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Chapter Three

The Failure of the Gallery of Education: The Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857

Unlike the spaces of display discussed in the previous chapter, the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857 was an isolated event, which opened its doors on the May of that year, and then closed them for good in October. It was a massive feat of organisation, with over 16,000 works of art being brought to Manchester to be displayed in a purpose-built structure which was designed, erected, utilised and dismantled within the space of a year. The significance of the Exhibition with regards to this thesis involves issues of inclusiveness, both in terms of the collection that was assembled, and the class of visitor whom it was intended to benefit. Early Italian art featured prominently on the walls of the art ‘palace’ which was constructed at Old Trafford; this is important both in terms of the level of its acceptance into the Victorian canon of ancient art, and its role in the educational and art historical programme adopted by the Exhibition’s administrators. As with much of the commentary on the National Gallery, intentions and hopes voiced in connection with the project were both democratic and didactic; its organisers insisted that the Art Treasures Exhibition was designed to benefit the community at large. Attendance issues were thus foregrounded in reportage and discussion of this declared attempt to bring art to the artless. The population was widely expected to seize the singular opportunity the Exhibition was taken to represent at the time of its inauguration, and commentators speculated as to the moral, intellectual and social improvements that would soon become apparent in the conduct of the citizens, and particularly industrial workers, of Manchester. However, the experience of the Art Treasures Exhibition failed to offer the expected confirmation of prevalent notions regarding art education.
and instead revealed the extent of the problems facing the putative pedagogues. These were fundamentally class-based, in that the upper echelons of the middle class were attempting to instruct and refine the lower-middle and working classes using paintings which, in the old master departments at least, were still largely the property of the aristocracy. This complex situation revealed the schisms that continued to define Victorian society despite attempts at harmonisation, amongst which the Manchester Exhibition can be included. In particular, it prompted expression of the dichotomous attitudes held amongst members of the middle class concerning those above and below them in the social hierarchy.

I. The Tradition of the International Exhibition: Art in the Space of Industry and the Paradigm of the Church

Ulrich Finke has remarked that an undertaking such as the Art Treasures Exhibition would have been ‘inconceivable without precedents’, and indeed many commentators chose to describe the building at Old Trafford in relation to its most obvious forerunner. The correspondent for the evangelical magazine The Leisure Hour, for example, remarked that its interior brought the scene encountered within the Great Exhibition at Hyde Park six years earlier ‘forcibly to remembrance’. This comparison was drawn many times throughout the Art Treasures Exhibition’s duration to make a number of points about its successes and failures. The two were indeed broadly similar, being public exhibitions of items of cultural interest whose proclaimed goal was the educational and therefore moral improvement of society at large. The Manchester Exhibition can in fact be regarded as falling to an extent into the tradition  

2The Leisure Hour, vol.6, 1857, p.486.
3For example, Spectator, vol.30, 1857, p.1071. The Magazine saw an ‘unenviable contrast’ between the Art Treasures Exhibition’s uncertain financial outcome and the vastly profitable Great Exhibition.
of the international exhibition, which attained massive popularity during the 1850s, due in no small part to the phenomenal success of the Great Exhibition early in the decade. The *Art Treasures Examiner*, an illustrated magazine devoted to providing ‘A Pictorial, Critical and Historical Record’ of the Manchester Exhibition, stated in the introduction to its preliminary number that those who had conceived of the Exhibition were ‘strongly impressed with the happy results of the Paris Exhibition of the previous summer, as well as those of the Dublin Exhibition of 1853’, which suggests not only a keen awareness of the management of such precedents, but also a desire to learn from them. Much of the experience gained in Dublin and London could indeed be brought directly to bear in Manchester, as several of its organisers had worked in a variety of capacities at these earlier exhibitions. However, those who planned the Art Treasures Exhibition were adamant from the outset that there was to be a significant difference in terms of the content of their display. The private paper co-authored by J.C. Deane and Peter Cunningham in May 1856, which effectively instigated the Manchester Exhibition, expressed the opinion that time must ‘necessarily elapse’ before the staging of another industrial exhibition like those of London, Dublin and Paris. They argued that an art exhibition could exert an equally positive influence upon the people of Manchester. Prince Albert, who was approached early on with a request for patronage, stated that such variety was desirable, and that ‘mere repetition’ of the 1851 Exhibition should be avoided; he praised the ‘distinctive character’ of the proposed exhibition of paintings, prints, drawings and photographs.

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5 Two notable examples are J.C. Deane and Thomas Fairbairn. Deane, who was one of the originators of the Manchester Exhibition and later its general manager, had been a commissioner at both the Dublin Exhibition, and the Crystal Palace after its relocation to Sydenham; Fairbairn, who was chairman of the Art Treasures Exhibition’s executive committee, had been a commissioner for the Great Exhibition.

6 *Exhibition of Art Treasures of the United Kingdom held at Manchester in 1857: Report of the Executive Committee, Manchester, George Simms, 1859*, p.3. The quotes are from a letter from Albert to the Earl of Ellesmere regarding the project dated 3rd July 1856, which was widely reproduced for the purposes of publicity.
There had been art at the Great Exhibition, but it had been largely decorative in character and entirely overwhelmed by fetishistic displays of machinery attempting to offer glimpses of a glorious future. Paul Greenhalgh refers to the fine arts as having been 'the only inadequate areas' of the Exhibition, with aesthetics being subordinate throughout to the demonstration of technological progress. The exhibitions of the intervening years gave the arts a more central role, and at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1855 they were even allotted a distinct area of the Exhibition. Administrators came to regard an artistic aspect as a necessary element of an international exhibition; this did not, however, ensure its popularity. At the close of the Exposition Universelle, 906,530 people had visited the fine arts palace, whereas 3,626,934 had been to the machine hall.

There is a lesson in these figures which would have been well learnt by the organisers of the Art Treasures Exhibition. The ostensible similarities between their venture and the international exhibitions of recent years led to many expectations which were not gratified. In its post-mortem of the Manchester Exhibition, the Spectator attempted to explain the differences in fortune between it and the London Exhibition. At the Great Exhibition, it maintained, 'every taste was consulted and stimulated' within its walls, whereas at the Art Treasures Exhibition there was 'nothing but art'. There was variety within the bounds of art, the journal conceded, but this was not enough to draw in the crowds, and a significant proportion of the exhibits were 'worst of all, high art', which would repel them. Such comments illustrate the confusion that lay at the core of the undertaking. There was a fundamental disjunction between the paradigm of the international exhibition, which had inspired the Manchester Exhibition and been the

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8 Ibid., p.198.
source of many of its organisational principles, and the cultural register of its contents. An international exhibition was, in theory at least, relevant and useful to all; it was an environment in which class distinctions, although still palpable, did not automatically rank the validity and value of responses to the multifarious display. The display at the Art Treasures Exhibition, as the Spectator commented, was very limited in comparison. Attempts were made to introduce a more practical element in the form of items of furniture, tapestry and metal work, as admirable for their technical accomplishment as for any less tangible artistic qualities. This enabled the Exhibition's more ardent supporters to claim that it offered 'the history of art and industry told in its choicest works', but most were unconvinced.

The picture galleries were generally regarded as the Art Treasures Exhibition's primary attraction, alongside which the ornamental and decorative art seemed 'inadequate and inferior'. Their contents jarred with the egalitarian connotations of the paradigm of the international exhibition, which the undertaking otherwise evoked so vividly. The international exhibitions of the 1850s drew their materials from factories and workshops as well as private collections, but the Manchester Exhibition was entirely dependent upon the loans made by the owners of art. As with the Summer Exhibitions of the British Institution, many of the inadequacies of the Art Treasures Exhibition were accordingly attributed by professional middle-class critics to the ignorance and incapacity of rich collectors, and the right of the wealthy individual capable of its purchase to control the work of art was widely questioned in press coverage of the event. This hostility was countered, however, by the persistence of notions that the 'quality' of a person or group would be reflected in their ability to react to art, and that the gallery of an art exhibition, as opposed to that of an

11 Saturday Review, vol.3, 1857, p.454. Also, Blackwood's, vol.81, Jan.-June 1857, p.760: the pictures are declared 'the strength and paramount attraction of the Exhibition'.
international exhibition, was a space to flaunt knowledge rather than to acquire it. The working class, in their seeming unresponsiveness, were emphatically out of place in this environment, and were inevitably characterised in many instances in terms of inferiority. The Art Treasures Exhibition was, in a number of ways, an environment that sacrificed the intelligibility and general interest of the international exhibition in order to provide the conditions necessary for the consumption of pictures by the learned and experienced; as Finke states, ‘the Exhibition was of most value to the informed visitor’. It was ultimately ruled by the same discourse of luxury that defined the private picture galleries of the aristocracy, as discussed in the previous chapter. This would prove socially divisive, and when awkwardly coupled with the more democratic intentions inherited from the recent events on which it was modelled, created a space characterised only by uncertainty and paradox.

Initial reactions to the Art Treasures Exhibition in the press during the time of its assembly and opening were idealistic, and many commentators chose to understand its significance as being remarkably similar to that of the Great Exhibition. Both were thought occasions for patriotic pride and the expression of hopes for some kind of social transformation, and their historical importance was considered to be beyond doubt. This sense of the monumental was reflected in responses to the buildings in which both were housed. The ‘Crystal Palace’ of Hyde Park was considered to be, in the words of the Eclectic Review, nothing short of an ‘architectural marvel’. The originality of Joseph Paxton’s structure was universally lauded, entire publications were devoted solely to it, and it became, as Greenhalgh states, ‘the great icon of’

13 See chapter 2, section IV, pp.137-140.
14 For example: Art-Journal. vol.3, 1857, p.161. The magazine declared that the Art Treasures Exhibition would ‘unquestionably be considered among the “great facts” of the age’. Notes and Queries. vol.3, 1851, p.361. The Great Exhibition, it is here stated, would be remembered ‘for centuries after those who have witnessed its glories have passed away’.
exhibition architecture. Although it followed very much in the wake of the 1851 building, the construction at Old Trafford was nonetheless praised widely. The designs of the architect C.D. Young, who had recently completed work on the exhibition building at South Kensington, were regarded by the Art-Journal among many others, as blending original features with 'the excellencies of the great type of the Paxton style', and even a cursory comparison of two external views demonstrates that the influence of the Great Exhibition building was strong at Manchester (see figure 3). There was, however, a perceived unity of ideological purpose between the building and its contents at Hyde Park which some failed to detect at Old Trafford. The building itself was a celebration of industrial might and aptitude, which complemented the technical innovations on display within. In contrast, several commentators found the Manchester Exhibition building unimposing, and some even questioned the extent to which the 'great type of the Paxton style' was appropriate for an art exhibition. The Athenaeum felt the building to be far too plain, and asked:

Whether, or why, something of art and fancy should not be attempted, when the thing to be produced is a casket for specimens of fancy in art. Is there not now some peril of our becoming prosaic and meagre, the excuse being the rapidity, convenience and cheapness of this novel iron-and-glass architecture?

The dilemma of the Art Treasures Exhibition is once again clear in these comments. The building and its contents were seen to be incompatible, their particular associations at odds with one another. Art was associated with splendour and a certain

18 This cohesion has been commented upon in recent study of the Great Exhibition; John MacKean, for example, writes of how ‘building and contents unify into one experience’ (John MacKean, Crystal Palace: Joseph Paxton and Charles Fox, London, Phaidon, 1994, p.28).
19 Art Treasures Examiner, p.1. W.Bianchard Jerrold remarked that the exterior was ‘certainly not imposing’.

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exemption from the vagaries of time, largely due to the luxurious private residences in which it was most commonly encountered. In the case of old master painting, certain works had hung in the palaces and castles of the aristocracy for generations; their removal from spaces which were apart from the flux of the industrial age to an extremely modern, temporary environment with starkly different viewing conditions resulted in several critics recoiling from the incongruity. The above quotation from the Athenaeum indicates that the qualities which had made the Crystal Palace ideal for the Great Exhibition were regarded by some as being entirely irrelevant, indeed inimical, to art. As the discussion of the National Gallery’s progress in the previous chapter suggests, the requirements of the art gallery as a distinctive space had yet to be defined, and the value of the international exhibition as a template was open to debate. Influential voices did speak up in support of the Art Treasures Exhibition as a picture gallery, yet the doubt of publications such as the Athenaeum and others indicates the clash of priorities and preconceptions that took place within it. Just as the associations of the international exhibition were nullified by high art, so was the effect of this art inhibited by its being placed in the building of an international exhibition.

Both the Art Treasures Exhibition and the Great Exhibition were considered to be international concerns, which inevitably led to the expression of strong patriotic feeling in connection with them. The Great Exhibition, containing displays by a massive variety of nations, was commonly characterised as a huge competition of sorts, but one that would demonstrate to the world the ‘unquestionable superiority of England’, as the Eclectic Review put it. The situation could hardly have been otherwise; Britain and her colonies occupied half the total exhibition space, allowing for a far more extensive and impressive display than that possible for all the other contributing nations. An emphasis on the particular merit and power of the country in which it was


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being staged became a part of what Greenhalgh calls the 'positivist dialectic' of the international exhibition, arguing that 'especially for the host nation, the exhibition would invariably be a celebration of the past as a preparation for a better future'.

This was certainly true of the Art Treasures Exhibition, which was taken as 'proof of the widening of our art taste and knowledge', and a clear sign that England was 'moving onwards in art'. The sense of patriotism at Manchester was necessarily different to that encountered at the Great Exhibition as the Art Treasures Exhibition was not international in the same manner. Half of its picture galleries were given over to European painting, and half to British, but the European side was composed entirely of old masters lent by British owners. No-one but British collectors were approached for loans, the stated intention of the organisers being to amass 'a treasury of art worthy of this country'. This stands in complete contrast to the composition of the 1850s international exhibitions; the Paris Exposition Universelle, for example, was divided between host and foreign loans in the same proportions as the Great Exhibition, and contained only modern painting. Much of the patriotic pride expressed concerning the Manchester Exhibition was founded upon the belief that the collection could have been assembled by 'no other country in the world', to quote The Times. English eminence was asserted without the need for a foreign comparison; the selection offered was believed, initially at least, to be splendid beyond contest, a display of extraordinary wealth and impeccable taste of which the entire country could be proud, and with which no other nation could compete.

The sense of the unprecedented spectacle permeates general accounts of both the Great Exhibition and the Art Treasures Exhibition. Queen Victoria, at a ceremony held

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22 Greenhalgh, Ephemeral Vistas, p.23.
23 Athenaeum, No.1540, 2nd May 1857, p.564.
25 Report of the Executive Committee, p.5. From Deane and Cunningham's private paper.
26 The Times, 11th May 1857, p.10.
in honour of her visit on the 2nd July 1857, declared herself impressed by the ‘splendid spectacle’ of the Manchester Exhibition;\textsuperscript{28} and at the opposite end of the social spectrum, the \textit{Yorkshire Visitor’s Guide to the Great Exhibition} instructed its readers to admire the ‘full glory’ of the nave of the Crystal Palace.\textsuperscript{29} Much was made at both of the convergence of society for the purpose of a large-scale exhibition. The \textit{Eclectic Review}, for example, grandly proclaimed the Great Exhibition ‘the largest gathering of human beings on which the sun has ever shone’.\textsuperscript{30} Such a congregation, considered in conjunction with the issues of education and working-class attendance, summoned to the minds of many an analogy with the church, which proved an effective means of evaluating and characterising an exhibition.

The enthusiasm for public education which had essentially given rise to both these exhibitions was motivated by the common belief, here voiced by \textit{Art-Journal} at the outset of the Art Treasures Exhibition, that ‘to improve taste is to inculcate virtue’;\textsuperscript{31} that a public with improved faculties of cultural judgement would as a corollary gain a moral benefit which would inform not only their work but also their social behaviour. The possible spiritual dimension of this process was not missed, leading to the exhibitions being frequently likened to churches or temples\textsuperscript{32} devoted to culture, industry or art, which were attended by ‘eager and zealous worshippers’.\textsuperscript{33} Terms that

\textsuperscript{29}The \textit{Yorkshire Visitor’s Guide to the Great Exhibition}, and also to the Principal Sights of London: by the reporter for the Leeds Times, Leeds, Joseph Buckton, 1851.
\textsuperscript{30}Eclectic Review, vol.2, 1851, p.624.
\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Art-Journal}, vol.3, 1857, p.188.
\textsuperscript{32}Such analogies tended to be informed by their particular contents, for example; Thomas Morris, \textit{A Historical, Descriptive and Directional Handbook to the Art Treasures Exhibition}, Manchester, A.Ireland, 1857, p.11: The Art Treasures Exhibition is called ‘a vast temple devoted to the fine arts’. The \textit{Yorkshire Visitor’s Guide to the Great Exhibition}, p.3: the Great Exhibition is termed ‘a magnificent temple of industry’.
signified religious practice were thus attached to exhibition spaces in order to describe them, and the role properly played by people within them. In a similar manner to religious practice, devotees would find their souls enriched and accordingly their ‘moral faculties and social habits...strengthened for good’.34

At the Great Exhibition, various religious societies recognised the potential of the event; in its special publication produced for the Exhibition, the evangelical Religious Tract Society declared it to be ‘an unprecedented opportunity for doing spiritual good on a large scale’.35 In addition to the various moral lessons the crowds would consciously or subconsciously learn from the display, the society proposed that Hyde Park be filled with preachers delivering religious wisdom in a more direct form. Whatever the array of cultural items on view were from an educational point of view, they were not, it was believed, overtly spiritual in character. In the spring of 1850, a speech given by Prince Albert at Mansion House on the subject of the incipient exhibition caused offence among certain devout critics, who believed that he was attempting nothing less than the consecration of the machine. Such concern led to the establishment of the Church Exhibition Committee by Bishop Blomfield, which distributed sermons and prayer books on the exhibition site, even issuing translated pamphlets for the benefit of foreign visitors. In the face of the exuberant metaphors of the press, the various denominations of the Church were eager to remind the populace that the Exhibition was not a place of religious worship, and that the word of God openly stated still had a role to play at the Crystal Palace. The blunt refusal of religious bodies even to contemplate the possible Sunday opening of the Palace,36 regardless of the boons this would have to operative attendance, testifies to their guarded view of the Great Exhibition’s spiritual benefits.

34Art-journal, vol.3, 1857, p.188.
35The Palace of Glass, p.127.
The situation at the Art Treasures Exhibition was somewhat different, largely due to the presence of 'high' art. Widely held critical beliefs assigned metaphysical qualities to sculpture and painting that made them sacred objects in themselves, regardless of the Christian doctrine from which they drew their subject matter. The Athenaeum, for example, described the making of an artwork as 'the transforming of a base thing, whether canvas, wood, steel or clay, into a glorified and more spiritual creation'.

The religious analogy could thus be carried further, as the Manchester Exhibition was not simply the congregation of a mass of people for the pursuit of self-betterment; the object of their communal attention had its own measure of the divine, and was therefore eligible for worship. The drawing of this similarity with the godlike, particularly the Christian God, in accounts of the Exhibition is occasionally overt. The Companion to a Walk through the Art Treasures Exhibition assigns the experience Christ-like powers of solace and even physical and spiritual regeneration. There will be those among the crowd of visitors, the author recognises, 'who are suffering from sickness, and some, perhaps, whose earthly affections it has pleased God to harrow up by sorrowful bereavements, so as to bind their best feelings with cords of affliction'. From this unfortunate state the Art Treasures Exhibition can deliver them, the reader is told; within its walls, 'let even these take comfort for the time'.

In a display environment where the exhibits themselves were revered, organised religion was a less prominent presence, and seemed almost to seek a lesser role; this did not, however, extend to the relaxation of strictures regarding Sunday opening. As briefly mentioned above, this issue inspired vociferous campaigning by religious groups during the 1850s. The evangelicals were at the forefront of such Sabbatarian activity, and opposed the opening of any display area, including permanent collections.

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38 The Companion to a Walk through the Art Treasures Exhibition of Paintings and Engravings at Old Trafford by an Amateur, Manchester, A.Ireland, 1857, p.3.
such as the National Gallery and British Museum. Fears concerning declining church attendance, and the opening of less salubrious venues as well as those of educational intent, ensured the continued Sunday closure of many public events and institutions until the final years of the century, despite continuous working-class protest. That the Art Treasures Exhibition was also denied permission to open on Sundays belies the godliness claimed for the event by the secular press.

Religious activity on the exhibition site itself may have been less prolific, but religious opinion on the deification of art and the conception of the Exhibition as a church was no less definite than it had been at the Crystal Palace. A series of Anglican sermons, published under a title that specifically identified them as having been 'preached in St. Ann's Church, Manchester, during the season of the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition', repeatedly emphasised the paltry nature of art alongside the glories of God. A typical example is 'The Offices of Reason and Faith with Respect to Revelation', delivered by the Rev. H. M. Neile, in which it was declared that the beauty of faith 'infinitely transcends all the Art Exhibitions and Crystal Palaces that human ingenuity can put together'. Having thus put the events into perspective, Neile addressed the notions of certain commentators concerning the spiritual nature of their contents:

> When anything, no matter how beautiful it is; science, taste, art, no matter how lovely in itself - when it has the first place in a man's estimation, and the most practical place in a man's life, it is his god and he is an idolater.

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39 This issue was raised by several witnesses during the sessions of the Select Committee of 1853, including William Coningham and Richard Ford; the latter argued that Sunday 'is almost their (the working classes') only day' ('Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery', minutes p.565, q.no.8014.). However, no mention of it was made in the report itself.

40 Bailey, Leisure and Class, pp.82-4. The Sunday opening of art galleries was delayed until 1896.
The religious men of Manchester did not seek to interfere directly with the business of art appreciation, but their sermons attempted to remind those who indulged in it that it was an earthly pursuit whose rewards paled in comparison with ‘the richer treasures of God’s grace and wisdom’. The religion of art that developed in the literature of the Art Treasures Exhibition was regarded as an idolatrous snare by some of those voicing the interests of true religion, and it was also barely distinguishable in their eyes from the science and industry fetishism of the Great Exhibition.

There is no suggestion of the dangers of idolatry in the idealism of the Exhibitions’ supporters. An important aspect of the paradigm of the church was the idea of the congregation, the gathering of people from all walks of life for a single, unified purpose. The very Christian implications of peace and goodwill among men that went with this idea managed to win the Manchester Exhibition the acceptance and even, in places, the endorsement of the Church despite the reservations discussed above. The international exhibition had the additional dimension of appearing to draw together people from different races and cultures in order to take stock of the overall progress of mankind. At the opening ceremony of the Great Exhibition, the Archbishop of Canterbury offered a prayer in which he expressed the hope that the display would increase ‘general prosperity by promoting peace and goodwill among the different races of mankind’. The promoters of the Art Treasures Exhibition could not wish for anything so global or indeed tangible as an increase in international wealth as a result of their exertions, but there was still a sense that the event promoted peace.

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Many optimistically thought at the Exhibition's outset that such plenary experience would promote harmony and understanding between the classes, as their respective prejudices were disproved by encounters in the hallowed halls of Old Trafford. The *Art-Journal* was a prominent champion of this cause in its early articles on the Exhibition. Its commentator believed that the Manchester Exhibition would bring about the 'abrogation of the dogma of the workers', that it had a 'levelling principle' which would have the effect of 'raising one class without depressing the other' 43. Such sentiments received prominent espousal at the opening ceremony on the fifth of May. Prince Albert declared in his speech that the Exhibition was evidence of a 'generous feeling of mutual confidence and good will between the classes', and the inaugural prayer of the Bishop of Manchester predicted the drawing of all society together 'in mutual love and kindness'. 44

This ideal vision of community quite astonished those who believed they had witnessed it. Friedrich Engels, better known for his descriptions of Manchester's squalid social conditions, was astonished by the atmosphere in the Exhibition's halls; in a letter to Karl Marx, he declared that 'here, everyone is a friend of art'. 45 The French critic Charles Blanc stated that the interior of the Art Treasures Exhibition was nothing less than 'the spectacle of a new society in motion', a symbol of the dawning of a new era of understanding and sympathy between rich and poor. This was all the more remarkable, he continued, for having taken place in England:

> Who would have thought that the idea of popularising the understanding of art and of propagating enlightenment to this extent would be applied with such brilliance by the country which is pre-eminently one of inequality, of individualism, of privilege?

43 *Art-Journal*, vol.3, 1857, p.188.
44 *ibid*.
45 quoted Finke, 'The Art Treasures Exhibition', p.102. Engels continued: 'Moreover, there are some very beautiful pictures here. You must come over this summer and see it with your wife.'
Rather than regard the Manchester Exhibition as an indication of cultural and social improvement in England, as native commentators were inclined to, Blanc considered the fact of the event in all its perceived brilliance to be ironic in the extreme. In an age where the cause of democracy was making considerable advances, he describes England as still ‘dominated by so many caste prejudices, and where there still flourishes an aristocracy that is faithful in many ways to Gothic forms and medieval thoughts’. 46 His opinions were doubtlessly coloured by the republicanism prevalent in his own land, and perhaps a certain resentment of the nationalistic proclamations made by British commentators regarding their achievement, but the identification of a disjunction between the Art Treasures Exhibition, or at least a positive or ideal estimation of it, and the cultural and social reality of the country responsible for it is significant. The Exhibition provided a vision of a more enlightened future, yet stood in stark contrast with English reality, which was still firmly rooted, Blanc maintained, in the repressive structures of a feudal past. It was therefore an illusion, too good to be true, serving as much as a reminder of the inequalities of the present as an illustration of the possibilities of the future. It has been claimed that the Great Exhibition, rather than promoting international peace and understanding, engendered rivalry and discord between the countries that participated. 47 A similar reversal of intended effect can be observed in accounts of the Art Treasures Exhibition; designed to unite and focus society, it ultimately highlighted difference and incompatibility of interest, and even exacerbated hostile feelings between the classes.

II. The Gallery of Education at Manchester: Historiographic Arrangement and the Inclusion of the 'Primitives'

From the outset, the Art Treasures Exhibition was conceived by its patrons and administrators as a gallery of education, which would be based upon the most current theories of exhibition. In his speech at the opening, Prince Albert declared the venture especially praiseworthy as it was not 'a mere collection of works', but one that had a pronounced 'educational character'. It was thus distinguished from the displays of the National Gallery and British Institution, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, were criticised for failing to impose a sufficient degree of intellectual or educational rigour within their galleries. Many commentators drew attention to the unprecedented and exceptional nature of the Manchester Exhibition in this respect; the Art Journal, for example, termed the building an 'unrivalled school of art'. The behaviour and attitudes of those who attended the Exhibition were essential to the success of this paradigm of the school, with visitors having to be prepared to become students within its walls. At the time of the Art Treasures Exhibition's opening, reviewers were keen to remind their readers that the Exhibition was no place for the frivolity and vacuity observed among the crowds at occasions such as the British Institution Summer Exhibition. The Manchester Guardian declared that the event was designed to 'serve a worthier and higher purpose' than that allotted to it by such a desultory and superficial approach; it was 'a place of study rather than a lounge, a school instead of a playroom'.

As with the paradigm of the church, the utilisation of the school as a conceptual template for the Manchester Exhibition had strong democratic implications. The

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\(^5\)Ibid., p.204.  
\(^6\)Manchester Guardian, vol.2, p.6. Similar sentiment was expressed elsewhere; for example, Jerrold, Jerrold's Guide, p.5. A visitor 'must not enter the building unprepared for a lesson'.
possible educational effects of the Exhibition were, the Art Journal asserted, ‘for the
general good of all’.51 The location of the Exhibition was seen to be particularly
appropriate by those who believed that it had a didactic mission to perform.
Manchester was Britain’s foremost industrial town, and was consequently regarded as
being spiritually arid by the majority of commentators. Its inhabitants were
characterised by both locals and outsiders as being exclusively concerned with the
prosaic activities of business and industry. Thomas Morris, a reporter from the
Manchester Examiner and Times, described Mancunians as being distinguished ‘chiefly
by their attachment to trade pursuits’. They were, however, being led by the ‘growing
intelligence of the age’ towards an attempt to effect a ‘general educational
improvement’. The Art Treasures Exhibition, Morris maintained, would greatly assist
such efforts due to its ‘elevating tendency’.52 Other publications concurred with this
assessment. The Art Treasures Examiner, for example, conceived of the Exhibition as
a ‘silken thread’ which could be used to draw the middle classes of Manchester away
from ‘that excessive adoration of money which is their main characteristic at the
present time’. Art was seen as a source of much-needed spirituality in a grossly
materialistic society; the middle classes of Manchester were not, however, the primary
concern with regards to the audience the Exhibition would attract.

The Art Treasures Examiner declared that the ‘silken thread’ of the Exhibition would
also pull ‘the working classes from the pothouse’53, a comment which alludes to the
general anxiety felt amongst the Victorian middle class regarding popular recreation,
as discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the National Gallery. The leisure
pursuits of the working classes were seen to be morally degrading and physically
inhibiting, and to invariably involve the excessive consumption of alcohol.

International exhibitions were designed to act as both a corrective and an alternative to

52 Morris, An Historical, p.8.
53 Art Treasures Examiner, p.40.
these iniquitous activities; Bailey cites the Great Exhibition in particular as a major example of ‘rational recreation’, as it represented ‘the fusing of recreation with instruction’. The Art Treasures Exhibition was certainly intended as an edifying experience for the operatives of Manchester, and numerous attempts were made in the press to suggest that the art exhibition had a form of practical instruction somehow encoded in it, which the worker would intuitively imbibe and act upon. It was confidently claimed that the ‘lads of the loom’, as they were jocularly styled by the Art Treasures Examiner, could not fail to be impressed by the display, and some would leave it ‘strong in a determination to achieve something’. Quite what they would be determined to achieve is not specified, and therein lay the obstacle to efforts to identify the Manchester Exhibition as a site for ‘rational recreation’. The Art-Journal expressed the belief that an object of beauty was a ‘perpetual instructor’ to the artisan, but no concrete lesson was determined beyond the retention of a ghostly image of aesthetic perfection in one’s mind whilst performing more mundane labours. This was a major disadvantage for the art exhibition, especially if compared with the more obvious boons of an international exhibition. At the Great Exhibition, for instance, popular guidebooks could direct workers to areas of the display which had an immediate relevance to their professional experience, and from which they could glean specific practical lessons. Ultimately, the lack of immediacy in the display at Manchester for the uninitiated was to be a factor in its widely-perceived failure to even hold the attention of its working-class visitors.

Despite this absence of apparent usefulness to working people, and the imprecise nature of the lessons to be learnt, it was repeatedly emphasised by the middle-class

54 Bailey, Leisure and Class, p.71.
55 Art Treasures Examiner, p.2.
56 For example, The Yorkshire Visitor’s Guide to the Great Exhibition directed its readers towards the areas of the display dealing with textiles, and machines and hardware, identified as the counties’ two major industries and therefore of interest to the Yorkshire visitor.
press that a strident work ethic was necessary within the halls of the Art Treasures Exhibition. *Blackwood's*, for example, firmly ruled that:

Knowledge is the condition of enjoyment, labour of reward; and just in proportion as the visitor is prepared to work, not to idle in vacancy, will he receive reward, and with it ennobling pleasure, from this wide world of thought and beauty.57

As with the attacks launched by periodicals upon the audience of the British Institution,58 'vacancy' is identified as the most undesirable state for a gallery visitor; it was regarded as an insurmountable barrier to the positive influences of art by the professional critic of the 1850s. At the Manchester Exhibition the perceived inadequacy of such a state was further heightened by overtly educational nature of the event, which was clearly indicated by the system of picture arrangement adopted.

The old master saloons of the Art Treasures Exhibition were arranged in basic accordance with the 'chronological and ethnological' system proposed by numerous commentators over the course of the 1850s in relation to the National Gallery.59 There were three principal saloons, designated A, B and C, arranged end to end along the north-eastern side of the building (see floorplan, figure 4). The display was meant to be experienced in chronological sequence, beginning with the earliest Christian art in saloon A, and concluding with that of the mid-eighteenth century in saloon C. In addition, a basic division between the schools of the north and those of the south, as had been suggested for the national collection by Eastlake when before the select committee of 1853, was implemented at Manchester; the productions of the two geographical regions were displayed on opposite walls. Visitors would thus be able, in theory at least, not only to trace the development of a certain painter, school or nation in the works on one wall, but also turn and, by studying the paintings behind them,

57 *Blackwood's*, vol.81, Jan-June 1857, p.776.
58 See chapter 2, section V, p.147.
59 See chapter 2, section VI, pp.169-174.
compare the relative merits of northern or southern art at the same moment in history.

The decision of the executive committee of the Manchester Exhibition to apply such a system signals a desire to associate their project with progressive attitudes towards the proper definition of the space of display; they sought to create a gallery of education, rather than the more traditional gallery of excellence.

Their efforts met with some approval in the press. The Times, for example, declared that the primary strength of the Exhibition was its presentation of 'a more complete illustration of the history of all the great European schools of painting...than can anywhere be found gathered under the same roof'.60 Unsurprisingly, Austen Layard expressed approval in the article he wrote on the Art Treasures Exhibition for the Quarterly Review, where he proclaimed the arrangement to be the 'principal interest' of the undertaking.61 This system, unlike the event as a whole, did not inspire any patriotic feeling, however; it rather served to remind critics of the general inferiority of the art displays of Britain. It was, the Saturday Review remarked, 'far better than anything we have been used to in England',62 a comment which serves to criticise the more commonplace English gallery as much as laud the halls at Old Trafford. Finke has argued that the Art Treasures Exhibition constituted 'a splendid example to those campaigning to raise the standard of the National Gallery',63 and accordingly Layard's complaints regarding this issue were directed towards a specific target; he stated that 'those who desire to see the chronological system introduced into our National Gallery, cannot but be grateful to the Manchester Committee for having shown the way'. Whilst the debate over the hanging of the national collection raged fruitlessly on, it was implied, a temporary provincial display had demonstrated the advantages of systematic arrangement which the prevarication of the director and trustees was

60The Times, 11th May, p.10.
63Finke, 'The Art Treasures Exhibition', p.112.
continuing to deny the public. Layard saw this as nothing short of a national disgrace. The Berlin Gallery, for which he also expressed great admiration in his 1859 article on the National Gallery, is identified as the source of inspiration for the arrangement of the Manchester Exhibition, as it was the first to have been hung chronologically; the failure of the National Gallery to adopt this system is taken to demonstrate that ‘we are as usual behind the rest of the world’.\(^\text{64}\) The achievements of the Art Treasures Exhibition’s executive committee were thus marginalised in the context of a comparison of national collections; the regional location of the event frequently led critics (usually writing for London-based publications) to the conclusion that its value in any larger sphere was limited.

The gallery of education was required to be exhaustive, and in deciding on this methodological approach to the Art Treasures Exhibition its administrators committed themselves to the incorporation of artworks with little popular appeal into the display of old masters. Foremost among such potentially problematic pictures were the paintings of early Italy, which were allowed to dominate the western end of salon A; in one of its reports from the Exhibition, The Times begged its readers, who were assumed to have ‘little previous knowledge’, to avoid the ‘contempt and hasty irreverence’ that they might feel the Italian ‘primitives’ deserved.\(^\text{65}\) By including these pictures, the executive committee again signalled their educational design, within which the art-historical importance of works was to be prioritised over their immediate palatability to a broad and largely untrained audience. The majority of critics rallied behind them, and even came to regard the initial inaccessibility of such painting as the principal value of its inclusion. As with the commentary on the British Institution and National Gallery, early Italian art was frequently considered to be a potent symbol of the need for learning, whose beauty and truth would only reveal itself to the informed.

\(^{64}\) Layard, ‘The Manchester’, p.181.
\(^{65}\) The Times, 11th May 1857, p.10.
and industrious viewer.\textsuperscript{66} At the Art Treasures Exhibition, however, it was not required to play the role of the necessary corrective to a legacy of corrupt tastes and indolent connoisseurial practices from previous eras. The Manchester Exhibition was a Victorian creation, and ‘primitive’ art was allocated a place in the display in recognition of the significance assigned to it by Victorian taste.

There were still critics who were only prepared to allow the earlier schools importance in as far as they were the imperfect precursors of the revered figures of the sixteenth century. W.Blanchard Jerrold, for example, named salon A the ‘nursery of art’,\textsuperscript{67} a characterisation akin to that encountered in certain reviews of the British Institution Summer Exhibition, and ultimately Kugler’s \textit{Handbook of the History of the Italian Schools of Painting}.\textsuperscript{68} This was countered, as it was at Pall Mall, by the pronouncements of those who sought to claim an independent value for the ‘primitives’, and in doing so demonstrated an allegiance to Rio and those British art historians who had been influenced by his work in the 1840s. Faced with the largest array of such painting ever to have been assembled in Britain, it was inevitable that many reviewers would embrace this method of explaining their worth. For example, of Botticelli’s \textit{Mystic Nativity} (cat.no. 100), lent to the Exhibition by William Fuller-Maitland, the \textit{Art Treasures Examiner} exclaimed that ‘the spectator retires from the contemplation of it with unmixed feelings of admiration and respect for the pure

\textsuperscript{66}For example: Layard, ‘The Manchester’, p.174; with regards to Giotto, it is declared that only those who have devoted time to a study of his works ‘can fully enter into their true spirit and feeling’. \textit{Saturday Review}, vol.3, 1857, p.477; early Italian art is said to ‘well repay close examination’. Gustav Waagen, \textit{What to Observe: A Walk through the Art Treasures Exhibition under the Guidance of Dr Waagen}, London, John Murray, 1857, p.1; when before early Italian paintings, Waagen advises readers to ‘look very closely at them, in order that their beauties may be fully understood’.


