandaio from the cloister of La Calza in Florence, and was prepared not only to offer £1500 for the work, but also to buy a less admirable *Crucifixion* by Perugino from the same place for £500, 'in case the owners will not allow them to be separated.'<sup>218</sup> This measure proved unnecessary, and the monks of La Calza accepted an offer of just £1240 for their altarpiece; the Tuscan government intervened, however, and refused to allow the exportation of the work, thus preventing Eastlake from securing it for the Gallery on his first purchasing tour.<sup>219</sup> During his second tour the following year, he was informed that the Government had ruled that the painting was church property and could not therefore be removed from the country.<sup>220</sup> It was in the Uffizi by 1857, and permanently out of reach for foreign buyers of all kinds.

The triumphs of Eastlake's efforts in Florence and elsewhere in Italy and Europe during the second half of the 1850s were unplanned and relatively inexpensive acquisitions, made in low-key transactions from private individuals, thus ensuring that the Italian authorities could not interfere. The majority were from the fifteenth century, in response to the criticisms of the 1853 select committee report, and were often by masters of lesser reputation than Leonardo, Perugino and Ghirlandaio, as if the director was reacting to the accusations of name-worship made by Lord Overstone in the evidence he gave to that committee. Eastlake was not impressed generally with the Italian art market, finding many of the available artworks to be either inauthentic or overpriced, or both. In the Villa Capagna at Rome in 1856, for example, he noted

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.3, p.33. From a meeting on 6th August 1855.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.4, pp.4-5. From a meeting on 12th November 1855.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p.104. From a meeting on 16th November, 1857. The intervention of the Italian authorities were to frustrate Eastlake's purchasing again in 1857, when the Government would not allow the exportation of a painting of *Saints* by Vivarini on the grounds that it had come from the chapel of a confraternity at Pesaro, although the work had already been bought from them by an Italian dealer. Eastlake had offered £350 for the painting.

misattributions to both Fra Angelico and Filippo Lippi,<sup>221</sup> and on his 1857 tour the few eligible works encountered were considered by him to be appallingly expensive, reflecting the steep rise in demand for such art that had occurred over the previous two decades.<sup>222</sup> However, the new flexibility of the National Gallery's purchase system meant that the money saved as a result of disappointments elsewhere could be promptly reinvested in any unexpected opportunities which arose. For instance, on the first tour in 1855, despite his failure to immediately secure any of the pictures on the initial list submitted to the trustees, Eastlake acquired four quattrocento works for the national collection by Botticelli, Benezzo Gozzoli and Cosimo Roselli, for a total of just £745.<sup>223</sup>

The acquisition record of the National Gallery in the 1850s was scarred by controversy. This primarily involved two large-scale paintings by Veronese, an *Adoration of the Magi* and *The Family of Darius before Alexander*, which were purchased for the nation in 1855 and 1856 respectively. Upon the appointment of Eastlake as director, the *Athenaeum* ominously remarked that 'mistakes are henceforth

<sup>221</sup> Eastlake, *Travelling Notebook, 1856*, 2 vols., hand-written, 1856, vol. I, pp. 15-16. Three pictures given to Angelico are described simply as 'not genuine'; a *Madonna and Child with Saints* is 'called F. Lippi, not equal to him'.

<sup>222</sup> *National Gallery Minutes*, vol. 4, pp. 105-109. From a meeting on 16th November 1857, Eastlake found nothing worthy of the Gallery's attention in Siena, Cortona, Arezzo, Pesaro, Rovigo and Padua. In the Zambecari collection in Bologna, he found the Count himself unwilling to sell the Francia that was his best work, offering instead a small Cima for which 'he asks much too high a price'. In Venice, amongst the remains of the Manfrini collection, a *St. Jerome* by Bellini was found, but its price of 1800 guineas was considered 'absurd'. The prices of the other pictures available were 'equally extravagant', even though 'not one is of a high class, or unobjectionable'.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5. From a meeting on 12th November 1855, Eastlake here reported to the trustees that he had bought two Botticellis for £331.13s and £160, a Gozzoli for £137.16s, and a Roselli for \$114.17s. Davies, *National Gallery Catalogue*, p. 110, cat. nos. 226, 275. The Botticellis, now considered studio works, are two tondos, both depicting *The Virgin and Child with St. John*. The Roselli, since reattributed to Francesco Botticini, is an altarpiece depicting *St. Jerome in Penitence* (p. 119, cat. no. 227). The Gozzoli, which remains the only authentic example of the painter in the collection, is an altarpiece depicting *The Virgin and Child Enthroned with Angels and Saints* (p. 73, cat. no. 283).

inexcusable'.<sup>224</sup> As mentioned above, hopes for the director and the improvements he would bring were high. The directorial profile given in the 1853 select committee report reveals that expectations were even quite unrealistic. It ruled that the director should have:

not only a complete knowledge of the styles of the various masters and schools of art, and of the value, both intrinsic and commercial, of their works, but also an enlightened taste in appreciating their several merits, to the exclusion of all partiality for particular schools, epochs, or authors.<sup>225</sup>

The impossibility of ever finding such a person was recognised by several of those examined by the committee, including the connoisseur and collector James Dennistoun, who said that he despaired of finding all of the necessary qualifications 'in any one individual'; he recommended instead the formation of a small, salaried committee.<sup>226</sup> Eastlake himself acknowledged that this figure of 'the perfect connoisseur' was unattainable, as 'the knowledge which is required is too vast and various'.<sup>227</sup> Richard Ford, a respected expert on Spanish art, realised that such a figure would carry a heavy burden of scrutiny, responsibility and expectation, and concluded that 'whoever becomes the director of a National Gallery of pictures is a brave man'.<sup>228</sup>

Negative responses to the two Veronese acquisitions had a focus for their attacks in the form of the new director. These two purchases were held by many to be disastrous 'mistakes', for which Eastlake should be cast from office. The *Spectator*, for example, declared that the *Adoration of the Magi* was 'for the purposes of a national gallery,

<sup>224</sup> *Athenaeum*, No. 1431, 31st March 1855, p.380. A similarly stern comment was made by William Rossetti in the *Crayon*: 'if blunders occur henceforth, one will know whom to look to' (vol. I, Jan-June 1855, p.329).