\textsuperscript{68}See chapter 2, section III, pp.131-2 for reactions to early art at the British Institution, in particular that of the Spectator to the 1848 Summer Exhibition. See chapter 1, section II, p.24, pp.26-7 for the conceptions of Kugler and his English followers.
religious fervour which inspired its production’. 69 As a prominent member of the
council of the Arundel Society, and vociferous supporter of Eastlake’s purchases of
examples of the early Italian schools (if not the manner in which he chose to arrange
them), Layard’s enthusiasm over certain specimens in saloon A’s display is
predictable. He remarked that a triptych of the Virgin and Child with Saints
(cat.no.11) attributed to Duccio:

cannot fail to make a deep impression on those who can feel the beauties of
works which, however poor in technical details, are rich in some of the higher
qualities of art - pure sentiment and noble intention. 70

This is a plain evocation of the first principle of moral art history, in that Layard
directs attention away from the external appearance of the work of art towards its less
tangible qualities. Layard’s review is in fact remarkable for its observance of the
scholarly structures erected around the study of early Italian art in the 1840s by writers
such as Rio, Lindsay and Ruskin. Also notable is the concentration of his interest in
that particular area of the display; a detailed intellectual account of the Italian schools
of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is delivered at the expense of
virtually every other period and region. Only the modern British and fifteenth-century
Netherlandish schools are also mentioned, the latter merely to provide a prosaic
counterpoint to the heavenly glories of Italian art of the same period; 71 an evaluation
facilitated by the hanging system. Some derived arguments that justified the study of
early art from the insistence on functionality found in the work of Jameson. The

69Art Treasures Examiner, p.75.
70Layard, ‘The Manchester’, p.173. The work was loaned by Christ Church College,
Oxford.
71Ibid., p.181. Early Netherlandish art is termed that of ‘the realistic schools’, and
Layard argues that whilst Italian artists were engaged in an ‘earnest struggle to obtain
the highest aim of art’, the expression and sentiment of the art of Northern Europe
was ‘made subservient to a careful and exact imitation of nature and of surrounding
objects.’ The Times concurred with this assessment, stating that the facing
arrangement showed ‘the superiority of the Italian to the German in the effort after
ideal and elevated beauty’ (4th June 1857, p.10).
Times, for example, declared that there was a 'fundamental distinction' between the 'primitive' painters and all who had followed them. The work of the Christian artist 'in a word, had a purpose'; the fresco of the devout subject performed the vital role of communicating religious stories to the illiterate, and therefore impressing devout truths upon the multitude. These, the paper declared, 'were the noblest uses of art',72 which were gradually lost over the course of the Renaissance and never subsequently regained.

Their appreciation of early art in accordance with the principles of moral art history led many commentators on the Art Treasures Exhibition to the critical corollary (just as it had also manifested in criticism of the National Gallery and British Institution Summer Exhibition) that much of the later painting included in the display had compromised its religious value and utility, and therefore its moral character, for the sake of painterly effect. The Rioesque concept of the absolute tragedy in art received some prominent espousal at the Manchester Exhibition. The three-page introductory essay to the official catalogue of the old master galleries, written by their curator, the artist and art lecturer George Scharf,73 is devoted entirely to art prior to the High Renaissance. Scharf comments that after Raphael artists 'lost sight of the first object of their calling', and sought merely to 'parade their art, and display their mechanical skill'.74 There was harsh criticism of the sensuality and moral laxity of the later schools in a wide range of publications. The Saturday Review was particularly vehement, attacking the 'scant modesty' of Veronese, and the late style of Michelangelo himself for having 'not so much heralded as exemplified the initial

72The Times, 15th May 1857, p.12.
73Robertson, Eastlake, p.163. Scharf had made drawings to be engraved in the 1855 edition of Kugler's Handbook, and had lectured on Christian art at the Royal Institution. He had also been officially appointed as secretary of the National Portrait Gallery in March 1857.
abandonment of the highest aims and objects of art'. All of the schools and eras, including the modern British, were judged by its reviewer to be inferior to the 'refined idealism and pure love of beauty' of the early Italians.\(^7\) The Times stated that the devotional and pedagogic purpose so admirable in earlier art had entirely vanished by the sixteenth century; the religious works of the Venetian school, for example, are said to be 'rather magnificent church decorations than helps to devotion'.\(^6\)

However, certain commentators did not subscribe to the broad judgmental sweep of the approach derived from De la Poésie Chrétienne. It was clearly felt by some to be contrary to the educational goals of the Exhibition to denigrate the larger part of the display. Like Jameson, they deemed that the cause of popular instruction necessitated the informing of readers or visitors of the perceivable virtues of every age of art, rather than imposing an inflexible set of moralistic theories that may inhibit their appreciation. The Manchester Guardian, for example, despite acknowledging the significance of early Italian art, did not seek to condemn the painting of all other periods through a comparison with it. Arguments and opinions were provided in support of all schools and periods, the paper's features including praise for the paintings of Cranach, Rubens and the Caracci as well as Cimabue. An assessment of the transition of the Venetian school from the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries even claims superiority for the later artists, in direct contradiction to the rulings of Rio.\(^7\) Even critics with a pronounced disposition towards moral art history balked at the extremity of the Tragic narrative employment found in De la Poésie Chrétienne. Layard’s favour for the Italian ‘primitives’ did not prevent him from expressing proud optimism regarding the

\(^6\)The Times, 22nd May 1857, p.6. The Bolognese school is also here criticised severely, for having ‘gradually sunk into the most offensive and emptiest display of mere technical skill’.
\(^7\)Manchester Guardian, vol.1, p.36. The crux of the argument is that 'the excellencies of Bellini were all united in his pupils, with the addition of numerous technical merits and refinements'. Rio, in contrast, identified Bellini as one of the last great mystic artists who was followed only by sensual depravity. See chapter I, section VI, p.78.
potential of the British school; in the modern galleries he saw 'the vigour and earnestness of youth giving the promise of future greatness' 78 He thus allowed for the possibility of Comic regeneration in art history, as had earlier English moral art historians such as Ruskin and Lindsay in the 1840s. 79 In his view, the modern galleries of the Manchester Exhibition contained the incipience of a rise which would follow the rise and fall charted in the old master saloons. It should here be noted that the modern saloons contained a number of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, which Layard took the opportunity to analyse in the light of the 'real Pre-Raphaelites' on display in saloon A. The full implications of their inclusion, and the responses they elicited, will be discussed in the next chapter. 80

III. 'Surfeit, not Satisfaction': The Conceptual Faults of the Art Treasures Exhibition

The system of arrangement implemented in the galleries of ancient art did not prove to be the educational and illustrative marvel the Art Treasures Exhibition's administrators had hoped for, and receptions of it in the press were mixed. The sheer ambition of the exercise prompted rapture in some at the outset of the Exhibition, the Art Treasures Examiner declaring in its opening number that the efforts of the organisers were 'beyond all praise'. 81 Such unqualified admiration was expressed with greater infrequency as the Exhibition's run progressed, being replaced with some bewilderment and a barrage of criticism. The mighty scale of the venture was enough to disturb some, the collection of pictures being so vast as to inspire only disorientation, regardless of their order; the official catalogue lists over 2000 paintings. This problem was recognised by Thomas Morris in his Handbook, but he had no

78 Layard, 'The Manchester', p.194.
79 See chapter 1, section VI, pp.81-6.
80 See chapter 4, section V, pp.327-9.
81 Art Treasures Examiner, p.40.
solution and was determined to be positive, and so could only write that 'if the idea of
confusion should suggest itself to the mind of anyone, we should recommend its
instant repression'.82 This attitude seems almost anti-educational, denying any lack of
comprehension in the audience for the sake of an outward appearance of fruitful study,
or earnest worship, regardless of the less perfect reality that may lie beneath this
veil.

The guidebooks produced for the Art Treasures Exhibition, although not all
attempting to craft audience experience in such a blatant manner, do generally tend to
offer glowingly positive estimations of its importance and the implementation of its
organisational schemes. It was, of course, in their financial interests that the Exhibition
succeed, and draw larger crowds who would seek instruction in the purchase of more
guidebooks. They therefore often seem to be trying to convince a reader of the event’s
greatness with their overwrought praise. Journals and periodicals, however, were less
littered by a desire for the Exhibition’s success, and provided the forum for a
sequence of unconstrained attacks on its organisation and administration.83

As mentioned above, the size of the Exhibition was a significant obstacle in the view
of many critics. The Saturday Review found it to be ‘rather bewildering than
instructive’, and packed with irrelevant articles of ornamental art,84 the Art Treasures
Examiner wrote on the contraction of the attention span in its halls, and the
‘indescribable fatigue’ that soon set in;85 the Athenaeum regarded the mingling of
painting, sculpture, ornamental art and music as ‘tending towards confusion, not

82Morris, An Historical, p.21.
83This contrast between the tone of guidebooks and that of journal reviews can be
clearly observed in the work of Waagen; his What to Observe contains none of the
reservations and doubts expressed in his article ‘On the Exhibition of Art Treasures at
Manchester’ in the Art-Journal. A vicious review of What to Observe in the
Athenaeum (No.1533, 1st August 1857, p.978) accused Waagen of being
commercially minded and prescriptive, abusing his position of recognised authority in
order to ‘bid men buy his book’.
84Saturday Review, vol.4, 1857, p.371. In vol.3, p.453, it is remarked that the suits of
armour present seem ‘scarcely to fall within the proper scope of the Exhibition’.
85Art Treasures Examiner, p.2.
comfort - towards surfeit, not satisfaction'.\textsuperscript{86} It was widely felt that the scale of an international exhibition was inappropriate for a display of art, creating a result that was overwhelming rather than impressive, and was more likely to deter than attract. Pictures were seen to be far more involving than objects of craft, examples of produce and pieces of machinery, requiring more effort and concentration, and therefore more likely to prove overpowering if viewed in large numbers.\textsuperscript{87}

The magnitude of the Exhibition was such that seasoned critics commented on the adverse effects it had upon their ability to appreciate what was before them. They were also aware that these effects would be felt far more intensely by an inexperienced member of the general public seeking a rare encounter with 'high' art. Such an audience, the critics maintained, was simply not mentally equipped to deal with the experience of the Art Treasures Exhibition. The facilities for acquiring knowledge once inside were judged to be deficient; the \textit{Art-Journal}'s reviewer thought this lack of useful educational tools a fatal oversight, as the Exhibition was 'too perfect, too noble, too elevated to be felt without the clearest and most attractive of interpreters'.\textsuperscript{88} Any instinctive response to art that the audience may be capable of would be smothered, the journal argued, by the sheer scope and splendour of the display. Peripatetic lecturers were proposed, as well as a fully illustrated catalogue, in order to assist the disoriented visitor. Neither were provided, however, engendering some bitterness in the \textit{Art-Journal}, which went from being a staunch supporter of the Exhibition to one...

\textsuperscript{86}Athenaeum, No.1530, 21st Feb 1857, p.253.
\textsuperscript{87}The question of how large a public collection of art can be before it defeats its own educational aims was raised by the 1853 select committee on the National Gallery, with reference to plans to combine the Gallery with the British Museum. George Fogg objected to the creation of a massive institution 'where individuals are obliged to run through the galleries...where confusion and fatigue are so great, that headache and fever are very often the results, and where no good recollection of a picture can be obtained' ("Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery, minutes p.514, q.no.7262). No mention of the combination of the Gallery and the Museum appears in the report itself.
\textsuperscript{88}Art-Journal, vol.3, 1857, p.204.
of its harshest detractors. The failure of the administration to provide labels identifying subject and artist alongside each picture was bemoaned by many. A letter to The Times ascribed a financial motive to this omission, stating that the executive committee had hoped it would sell more copies of the official catalogue. This logic is described as 'penny wise and pound foolish', as it had given the event a reputation for tedium and thus affected attendance figures; the correspondent claims that with labels one could 'inspect' 100 pictures 'in less time and with less fatigue' than it took to identify a dozen under the current catalogue-based system. The absence of labels served to focus attention on this catalogue, which was found to be woefully inadequate. It acquired a vociferous enemy in the Saturday Review, which denounced it for being 'expensive and confused', and therefore in contradiction with the democratic aims of the Exhibition:

The purchase of a shilling catalogue doubles the price of admission to the classes at once least able to afford it and most needing instruction - not to mention that to use a catalogue at all demands some previous knowledge and experience.

It is here recognised that the impact of such administrative folly would be mainly felt by the working-class visitors to the Exhibition, whose prior exposure to art was minimal or non-existent, and whose financial reserves were low. Their tolerance for that which eluded immediate comprehension appears to have been similarly limited. A report in The Times of a visit by 1000 workingmen and their families from the steelworks of Messrs. Turton and Sons in early June relates that many left after an extremely cursory examination of the artworks, in order to go to the Bellevue Botanical Gardens next door. This unwillingness of operatives to engage with the

89 The Times, 18th September 1857, p.8. Also, June 1st, p.10; an earlier letter made the same accusation regarding labels: 'I cannot believe that the spirited individuals who have done so much honour to themselves and their city by their splendid and successful enterprise will withhold such a great convenience from their visitors for the sake of gaining a few pounds per week by the sale of catalogues'.

display is attributed to a reluctance to part with 'an extra shilling' for the catalogue.\(^91\) The reality may have been more complex, as will be discussed later in the chapter. Even those members of the public who attempted to participate in the Exhibition were seen by the press to experience only bemusement and frustration. The \textit{Art-Journal} observed that a large number of visitors leave the building 'with a confused idea of walking until they are tired among a mass of valuable things which they do not at all understand';\(^92\) the account of the \textit{Art Treasures Examiner} was no better, the paper stating that people wander 'hither and thither without a fixed purpose, and have held the educational and refining influences of the affair in suspense'.\(^93\) Their apparent vagueness and confusion was taken to mean that no social benefit was being accrued, and the \textit{Art Treasures} Exhibition was regarded in many quarters as having frustrated the designs of its own educational programme with a few fundamental blunders.

Just as criticism of the National Gallery as a place of popular education had assigned responsibility for its flaws to the trustees or the director, so the blame for the ineffectual display of the Manchester Exhibition was laid with Scharf or the executive committee; critical opinion ruled that the gallery of education had a duty to its intended audience, who could hardly be expected to react appropriately if this duty was not fulfilled. The life of a man of work was driven by practical necessity and the particular demands of his trade, it was believed, which dominated his time and left no room for the supplementary learning required to develop a taste for art.\(^94\) The idealism that had led to the application of the paradigm of the church to the \textit{Art Treasures} Exhibition was regarded in many quarters as having frustrated the designs of its own educational programme with a few fundamental blunders.

\(^{91}\) The \textsl{Times}, 1st June 1857, p. 7. The paper remarked that: 'No doubt to working people the want of labels to the pictures is a drawback, as few of them will expend an extra shilling on catalogues after payment of a shilling for entering the building.'\(^{92}\) \textit{Art-Journal}, vol.3, 1857, p.304.\(^{93}\) \textit{Art Treasures Examiner}, p.60.\(^{94}\) \textit{Art-Journal}, vol.3, 1857, p.304: 'It is no disgrace to the many hundreds who enter this building that they do not understand much of what they see: most men in England are absorbed in their own trades, in studying how to perfect themselves in it, and how to support their families - they have no time for other study.'
Exhibition crumbled before the actual experience of the ‘congregation’ before the ‘altar’; a love for painting was recognised to be the result of education rather than instinct. The veracity of the template of the school was disproved also, however, as it was found that nothing could be learnt by the uninitiated in the Manchester Exhibition. Only the knowledgeable could make sense of the display, and the possession of such knowledge was a potent social signifier; as the Saturday Review commented, the collection had meaning only to ‘those whose rank in life has brought them under the harmonising influences of a high mental culture.’ Division thus existed where there was supposed to be unity; the educational failure of the Manchester Exhibition was one of the sources of social fracture that ultimately characterised the venture. The completeness of this failure was felt with particular vehemence by the Art-Journal, which, by the time of its closure, regarded the Exhibition as having been a waste of effort. ‘There is no use exhibiting if we do not educate’, its reviewer railed, asserting that as far as the workman was concerned the Exhibition was:

altogether useless except as a holiday show. If the managers had hung the walls with Indian shawls, and filled the cases with stuffed birds, “the sight” would have been equally attractive and useful.

The validity of comprehending the Art Treasures Exhibition through the paradigm of the international exhibition was thus also disproved by the actuality of the event. The event’s status as an instance of the ‘rational recreation’ described by Bailey was questioned; its lack of educational usefulness made it more akin to the tawdry and vacuous ‘holiday show’ that was the antithesis of the international exhibition. It is here damningly described as a popular entertainment offering distraction, rather than a worthwhile undertaking which had an array of legible moral lessons to offer the multitude for which it was designed.

The Art Treasures Exhibition also failed to satisfy on a more intellectual level. Criticism focused upon the supposed merits of the system of display adopted in saloons A, B and C. Many reviewers found that, as the Athenaeum commented, 'a practical and a theoretical arrangement of pictures are two very distinct things.' The main problem, the magazine continued, was that the productions of the various schools and nations were often of very different sizes, a difficulty also encountered by those attempting to arrange the National Gallery. This was particularly noticeable when comparing the paintings of Germany and Holland with those of Italy; that the former generally tended to be far smaller than the latter could 'seriously derange all good intentions of a chronological parallelism'. There is a slightly mocking tone to the Athenaeum's remarks that signals a scorn for any system in the display of art at all, and which perhaps hints at a preference for a more traditional gallery of excellence. Despite their unrivalled splendour, the magazine continues, the works of Rubens, Titian and Veronese are a source of confusion at the Manchester Exhibition, because their expansiveness 'may disturb the calculations of a time-keeper'. This time-keeper is made to appear a pedant, whose attempts at accuracy are both doomed to failure and at variance with true art appreciation. The Athenaeum's conception of this appreciation was traditional and undemocratic, involving the demonstration of previously acquired knowledge before paintings, rather than any kind of learning process.

Those who approved of the intentions of the Exhibition's administrators also found fault with the end result; having declared the system to be the 'principal interest' of the Exhibition, Layard went on to name a confusion of schools within this system to be its 'principal defect'. In saloons B and C, he noted disapprovingly, the art of the Flemish,

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97 Athenaeum, No.1540, 2nd May 1857, p.566.
98 The size of Veronese's The Family of Darius before Alexander meant that it had to be placed in the Flemish room when it was hung in November 1857: see chapter 2, section VI, p.172.
99 Athenaeum, No.1540, 2nd May 1857, p.566.
Spanish, French and others was 'jumbled together in the most arbitrary and perplexing manner', but his principal complaint, predictably enough, was with the arrangement of the Italian works in saloon A. Unlike at the Berlin Gallery, Layard's consistently cited exemplar of exhibition arrangement throughout the late 1850s, no recognition had been made at the Art Treasures Exhibition of the fact that the various schools of Italy had developed independently of one another, at different rates and times, and had their own distinctive features. These should rightfully be separated, he maintained, arguing that to amalgamate them into one long chronological account of Italian painting, as had been done at the Manchester Exhibition, would result in confusion and misconception amongst the audience, and only serve to 'mislead those not intimately acquainted with the subject'. The educational goals of the event, supposedly symbolised and immeasurably assisted by the arrangement, were thus seen to be compromised by its practical implementation. Layard thought it was clear that the collection had been 'hastily formed', and indeed the Manchester Guardian formulated a defence of Scharf that emphasised the 'very short time' that had been available to him to arrange the massive collection. The paper was inclined to be lenient towards the curator, and described the difficulties he faced as 'almost insurmountable'. The range of sizes amongst the works to be arranged was only a part of the problem, its reviewer contended; far more fundamental to the failure of the display was an unevenness in the loans that composed it. This was an issue that all commentators who were dissatisfied with the Art Treasures Exhibition felt compelled to comment upon: the dependence of the venture on the private collector.

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100 Layard, 'The Manchester', p.181.
101 Ibid., p.169.
102 Manchester Guardian, vol.1, p.83. The Times' correspondent was similarly sympathetic, complaining of 'a want of sequence in the hanging of productions and schools', but reasoning that 'Mr. Scharf has probably difficulties known only to himself' (22nd May 1857, p.6).
It was widely recognised from the outset that the ‘beautiful’, in the form of ‘high art’, would have to be brought to Manchester from elsewhere, at least with regards to the old master saloons. In their official report, the executive committee describe their entreaty for ‘extensive co-operation from all patrons and lovers of art’ in the composition of the Exhibition, and their confidence that there would not be ‘any serious difficulty in securing contributions’. 103 Potential contributors were given two powerful reasons for submitting their works for display, which the committee and the press ensured they were made thoroughly aware of. The first was purely selfish, and appealed to an owner’s personal interests, both financial and intellectual. As the Saturday Review commented, the presence of a work at the Manchester Exhibition ‘will stamp an additional value’ upon it, and its entry into the official catalogue ‘will always be quoted as part and parcel of its pedigree’. 104 A similar point was made by The Times, which argued that inclusion in the display ‘will confer on their contributions a status in art which hoarding for centuries in galleries and cabinets could never give’. 105 The second reason drew its strength from developing attitudes towards the proper educational role of art in society, and the duty of a private collector in relation to this. As Prince Albert candidly remarked to the Earl of Ellesmere in a letter of 1856:

A person who would not otherwise be inclined to part with a picture would probably shrink from refusing it if he knew that his doing so tended to mar the realisation of a great national object. 106

Ideally, it was to be hoped that an owner of paintings would be motivated to lend by a desire to contribute to what was essentially a philanthropic venture, and to see his possessions bring about social good. This would accordingly have a favourable effect on his reputation as a modern and enlightened connoisseur. However, as Albert states

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105 The Times, 12th May 1857, p.10.
106 Quoted Report of the Executive Committee, p.17.
above, a collector's fear of being seen not to contribute, and therefore detracting from the efficacy of something that it was in his power to enhance, could prove just as effective, as it would identify him as old-fashioned, unprogressive and unpatriotic. The Art Treasures Exhibition provided an opportunity for collectors to demonstrate that private ownership was not incompatible with the cause of popular art education, and to signal their personal commitment to the principles of a new era of critical practice. The Exhibition's organisers expected them to jump at the chance.

The executive committee did not expect entirely unconditional enthusiasm from the contributors, and went to considerable lengths to assure them of the great care and consideration that would be devoted to the transportation and exhibition of their treasures. The thorough nature of the arrangements and assurances made gave the loaning of pictures to the Manchester Exhibition the character of a business transaction in many accounts. The organisers and contributors became active and passive partners respectively, the latter entrusting their property to the former in order to create an end result which would benefit each in different ways. The report of the executive committee testifies to the zeal with which the active partners set about establishing a fair deal, prioritising the interests of the collectors from whom they borrowed above all other concerns. For example, the first requirement of the site chosen was that it should give "every possible security to the possessors of works of art that their treasures shall not receive any injury in consequence of their liberality".\(^\text{107}\) The location finally decided upon was accordingly away from the city centre where it was feared that the turbidity of industrial pollution would have a deleterious effect on the canvases; the site chosen was a cricket club at Old Trafford, a mile and a half from the Manchester exchange.\(^\text{108}\) This decision was made despite the

\(^{107}\) Ibid., p.10.  
\(^{108}\) Ibid., p.12. The reviewer from The Leisure Hour described the omnibus journey out to the Exhibition as one through an area of Manchester which was "half way between waste-ground and suburb" (p.486).
complications regarding access that it created, which could only have had a negative impact upon attendance figures, especially among the working classes who were significantly less likely to attend an exhibition that was outside walking distance. The executive committee’s report reveals that the issue of access problems was raised in preliminary meetings, but was subsequently dismissed as unlikely to affect attendance figures. It was concluded that the distance would ‘hardly be felt at all’ by most local visitors, who could hire a carriage to convey them if they did not own one, and for those to whom even this course was financially inconceivable, the available public transport systems would suffice.109

This situation stands in complete contrast to that of London galleries and exhibitions. The Great Exhibition had been deliberately placed in the most central, and therefore accessible, expanse of ground available. The national collection remained at Trafalgar Square, despite warnings of the harm that could be inflicted on the pictures by the smoky atmosphere of central London, because of the accessibility of the situation to the general public; indeed, the report of a Parliamentary site commission which endorsed the location of the Gallery for this reason was delivered in the same year that the Art Treasures Exhibition was staged.110 The opposite applied there, however, where the popular concept of the gallery of education, and accordingly the efforts put into the system of arrangement which the National Gallery had conspicuously failed to adopt, were compromised by the necessity of appeasing private collectors. The logic which governed certain responses to the working-class presence in the National Gallery described by Colin Trodd, as discussed in the previous chapter, can also be detected at the Art Treasures Exhibition, but at an administrative rather than critical level. Trodd argues that the body of the working class were seen as an influx of the city into the space of the gallery, and they were identified, by Waagen in particular, as

109 Ibid., p.13.
110 See chapter 2, section VII, p.184.
the source and medium of dirt'. Given this perceived interchangeability of the urban environment and those that populated it, the attempt of the Manchester Exhibition's administrators to remove the display from the grime of the industrial city centre could be regarded as an attempt to distance the event from the workers themselves.

The scale and scope of the enterprise prompted many expressions of amazement and gratitude towards the executive committee for their exertions, and also to the owners who had provided the contents of the Art Treasures palace. The Art-Journal unreservedly proclaimed at the time of the Exhibition's opening that the first duty of any reviewer was 'to give expression to public gratitude' to anyone who had been involved. Much was written in periodicals, papers and guidebooks on how the nobility and gentry had 'generously imitated the example of their sovereign and her royal consort', either by 'naming their principal works for exhibition or opening their galleries for free selection to the agents deputed to the performance of that duty'. The Saturday Review commented at the close of the Exhibition on the perfect record of the transport and packing companies hired, which meant that lenders had 'no reason to regret this liberality', but there had been a considerable element of mutual trust involved in the 'deal' brokered between the owners of old master paintings and the Exhibition's organisers. The limitations of their guarantee fund meant that no financial insurance could be provided by the executive committee, although several contributors had proposed it. The business sense of the event's administrators rebelled against the suggestion. It would, they maintained, cost far more than the Exhibition could ever make; owners would have to be satisfied with 'the promise of the committee that

111 Colin Trodd, 'Culture, Class, City', p.44. See chapter 2, section VII, p.183.
113 Morris, An Historical, p.13.
114 Art Treasures Examiner, introduction p.iii.
every precaution should be adopted to prevent injury'. Given the sentiments widely endorsed concerning the priceless nature of art, the level of trust demonstrated by the private collectors was considered remarkable by some. The *Art-Journal* expressed astonishment that so many were prepared to entrust to the committee 'for so long a period' objects 'for loss or injury to which no money could compensate'.

A level of faith in the connoisseurial status of the collectors they approached was also an intrinsic part of the executive committee's part of the 'deal'. In some cases, the renown of a work made such faith unnecessary, but in many more the committee had to take an owner's word for the quality of their possessions. Several of the large loans consisted of a small number of famous paintings of established repute accompanied by droves of less auspicious works which could be refused only at the expense of the recognised masterpieces. Initially, the executive committee took on an active role, in that they requested works from collectors who would then grant permission for their property to be removed. However, when it became clear that the *Art Treasures Exhibition* was to be an occasion of some significance, with royal patronage and support, contributions were volunteered, but by then the rules for submission had already been established. They were designed to favour the contributor, in order to make the idea of lending appealing. As with the British Institution Summer Exhibition, the concessions made included the acceptance of owners' attributions of the works they lent, and the printing of these attributions in the official catalogue. This ensured that the walls of the old master galleries at Old Trafford were covered with paintings, but was to have dire consequences regarding the critical success of the venture.

116 Report of the Executive Committee, p.41. These precautions included large water reserves in case of fire.
118 Report of the Executive Committee, p.9. In their proposal, Deane and Cunningham ruled that personal interviews with the collectors to convince them of the worthiness of the *Art Treasures Exhibition* were essential to the event's success.
IV. A Bad Deal Exposed: The Disappointment of the Display

After the optimistic enthusiasm inspired by the formal opening of the Exhibition, the collection came under a great deal of close scrutiny. Most commentators concluded that the assembly of artworks was seriously flawed in several crucial areas. The ‘deal’ established by the executive committee was a bad one, due to the faith placed in private collectors, of which many were shown to be quite undeserving. The complaints made in the press were similar to those made in reviews of the British Institution Summer Exhibition, but the sins of the owners of art were thought to be compounded by the popular and educational nature of the Art Treasures Exhibition. Waagen, who had acted as a special advisor to the executive committee, wrote an article for the magazine in which he listed the major private galleries who had failed to contribute. No works were present, he attested, from the ‘six first collections of pictures in England’, and many other names were mentioned by him on account of their inexplicable reticence.119 The listing of names as a sort of roll-call of shame almost became Art-Journal policy; the Art Treasures Exhibition article of September (a regular feature in the magazine throughout the Exhibition’s run) demanded to know why ‘the Warwick Vandykes’, ‘the Sutherland Cuyp’ and ‘the Wellington Velazquez’ had not been submitted for display. The royal example was also evoked by the magazine, but rather than detecting a concordance with the behaviour of collectors at large, as others had, it saw instead a contrast:

The Queen has, with the most gracious liberality, allowed the Committee to select from her palaces, but the royal example has not been imitated. Behind what excuse soever the proprietors of these glories of extinct schools may

119 Waagen, ‘On the Art Treasures at Manchester’, Art-Journal, vol.3, 1857, p.236. The six were ‘the Bridgewater collection, those of Lord Ashburton, the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim, Lord Radnor at Longford Castle, Mr.Miles at Leigh Court, and Colonel Egremont Wyndham, at Petworth’. Lord Lansdowne, the Dukes of Devonshire and Hamilton, Sir Robert Peel, Mr.Tomline, Mr.Munro and Mr.Banks are also mentioned as having held back pictures.
shelter themselves, we cannot believe that they could not have sent their pictures.\textsuperscript{129}

The reluctant owners are accused of a callous betrayal; their apparently selfish denial of the 'glories' in their possession to the public at large caused the representation of the private collector in the coverage of the Exhibition, in the \textit{Art-Journal} and elsewhere, to undergo a change as its run progressed. They came to be seen not as a national institution, offering evidence of the refined tastes of Englishmen, but as a social evil, an obstacle to the democratic cause of art education. The Manchester Exhibition had offered a chance for the lords and gentlemen to signal their awareness of, and sympathy with, the evolution of perceptions of the purpose of art within society that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. It was an opportunity that many of them refused to take, choosing instead to 'shelter' behind excuses that, as the above quote illustrates, failed to convince the supporters of art education.

The absence of certain major works meant that the collection formed was regarded by many as inadequate for the proposed educational ends of the Exhibition. The \textit{Art-Journal} thought that 'no just conception of the old masters' could be formed inside its walls, either in terms of individual painters, or a grand overview of the history of art. The system of arrangement was judged to have been confounded by missing paintings, which had led to a noticeable unevenness in the representation of the various epochs and schools.\textsuperscript{121} Layard considered the lack of co-operation on the part of certain collectors to be the great weakness of the Art Treasures Exhibition. He unsurprisingly noticed the effects of this most keenly in saloon A., before the early Italian schools, which he proclaimed 'the weakest and most incomplete part of the Exhibition'.\textsuperscript{122} This comment is perhaps intended more as an indication of the great

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{120}ibid., p.279.
    \item \textsuperscript{121}Finke points out that Scharff's organisational plans were 'hindered by insufficient resources', with several prominent galleries failing to lend paintings ('The Art Treasures Exhibition', p.118).
    \item \textsuperscript{122}Layard, ‘The Manchester’, p.169.
\end{itemize}

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difficulty involved in acquiring a representative specimen of the early Italian schools for a private collector, than as a direct criticism of the collectors themselves; all of those identified in the previous chapter as collectors with a pronounced specialist interest in early art contributed a number of pictures each, ensuring that there were over 120 Italian works from the quattrocento and earlier in the display. Complaints were made at the selection of works certain owners chose to submit, however. Some were willing to lend the acknowledged masterpieces in their possession, such as Lord Ward who provided the Exhibition with his famed Crucifixion by Raphael. Others were more reluctant; Layard identifies Davenport-Bromley as a notable example of a contributor who supplied a number of his more mediocre paintings, whilst withholding major works. In Davenport-Bromley’s case, this comment applied to one picture in particular, a Death of the Virgin by Giotto which Layard considered to be one of the few worthy productions of the artist in England.

The Manchester Guardian was uncompromising in its assessment of the Exhibition, and its reporter concurred with Layard on the inadequacy of the early Italian section. Giotto is identified as a figure of enormous art-historical significance, but ‘we regret to say we cannot point to any striking examples in the present exhibition’. Fra Angelico, similarly, is ‘not adequately represented here’, and of Masaccio, recognised as another

123 Scharf, Catalogue, pp.13-22. For example: the Rev. J. Fuller Russell lent three predellas by Ugolino da Siena (nos.25-27), an Adoration of the Kings by Bernardo di Fredi (no.35), and a Coronation of the Virgin by Taddeo Gaddi (no.43); Alexander Barker lent five predella panels by Perugino, which had been shown at the British Institution Summer Exhibition in 1852 (nos.83-87); W. Fuller-Maitland lent The Sacrifice of the Mass by Cosimo Rosselli (no.68), Peter and John Healing the Lame Man by Lippi (no.71), and the Mystic Nativity by Botticelli (as already mentioned); Davenport-Bromley lent a Coronation of the Virgin by Giotto (no.34), a Christ on the Mount of Olives by Bellini (no.89) and a Virgin and Child by Rosselli (no.93); Henry Labouchere lent a Baptism by Francia (no.81) and a Holy Family by Ghirlandaio (no.107); Lord Ward lent a Virgin and Child, Angels and Saints by Angelico (no.52), a Virgin and Child by Francia (no.108), a Virgin and Child and St John by Perugino (no.109), and a Crucifixion by Raphael (no.123).
figure of great importance to the development of painting, there is ‘little in our
collection which is satisfactory’. This local paper regarded the Exhibition as
belonging to the people of Manchester, as the reference to ‘our collection’ indicates. It
was assembled for their benefit, and the paper was very thorough and exact in its
apportioning of blame for its perceived failings. The larger part of this blame was
assigned to the aristocratic private collector, who was held responsible for the many
gaps in the chronological system of the old master galleries. The selfish hoarding of
Lord Folkstone, for example, was judged to be the reason for the absence of
representative Holbeins, and a dearth of later specimens of Raphael was explained
as being due to the complications involved when paintings became ‘heirloom property’
in an aristocratic family. The highly praised Ansidei Madonna, for example, remained
‘locked up at Blenheim’, ‘vested in trustees’, which meant that despite the willingness
of its owner, the Duke of Marlborough, to lend it, it could not be removed from the
family seat.

The private galleries of the nobility were thus frequently characterised as prisons in
which artworks were ‘locked up’, with or without the complicity of their owners.
Their improving influence was denied to the multitude, who were portrayed by the
Manchester Guardian as the victims of this lack of co-operation on the part of certain
collectors. The reputation of Raphael, the paper declared, circulated by prints after
his pictures, would ‘lead the public naturally to look for his works before those of any
other’; at the Art Treasures Exhibition, though, any high expectations among them will

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126 Ibid., p.51. Lord Folkstone is unflatteringly described as an eccentric who will only
permit his Holbeins to be viewed if ‘certain conditions’ are observed, which include
the ruling that ‘no-one is allowed to make even the slightest sketch or memorandum
from them’. The loss of an opportunity to measure ‘Holbein at his fullest strength with
some of his most distinguished German and Italian contemporaries’ is lamented; it is
implied that Holbein’s reputation, and therefore the value of Folkstone’s pictures, may
decline as a result.
127 Ibid., p.25.
be 'grievously disappointed'. As briefly mentioned above, the majority of works present which were of doubtless authenticity were from the early period of Raphael's career. Blackwood's stated that this meant the display could offer no true demonstration of his abilities, and even failed to provide a chance for the public 'to decide the long-agitated question whether Raphael did or did not, in his later years and manner, suffer a degenerate fall'. The Manchester Exhibition thus failed as a gallery of excellence, and as one of education.

The problem of authenticity was also prominent at the Art Treasures Exhibition. The fundamental difficulty was the same as that of the British Institution Summer Exhibition; the administrators were indebted to the owners of paintings for their magnanimity in submitting their possessions, and for them to then reject a work, or reattribute it to a more minor artist, would be considered extremely impolite and presumptuous. Social etiquette appears to have deemed that the most wretched of works be accepted without a murmur of complaint; Layard for one expressed sympathy for the 'delicacy of the position' the executive committee and their team of curators found themselves in. Works were requested on the basis of reputation, or an entry in Waagen's Treasures of Art, a volume which even Deane and Cunningham had to admit in their proposal was 'valuable but imperfect'. Finke describes Waagen as 'an outstanding art historian', but his judgements were far from universally accepted or even respected by Victorian critics, and his expert status was constantly being questioned. Despite this, however, there is no evidence that the

128 Ibid.
129 Blackwood's, vol.81, Jan.-June 1857, p.765.
130 Layard, 'The Manchester', p.181.
131 Report of the Executive Committee, p.3.
133 For example, Spectator, vol.30, 1857, p.1223. Waagen is here described as 'a bit of a humbug', repellent in his ignorant complacency: 'he believes in himself and his profundity, however absolute his want of originality and insight'. He is charged with simply 'recycling the jargon of studios and galleries' in place of true criticism.
executive committee sought any other informed opinion concerning the works they asked for. The owner was not obliged to provide any proof of the authenticity of his possessions upon submission, and the emphasis on the priority of the collectors' interests meant that everything offered was accepted and exhibited, at least until the available space was filled. The necessity of convincing collectors to loan their works had been anticipated; that of imposing some kind of quality control or right to refuse had not. The terms of the 'deal' proposed by the executive committee served to attract not the proprietors of mighty masterpieces, such as Lord Folkstone, but the owners of minor paintings whose artistic worth, and therefore financial value, was less established. A dichotomy inevitably manifested itself between exchange value and exhibition value; as attempts to place art beyond the power of money indicate, art education was regarded as being best served by a critique that was uninfluenced by such external factors.

The press attempted to provide such a critique; The Times wrote of the executive committee's obligation to accept the owners' attributions, remarking that 'luckily we are restrained by no such courtesy', and promptly reattributing a painting listed as Leonardo da Vinci in the catalogue to Andrea Solario. Problems of misrepresentation were rife, just as they were at the British Institution, but its potential evils were exacerbated by the presence of the uninitiated masses. Layard asserted that an uninformed viewer may be deterred from pursuing art appreciation completely by a disappointing encounter with works supposedly by Raphael, or, even worse, he may come to 'a false appreciation of art' leaving the Exhibition with 'his taste corrupted and his judgement misled'. It would have been preferable, Layard opined, to have discarded etiquette and only accepted the best paintings, regardless of offence caused or artworks denied as a result. This view is based in a criticism of the enormousness of

134 The Times, 15th May 1857, p.12. The painting in question was a Portrait of a Man (cat.no.143).
135 Layard, 'The Manchester', p.182.
the undertaking; Layard thought a small, accurate lesson was preferable to a massive one packed with errors, and other obstacles to the learning process. There was no contest, he maintained, between the interests of contributors and the interests of education, which were fundamentally incompatible.

As the above comments quoted from The Times suggest, the critics from various magazines and newspapers attacked the collection zealously. It could be claimed that they were in fact influenced by financial factors in their estimation of the Exhibition, through their evident desire to devalue much of what was on display. The lower middle and working classes may have lost an opportunity to learn from great examples of art, but the critics of England gained a chance to expose the ignorance of the private collector, as evinced by the poor quality of his purchases. In a similar manner to the coverage of the loans exhibitions staged at the British Institution, distinctions were drawn between the space of the private collection, and that of the public gallery, and the differing viewing conditions in each. The Times had described the shift between the ‘dignified seclusion of the country mansion’ and the ‘sharp eyes and unspiring judgement of a London exhibition room’ in its review of the British Institution old masters show in 1850.136 at Manchester, the Athenaeum likened the process of exhibition to a removal of pictures from the inadequate viewing conditions of many a ‘dark and close library’ into the clear light of an art gallery, a space specifically designed to facilitate proper examination. This transferral clearly had a symbolic dimension, it being from the often ignorant and therefore ‘dark’ grasp of the private owner to the more enlightened jurisdiction of experts and critics. There is a suggestion of sympathy in The Times’ remarks for the collector, however, that was entirely absent in commentary of the Art Treasures Exhibition.

136The Times, 10th June 1850, p.5.
The Athenaeum's reviewer found that he could not take much of the display at Old Trafford seriously, commenting that even before reaching the art of the fifteenth century he had been 'amused at several instances of wonderful misnomers'. Problems with the ownership of early Italian art were emphasised by the Manchester Exhibition, with many of the works recognised as inauthentic hailings from salon A. For example, a Crucifixion assigned by its owner, the notorious Lord Northwick, to Giotto (cat. no. 26), was identified by the Athenaeum as a 'glaring example' of misattribution, and Layard stated that it was 'to be regretted' that the work had even been admitted, as the signature it bore was a blatant forgery, and its presence could only serve to 'mislead and create confusion in the minds of those not intimately acquainted with that period'. At the Art Treasures Exhibition, of course, this meant virtually all who were expected to attend. In a handful of rare instances, being brought from darkness to light improved the reputation of a painting. One collector even benefited from the plethora of reattributions that were being made; a Holy Family (cat. no. 107) belonging to Labouchere had arrived in Manchester as a Ghirlandaio, but was, according to Layard, 'unanimously attributed by all the best judges' to Michelangelo. The taste and discernment of Labouchere are praised, especially as his purchase of the work had prevented it from being sold overseas after it had been rejected by the National Gallery. Labouchere was made to represent the positive aspects of private collecting in Layard's article, in that he was a man of wealth and intelligence who could make purchases as much for the good of the country as his own collection; this sense of social responsibility also meant that he would willingly lend his works to public exhibitions. Such men, however, were as much in the minority as the attribution promotions enjoyed by their works.

137 Athenaeum, No. 1540, 2nd May 1857, p. 567.
138 See chapter 2, section V, p. 157, note 199.
139 Layard, 'The Manchester', p. 170. Layard was disgusted with the array of supposed Giottos in the Exhibition; there were, he declared, 'no authentic or worthy works'.
Erroneous attributions were not the only source of complaint amongst critics concerning the old master paintings submitted to the Art Treasures Exhibition. The physical condition of works was often lamented also, especially where the older pictures were concerned. For example, the Triumph of Scipio by Mantegna, property of George Vivian, was described by the Athenaeum to be 'like several other specimens illustrative of this early period of art...saddly obscured by dirt'. The Manchester Guardian declared the work's filthy state to be deeply regrettable from a critical and intellectual point of view, as 'much that would be really interesting to study is lost'. That works were arriving at Old Trafford so encrusted with grime that they could not be studied properly led to an inversion amongst the Manchester Exhibition's critics of the pattern on which the more typical anxieties of the age regarding art, dirt and public exhibition were based. Rather than conceiving of the public exhibition as an environment in which art, having been taken from the hygienic safety of its owner's gallery, was exposed to dirt in the form of a mass audience, it was the private collection itself that came to be identified as the source of contamination. The Athenaeum explained the state many of the paintings were in by pointing out that they had been gathered from 'many a dusty corridor and mouldy oak-panelled chamber'. In the darkness of the private collection, due to the thoughtlessness and ignorance of the proprietors, dirt accumulated, and it was only when works were transferred to the bright spaces of the public exhibition and scrutinised by the critics and experts within it that the true extent of the damage could be assessed. The language used by the magazine above introduces the concept of time to this characterisation; dust and mould upon corridors and oak panels suggests ancient and neglected edifices, which contrast sharply with the pre-eminently modern context of a Paxton-style exhibition building.

141 Athenaeum, No.1540, 2nd May 1857, p.567.
143 Athenaeum, No.1541, 9th May 1857, p.595.
Given his low opinion of the selection of early Italian works, Layard was particularly dismayed to witness the poor condition of Lord Ward's Last Judgement by Fra Angelico (cat.no.58), one of the few paintings present of which he had a high opinion. He concluded that it was down to the owner to ensure that the great works of art they possessed did not fall into disrepair:

"It is the duty of the owner to take the utmost care that they should not be exposed to injury or suffer from neglect. Those who through their wealth or station are fortunate enough to acquire treasures of art like these become in a manner responsible to the world for their safe-keeping; and one who wilfully neglects the precautions which it may be in his power to employ for their safe-keeping commits a great wrong." 144

Ownership of art is presented as being a privilege, and one that burdens those 'fortunate enough' to attain it with very real duties, and a general responsibility to society at large. This is based in a redefinition of the proprietorial role; owners are made subservient to their works, and their status is reduced from that of lordly expert and discerning connoisseur to that of custodian. The function of the collector, Layard asserts, was to maintain works of art for the public, who had a basic right to experience the wonders of old master painting and benefit from them, regardless of who actually owned the particular paintings. The privilege of possession of ancient art was being roundly abused by the rich and titled, he declared, and the victims were the multitudes denied the chance to learn by the ignorance and negligence of a few. The Art Treasures Examiner concurred with this judgement, and openly questioned the right of the rich to control works of art simply because they could afford to buy them.

The paper called for the wresting of old master painting from the aristocracy to make it a more general concern based around knowledge and scholarship. The 'leaning of the time' was identified as being towards 'an intellectual standard of merit' on the part

of those involved with art; the magazine portentously declared that 'titles are not worth so much now-a-days as formerly'.

V. Anti-Aristocratic Sentiment at the Art Treasures Exhibition: The Abuse of Privilege, 'the Silly Vanities of Fashion' and 'the Mere Collector'

A strong vein of anti-aristocratic sentiment is evident in much of the commentary of the Art Treasures Exhibition discussed above. Open hostility towards the nobility is expressed in places, in a far more acerbic and direct manner than in other situations where the class tensions were comparable, such as at the British Institution Summer Exhibition. At the Manchester Exhibition, it could be argued that commentators observed an ominous parallel with the events of the Crimean War of 1854-1856, in that aristocratic incompetence and abuse of privilege was having a direct impact upon the interests of the working class. Visual evidence of this recent conflict was noted in the halls of the Exhibition. The Art Treasures Examiner, for example, mentioned 'officers wearing the Crimean medal' as being conspicuous among the crowds of dignitaries who attended the Exhibition's opening ceremony, and singled out 'the bright face of The Times' Crimean commissioner' amidst the ranks of the press present. Memories of the Crimean campaign and its battles were still very fresh, and the bitter polemic provoked by the running of the war had attained a wider relevance in its aftermath. The war can be characterised in terms of the enormous social gulf which existed between the common soldiery and their officers. In terms of its social constitution, as well as its tactics and health measures, the British Army revealed itself to be hopelessly outdated in the Crimea. The middle class were.

145 Art Treasures Examiner, p.85.
146 Ibid., p.2. Finke, 'The Art Treasures Exhibition', p.111. Florence Nightingale was among the celebrated visitors to the Exhibition.
147 A.J.Barker, The Vainglorious War 1854-56, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970, p.17. Barker comments that the gulf 'between an officer and a private soldier of the British Army was so wide that it was virtually impossible for one to understand the other'.
excluded altogether, and could only express indignation and horror at the gross incompetence of the officers, and the resultant suffering of the troops. As the vast majority of those holding high rank within the army were from the aristocracy, the failure of the war was seen by the middle class as the failure of a system that allowed men to command simply because of their birth, rather than because of any demonstrable ability. Lalumia identifies the newspaper as the medium through which the political and moral dissatisfaction of the middle class was voiced, stating that papers ‘throughout the country clamoured for reform’. A primary target of reformers was the purchase system, which enabled the wealthy to buy their way up the through the ranks. Layard was among the most outspoken critics of the Crimean campaign, and he organised and chaired the Administrative Reform Association, which was especially dedicated to the abolition of this system. The call amongst the middle class was for a meritocracy, for a change to a situation where power was inherited or bought rather than earned, and can thus be directly connected with sentiments aroused by the Art Treasures Exhibition. In both cases, the aristocracy was perceived as being in a position of unreasonable and undeserved privilege, and the rest of society were made the victims of their ignorance and incapacity, denied effective

148 Ibid., p.27. Lord Raglan, commander-in-chief of the British forces, had no experience of commanding troops in the field at the time of his appointment. Lloyd’s Weekly announced on 11th February 1855 that ‘everybody knows that Lord Raglan commands in the Crimea because he is the son of a Duke’. (quoted Matthew Lalumia, Realism and Politics in Victorian Art of the Crimean War, Michigan, UMI Research Press, 1984, p.50.)

149 Lalumia, Realism and Politics, p.48. The Manchester Courier is quoted as an example, demanding that public offices ‘be filled with practical and competent men, not persons possessed of political influence, or related to families who have always lived off the public.’

150 Campaigning on this front continued after the conclusion of the Crimean war, and was given impetus by the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The Times, for example, declared in September that ‘It is chiefly to and through the ranks that the middle-class infusion is required. This will be the real lever to raise the character and efficiency of the army throughout all its grades, and the abolition of the purchase system and the establishment of a system of promotion according to professional qualifications and good service, I believe to be indispensable for this purpose.’ (19th Sept.1857, p.6.)

151 Lalumia, Realism and Politics, p.50.
leadership or cultural instruction by the inadequacies of the hereditary heads of the British social hierarchy.

The expression of anti-aristocratic sentiment in reports from the Art Treasures Exhibition is occasionally both blatant and blunt. An article from the Dublin University Magazine is a prime example, opening with the assertion that:

In our land our best treasures are locked up from the great masses of our people; not from the poor alone, but from the entire middle class of society.

Private ownership is here portrayed not as a duty, as it was by Layard, but as a crime, a deliberate denial to the people of what is rightly theirs. The term 'locked up' is employed once more, as with the Blenheim Holbeins, again suggesting works stifled by the narrow selfishness of their owners. A distinction is established between the aristocracy, who are self-serving and decadent, and the rest of society, who operate in harmony for the sake of the general good. The Art Treasures Exhibition is taken to be an illustration of this, as it was arranged and supported by the middle class, or at least certain echelons of it, for the benefit of all, whilst aristocratic collectors remained largely or entirely uninvolved. Such collectors are described as men 'whose lives of luxurious idleness were spent lounging in continental cities or gaping over foreign galleries', 152 in an article which glorifies 'labour-lords' and their 'practical energies', the coupling of luxury and idleness strongly emphasises the fact that the wealth of the nobility has not been worked for or indeed earned in any way, and is therefore undeserved. Their interests are portrayed as entirely alien, being based in the 'continental' and the 'foreign' rather than the British, and their appreciation of art is reduced to mere 'gaping', as it is devoid of the intellectual rigour of the professional middle-class critic.

152 reproduced in Art Treasures Examiner, p.33.
In the context of contributions to the Manchester Exhibition, several commentators attempted to draw a contrast between the aristocratic owners of old master painting, and the middle-class, self-made owners of modern painting. This was a fairly broad generalisation, as many businessmen and industrialists lent ancient works, and a number of nobles contributed more recent examples; the conclusions it enabled them to reach, however, made it too appealing to resist. Noting the collections which had failed to contribute, which were largely aristocratic, the Art-Journal stated that the middle class bought modern, and had lent their best works, yet had not been followed in this by 'the noble holders of ancient art'. In an attempt to explain why a middle-class buyer supposedly would not attempt to acquire an old master, the Manchester Guardian stated that such a man was 'too honest to affect a taste he does not possess'. As well as pretentious and indolent, the majority of aristocratic buyers were therefore dishonest also:

Nine-tenths of the noble picture buyers who went into raptures over a dingy Caracci or a fictitious Raphael were as ignorant and as incapable of true appreciation of old pictures as he is, only they had not the courage to confess it. Collecting a gallery, and prating about its contents, were fashions of the day, and so men of fashion must be virtuosi, cognoscenti, and dilettanti, just as they must go on the grand tour, and drop their money at the gambling table at White's or Brooke's, or vote with the opposition or the minister in the House of Commons.

Ownership of old masters is here linked to a whole lifestyle of privilege and its abuse. The purchasing of fakes, and the neglect of originals, is likened to having the means to travel abroad but gaining nothing from the experience, having a fortune which is simply gambled away, or having political influence despite a complete detachment from the realities of British society. The life of the aristocracy is identified as one entirely defined by the 'fashions of the day', by trends and caprices which, far from

153 Scharf, Catalogue, p.35. Wynne Ellis, for example, lent a number of his old masters, including a David and Bathsheba by Guercino.
being harmless or relevant only to those directly involved with them, had very real repercussions for the rest of the population. The army is significantly identified by Lalumia as a "fashionable stopping-place" for the titled and wealthy waiting to inherit, making it yet another institution corrupted by the whims of the rich, for which the masses were made to suffer.

This open antipathy towards the aristocracy in the press coverage of the Art Treasures Exhibition was provoked by more than picture-related issues alone. As with the gaslit evening views and system of governorship at the British Institution, efforts to create a means of ranking visitors, and establishing exclusive events for those at the top of resultant hierarchy, can be observed at the Manchester Exhibition. The variety of types of tickets that could be purchased provided an effective way of distinguishing the social 'quality' of visitors, and as a result certain special occasions, such as the official opening, were open only to those who had bought a full season ticket, the most expensive option available. At this ceremony, held on the 5th May, Prince Albert inaugurated the building in the presence of 10,000 spectators; The Times reported that 'a large number of the rank, fashion and beauty of Manchester and its vicinity' were in attendance. Despite the distinctions made between them by the press, Manchester industrialists and businessmen and the nobility were here united to form an upper-class audience for the Prince. The combination of wealth and exclusivity created a fashionable environment, as noted by The Times, of which certain commentators found they could not approve. The Art Treasures Examiner, for example, remarked that 'the brilliant dresses give a holiday aspect to the place', a comment reminiscent of the Spectator's objection to the 'general tone of holiday-making' in the rooms at Pall

156 Lalumia, Realism and Politics, p.44.
157 The Times, 6th May 1857, p.9.
158 Ibid., 13th May 1857, p.11. Other reports in the paper from the Exhibition make allusions to the 'elite of Manchester', by which is meant the same combinations of rich and titled (although predominantly the former).
The paper went on to state that the opening ceremony provided 'a perfect exhibition of the modern modiste's art', staged at the expense of the art exhibition it supposedly honoured. The *Art-Journal* was concerned that this preponderance of the rich and splendid at the opening boded ill for the proclaimed democratic and educational aims of the Exhibition as a whole. The combination of the fashionable crowd in all their sartorial finery, and the dress uniforms of the dignitaries and officials involved in the ceremonials, may have created a visually breathtaking assembly, the magazine stated, but a certain important dimension was missing:

We looked in vain for those representatives of Art, Science and Letters, whose presence would have added dignity and grace to the occasion, and given the ceremonial an interest it undoubtedly lacked.

Eastlake and Waagen were among the few 'representatives of art' who were invited, but less prominent experts were almost entirely excluded. The magazine mentions Anna Jameson and Mrs. Forster as noticeable by their absence, as both had been referred to as experts in the official catalogue. The implication of the *Art-Journal*'s remarks is clear; at a vital early stage, the Art Treasures Exhibition had compromised its educational identity for the sake of fashionable splendour, which could only have the effect of detracting from any real interest or distinctiveness the event could hope to achieve.

Later accounts were even less impressed by the presence of the fashionable. An article featured in the *Art Treasures Examiner* entitled 'The Exhibition Undressed', bristled with animosity towards the modish at Old Trafford. Its author hoped that 'even the

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159 See chapter 2, section V, p.148.
160 *Art Treasures Examiner*, p.2.
162 Jameson, *Letters*, pp.301-319. Jameson did not in fact visit the Art Treasures Exhibition at all, having left for Italy in the Spring of 1857, and not returning until Spring 1858; such apparent indifference to a well-publicised event is perhaps an indication of mixed feelings regarding it.

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most thoughtless block of millinery in the place' would gain some benefit from the display, but was doubtful:

If they had to go solely for the pictures - to look at pictures, and not at their neighbours - how many season tickets would have been sold, how many crinolines have choked the turnstiles?163

The mindless and fashionable crowd metaphorically become their clothes, or rather become women's clothes, as such superficiality is all they are perceived to have to offer. They are rich, entering on season tickets, but are 'thoughtless' and therefore extraneous; the image of crinolines choking turnstiles graphically suggests an excess of that which is inappropriate. It is not simply that they are uninterested once inside that prompts scorn, but that their original motives for attendance were social rather than intellectual. For a member of the fashionable crowd, the display of art is supplanted by the display that they themselves create. This tendency among the rich and fashionable was also noted at the Great Exhibition, the Illustrated London News remarking on the seeming insouciance of such people before the display, commenting that 'nobody looks at anything in particular, unless it be somebody else'.164 The tone, however, is one of amused tolerance, in contrast with the vehemence of the Art Treasures Examiner's reporter concerning similar behaviour in the Manchester Exhibition. The explanation for this lies in the particular conglomeration of paradigms that informed criticism of the Art Treasures Exhibition. As well as being anti-educational, the conduct of the fashionable in the gallery was seen to have more serious ramifications.

The author of 'The Exhibition Undressed' regrets the presence of:

The frivolous and the idle, making that temple a parade ground, insulting the shades of the mighty men of genius, whose trophies hang around, with the silly vanities of fashion, and vexing the true worshippers.165

163 Art Treasures Examiner, p.60.
164 Illustrated London News, vol.19, July-Dec. 1851, p.101. 'Five-shilling Days and One-Shilling Days'. The crowd is said to show 'no eagerness, mark you; no flutter of curiosity'.
165 Art Treasures Examiner, p.60, 'The Exhibition Undressed'.
Under the conditions of the paradigm of the church as it was commonly applied to the Manchester Exhibition, the behaviour of the fashionable crowd in its halls was nothing short of sacrilegious. What could be tolerated before machines and works of craft was taken as extreme disrespect before works of art sanctified by their beauty and intellectual potency. Gender prejudice is here present also, the reference to 'men of genius' emphasising that the gallery was a male domain in which women and the 'silly vanities of fashion' which inevitably accompanied them were offensive and unwelcome.

The injurious effects of fashion with regards to purchasing trends in old master painting, as discussed in the previous chapter, were also observed at the Art Treasures Exhibition. Layard was appalled by the by the number of fake Raphaels he detected among the display at Manchester, many of which were so bad as to be offensive to the intelligence of an experienced viewer. These were, he stated, the 'very mischievous results' of the modern manufacture of old master forgeries, a practice which was on the increase as 'the demand for a certain class of pictures, as in all areas of commerce, creates the supply'. The incongruity of business ethics and private ownership of old masters is again foregrounded. Layard wrote that the only way a dealer could keep up with changing trends in private purchase when the range of works available was largely fixed was by reattribution or forgery. Reattribution, which often involved the addition of details and signatures, and the application of fresh coats of paint, had the more ruinous effect on scholarly endeavour in Layard's opinion. It meant that the work of minor names and schools would appear to vanish as it was doctored and then sold as the produce of more famous artists. Actual forgeries and fakes were regarded by Layard as being less of a threat, his major concern being that willing purchasers

166 Layard, 'The Manchester', p.182. He declared a Christ Carrying the Cross to be 'a made-up picture without a shadow of a claim to authenticity', and a number of the other works present to be 'coarse and ill-executed copies of well-known pictures'.

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could be found for such obviously inauthentic examples, leading him to lament the
glance which too often underlaid purchases motivated by fashion.\textsuperscript{167} Many of the
pictures at Manchester exhibit the ‘tendency in those who pretend to taste to
degenerate into the mere collector’, into one who will simply buy for the sake of
being seen to do it. Such people may deserve what they get, but whilst events like the
Art Treasures Exhibition are dependent on private collections for their materials, it is
the public who will ultimately suffer for the hollow posturing of ‘the mere collector’.

There is evidence to suggest that the Art Treasures Exhibition suffered as a result of
perceptions of its locale amongst collectors and critics alike. Manchester was seen as
unfashionable by many, and in certain significant cases works were withheld from
exhibition there in order to be displayed in a more desirable context. The principal
example is that of Davenport-Bromley’s Death of the Virgin by Giotto, which its
owner chose to submit to the British Institution Summer Exhibition of 1857 rather
than the Manchester Exhibition, to which he lent a Coronation of the Virgin of far
more dubious authenticity.\textsuperscript{168} Had the former painting been in Manchester, Layard
commented, the collection of supposed Giottos on the walls would have featured ‘one
worthy of the man to whom may mainly be attributed the revival of art in Italy’; ‘we
should have been glad to see such a work included’, he regretfully remarked.\textsuperscript{169}
Davenport-Bromley’s actions can be understood as a prioritising of his reputation
amongst the London cognoscenti as a discerning collector of Italian ‘primitives’ over
the educational ends of a provincial and popular exhibition. It is possible that he
believed the poorer quality of his Manchester loan would go unnoticed in a display

\textsuperscript{167}Ibid., p.183. ‘The greater number are so wretched in execution, so utterly
contemptible as works of art that it is a matter of astonishment how anyone, even the
most ignorant and deficient in taste, can be taken in by them.’

\textsuperscript{168}Manchester Guardian, vol.1, pp.10-11. The Coronation of the Virgin is described
as ‘pale and tame, wanting entirely that dash and spirit which characterise his works’;
of the absent Death of the Virgin, in contrast, it is remarked that ‘the artistic touch,
depth feeling and subdued colours are all worthy of the great Florentine’.

\textsuperscript{169}Layard, ‘The Manchester’, p.171.
composed for the benefit of the unschooled multitude. At any rate, it indicates a preference for the London venue which others shared. A number of London-based critics failed to venture to the Art Treasures Exhibition at all, but some of those that did concluded that for the professional critic, the London exhibitions were vastly preferable. A commentator for The Times, for example, in the course of a complaint about the unreasonable scale of the Manchester event, stated:

Let anybody just consider what it is to go to the smaller annual exhibitions in Pall Mall, and he will have some measure of the quantity of which the mind is capable. It is a very good day's work to study and enjoy the 200 pictures in that quiet, comfortable gallery, where you may not see 50 people in a summer's day, and may recognise among them three or four old friends.

The many faults of the British Institution are here forgotten in an evocation of a gallery which is civilised, quiet and familiar, and populated not by multitudes from every walk of life, but a select circle from the London art world. This somewhat exclusive view, also expressed by Dennistoun when before the 1853 select committee on the National Gallery regarding the location of the collection, which was intellectual but not educational, would manifest itself elsewhere in coverage of the Manchester Exhibition.

Other professional middle-class critics did not yearn for the conditions of the British Institution Summer Exhibition in this manner, however, and can even be seen to implement many of the same tactics to denounce the private collection at Manchester as they had in the rooms at Pall Mall. For example, specialist knowledge was frequently evoked in order to demonstrate the limited academic value of all British private galleries of old master painting. This was done most notably with regards to the display of early Italian painting in saloon A; as at the British Institution, the

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170 Notes and Queries, vol.3, 1857, p.340. This journal offered no coverage of the Manchester Exhibition in protest of the fact that it had not been held in London.
171The Times, 17th October 1857, p.8.
172See chapter 2, section VII, p.184.
examples that could be brought forth from the residences of private owners were frequently declared inadequate even when genuine, due to comparison with the frescoes by the same hands that could be seen in Italy.173 These Italian frescoes were both public and immovable, and could only be 'possessed' through study, giving them a symbolic dimension which was in complete accord with the educational and democratic ideals of the Art Treasures Exhibition. Later artists of more established renown were also found to be misrepresented at Manchester by substandard works; as already mentioned, Raphael was a prominent example of this. The Saturday Review was unsurprised: masterpieces by 'Il Divino', it stated, 'are not reasonably to be looked for in a collection borrowed from private English galleries'.174 The scope for denigration which the expansion of critical knowledge brought with it was considerable; encounters with foreign old master reserves enabled the devaluation of centuries of endeavour by English collectors. Experiences abroad permitted critics to conclude that much art, indeed the best art, was beyond the imprisonment of the private collection.

Despite the purportedly intellectual tone of the event, and the progressive educational efforts made in terms of inclusiveness and arrangement, the Athenaeum still detected the vestiges of the older connoisseurial order it had attacked at the British Institution in the 1840s at the Art Treasures Exhibition in 1857.175 It singled out Waagen as a particular manifestation of this order, as a representative of a discourse of art criticism which existed purely to support and endorse the abuses of the private collector. He was, in this respect, an obvious target, for the same reasons that had seen him appointed as a special consultant to the executive committee; for all Layard's

173 The Saturday Review in particular favoured this method; for example, vol.3, 1857, p.477. The magazine admitted that Fra Angelico was reasonably well represented in the Exhibition, but remarked on 'how little notion these paintings give of what the mystic artist achieved in the cells and corridors of the San Marco at Florence, or the Chapel of Pope Nicholas in the Vatican, or in the Duomo of Orvieto'.
174Ibid.
175See chapter 2, section III, pp.134-5.
lukation of his arrangement of the Berlin Gallery, Waagen’s reputation in this country was indissolubly linked to the private collection. The Athenaeum’s review of *What to Observe: A Walk through the Art Treasures Exhibition Under the Guidance of Dr. Waagen* is little more than a prolonged assault on the reputation of the German critic. He is accused of being prescriptive and unprogressive (which is ironic considering Layard’s view of his curatorial abilities), and is characterised as a relic from a previous critical era. Waagen’s prose is described as ‘the true dead language of the time of the Georges’, and the expressions which litter his text are quoted and ridiculed, the reviewer commenting that ‘these phrases save all thinking and can be applied to anything’. It is asserted that just as aristocrats and various other private collectors pretend to taste, those critics who laud their purchases with essentially empty eucumia pretend to knowledge.

VI. A Dichotomy: Idealisation of the Workers and the Discourse of Luxury

Idealistic visions of the working class were common in early reports from the Manchester Exhibition. In a feature published shortly before the official opening of the Art Treasures Exhibition, the *Athenaeum* attributed the event’s very existence to the instigation of the working men of Manchester:

What provincial city but Manchester would have desired, or could have got together, or would have wished for such a sight? It is as much to say, O brothers! we are weary of this spider-spinning, this weaving of thin lilacs and blue striped stuffs for the men of Ashantee, - weary of iron bars and such materialities, - weary of ever-revolving wheels, and the jar and buzz of many tiered factories. Give us the finer results of a life: steel beaten to a filigree, - ivory fretted as thin as a dragonfly’s wing, - china, frail and white as the lily’s bell, - and above all, pictures, those magic results of oil, and earth, and canvas, - the grapple of Rubens, the cathedral twilight of Titian, the gentleness of

176 Athenaeum, No.1553, 1st August 1857, p.978. Examples of these ‘phrases’ are given: ‘graceful motives, juicy colour, silvery tone, warm and clear in the chiaroscuro, full body juicy in the golden tones etc.’
Vandyke, the saintliness of Correggio, the tenderness of Guido. The men of Manchester wished, and lo! the Exhibition! 177

In this confabulated account, the mighty energy of the workers' collective will, capable of maintaining the operation of Britain's foremost industrial town, is transferred to thoughts of art, and an unprecedented gallery is promptly brought into being. The working class is characterised in terms of practical power, as a vast reserve of raw energy with whose impulses the rest of society had to align itself. The legacy of the Crimea can be here detected in the obvious esteem for those described. Lalumia relates how, as the campaign wore on, public dissatisfaction with the war expressed itself through antipathy towards the aristocratic monopoly, and, conversely, 'unlimited admiration' for the common soldiery. 178 The troops were seen to have a basic common sense shockingly absent in their leaders; very similar claims were made for the ordinary people who attended the Art Treasures Exhibition, who became soldiers to the officer class represented by the private collector. The Dublin University Magazine, after its attack on the aristocratic collector quoted earlier, made the following claim for the working class at the Manchester Exhibition, or indeed at any gallery:

There is no class of men who appreciate and enjoy the fine arts with a keener relish than the men of toil when their toil is over. Watch any artisan in any of our national galleries. His is not the cold eye of languid inspection - his are not the vapid commonplace of conventional rule-criticism. There you mark the quick glance, the flushing cheek, the healthy, hearty admiration that expresses itself curtly, coarsely it may be, but earnestly and forcibly. 179

An opposition is created between the working man and the experienced connoisseur which, in a similar manner to that established elsewhere between the middle-class collector of modern art and the aristocratic collector of old masters, assigns honesty and earnestness to the inexperienced. As in the Athenaeum's damning of Waagen, the

177 Athenaeum, No.1540, 2nd May 1857, p.564.
178 Lalumia, Realism and Politics, p.49.
179 Art Treasures Examiner, p.33.
language of 'the expert' is dismissed as being fundamentally empty, and there is a general hostility to the structures of knowledge erected around the appreciation of ancient art by those in positions of authority. In the place of learning is a faith in the ability of all mankind to respond instinctively to art, to find it deeply affecting regardless of social background. The Athenaeum believed a factory worker longed for the 'grapple of Rubens' and the other variegated charms of old master painting, and the Dublin University Magazine asserted that evidence supporting this belief filled the galleries of the country. This was the paradigm of the church applied to the Art Treasures Exhibition, but it was that of a republican church which eschewed hierarchy and specious instruction, and celebrated congregation rather than priesthood. Employment of this particular variety of the paradigm enabled commentators to predict with confidence both mass attendance and instant conversion; the actual results of the Exhibition were reported as having been somewhat different.

Despite the progressive sentiments it inspired, and the opportunities it offered for the expression of anti-aristocratic feeling, an instant emphasis was placed in much of the coverage of the Manchester Exhibition on luxury. Political and social concerns were overshadowed in numerous accounts by a revelling in the sensual extravagance of such an assembly of art objects. The long-standing associations of these objects, which were discussed in the previous chapter, prompted an automatic deference in many, and were accepted as symbols of their owners' mighty status, even though they also revealed a catalogue of abuses and thus supported arguments for having that status reduced. Attempts at social levelling, and the promotion of mutual understanding between the classes, widely proclaimed to be at the heart of the venture, were confused and ultimately frustrated by the composition of the display from private loans. Expressions of gratitude in the press would remind the majority of visitors of

180 ibid., p.40. In an article entitled 'Working Men and the Art Treasures Exhibition': 'thronging thousands will crowd its aisles, and taste a pure and elevated enjoyment in contemplating its matchless display.'
the gulf that lay between them and those who contributed to the Exhibition, and of their own subservient position. Given his reputation, it is perhaps unsurprising that Waagen asked the readers of the Art-Journal to spare a thought for the owners whilst enjoying the display:

It is of no little sacrifice to their owners to be deprived of these familiar objects of interest refreshing alike to the eye and mind, for a long period of seven months, especially as the season falls at precisely the time of year when an Englishman desires to entertain his friends, and naturally likes to show his rooms to their best advantage.

It is not simply a sacrifice for an owner to part with his picture, but a 'great personal sacrifice'; what is extraordinary to the more humble eye is 'familiar' to his. For the predominantly middle-class readers of the Art-Journal, the Exhibition was not only an experience with art, but an insight into the lives of the rich and powerful. Pictures were perceived by many as being a part of an alien lifestyle, or the discourse of luxury identified in chapter two, of which they had little direct experience. Waagen's self-conscious reference to the consequences of the 'season' in relation to the leisure-based lives of the rich emphasises yet further the 'otherness' of paintings and the conventions surrounding their private ownership to the body of the British public. He asks his readers to consider and respect such factors, which have no relevance whatsoever to themselves, when contemplating an exhibition staged for the benefit of the populace. Special notice was provided in the Art Treasures Examiner on the visits of the titled to the building at Old Trafford; the reports given on the visits of dignitaries such as Lord Russell and Sir Charles Napier attest to both the preferential treatment such figures were granted, and the fascination and admiration they commanded from the general public. That these two men, who had risen to the

182 See chapter 2, section IV, pp.137-140.
183 Art Treasures Examiner, p.23. Visiting shortly after the official opening, Russell was given a personal tour of the Exhibition by Scharf; true to the general preconception, he spent most of his time in the department of ancient art: 'there was evidently much interest excited from the presence of a nobleman so distinguished in
pinnacle of the political and naval hierarchies respectively at least partly as a result of birth, and were thus possible instances of the unreasonable social privilege which had drawn so much bitter criticism in the wake of the war with Russia, appears to have had little impact upon the enduring and habitual British regard for the nobility.

The Great Exhibition had been criticised for the opulence of much of what was chosen to feature in its display; Blackwood's saw such elements as unnecessary and overbearing, as well as inimical to the educational purposes of the Exhibition, and sarcastically proposed it be renamed 'the luxury of all nations'. More positive reviews featured descriptions such as 'this universal fair, or shop, or warehouse'; comparative comments which imply a lesser degree of extravagance. Signifiers of luxury were unavoidable at the Art Treasures Exhibition, due to the enduring strength of the connection between art and aristocratic opulence; furthermore, despite the supposed educational programme of the event, this connotation of luxury was not criticised, but admired. The Athenaeum, for example, commented on the 'marvellously fine effect' of the central nave at Manchester. In this space, full-length Van Dyck portraits formed the backdrop to a display of precious objects, tapestry and fine furniture; a simulacrum of a magnificent aristocratic dwelling was thus formed by the accumulation and suitable arrangement of objects borrowed from a number of the dwellings themselves. The sum was logically regarded as being larger than its parts, Morris describing the building in his guidebook as a palace whose contents 'infinitely transcends that which the greatest monarch of the world ever saw or could see'.

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184 Blackwood's, vol.70, July-Dec.1851, p.142.
186 Athenaeum, 1857, p.564.
187 Morris, An Historical, p.23.
There are democratic overtones here, as this reputedly peerless collection was open to anyone with a shilling. Indeed, several commentators regarded the fact that it afforded 'the public an opportunity of seeing what they cannot ordinarily see' as being the most important aspect of the Exhibition.

In relation to all of this luxury, members of the working class at the Art Treasures Exhibition were allocated the role of inferiors. Even the idealistic conceptions of them discussed earlier in the chapter were based on the expectation of a certain compliance of attitude and behaviour on the part of the multitude, and an important part of this was the retention of a humble and deferential demeanour. The working class were, in short, expected to conform with middle-class preconceptions at the Manchester Exhibition, and enthusiastically imbibe both the metaphorical and the literal feast available in the Exhibition building, in the picture galleries and refreshment rooms respectively. No alternative was in fact permitted in terms of foodstuffs, as the bringing of one's own provisions was forbidden, a rule which was enforced by the police throughout the Exhibition's duration. The Art Treasures Examiner, following a report on the capacity of the kitchens, stated that 'picnics' were unnecessary as 'the arrangements are adapted for the suitable supply of all classes'. There was, however, widespread protest over 'this arbitrary regulation', which had caused, it was claimed, 'serious inconvenience to the working man'. A letter to The Times from an 'employer of labour' claimed that the purchase of food in the exhibition hall constituted half a week's wages for the average operative, and this enormous expenditure was deterring potential visitors. When combined with the admission fee, the necessity of buying a catalogue, a visit amounted to a very expensive affair.

189 The analogy of the feast was drawn many times in relation to the display; the Manchester Guardian, for example, remarked that 'for those who partake of the intellectual, as for those who sit down to the material feast of the day, we have only one wish - "May good digestion wait on appetite, and health on both!"' (vol.2, p.12.)
190 Art Treasures Examiner, p.8.
the correspondent maintained; as a result, he claimed to have frequently heard his employees complain that 'working people, as a rule, could not afford a visit to the Art Treasures Exhibition'. 192

Some factory owners responded to the lack of provision at the Manchester Exhibition for the limited economic capabilities of the working class identified above with the company visit, where the owner would pay for his entire workforce to attend the Exhibition, and in some instances even provide a meal as well. These excursions were invariably made by rail, utilising the line which had been laid to facilitate such mass attendance (see floorplan, figure 4). They can be seen as belonging to the mid-nineteenth century tradition of the railway excursion, where middle-class reformers sought to provide opportunities for 'rational recreation' for the poor. 193

These special company trains boosted attendance figures enormously, 194 as well as allowing the Exhibition's organisers to claim that the working class were attending in large numbers. Among the largest of the company trips mounted was that of the factory of Messrs. Titus Salt and Co. of Saltaire on 19th September. 2,500 workers came in three special trains, the first of which had 37 carriages. 195 The account of the visit in the Art Treasures Examiner has strong undertones of discipline; the company visit, as well as ensuring attendance, guaranteed that the workers were controlled in the space of the gallery, as they would behave beneath the gaze of their employer for the sake of their jobs if nothing else. No attempt is made by the Art Treasures Examiner to describe the experience of the Salt workforce in the gallery itself. Its report concentrates instead upon the less complicated and more concrete benefits of a free meal. Several details of this monumental repast are provided, in particular the

192 The Times, 8th August 1857, p.10.
193 Bailey, Leisure and Class, p.47.
194 Art Treasures Examiner, 'Statistics of the Art Treasures Exhibition', p.120. For example, attendance figures on the 23rd of July totalled at 7,512; the following day, when a 'large number' of special trains arrived, the tally rose to 9,775.
tour of the dining area by Miss Burdett-Coutts, who 'expressed her great gratification at the novel sight she witnessed, in the many happy faces gathered around the festive board'. Burdett-Coutts was a renowned and active philanthropist, and her interest and gratification in the trip gives it the appearance of an act of charity towards the needy, rather than a treat or reward for the working class. Burdett-Coutts was invited into and shown around the second-class dining area by Titus Salt himself, who had paid for the entire trip and evidently wanted to show the results of his altruism to an enthusiast, as if it were an additional part of the display of the Exhibition. The description of the sight of 'so many happy faces' enjoying a meal as novel augments the notion of charity, as it adds an implication of everyday deprivation. The working class are thus located in an extremely subservient position, granted an identity of sorts, but one that is based in helplessness and dependence on their social superiors, not only for morally and intellectually elevating experiences, but also for decent meals.