<sup>225</sup> Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery, report p.xvi.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, minutes p.395, q.no.5753.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p.451, q.no.6411.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p.565, q.no.8008.

worthless', as, although doubtlessly authentic, it was 'not in any sense a grand or fine Veronese'. The magazine openly stated that 'Sir Charles Eastlake is not a proper person to be the director of the National Gallery'.<sup>229</sup> Neither did old adversaries of the director such as Morris Moore and Lord Elcho miss the opportunity to snipe at the gallery's administration, and Eastlake in particular, in letters to *The Times* and questions put before the House of Commons, especially in reference to the large sum paid for the *Family of Darius*. Such views were far from unanimous, however; critics disagreed with one another, hinted at ulterior (usually careerist) motives on the part of Eastlake's most prominent detractors, and delivered opposing verdicts on the two works.<sup>230</sup> Against this fractious background, responses to the various productions of the earlier Italian schools which were acquired in the same period initially appear to have been relatively harmonious, with some works even attaining a consensus of approval.

One such painting was the portion of an altarpiece by Perugino depicting *The Madonna and Child with the Archangels Raphael and Michael*, purchased from the

<sup>229</sup>*Spectator*, vol.29, 1856, pp.421-2.

<sup>230</sup>For example: the *Art-Journal* took issue with Coningham, who wrote a letter to *The Times* attacking the *Adoration of the Magi*; the magazine stated that the picture did not deserve the censure he loaded upon it, and that 'Mr. Coningham, we fear, will never be satisfied with any acquisition the National Gallery receives till he is consulted previously to its purchase...we have far less confidence in his judgement, even were he of less querulous disposition, than in that of the Director and the secretary' (vol.2, 1856, p.126). Defence of the *Family of Darius* was widespread; the *Illustrated London News* dismissed the 'worthless accusations' of the 'pugnacious Mr. Moore' regarding it (vol.31, July-Dec.1857, p.651); the *Spectator*, despite its denouncement of the *Adoration of the Magi*, declared that in a few years the large price paid (£13,650) would be forgotten, whereas 'year by year the nation will feel more securely, and rate more jealously, the value of so eminent a masterpiece of art, and the honour which it confers on the gallery' (vol.30, 1857, p.1142). Ruskin wrote to *The Times* in defence of the picture, in the form of a direct reposte to statements made by Lord Elcho in the House of Commons; he wrote that it was worth at least a third more than had been paid for it, as it had been 'simply the best Veronese in Italy, if not in Europe' (Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol.13, p.88, Letter originally published in *The Times*, 9th July 1857).



Melzi family at Milan in 1856, after months of negotiations; it was the only work which featured on Eastlake's list of 1855 to eventually be included in the National Gallery.<sup>231</sup> *The Times* pointed out that they had obtained it from the Church of Certosa near Pavia, 'for which Vasari tells us it was painted',<sup>232</sup> clearly revelling in the brevity of this provenance and the irrefutable authenticity it was taken to signify. The work was universally praised in the periodical press, and satisfied even the most demanding critics; Ruskin, for instance, cited it as an especially fine example of 'living symmetry' in his *Elements of Drawing* of 1857.<sup>233</sup> Several publications commented upon the distinct change they believed had occurred in the purchasing policy of the National Gallery in the wake of the 1853 select committee report and the appointment of Eastlake. On the occasion of the unveiling of the Perugino panels and several other newly acquired early works on the walls at Trafalgar Square, the *Spectator* remarked that it was 'notable change indeed from the days when Caraccis and dubious Guidos were "the thing", and when the admission of a Francia or a Van Eyck was held to threaten converting the gallery into a museum of curiosities!'<sup>234</sup> *The Times* suggested in 1858 that this development reflected the 'prevailing feeling of the amateurs of our day', going on to argue that:

<sup>231</sup> *National Gallery Minutes*, vol.3, p.32. From a meeting on 6th August 1855. Eastlake here allocated £3500 of his budget to the acquisition of the Melzi Perugino. In November, he reported that after having offered £3200 for the work, he was 'still in negotiation' over its purchase (vol.4, p.4). It entered the national collection before August 1856 (Davies, *National Gallery Catalogue*, p.405, cat.no.288).

<sup>232</sup> *The Times*, 18th August 1856, p.6.

<sup>233</sup> Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol.15, *The Elements of Drawing*, p.170. 'In many sacred compositions, living symmetry, the balance of harmonious opposites, is one of the profoundest sources of their power; almost any works of the early painters, Angelico, Perugino, Giotto etc. will furnish you with notable instances of it. The *Madonna* of Perugino in the National Gallery, with the angel Michael on one side and Raphael on the other, is as beautiful an example as you can have.'

<sup>234</sup> *Spectator*, vol.29, 1856, p.903.



whereas the connoisseur of former days regarded with favour the latest followers of the great masters, the modern collector unhesitatingly prefers the precursors of those masters to their imitators.<sup>235</sup>

A purchasing preference for the earlier schools is significantly identified as 'modern'; in actively seeking early works, and putting them on display in the national collection, Eastlake was regarded as effectively modernising it. This modernisation of content prompted an intensification of calls for an according modernisation of arrangement.

The taste for early Italian art was predicated upon a desire to intellectualise the appreciation of the old masters. As Eastlake was attempting to reflect this taste in the National Gallery, it was widely felt that he should also strive to apply rigorous historiographic principles to the arrangement of the collection he was embellishing. Ruskin was a keen advocate of this course of action on the part of the gallery's administration. In 1852, he wrote a second letter to *The Times* on the subject of the collection's failings, in which he argued that:

Nothing has so much retarded the advance of art as our miserable habit of mixing the works of every master and of every century. More would be learned by an ordinary intelligent observer in simply passing from a room in which there were only Titians, to another where there were only Caraccis, than by reading a volume of lectures on colour.

Central to this proposal was the idea of art education, of forming a gallery in which useful knowledge could be easily, or at least conveniently acquired. The paintings would be hung in such a way as to make them instructive rather than, or as well as, impressive; the national collection, Ruskin ruled, should represent the history of painting in all its epochs, and not be restricted to areas of broadly recognised excellence. He stated that the proper system of arrangement for such a collection should be 'chronological and ethnological'.<sup>236</sup> Similar recommendations had been

<sup>235</sup>*The Times*, 24th April 1858, p.5.

<sup>236</sup>Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol.12, pp.412-3. Originally published in *The Times*, 29th December 1852.

made as early as 1836, when Waagen told the select committee on arts and manufactures that a 'historical arrangement' was the most desirable method of hanging paintings in a public gallery;<sup>237</sup> his own arrangement of the Berlin Gallery was commonly cited by British commentators as being the shining exemplar of such practice. Several of those who gave evidence to the 1853 select committee on the National Gallery spoke out on this issue. Dennistoun, for instance, commented upon 'the extreme desirableness of something like an arrangement of the pictures', ideally 'a chronological arrangement in schools',<sup>238</sup> Eastlake himself went one step further when before the committee, proposing not only the adoption of a complete chronological system, into which every picture in the collection would be incorporated, but also the separation of the Italian and northern paintings, and the distinct hanging of each Italian school, 'so connected as to show its relation to neighbouring schools'.<sup>239</sup> However, despite the proclamation of these rigorously scholarly schemes by the future director, four years later Ruskin told the National Gallery Site Commission of his 'great hope' that the collection at Trafalgar Square may yet 'become a perfectly consecutive chronological arrangement'.<sup>240</sup> Two years after the report of this commission, Layard was still characterising the National Gallery as an institution that was considerably behind the rest of Europe in terms of the conceptual sophistication of its display. He identifies the Berlin Gallery as 'the most valuable in Europe for the illustration of the history of art', and marvels at the attention to detail in the hanging. The classification of pictures according to time and birthplace of their painter is said to afford 'not only a history of the development of art in each country, but even in different cities of the

<sup>237</sup> Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures', minutes p.11, q.no.86.

<sup>238</sup> Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery', minutes p.410, q.no.5892.

<sup>239</sup> *ibid.*, p.459, q.no.6516.

<sup>240</sup> Report of the National Gallery Site Commission, Together with Minutes, Evidence, Appendix and Index', *Reports from Commissioners*, 9 vols., London, Presented to both Houses of Parliament by the Command of her Majesty, Printed by Harrison and Sons, vol.9, session 30 April - 28th August 1857, minutes p.93, q.no.2401.

same country';<sup>241</sup> this system of arrangement is very similar to that envisioned by Eastlake six years earlier, and indeed he had singled out Waagen's gallery for praise on that occasion. In 1859, however, it was still being presented as a condition to which the organisers of the National Gallery should aspire.

Many critics understood the flurry of purchases of early Italian pictures that occurred in the mid-1850s to be a campaign on the part of the director to enable the chronological arrangement of the National Gallery. In October 1857, after a brief period of closure, the gallery reopened with eight new works incorporated into the display. They included one of the *Virgin and Child with St. John the Baptist* tondos attributed to Botticelli (cat.no.226), and the *St. Jerome* attributed to Rosselli (cat.no.227), which Eastlake had acquired in 1855 whilst on his first purchasing tour for the Gallery. Also among the eight were two of the director's more recent Italian successes, both secured in Florence during his 1857 tour; they were a *Virgin and Child with Sts. Jerome and Dominic* by Filippino Lippi, which had been bought from Giuseppe Rucellai,<sup>242</sup> and a large-scale *St. Sebastian* by Pollaiuolo from the Palazzo Pucci.<sup>243</sup> On show for the first time as well was the divisive *Family of Darius Before Alexander* by Veronese.<sup>244</sup> The minutes of the trustees' meetings reveal that some thought was put into the arrangement of these works on the walls of the Gallery. It was stated that 'advantage was taken of this opportunity in the rehanging to bring the works of the earlier painters together'; the four new fifteenth-century works were all hung in 'the small room on the south side of the passages', and four other 'primitive' pictures were also moved there from the 'large west room'.<sup>245</sup> As a result, 'seventeen

<sup>241</sup> Layard, 'The National Gallery', p.352.

<sup>242</sup> Davies, *National Gallery Catalogue*, p.286, cat.no.293.

<sup>243</sup> *National Gallery Picture File No.292*. A receipt in this file states that Eastlake bought the work from Marquis Roberto Pucci for 13,500 francs.

<sup>244</sup> *The Times*, 26th October 1857, p.9. The others were *Christ Driving the Money-Lenders Out of the Temple* by Bassano, *Portrait of a Man in a Green Headress* by Van Eyck, and *Portrait of a Lady in a Red Dress* by Cranach.

<sup>245</sup> *National Gallery Minutes*, vol.4, p.118. From a meeting on 16th November 1857.

early Italian pictures are placed together, and give a distinct character to the room, illustrating the quattrocento schools of Italy.' Commentators on the Gallery, however, were unimpressed by this supposed development in its approach to picture arrangement, and some even failed to notice it at all.

The *Athenaeum* judged the Pollaiuolo to be the most important of all the government's purchases that decade, due to its perceived significance in the history of perspective in painting, but the magazine's pleasure was tempered by confusion regarding the overall management of the collection. Despite the individual successes of the various pictures acquired, it expressed the hope that:

a more systematic arrangement of the pictures on the walls may soon be attempted. Even now we cannot help feeling that a favourable opportunity of commencement has been lost. Sufficient pictures have by this time been accumulated so as, at least, to group all the early pictures together.<sup>246</sup>

This criticism is remarkable in its apparent failure to notice the efforts that had been made by the Gallery's administrators to hang as many of their early Italian works as possible in the same room. The precise wording of the statement given by the keeper Ralph Wornum in the Gallery's minutes offers a possible explanation for the magazine's dissatisfaction: the southern room was 'almost exclusively' devoted to the fifteenth century, and was 'chiefly Italian'. In addition, the *Family of Darius before Alexander*, which might usefully have hung with other Italian pictures, was placed in the Flemish room due to lack of space.<sup>247</sup> The rehangings were not, in short, entirely rigorous, and certainly not rigorous enough to satisfy those seeking the establishment of a 'systematic' historical arrangement in the rooms at Trafalgar Square.

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These four were works ascribed to Giotto (cat.no.276), Lorenzo da Sanseverino (cat.no.249), Niccolò Alunno (cat.no.247) and the other Botticelli tondo acquired by Eastlake in 1855 (cat.no.275).

<sup>246</sup> *Athenaeum*, No.1566, 31st October 1857, p.1362.

<sup>247</sup> *National Gallery Minutes*, vol.4, p.118. From a meeting on 16th November 1857.