The large number of company trips undertaken attests to the enthusiasm of factory owners for their workers to attend the Exhibition, regardless of the expense such visits involved. This can be seen as a recognition on the part of the employers of what E. P. Thompson terms 'the need for industrial peace', which had necessitated the modification of managerial techniques in the mid-nineteenth century and ultimately led to 'the growth of new forms of paternalism'. A strong ulterior motive was present in these efforts to introduce operatives to a site of 'rational recreation'; as Bailey argues, it was hoped that the experience of such events would 'immunise workers against the alleged degenerations of their own culture, and counter the more corrupt

196 ibid.
197 See Jennifer S. Uglow (ed.), Dictionary of Women's Biography. London, Macmillan, 1982, p.86. Burdett-Coutts was renowned for her endeavours with regards to popular education and the improvement of the living conditions of the urban working class; she was known as 'The Queen of the Poor'.
appeal of the embryonic leisure industry'.\textsuperscript{199} It would essentially provide a lesson in moral conduct, and in the duty of every man to excellence in his daily work; high hopes were held of the Manchester Exhibition in this respect. In a lecture entitled "A Joy for Ever" (and its price in the market), which he delivered at Manchester at the height of the Exhibition's run, Ruskin stressed the importance of educating the workforce in artistic matters. He compared a man and a horse, declaring the horse more commercially valuable as it could be bridled. The situation changes, he continued, if the man has been properly instructed; 'if you can bridle him, or, which is better, if he can bridle himself, he will be a valuable creature directly'.\textsuperscript{200} Art education, Ruskin ruled, would make a working man more open to discipline, or even self-disciplining.

Manchester employers clearly sought to bring about such a 'valuable' change in their workforces. Edmund Potter, for example, a member of the Art Treasures Exhibition's executive committee and a local cotton and fabric manufacturer, supplied every employee of his factory with a free ticket to the event, which was accompanied by a short pamphlet he had written. In this Potter emphasised the high moral character of art, and the lessons that could be gained from it. Painting, he told his workers, was not only a potent manifestation, but also the ultimate font of the civilised instinct in man, 'without which we should have been living as little better than animals'. He expressed the hope that they would both spread the word about the wonders of the Exhibition, and take full advantage of the 'great delight and instruction' it offered.\textsuperscript{201} The Report of the Executive Committee optimistically anticipated, at the conclusion of the

\textsuperscript{199}Bailey, Leisure and Class, p.6.
\textsuperscript{201}Edmund Potter, Presented with a Ticket to the Art Treasures Exhibition, Manchester, Johnson and Rawson, 1857, p.3.
Exhibition's run, the imminent manifestation of definite results from the presumed arousal of a love of art in the common man:

It will have been a practical national good - encouraging us to look for a speedy manifestation of its influences on society, and rewarding the good intentions of its promoters by the gradual growth amongst the manufacturing districts of England of improved habits, more refined tastes and higher virtue.\[202\]

The anticipated 'rewarding' of the promoters would come from an enhanced workforce as well as from a sense of charitable well-being at having improved the lot of the less fortunate. The qualities mentioned here make no direct reference to boons to productivity, or employee skill, however, they are all rather concerned with the more general moral conduct of the working class. As was realised by certain commentators in relation to the National Gallery,\[203\] the art exhibition, as opposed to other manifestations of 'rational recreation', did not offer direct practical instruction; it was rather seen to inform and develop the personal substance of the working man by means of its improving moral influence.

VII. 'The Stupidest Exhibition that Ever I Saw': the Failure of Popular Education at the Art Treasures Exhibition

Vital to the success of this conception was the supposed malleability of the masses. Jerrold, writing in the Art Treasures Examiner, confidently declared that 'we can so attune a man's nature as to make every step he takes a delight to him'.\[204\] This was to be done, he claimed, through simple, authoritative instruction, and accordingly material addressed specifically towards the working class had an overtly prescriptive tone, unlike the carefully balanced impartiality found in publications whose intended audience was more middle class, such as the Manchester Guardian. A Peep at the

\[203\] See chapter 2, section VII, pp.185-6.
\[204\] Jerrold, 'Art in the Attics', Art Treasures Examiner, p.37.
Pictures, for example, imparted broad uncontroversial generalisations in an authoritative manner; readers were told what to like and why in each department of the Exhibition. Their attention was directed towards the paintings of Fra Angelico as ‘we like to look at his pictures, both for their graceful beauty, and because they are the handiwork of a man who led a religious life’.\(^2\) As this extract illustrates, a blatantly moralistic element was often woven into such instruction, with qualities like piety and obedience portrayed as admirable; in this respect it is similar to the artists’ biographies written by Jameson for the *Penny Magazine*, published in 1845 as *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters*.\(^3\) The inclusion of early Italian art at the Art Treasures Exhibition had been one of the more prominent signs of its organisers’ commitment to art education. The treatment of it in popular guides and papers, however, reveals the difficulty it posed with regards to the interpretation of the Exhibition to the uninitiated. Some chose to see it as a challenge, and went to great lengths to explain its significance to their readers, combining a basic version of moral art history (as in the quotation above) with recourse to the established metaphor of ‘art’s cradled babyhood’.\(^4\) Others either glossed over the early schools rapidly, or failed to mention them at all; *The Visitor’s Handbook to the Art Treasures Exhibition*, for example, commenced its tour with the art of the High Renaissance.\(^5\)

A proportion of the critical presence at the Manchester Exhibition, whilst remaining committed to academic progressiveness, demonstrated considerable scepticism regarding the educational aspect of the Exhibition that was accepted as its corollary by other commentators. This scepticism found a focus in the display of saloon A. The Athenaeum, despite its idealism of the workers at the outset of the Exhibition, stated

\(^{205}\) *A Peep at the Pictures*, p.2.  
\(^{206}\) See chapter 1, section IV, p.51.  
\(^{207}\) *The Leisure Hour*, vol.6, 1857, p.510. See also *A Peep at the Pictures*, p.1: ‘Art was in its infancy when they were produced’.  
\(^{208}\) *A Visitor’s Handbook to the Art Treasures Exhibition, or What to See and Where to See It*, Manchester, Abel Heywood, 1857.
that it had 'no faith in the power of the masses' to understand 'primitive' art, but 'this corner of the building will be dear to many experienced lovers of art, who will read and interpret the genuine touches for themselves'. The Spectator likewise described early art as 'not calculated to rivet the common homage'; the professional critic can here be seen to distance himself from the populace, instead of taking on the role of its instructor. The painting of the fifteenth century and earlier, the magazine continued, was 'incomparably higher and deeper' than the pictures which had proved popular, such as Wallis' Death of Chatterton and Annibale Caracci's Three Maries. The taste of the multitude was characterised as base and superficial, and was juxtaposed with that of the middle-class critic and his readership. Popular taste was essentially characterised as being receptive to the gallery of excellence, with crowds gathering around famous or spectacular works at the expense of those which were perceived as being intellectually edifying. The multitude were seen to have little interest in the efforts that had been made on their behalf in terms of the arrangement of the old master galleries as a discursive experience, choosing instead to concentrate their attention on a small number of celebrated canvases.

A large proportion of 'the masses' were reported as being unable to even understand the Art Treasures Exhibition as a spectacle alone, or a gallery of excellence; the Spectator, for example, remarked that:

such phrases as "the stupidest exhibition that ever I saw" have been the too-frequent verdicts of the classes unprepared by their general habits of life, and the transit from the Exhibition to the Bellevue Gardens, the Manchester Cremorne, their too-frequent recourse.

The lure of venues of popular leisure, which the Manchester Exhibition was arguably undertaken to combat, is frequently mentioned in accounts of the failure of the

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211 Ibid.
working-class attendance at the halls of Old Trafford. This seemingly irresistible attraction was felt by those who had been brought to the Exhibition by their employers as part of a company trip as well as those who came of their own volition; as mentioned earlier in the chapter, The Times noted that many of those who came as part of the outing of Messrs. Turton and Sons of Sheffield fled the building at the earliest opportunity in order to seek gratification elsewhere.212

In many more cases, the working class were reported not to be attending the Exhibition at all, often out of preference for less edifying pursuits. This applied to rural as well as urban workers; The Times described the typical weekend exodus of 'country people' to Manchester, who flocked in to create 'what is locally termed "gaping Saturday"'. The same verb applied to the ignorant and idle behaviour of aristocrats in continental galleries by the Dublin University Magazine213 is here used to indicate the vacuity of the mass of farm workers. The paper goes on to depict the manner in which they 'wander about the streets looking at shop windows, and gazing at anything which may strike them as novel and wonderful'. Its correspondent estimates that there must have been up to 30,000 people engaged in this pointless activity, but:

it is evident that works of art have little attraction for such visitors, those of whom are disposed to go beyond the streets preferring the races or public gardens, with dancing and their more exciting amusements.214

The working class could not be made to go to the Manchester Exhibition, it was realised, and when free to choose for themselves were deemed more likely to gravitate

212 The Times, 27th May 1857, p.7. They 'showed less appreciation of the pictures than any of the working classes that have yet seen them, and left the building early to see the botanical gardens and visit Manchester.'
213 See this chapter, section V, p.242.
214 ibid., 8th June 1857, p.12.
towards a venue of popular rather than 'rational' recreation, with its attendant moral
perils.

Much was made in some quarters of the difficulties encountered by the worker; certain
prominent commentators were inclined to make allowances for the reason touched
upon in the above quote from the Spectator. Charles Dickens and Scharf both asserted
that the conditions of their daily lives made it unreasonable to expect any prolonged
concentration from the industrial working class in an art gallery.215 As discussed
colder in the chapter, the excuses made for the non-attendance of the operatives of
Manchester at the Exhibition often centred upon consideration of the expense
involved. Some critics, however, were unconvincd by such reasoning. The
Manchester Courier, for example, stated at a relatively early stage in the Exhibition's
run that:

It is a lamentable confession, but true, but the people prefer horseriding,
fireworks and indifferent music to refining art of a high class. More people
visited the American circus on each day of its stay than the Art Treasures
Exhibition, though the price of admission for the cheapest accommodation was
the same.216

Efforts were in fact made to make the Exhibition as affordable as possible for the
working class, as their importance to the monetary success of the venture was
recognised from the outset.217 Roughly halfway through its run, the administrators
decided to introduce 'sixpenny Saturdays', with the basic entrance fee dropping from a
shilling to sixpence after 2pm on Saturday from the 15th August. This measure

215 Finke, 'The Art Treasures Exhibition', p.121. Finke quotes Dickens arguing that
'the thing is too still after their lives of machinery; the art flows over their heads in
consequence.' Scharf is also quoted, explaining in a lecture given after the event that
'the people whose duties keep them under mill roofs day after day, naturally preferred
the fresh air...the lower and uneducated classes did not go to the Art Treasures
willingly' (p.125).
217 Report of the Executive Committee, p.4. Deane and Cunningham's paper specified
that it was 'to the shillings we must look mainly for success'.

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provided a boost to attendance figures, on Saturdays at least. The above quotation seeks to argue, however, that the working class could afford the shilling tariff, and just assigned greater importance to trivial and meretricious pastimes.

This perceived failure of the working class to behave as expected at the Manchester Exhibition can be understood as a possible indication of a rejection of middle-class schemes to discipline and control them by means of 'rational recreation'. The attitude of art educators towards their would-be pupils was very much that of the disciplinarian, and they saw the process of the instruction of the working class as one of the latter learning their place in society. An anonymous article in the Art Treasures Examiner entitled 'Working Men and the Art Treasures Exhibition' repeatedly emphasised this. Its author declared 'let the working men seek to be refined, - to be gentlemen in feeling and manners': if not, it is implied, in wealth and social privilege. The workers would, in essence, aspire to the condition of the middle class after a visit to the galleries of the Art Treasures Exhibition, and would thus 'speedily take their rank in the great human family'. This would, of course, be one of the lower ranks, perhaps akin to that of children, under the patriarchal control of their middle-class employers. The role here envisaged for the working class was above all a deferential one. Publications specifically intended for the operative audience of the Exhibition attempted to instruct them in the behaviour they were expected to exhibit, and reminded them of their subservient position by demanding gratitude for the display which had been assembled for their benefit; it was suggested that the best way for them to demonstrate this gratitude was by repeated visits. However, as Thompson

218 Art Treasures Examiner, 'Statistics of the Art Treasures Exhibition', p.192. The first one, on the 15th August, drew 15,0534 people, 10,864 of which were sixpenny admissions. The following Saturday, 22nd August, was even more successful: 20,610 people in total, 16,275 sixpenny admissions (p.204).
220 A Peep at the Pictures, p.13. 'We can offer to the generous lenders of these pictures no thanks so graceful as our worthy appreciation of them, shown by our presence at Old Trafford.' A Visitor's Handbook, p.16. The treasures were lent for
argues, by the mid-nineteenth century 'the class-consciousness of the working man has little in it of deference', and accordingly gratitude was seldom shown, and attendance lower than anticipated.

The middle-class reaction to the frustration of its designs, or confirmation of its suspicions, that was signalled by the reported behaviour of the working class in relation to the Art Treasures Exhibition, can be gauged by the increasing prevalence of elitist opinion regarding the critical and moral incapacity of the public at large in the pages of a number of journals. The emphasis placed on the importance of work in the gallery, on absolute application to the task of viewing, meant that the largely unresponsive multitude were seen to be indolent in the space of the Exhibition. They were believed to be unprepared to devote the necessary amount of cerebral activity to arriving at a comprehension of what was before them, and were therefore lacking in spiritual nobility as well as moral and intellectual fibre. A reversal was enacted; an environment constructed along the lines of the luxurious retreats of the wealthiest in society became a site for industry, those who privilege and leisure had allowed to accrete the requisite knowledge to appreciate its contents became pious labourers striving for self-improvement, and those denied comprehension of art by the deprived conditions of their social background and daily existence became willful idlers who were squandering a valuable opportunity. Popular taste was described in terms of...

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221 Thompson, The Making, p.831.
222 Report of the Executive Committee, p.42. The visitor total was 1,336,715, only slightly higher than the minimum attendance figure of 1,200,000 cited at the Exhibition's outset. The Spectator explained this low figure with the observation that 'high art does not attract the multitudes needed to crown such a project with the halo of brilliant success' (vol.30, 1857, p.1017).
223 The Times, 11th August 1857, p.10. There is a reference here to the 'so-called working classes', who had been noticeable by their absence at the Art Treasures Exhibition; this is ascribed to an aversion to the 'labour of leisure' that a visit to the Exhibition would entail.
superficiality and unsubtlety, and often juxtaposed with the more refined taste of the
expert or connoisseur. Working-class visitors transformed from the focus of
democratic idealism to the object of indifference, scorn or ridicule, whose condition
was lamentable but immutable, as they would not help themselves by partaking of the
morally elevating effects of art. There is a sense that the evidence of the failure of the
social experiment of the Art Treasures Exhibition was relished by those who identified
themselves as belonging to the superior order. Those of wealth and culture seem to
have experienced an affirmation of their status by their brush with the crowds of the
ignorant; the identification of the heathen masses and an unsuccessful attempt at
conversion served to strengthen the will of the faithful.

In some reports from the Exhibition, working-class attendance took on comic
proportions. Anecdotes were circulated about the ludicrous behaviour of crowds of
poor in the building at Old Trafford, for instance how they would make an extremely
cursory inspection of the contents and exclaim "'There's nowt here but pictures, let's
off to the Belle Vue'. Another related the case of a working man sitting gravely on a
bench for some time, before finally asking "'When is the Exhibition going to
begin?'" Several books with a primarily comic intention were also published, a
prime example of which is Bobby Shuttle and his Wife Sayroh's Visit to Manchester
in the Greight Hurt Treasures Palace. As the title indicates, the entire book is written in

224 Spectator, vol.30, 1857, p.1071. The magazine declared that 'the vast majority
judge simply according to subject, and the more obvious qualities of expression'.
Blackwood's was generally dismissive of popular works, deeming them inferior to
carly Italian art. On Caracci's Three Maries: 'The expression of grief, though intense,
and above all, intelligible to the multitude, has none of the finer touches and subtleties
found in the school of Florence.' (vol.81, Jan.-June 1857, p.767)
225 Both are related in an appendix to the Visitor's Handbook, (p.17), which was
added to it upon its inclusion in a compendium of Art Treasures Exhibition
guidebooks published in December 1857. This volume featured a range of
publications, presumably to demonstrate the variety amongst them, and effectively
removed the Visitor's Handbook from the sphere of its originally intended readership.
The appendix thus contains comment written in a very different tone to the body of the
text.
a style intended to phonetically represent working-class vernacular, and much of the intended humour is derived from this mimicry of the linguistic mutations and malapropisms that were supposed to litter the speech of operatives. Such publications were a common feature of the 1850s and 1860s. Bailey argues that they illustrate 'the gap between ideals and achievements in the work of those who wanted to reform popular recreation', and this was certainly the case with Bobby Shuttle. Similar texts were also produced at the time of the Great Exhibition, for example Tom Treddlehoyle’s Trip to Lunnan, to see Paxton’s Great Glass Lantern. Both offer a dense parody of their subject’s speech to the reader, and attempt to give a humorous fabrication of a simple-minded worker’s experiences in and reactions to the Art Treasures Exhibition and Great Exhibition respectively. However, the central comic idea of each is different. Tom Treddlehoyle is from the West Riding, and his story begins with his journey to London; once there, he goes straight to the Crystal Palace and the remainder of the text is devoted to his reactions to the display. Bobby Shuttle is from Bolton, and his journey is far shorter, but very little of the book concerns his experiences with the pictures themselves. He and his wife are constantly eating, their day being a series of meals and distractions; a stream of trivial events delay their arrival at the Exhibition, and once they are inside, they are seemingly incapable of actually engaging with the collection, preferring to argue at length and repeatedly with staff over the cost of refreshments. This would seem to be in accord with expressions of compassion for the poor over the cost of attendance found in the Saturday Review, with Bobby even having trouble with his catalogue. However, his

227 Tom Treddlehoyle’s Trip to Lunnan, to see Paxton’s Great Glass Lantern, Leeds, Alice Mann, 1851, p.23. Of Burd and Sons Window Blinds - ‘he war no blockhead at bed dun ‘em, for thay wor reight nice’.
228 Bobby Shuttle and his Wofle Sayroh’s visit to Manchester un th’Greight Hert Treasures Palace, Manchester, John Heywood, 1857, p.64. He was reluctant to buy in the first place, considering it overpriced, but the sight of the interior changed his mind. After ‘quertuer uv un beawr’s bother wi’’ he found the British portrait gallery.
desire was not to eat in the refreshment room, but to drink, and although the price of sixpence a bottle for bitter ale deters him briefly, the book concludes with Sarah and him eventually returning to the second-class room and pursuing inebriation despite their limited finances.

Bailey argues that the perpetuation of a tradition of a 'loutish stereotype' in works such as these provided readers with 'an implicit confirmation of bourgeois superiority of manners and morals'. This sense of superiority over the working class led to the expression of pity as well as mockery in the literature of the Manchester Exhibition. An article in the Art Treasures Examiner entitled 'The Functions of Art', published in early August, reported that the workers present had been frequently heard to complain that there was nothing to see in the Exhibition. In order to explain this, the author provided a harsher version of the liberal reasoning of Dickens and Scharf mentioned above; they could not, he maintained, be held responsible for such comments as they were 'but gnomes groping in the earthy darkness of ignorance and of instincts merely animal'. Others did not make this (albeit limited) attempt at understanding, and expressed only contemptuous wonder at the seeming mental limitations of the masses. E.H. Weeks, for example, in his address at the closing of the Exhibition, stated that:

To multitudes, a village sign board, in flaring colours, would be just as pretty or prettier (for so would they speak of it) than some of the finest conceptions the Exhibition contained.

There is a sense here of a difference that is both extreme and fixed, of the working class being beyond the reaches of any cultural evangelism due to the deadening effects of their lifestyles, routines and experience. This was the reason most commonly

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229 Bailey, Leisure and Class, p. 105.
230 'The Functions of Art', Art Treasures Examiner, p. 176. The author is identified only as 'R.H.'
identified for their lack of engagement with the display. It was widely hoped that the
effects of art would cause the working class to improve their poor domestic habits and
wretched living conditions. Many, however, concluded that they had been corrupted
too much by these factors already, and were now incapable of elevating themselves,
even with the assistance of art. The author of ‘The Function of Art’ lamented ‘the
lowering tendencies of common life, which are too apt to engulf the whole nature’.232
One of these tendencies, that of excessive alcohol consumption, was of particular
concern, and there are many references to the worker’s inclination towards ‘indulging
sensual propensities’.233 In the expression of a sentiment to be later echoed by Weeks,
Jerrold asked how many attendees of the Exhibition would see ‘as many wonders of
skill in the red lion of the village alehouse as in the sublime creations of Raphael?’ 234
The attraction of the alehouse sign to the working man is not, it is implied, an aesthetic
one alone.

Alcohol was present at the Art Treasures Exhibition in plentiful supply.235 The
working class demonstrated that they were beyond middle-class control in the space of
the gallery, and would reject or ignore any discipline which was imposed upon them;
as a result, anxiety rose over the potential of the event to be abused for the purposes
of intoxication. Arrests for drunkenness in the building were made,236 and the fact that
a major temperance rally was held in Manchester to coincide with the Exhibition
indicates the serious manner in which the problem was viewed by a section of the

232 Art Treasures Examiner, p. 176.
235 Art Treasures Examiner, p. 1. The supplies laid on in the refreshment rooms
included a thousand barrels of ale, nine hundred butts of London porter and ‘some
thousand or two’ dozen-bottle cases of wine.
236 Manchester Guardian, 4th September 1857, p. 4. It is here reported that Thomas
Cooper, a cotton-spinner, was fined 5s. for drunkenness in the exhibition building.
22nd September, p. 4. John Keating, a soldier, who had been drunk at the Old Trafford
railway station and assaulted a porter, was fined £5, which he couldn’t pay; as a result
he was committed for 2 months.
community. Concern was also expressed at the Great Exhibition over the possibility of the occasion being abused by those seeking 'the gratification of sensuality and intemperance', and the presence of those who would take advantage of the holiday atmosphere in this manner was regarded as an attendant risk of any large-scale public exhibition. At the Art Treasures Exhibition, however, the evils of alcohol found a parallel on the walls of the gallery. In his address, E.H. Weeks mentioned the concern that had grown over the course of the Exhibition's run amongst 'conscientious Christian men' that the works of the old masters on display may actually provoke 'evil desires' amongst the working class. They were anxious, he declared:

lest the exhibition of so many Roman Catholic symbols and scenes, pictures and paintings, might lead some of the superficial and impressionable astray into that pernicious heresy, or at least familiarise their minds with that which may hereafter be turned to evil account.

Much as it was possible to abuse the literal feast of the Art Treasures Exhibition for the purposes of intoxication, so it was thought that the metaphorical feast of the display could be likewise turned to evil account by the ignorant masses. Saloons A and B contained many works whose subject matter was the 'symbols and scenes' of Catholic dogma; the danger certain commentators perceived was that the crowd would glut itself on this one aspect of the feast, which could lead them only to heretical turpitude.

Weeks' statements reflect the anti-Catholic sentiment that was prevalent in many areas of British society in the 1850s following the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850 by Pope Pius IX, which was received by many as an open act of

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237 Manchester Courier, 5th Sept. 1857, p.3. On the 1st of September, attendance at the Exhibition was swelled by 1500 by the presence of a large temperance demonstration, who were addressed in the second-class refreshment room extension by 'the well-known American temperance advocate' J.B.Gough.
238 The Palace of Glass, p.128.
239 Weeks, The Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition, p.11.
Papa! aggression. The second half of the century was marked by efforts to increase the piety and religious observance of the working class, to draw in the many erring members of the flock. Manchester was a region of particular denominational tension, due to high numbers of Irish immigrants; by the 1850s, Lancashire had over 200,000, attracted by the prospect of employment in the factories and mills. Of these, some 85 percent were Catholic, leading to much anti-Catholic activity, and, in turn, violent responses from the Catholic community itself. The Papal aggression of 1850 added stimulus to the exertions of both sides in this parochial conflict, which raged throughout the decade. The Manchester Courier reported a number of incidents of ‘Popish turbulence’ on the streets of the city over the course of the Art Treasures Exhibition’s run, which doubtless gave the issue an immediacy it may have lacked elsewhere in the country. The fear regarding the Exhibition, voiced by Weeks, was that the influence of Christian art, or indeed any religious painting, might attract the ignorant to the wrong denomination, or somehow further the cause of Papism at the expense of the Church of England. Such anxieties were not entirely without foundation; Wiseman, who was made a cardinal in 1850, had characterised exposure to the Christian painting of the past as a fundamentally Catholic experience. In 1847, when writing on the public’s appreciation of Fraenca’s Pieta in the National Gallery, which he regarded as a prime example of Christian art, he declared the populace to be ‘feeling, if they do not fully comprehend, the essentially Catholic spirituality of the scene, and the deep mysteries which it conceals.’

242 Manchester Courier, 13th June 1857, p.7. A report is provided of an aggressive priest, unrepentant before a magistrate after being accused of assaulting a Protestant scripture reader: ‘this being the temper and bearing of their priesthood, it is hardly surprising that their ignorant followers should display a strong partiality for open violence, and that the police should have their hands full of Popish turbulence.’
contained six works attributed to Francia, and many others by his contemporaries; it thus contained, in the view of both Protestants and Catholics, a large number of Catholic beacons, which transmitted explicitly denominational sentiments to all who stood before them.

These fears were not taken seriously by all, however. Bobby Shuttle, who found himself at one point on his desultory tour 'lookin' yerstfully at a big pictur which th'catalog said wur a "triptych", is so hopelessly ill-equipped intellectually that he can make nothing of such art at all. Similar conclusions were reached by the Athenaeum and the Spectator, as discussed above; there could be no danger of the multitude being led astray by something that was entirely beyond their meagre comprehensive abilities. A notable care is taken nonetheless in popular guides such as A Peep at the Pictures to lace its commentary of Catholic art with Protestant propaganda in order to nullify any religious potency the images might have. The tactic employed in the text is similar to that utilised by Jameson in Sacred and Legendary Art, when she stressed that Catholic 'legends' were to be understood as 'lovely allegories to which the world listened in its dreamy childhood'. More of an attempt is made, however, to contrast the religious sensibility which the paintings were understood to display with the more rational theology of modern Protestantism; the guidebook attempts to make an experience with 'primitive' painting a lesson in the comparative sophistication of the nineteenth-century Anglican Church.

244 Scharf, Catalogue, pp.19-22. These were two versions of the Baptism (nos.81 and 132), a Virgin and Child and St. Joseph (no.108), two versions of the Virgin and Child (nos.124 and 127), and a St. Roche (no.146).
245 Bobby Shuttle, p.67.
246 See chapter 1, section V, p.73.
247 A Peep at the Pictures, p.1. Of the iconography: 'we can fancy how a story told from one generation to another, heard perhaps by a child on its father's knee and then by him remembered and repeated, would be changed by forgetfulness, until, what with alterations and additions, little trace of the original facts remained.' Modern Protestantism, in contrast, did not attempt to present its adherents with folklore dressed up as religious truth, in order to explain away the machinations of the universe: 'the more we know of the earth and its wonders, the more we feel the
Over the course of the Exhibition, the anxiety clearly grew that, in contradiction to much of the early idealism which predicted moral elevation, exposure to ancient art could have a negative effect on the populace, such was their ignorant impressibility, leading them to sin and even heresy. These fears were based in the fact that art was largely alien to the working class, and their reaction to it could not be predicted. The behavioural variables involved meant that an operative might fail to attend at all, or enter the building and then promptly leave, or find within the pictures of the Exhibition enough spiritual profundity to alter the nature of his religious belief. The solution to this uncertain situation was regarded by some as being a more effective level of art-historical instruction in British society. The Manchester Courier declared that within the hall at Old Trafford it was ‘painfully evident that the majority of visitors were unable to appreciate the worth of the matchless treasures around them’, going on to state that:

It will take another generation to educate the people to a proper understanding of such an exhibition; in the mean time, it will have the effect of pointing out one of the wants of the age - art education - and the knowledge of a want is the first step towards its being rectified.\[^248^\]

Others concurred with this assessment; the Saturday Review, for example, concluded its coverage of the undertaking by declaring that it had been ‘premature’, arguing that with regards to the working class ‘something more must be done for the elevation of their taste and the embellishment of their life’ before ‘our labourers can be expected to value properly a display of the wonders of ancient art’.\[^249^\] The idealism that had informed the concept of the gallery of education was exploded as the process of popular art instruction was shown to be more complex than simply placing an uninformed crowd in a systematically arranged gallery. The manifold failures of the

\[^248^\] Manchester Courier, 6th June 1857, p.7.
Manchester Exhibition inspired demands, such as those quoted above, for a fundamental reconsideration of art education on a conceptual level; the limited value of the methods adopted at Old Trafford to an entirely untrained multitude had been convincingly demonstrated. The Art Treasures Exhibition appeared deeply misconceived to these commentators. Intended as an exercise in social unity, it had rather exposed the acrimonious divisions, and inherent contradictions that characterised class relations in mid-nineteenth century Britain.
Chapter Four

From Spirit to Nature, from the Divine to the Human: Moral Art History Refuted

The connections between the discourse of moral art history and the rise in democratic feeling with regards to art education which occurred over the course of the 1840s and 1850s have been established in the previous three chapters. Ancient art, particularly that of the Italian quattrocento and earlier, was widely understood to be a repository of moral purity which should be made accessible to all, for the purposes of instruction and edification. This conception had been at the root of much of the criticism of the British Institution and National Gallery, and had provided motivation for the administrators of the Art Treasures Exhibition. However, the experience of the Manchester Exhibition had revealed the many obstacles facing would-be educators which were not properly addressed by the idealisms of moral art history and the historicist attitudes it had engendered. This final chapter is largely concerned with the further difficulties encountered in works of art criticism, general history and historiographic fiction with the discourse of moral art history. Much was written over the course of the 1850s on the flaws and logical gaps in the approach; there was a general critique of both the assumptions on which it was founded, and the painting which it championed. As discussed in the previous chapter, British society was riven by religious tensions throughout this decade, and objections to moral art history in the periodical press increasingly focused upon its alleged Catholic sympathies. Such denominational aggression was complemented by a sense that religious morality, and the reverence for unsullied divinity which accompanied it, was an inadequate foundation for the appreciation of old master painting. This intellectual realisation appeared in diverse texts, from the criticism of Ruskin, to the poetry of Robert
Browning and prose of George Eliot. This chapter will also include discussion of the
establishment and rise of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and the reception of its
productions in the English art world. Fears aroused by this movement, which primarily
corrected its supposedly retrogressive tendencies, had a great effect upon the
appreciation of the Italian 'primitives' in England during the 1850s. The artistic
theories of the Pre-Raphaelites themselves will also be considered, as well as their
attitudes towards their namesakes; I will argue that these constitute a significant move
away from the conceptions and arguments of moral art history.

I. Moral Art History in the 1850s: Anna Jameson, Austen Layard and the
Arundel Society

Many critics continued to make judgements and pronouncements indebted to moral art
history throughout the 1850s; the previous chapter, for example, included discussion
of the reliance by many commentators on the discourse's principles when reviewing
the old master salons of the Art Treasures Exhibition. A limited heritage can also be
observed in more formal academic works, a notable instance of which is Memoirs of
the Dukes of Urbino (1851) by James Dennistoun. This text was not primarily
art-historical in nature; Dennistoun's study encompassed political, economic and social
issues as well as cultural ones, and covered over 400 years of Italian history, from the
fourteenth century to the eighteenth. Included within it, however, was a lengthy
account of the Umbrian school of painting, which concentrated upon the fifteenth
century, and the careers of artists such as Perugino, Fra Angelico and the young
Raphael. The general tone of Dennistoun's volumes is positive, the intention of the
author clearly being to glorify the achievements of Umbria and its rulers. In that
Umbria was identified by Rio as being a major point of origin for the mystic school,
the tenets of moral art history lent themselves to a favourable estimation of the artistic

1See chapter 3, section II, pp.213-6.
productions of the region. They were accordingly stressed throughout the art-historical chapters of the Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino, and Dennistoun openly acknowledged his debt to several of the moral art historians identified in chapter one, including Rio himself. He wrote of the need for an industrious interpretative process that went beyond executive details in a search for the 'grandeur of sentiment' contained within a work of earlier art, and was especially insistent on the consideration of original function and significance when assessing 'primitive' painting. Of early frescoes, and their unpalatability to many connoisseurial eyes, he declared that:

In the absence of priests, they became guides to popular devotion, and consequently were addressed to spectators who came to worship, not to criticise; whose credulous enthusiasm was nourished by the yearnings of the heart, not by the cold judgement of the eye.

The distinction between the modern and the ancient criterion of judgement was thus established, and the appreciation of early Italian art made a question of historical context rather than stylistic criticism. In order to validate such study in terms of religious denomination, Dennistoun refers to the concept of the Church Eternal, arguing that 'whatever may now be alleged against the dogmas or legends embodied by early artists, they were then universally received'. Prevailing opinion regarding Catholicism in any form was especially hostile at the time of the publication of the

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2 James Dennistoun, Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino. Illustrating the Arms, Arts and Literature of Italy from 1440-1630, 3 vols., London, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1851, vol.II, p.165. Lindsay's Sketches of the History of Christian Art is called 'the best history of Christian art yet produced'; Ruskin is praised as one whose 'earnest feelings and happy thoughts are often most happily expressed' (p.164); Rio is called 'the eloquent elucidator of sacred art' (p.169).

3 Id., p.156. "Those who look with intelligence upon pictures which, to the casual glance of the uninformd spectator, are mere rude and monstrous representations, will often recognise in them a grandeur of sentiment, and a majesty of expression, altogether wanting in more matured productions, wherein truth to nature is manifested through unimportant accessories or combined with trivial details."

4 Id., p.164.

5 Id., p.156.
Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino due to the Papal Aggression of the previous year, as discussed in chapter three; Dennistoun was clearly obliged to defend his studies from any possible charges of sympathy with the Roman Catholic establishment of the mid-nineteenth century.

The arguments of original function and the Church Eternal continued to provide a basis for the work of Anna Jameson, and are evoked by her as a theological disclaimer in the introductions of her two major publications of the 1850s, the Legends of the Monastic Orders of 1850, and the Legends of the Madonna of 1852. The earlier text, for example, opens with the assertion that religious art ought to have:

"a deep, a lasting, a universal interest; that even where the impersonation has been, through ignorance or incapacity, most imperfect and inadequate, it is still consecrated through its original purpose, and through its relation to what we hold to be most sacred, most venerable, most beautiful, and most gracious, on earth or in heaven."

Jameson was identified in chapter one as the writer whose adoption of the principles of De la Poésie Chrétienne was the most partial of those studied, yet her work of the 1850s reveals that it was upon her that they had their most enduring influence. Despite the controversy it caused, she still insisted in 1852 that images of Mariolatry were worthy objects for Protestant attention and admiration, urging her readers to 'seek to comprehend the dominant idea lying behind the mere representation'. The Spectator in particular objected to a perceived toleration on Jameson’s part for the dogmas of Papism, which will be discussed later in the chapter. What is here important is the fact that in the writing of both Jameson and Dennistoun, the discourse of moral art history still had considerable utility as a means of explaining the value of earlier Italian art and its subject matter in the context of a broader study.

\[6\] Anna Jameson, Legends of the Monastic Orders as represented in the Fine Arts, London, Longmans, Green and Co, 1891 (1850), introduction p.i.
\[7\] Jameson, Legends of the Madonna, preface p.xviii.
Appreciation of the discourse as an instrument of instruction can also be detected in the activities of the Arundel Society. As mentioned in chapter two, this organisation was founded in 1848, a year in which interest in 'primitive' painting reached a peak in cultured society. Several familiar names were associated with the Society at the time of its inception; Ruskin, Lord Lindsay, Lord Ward, Samuel Rogers and Charles Eastlake were all members of the council formed to select the paintings on which the funds and efforts of the Society would be expended. The most active and committed council member was Austen Layard, who undertook numerous trips to Italy on the Society's behalf over the course of the 1850s, and, in 1856, even provided the money for the circulation of a chromolithograph and five line engravings of Perugino's Martyrdom of St. Sebastian at Panicale. The Arundel Society can be considered as a concrete manifestation of the educational and democratic idealism inspired by moral art history. From the outset, it was conceived as having a primarily didactic purpose, the declared intention of its founders being to spread familiarity with the figures and images of art history by means of reproductions that were both affordable and of a high quality, accompanied by explicatory essays by acknowledged experts. Initially, the historical scope of its interests was broad, and included classical as well as Christian productions; for example, in an article on the Society for the Quarterly Review of 1858, which was part retrospective and part advertisement, Layard wrote that the earliest prints produced for general sale were a series of scenes taken from the Elgin marbles. By the 1850s, however, the attentions of the council, and thus the prints it commissioned, were devoted to Italian painting of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This concentration can be partly ascribed to the ascendancy of

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8See chapter 2, section III, p.129.
9Robyn Cooper, 'The Popularisation of Renaissance Art in Victorian England: The Arundel Society', *Art History*, vol.1, no.3, September 1978, p.264. There were 14 members in total in the Society's council; from 1855 onwards, they were elected at the annual general meeting.
10Layard, 'The Publications', p.278. These were soon followed by 170 facsimiles from ancient ivory carvings.
such art in the critical canon, and the particular interests of certain council members; it was also due to the wider relevance of the 'primitives' to the proclaimed goals of the Society.

As in commentary on the displays of the National Gallery, British Institution and Art Treasures Exhibition, early Italian art was taken to symbolise the need for learning in the appreciation of old master painting by the administrators of the Arundel Society. It was also understood to represent a counterpoint to the abuses of the private collector, for which the Society wished to compensate. Its prospectus, which was published in a summarised form by the Art-Journal in 1849, questioned the motives of the collector in a similar manner to the critics in the Art Treasures Palace at Old Trafford, or the Summer Exhibition of the British Institution, declaring that ownership was too often looked on as 'an exhibition of wealth, or, at best, as a refined pursuit'. A marked failure was observed amongst the majority of collectors to consider the higher moral purpose of ancient art, and the possibilities that could be opened up if it were made accessible to a wider public. It was here that the council saw its task as lying. The Arundel Society, the prospectus announced:

proposes to do the best that any influence extrinsic can do; it undertakes to collect diligently and with discrimination the highest and best examples of art, and to bring them before hundreds of English minds, which would never otherwise have been touched by such guiding and elevating influences.\(^\text{11}\)

There is here a fundamental similarity of intention with the Art Treasures Exhibition, but rather than attempt to bring the people to art, the council sought to bring art to the people by means of mechanical reproduction. Problems were also encountered, however, involving compromise and contradiction regarding this seemingly unambiguous stance towards issues of education and possession, which will be explored later in the chapter.

\(^{11}\) Art-Journal, vol.11, 1849, p.207.
The prospectus explained that the concentration of the Society on early Italian art was founded in a desire to improve both public taste and the practice of painting by advancing down 'hitherto untrodden paths'. Students, whether they be professional or not, would then be able to trace 'the progress of art from its earliest efforts'.12 This concern with the completion of an awareness of the entire history of art in the popular and artistic consciousness is akin to both the purchasing policy of the National Gallery during the 1850s, and the inclusive critical approach of Jameson. All sought not only to familiarise a reader or viewer with the 'primitive' schools, but also to stress their place in a teleological 'progress of art'. Indeed, Jameson openly recognised that her audience and that of the Arundel Society were largely the same, and was careful to cross-reference her arguments with its publications.13 Layard's attitude regarding the Society's choice of subject was more strident. His Quarterly Review article reveals that several of the more contentious aspects of moral art history continued to inform the thinking of one of the more prominent members of the council several years after they had been abandoned, or at least heavily modified, by those British writers who had adopted them in the 1840s. The age of the Italian 'primitives' is declared 'the golden age of modern art', against which all later painting is unfavourably compared. Layard laments the time when:

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\text{the deep religious feeling of the Middle Ages, that union of child-like faith with an earnest impatience of the vices and powers of priestcraft, gave way to an uninquiring pietism and a cowardly resignation to priestly authority, the nimble brush of the academies swept over the solemn, heartfelt outpourings of the earlier masters, bearing in their stead theatrical groups of muscular apostles and} \]

12Ibid.
13Jameson, Legends of the Monastic Orders, introduction, p.xxix. For example, she here refers to a Crucifixion by Fra Angelico, executed in fresco in the San Marco in Florence, 'because it is important as a chef-d'oeuvre of one of the greatest of the early artists, Angelico da Fiesole; and because, having been recently engraved for the Arundel Society, it is likely to be in the hands of many, and convenient for immediate reference.'
anatomic saints, happily, for the most part, invisible in varnish and
chiaro-scuro.14

This is the same fall of painting identified by Rio in De la Poésie Chrétienne, in which
the perceived decadence of the Renaissance infected both the art and life of Italy.
Layard also declared his faith in the notion that the moral character of an artist as a
man would be reflected in his work; he even stated that 'a pure and holy life' was an
essential prerequisite for any successful religious painter of the fourteenth and fifteenth
centuries. Like The Times' correspondent at the Art Treasures Exhibition, Layard
regarded the functionality of early Italian art as being one of its most praiseworthy
aspects. He compared the role of 'these old painters' in society with that of the
priesthood, in that both were concerned with the religious education of the illiterate
multitude, and 'the one taught by the eye, as the other did through the ear'.15

The fresco was central to this conception of public art, of pictures painted 'for the
edification of men in general, and not for the gratification of individuals'. Layard
devotes several pages of his article to extolling the manifold virtues of the form,
judging the history of fresco to be 'the true history of painting in its highest and most
spiritual development'.16 However, the greatest works of the early painters were
denied to the English populace for the same reasons that they were unattainable for
private collectors. The council of the Arundel Society saw the solution to this problem
to be the cheap reproduction, and hence the vast majority of its publications attempted
to replicate scenes from the fresco cycles of fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italy.
Layard stated that the Society's programme of reproductions was intended to 'enable
those who lack the advantage of seeing the frescoes themselves, to understand their
character and merits'.17 The Society can thus here be seen to share the central
paradox of popular art education regarding early Italian painting. An interest is

15Ibid., p.281.
16Ibid., pp.286-7.
17Ibid., p.278.
declared in assisting the less fortunate members of society, who were unable to afford a visit to Italy itself, yet as the experience of the Art Treasures Exhibition demonstrated, it was only those with a degree of wealth and prior education who actually appeared to care for 'primitive' pictures at all. Opinions expressed in the press regarding the wider influence of the Society’s exertions were certainly not optimistic. For example, when a display of the Society’s productions was opened in the Crystal Palace at Sydenham in October 1855, William Rossetti stated in the Crayon that despite the quality of the engravings exhibited, 'on the general public their presumable effect may be rated at zero.'18

II. Art in ‘A Den of Monkeys’: English Fears Concerning the Preservation of the Frescoes of Italy

Those who were enthusiastic about the ‘primitives’ were generally able to fund repeated visits to Italy, and as the comments of critics before the displays of the British Institution and Art Treasures Exhibition reveal, pilgrimages to see the frescoes of the early masters were seen as a vital undertaking for anyone seeking to develop a serious and worthwhile interest in their work. Italy accordingly became the site where many of the conflicts inherent in the British appreciation of old master painting became apparent during the period covered by this thesis. Many of those who embarked upon a tour of the fresco cycles of the country were outraged and disappointed by what they encountered; these reactions were provoked not by the artistic quality of the pictures, but their physical condition. The rise in interest in the painting of the earlier schools meant that those who travelled in order to study their productions were frequently confronted with what they took to be evidence of centuries of abuse and neglect.

Whilst in Pisa in May 1845 researching the second volume of Modern Painters, Ruskin

wrote to his father of the lamentable state of the frescoes of the Campo Santo, declaring that ‘these wonderful monuments are rotting every day.’ His anxiety on this point continued unabated in the years that followed; in his second lecture on ‘The Political Economy of Art’ delivered in Manchester in 1857, for example, he impressed upon his audience the urgency of the situation, stating that Giotto’s frescoes at Assisi ‘are perishing at this moment for want of decent care.’ Layard shared this concern, and regarded the activities of the Arundel Society as having an additional value in that they created an accurate visual record of masterpieces that would perhaps soon no longer exist. He estimated in the Quarterly Review that ‘half; if not more than half’ of the ‘great frescoes’ of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had already been destroyed, damaged beyond repair or painted over.

The responsibility for this ruinous state of affairs was commonly assigned to the modern Italian people. In his Manchester lecture, Ruskin portrayed them as bestial and mischievous beings, whose ignorant interference with art inevitably led to its destruction; he compared the experience of studying in Italy to ‘living and working in a den of monkeys’. Layard was equally hostile, describing the variety of injuries and defacements visited upon religious works by the Roman Catholic clergy in the years since their execution. He wrote with searing sarcasm of the ‘age of whitewash’ which followed the absurdities of high mannerism, when priests and their underlings ‘with the lime-pail in one hand and the broom in the other, restored the walls disfigured by old pictures’. The reason for this purgation, Layard continued, was the overbearing vanity of the Papal authorities; he asserted that the works of Giotto and his peers did not always afford monks and Popes ‘the highest respect and authority’, and therefore

19 Shapiro (ed.), Letters, p.61. From a letter to his father, Pisa, 13th May.
earned themselves obliteraton. Notions of the Church Eternal can here be detected; Layard implies that the earlier artists were free from the authoritarian constraints and mandatory deference of the post-Reformation Catholic church.

The judgements of both Ruskin and Layard are founded in a belief that the Italy that had succeeded the era of ‘Christian’ art was unworthy of its heritage. This view was widespread among British intellectuals; Robert Browning, although fond enough of the country to live there for the duration of his 15-year marriage to Elizabeth Barrett, dramatically expressed it in his poem ‘Old Pictures in Florence’, which was written in the city of the title in the early 1850s, and then included in the anthology Men and Women of 1855. The narrator imagines that the ghosts of the early painters stand ‘Watching each fresco flaked and rasped, Blocked up, knocked out, or whitewashed o’er’, helpless before the ignorance of their heirs, and able only to shake their heads in dismay and wander off down the ‘black streets’ of a forgotten medieval Florence. He also asserts that things would have been different if the pictures had been on the walls of English churches. In Italy:

The works on the wall must take their chance,  
‘Works never conceded to England’s thick clime!  
(I hope they prefer their inheritance  
Of a bucketful of Italian quick-lime.)

The irony of the situation is clearly indicated; sophisticated England, denied frescoes of its own by the arbitrariness of climate (or so it was believed), was forced to witness an inferior nation blessed with a rich artistic legacy squander it through acts of destructive stupidity. The disadvantages of England are here presented as a decidedly lesser evil when compared with those of Italy, a view with which Layard vigorously concurred. He indignantly wrote:

Talk of London smoke! why, Italian neglect, indifference and ignorance have done more to deprive the world of some of its noblest and most precious monuments than could be accomplished by the atmospheres of ten Londons!  

Concern over 'primitive' frescoes is here placed in relation to contemporaneous debate over the location of the National Gallery, with Layard asserting that more important artworks were receiving far worse treatment in the churches of Italy. It could be argued that an implicit comparison is being drawn between modern Italy and the private collectors of England. Both were identified by Layard as neglecting the duty of custodianship, which had been granted to them by accidents of fortune or location, and allowing masterpieces to decay when they could easily have taken preventative action. At the Art Treasures Exhibition, he accused collectors of robbing the world of examples of great art through their ignorant apathy regarding the condition of their possessions, and the same crime is attributed to the Italian ecclesiastical authorities who have allowed nails to be driven into the 'most precious monuments' that adorn the walls of their churches. Indeed, the offence of the Italians was further magnified by the greater significance given by English experts to the fresco cycles which were placed in their care.

Layard's hostility was not limited to the philistine priesthood of the Catholic church, however. In addition to the actual physical assaults visited upon the artworks by whitewash, nails and architectural modification, he regarded the general atmosphere of a Catholic place of worship to be extremely injurious to any frescoes that may exist within it. He describes how 'the fumes of incense and the smoke of a thousand tapers roll up from the altars, and uniting with the fetid exhalations of the Italian crowd, curl round the walls.' This conception suggests potential conflicts with the precepts

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26 See chapter 2, section VII, p.184.
27 See chapter 3, section IV, p.239.
of moral art history. It is based in anti-Catholicism; incense was often used by
Protestant commentators as a symbol of the intoxication and obfuscation they believed
to be involved in Roman Catholic ritual. Here, it both obscures and ultimately impairs
the pure spiritual message transmitted by the early frescoes. It could be argued that
this contradicts the consideration of original function and context repeatedly
emphasised in the work of moral art historians, including Layard himself. To claim that
'Christian' art was ill-served by the conditions of the building it was painted for was
essentially to prioritise its intellectual significance over its devotional function, which
could be seen to run contrary to the spiritual creed of Rio. The idea of the Church
Eternal can once again be detected in Layard's comments; he implies that remnants of
the purity of the united Church are being literally sullied by the filth of its
post-Reformation successor.

The dirt generated by the copious combustion involved in modern Catholic services
was only one source of contamination identified by Layard in the above quotation. The
other was the congregation themselves, and he here grafts a sub-human
characterisation onto the Italian people that is almost as extreme as those found in the
writing of Ruskin. The 'fetid exhalations' he describes call immediately to mind the
anxieties regarding working-class attendance at the National Gallery, as discussed in
chapter two.29 The combination of opinions expressed by Layard appear paradoxical;
he stresses the democratic nature of the fresco as a form, and identifies its instructive
public role as being its greatest virtue, yet presents the presence of the populace before
the pictures themselves as a threat, rather than as evidence of these admirable qualities
in action. Class issues are in part responsible for this, with the presence of the
multitude before esoteric early paintings causing the expert some unease, as it had
done at the Art Treasures Exhibition. The coexistence of an abstract democratic
idealism with a marked suspicion of the uninitiated in the spaces of display was an

29See chapter 2, section VII, pp.182-3.
enduring contradiction of moral art history. However, the question of nationality and
denominational difference is perhaps of greater significance here. This filthy crowd are
not gathered for an experience with art, but a religious service for which a Protestant
commentator could feel only scorn; the paintings are no longer an integral part of this
worship, Layard implies, and are consequently allowed to decay in the smoky recesses
of the church.

Layard's article contains numerous expressions of his belief that the condition of the
monuments of religious art in Italy would have continued to decline if it had not been
for the intervention of an increasing number of foreign visitors and scholars. He
recounts how the decomposition of the fresco cycles had slowed in recent years as
'intelligent travellers indignantly exposed it'. The English are predictably granted a
large proportion of the credit for the few positive steps that had been taken. For
example, Layard recounts the story of the discovery of a Portrait of Dante which was
believed to be by Giotto in the Chapel of Podesta by Seymour Kirkup. This chapel had
been converted into a prison, and the interior entirely whitewashed. Kirkup's find had
been greeted with massive popular enthusiasm in Florence; Layard remarked of this
reaction that 'they appear to have forgotten that it was not to one of themselves that
they owed this delivery from a national reproach.'

More radical solutions were suggested to the Italians' neglect of their art than the
thankless efforts described above. During the early 1860s, rumours abounded in
cultured circles that the Arundel Society was involved in negotiations with the
Gradenigo family, the owners of the Arena Chapel, for the purchase, detachment and
removal of its Giotto frescoes. This would appear to be an absolute contradiction of
the argument of original function; the early frescoes were here reduced to the status of

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31 Ibid., p.293.
mere commodities which could be purchased from private owners, and subjected to the logic of the commercial art world, which they were frequently understood elsewhere to oppose and even undermine. The scheme proved impractical, however, and was soon abandoned; besides the possibility of damage to the works themselves, the difficulty of exporting major artworks from Italy was increasing due to the vigilance of the country’s government, who, as Eastlake experienced during the 1850s, were keen to staunch the flow of Italian paintings to foreign galleries. Blackwood’s commented that ‘fortunately for Italy, but unhappily for England, these wall-pictures admit of no ready removal’, going on to lament that they ‘must ever remain, in the legal phrase, as fixtures to the freehold’. 33 Ruskin’s answer to the problem was based in this legal and financial viewpoint; if the paintings were ‘fixtures to the freehold’, then Englishmen must acquire the freehold. In 1857, he informed his Manchester audience that it was England’s responsibility, as the world’s wealthiest nation, to invest in the maintenance of foreign sites of art historical importance. This should be done by individuals, he declared, rather than the state, arguing that:

the holding of property abroad, and the personal efforts of Englishmen to redeem the condition of foreign nations, are among the most direct pieces of duty which our wealth renders incumbent upon us.34

This idea had long been in his mind, and he thought the Italians, in their animalistic greed, would eagerly accept any deal which provided financial reimbursement.35 The proposal was essentially imperialistic, with rich men replacing occupying armies, and property deals supplanting military action as the means by which British authority was to be established. The ‘duty’ described by Ruskin, although ostensibly to be taken on for the benefit of mankind, involved the establishment of a means of control. This

33 Blackwood’s, vol.68, July-December 1860, p.470.
35 Shapiro (ed.), Letters, p.100. For example, from a letter to his father, Florence, 5th June 1845: ‘I don’t think the Italians have soul enough to feel anything about foreigners paying for their buildings. If the English would give the money, they would take it soon enough’.
would allow the restriction of access to frescoes created for the spiritual benefit of the Italian public, who, given the antipathy generally felt towards them, would undoubtedly have been the first victims of an exclusive entrance policy imposed by English proprietors. Ultimately, these schemes both demonstrate that despite the populist idealism which declared early Italian frescoes to be beyond purchase, and indivisibly bound to their original devotional function, it was to the possibilities of wealth, and the emancipation of art from its country of origin, that English experts immediately looked when attempting to solve problems of conservation.

III. ‘English-Ridden’ Italy: Private Collecting and Mass Tourism

Ruskin and Layard both appear to have been motivated by an academic urge to preserve the objects of their study, and this manifested itself at times, in their work, as a desire to get as much ancient art as possible either into England, or under direct English control. Neither of the plans mentioned above were implemented: the fresco cycles of Italy proved to be truly beyond the reach of money. Panel paintings and canvases, however, were not, and both critics display a degree of ambivalence towards the collecting activities of individuals whilst abroad. In his second lecture on ‘The Political Economy of Art’, Ruskin advised his audience not to buy pictures for themselves, and to avoid foreign dealers, yet also argued that private ownership was not necessarily a bad thing in itself. The people who buy paintings, he claimed, were often ‘just the people who are fond of them’, and ‘so long as works of art are scattered through the nation, no universal destruction of them is possible’.36

Layard’s views were more guarded, as his review of the Art Treasures Exhibition might suggest.37 His article on the National Gallery, published in the Quarterly Review

37See chapter 3, section IV, pps.235-6, 239-40.
in 1859, demonstrates his awareness of the dichotomy between moral art history and the concerns for preservation as they related to private ownership. The panel paintings of the fifteenth-century artists are described as the works of men who had ‘devoted their genius to the service of religion and to public instruction’, which were subsequently ‘torn from the sanctuaries in which they had placed them and hung in galleries to gratify private vanity or ambition’. Layard recognises, however, that these ‘sanctuaries’ were religious rather than artistic, and pictures which had been removed from them had been ‘rescued from future neglect and destruction’. As a result, his description of English efforts to purchase what few paintings remained in their original ‘sanctuaries’, and then smuggle them past the increasingly vigilant Italian authorities, assigns unequivocal moral superiority to his countrymen. Information is provided of the restrictions enforced by the Italian government on the export of art; these are judged to be ‘not due to any real love of art, or to any just appreciation of the true value of the objects themselves’, but rather ‘a foolish jealousy of foreigners’. The situation is deemed especially offensive to the cultivated Englishman considering the state of dilapidation into which the self-righteous Italians were believed to have allowed numerous fresco cycles to sink. Layard’s attitude can be seen as an adaptation of the Tragic narrative employment found in Río’s De la Poésie Chrétienne, as discussed in chapter one. It is implied that the time of spiritual purity, in both Italian art and society, has passed, never to be reclaimed, and whilst consideration of original function might enhance historical understanding, leaving pictures in the locations for which they were intended is to consign them to decay at the hands of incompetent custodians. The removal of paintings to England was thus ultimately regarded as the moral responsibility of a civilised nation, rather than a moral transgression inimical to the intentions of the early Italian artists.

39 Ibid., p.361. The restrictions included decrees that nothing could be sold without government permission, that the government should have the right of pre-emption, and that there should be an export duty of 20% on every sale made.
40 See chapter I, section II, pp.23-4.
The quotations given in the paragraph above refer specifically to the endeavours of Eastlake in Italy on behalf of the National Gallery. Layard found the activities of private individuals, who often possessed considerably less expertise in matters of art appreciation, more difficult to condone. The evidence of their limited powers of judgement was believed to be all too obvious in the displays of the British Institution Summer Exhibition and the Art Treasures Exhibition, as discussed in chapters two and three. Several pages of Layard's review of the Manchester Exhibition is devoted to exposing the subtle confidence tricks employed by Italian dealers in order to sell sub-standard or inauthentic works to unwitting English customers; he comments that these tricks are so intricate in their deception that they alone would 'afford matter for an amusing and instructive article.'

The consequences of the dealers' deceit and the tourists' folly were less entertaining to the art critic at the public loans exhibition, confronted with yet another array of fake Italian masterpieces. Pursuit of art was one of the more refined pastimes open to the increasing number of English visitors to Italy, and often such activity was not stopped by the journey home; Lord Lindsay was among the burgeoning numbers of the wealthy who established long-term commercial relationships with dealers in Italy in order to acquire works for his collection. As mentioned in the previous chapters, this meant more opportunities for unscrupulous dealers to engineer 'discoveries' of lost works by the great masters. This problem was particularly pronounced with regards to the early schools. They were the recognised fashion of the day in terms of old master painting, and the relative lack of interest in them on the part of previous generations meant that greater hopes were held of making a significant find. Also, critical knowledge of the period was still inchoate.

41 Layard, 'The Manchester', pp. 185-7.
42 Brigstocke, Lindsay as a Collector, pp. 303-304. Significantly, Lindsay's dealer was an Englishman, William Spence, who lived in Florence. Having recognised Lindsay's potential as a customer, Spence sold him a number of works over the course of the 1850s, including works attributed to Cosimo Rosselli, Benozzo Gozzoli and Leonardo da Vinci.
even amongst more intellectual visitors, which meant that greater liberties could be taken by sellers regarding the attribution of their wares.

Robert Browning is an interesting example of an Englishman who engaged in picture collecting whilst a member of the English and American community in Florence. This community had a core of long-term residents such as Browning himself, and was continually supplemented by tourists and travellers who were in the city on a more ephemeral basis. It included many with a pronounced interest in the appreciation and purchase of 'primitive' paintings, and had its own particular experts and enthusiasts, with whom Browning was acquainted. Notable amongst these was Seymour Kirkup, mentioned above in connection with the Portrait of Dante found in the Chapel of Podesta, who was a Dante scholar and supposed authority on old master painting, and James Jackson Jarves, a Bostonian millionaire with a mania for art collecting. Under their influence, Browning briefly became a small-scale collector. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote to Anna Jameson in May 1850 that:

Robert has been picking up pictures at a few pounds each, 'hole and corner' pictures which the dealers had not found out; and the other day he covered himself with glory by discovering and seizing (in a corn shop a mile from Florence) five pictures among heaps of trash; and one of the best judges in Florence (Mr. Kirkup) throws out such names for them as Cimabue, Ghirlandaio, Giotto.43

Despite the high regard in which he was held by his contemporaries, including Browning himself,44 doubt has been cast upon Kirkup's expert status in recent scholarship; Leonée Ormond, for example, describes him as extremely unreliable and

44W.M.Rossetti (ed.), Ruskin, Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelitism: Papers 1854-62, London, George Allen, 1899, p.247. In a letter to William Rossetti of 22nd September 1860, Browning recommends that whilst on his imminent tour of Italy, Rossetti should pay a visit to Kirkup, who is 'one of the kindest and learnedest of men.' Kirkup had been acquainted with Rossetti's father, who had also been a scholar of Dante.
prone to 'wild attributions', and indeed at the Browning sale at Sotheby's in 1913 the names given in the catalogue are certainly not as auspicious as those mentioned above.\(^45\) Browning's collecting activities, as his wife's comments indicate, were inspired by a romantic notion, shared by many, of discovering lost masterpieces of ancient art among the detritus of modern Italy. He was not committed to this practice, however, and engaged in it only sporadically; at the time of his departure from the country in 1861 he owned fewer than ten old master paintings. It could be argued that for him the pursuit of art in Italy was a light-hearted recreational activity, to be approached in a very different manner to the rigour and seriousness with which it was undertaken by specialist English collectors such as Alexander Barker, whose intellectual identity was dependent on the contents of their private galleries in a way that Browning's was not.

Browning's verse of this period, however, demonstrates that his engagement with the hunt for 'hole and corner' paintings among the English and American community in Florence was more profound than a brief participation in a sport he soon tired of. 'Old Pictures in Florence' offers a meditation on the mentality behind these picture-collecting activities, and the contradictions Browning perceived within it. Recent criticism has treated the poem as an example of autobiographical verse, due to parallels between Browning's own experiences and those related in the text. Jacob Korg, for instance, describes it as 'a jocular, rambling celebration of the pleasure he took living in Florence, sharing its political aspirations, and studying its art'.\(^46\) I would contend that it is rather to be thought of as a poetic construct, a dramatic monologue akin to 'Fra Lippo Lippi' or 'Andrea del Sarto', both also from *Men and Women*. Browning's narrator is an English private collector in Florence, perhaps an

\(^45\) Leonora Ormond, 'Browning and Painting', in Isobel Armstrong (ed.), *Robert Browning. London*, G. Bell and Sons, 1974, pp 198-9. At the sale, a St Jerome, a Portrait of a Bishop and a Crucifixion are simply listed as 'Tuscan school'.

exaggerated version of himself reduced from the status of poet to narrator for the purpose of self-analysis and criticism. D.Loy Martin describes how the dramatic monologue is used by Browning to bring before the conscious eye the contradictions inherent in nineteenth-century middle-class ideology, which typically takes the form of ‘the opposition of private and general interest’. This assessment is certainly applicable to ‘Old Pictures in Florence’. The narrator, like many others, seeks to furnish himself with examples of the best early Italian art, and proudly asserts the exhaustivity of his taste. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, he laments the destruction of frescoes at the hands of modern Italians, a subject of ‘general interest’ as it involves a loss which will be felt by all and has truly global ramifications. This is immediately juxtaposed, however, with the ‘private interest’ that is portrayed as dominating the views of a collector. The wronged ghosts of the early masters wander off through a city:

Where many a lost work breathes though badly -
Why don’t they bethink them of who has merited?
Why not reveal, while their pictures drear
Such doom, that a captive’s to be out-ferreted?
Why do they never remember me?

Over the course of a few stanzas the narration transforms from a eulogy to the decaying treasures of Italy to the expression of a collector’s self-pitying frustration at his inability to acquire notable works. The narrator is made to appear increasingly ridiculous as he pleads with the retreating phantasms for examples of their art to put in his collection. This begging extends over several verses, with certain early painters being addressed directly and asked to ‘contribute’ samples of their distinctive styles.

48 Browning, ‘Old Pictures’, verse xxiii, p.128: ‘My sculptor is Niccolo the Pisan/My painter—who but Cimabue?/Nor ever was man of them all indeed./From these to Ghiberti and Ghirlandaio/Could say that he missed my critic—need.’
49 ibid., verse xxv, p.128.
50 ibid. For example, verse xxvi: ‘...are you too fine, Taddeo Gaddi/To grant me a
The concerns of the collector, the poem asserts, are fundamentally selfish; the acquisitive impulse entirely supersedes interest in deteriorating fresco cycles in ‘Old Pictures in Florence’. The egotistical aspect of picture collecting is here made blatant, it being clear that the narrator’s primary motivation is not the chance to embellish the ancient art reserves of England, but the personal glory and enhanced connoisseurial reputation that notable purchases were sure to bring. It was perhaps Browning’s perception of an inconsistency between a passionate interest in Italian art history, and the desire to convert as much of it as possible into your personal property, that caused him to cease collecting himself.

As the size of the English community in Florence grew in proportion with the tourist trade that supported it, so did the number of credulous aspirant collectors, whose ignorance and willingness to part with their money lent further encouragement to the copyists and corrupt dealers of Italy. Experiences such as the Art Treasures Exhibition demonstrated to critics and experts the dire consequences of this process, both for attempts at popular art education, and the development of art history as an intellectual discipline, in that it was seen to perpetuate error and inhibit objective study. This was not, however, the sole iniquity that was attributed to the increase in English visitors to the country and their evident interest in the earlier schools. Only a small proportion sought to become collectors, but the majority embarked upon sightseeing tours of major public buildings and their fresco cycles. Layard expressed the fear in the Quarterly Review that more damage might be done to artworks by Italians acting in the interests of their burgeoning tourist trade than by their neglect. He recounted how, in some instances, the political and ecclesiastical authorities, ‘finding that a few pence might be gained by the preservation of objects which attracted the curiosity of

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\text{taste of your intonaco - /Some Jerome that seeks the heaven with a sad eye?/No charulish saint, Lorenzo Monaco?/. Also, verse xxvii, with regards to Pollaiuolo: “No Virgin by him, the somewhat petty./Of finical touch and tempera crumbly - /Could not Alesso Baldovinetti/Contribute so much, I ask him humbly?” (p.129)}
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strangers, suddenly appreciated their importance'. This led to the unleashing upon the pictures of 'a plague more terrible than any that had as yet swept over them': Italian restorers, intent on freshening colours, altering lines and adjusting compositions. Layard argued that the ultimate effect of this practice was much the same as that of the alteration of panels which he had observed at the Manchester Exhibition. He claimed that it would similarly lead to minor artists being erased from art history, as their work was defaced and reattributed to major figures, as well as to problems of misrepresentation and the perpetuation of false notions of a painter’s merits and faults as original work was covered over.

Although it was vexatious, such inept restoration could be easily identified by the expert eye, Layard continued. The danger lay in the responses of 'ignorant men', who failed to see what had been done to the object of their veneration, and who thus arrived at erroneous conceptions of early Italian fresco painting, which they might pass on to others. This distinction between the knowledgeable and the ignorant, as in the display spaces of England, can often be seen to be bound up with class issues. For many intellectual visitors, the crowds of their less cerebral countrymen who filled sites of cultural interest were an annoyance, and their accounts demonstrate a scorn for the uninformed; these people were perceived to belong to the lower echelons of the middle class, whose presence was primarily due to the new affordability of travel, rather than any genuine cultural curiosity.

The expansion of the travel industry in mid-Victorian England was due to the general reduction of the expenses involved, and the rise in the number of people who were willing and able to embark upon continental tours as a result. Associations of such travel with the lifestyles of the aristocracy and gentry appear to have persisted,

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51 Layard, ‘The Publications’, p.280. The effect of the practice is described as being 'more mischievous than even that of time and neglect'.
52 ibid.
however, and as with visits to exhibitions such as the summer display at the British Institution, it became a means for members of the lower middle class to experience a version of the high society denied to them in their everyday existences in England. The correspondence of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett immediately prior to their elopement reveals the concern of those of established wealth that the romantic haven of Italy was being overrun by vulgar, posturing nouveaux- riches. Florence was identified by them as a particularly undesirable destination. Barrett told her fiancé that Jameson, who was then planning a trip to Italy with her niece, had an agent "who assures her in his programme that she may "walk in silk attire" and drive her carriage like an English aristocrat, for three hundred a year" in the city. The consequence of such cheap luxury in Florence, Barrett had heard, was that it was "English-ridden - filled and polluted." The imagery employed here suggests that they form an obstacle before the experience of Italy akin to that of the working class before art in the National Gallery, as observed by Waagen. Browning could only concur:

The English there are intolerable, - even from a distance you see that: indeed, I have heard here in England of a regular system of tactics by which parvenus manage to get among the privileged classes which at home would keep them off inexorably. Their fear was that in the English community of Florence, the distinctive class boundaries of England would become blurred, as membership was dependent upon nationality alone. It was an environment in which everything could be bought, and at relatively little expense; visitors of modest means could attend balls held by the Tuscan nobility, and even be introduced to the archduke. As with the comments of certain critics in both the British Institution and the Art Treasures Exhibition, those who saw themselves as belonging to an intellectual elite felt the need to distance themselves

54Ibid., p.746. Browning to Barrett, 31st May 1846.
from the multitude, be they the working men of Manchester, or the 'parvenus' of London and Florence. The Brownings achieved this by seeking seclusion in Italy, carefully limiting their circle of acquaintances when residing in the Casa Guidi in Florence, which was their home for the majority of their time in the country. George Eliot adopted a similar approach when in the city during the summer of 1860, on the visit which would inspire her to write *Roma.* In a letter to her then publisher John Blackwood, she declared that engagement with the English and American community of Florence was 'to be in a perpetual noisy picnic'; she and her common-law husband George Henry Lewes, desiring time for peaceful study of art and history, 'concur in the disposition to know nobody.'

The noisy frivolity of the mass of English visitors to Italy was found to 'pollute' other spheres than the merely social. Frances Trollope, for example, related in her *Visit to Italy* how she was 'exceedingly disgusted and not a little ashamed' by the openly irreverent behaviour of English members of the congregation of a service she attended in the Sistine Chapel. They were identified by her as a 'second class' of English traveller, 'who every year scramble abroad for a few weeks, instead of spending their money at Margate or Brighton', and who have 'no joy equal to that of drawing all eyes upon them.' It could be argued that a distinction was more generally made between the worthy visitor, in Italy for a lengthy period in order to study and pay homage to the nation's monuments of artistic and historical greatness, and the tourist, abroad for far shorter terms for the purposes of leisure, and inclined to treat the country as a pleasure-park which was entirely at their disposal. Like the idle 'gossip gatherers' and people of fashion in the space of the gallery, professional critics and writers identified the conduct of these tourists as completely inappropriate, and often abhorrent. Trollope goes on to tell of an Easter mass given by the Pope which was

disturbed by the sound of champagne corks being popped by the English present, a
tale she proclaims to be ‘quite as offensive to Protestant as to Popish ears’. Travel
was characterised as a fundamentally educational experience, requiring respectful
patience; as with the public gallery of old master paintings, disruptive refusal to labour
at the lessons proffered was taken to signify ignorant arrogance.

Ruskin’s experiences while researching in Italy prevented him from voicing the
democratic idealisms regarding the public art of the country found in the writing of
Layard and others. In his letters to his parents of 1845, he expressed his astonishment
at the complete failure of both locals and English visitors to appreciate what they saw.
He writes of the stream of interruptions that befell him as he attempted to work before
the frescoes and statues of Florence, which came in the form of repellent monks, and
indolent Florentines curious to see what he was doing, but with no interest in what he
was studying. Just as frequently and disruptively, however:

it is an English cheesemonger and his wife, who come in, as happened to me the
other day while I was looking at the gates of Ghiberti, those which Michael
Angelo (sic) said were fit for the gates of heaven. Two English ladies came and
stopped before them. Dear me - said one - how dirty they are. Oh, quite
shockin’, said the other, and away they went.58

These comments are heavily class-coded, with the profession of Ruskin’s hypothetical
English visitor immediately identifying him as someone from the lower levels of the
middle class, essentially one of the ‘second class’ travellers mentioned in Trollope’s
Visit to Italy. Although intended only for the private amusement of his parents, these
remarks can be regarded as performing the same function as Bobby Shuttle and his
Woife Sayroh’s Visit to Manchester un the Greight Hert Treasures Palace of 1857,
discussed in the previous chapter. The vernacular of the two ‘ladies’ suggests humble
origins, with only the economic capital generated by a husband’s success in some

inauspicious trade making their presence possible. As with Bobby Shuttle, Ruskin's characterisation establishes the unquestionable superiority of the reader over the subjects, who are mocked through the phonetic representation of their speech, and the simplicity of their thought. The filthy condition of the public art of Italy, rather than constituting an obstacle to their interest, as it had to the expert eyes of Ruskin or Layard, represents the full extent of their engagement with it. Such presentation of lower-class superficiality before art is also found in Bobby Shuttle, albeit in a more explicitly humorous manner. When before Wallis' *Death of Chatterton*, Bobby's wife appears to go into a trance; upon enquiring what is wrong, he is told that "'aw wur thinkin abeawt straitenin that bed-quilt.'"59 In both cases, an essentially domestic attitude towards dirt and disarray prevents any higher thoughts entering the minds of the wives of both the cotton spinner and the cheesemonger. The latter, although more affluent, is portrayed by Ruskin as being equally insensitive and intellectually limited.

In a similar manner to the Art Treasures Exhibition, the experience of commentators in the Italian public spaces of art served to accentuate their sense of difference in relation to those who they regarded as their social inferiors, rather than promote harmony and understanding between the classes. The environment of the English community of Italy appears to have provided self-affirmation to upper-middle-class intellectuals and art experts, which involved establishing the inferiority of the 'parvenus', the 'second class' tourists, or the 'cheesemonger'. This body of critics and literati was far from uniform itself, however, and social divisions were often drawn within it. Typically, those who were free from the pressures of economic necessity, such as Browning and Ruskin, demonstrated reservations that ranged from gentle contempt to harsh scorn concerning those who had to write in order to make a living, such as Trollope and Jameson. In a letter to her sister from Italy in early 1847, for example, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote of her husband's reluctance to become involved in the social circle established

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59 *Bobby Shuttle*, p.65.
around 'that coarse, vulgar Mrs. Trollope', who had lived in Florence since writing her *Visit to Italy* of 1841. Trollope herself was rendered 'second class' in Browning's opinion, a status signalled at least in part by her participation in the tawdry simulation of high society enacted by the mass of English residents in the city.

Despite the continued popularity of her work throughout the 1850s, Anna Jameson was not wealthy. Like Trollope, she had commenced her writing career in order to support her family, and experienced financial privations until the end of her life. Her letters to her sisters from Italy written over the course of her 1857-1858 trip are filled with references to the economic pressure they were under, and the dependency of their fortunes upon her literary successes. As the quotation from the Browning's courtship correspondence given above suggests, she found the relative cheapness of Italy to be a blessing, and frequently wished that she could relocate her family there, taking them out of England, which was 'the land of the rich but not the land of the poor.' The Browning's attitude towards her was one of patronising affection, describing her as 'a good, sympathising friend of ours', but dissenting from her

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61 Elizabeth Barrett-Browning to Henrietta Barrett, 7th January 1847, Collegio Ferdinando.
62 *Saturday Review*, vol.5, 1858, p.592. It was here remarked that she was 'a very favourite author with the public, and whatever she writes is sure to command a large audience'.
63 Robinson, *Wayward Women*, p.197. Trollope had started writing after a failed business enterprise in America had left her husband bankrupt.
64 Adele Holcomb, 'Anna Jameson 1794-1860: Sacred Art and Social Vision', Sherman and Holcomb (eds.), *Women as Interpreters*, p.115. Her husband, from whom she had been separated since 1838, retired in 1851, which meant the end of the small allowance he had granted her; he then died three years later, leaving her nothing in his will. The Queen granted her a pension in that year, but she was still far from financially secure.
65 Jameson, *Letters*, p.316. For example, she wrote in January 1858, after a poor year's earnings, 'I must work this year - or where shall we all be?' (Jameson to her sisters, 25th January 1858, Florence)
approach to Italian travel and residence in several crucial respects. Foremost among these was Jameson’s seemingly willing involvement with the social activities of the English community. Browning told his wife’s sisters that Jameson ‘found Florence the gayest of gay cities, distracting from its routine of visits given and received etc.’, going on to relate their almost complete abstinence from such frivolity; the couple enjoyed ‘exactly as much solitude as we like’ - not receiving six visits in six months.\(^6^7\) The implication appears to be that Jameson’s humble origins and modest means are revealed in her enthusiasm to embrace an aspect of life in Florence which people of true quality abjured, having no need to assume in Italy a gentrified status they genuinely possessed in England.

Ruskin’s comments on Jameson were considerably more severe; they were similarly based in an awareness of her lower-class background, but were far more open in their references to this. He met her while both were studying in Venice in the autumn of 1845, and repeatedly remarked in his letters to his parents on her resemblance to Ann Strachan, the Ruskin family’s servant. This likeness was applied not only to physical appearance; he stated that ‘Mrs. Jameson is Ann over again in all respects, and I would quite as soon take Ann’s judgement of a picture’.\(^6^8\) Despite being a recognised authority on old master painting, Jameson was, in Ruskin’s eyes, from an inferior order, both socially and intellectually, and this distinction was both obvious and indelible. The relevance of her response to art was rated in accordance with this perception; there is a complete contrast in Ruskin’s Italian correspondence between his dismissal of Jameson and his eager anticipation of Lord Lindsay’s \textit{Sketches of the History of Christian Art}.\(^6^9\) Lindsay’s gender was certainly part of the reason that

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\(^6^8\) Shapiro (ed.), \textit{Letters}, p.216. Ruskin to his father, 30th September 1845, Venice. In an earlier letter (p.215, 28th September) he remarked that Jameson ‘knows as much of art as the cat’.

\(^6^9\) Ibid., p.123. Ruskin to his father, 20th June 1845, Florence. Ruskin here asks his father to get George Richmond to make enquiries as to Lindsay’s progress, and then
Ruskin chose to treat him as an equal, but also of importance was his high social rank. Unlike Jameson, he had not yet published a text on Italian painting, or offered any evidence to support a claim for expert status, yet his efforts were validated by his station.