The steady stream of early Italian art entering the National Gallery did not ebb during the final years of the 1850s. In 1857, a major purchase from the Lombardi-Baldi collection in Florence introduced the first examples of Duccio and Uccello to the collection.<sup>248</sup> Over the following two years, many more works from the fifteenth century and earlier were acquired; they included a *Pieta* by Crivelli, bought by Eastlake in 1858 from the collection of P. Vallati in Rome, and a *Portrait of a Man* thought to be by Masaccio, which had been obtained at the Northwick sale in August 1859.<sup>249</sup> The minutes again attest to some consideration on the part of the Gallery's administrators of how to arrange these new acquisitions in a manner which would be intellectually edifying to a viewer. It is noted that when hanging the Crivelli and the 'Masaccio' in 1859, Wornum had been inspired into 'attempting a stricter classification of the schools than has hitherto been observed'. This took the form of moving the Italian works dating from before 1400 to the 'north small room', meaning that the 'south small room' was now 'chiefly Italian pictures of the fifteenth century'.<sup>250</sup> These continued efforts suggest an awareness of the deficiencies of the National Gallery in this area, and the discontent they caused among prominent commentators such as Ruskin and Layard.

It could be argued that the National Gallery was scarcely more progressive in this respect than the British Institution, which continued to include the art of all eras from the thirteenth century onwards in its Summer Exhibitions, yet reportedly failed to apply any organisational principles to them. In 1859, for example, the north room at

<sup>248</sup> Davies, *National Gallery Catalogue*, p.172, cat.no.566. The Duccio was a *Madonna and Child with Saints*, the Uccello a scene from the *Battle of San Romano* (p.529, cat.no.583). Also among the paintings acquired at this sale were a *Virgin and Child Enthroned* by Mararitone (p.345, cat.no.564), an *Adoration of the Kings* attributed to Filippino Lippi (p.97, cat.no.592), which has since been reattributed to Botticelli, and a predella panel depicting the *Adoration of the Kings* by a follower of Fra Angelico (p.32, no.582).

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p.155, cat.no.602 (Crivelli), p.98, cat.no.626 ('Masaccio', since reattributed to Botticelli).

<sup>250</sup> *National Gallery Minutes*, vol.4, p.201. From a meeting on 30th November 1859.

Pall Mall featured a mixture of Italian and northern European painting from the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Works attributed to Bellini, Botticelli and Perugino hung alongside Titians, Caraccis and Van Dycks.<sup>251</sup> *The Times* was unimpressed with both the quality of the artworks on display, and the chaotic variety with which a visitor was confronted. It advised the directorate to consider devoting exhibitions to specific masters or schools, a suggestion similar to Ruskin's vision of rooms in the National Gallery devoted to Titian or the Caracci; the paper ruled that 'there is more to be learnt from a succession of such collections than from any number of haphazard gatherings of great works from all countries, ages and styles'.<sup>252</sup> This advice went unheeded, predictably enough, as the priorities of the Institution cannot be said to have been didactic, nor its directorate 'modern' in their thinking. However, the failure of the National Gallery, one of the few truly public galleries in Britain at this time, to successfully impose a comprehensive system of arrangement upon its walls despite the continued contribution, either directly or in the form of comment, of some of the foremost Victorian authorities on old master painting, warrants further discussion in this thesis.

## VII. Excellence versus Education: Conceptions of the Popular Function of the National Gallery

This failure on the part of the National Gallery can be partly explained by space restrictions in its rooms, and the gaps in historical sequence which continued to exist in the collection itself. Its administrators were also hindered, however, by the lack of consensus on the subject of arrangement in the English art world. Those who ran the

<sup>251</sup> *British Institution Catalogue*, 1859. J.H. Anderton lent a *Virgin and Child and Saints* attributed to Bellini; Wynne Ellis lent a *Crucifixion* attributed to Perugino; Davenport-Bromley lent two supposed Botticellis, a *Venus* and a *Virgin and Child with Angels*. These paintings were heavily outnumbered by sixteenth-century works by artists such as Baroccio, Baglione, Schiavone, Cesari and Carracci.

<sup>252</sup> *The Times*, 6th June 1859, p.10. Davenport-Bromley's Botticellis are pronounced 'second-rate'.



National Gallery, in the 1850s at least, demonstrated a responsiveness to the advice of acknowledged experts, not least through the efforts made by the director to supplement the number of early Italian paintings in the collection. In the case of picture arrangement, and connected issues involving the wider philosophy on which the Gallery should operate, conflicting views among commentators prevented any clear course of action from becoming apparent. It was a topic of fierce debate between traditionalists insistent on a Peelite gallery of excellence, into which only the greatest masterpieces should be admitted, and more modern intellectuals and arts professionals who favoured a gallery of education. As has been discussed, the latter group spoke up repeatedly about the necessity of adopting a chronological system which incorporated examples from all periods and schools, in order to provide a viewer with a powerful lesson in the history of art. This debate involved the Italian 'primitives' with regards to the scope and arrangement of the collection, and also in terms of its accessibility to the general public; several experts were of the opinion that the inclusion of such art would have an alienating effect upon the uninitiated masses. Fundamentally, however, the issue at stake was the role and function of the National Gallery in society at large; critics were seeking to define both the nature of the benefits the collection offered to the populace, and the means by which these benefits were best imparted to them.

As might be expected, the various conceptions of the Gallery's nature and purpose, and the differences between them, can be observed with particular clarity in the reports and minutes of the parliamentary select committees appointed to investigate it. In 1836, Edward Solly raised an objection to the concept of the gallery of education which would be restated many times in the decades to come. He declared:

If it is to be a complete historical collection, of course it must commence from the time of Cimabue and Giotto; but I should not think it advisable to commence in that way; I should think the preferable way would be to commence with the very best masters, those who had brought it to the greatest state of perfection, and then go up to the source as well as come down to the present time. I do not



think that the public would take that interest if we were to commence with Cimabue and Giotto.<sup>253</sup>

The educational gallery was thus defined as being anti-popular, and would repel those it was attempting to instruct with its harsh, ungratifying lessons in 'primitive' art. Solly's own interest in and collection of early Italian painting, discussed earlier in the chapter, should here be noted; as will also be seen elsewhere, there was no necessary correlation between a taste for such art, and a belief in either the need for methodical art education, or for the chronological arrangement of public art collections.

By the time of the 1853 select committee report, attitudes towards early art had been transformed, and support for the creation of a gallery of education at Trafalgar Square had grown enormously. The report itself explicitly states that the collection enlargement funds allocated to the administration should be expended 'with a view, not merely of exhibiting to the public beautiful works of art, but of instructing the people in the history of that art',<sup>254</sup> thus endorsing the purchase of 'primitives', and a chronological hanging system. This recommendation, however, was formed in contradiction to the evidence of several of those who spoke before the committee; their views testify to the persistence of the notion that the National Gallery should only feature the greatest paintings in its display. For example, Coningham (another collector of early Italian paintings) was opposed to what he regarded as the conversion of the Gallery 'into a mere archaeological museum for literary antiquarians', which would be 'quite misapprehending the real object of a gallery of ancient masters'. This is essentially the same objection as that raised by Solly seventeen years earlier; Coningham feared that an educational gallery, with its comprehensive and historically arranged collection, was, paradoxically, an elitist concept, only having significance for those with considerable prior knowledge. The 'real object' he refers to is the instilling

<sup>253</sup> Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures', minutes p.147, q.no.1838.

<sup>254</sup> Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery', report p.xvi.

of a love for art in the general public, which he believed an 'archaeological museum' of painting could not achieve. Unlike Solly, Coningham was in favour of the Gallery obtaining as many 'primitives' as it could as soon as possible (as mentioned above), but tempered this enthusiasm by proclaiming that he would not 'concentrate the early works so much together', and that he generally thought 'too much has been made of chronological arrangement'. Ultimate preference was given by him to the works of Titian and Raphael, perhaps the most conservative selection possible in mid-nineteenth century Britain.<sup>255</sup>

Richard Ford and Morris Moore both also argued against a gallery organised and composed in accordance with rigid educational principles. Ford echoed Stirling in his expression of a preference for an 'artistical' to an 'archaeological' collection, and, like the report itself, used the analogy of a library, but to make an entirely contrary point. When compiling a library, he reasoned, 'you would not begin with black-letter books; hereafter, when you get very forward, you may, if you are rich enough, have curiosities; but you do not begin with them.'<sup>256</sup> This is a similar argument to that of Solly, with Ford also talking of the Gallery as if no pictures had yet been bought for it. The use of the term 'curiosities', the same one attributed to Peel by Eastlake, identifies Ford as a traditionalist whose views on the National Gallery were those of an older connoisseurial generation. By Moore's definition, 'the object of a national gallery is to elevate the public taste in art', which could be done, he seems to argue, with a display of works from the 'great Italian schools', due to their 'great superiority to all other schools.'<sup>257</sup> The pinnacle of pinnacles was, predictably enough, Raphael, and Moore provided the committee with his exhaustive account of the cheap Raphaels the trustees

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, minutes pp.490-491, q.nos.6943-6959. The paintings of Raphael and Titian are declared 'works of the greatest importance and models for the student'.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p.559, q.no.7910.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.684-685, q.nos.9822-9833.

could have acquired, in place of the offensive specimens of Zurbaran, Velazquez and others which they had chosen to purchase.<sup>258</sup>

As already demonstrated above by the *Illustrated London News*' notice of the Coningham donation of 1848, the gallery of excellence was an easier concept to justify in terms of public attendance and appreciation. The idea that everything contained within a gallery was of the best quality, and represented the highest standards of beauty, was supposedly a populist one, in that it meant that only the finest painting was laid before the people. It certainly simplified the gallery experience, as it attempted to preclude dispute or dissent through an incontestable encounter with the most empyrean realms of genius. Layard, however, openly challenged the idea that the historical system was anti-popular in the *Quarterly Review*. The gallery of excellence is an untenable proposition, he asserted, due to the sheer arbitrariness of excellence itself. Layard simply asks 'who are the best masters?', reminding his readers that until the 1840s the eclectic school of Bologna was considered to be the greatest, only to fall from grace as 'primitive' art gained favour. The gallery of excellence was, in short, subject to the flux of fashion; tastes change with astonishing rapidity, he argued, and in retrospect could usually be demonstrated to have been founded in some sort of folly. In Layard's view, the National Gallery should aspire solely to the condition of a museum of art, dedicated to providing 'materials for study and comparison'. This was, he believed, in the best interests both of the general public and the cause of British art. It was often claimed in support of the gallery of excellence that it would offer enormous benefits to painters, who could visit it and be inspired by the pinnacles of achievement attained in the past. Ruskin, as discussed earlier, faulted this notion and recommended the study of those who the greatest artists of the High Renaissance had themselves studied. Layard rejected both views, claiming that to suggest that the

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<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*, p.685, q.no.9384. For example, he claimed that since 1843, four high-quality Raphaels had been sold for a total of £1683; this is compared with the purchase of *Δ Boar Hunt* by Velazquez by the trustees for £2200.

gallery was intended for the direct edification of painters was to miss the point. He argued that it was rather meant for the instruction of:

the people...to furnish them with the means of forming their taste and judgement, upon which, after all, the true advancement of art and the character and quality of the artists' work must depend.

The historiographic approach to gallery arrangement was thus presented as the truly democratic one, as it permitted the populace to arrive at their own conclusions concerning the relative merits of the various schools and eras, instead of providing a collection of a supposedly uniform quality to which there could only be one legitimate response. A careful and systematic array of old master paintings would also make them accessible, Layard stated; they could be enjoyed 'by every reflecting visitor to a well-arranged gallery'.<sup>259</sup> He admired many of the government's recent purchases of earlier paintings, including the Perugino panels and Pollaiuolo's *St. Sebastian*, as works that could be easily and effectively incorporated into such a scheme, but was careful to commend the later pictures obtained as well, such as Veronese's *Family of Darius Before Alexander*.<sup>260</sup> In the properly arranged public gallery of ancient art, it was maintained, every school and century was of equal importance to the overall object of presenting a coherent history of painting to the people.

Ruskin also contributed to the efforts made to dismiss objections to the gallery of education made by those who favoured one of excellence. When before the site commission of 1857, he stated that under an educational system of collection and arrangement in the National Gallery, those who desired to see superlative works of art should be gratified by the fact that there would be plenty of them featured in the display: 'all that I should beg of them to yield to me would be that they should look at

<sup>259</sup>*Ibid.*, p.354.

<sup>260</sup>*Ibid.*, p.358. The price of the Veronese is said to have been high, but 'not too large for a nation to pay for one of the few great masterpieces not shut up in a [foreign] public gallery.'