IV. Conceptions of Giotto: Ruskin, Mrs. Higford-Burr and the Arundel Society

Ruskin's disdain for the petit-bourgeoisie in the 1840s offers an explanation for his apparent lack of consideration of the issue of register and popular accessibility in his work for the Arundel Society in the early 1850s. Unlike Jameson in her Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters, and even Lindsay in his Sketches, he did not adapt his style or esoteric level to suit the broader, largely uninstructed audience that the Society was attempting to attract and educate through its endeavours. Between 1853 and 1856, Ruskin participated in a project to provide the society's subscribers with a set of prints representing Giotto's fresco cycle in the Arena Chapel, accompanied by individual analyses of each scene and a biographical essay on the painter, which he would write. It was the first original work commissioned by the Society; all its previous publications had relied upon existing prints, usually by foreign artists. Ruskin was dissatisfied with the quality of these reproductions, believing that they failed properly to convey a notion of the reality of their subject. Under his guidance, not only were English artists commissioned to produce the prints, but the medium of wood engraving was chosen; Cooper argues that this was done in order to reflect the primitive nature of the original paintings, and to correspond with the version of Giotto presented by Ruskin's essay.

This essay, entitled Giotto and His Works in Padua, is remarkable for its scholarly

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70 Cooper, 'The Popularisation', p.268. For example, the publications of 1850-1852 consisted of copperplate engravings of the Fra Angelico frescoes in the chapel of Nicolas V in the Vatican by the German artists E. Schäffer and L. Gruner.

71 Ibid., p.270.
rigour, and indeed all aspects of the project with which Ruskin was involved are marked by an uncompromisingly esoteric seriousness. It is my contention that this stance was somewhat undercut by the inclusion in the package of a chromolithograph taken from a water-colour by the amateur Mrs. Higford-Burr, which depicted The Interior of the Arena Chapel, Padua, with Dante and Giotto (figure 5). This full-colour image was clearly included to supply subscribers with some straightforward visual and imaginative gratification, essentially providing light relief after the stern lessons imparted by Ruskin and the woodcuts. The contrast in tone between these different elements illustrates once again the fundamental dichotomy of the Arundel Society, its broad didactic aims and populist intent clashing with the inaccessibility of its subject matter.

Visual fidelity to this subject matter in reproductions of it was deemed to be of the utmost importance in the publications of the Society. Ruskin wrote in his essay of the 'courage and skill' necessary in the copyists of the works of the early masters; he declared that it was imperative that they 'speak out honestly all the rough and rude words of the original speaker', and resist any temptation to modify the originals so they would be more aesthetically appealing to modern viewers. This view corresponds with statements of intent given by him in other texts from the same period concerning his perception of the duty of a historian of art and architecture. The preface of the second volume of The Stones of Venice (1853), for example, stresses the efforts made 'to ascertain and speak the truth'. Veracity is also identified by Ruskin as the most desirable quality in the artists themselves: the truthfulness here praised can be described as the depiction, in words or images, of the reality of your

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72Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), The Complete Works, vol 24, Giotto and His Works in Padua, 1854, p.41. Layard concurred with this view, stating in the Quarterly Review that the 'primitives' must be copied 'without exaggeration', in order to 'preserve their real feeling, without either conceding or giving too much prominence to defects or peculiarities of manner' (Layard, 'The Publications', p.306).
subject, with as little adornment or contrivance as possible. This development of his
critical position effectively rendered moral art history untenable for Ruskin, as the
approbation of truth in art was incompatible with a moralistic aversion to naturalism.
As discussed in chapter one, Giotto’s generally accepted status as the original
naturalistic painter, and therefore founder of modern painting, made him a problematic
figure for Rio and the British writers influenced by him.74 In his essay for the Arundel
Society, however, Ruskin openly celebrated Giotto as ‘a daring naturalist, in defiance
of tradition, idealism and formalism’.75 The portrait he composed clearly illustrates his
progression away from the precepts of Rio, and reflects the general concerns of his art
criticism during the first half of the 1850s.

Throughout his essay, Ruskin repeatedly refers the work of Lindsay as the major
precedent to his study, and even recommends the ‘very beautiful sketch of his
character and art’ found in the Sketches to his readers.76 Given his views on the
primacy of truth in historical writing, however, it is possible that this description had a
dissuasive implication, and his own biography certainly differed from Lindsay’s in
many respects. Ruskin had complained in his review of the Sketches seven years
earlier that Lindsay had largely ‘left the artistical orbit of Giotto undefined, and the
offence of his manner unremoved’,77 providing instead a wealth of diverting stories
relating to the artist’s life. Ruskin eschewed this anecdotal basis in his history,
choosing rather to confront the problems presented by the paintings themselves. He
emphasised the importance of the idea in art, and presented this as a defence of the
study of early Italian painting that excused any executive defects. Giotto’s works did
not offer lessons in drawing, Ruskin asserted, but rather in ‘the history of the human

74 See chapter 1, section IV, pp.46-53.
75 Ruskin, Giotto, p.27.
76 ibid., p.35.
77 Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), The Complete Works, vol.12, The History of
Christian Art, p.221.
mind'. The limitations of his style were seen to actually facilitate the observation of this aspect of the paintings; they were 'simple suggestions of ideas', and this was reflected in their sparse appearance, which was devoid of any superfluous detail. This conception echoes declarations made in the chapter of The Stones of Venice entitled 'The Nature of the Gothic', where Ruskin instructed his readers not to withhold admiration from 'great excellencies' because they may be mingled with 'rough faults'; this notion of laudable imperfection will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

This concept of the 'idea' within a work is not strictly incompatible with moral art history, however, having little to distinguish it from the pure spirit praised by Rio and his followers. Ruskin's true divergence from the discourse in his essay on Giotto came in the portrait of the man he created, and the relationship established between him and his work. Much is made of the point that Giotto's art was exclusively religious, and that this 'was not a result of his own peculiar feeling or determination; it was a necessity of the period'. Rather than stress the painter's piety, as Rio had done, Ruskin styled him as one who was 'proud to be a good workman', whose faith was 'firm', but whose subject matter was determined for him by his employers, who were predominantly ecclesiastical. His attitude towards the heroic paradigm found in Vasari, which had been utilised by Jameson and Lindsay, was guarded. At the outset of the essay, Vasari is said to be an unreliable source, in whose work solecisms of fact and judgement are 'always numerous'. The 'superiority of the artist' is asserted by Ruskin, with Giotto declared to have been 'not one of the most accomplished painters, but one of the greatest men who ever lived'. The proof of this, however, is believed

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78 Ruskin, Giotto. p.28.
79 Ibid., p.40.
81 Ruskin, Giotto, pp.21-2.
82 See chapter 1, section IV, p.45.
83 Ruskin, Giotto, p.28.
to lie in the paintings themselves, rather than in anecdotes telling of his wit and
intellect, and his association with kings. The root of his greatness, Ruskin asserts, was
the coupling of his formidable artistic originality with his personal modesty and
simplicity. In Ruskin's essay, Giotto is portrayed as 'a serene labourer' who wandered
Italy, doing his duty to the church and enriching the lives of the populace; he was paid
by the day, and was not vain or oversensitive about his creations.84

The implications of this paradigm of the artist-labourer upon Ruskin's interpretation of
Giotto's works are evident in his analysis of the Italian painter's treatment of religious
iconography. The frescoes of the Arena Chapel, which depicted the Life and Passion
of Christ in 38 separate scenes, are declared by Ruskin to be remarkable for their
adherence to the Scriptures. The artist was a man with a 'stern and just respect for
truth', a very rare type who would not allow his prejudices or his pleasure to tempt
him to some colouring or distortion of it'. This was connected with his unassuming
nature, in that egotism did not intrude and lead to pointless imaginative
embellishments; the workmanlike painter produced functional art, and sought only to
communicate a simple and veracious message. Ruskin wrote of how, in contrast to this
iconographic simplicity, many popular religious stories and ideas were elsewhere
'encumbered by fictitious detail'. He regarded this as dangerous due to the
'well-known weakness of the popular mind',85 unadorned truthfulness in art was thus
vital in order to avoid leading the ignorant multitude into error. It could be argued that
this principle was also observed by Ruskin in his essay, as the portrait of Giotto it
presents is comparatively free from the fictive elements that litter the version found in
Lindsay's Sketches, for example. The inevitable degree of fictionalisation within it is
more 'primary' than 'secondary', to use the terminology of Jauss; Ruskin's assertions

84 Ibid., p.33.
85 Ibid., p.29.
regarding Giotto’s character and the circumstances of his life are solidly based in ‘the probable’, in that they are largely extrapolated from the facts of his art.

This commitment to the ‘truth’ as he perceived it had the effect of making Giotto and His Works in Padua an uncompromisingly scholarly piece of writing, despite the fact that Ruskin’s intention seems to have been to impart a clear and unambiguous lesson to an uninitiated audience. As the biographies of Lindsay and Jameson demonstrate, the inclusion of colourful ‘secondary fictionalisations’ was regarded as necessary by other art historians of the period in order to make their attempts at popular instruction attractive to their audiences. The communicative function of the fictive was recognised by them, and used to stimulate the imaginations of their would-be pupils; it could be claimed that their reliance on anecdote was intended to make art education more appealing to a readership seeking recreation as well as self-improvement. I would argue that it was this reasoning which informed the decision of the Arundel Society in 1856 to issue the chromolithograph of The Interior of the Arena Chapel with Dante and Giotto, at the conclusion of their batch of publications on this subject.

This chromolithograph was in many respects entirely contrary to the concerns of both Ruskin’s essay and the 38 woodcuts of the individual scenes from the fresco cycle. It was the Society’s first print in the medium which would dominate its output from then on. This development took place at the instigation of Layard, and proved an enormous popular success; Ruskin remained unenthusiastic, however, due to the limitations involved regarding the accurate reproduction of colour. 86 Layard and Higford-Burr had toured Italy together in early 1856 making sketches for the Society, from which The Interior of the Arena Chapel with Dante and Giotto had been derived. 87 He felt

87 Haskell, Rediscoveries, p.105. Dante Gabriel Rossetti met Higford-Burr in 1856, and is quoted by Haskell as reporting her to be: ‘about 32, refined and very nearly beautiful, energetic withal to an extraordinary degree in Ruskin’s style, but quite mild
compelled to include a lengthy defence of the image on educational grounds in his Quarterly Review article of 1858. The exhaustivity of the woodcuts is praised, but Layard opined that 'to convey an accurate idea of the entire work, of the marvellous effect of colour, design and ornament when combined into one harmonious whole, a general view of the interior of the chapel was required'. This opinion differs from that expressed by Ruskin in his essay; he declared that the woodcuts alone offered a lucid demonstration of the plan of the chapel, and certainly attempted in his exegeses of the separate scenes to relate them to the entire sequence.

There is, of course, more featured in Higford-Burr’s scene than just an interior view of the Arena Chapel; it depicts the artist himself in the process of completing his masterpiece in the company of Dante, whose supposed friendship with Giotto was taken by Victorian writers as an important piece of evidence attesting to the superiority of the artist’s character, as discussed in chapter one. Only the briefest mention of this association is made by Ruskin, in contrast to the significance and space allotted to it by Jameson and Lindsay. Cooper even cites Lindsay's imaginative description of the visits made by Dante to the Arena Chapel as the source for Higford-Burr's painting. Layard’s continued adherence to the discourse of moral art history as it featured in British texts of the 1840s is further indicated by the description he gave in the Quarterly Review of the scene presented in the chromolithograph:

Near Giotto, who is putting the last touch to his great work, stands the divine poet, feeding the imagination of the painter with his own exquisite fancies, or watching the children as they gambol around their mother - not an ideal scene,

and feminine - ten hours at the top of a ladder to copy a Giotto ceiling being nothing to her. She has been travelling all over Italy with Layard, and they together have given one one’s first real chance of forming a congruous idea of early art without going there.7

89Ruskin, Giotto, p.42.
90Cooper, ‘The Popularisation’, p.275. See chapter 1, section IV, p.52 for Lindsay’s description.
but one bequeathed to us by a tradition which is alone sufficient to attach an undying interest to the Arena Chapel.91

This evocation is essentially opposed to that of Ruskin’s essay. It asserts that the art of Giotto was informed by the intellect of his august friend, rather than simply being his own revolutionary but straightforward visual interpretation of the Scriptures; it is also based in the structures of a ‘tradition’ from which Ruskin was attempting to emancipate the appreciation of the frescoes. Layard’s claim that the scene is ‘not an ideal’ one is interesting, as it indicates an acceptance of anecdotal ‘secondary fictionalisation’ as a concrete aspect of art history, on which scholarship could comfortably rest and from which critical conclusions could be drawn. Ruskin was less open to the testimony of such tales, declaring them useful in ‘their general tone’, but hesitant to use them as the basis for a ‘truthful’ history.92

The description of the image as not being ‘ideal’ could also be a reference to its genre qualities, the moment depicted relying upon the juxtaposition of the glories of the chapel itself and the conversation of the learned men with the activities of Giotto’s family for an important part of its effect. Higford-Burr’s water-colour can be seen to belong to a recognised subgenre of Victorian history painting, the depiction of scenes from the lives of great artists. Susan Casteras identifies how such works attempted to offer a view of history which was romanticised, but also humanised, in order ‘to make it accessible’.93 She argues that female characters in these scenes are portrayed as outsiders to a male realm of genius, often representing the mundanity of the ordinary world against which the remarkable artist is defined, or at most serving as inspiration, a muse who is venerated but denied any power of her own. This can certainly be seen in The Interior of the Arena Chapel, with Dante and Giotto; the painter’s wife spins

92 Ruskin, Giotto, p.22.
cotton, her children beside her, an everyday aspect to an extraordinary scene. Her presence is intended to suggest that rather than being a complete fantasy, the image presented is a realistic depiction of the congress of two of the mightiest minds of their time before one of its greatest monuments.

Scenes from the lives of a wide variety of artists are found in Victorian painting of the 1840s and 1850s, and this included those from the earliest Italian schools, presumably as a result of the general rise in interest in such painters. Frederick Leighton, for example, produced two works at the outset of his career which portrayed incidents from the chapters on Cimabue and Giotto in Vasari’s Lives. The first was *Cimabue Finding Giotto Among the Sheep*, painted in 1848; the second was the enormous *Cimabue’s Madonna Borne in Procession*, which was shown at the Royal Academy in 1855. Hilary Fraser has argued that both were intended by the painter as symbolic statements on his own position within the English art world. In the earlier work, she states, Leighton identifies himself with the young Giotto, astounding the previous generation with his skill; the implication is that like Cimabue, the English art establishment will at first patronise the young prodigy, but ultimately find itself eclipsed by him. Leighton’s representation of the scene focuses upon the astonishment of Cimabue mentioned by Vasari, to whose testimony the English artist adhered in his later, more ambitious painting which also took the art and artists of thirteenth-century Italy as its subject matter. Fraser describes *Cimabue’s Madonna Borne in Procession* as ‘strikingly metafictional’, in that she understands it to be a painting about paintings and their public reception; she claims that a comparison is presented between the harsh critical climate endured by the Victorian artist, and the

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94Fraser, *The Victorians*, p.53.
95Vasari, *Lives*, p.97. Cimabue is here said to have watched Giotto drawing sheep on a smooth stone ‘standing all fast in a marvel’.
adulation enjoyed by his early Italian counterpart. Cimabue, with whom Leighton here claims an essential kinship, is portrayed as a radiant figure, clothed entirely in white, whose creation causes great enthusiasm amongst the crowd as it passes on its way to the Church of Santa Maria Novella for which it was painted. The subject appears to be more the honour paid to the man rather than the duty his work performed for the cause of God, however; despite his luminous appearance, Cimabue is made the recipient of earthly glory, distinguishing him from the artist-saints of moral art history, such as the modest and retiring Fra Angelico. This interpretation was derived from Vasari, who stressed the fact in the Lives that the artist was 'much honoured and rewarded' as a result of the artistic accomplishment of his panel. In Leighton's painting, he is an artist-hero, an alter-deus who creates like a god rather than merely in the service of one, and is worshipped accordingly. The art itself, and its original religious significance and purpose, are not the concern of the picture; it is rather a statement on the mighty status that should be properly conferred on to the artist.

This glorification of cultural heroes at the expense of their creations in Victorian history painting can also be observed in The Interior of the Arena Chapel, with Dante and Giotto. However, the 'hero' of Higford-Burr’s scene appears to be not Giotto, but Dante. Indeed, in terms of dress, it is only the painter's brocaded cap which elevates him above the paradigm of the artist-labourer established by Ruskin; the man described as the companion of kings and princes by Vasari here wears the smock of an artisan. Although he stands above the genre group formed by his family, in order to converse with the poet, he is nonetheless a part of it, whereas Dante is positioned away from them in messianic isolation, in robes of a colour more vivid than any other area of the

97 Fraser, The Victorians, p.54.
98 Vasari, Lives, vol.1, p.55: 'this work caused so great a marvel to the people of that age, by reason of there not having been seen up to then anything better, that it was borne in most solemn procession from the house of Cimabue to the church, with much rejoicing and with trumpets, and he was thereby much rewarded and honoured.'
painting, including the frescoes themselves. The light which falls through the chapel's windows seems to connect Dante's gaze with the paintings before him, suggesting the channelling of his divine imagination into them, as Layard described in the Quarterly Review. Dante features in Cimabue's Madonna Borne in Procession, but as an observer, a shadowy foreground figure dressed in grey, withdrawn from the glories of art which are paraded before him. In The Interior of the Arena Chapel, with Dante and Giotto he stands in the full glare of the light, and actively participates in the wonders being created. The Arundel Society's aims in circulating this scene were very different to those of Leighton in his painting; their publications were issued in accordance with an educational agenda, rather than a personal and artistic one. Their reasons for wishing to establish a significant role for Dante in the creation of the frescoes of the Arena Chapel were based in a desire for accessibility. Kirkup's discovery of the supposed portrait of Dante by Giotto in Florence earlier that decade had presumably stimulated British interest in the connection between the two men. In addition to this, Dante was a figure of established and eminent reputation, and the association of Giotto and his paintings with him could only enhance the artist's appeal to a British audience.

In the terminology of Jauss' response theory, this chromolithograph offered subscribers to the Arundel Society something 'culinary', in that it would not challenge the boundaries of their 'horizon of expectation'. Despite his attempts to justify the image on educational grounds, Layard admitted that a large part of the print's attraction was that it was 'from a very beautiful drawing'. The language used is the same as that found in Ruskin's description of Lindsay's account of the life and work of Giotto in his Sketches, and could contain the same slightly dismissive implication. Beauty, be it in the form of an engaging anecdotal narrative or an aesthetically pleasing
scene from the life of a great artist, was recognised by these two critics to be gratifying to an uninstructed audience, but of more questionable value with regards to its art-historical instruction. Ruskin in particular was aware of the danger of distraction from the true lesson at hand that it presented, and his fears were not without foundation. Cooper relates how the chromolithographs issued by the Society were often treated as real works of art by its subscribers, who would frame them and turn what was intended, ostensibly at least, as an educational tool, into a piece of domestic decoration. This process can be identified as the decay of the 'aura' of art described by Walter Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. Benjamin asserts that the technique of reproduction emancipates the reproduced object from its traditional dependence on ritual, as the reproduction meets its mass audience in their own particular situation; this leads to a 'reactivation' of the object reproduced, often with very different significances to those of the original, which were dependent on its fixed ritualistic context. The Arundel Society attempted to instruct large numbers of the British Public in the unique importance of early Italian frescoes, which involved study of their function in terms of religious ritual, or appreciation of their 'aura'. However, the Society substituted this uniqueness for the plurality of the reproduction, and thus undermined its own efforts. Ironically, its striving for visual fidelity in the form of the colour reproduction in order to enhance the efficacy and attractiveness of the lesson led to the instruments of education being 'reactivated' as items of domestic furniture which served a primarily aesthetic purpose.

The critical reaction of the periodical press to the Arundel Society's publications on the frescoes of the Arena Chapel was mixed. Some reports were favourable, and accepted the arguments laid out by Ruskin in Giotto and His Works in Padua; the

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Spectator, for example, declared in 1856 that the woodcuts had an 'unsurpassable nobility', describing \textit{The Marriage at Cana} as displaying 'a striking union of simplicity, dignity and lifelike character', made all the more remarkable by the fact that the technical aspects of the composition were 'childlike'.\footnote{Spectator, vol.29, 1856, p.614.} Others were more measured in their praise, with the \textit{Art-Journal} stating in 1854 that although interesting, the woodcuts were only 'for the learned in antiquarian art' due their visual severity, which would make them inaccessible to 'those who see pictures only with modern eyes'.\footnote{Art-Journal, vol.6, 1854, p.123.}

It was perhaps reviews such as this which prompted the Society to include \textit{The Interior of the Arena Chapel, with Dante and Giotto} amongst the woodcuts two years later as a populist compromise.

Higford-Burr's image actually received very little press attention; the \textit{Spectator} and the \textit{Art-Journal} made no mention of it all, and the \textit{Athenaeum} simply reprinted the passage from Lindsay's \textit{Sketches} on which it was based, without offering any opinions regarding its possible merits or defects. Ruskin's contribution to the project provoked more comment, little of it positive. A common charge was that he was overestimating the value of Giotto as an artist. The \textit{Athenaeum} thought that in his interpretations of the individual scenes of the cycle, Ruskin was describing 'his own feelings when he thinks he is conveying those of the painter.' His complex typological analyses of the elements of the \textit{Life of Christ} are seen to contradict his evocation of the simple artist-labourer in \textit{Giotto and His Works in Padua}. Of Ruskin's claim that the river depicted in \textit{The Baptism of Christ} made iconographical reference to the River Jordan, the magazine incredulously asked 'can one seriously suppose that Giotto - so unimaginative, so essentially Italian - knew or cared anything about the actual Jordan, which he simply borrowed from old forms?' Ruskin's characterisation of Giotto as a simple man with an unbending respect for truth is here taken to indicate a lack of
artistic imagination, and attempts to assign any complexity to the work of the painter are accordingly dismissed as 'fantasies'.

There was a more general questioning in these magazines of whether Giotto warranted the amount of attention which the Society were allowing him. The *Art-Journal*, in a review of *Giotto and His Works in Padua*, declared itself unconvinced at the 'utility' of the project as a whole. Whilst recognising that it could not deny a private society the right to circulate whatever it wanted among its members at their expense, the magazine saw the Society's apparent interest in Giotto to be largely worthless and irrelevant. Its reviewer stated that:

In this age one is led to expect some public benefit from the proceedings of all associated bodies - something that will instruct us concerning the past, while it teaches us what to do now, and what may be done hereafter; the present generation are looking forward - not backward. The only advantage our painters will gain from studying the works of Giotto, is to learn what to avoid.

This judgement reveals a lack of comprehension of the idea of public art education promoted by moral art history as a whole, and the Arundel Society in particular. It indicates, among other things, the tenacity of the essentially Reynoldsian view that the only lessons offered by the old masters were painterly ones, and that early art did not therefore warrant serious study as it had little or nothing to offer the improvement of contemporary artistic practice. Reservations expressed in other journals were based on a reaction to the sudden rise in intellectual attention given to the early schools, rather than a seeming unawareness of it. The *Athenaeum*’s critic, for instance, wrote of the ‘unjust praise’ that had been lavished upon Giotto in recent years, concluding that ‘we distrust eyes that see further into mill-stones than most eyes, yet are stone-blind when they look elsewhere.”

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105 *Athenaeum*, No.1443, 23rd June 1855, p.736.
106 *Art-Journal*, vol.1 (new series), 1855, p.34.
107 See chapter 1, section II, pp.15-16.
The above quote from the *Art Journal* contains, in its opposition of the interests of early Italian and contemporary British painting, an unmistakable reference to the widespread controversy surrounding the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Francis Haskell has claimed that rather than advancing the 'rediscovery' of the Italian 'primitives', Pre-Raphaelitism actually retarded it, due to the pejorative connotations the name and all that was associated with it took on amongst certain sections of the population during the 1850s.\(^{109}\) It is certainly true that concerns over the danger that the movement was thought to represent to the modern British school informed the many savage attacks launched against Rio, Ruskin and the early Italian painters over the course of the decade. The hostility directed towards Ruskin's *Giotto and His Works in Padua* was probably provoked in no small part by his open association of the Italian artist with John Everett Millais, who is described as a fellow 'daring naturalist'. The works of Giotto and those of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood are claimed to have an essential kinship as they both assert 'truth against tradition'. This identification of two exemplars of artistic truthfulness standing above 'the dust of intervening generations'\(^{110}\) no doubt provoked the charges of incommensurate praise, given at the expense of more established figures of greatness, which were made in the periodical press.

V. The 'Slyness' of Fra Angelico: Moral Art History, the Pre-Raphaelite Controversy and Fears of Revivalism

The association between the Pre-Raphaelites and the Italian 'primitives' was already extremely strong in the minds of hostile critics on account of the movement's name. The journalist David Masson, writing in defence of the Brotherhood in the *British...*
Quarterly Review in 1852, attempted to belittle the significance of its appellation, claiming that it had been adopted 'half in freak, half in earnest', and the practice of placing the initials 'P.R.B.' next to the signature on the Brethren's paintings was 'to show that they were a good deal in fun all the while.' Members of the movement were less keen to diminish the importance of this issue, however; in 1900, William Rossetti declared that the name had 'much defiance in it, some banter, some sense, a great deal of resolute purpose, a large opening for misinterpretations, and a carte blanche invitation for abuse'. Although he admits that there was a light-hearted aspect to the decision, Rossetti's comments make it clear that the name was nonetheless intended to suggest the Brotherhood’s anti-establishment views and goals.

There are connections between this aspect of Pre-Raphaelitism and the polemical side of moral art history. William Holman Hunt's retrospective explanation of how the name was invented lucidly illustrates the debt his opinions on old master painting owed to the conceptions of Rio. He relates the strident nonconformity of his and Millais' behaviour at the Royal Academy, stating that:

we did not bow to the chorus of the blind, for when we advanced our judgement of the Transfiguration we condemned it for its grandiose disregard for simplicity of truth, the pompous posturing of the Apostles, and the unspiritual attitudinis of the Saviour...In our final estimation this picture was a signal step in the decadence of Italian art.

As a result of this bold originality of thought, they were told by their fellow students that they were Pre-Raphaelites; 'Millais and I laughingly agreed that the designation must be accepted'. Although doubtless fictionalised to some degree in order to

stress the young painters' independence from received notions of artistic excellence, 
their judgement of Raphael's final major work accords with the division of his oeuvre 
found in the volumes of moral art historians.114 Another example of the influence of 
Rio and his British followers upon Pre-Raphaelite art criticism can be found in William 
Rossetti's comments on the Renaissance Court in the Crystal Palace at Sydenham in 
1854. The Renaissance is described as the time when 'reverence and faith went out, 
and artifice came in: but artifice is not art'. The revival of classical form gave painters 
and sculptors 'skeletons to reclothe with flesh, but not with divinity', and essentially 
'Christians became pagans in art';115 as in the accounts of moral art history, the 
Renaissance is conceived not as the period of art's most effulgent splendour, but as 
that of its irreligious degeneration.

The paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites elicited a strong critical response. J.B.Bullen 
provides detailed analysis of reactions to the 'aggressively unusual' art of the 
Brotherhood in the mid-nineteenth century art world, paying particular attention to the 
ugliness perceived by contemporaries in depictions of the body.116 Objections focused 
on elements of what can broadly be termed primitivism within Pre-Raphaelite painting, 
which were incorporated with passages of often incredibly detailed and skilled 
draughtsmanship. Elizabeth Prettejohn has described the impact of the movement's 
early productions as being due to the fact that 'it brought the primitive into shocking 
friction with the illusionistic sophistication and technical refinement ordinarily 
expected of painting in the modernised and industrialised world of Victorian 
England.'

It was not, however, the appearance of the Brotherhood's paintings

114 See chapter 1, section III, pp.35-7.
115 W.M. Rossetti, 'The Epochs of Art as Represented in the Crystal Palace', in Fine 
Art, Chiefly Contemporary, London and Cambridge, Macmillian and Co., 1867, 
pp.89-90.
116 J.B. Bullen, The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry and 
117 Elizabeth Prettejohn, The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites, London, Tate Publishing, 
2000, p.19.
alone that caused them to be attacked frequently and virulently in the press throughout the early 1850s. Several modern critics have written of the sudden change in the movement’s fortunes following the revelation of the meaning of the mysterious initials ‘P.R.B.’ in a newspaper column in 1850, two years after its formation. Cooper, for example, states that in 1849 its members had been mostly regarded as ‘reformers seeking to elevate and purify English art by a return to the inspiration of the earlier masters’, but the revelation of ‘a “Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood” turned them into a band of revolutionaries, defiant of the most sacred name in art and conspiring the overthrow of all the advances made since Raphael.’

This also meant the overthrow of the modern Academy-based English school, and all it was thought to have achieved, labouring under the weight of Reynolds’ theoretical legacy. Many Victorian critics therefore felt that Pre-Raphaelitism represented a threat to all great art, both ancient and modern, and they leapt zealously to its defence.

This defence largely took the form of crushing condemnation of the movement and its productions. Hunt described the verdict of the press on the Pre-Raphaelite pictures in the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1850, among which were Millais’ *Christ in the House of His Parents (The Carpenter’s Shop)* and Hunt’s *A Converted British Family Hiding a Christian Missionary from the Druids*, as having been uttered ‘with one voice of condemnation...the leading journals denounced our works as iniquitous and infamous.’ Tom Taylor in *The Times* stated that *The Carpenter’s Shop* displayed ‘a marked affectation of indifference to everything we are accustomed to seek and admire’, *The Athenaeum* attacked the Brotherhood’s ‘affected simplicity and rudeness’, which was rendered especially objectionable due to its juxtaposition with a

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118 Cooper, ‘The Relationship between the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Painters before Raphael in English Criticism of the Late 1840s and 1850s’, *Victorian Studies*, No. 24, Summer 1981, p.413. See also Haskell, *Rediscoveries*, p.51.
120 quoted Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p.10.
refinement of imitation which belongs to the latest days of executive art. These accusations of affectation are founded in a belief that the painters in question have consciously regressed to the principles of a more basic era of art, and accordingly neglected established modes of pictorial beauty.

This idea of regression received its most thorough treatment in an article entitled ‘Modern Moves in Art’ by Ralph Wornum, which appeared in the Art Journal in September 1850. His objections to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were based upon the progressive art historical principles he had inherited from Kugler and Eastlake, as discussed in chapter one. Explicitly Hegelian language is used at the outset of his article to establish the proper nature of the advance of culture:

Modern civilization is but the aggregate of an aggregate of a series of progressions infinitely small in their individual steps; and so its varieties are more or less accomplished, exactly in so far as they are an aggregation of the contributions of all times.

The Pre-Raphaelites were taken to contradict this notion as they were a ‘retrograde’ rather than ‘progressive’ movement, who had discarded the contributions of some of the most significant eras of art in their ‘recurrence to an old an imperfect style of design in painting’. The Brotherhood was judged to be revivalist in intention, and therefore inimical to the advancement of British art; Wornum was among a plethora of critics who concluded, after the revelation of their name, that they sought to resurrect the practice of the ‘primitives’ in accordance with the interpretations offered by moral art history. He accordingly takes the opportunity in ‘Modern Moves in Art’ to discredit the concepts of the discourse in relation to the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites, especially regarding the idea that ‘where there is less material there must be more spiritual’. This notion is taken to explain the grotesque ugliness

121 quoted Hunt, Pre-Raphaelitism, vol.1, p.205.
122 See chapter 1, section II, pp.24-6.
Wornum perceived in the figures of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, the rationalisation being, he assumes, that their appearance was determined by an attempt for greater spirituality; it is stated that this attempt fails because the figures simply became repellent. Wornum claims that there is no antagonism between the soul and the body, and presents a physiognomic argument as proof of this: ‘as in nature, we do not infer a superior soul or sentiment from a deformed, imperfect, or diseased body.‘

The fifteenth-century Italian schools, which were believed to be venerated by both moral art historians and Pre-Raphaelites, received greater censure from Wornum in 1850 than they had done in his Epochs of Art in 1847, although his methods remained fundamentally the same. The painting of the quattrocento is subjected to lengthy and unfavourable comparison with that of the cinquecento, which is called the second epoch of painting and ‘the epoch of its greatest perfection among the moderns’. Wornum declares earlier art to be esoteric and inaccessible, and ‘thoroughly conventional’ due to the narrow limits of its range and expression. It is ultimately described as ‘mere shell-painting in comparison with the cinquecento’, in which all the defects and deficiencies of the previous century were supplied. The main objection to the High Renaissance put forward by moral art historians, who claimed that it lacked the spirituality of earlier art, is dismissed as a ‘wholly groundless notion’; Wornum opines that Raphael and Michelangelo ‘did not surpass the quattrocento masters less in sentiment than they did in their physical development.’ This harsh evaluation of the schools of fifteenth-century Italy can partly be ascribed to the sense of danger which was generally felt concerning the Pre-Raphaelites and the future of the modern British school. A denunciation of their namesakes was clearly intended to undermine the Brotherhood itself, by removing its perceived foundations. Wornum ascribes the two main faults of the movement to the influence of the ‘primitives:

124 Ibid., p. 270.
it breathes in the spirit of its works the miserable asceticism of the darkest monastic ages; and exhibits in their execution quite the extremest littleness of style that ever disfigured the works of any of the early middle-age masters.

Unlike the Athenaeum, Womun considered the detail present in Pre-Raphaelite pictures to be another aspect of their revivalism, rather than a pre-eminently modern aspect of their work which drew attention to the affectation behind its more medieval aspects. By aligning all of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood’s defects with their supposedly exclusive attention to the Italian ‘primitives’, Womun could express the hope that its members would cast off the shackles of this unhealthy devotion, and one day begin to address the problems of art ‘without retrograding four hundred years’.

Similar high-profile attacks on the Brotherhood’s perceived retrogressive tendencies were launched in the early 1850s, perhaps most notably by Dickens: his objections will be discussed later in the chapter. As early as 1852, however, the storm of critical protest was judged by some to be abating; Masson commented upon the ‘complete change’ in attitudes towards the Pre-Raphaelite works in the Royal Academy Exhibition, which he attributed ‘in a considerable degree to the generous intervention...made by Mr. Ruskin last year.’ Ruskin himself noted the ‘most extensive popularity’ which the Brotherhood’s pictures had obtained by 1854. Its members were keenly aware of this development in their fortunes, and observed a corresponding extension of their influence on British painting. William Rossetti reported to the Crayon in 1855 that ‘beneficent Pre-Raphaelitism is gradually working

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126bid.
127Masson, ‘Pre-Raphaelitism’, p.81. He stated that ‘the Pre-Raphaelite paintings of the present year, and especially those of Millais, have been more widely commented upon, and more heartily praised than any others in the Exhibition.’ The works on display included Collins’ May in Regents Park, Lyra Innocentium and St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Hunt’s Hireling Shepherd, and Millais’ Ophelia and A Hugenot Refusing the Badge on St. Bartholomew’s Day.
a change in the tenor of our pictorial doings'. The two principal faults of
Pre-Raphaelite paintings identified by the critics discussed above, namely the imitation
of the defects of the 'primitives' and the inclusion of indiscriminate and excessive
natural detail, are dismissed as 'calumnies (which) are getting stale, and hardly serve
their turn any longer'.

If the 'turn' of such accusations was to inhibit the acceptance of the Pre-Raphaelites
amongst the art-lovers of Britain, they were certainly failing to serve it by the
mid-1850s. As Fraser and others have illustrated at length, the Pre-Raphaelites found
increasing numbers of enthusiastic patrons among the rich middle class as the decade
progressed, who were impressed by the work ethic suggested by the detailed finish of
the paintings, and the profound yet generally intelligible nature of their subject
matter. This could be explained by the general identification in the periodical press
of the development of a less extreme style among the Pre-Raphaelite painters; the
Athenæum, for example, wrote in 1857 that the movement's 'errors, eccentricities,
and wilful aberrations, are fast modifying and softening'. The reason for this change
in opinion may have been the dissolution of the Brotherhood in the early 1850s, as
identified by David Riede; the works themselves, although still executed in the
Pre-Raphaelite style, could have appeared more innocuous once liberated from direct
association with an active and revolutionary artistic movement. Whatever the
explanation, Pre-Raphaelitism came to find, in the words of Frederick Stephens in his
1860 biography of Hunt, 'its best critics and truest encouragers' amongst 'the rich

129 W.M. Rossetti, 'Correspondence: Art News from London, No.1', Crayon, vol.1,
Jan-June 1855, p.263.
130 Fraser, The Victorians, p.120. See also Cooper, 'The Relationship', p.435.
131 Reprinted in William Michael Rossetti (ed.), Ruskin, Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelitism:
132 David Riede, Dante Gabriel Rossetti Revisited, New York, Twayne Publishers,
1992, p.51. The break-up of the Brotherhood is attributed to the departure of Hunt for
the Holy Land in 1854, the appointment of Millais as a Royal Academician in 1853,
and Rossetti's loss of interest in religious subject matter.
bourgeois of Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, Preston, Glasgow, and of the metropolis'.

This favour enjoyed by the exponents of Pre-Raphaelitism with the affluent industrialists of provincial cities accounts for the significant presence of their work in the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition. Finke writes that it was the ‘liberal attitude’ of the Mancunian organisers of the event which made it possible for ‘a broad and almost complete spectrum of contemporary British art to be presented’; works by officially recognised figures such as Eastlake, Landseer and Wilkie were seen alongside those by Millais and Hunt in the modern English galleries of the Exhibition. Bullen cites this as the final confirmation of the entry of Pre-Raphaelitism into the established canon of English art. However, as Finke notes, although the works gained admission to the display, they were far from universally acclaimed. A notable critic of their contribution to the Exhibition was Layard, who devoted several pages of his review of the event to the faults of the Pre-Raphaelite style. His objections were remarkably similar to some of those voiced by Womum seven years earlier, especially with regards to charges of revivalism. The Pre-Raphaelites are reproached by Layard for imitating the technical, and particularly anatomical, defects of the Italian ‘primitives’, in the hope that this would result in the achievement of their spiritual depth and purity. Such reasoning is denounced, and likened to trying to replicate the admirable qualities of Chaucer by mimicking his archaic spelling. He states that, when before the works of the early Italians:

134Finke ‘The Art Treasures Exhibition’, p. 120.
135Bullen, The Pre-Raphaelite Body, p. 46. He states that by 1857 Pre-Raphaelitism ‘had achieved the distinction of ‘Masters of Modern Art’ at the famous Art Treasures Exhibition in Manchester.’
136Finke ‘The Art Treasures Exhibition’, p. 120. Reactions to their paintings are described as ‘mixed’; Millais’ Autumn Leaves (cat. no. 543) is said to be the only Pre-Raphaelite work which escaped criticism.
It is a proof of genius of those great men, that we almost forget their technical defects, arising from imperfect knowledge, in our sympathy for their earnest endeavours to embody the true and beautiful. When technical defects are the result of affectation or mere carelessness, they are unpardonable.  

In 1857, despite having been embraced in certain quarters, the Pre-Raphaelites were thus still being accused of stylistic affectation by prominent art critics. Cooper points out that ‘there was no connection between liking the Pre-Raphaelites and liking early art’, and Layard can here be seen using his art historical knowledge and preferences to discredit the modern school in a similar manner to Wornum, despite their divergent views on the respective merits of the various epochs of Italian art.

Hunt’s Awakened Conscience (cat.no. 565), which was lent to the Exhibition by Thomas Fairbairn himself, was singled out for particular disapprobation by Layard, who claimed that it failed to come within ‘the legitimate scope of painting’. He recognised the painting’s moral tone, but opined that art should teach by ‘showing the beauty of virtue and its reward’, as in the works of artists such as Fra Angelico or Perugino, rather than ‘the horrors of vice and its punishment’. The comparison of the productions of Pre-Raphaelism and the early Italian schools was facilitated in this instance, as examples of the two were under the same roof for the first time in a public display. However, all this demonstrated to Layard was the failure of modern attempts at didactic painting, even when placed next to the inferior assemblage of ‘primitive’ pictures present at the Art Treasures Exhibition. Layard’s concern with public art, in the form of frescoes and visual reproductions, also informed a part of his perception

139Stephens, William Holman Hunt, p.36. Fairbairn is here identified as an important patron of Hunt’s, whose ‘accuracy of judgement led him to buy the Valentine Rescuing Sylvia and Awakened Conscience when the artist’s fame stood still in the balance.’
141See chapter 3, section IV, pp.231-2.

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of educational failure in the *Awakened Conscience*. He wondered how such an explicitly moral subject could have any real success in exerting an improving influence when it was confined to a panel which would soon be back in a private collection away from the public gaze, especially since its unappealing appearance made it an unlikely candidate for engraving.142 This expert on the morality and didacticism of early Italian art judged the Pre-Raphaelite project as it was represented at the Art Treasures Exhibition to be somewhat ill-conceived and contradictory.

Fierce opposition to the principles of Pre-Raphaelitism continued despite its commercial success and increasing acceptance within the critical community. It became, in fact, the divisive issue within this community; Prettejohn argues that by the late 1850s, ‘the most reliable way to establish a distinctive critical voice was to adopt an aggressive stance for or against Pre-Raphaelitism’.143 It often appears to form a subtext to debate on the old masters during the decade, particularly with regards to the early Italian schools. Haskell claims that Eastlake’s disparagement of the ‘primitives’ when before the Select Committee of 1853, as discussed in chapter two,144 was partly due to a desire not to be seen to endorse or sanction the supposed regression of the Pre-Raphaelite school to the technical standards of that era.145 Eastlake’s evidence certainly contains some clear and unfavourable references to revivalism; he remarks, for example, that some traits of the early masters ‘would not be tolerated in a modern artist, nor should they be admired in any artist.’146 Over the course of the 1850s, many other commentators and critics followed Wornum’s example by making an

144See chapter 2, section V, pp.159-161.
145Haskell, *Rediscoveries*, p.53. Also, see Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p.13. It is argued that Eastlake’s opinions were coloured by the fact that he was ‘speaking as an academic at the height of the controversy over Pre-Raphaelitism.’
146‘Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery’, minutes p.456, q.no.6480.
indirect attack on Pre-Raphaelitism through the denigration of early Italian art. It was not only the paintings themselves which were denounced, but also those who had attempted to establish a proper appreciation of their perceived merits during the 1840s, and thus awakened widespread interest in them within the English art world. In the minds of their opponents, Pre-Raphaelitism and moral art history became commingled, being viewed as different parts of the same antagonistic movement, which warranted the strongest condemnation.

The reaction of certain periodicals to the publication of an English translation of Rio's De la Poésie Chrétienne in 1856 reveals a pronounced antagonism towards those who cultivated an exclusive taste for the 'primitives'. The Athenaeum stated that in the years since its original publication there had been:

a wholesale deposition of the Domenichinos, and Dolces, and Guidos, in favour of Angelicos, Giottos, Gozzolis, Orcagnas, belonging to the severer and more spiritual school of art; old notions concerning the mere manner of painting - long time held to be in its infancy - have been revived and defended as if they contained the life-breath and sinew of art's maturity.

The moral art history which Rio's text inspired is described as having encouraged 'foppery and frenzy' amongst the public, leading to many basing their taste on specious principles due to the influence of fashion; Pre-Raphaelitism and the popularity it had achieved was regarded as a symptom of this endemic revivalism. The appearance of this translation presented an opportunity to take intellectual issue with Rio and his British followers, and it was seized upon by certain reviewers. Blackwood's, for example, used its notice of the text to entirely refute the central tenets of De la Poésie Chrétienne. The magazine challenged the logic behind the French critic's assertion of the supremacy of the mystic painters, characterising them as men who had lived 'morbidly apart' from their peers, filling the same iconographic forms over and over again with 'the egotistical outpourings of overwrought emotion'.

147 Athenaeum, No.1511, 11th October 1856, p.1242.
As a result, it claimed, the productions of the Sienese school in particular were 'one doleful, monotonous whine'. Rio's demonising of naturalism in art is also attacked, with the journal's critic stating that 'the study of nature, rightly directed and employed, became absolutely essential to the further and full maturity of art.' The argument of the book is ultimately dismissed as static and therefore unrealistic, as it denied art any further progress after the cessation of the mystic school, a position Blackwood's regarded as untenable.

This spirit of informed objection to moral art history and the painters it championed can be observed in a series of articles in the Art-Journal, published between 1858-9. The relevance of these articles to the continuing debate on Pre-Raphaelitism has been recognised by several modern critics. Haskell, for example, claims that they were 'directly inspired by the danger to the modern English school - the fear of retrogression rather than progress.' Prettejohn identifies their probable author as being Joseph Beavington Atkinson, an avowed enemy of the Pre-Raphaelites and their supporters, who 'did not hesitate to link his critical position, not only to the High Art tradition, but to more general conservative values.' The articles were devoted to the Italian artists of the fifteenth-century, and took what can be described as the opposite stance to Rio regarding their various merits, celebrating the naturalistic and censuring the spiritual. In their open reference to Rio and his followers, and engagement with their views, the aim behind them seems to have been to present a conservative corrective to the influential view of the art history of this period given in De la Poésie Chrétienne. Like the Blackwood's review discussed above, the articles stress the importance of naturalism to the development of painting, and condemn the repetitious and restrictive treatment of religious iconography by the earlier schools.

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149 Haskell, Rediscoveries, p.53.
150 Prettejohn, 'Aesthetic Value', p.76.
151 Art-Journal, vol.4, 1858, p.349. Of the paintings of the Sienese school: 'Their faces are nearly all alike, and the little expression in those long, narrow slits of eyes, and
Several naturalistic painters are rescued from the castigation of Rio; of Albertinelli, for example, it is remarked that ‘the monkish cynicism of Rio casts on him much unfounded opprobrium’. However, the true extent of Atkinson’s polemical designs regarding the discourse of moral art history are revealed in his assaults on the artist-saint Fra Angelico, which can literally be regarded as iconoclastic. Angelico is said to be an artist about whom ‘our eloquent critics have of late so raved about, as unapproachable in art’, on account of ‘his heavenly sanctity of expression, raised far above all earthly soil of impurity and disturbance’. This holy vision is immediately undercut by the description of the paintings themselves as ‘insipid and almost nugatory’, displaying in their lack of sophistication an ‘apparent barbarism’ that belies the lofty claims made for the painter by the ‘eloquent critics’ of moral art history.

It was not only the claim of Angelico’s art to divine purity which was belittled in the magazine; the character presented in the biographies given by Rio and others, constructed to complement their view of the pictures, was doubted also. Atkinson commented that the biography of Angelico was so laden with tales attesting to his holiness that ‘it begins to look something like a sin to disparage him in any degree’, and that his fame as an artist had been ‘greatly enhanced by the spotless innocence of his dreamy life’. He accused Angelico’s supporters of supplying the painter’s manifold shortcomings with yet more biographical details which reinforced his identity as an artist-saint, and therefore fabricating a character of such unimpeachable holiness that it alone justified reverence. Ironically enough, given the stance he took in Giotto and His Works in Padua, Ruskin was identified as a particular offender, in whose work

hard meagre features, is disagreeable rather than otherwise.”

152 ibid., vol.5, 1859, p.132. Another example is Filippino Lippi: ‘Rio says that his career was one continued development of faults; but a jealous severity against those who fall away in any degree from the old ascetic standard often leads that writer into exaggerations.’

153 ibid., vol.4, 1858, p.350.
fictional embellishments were allegedly 'thrown in to heighten a picture'. Atkinson can be said to have undertaken the deconstruction of the narrative of moral art history. H.R. Jauss writes of the three functions of the fictive in narrative historiography in his essay 'The Use of Fiction in the Perception and Representation of History'. Foremost among these is the 'illusion of a complete unfolding of a course of events', which allows 'a fictive consistency that eliminates gaps in the narrated sequence', producing a self-sufficient and coherent whole. Atkinson's article on Angelico represents a conscious attempt to dissolve the central 'illusion' on which the discourse's narrative was based. The 'course of events' laid down in De la Poésie Chrétienne was dependent upon notions of a fall of painting, which was due to the moral corruption of fifteenth-century Italian society, of which the influx of naturalism into artistic practice was an obvious symptom. The leading figures of the spiritual school were necessarily portrayed as pure and devout men in order to maintain the coherency of the narrative; in casting aspersion on the historical truth of this portrayal, Atkinson was essentially demystifying mystic painting and challenging Ré's conception of the progress of Italian art. If the saintly persona of the artist was disproved, the religious magic of his work vanished, thereby negating the special value set upon 'primitive' painting by the moral art historian, and rendering it decidedly inferior to the naturalistic art which succeeded it.

Atkinson went further still in his efforts to depose Angelico by refusing to recognise the concept of the Church Eternal, which had been widely used by Protestant moral art historians to excuse their admiration for artworks produced for the purposes of the Catholic church. He claimed that his paintings, far from being elevated above the concerns of creed by their evocation of a pure religious ideal, bore the unmistakable

154 Ibid., p.351.
155 Jauss, 'The Use of Fiction', p.30. The other two functions given are 'the illusion of a clear origin and definite end', and 'the illusion of an objective picture of the past'.
impress of modern Catholicism, and accordingly participated to some extent in its mendacious abuses. In Angelico’s art, it was stated:

the clerical sanctities have, some of them, much the air of having been taken from life; exhibiting that peculiar self-complacent smile of conscious piety, with a certain dash of slyness beneath, which is a strong image in the memory of those who have loitered much in precincts where incense customarily rises.\[156\]

Anti-Catholicism is here made a factor in the appreciation of mystic art, with the signifier of incense used to summon a catalogue of Papal absurdities to the minds of the magazine’s readership. It was also suggested that the popularity of Angelico and his ‘slyness’ could have an injurious effect upon the character of Victorian Britain. The painter’s fashionable status had led to much wilful misrepresentation of the merits of his art, the *Art-Journal*’s critic argued, and had turned him into ‘a mere peg on which to hang vanities by no means conducive to a healthy state of imagination, or to sound religion or morality.’\[157\] The implication is clear; ignorant attempts at the appreciation of Catholic art in the name of fashion could lead to an engendering of sympathy for their heretical aspects, and therefore represented a threat to the Protestant faith of England. This allegation is similar to the fears expressed by E.H. Weeks at the close of the *Art Treasures* Exhibition,\[158\] apart from the fact that Weeks’ anxieties were entirely focused upon the uneducated working class. It was here proposed that there was also a danger to elements of the middle class as well, reflecting perhaps the internal schisms within this class discussed earlier in the chapter. Atkinson seems to assert that the weaknesses of ignorance, and therefore the spiritual hazards of partial understanding, were to be detected at all levels of British society.

The Pre-Raphaelites and their supporters would certainly have been considered by Atkinson to be prominent among those who had succumbed to the lure of Catholicism

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\[156\] *Art-Journal*, vol. 4, 1858, p. 353.

\[157\] *ibid.*, p. 351.

\[158\] See chapter 3, section VII, p. 271.
through their admiration of the Italian ‘ primitives ’. Anti-Catholicism was indeed an important element of the antipathy expressed towards the movement during the 1850s. Worwum makes several open references to possible Papal sympathy amongst the Brotherhood in ‘ Modern Moves in Art ’; he states, for example, that the works of their namesakes were products of ‘ a superstitious, Priest-ridden age ’, 159 and that (as quoted above) the artists themselves breathe in the spirit of ‘ the miserable asceticism of the darkest monastic ages ’. Such accusations were made with particular vehemence in criticism of the Brotherhood’s religious paintings. These paintings were by no means the first Christian images to be produced by Victorian artists: Dyce, Stothard and others had exhibited religious subjects throughout the 1830s and 1840s. A significant precedent was J.R. Herbert’s Our Saviour Subject to His Parents, which was shown at the Royal Academy in 1847. Despite the painter being a Catholic convert, whose work was enthusiastically praised by Wiseman, it appears to have attracted little controversy; Wiseman, although undoubtedly biased in its favour, declared in his essay ‘ Christian Art ’ that ‘ this painting has met with universal, and almost unbounded praise ’.160

The widespread animosity expressed towards Millais’ treatment of the same subject three years later can be attributed to the fact that it was regarded as a part of a movement, of a retrogressive body which posed a threat not only to British art, but also to British religion, and therefore British culture as a whole. Bullen has pointed out that Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, a Pre-Raphaelite picture with a more overtly Catholic sensibility than The Carpenter’s Shop, escaped the same critical condemnation as it was exhibited before the meaning of the initials ‘ P.R.B. ’ were known. After the full name was revealed, the religious paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites looked to commentators like part of a sinister Papist conspiracy.

160 Wiseman, ‘ Christian Art ’, p.379. He stated that ‘ it cannot make any but one impression, a tender and devout one ’.
which could no longer be excused as 'the product of individual and harmless eccentricity'. \(^{161}\) William Rossetti remarked in the *Critic* that its enemies considered the work to embody 'something not spiritual, not even human, but brutal and degrading'. \(^{162}\) Dickens was perhaps the most vociferous of these enemies, launching a famous attack in the editorial of the journal *Household Words*, in which he refused to associate the figures in the painting with the religious personages they represented, identifying them instead with various states of disease and squalor. \(^{163}\) Bullen provides a lengthy analysis of Dickens' reactions to the picture, in which he ascribes to the operation of a 'pathological discourse' born out of anxiety relating to the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England. \(^{164}\) He argues that dirt, disease and deformity were commonly associated in the Protestant mind with Catholicism, which was thought incompatible with bodily fortitude; the inherent corruption of the denomination was held to display itself in the bearing and well-being of its adherents. \(^{165}\) The fear, especially acute in 1850, was that Protestant Britain would become 'infected' through exposure to the febrility of Rome. Dickens believed that the consequences of the perceived Pre-Raphaelite regression to Catholic techniques and styles was clearly visible in the contorted and feckulent protagonists of *The Carpenter's*

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\(^{161}\) Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, pp.32-34.


\(^{163}\) Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p.16

\(^{164}\) Ibid., pp.35-45.

\(^{165}\) Dickens' own subscription to these views can be seen in *Pictures from Italy*, in which he remarked of the priests and monks of Genoa: 'I have no knowledge, elsewhere, of more repulsive countenances than are to be found among these gentry. If Nature's handwriting be at all legible, greater varieties of sloth, deceit and intellectual torpor, could hardly be observed among any class of men in the world' (Pictures, p.56).
Shuil, Echoes of his language are still detectable nine years later in a judgement on the Pre-Raphaelites delivered in the concluding paragraph of Atkinson’s final Art-Journal article on the Italian ‘primitives’; the school’s productions are here censured for their ‘astonishing awkwardness and hideousness of conception’.166

Significantly, however, the Pre-Raphaelites were never claimed by Wiseman as representatives of the ‘Catholic school of art’. In an addendum to ‘Christian Art’ made in an 1853 edition of his collected essays, he declared that although there was some promise in certain productions of this new group, their works were on the whole far too base and unappealing to qualify as true Christian painting.167 Nonetheless, the association of Pre-Raphaelitism with Papist sympathies was made by a wide range of British critics in the early 1850s, including the movement’s most staunch supporters. In his 1851 essay ‘Pre-Raphaelism’, which was written in defence of the Brotherhood, Ruskin identified its path as a hazardous one as it ran between the twin dangers of Romanism and medievalism; the latter, as Cooper has argued, was persistently associated with pernicious Catholicism due to the ‘Puginesque medievalism’ of the 1840s.168 Engagement with the principles of Christian art found in the works of the ‘primitives’, he opined, may lead ‘some weak ones’ to be touched by ‘the Tractarian heresies’; he was confident, however, that ‘if so, they will drop off like decayed branches from a strong stem.’169 Ruskin’s toleration and indeed appreciation of the religiosity found in the paintings of the ‘primitives’ clearly did not extend to the productions of the modern British school. This can be attributed not only to anti-Catholic feelings, with reference to mid nineteenth-century England at least, but also to his Hegelian convictions regarding progress in British art, as discussed in 166 Art-Journal, vol.5, 1859, p.132.
167 Wiseman, ‘Christian Art’, p.380 (note). He stated that ‘at present, with some exceptions, it stands to the real Christian Art, as the works of Niccolo di Fuligno do to those of Beato Angelico.’ Fuligno was a minor sixteenth-century painter.
chapter one. It should be noted that it was not Catholicism itself which Ruskin thought might develop among the Pre-Raphaelites, but rather Anglo-Catholicism, also known as Tractarianism or Puseyism. It was a suggestion which was hotly refuted by members of the Brotherhood, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Masson was another self-professed supporter of the Brotherhood who regarded the possible development of 'a leaning to Puseyism' as an inherent risk to the Pre-Raphaelite project. Writing in 1852, he stated that Ruskin's prediction had to some degree been fulfilled, in that several of the most prominent members of the group had laid 'their Pre-Raphaelism at the feet of the ancient mother-church, in whose service the early artists produced the paintings they so much admire.' This comment from a supposed ally of the movement seems to repeat the accusations of revivalism made by its enemies. Like them, Masson stresses the incompatibility of the theological outlook of the middle ages with the sophisticated scientific rationalism of Victorian Britain. His hope was that these regressive tendencies were but an 'evanescent tinge', which would soon be thrown off as the Brotherhood reapplied itself to the forward struggle of artistic progress.

As Wiseman had realised, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were not actually Catholics, and could not therefore be directly attacked as such by their opponents. Rio, however, was a Catholic, and was also associated with the movement due to his key role in the establishment of the taste for the 'primitives' in Britain. He thus became a focus for anti-Catholic feelings regarding the taste for early Italian art, as Atkinson's comment on his 'monkish cynicism' quoted above indicates. The review of the translation of De

170 See chapter 1, section VI, p.85.
171 Masson, 'Pre-Raphaelitism', p.79. He wonders 'how shall artists now tell of heaven and hell as emphatically as these old Italians, - now that the earth is not, as they fancied it, an infinitely extended mass of brown mineral matter, with a sulphurous hell somewhere in the chasms beneath, and a heaven of light so close above, as seemed the upper sky with its stars; but a little orb poised in infinite azure.'
La Poésie Chrétienne in Blackwood’s demonstrates a similarly keen awareness of denominational difference, with the journal remarking that Rio writes of the Madonna and the saints with ‘a reverence and a worship which befits that Church to which he evidently himself belongs’; the result of this is that ‘while we admire his earnest advocacy, we dissent from his conclusions.’ This declaration came at the beginning of the review, thus establishing the grounds for the intellectual revision of what were presented as deeply flawed theories. It was insinuated that the judgement of a Roman Catholic commentator on religious art could not be deemed in any way reliable by the more objective mind of a Protestant observer. The Art-Journal was more blatant in its accusations, recurrying to a familiar image in its attack on Rio’s ‘unctuous, incense-perfumed style’, which may ‘do some little for Rome, but it will do nothing here.’ The precise meaning of the symbol of incense to the Protestant critic is enlarged upon; Rio’s words are said to ‘rise like a soft cloud from a censer, sweet but rather mawkish, and partially obscuring’. Like the effects of actual incense in Italian churches, which were noted by Layard, the style of the French critic is said to represent a barrier before a clear and just appraisal of the paintings themselves. His influence in England, like that of Catholicism itself, is presented as both insidious and iniquitous. The magazine declares that it:

would ask those disposed, by weakness of temperament or corruption of fancy, to be influenced by him, to pause, and examine the expressions in these pictures, and ascertain of what they are really composed.

Adherence to the tenets of Rio is here equated with conversion to Rome, in that it represents a decision which could only be made through ‘corruption’ or ‘weakness’. In its series of articles on early Italian art, the Art-Journal called for a banishment of all vestiges of Catholic sympathy from the English art world, the primary manifestations:

\[172\] Blackwood’s, vol.80, July-December 1856, p.350.
of which were thought to be the endeavours of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and the moral art history engendered by De la Poesie Chrétienne.

Accordingly, responses in the 1850s to the publications of those British writers who had demonstrated the influence of Rio in their work of the previous decade were fraught with anxieties concerning denominational issues, and as mentioned earlier in the chapter, this was particularly pronounced with regards to the productions of Anna Jameson. The difference between the critical reactions to Sacred and Legendary Art of 1848 and Legends of the Monastic Orders of 1850 illustrates the change in British attitudes towards Catholicism as a result of the re-establishment of the Papal hierarchy. Whereas the earlier volume had received broad approbation, with few doubts expressed over the propriety of its subject matter, the later one elicited a more qualified response, and was treated with a degree of suspicion by certain elements of the periodical press. The attempts of Blackwood’s, in what was essentially a positive review, to establish a distinction between the pure, industrious monks who were the focus of the text’s discussion, and the corruptions of a ‘tyrannical Papacy’, indicate the politically charged nature of its content. The journal characterised the monastic orders as having been the last preserve of pious decency in the Catholic world due to their reclusive and worldly inclinations, commenting that ‘the evil of the Papacy had not reached them at once in their wildernesses.’ It would come to infect them eventually, it was conceded, but not before the Reformation had gained its initial impetus from within the walls of their institutions. Blackwood’s was careful to establish that this purity had been entirely extinguished, and was gone forever; recognition of the once-admirable nature of the monasteries could not be allowed to prompt nostalgia for them amongst Britons. Their denomination, it was stressed, made them incompatible with a modern Protestant nation:

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174 See chapter 1, section VI, p. 75.
Romanism is antagonistic with everything that is not of it. It demands at all times and everywhere to be the dominant power. To give it more than toleration, is to put into its hands that fulcrum which will be incessantly employed to subvert every institution that cannot be resolved into itself. Neither governments nor homes can escape its snares and its tyranny.\[175\]

The anti-Catholic feeling here expressed is more extreme than any encountered in earlier reviews, and it directly reflects fears that the Church of Rome was attempting to regain ecclesiastical control of Britain, which had been provoked by its actions in 1850. Other critics were more hostile still, and felt that Jameson was too sympathetic in the account she gave. The Spectator, whilst concurring with the claim that the devout nature of the ancient monastic orders stood in complete contrast to the turpitude of the priesthood,\[176\] nonetheless commented on the excessive ’toleration’ of the author. That which Blackwood’s had identified as the limit of Protestant acceptance was considered too liberal, and Jameson was criticised for depicting ’too much of bright colouring, or an absence of shade’. The magazine argued that monks, whilst pious, were also responsible for the repression of knowledge, having stifled all science and philosophy which was outside their narrow purposes, and thus ’kept the mind of man in cloistered darkness’.\[177\] Unsullied Catholic religiosity is here associated with the inhibition of the progress of mankind, much as it was in the attacks on Rio’s mystic school of painting discussed above. The Spectator’s judgement of Legends of the Madonna two years later was even more severe, largely due to its reviewer’s aversion to the subject matter. A ’certain sameness’ is detected in the volume, but it is also said to have ’a deeper source of inferiority’. The journal stated that the Virgin Mary, whilst not worshipped with the same intensity that she was in Catholic countries, still had ’great reverence’ attached to her in England.

\[175\]Blackwood’s, vol.69, January-June 1851, p.306.
\[176\]Spectator, vol.23, 17th August 1850, p.784. ’The mind which can best sympathise with the devout feeling and catholic Christianity of many monks even in the darkest times, will be the most deeply shocked at the priestly pride, the personal ambition, the secular objects, the bloody persecutions, the reckless disregard of truth, and too often the gross immorality, which have upon the whole distinguished the Romish clergy.’
\[177\]Ibid., pp.784-5.
Embellishments made to her life in Catholic apocrypha were thus 'at least distasteful to
Protestants', causing an offence absent in comparatively innocuous fantasies involving
saints or monks. 178

This opinion was not unanimous, however, and the connections between the subject of
Legends of the Madonna and modern English religion enhanced its significance for
some, without the generation of any denominational anxiety. Despite its careful
definition of its position with regards to Legends of the Monastic Orders,
Blackwood's unreservedly embraced the theological principles and the paintings
informed by them which were discussed in the Legends of the Madonna. Its critic
declared that it was impossible to approach scenes from 'this sacred drama, or legends
of the Virgin' without 'an awe and a reverence', which was equally due to the
'consummate genius' that had gone into their artistic production, and 'their deep and
sanctified sorrows, their grandeur, their celestial termination', which were ultimately
derived from their religious sources. 179 This lack of concern can be explained by an
evident faith in 'our Protestant authoress' to balance her discussion in a manner which
will prevent any heretical suggestions. Jameson's own argument, repeatedly made in
her work to defend her study of Catholic scenes and symbols, was here entirely
accepted by the magazine. Roman Catholics are openly identified as 'the enemy', and
fears expressed 'lest Romanism get strength from our weaknesses', but the study of
the religious art of the earlier schools is excused from any association with its cause. It
is stated of such painting that:

There was no Popery in all this, nor was it in the hearts of these great yet
unpresuming workers. Let us not, in a misdirected Protestant zeal, be guilty of a

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178Ibid., vol.25, 25th December 1852, pp.1234-5. It is remarked that 'grotesque or
undesignedly comic legends of men and women, whose claims at the very best are only
those of superior virtue, may raise a smile without offence; but the life of the Virgin
Mary does not permit any light feeling and is best left in the same obscurity as the
Evangelists left it.'

179Blackwood's, vol.74, July-December 1853, p.37.

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blind and unjust fanaticism; but looking back upon the page of history, and keeping in mind the visible culture of our own day, let us not be unthankful for benefits largely received, and show ourselves steeped in the superstition of self-pride.180

As in the work of Jameson herself, this plea for a just and measured response was informed by the concept of the Church Eternal, and asserted that there was a core of spiritual purity to the religious art of the pre-Reformation in which the foundation of the Christian faith as a whole could be observed.

The Spectator was not prepared to accept mitigating arguments of this nature, but despite its deep suspicion of Jameson’s subject matter, it made some allowances regarding her ‘toleration’ because of its perception of the function of her volumes. Legends of the Monastic Orders, the journal stated, was ‘a book intended for the drawing-room as well as for the library’, which explained the omission of ‘the foul and filthy in asceticism’, the ‘cruelty in fanaticism’, and ‘the false in the legendary’. This excuse could be regarded as an intellectual trivialisation of her work, the implication being that as a purveyor of entertainment as much as instruction, Jameson’s ultimate responsibility was to an aesthetically pleasing rather than an accurate view of history. It is proposed that her ‘feminine feelings’ enable her to ‘enter into the devout or the mystic devotion’ of the monastic orders, thus establishing an unspoken contrast between a mystic, partial and ‘feminine’ history, and a complete, rigorous, masculine one, which is essentially naturalistic in its prioritisation of truth and progress.

VI. ‘Truth Against Tradition’, Nature Against Raphael: Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite ‘Rebellion’

It was perhaps his perceived divergence from this conception of masculine history which earned Ruskin widespread vilification in the periodical press. Unlike Jameson,
he could not easily be trivialised, nor could the threat his work represented to the
critical status quo be ignored or dismissed; his writing often directly challenged
established notions of taste, exalted controversial modern artists such as the
Pre-Raphaelites, and contained no apology for its frequent assaults on bastions of
art-historical excellence. A Blackwood's journalist compared the two authors, and
identified a complete contrast between them. Ruskin, it was sarcastically reported, was
'the more eminent critic', who brags constantly and assures his reader of his
intellectual pre-eminence. Jameson, however, was 'content to divest herself of her
superiority, and give her audience an opportunity of judging with her'. With her, the
magazine contended, 'we have here no great critic to deal with, but an accomplished
observer, and lover of art.' 181 Whereas Jameson's work, in the judgement of
Blackwood's, was almost entirely innocent of egotism, Ruskin's was thought to be
consumed by it; many commentators appear to have been as offended by what they
took to be his self-opinion as by any of his proclamations on art. The combination of
the two often provoked outrage amongst reviewers. The Athenaeum, for example,
remarked in its notice of the first volume of The Stones of Venice that:

His censures are so widely flung about, his denunciations are so dogmatic and
curt, his doctrine is so directly counter to all the techniques and practices of our
time, and so subversive of nearly all hitherto received authority, that those who
are otherwise at variance with each other will make common cause against
Mr. Ruskin as their common foe. 182

As this quotation suggests, Ruskin's name was firmly associated by the 1850s with
bizarre and exclusive tastes, and savage and irrational attacks on acknowledged
masters and their pictures. The Art Journal was one of his harshest opponents,
devoting a great deal of column space to the censure of both the man and his theories.

181 Ibid., vol.78, July-December 1855, p.709.
182 Athenaeum, No.1221, 22nd March 1851, p.330. Similar views were expressed in
other periodicals, for example Blackwood's, vol.75, January-June 1854, p.755: when
writing on painting, Ruskin 'stabs right and left, like a Malay under the influence of
opium.'
Ruskin was a favoured target for disparagement over the course of Atkinson's series of articles on early Italian art discussed earlier in the chapter, as he was recognised as one of the most ardent and flawed advocates of Rio's critical discourse.

Ruskin's association with both moral art history and Pre-Raphaelitism made him the arch-rival of traditionalist critics throughout the 1850s. Antagonism towards him reached something of a peak in August and September 1859, when Atkinson provided the *Art-Journal* with a two-part article entitled 'Ruskin versus Raphael'. In this article, Raphael is vigorously defended against the slights made to his mighty reputation by Ruskin, both directly, in the form of invectives against the decadence of the High Renaissance, and indirectly, through support for the group of young British artists who were attempting to squander Raphael's artistic legacy, and thus lead the national school to ruin. The paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites are briefly and derisively compared with those of Raphael; unsurprisingly, they are said to reveal only 'pretentious arrogance' and, once again, 'affectation of manner'. In terms of his appreciation of the old masters, Ruskin was denigrated as a second-rate imitator of Rio, with all the ramifications that such a wretched condition was seen to involve. His style is described as being in places 'a poor affectation of the monkish tone', thus indicating his connections with the practice of the Pre-Raphaelites. This description not only ranks his work beneath the 'monkish cynicism' of the French critic, but also suggests possible Catholic sympathies; there is a clear contrast here with the efforts made by *Blackwood's* to defend Jameson from such inferences. Atkinson presents a complete reversal of the evaluative system proposed by moral art history, claiming that the Renaissance came about due to the advent of artistic freedom, rather than as a result of moral degeneration:

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\[^{183}\] *Art-Journal*, vol.4, 1858, p.350. In relation to Angelico, for example, Ruskin's critical interpretations are described as 'confused and shallow'.

\[^{184}\] *ibid.*, vol.5, 1859, p.230.
The age of all-absorbing monkish pietism and severe ascetic moralising in art was past; and religious dogmatism being through the printing press consigned to better hands, painting assumed the proper functions of a liberal art.

The 'narrow and strict dogmatism' which had fettered the pre-Renaissance era, and which Ruskin was seen to be attempting to resurrect, was portrayed as a worthless anachronism, which was of no value to either the formulation of a coherent art history, or the progress of modern painting. Ruskin's attacks on Raphael, thought by Atkinson to be the godhead of all painting, are dismissed as 'only a paroxysm of that sad complaint, the Raffaelophobia'; a mocking offer is made to lead him, 'supporting your arm', to the 'nearest soothing Francia'.

The validity of many of the assumptions and accusations made by the opponents of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites during the 1850s, particularly regarding connections with moral art history, is questionable. One area in which they certainly were valid, however, was that of Ruskin's persistence in expressing extreme and iconoclastic opinions concerning Raphael. Rather than simply follow in Rio's wake, as Atkinson had claimed, Ruskin honed the conception of the career divided in two by the decadence of the High Renaissance found in De la Poésie Chrétienne so that the precise point of Raphael's fall into degeneracy could be identified. This was believed to come in the Stanze della Signatura, when Apollo was painted on the walls of the Pope's private rooms. Ruskin proclaimed in 1854 that 'the doom of the arts of Europe went forth from that chamber.' If anything, his views became more extreme and dramatic as the decade progressed; in the third volume of Modern Painters, published in 1856, he attacked the Hampton Court Cartoons as prime examples of 'the false ideal'. The cartoon of The Miraculous Draft of Fishes is declared to be beyond all credibility, 'a mere mythic absurdity, and faded concoction of fringes, muscular arms,'
and curly heads of Greek philosophers'. Rather than being unreligious, as Rio might have claimed, Ruskin denounces the cartoons as being anti-religious. He remarks that:

A dim sense of impossibility attaches itself always to the graceful emptiness of the representation; we feel instinctively that the painted Christ and the painted apostle are not beings that ever did or could exist; and this fatal sense of fair fabulousness, and well-conceived impossibility, steals gradually from the picture into the history, until we find ourselves reading St. Mark, or St. Luke, with the same admiring, but uninterested, incredulity with which we contemplate Raphael.\textsuperscript{188}

This categoric denunciation, which perhaps prefigures Ruskin's 'unconversion' of 1858, represents a modification of the moral art historian's view of Raphael after experience of Pre-Raphaelitism. It reflects Ruskin's pronounced concern in the 1850s with the presence of 'truth' in painting, which, as discussed earlier, is also apparent in his work for the Arundel Society on Giotto. The traditional arguments made by Atkinson as a riposte to this scornful identification of the mature Raphael as a peddler of iniquitous falsehoods seem somewhat inadequate.\textsuperscript{189}

It was against deference such as Atkinson's to the High Renaissance, and the late works of Raphael in particular, that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had sought to define itself, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, it was, according to Hunt, their low opinion of the Transfiguration which had inspired their name. The movement had a broad polemical purpose similar to that of moral art history, in that it sought to apply different criteria to the evaluation of art, and thus cast aside the standards and principles of established convention. Stephens, who had been one of the founding members of the Brotherhood, summarised its project in 1850 in the pages of the short-lived Pre-Raphaelite journal the Germ. Its efforts, he claimed, represented:

\textsuperscript{188}Cook and Wedderburn (eds), \textit{The Complete Works, vol.5, Modern Painters III}, pp.82-83.
\textsuperscript{189}Art-Journal, vol.5, 1859, p.263. For example, Atkinson claims that Ruskin ignores the 'wonderful truthfulness, force and grandeur' in the Cartoons.
a marked attempt to lead the taste of the public into a new channel by producing pure transcripts and faithful studies from nature, instead of conventionalities and feeble reminiscences from the old masters; an entire seeking after originality in a more humble manner than has been practised since the decline of Italian art in the middle ages. 190

The worth of nature is asserted over the conventions believed by the Pre-Raphaelites to govern artistic practice in England, and especially that of the Royal Academy. Although the corrective measures proposed by the Brotherhood were very different from those of moral art history, as will be discussed later in the chapter, there is a similar conviction in the necessity of a complete revision of existing principles of artistic assessment; these traditional principles were thought by both to have fostered indolence and ignorance within the British art world. 191 William Rossetti stated in the Spectator in 1851 that the very term 'conventional' was 'an epithet of reproach', 192 as those labouring under its dictates were taught to rely not on nature, but on the work of other painters. He queried the logic behind the practice of painters who strove for 'imitation of Phidias' or Raphael's preference in feature, because Phidias or Raphael liked that, while you prefer Miss Smith'. Rossetti here argues that the art produced had little or no relevance to mid nineteenth-century life. He attributed its existence to the relative ease with which artists could follow the conventional path which led to its creation. After all, he reasoned sarcastically, 'it is so pleasant to learn what you have

190F. G. Stephens, 'The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art', Germ, nos.1-4, Ayloitt and Jones (facsimile edition), 1850, no.2 (February), p.58

191Both Ruskin and William Rossetti voiced their dissatisfaction with the general standard of English exhibitions of modern painting. Ruskin scorned 'the eternal brown cows in ditches, and white sails in squalls, and sliced lemons in saucers, and foolish faces in simpers' in his defence of the Brotherhood ('Pre-Raphaelitism', p.45); Rossetti informed the readers of the Crayon that the London exhibitions were characterised by 'extreme mental poverty and inanity of subject' (vol.1, Jan-June 1855, p.263).

to do, instead of studying and discovering it';\textsuperscript{193} British art and the general public, however, were thought to be suffering as a result of this painterly lassitude.