Titian only, or Raphael only, and not wish to have Titian and Raphael side by side.<sup>261</sup> A gallery of education, he argued, was all-inclusive, and those interested in excellence only would simply have to be selective in their viewing; the gallery of excellence, however, sought to exclude the products of entire eras of art history, and would make attempts at instruction in the development of painting impossible. Some remained unconvinced: Frederick Hurlestone, president of the Society of British Artists, gave evidence to the site commission directly after Ruskin, and spoke of his disapproval of the purchase of 'the works of those early Italians' by the Gallery. His comments exhibit almost identical anxieties, and terminology, to those who faulted the concept of the gallery of education before the 1853 select committee. For example, Hurlestone expressed the fear that the adoption of such a principle would make the National Gallery 'a museum or an archaeological collection, and would cause the admission of many inferior works'.<sup>262</sup>

In the second half of the 1850s, an added emphasis was placed upon the experience of the public at the National Gallery in certain areas of the press commentary upon it. A letter published in *The Times*, for example, praised the Perugino panels as 'a first-rate work of a great painter', which will be 'a credit to the gallery in the eyes of critics and artists, and, what is of infinitely more importance, which will be a source of pure delight to thousands and thousands'.<sup>263</sup> Debate between the advocates of the gallery of education, and that of excellence, was bound up in class issues of a sort that had not been encountered at the British Institution. A significant proportion of the public who attended the rooms at Trafalgar Square were from the working class, who lacked the aspirational impulse shared by even the lowest social echelons who paid for entrance to the Summer Exhibition. Both the would-be educators and their opponents sought to

<sup>261</sup> Report of the National Gallery Site Commission', minutes p.97, q.no.2494.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99, q.no.2522. William Rossetti informed the readers of the *Crayon* in 1855 that Hurlestone was a lamentably old-fashioned artist 'who has a hankering after the Murillo manner of art' (vol.1, Jan-June 1855, p.328).

<sup>263</sup> *The Times*, 11th September 1856, p.9.

control this element of the public in their different ways, by means of either subjugation to a strict programme of instruction, or bombardment with an uninterrupted display of what its supporters imagined would be awe-inspiring beauty.

Sentiments regarding the populace and the National Gallery during the period covered by this thesis were mixed, with commentary mostly divided between democratic feeling relating to the presentation of fine art to the masses, and anxiety concerning the possibilities of their misbehaviour when before it. In the late 1830s, the emphasis was firmly on the former; the 1836 report on the connections between art and the manufacturing industries lamented the lack of opportunities for 'our workmen' to experience art or receive art instruction in the country at large, despite the fact that 'there exists among the enterprising and laborious classes of our country an earnest desire for information in the Arts.'<sup>264</sup> The National Gallery was thus seen as an especially valuable and rare opportunity for the working class to satiate its desire for high culture. The report accordingly stressed the importance of the considerate determination of opening hours, in order to ensure that 'operatives' had time to attend, and harshly criticised even the suggestion of entrance fees. At a public meeting at the Freemasons Hall the following year, a resolution was carried to ensure the continuation of free entry to the Gallery; claims that the working classes were prone to injure things were dismissed as 'ill-founded and unjust', and support was unanimously given to the 'unoffending public'.<sup>265</sup> Foggo, who chaired this meeting, demonstrated his continued support for its resolutions in his book on the National Gallery seven years later, in which he declared that the arts were 'no longer to be considered as the

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<sup>264</sup>Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures', report p.iii.

<sup>265</sup>George Foggo (hon.sec.), Report of the Proceedings at a Public Meeting Held at the Freemasons Hall on the 29th May 1837 to Promote the Admission of the Public Without Charge to Westminster Abbey, St.Pauls Cathedral, and All Depositories of Works of Art, of Natural History, and Objects of Historical and Literary Interest in Public Edifices, London, Printed by Order of the Committee, 1837, pp.7-8. This particular motion was raised by Mr.Chambers.



exclusive enjoyment of the few', and that 'the entire population of this kingdom is interested in their prosperity'.<sup>266</sup>

This conclusion was contradicted by others commenting on the levels of interest in the crowds attending the Gallery in the early 1840s, however. When giving evidence to a select committee appointed in 1841 to investigate 'national monuments and works of art', George Saunders Thwaites, then sub-keeper and secretary of the National Gallery, doubted that 'the mass of people who attend, particularly on holidays, take any particular interest in the pictures; they come and go without paying very much attention to them'. He did then add that even the most indifferent conducted themselves 'peaceably and orderly',<sup>267</sup> and were a harmless presence within the rooms at Trafalgar Square. By the time of the first select committee on the National Gallery in 1850, this tolerant attitude had been replaced by a less forgiving approach. The report submitted by this committee expressed concern that:

the Gallery is frequently crowded by large masses of people, consisting not merely of those who come for the purpose of seeing the pictures, but also of persons having obviously for their object the use of the rooms for wholly different purposes; either for shelter in case of bad weather, or as a place where children of all ages may recreate and play, and not infrequently as one where food and refreshments may conveniently be taken.<sup>268</sup>

Many of those in the crowds which packed the Gallery were regarded as acting in an improper manner; their behaviour was seen to be at odds with the space they occupied, with the Gallery being used by them as almost everything but a venue in

<sup>266</sup> Foggo, *The National Gallery*, introduction p.viii.

<sup>267</sup> 'Report from the Select Committee on National Monuments and Works of Art; with the Minutes of Evidence and the Appendix', *Reports from Committees*, 6 vols., London, Ordered by the House of Commons to be Printed, vol.6, session 26th Jan.-22nd June 1841, minutes p.133, q.nos.2584-2585.

<sup>268</sup> 'Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery; together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index', *Reports from Committees*, 11 vols., London, Ordered by the House of Commons to be Printed, vol.7, session 31st Jan.-15th August 1850, report p.iv.



which to appreciate old master painting. The supposedly practical justification for objecting to the multitudes in the National Gallery was also given in the 1850 report, which stated that the influx of more than 3000 visitors a day was creating a 'film of dirt' over the pictures, which may 'permanently diminish their value'.<sup>269</sup> Colin Trodd has written of the fundamental disparity perceived by Victorian commentators between the urban working class and the space of culture represented by the art gallery. Waagen is quoted as one who characterised the working-class presence as an invasion of filth, which endangered the works themselves and created a barrier between the more enlightened observer and the experience with art offered by the National Gallery. They were regarded, Trodd argues, as unwilling to engage in the 'proper' employment of leisure time within the gallery, or the 'labour of leisure' demanded of them by art; their very identity was seen as an insurmountable obstacle to any real understanding of the true value of a collection of old master paintings.<sup>270</sup> This 'labour' was especially pronounced in the historically arranged gallery of instruction, but even the gallery of excellence required the concentration and cooperation of the 'ordinary intelligent observer' cited by Ruskin, or the 'reflecting visitor' imagined by Layard. Trodd establishes a contrast between the idealised visions of the gallery conceived by pre-Victorian critics such as Hazlitt, and the turbid realities reported by Waagen, who thought the national collection had been overrun and degraded by those it had been intended to benefit.<sup>271</sup>

<sup>269</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> Colin Trodd, 'Culture, Class, City: The National Gallery, London and the Spaces of Education', Marcia Pointon (ed.), *Art Apart*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1994, pp.40-47. The views of Waagen referred to were given in an article on the National Gallery in the *Art-Journal* published in 1853.

<sup>271</sup> 'Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery' (1850), minutes p.36, q.no.533. Waagen here testifies to the 'striking difference' in the condition of the pictures in the National Gallery since he saw them first in 1836, a deterioration he attributes to the dust and dirt occasioned by the admittance of 'a great crowd' (q.no.586).

One of the responses to this alleged threat and the added hazard of London smoke was the removal of the collection to a site in South Kensington. Eastlake considered this scheme when before the 1850 select committee; it was essentially a choice between the absolute safety and preservation of the artworks, and the accessibility of the Gallery to the populace. The future director concluded that the relative inaccessibility of Kensington was 'a serious objection', but also pointed out that Hampton Court, which was yet more remote, was inundated with visitors.<sup>272</sup> Dennistoun, when speaking to the 1853 select committee, had none of this ambivalence; he declared that if removed to a more suburban location, public interest in the Gallery would indeed decrease, but this would be 'a very great boon to connoisseurs'. A proper analysis of the pictures was at present impossible, he continued, which was rendered all the more irritating by the fact that 'great numbers of people who now visit the Gallery are mere stragglers'.<sup>273</sup> Many of those examined by the 1853 committee contested this elitist appraisal. Coningham, for example, was vigorously opposed to the proposed relocation, due to the impact it have on working-class attendance; he expressed the belief that the additional distance constituted 'a very great obstacle' to such people.<sup>274</sup> This argument proved decisive for the 1857 site commission, which ruled that accessibility was the most important issue, and that the Trafalgar Square site was 'more in the way of all classes, and, from long usage, more familiar to them, than any position on the outskirts of the metropolis'.<sup>275</sup>

The enthusiasm for the members of the working class to attend the National Gallery, which lay behind the democratic convictions expressed above, was itself based in a

<sup>272</sup>*Ibid.*, p.26, q.nos.370-380.

<sup>273</sup>'Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery', minutes p.408, q.no.5877.

<sup>274</sup>*Ibid.*, p.494, q.no.711. The social topography of London is used to further illustrate this point: Coningham argues that the move would 'cut off all the east-end of London; the very dense population in Finsbury, for instance, if they had to go all the way down to Kensington, it would become a matter of impossibility for them to visit the Gallery.'

<sup>275</sup>'Report of the National Gallery Site Commission', report p.vi.

belief that such experience would have an improving effect upon them. The 1836 report stressed that access to the arts enhanced them as a workforce, pointing out that 'the connexion (sic) of art with manufacture has often developed the genius of the greatest masters in design'.<sup>276</sup> Similar sentiments were voiced seventeen years later by those giving evidence to the select committee investigating the National Gallery, with Ford, for instance, arguing that 'you must educate people in art' if design was to improve.<sup>277</sup> Others saw less directly utilitarian advantages in making the arts available to the populace. At the public meeting called in 1837 to discuss the issue of access to sites of cultural interest, it was resolved that 'a frequent contemplation' of artworks was 'eminently conducive to the instruction, refinement and rational amusement of the people'.<sup>278</sup> This notion of 'rational amusement' is of key importance; comparisons were drawn throughout the meeting between the pursuit of culture, and the other less salubrious pastimes of the people. For example, the Member of Parliament N.Ridley Colbourne stated the belief:

that the contemplation of works of art and science extends the ideas and improves the mind of every man who sees them. In truth also, let me say, it is the best species of temperance society.<sup>279</sup>

Two assertions are here being made. Firstly, that the arts were to be recommended as they represented an alternative leisure activity to a visit to a public house or similar venue. Secondly, and more profoundly, that they had the effect of making such venues and the iniquitous attractions they offered ultimately unappealing to the 'improved' member of the working class. Foggo openly declares in the introduction to his *The*

<sup>276</sup> Report from the Select Committee on the Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures', report p.iii.

<sup>277</sup> Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery', minutes p.566, q.no.8028. Ford stated: 'You send boys to school for every other object of study; but you do not send them for the purpose of acquiring a knowledge of art, one of the most difficult.'

<sup>278</sup> Foggo, *Report of the Proceedings at a Public Meeting*, p.4.

<sup>279</sup> *ibid.*, p.5.

National Gallery that the arts were a tool to be used in 'the moral instruction and recreation of the people',<sup>280</sup> which made the national collection an institution devoted to the creation of better citizens, as well as better workers. This opinion was repeated by several of those who gave evidence to the 1853 select committee, including Foggo himself.<sup>281</sup> It may explain the dismay of some at the sight of those who attended the Gallery, and yet paid no attention to the pictures; these people were believed to be wilfully denying themselves a chance for self-improvement. Peter Bailey has written of the efforts made from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards by the bourgeoisie to offer opportunities for 'rational recreation', for the benefit and subsequent betterment of the populace. The activities which 'recommended themselves to respectable tastes were those with some manifest moral or improving content';<sup>282</sup> the National Gallery, with its supposed fusion of recreation with instruction, was a prime example of 'rational recreation'.

In his second letter of complaint to *The Times* in 1852, one of Ruskin's major points of protest was that the gallery was being enlarged and hung as if it were a private collection. He stated his belief that pictures should be hung to be seen, but bitterly reflected that:

It is not commonly so understood. Nations, like individuals, buy their pictures in mere ostentation, and are content, so that their possessions are acknowledged, that they should be hung in any dark or out of the way corners which their frames will fit.

<sup>280</sup>Foggo, *The National Gallery*, introduction p.viii.

<sup>281</sup>'Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery', minutes p.511, q.no.7224. Foggo here states that the Gallery is for 'the instruction and improvement of the intellect and moral condition of the people.' Earlier that day, Hurlstone had said that the object of the National Gallery was to 'endeavour to afford a more refined description of amusement than the mere sensual amusements of the people in general, to which, were they denied this, of course they would be compelled to resort' (p.504, q.no.7139).

<sup>282</sup>Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p.71.

There was no independent paradigm for the space of the public gallery, just as there was no universally accepted method for its arrangement and interpretation, and this was identified by some as the primary reason for the lack of interest among the populace which was reported by the 1850 select committee. Ruskin prefigured the 1853 select committee report by insisting that the public gallery should be like 'a great library, of which the books must be read upon their shelves',<sup>283</sup> a conception which accords with his allegiance to notions of the national collection as a place of instruction and study.

However, when before the National Gallery site commission five years later, Ruskin made very different recommendations regarding the coding of its space for the benefit and, more importantly, control of the working-class visitor. In reference to the decoration of the gallery, he pronounced that:

great care should be taken to give a certain splendour - a certain gorgeous effect - so that the spectator may feel himself among splendid things; so that there shall be no discomfort or meagreness, or want of respect for the things which are being shown.<sup>284</sup>

The most significant response expected by Ruskin here is 'respect'; the working class visitor will be humbled by the overall splendour of the Gallery, and therefore made more receptive to the improving lessons which can be learnt from its display. Similar conceptions can be found in Layard's writing. In his *Quarterly Review* article on the National Gallery, he lamented the disgraceful condition of the interior at Trafalgar Square. He proclaimed that with 'its clumsy skylights, its paltry boarded floors, its few rickety chairs, its vulgar railings, its shabby fittings, and the ugliest of common paper', the environment was more that of 'an ill-regulated workhouse than a palace dedicated to the arts'.<sup>285</sup> Waagen, as Trodd argues, thought the working class brought the

<sup>283</sup>Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol.12, p.410.

<sup>284</sup>'Report of the National Gallery Site Commission', minutes p.94, q.no.2136.

<sup>285</sup>Layard, 'The National Gallery', p.379.

industrial feculence of the city into the sacrosanct space of the gallery, and thus corrupted it; he wrote in the *Art-Journal* that 'it is scarcely too much to require, even from the working man, that, in entering a sanctuary of art, he should put on such decent attire as few are without'.<sup>286</sup> The issue of 'public decorum' with regards to dress was also mentioned by Hurlestone to the 1853 select committee.<sup>287</sup> This recalls the efforts of the directorate of the British Institution to impose a dress code at their evening views. In both cases, visitors are expected to conform to the requirements of an elevated space; the consequence of nonconformity, it was claimed, was the loss of this elevation. In Layard's commentary, the status of victim is shifted from the space itself to the visitor. Instead of bringing the unrefined, the dirty and the menial in with them, the working class are confronted with it upon entrance. They expect a 'palace', yet are given a 'workhouse'; this juxtaposition of luxury and industry, and the connotation attached to each, seems directly to contradict the precepts of the gallery of instruction. Layard goes on, however, to insist on the presence of opulence in the public gallery:

The common multitude will not be persuaded that things can be very precious which are crowded on bare walls like useless lumber. We feel certain that it would no longer be necessary to warn the public that they are not to bring into the Gallery baskets with provisions, and to litter the floor with sandwich papers and orange peel, if the furniture and decoration of the rooms were such as to lead them to believe that they were in a place where they were expected to behave with decency.<sup>288</sup>

The populace cannot be blamed for behaving with a lack of elevation in an environment that fails to provide them with a sufficiently transcendental experience, Layard argued; the 'common multitude' were met with 'common paper' at Trafalgar Square, and it was therefore to be expected that they would behave as if at a picnic or similar non-cerebral event. It can be claimed that despite the opinions he expressed

<sup>286</sup> quoted Trodd, 'Culture, Class, City', p.42.

<sup>287</sup> Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery', minutes p.503, q.no.7126.

<sup>288</sup> Layard, 'The National Gallery', p.380.



regarding the vital nature of intellectualism in the formation and arrangement of a public gallery, Layard was here campaigning for the preservation of a splendour in the space of exhibition that has little to distinguish it from that typically found in the aristocratic private collection. For a member of the working class, the gallery experience would thus involve, in theory at least, an element of deference, and an awareness of inferiority which would encourage good behaviour.

There is a paradox inherent in Layard's article that characterises attempts at popular art education within the space of the gallery in the 1850s. The 'common multitude' should be elevated and enriched by a visit to the National Gallery, he stated, but also subdued and reminded of their humble status by the magnificence of the environment they found themselves to be in. Bailey describes how 'rational recreation' was 'an attempt to forge more effective behavioural constraints in leisure';<sup>289</sup> similarly, Trodd argues that art education was widely regarded by those who sought to administer it as a tool for the dissemination of discipline. Trodd goes on to identify the administering of cultural awareness to the lower classes as 'the process by which the subject is able to police himself in the art of citizenship'; an education in art was thought to rightfully lead to the betterment of the workers, and an improvement of their 'moral condition'.<sup>290</sup> An important part of this process was a reinforcement of their subordinate, menial role within society through the class signification of the gallery itself, with even progressive and professedly democratic commentators such as Layard and Ruskin campaigning for a preservation of ostentation in the exhibition space. This represents a denial of any point of identification or comfort for the lower echelons within the gallery, and seems to suggest that concerns of accessibility were ultimately secondary to those of control.

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<sup>289</sup>Bailey, *Leisure*, p.170.

<sup>290</sup>Trodd, 'Culture, Class, City', p.39.



Those who wished to reformulate the national collection as a gallery of instruction were faced with a problematic situation. Their conception of the 'proper' way in which to view art denied the attendance of a casual visitor; the attending public must be both assiduous and industrious. For the majority of the members of the populace who entered the gallery, however, it constituted a recreational venue visited during leisure time, within which they were unwilling to submit to a programme of educational labour. The gallery of excellence, it could be argued, was not only an easier concept to explain to the uninitiated, but also a more immediately gratifying prospect for them, as it presented art as a spectacle that required no intensive personal application. In their attempts to impress the inappropriate nature of this extraction of entertainment from the public gallery of ancient art upon the lower classes, the would-be educators can be said to have resorted in part to the traditional class-based structures that their pedagogic approach was seeking to revise. This confused and contradictory situation can be observed with particular saliency at the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857, which was the major public exhibition of old master paintings of the era. Here, the display was constituted of loans from the private collections of Britain, yet designed primarily for consumption by the working classes of Lancashire. The professional critics and art experts of the upper middle class were thus confronted by the abuses of the privilege-based systems of art ownership as encountered at the British Institution, and the difficulties of guaranteeing response and behaviour involved in the attempted instruction of the uninitiated masses, within the space of a single venue.

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