This issue of the imitation of certain renowned old masters amongst 'conventional' painters became a popular counter-accusation among the Pre-Raphaelites and their supporters against charges of medieval revivalism, and the name of Raphael was frequently mentioned in this context. Ruskin lamented in the course of his high-profile defence of the movement in 1851 that young painters are frequently told ‘that Nature is full of faults, and that he is to improve her; but that Raphael is perfection, and that the more he copies Raphael the better.’\textsuperscript{194} This ad vocation of the modification of nature is essentially Reynoldsian; Masson cites Reynolds as the particular enemy of the Pre-Raphaelites, even reproducing passages from the \textit{Discourses} ‘against which, as we conceive, Pre-Raphaelitism is most distinctly a rebellion.’\textsuperscript{195} Masson also argues that for centuries ‘painters have for the most part held up Raphael between themselves and nature’, thus making worship of the ‘divine painter’ and the development of a true naturalistic style fundamentally incompatible.\textsuperscript{196} The art of Raphael, of Reynolds, and of the modern British school was judged by these commentators to be devoted to the pursuit of beauty, which was thought to be a frivolous and superficial agenda. The Pre-Raphaelites, in contrast, sought truth, and wished to bring a new seriousness to British painting; like moral art history, the Brotherhood strove for the imposition of a higher level of emotional and intellectual engagement with art in society. Hunt stated in 1905 that the members of the movement believed they were acting for the national good in their desire to ‘replace this mere egotistical whim for art by a patriotic enthusiasm’. He also remarked upon the disfavour Pre-Raphaelite art found with those

\textsuperscript{193}ibid., p.170.
\textsuperscript{194}Ruskin, ‘Pre-Raphaelitism’, p.47.
\textsuperscript{195}Masson, ‘Pre-Raphaelitism’, pp.70-72. The Reynoldsian principles which the Pre-Raphaelites are said to be rejecting are that of the presentation of an 'abstract idea' of nature in order to avoid deformity; the use of poetic license in the portrayal of biblical figures; and the omission of details in the painting of nature.
\textsuperscript{196}ibid., p.73.
who looked upon art as "a pretty toy", similar language to that used by the Athenaeum in its condemnation of frivolity among the private collectors of old masters at the Summer Exhibition of the British Institution in 1859. Both the Pre-Raphaelites and their supporters, and the admirers of the Italian "primitives", were committed to combating such trivial attitudes towards art.

As the above quote from Stephens indicates, the Pre-Raphaelite project involved a quest for originality. It is unsurprising, therefore, that they contested strongly the efforts of their opponents to locate them in a nineteenth-century artistic tradition. Wimpern, for example, judged the source of the movement to be the modern German school, or Nazarenes, and Overbeck in particular. In his opinion, the Brotherhood owed a clear debt to the German painters who were guilty of first "transplanting the most morbid asceticism of the cell to the hitherto glowing face of Art." This verdict has both an aesthetic and a religious level; to be associated with the Nazarenes was to be associated not only with stylistic revivalism, but also with Catholicism. There was some anxiety regarding the denominational question amongst the Pre-Raphaelites themselves, as well as amongst their supporters and detractors. Hunt was worried about nomenclature, objecting to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's original title of the 'Early Christian Brotherhood'; this was partly due to his feeling that it was not "radically exact", but also because, as Prestejohn points out, it savoured "too much of modern revivalist schools such as the Nazarenes" who, as everyone knew, were Roman Catholics. There is evidence to suggest that William Rossetti was also sensitive about this issue. He reacted angrily to Ruskin's claim that tendencies indicating a possible susceptibility to Tractarianism could be detected in the movement, noting in

197 Hunt, Pre-Raphaelitism, vol.1, p.139.
198 See chapter 2, section V, p.154.
199 Wimpern, Modern Moves', p.270.
200 Hunt, Pre-Raphaelitism, vol.1, p.141.
201 Prestejohn, The Art, p.28.
the journal of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood that these supposed tendencies were
‘utterly non-existent in fact’.202

Such sensitivity may have been due to internal conflict in the Brotherhood during the
early 1850s regarding this question of sympathy with Catholicism, and its Tractarian
derivatives. This conflict centred around the religious works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
who had coined the term ‘Art-Catholic’ in the late 1840s to describe his views relating
to the execution of sacred art. Rossetti was extremely vague about his personal
religious beliefs (or lack of them). His short story ‘Hand and Soul’, which appeared in
the first issue of the Germ in 1850, even displays an ambivalent attitude concerning the
value of faith in painting: this will be discussed later in the chapter. The approach of
the ‘Art-Catholic’ involved what Riede has termed ‘an essentially atmospheric use of
medieval Catholicism’, which meant that the forms and symbols of sacred images were
employed by Rossetti in order to gain something of their ‘emotional tone’ for modern
painting.203 This can be compared with the figure of the ‘artist-saint’ Fra Angelico
composed by moral art historians in the 1840s, as discussed in chapter one,204 with
which Rossetti may well have been familiar. In both, the desire for some manner of
divine experience, or the ‘need for the perfect’ in the terminology of Jauss, has
inspired the utilisation of the visual or linguistic forms of religion in the attempted
creation or location of spiritual ‘perfection’ in art.

Riede has also stressed the ‘indirect but significant’ influence of the Nazarenes upon
Rossetti’s first Pre-Raphaelite works, which was exerted through his contact with
Ford Madox Brown, who was an admirer of the modern German school, and had even

202William Frere (ed.), The Pre-Raphaelite Journal: William Michael Rossetti’s
Diary of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood 1849-1853, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975,
p.94. From an entry dated 13th-15th May 1851.
203Riede, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, pp.28-29.
204See chapter 1, section IV, pp.57-63.
visited the studios of Overbeck and Cornelius. This is generally taken by modern critics to explain why The Girlhood of Mary Virgin of 1849 is, as Cooper puts it, 'unmistakably revivalist in subject and style'; its 'sequel', Ecce Ancilla Domine of 1850, is scarcely less so. These paintings were both exhibited in London, but in more minor exhibitions than that of the Royal Academy, which was where Millais' and Hunt's works were shown. This meant that despite their Marian subjects, and blatantly revivalist style, they received a lesser degree of opprobrium from the critical community, and were seldom singled out for the purposes of illustration in articles devoted to the denunciation of Pre-Raphaelitism; this could be because, as they were not included in the Academy Exhibition, they were perceived as less of a threat to the British school. Perhaps the most serious discontent stirred by Rossetti's paintings, however, was among his Brethren. Hunt and Millais complained that his works would associate Pre-Raphaelitism with Papist belief due to their evident debt to the Nazarenes. Hunt later described The Girlhood of the Virgin as having an 'Overbeckian revivalist character', and lamented that despite continued superintendence, Ecce Ancilla Domine 'still reflected Brown's early Christian phase'.

As Hunt's description of The Girlhood of the Virgin indicates, the objections of the Pre-Raphaelites to the Nazarenes were also aesthetic, and concerned the issue of stylistic revivalism. Hunt also stated in his memoir of the movement that the 'German

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205 Riede, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p.39.
206 Cooper, 'The Relationship', p.412.
207 Womum, for example, makes no mention of Rossetti and his works in 'Modern Moves in Art'; which is not, of course, to say that they escaped unscathed. Bullen, The Pre-Raphaelite Body, pp.32-33. The Girlhood of Mary Virgin was shown at the 'Free Exhibition of Modern Art' at the Hyde Park Gallery, where, although praised for its mystic purity, it was also accused of being populated by grotesquely rigid figures. Ecce Ancilla Domine, shown at the exhibition of the National Institution after the meaning of 'P.R.B' had been revealed, attracted yet more harsh comments: the Athenaeum, for example, considered it full of 'infantile absurdities'.
antiquarianism' with which Madox Brown was so enamoured 'was one of the principal
enemies which we originally committed ourselves to destroy.' Elaboration of the
reasons for this can be found in William Rossetti's journalism from the 1850s. In the
Spectator in 1851, he characterised the Nazarenes as thoroughly conventional, 'an
academic revival' whose ideal, as evinced by their work, 'seems beyond doubt to be
Raphaelesque'; the medievalism identified as the defining feature of their painting by
Wormum is thus denied, and the German movement aligned with the sterile restrictions
of mainstream British art. The Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti continued, 'recur to the one
primary school - Nature, as interpreted by their own eyes and feelings; the Germans,
to the purest form of a school ready-organised for them.' Four years later, he
declared in the Crayon that the two movements 'are simply at the Arctic and Antarctic
poles of Art'. The argument hinged once more upon the difference between the
Nazarenes' revivalism, and Pre-Raphaelism's allegiance to nature; revivalism of any
kind is likened to a distraction which the painter in search of truth must abjure in
favour of absolute dedication to the study of the natural world.

Despite the revivalist tendencies apparent in the first works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as a whole cannot be said to be the retrogressive
movement imagined by Wormum and others. This conception, as Cooper argues, was
due the presence of features in Pre-Raphaelite painting which were 'associated in the
public mind with medieval and revivalist art', such as flat colours, well-defined
contours, and predominantly religious or medieval subject matter. Ruskin pointed
out in his 1851 defence of Pre-Raphaelism that the most absurd aspect of this

209 ibid., vol.1, p.226.
210 W.M. Rossetti, 'Pre-Raphaelitism', p.175.
211 W.M. Rossetti, 'Correspondence: Art News from London, No.1', Crayon, vol.1, Jan.-June 1855, p.409. It is declared that 'the whole system of the Englishman consists in the utter rejection of all pre-conception...they will go straight to Nature, and her alone; forget everything about classicism, and medievalism, and revivalism, and
embody their own new thoughts according to the very sight of their own extant eyes.'
212 Cooper, 'The Relationship', p.411.
The relationship of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with its namesakes was more abstract than was often claimed by its opponents. As discussed above, the art-historical analysis of Wornum had led him to the conclusion that ‘primitive’ painting was conventional, in that its creation had been governed by a multitude of inflexible rules. Ruskin concurred with this judgement, declaring the style of early Italian art to be ‘conventional and imperfect’; in his view, however, this was irrelevant to its true value, as the outward form was ‘only a language wherein to convey the knowledge of certain facts’. His association of the Pre-Raphaelites with Giotto, mentioned above, as both represented the assertion of ‘truth against tradition’, was made on the basis of parallels between their historical situation, and their perceived artistic motives, rather than because of any great stylistic similarity. This was the

213 Ruskin, ‘Pre-Raphaelitism’, p.49.
214 Hunt, Pre-Raphaelitism, vol.1, pp.133-134.
215 Ruskin, ‘Pre-Raphaelitism (Lecture)’, p.142.
nature of the connection with the 'primitives' adopted by the Pre-Raphaelites
dthemselves; William Rossetti, for example, proclaimed that in true art 'the motive is
everything, the form comparatively nothing.'

This statement bears a superficial resemblance to the assertions of moral art history,
but the 'motive' of the Pre-Raphaelites was the pursuit of truth through the
representation of the natural, rather than the pursuit of divine purity through the
representation of the spiritual. The quote from Stephens given above cites their
humble search for originality as an aspect of early Italian art most admired by the
Brotherhood; this suggests a Hegelian conception of the continuing Comic progress of
human endeavour. Significant choices and arguments relating to the approval of
specific artists are also made in the course of this article for the Germ, which is entitled
'The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art'. The majority of the painters praised
by Stephens are from what a moral art historian would term the naturalistic school.
Masaccio, for instance, is lauded for the knowledge his works display, which is
'stranger and more pure...than in the Caracci, and the faith higher and greater'. He is
said to represent nature 'with more true feeling and more love, and with deeper insight
into her tenderness... it is the crying out of the man, with none of the strut of the
actor.' Although not condemned in the same manner as Filippo Lippi, with whom
he was commonly associated, Masaccio did draw some criticism from Rio for
allegedly using portraits to represent sacred personages, thus committing the cardinal
sin of the religious artist in the eyes of the moral art historian. It was, however, this
utilisation of the natural world, and humanistic approach to the depiction of religious
subjects, which won Masaccio the approbation of the Pre-Raphaelites. Of equal
importance to this admiration of naturalists in Stephens' article is his reinterpretation

\[
\text{Stephens, 'The Purpose', p.60.}
\text{Rio, De la, p.86. This was declared to be particularly visible in the Brancacci Chapel.}
\]
of the value of spiritualists. Fra Angelico is praised alongside Ghiberti and Ghirlandaio for their ‘character of gentleness, grace, and freedom’, which ‘must have been obtained by their peculiar attachment to simple nature alone, their casting aside of all ornament, or rather their perfect ignorance of such’. The exemplar of Rio’s mystic school was thus reinvented as a naturalist, in complete contradiction of the views of Angelico held by his worshippers and detractors alike in the 1840s. The Pre-Raphaelite view of art history was one which chose to regard the painters of fifteenth-century Italy as belonging to one school, unified in its efforts to attain truthfulness through the study of nature.

Despite this, both the Brotherhood and its supporters were keen to stress the major technical differences which existed between their works and those of the ‘primitives’. This typically involved the issue of painterly sophistication. In answer to accusations of stylistic revivalism, William Rossetti stated in 1851 that the two shared the same aim, ‘truth’, and the same process, ‘exactitude of study from nature’, but the practice was different as the ‘means are enlarged.’ The early Italians were not therefore to be regarded as prototypes for Pre-Raphaelitism in terms of direction, but rather ‘in tone, of mind - in earnestness and thoroughness’. In 1851, Ruskin had vigorously defended the Brotherhood’s works against charges of stylistic unsophistication; he echoed Rossetti’s assertions in 1854, when he commented upon the mistaken supposition among the public at large ‘that, instead of wishing to recur to the principles of the middle ages, these men wished to bring back the ignorance of the middle ages’.

221 Ruskin, ‘Pre-Raphaelitism’, p.49. This included open dispute with the claims of The Times and the Art-Journal that the Pre-Raphaelite works in the Royal Academy that year featured contrived, and therefore doubly iniquitous, errors of perspective.
222 Ruskin, ‘Pre-Raphaelitism (Lecture)’, p.144.

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It could be argued that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood did not actually have sufficient experience of 'primitive' art to base a revivalist movement upon, and that their idea of early painting was derived primarily from the accounts and descriptions of others. None of its members had been to Italy, and there is a certain vagueness to many of their critiques of early masters which suggests a lack of extensive first-hand knowledge. However, they would probably have been familiar with some of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth-century works which could be found in certain English galleries. Malcom Warner regards the National Gallery's panels then attributed to Taddeo Gaddi to be of key importance to the inception of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. As discussed in chapter two, they were donated to the Gallery in 1848, the year of the Brotherhood's foundation, and Warner makes an exhaustive attempt to attribute stylistic and symbolic elements of both Millais' *Isabella* and Dante Rossetti's *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* to their influence. If such direct links were made by the artists' contemporaries, it would justify Haskell's interpretation of Eastlake's evidence to the 1853 select committee. It should be noted, however, that belief in the potential of 'primitives' in the National Gallery to encourage Pre-Raphaelite revivalism on Eastlake's part would make his determined pursuit of earlier works once he was the Gallery's director seem somewhat perverse. It is possible that his collecting activities on behalf of the Gallery in the second half of the 1850s indicate an awareness of the avowed anti-revivalist stance adopted by the Brotherhood itself, meaning that the early Italian schools could be collected without fear of fomenting widespread stylistic regression among the modern English school. Ultimately, though, no public opinion explicitly concerning Pre-Raphaelitism was ever expressed by Eastlake. In 1851, Ruskin wondered why the heads of the Royal Academy remained silent whilst paintings they had selected for inclusion in the annual Exhibition were savaged by the

223 See chapter 2, section II, p.113.
press on specious and often ridiculous grounds.\textsuperscript{225} This may well have been because
of private agreement with the hostile sentiments being expressed,\textsuperscript{226} but Ruskin
nonetheless argued that they could do a great service to British art by publishing their
opinions of the works shown. This was never done, and it was perhaps this perception
of a lack of a formal commentary on the Royal Academy Exhibitions which inspired
Ruskin to commence his \textit{Academy Notes} in 1855.

The Pre-Raphaelites were also exposed to reproductions of early Italian art, most
notably Carlo Lasinio’s engravings of the cycle of the frescoes in the Campo Santo at
Pisa by Benvenuto Gozzoli, which were seen by the Brotherhood in 1848. Much has
been made of this experience by modern critics; Warner states that they reacted to the
prints with ‘cultish excitement’,\textsuperscript{227} and Tim Barringer has argued that they provided
the nascent movement with its ‘most immediate stimulus’\textsuperscript{228} Hunt’s recollection of
the Brotherhood’s estimation of Gozzoli as a result of this encounter reveals qualified
opinions of ‘primitive’ painting similar to those discussed above: the feelings provoked
by the prints were not, according to his report, unequivocally positive. The
Pre-Raphaelites’ identity as mid-nineteenth-century painters meant that they could not:

\begin{quote}
curb our amusement at the immature perspective, the undeveloped power of
drawing, the feebleness of light and shade, the ignorance of any but mere black
and white differences of racial types of men, the stinted varieties of flora, and
their geometrical forms in the landscape; these simplicities we noted as
belonging altogether to the past and to the dead revivalists, with whom we had
determined to have neither part nor lot.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{225}Ruskin, ‘Pre-Raphaelitism’, p.49. Ruskin here wonders why the Academicians do
not attempt ‘the contradiction of statements directly false respecting them’ (the
Pre-Raphaelites’.

\textsuperscript{226}Haskell, \textit{Rediscoveries}, p.53 (note). Haskell quotes Mary Howitt’s \textit{Autobiography}
of 1851 to illustrate Eastlake’s distaste for Pre-Raphaelitism: ‘the then recently
appointed President of the Royal Academy, Sir Charles Eastlake, privately said that it
was the last year that the Hanging Committee would admit this outrageous new school
of painting to their walls.’

\textsuperscript{227}Warner, ‘The Pre-Raphaelites’, p.4.

\textsuperscript{228}Tim Barringer, \textit{The Pre-Raphaelites: Reading the Image}, London, Everyman, 1998,
p.34.
Such technical deficiencies and limitations were thought to be detrimental to the pursuit of truth in art, and therefore to the Pre-Raphaelite project; the movement appears to have gained an affirmation of their goals and purpose through the criticism of one of their namesakes. However, despite the contemptuous attitude displayed towards this range of crude and ignorant flaws they perceived in Gozzoli’s art, Hunt reports that the Pre-Raphaelites also found much to admire in the engravings. Foremost among these was the remarkable level of ‘incident derived from attentive observation of inexhaustible Nature’.  

The naturalism to which the Pre-Raphaelites repeatedly claimed their devotion was not the base, sensual naturalism so roundly condemned in the moral art historical texts of the 1840s. The term was essentially reclaimed from Rio by the Brotherhood, and purged of any pejorative connotation through association with the pursuit for truth. Rather than oppose the natural and the spiritual as moral art history had done, the natural was defined as the route to a piety in painting which was relevant to British society in the mid-nineteenth century; as discussed in chapter one, even the most enthusiastic admirers of early Italian painting were keen to stress its theological ‘otherness’. The formulation of the mythology of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was commenced soon after the paintings of its former members attained the acceptance of the art buying public. It emphasised the critical role the natural world had played in the development of the artistic consciousness of the movement, and often suggested that it had provided some kind of spiritual experience to its young members. Stephens’ 1860 biography of Hunt, for example, tells of how the painter as a youth would walk the 35 miles from his home to Hampton Court with his friends:

229 Hunt, Pre-Raphaelitism, pp. 134-135.
230 See chapter i, section V, pp. 66-70.
ostensibly to visit the Titians, Tintorettos, Holbeins and Raffaeles (sic), but really to bathe themselves deep in the fresh sunlight and air, and to linger under the avenue in Bushy Park, or lie on the river bank, discussing Art questions...and returning footsore, hungry, weary, yet happy, to the dingy homes in London, going to work the next day with a newer life and a wider experience.231

This deeply Romantic vision of Hunt's childhood assigns inspirational, even transcendental qualities to his 'bathing' in nature, which has displaced art as the object of the young painter's lengthy pilgrimage. The Pre-Raphaelite approach to nature was frequently perceived to have religious significance by members of the Brotherhood. In 1850, Stephens proclaimed in the Germ that by 'enabling himself to reproduce, as far as is possible, nature herself, the painter will best evince his share of faith.'232 This idea of artistic naturalism as a mode of worship was enlarged upon by William Rossetti, who stated in 1851 that the Pre-Raphaelite, unlike the conventional artist, will not attempt to 'improve' God's works, as 'his creed is truth'.233

His creed, as Rossetti stated six years later in the Edinburgh Weekly Review, was also Protestantism. In an article entitled 'The Externals of Sacred Art', he argued that the 'consentaneous tendency' of the age was towards naturalistic art, which with reference to religious painting meant narrative rather than typical representation. This was compatible with Protestantism, which was thought to be predisposed to 'receive gladly any conscientious and heartfelt representation of scriptural history, in which the aim is to adhere strictly to the recorded fact, merely transferring it from verbal expression to form.'234 Rossetti here claims that Pre-Raphaelite principles could bring about the English Protestant school of religious painting declared impossible by Wiseman a decade earlier.235 This school, whose works would be simply 'direct bible narrative', would stand in complete contrast to the confusing, authoritarian complexity of typical

231 Stephens, Hunt, p.3.
(and Catholic) treatments of Christian subjects; this would be in keeping with the
tendencies of nineteenth-century Britain, where 'men like to see a proposition put into
crude form, and to have a truth enforced by example rather than precept.'

Protestantism, like Pre-Raphaelism, is said to have 'broken away from tradition', and
it is accordingly against pictorial traditionalism that Rossetti defines religious
naturalism. In a passage that clearly bears the influence of Ruskin's description of the
'false ideal' in Modern Painters III, Raphael's cartoons are identified as a model of
traditionalism. Rossetti goes on to declare that:

The traditionalist dresses his figures in blankets which were never worn, puts a
bit of Judaism here for the 'characteristic' heads, a bit of Anglicism there
(supposing him to be a Briton), a bit of classicism, and an entirety of nothingism.

This 'nothingism' is the result of the failure of the traditionalist to give his work a
factual aspect. In truly sacred art, Rossetti opines, the 'professed fact' of religion must
be depicted 'like a fact', otherwise 'the whole thing is dead, and worse than useless'.

This judgement is very similar to Ruskin's attack on the 'graceful emptiness' of The
Miraculous Draft of Fishes and its anti-religious tendencies; the traditional mode of
religious painting is proclaimed by both to be inimical to the spiritual value of what it
represents. The naturalist, however, whether from mid nineteenth-century England or
fourteenth-century Italy, was seen to be free from all conventions, with 'no model
except nature'. Rossetti here refers to the efforts of the Pre-Raphaelites to attain
realism in their religious pictures. These ranged from the faithful depiction of the
friends and family members used as models, which had elicited so much revulsion
among the press, to Hunt's first journey to Egypt and the Holy Land in 1854, in order
to provide accurate local settings and types for his representations of bible stories. The
result of this healthy practice, Rossetti argues, was 'a living art', with the reality of a
subject being both thoroughly felt and successfully communicated by the artist.236 As

236 W. M. Rossetti, 'The Externals', pp.45-47.
with moral art history, a binary opposition was created by Rossetti in his efforts to define true religious art; but rather than being demonised as the corrupter of art’s moral and religious purity, naturalism was here celebrated as a vibrant and original force, which countered the stagnation of a moribund traditionalism.

VII. ‘The Nature of the Gothic’ and ‘the Great Naturalist’

In 1859, Atkinson expressed the wish in the Art-Journal that Ruskin would get off his ‘spiritual stilts’ and develop an appreciation for the human in art, and soften his ‘morbidly intense devotion to things inanimate and abstract’; yet many of the volumes he produced during the decade, as well as his admiration of the Pre-Raphaelites, suggests that he had already done so. Whereas the other two writers identified in chapter one as the major British moral art historians of the 1840s either failed to develop significantly their theoretical approach, in the case of Jameson, or ceased to be involved in art criticism at all, in the case of Lindsay, Ruskin’s meditations on the relative merits of the various schools of old master painting underwent notable revision in the 1850s. For example, ‘The Nature of the Gothic’, from the second volume of The Stones of Venice, which was published in 1853, contains a system of classification of ancient art which represents a conclusive move away from the precepts of Rio. The polarisation of mysticism and naturalism found in De la Poésie Chrétienne, which Ruskin had himself utilised in Modern Painters II, has

238 Lindsay published no more works of art history; he also withdrew from involvement with the Arundel Society two years after its foundation, having done little more than lend his name to the list of council members (Cooper, ‘The Popularisation’, p.264). Furthermore, as Brigstocke notes, his activities as a private collector during the 1850s ‘confirm the impression that Lindsay had relaxed the regard for the école mystique which had dominated his aesthetic responses during the 1840s’: in March 1858, for example, he bought a Flight into Egypt by Guido Reni (Brigstocke, Lindsay as a Collector, p.305).
been significantly adapted in order to create a system which identifies three rather than two classes of religious painters, called those of the right, the left and the centre:

Those on the right perceive, and pursue, the good, and leave the evil; those in the centre, the greatest, perceive and pursue the good and evil together, the whole thing as it verily is; those on the left perceive and pursue the evil, and leave the good.

Although conceived in explicitly moral terms, the necessity of 'evil' in a complete work of art is recognised. Ruskin's concern with 'truth', and involvement with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, led to a greater engagement with the idea of naturalism which moved him away from the restrictive rulings of Rio. The centre group, he states, 'render all that they can see in nature unhesitatingly, with a kind of divine grasp and government of the whole', which sympathises with the good, but whilst 'confessing, permitting, and bruising good out of the evil also'. Artists of the right, or the 'Purists', were entirely caught up in the divine; those of the centre, or the 'Naturalists', interpret the divine as it relates to the human; and those of the left, or the 'Sensualists', were human only, and were invariably 'either useless or harmful men'.

The division proposed by moral art history is directly challenged, with Ruskin declaring that 'the basest class has been confounded with the second', and painters split into only two ranks, the Purists and the Naturalists. Such a conception, Ruskin argues, does 'infinite dishonour to the great faithful painters of nature'. He contends that:

the Purists, in their sanctity, are less separated from these natural painters than the Sensualists in their foulness; and the difference, though less discernible, is in reality greater between the man who pursues evil for its own sake, and him who bears with it for the sake of truth, than between this latter and the man who will not endure it at all.  


240 Ibid., p.224.
His assertion of the superiority of the ‘Naturalists’ led Ruskin to a perception of the limitations of the early Italian schools. The ‘Purists’ were largely indistinguishable from Rio’s mystic school, with painters such as Perugino, Francia and Bellini listed among their most prominent representatives. These artists are said to have completely withdrawn from the realities of earthly existence, shunning the representation of the body in particular, which they would rather depict ‘emaciated by the fast, or pale from the torture, than strengthened by exertion, or flushed by emotion’. This contrasted with the practice of ‘the great Naturalist’, who took on ‘the human being in its mortal as well as its spiritual strength’.

Ruskin’s influence can be seen in the conceptions of others who sought to correct Rio in the 1850s. The 1856 Blackwood’s review of the translation of De la Poësie Chrétienne, for example, also established three distinct categories of painters, with the same characteristics as those described in ‘The Nature of the Gothic’. Of these, the centre also is identified as the superior group, with the magazine asserting that the greatest religious art is that in which ‘the ideal and the actual become one’; the left are also reviled as artistically misguided, and morally deviant. Ironically enough, Ruskin’s perception of the flaws inherent in the ‘Purist’ mode of painting bear a strong resemblance to attacks in the periodical press not only on ‘primitive’ art itself, but also the English taste for it. Ruskin declares that ‘the very becoming of a Purist is commonly indicative of some slight degree of weakness, readiness to be offended, or narrowness of understanding of the ends of things’, accusations which are very similar to those made by the Art-Journal regarding the English followers of Rio discussed earlier in the chapter, of whom Ruskin was seen to be the most prominent example. In ‘The Nature of the Gothic’, however, he demonstrated that his theories

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241 Ibid., p.226.
242 Blackwood’s, vol.80, July-December 1856, p.361. The journal commented that, with regards to the immoral art which came about in the wake of the Renaissance, ‘the evil arose, not necessarily in the study of nature, but from the want of a right study.’
regarding old master painting had developed, and that he had largely discarded the exclusive tastes decreed by an adherence to moral art history. The supremacy of the 'Naturalists' is repeatedly emphasised throughout the essay, and the artists named as the prime examples of this class come from a range of schools and eras. Ruskin's perennial favourites Tintoretto and Turner are among them, but also included are High Renaissance painters such as Michelangelo and Raphael. Ruskin's rancour towards the late paintings of Raphael hadn't yet reached the levels it would in 1856, but the artist, in his Roman period at least, is still belittled by classification as a 'Naturalist' whose work inclined more towards good than evil, and thus failed to achieve a dynamic balance between the two. The effect of this slight was enhanced by the identification of Giotto as an exponent of 'Naturalism' who, unlike Raphael, had attained the equilibrium between good and evil which was essential to great art.244

As the connection of Giotto and Millais in Giotto and His Works in Padua suggests, Ruskin thought Pre-Raphaelitism to be a 'stern Naturalist' movement.245 This declaration was made in Modern Painters III, which adheres to the same classificatory system as that of 'The Nature of the Gothic'; other modern artists were also evaluated in accordance with this system over the course of the volume, and all were found to be inferior to the Pre-Raphaelites. Stothard, an English artist whose links with early Italian art had long been recognised by his contemporaries,246 is declared a 'Purist'; with all the limitations of that class; Ruskin stated that 'nothing can be more pitiable than any endeavour by Stothard to express facts beyond his own sphere of soft pathos or graceful mirth.'247 Ruskin's opinion of the modern German school was extremely

244ibid., p.222.
246Haskell, Rediscoveries, p.50. It is here related that early English visitors to Italy such as Lady Calcott, who toured the country during the early 1830s, found themselves reminded of Stothard when before the works of the fourteenth and fifteenth-century painters.
247Ruskin, Modern Painters III, p.106. Stothard had also been briefly mentioned by Ruskin as belonging to the purist class of painters in his initial definition of his system.
low, and Overbeck is attacked at length in Modern Painters III for displaying 'Sensualist' tendencies. He is said to be a 'most notable instance' of one who 'degrades the subjects he intended to honour' due to deficiencies in both intellect and imagination.\textsuperscript{248} The right of the Nazarenes to be considered as precedents to Pre-Raphaelitism was thus categorically denied, as it had been by the members of the Brotherhood; given his worries concerning Pre-Raphaelite Tractarianism, it is possible that Ruskin's judgement of the German painters was also coloured by anti-Catholic feelings.

Despite these occasionally harsh verdicts regarding modern painters, Ruskin's new system was generally less polemical with regards to the canon of old master painting than his earlier conceptions, and the opinions that had informed them. Even artists he had openly attacked were admitted to the ranks of the 'Naturalists'; a notable example is Rubens, whom Ruskin had spoken out against in the 1840s on account of the predominance of his work amongst the purchases of the National Gallery.\textsuperscript{249} This was possible due to Ruskin's perception of differing measures of good and evil which were commixed in the pictures of a 'Naturalist', and Rubens is identified as one whose art was more akin to that of the 'Sensualists' than that of the 'Purists'.\textsuperscript{250} This new versatility of classification can be understood as a recognition of the limitations of Rio's system. Ruskin was not the only historian to arrive at such a conclusion; even Dennistoun, who chose to utilise the polarity found in \textit{De la Poésie Chrétienne} in his \textit{Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino}, acknowledged the fault in such a conception. He describes 'the two extremes - ribald vulgarity on the one hand, and transcendental mysticism on the other, between which the standard of true criticism may be sought'.\textsuperscript{251} Whilst it was a useful means of arguing the value of Sienese painting, a

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{248}A SO, p.50. \\
\textsuperscript{249}See chapter 2, section II, pp.110-111. \\
\textsuperscript{250}Ruskin, \textit{The Stones}, vol.2, p.222. \\
\textsuperscript{251}Dennistoun, \textit{Memoirs}, vol.2, p.162.}
fundamental opposition between mysticism and naturalism was nonetheless understood to be a flawed paradigm on which to base an appreciation of the entire history of art.

The poetry of Robert Browning also contains a rigorous interrogation and criticism of the principles of moral art history. Browning had read several of the texts produced in the 1840s which adopted the principles of De la Poésie Chrétienne, and was unimpressed by some, notably Mary Shelley’s Rambles in Germany and Italy of 1844. He made the following comment in a letter to Elizabeth Barrett in 1845:

Her remarks on art, once she lets go of Rio’s skirts, are amazing - Fra Angelico, for instance, only painted Martyrs, Virgins etc. - she had no eyes for the divine bon-bourgeoisie (sic) of his pictures; the dear common folk of his crowds, those who sit and listen (spectacle at nose and bent into a comfortable heap to hear better) at the sermon of the Saint- and the children, and women,- divinely pure they all are, but fresh from the streets and market-place.252

Interestingly, the example given of a supposedly independent commentary upon art by Shelley is one which accords completely with the central contentions of Rio’s work. It is possible that Browning is here seeking to indicate the ineluctable nature of profound intellectual influence, and the limitations imposed by adherence to a critical code; he would later question the validity of such art-historical formalism in his poetry. What is certain is his assertion, like that of Stephens in the Germ five years later, of an effective naturalistic element in the painting of Fra Angelico, which placed him in direct opposition to the French critic and his followers, who cited the life and work of this artist as the ultimate manifestation of the mystic school. Browning refuted the opposition of mysticism and naturalism as a sound basis for art appreciation, maintaining that it required a certain degree of critical dishonesty. As the above quotation illustrates, he thought that Shelley deliberately overlooked Fra Angelico’s

inclusion of the 'street and market-place' in his religious scenes in order to make her
Riaesque proclamations. Browning's approach was founded in a desire to admit
openly, and even revel in, the complexity and contradiction which he believed were
inherent to any analysis of ancient art. This attitude lies behind his claim that not only
was everyday reality an admirable aspect of Angelico's art, but that it was also
somehow sanctified. As in the work of the greatest 'Naturalists' identified by Ruskin,
mysticism and naturalism were here seen to be combined, a view which would have
been inconceivable to an acolyte of Rio, but which gained currency during the
1850s.253

As Browning's confident descriptions of the paintings of Fra Angelico in 1845
demonstrate, his earlier trips to Italy had allowed him to gain first-hand familiarity with
the Italian 'primitives'. Once actually living in Florence, his knowledge expanded yet
further; after having walked around the Louvre with him in 1851, Dante Gabriel
Rossetti commented that Browning's learning on such art was 'beyond that of anyone
I ever met'.254 Recent critics have pointed out that the major works of Rio, Ruskin,
and Jameson from the 1830s and 1840s constitute, as Dwight Culler puts it, 'the
background against which his painterly poems must be read'.255 There can be little
doubt, however, that Browning regarded them as exponents of a flawed and
mainstream critical approach against which he could define himself, rather than as a
source of information and interpretative strategy.

253 It is found, for example, in the art criticism of Wiseman, who stated in 1855 that:
'In the art of that period (the fourteenth century), so eminently Christian, we discover
a union between love of nature and deep religious spirit. Who can fail to see, that in
the beautiful religious paintings of early art, the subordinate parts, foreground and
background, are finished, as the Italians say, con amore, that is, with the love of what
they represent.' (Wiseman, On the Perception of Natural Beauty by the Ancients and
Moderns/ Rome, Ancient and Modern: Two Lectures Delivered on 10th December
1855 and 31st January 1856, London, Burns and Lambert, 1856, p.26.)
254 Benét (ed.), From Robert, 1936, p.35.
255 Culler, The Victorian, p.208.
VIII. The Early Italian Artist in Literature: Browning's Painter Poems and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Hand and Soul'

Fra Lippo Lippi' and 'Andrea del Sarto', the two 'painter poems' from Men and Women, stem from the same tradition of the dramatic portrayal of scenes from the lives of artists discussed earlier in the chapter in reference to Higford-Burr's The Interior of the Arena Chapel, with Dante and Giotto. This was as much a literary as a pictorial tradition, with Victorian poets and dramatists also producing representations of significant moments from the careers of great Italian painters. The body of anecdotes and simplistic characterisations found in Vasari's Lives was similarly the primary source from which the materials for these depictions were drawn. The moments chosen were various, with dramatic potential the only prerequisite; death scenes had an equal allure to the glories of achievement portrayed in paintings such as Leighton's Cimabue's Madonna Borne in Procession. In 1859, for instance, G. Walter Thornbury produced a series of short plays entitled 'The Last Hours of the Painters' which were published in the Art Journal. This series included a three-act piece entitled 'Fra Angelica in the Chapel of the Vatican', as well as dramatisations of the demise of more recent painters such as Watteau and Brauwer. Thornbury's Fra Angelico is little more than a transcript of the man described by Vasari, and the dialogue between his characters is full of information related in the Lives. The master dies surrounded by grief-stricken pupils, imparting wisdom and advice that corresponds closely with his Vasarian portrait. 256

256 Art Journal, vol. 5, 1859, p. 186. Angelico instructs Benozzo Gozzoli: 'Tell Michelino (a fellow pupil) never to paint till he has received the Eucharist; how can a man paint religious pictures if he have an impure heart? Stand boldly before men, but paint on your knees; a man sees best the holy passion he paints through his tears.' Compare with Vasari, Lives, vol. 1, p. 410: 'Some say that Fra Giovanni would never take his brushes in hand without first offering a prayer. He never painted a Crucifix without the tears streaming down his cheeks.'
Other Victorian scenes from artists’ lives were more experimental in their choice of moment and their utilisation of Vasari. The 1846 edition of Walter Savage Landor’s *Imaginary Conversations* included a discourse between Fra Filippo Lippi and Pope Eugenius IV which takes far greater liberties with the portrait provided in the *Lives* of the painter in question than the other two examples given above. Landor focuses his attention upon incidents and events to which Vasari devotes little space; indeed, the artist’s relationship with the Pope is only mentioned by him as a brief concluding remark:

(Lippi’s) death grieved many friends, particularly Cosimo de’ Medici, as well as Pope Eugenius, who offered in his lifetime to give him a dispensation, so that he might make Lucrezia, the daughter of Francesco Buti, his legitimate wife; but this he refused to do, wishing to have complete liberty for himself and his appetites.

This reference provided Landor with the basis for his conversation, with him using an imaginary meeting between libertine monk and sanctimonious pontiff as a means to explore and assess both Lippi’s experience and the insights it has brought him. Lippi is portrayed as a raconteur, relating the events of his varied and worldly life to a fascinated Pope, who clearly receives strong vicarious pleasure from hearing of the artist’s adventures, despite his awareness of their dubious morality from a formal Christian standpoint. Oppositions are established between the sensual abandon of Lippi’s life, and the ecclesiastical restraint and ambition of the Pope’s, which provides the basis for a play in the dialogue on the nature of experience. Eugenius tells the painter that ‘thou hast seen but little of the world’ due to the desultory path he has

257 Charles C. Crump (ed.), *Imaginary Conversations by Walter Savage Landor*, London, J.M. Dent and Co., 1891 (1846), 6 vols. This text was a project which took its author over twenty years to complete. The first edition was published in 1826, and consisted of only one volume; Landor embellished his work in subsequent editions, and the final version, first published in 1846, stretched to six volumes. The conversation between Lippi and Pope Eugenius IV was a late addition to the text, first included in the 1846 edition, and probably written in the early 1840s.


followed, yet the reader is shown that it is the Pope who is truly naive, having been
granted only a limited experience of life by his strict observance of Christian law. Their
debate primarily concerns the time Lippi was believed to have spent as a slave in
Barbary, having been captured by Turkish pirates whilst out in a pleasure-boat. Vasari
treats this incident as a horrific ordeal, stating that he had remained ‘in great misery for
eighteen months’ before gaining his release through displays of artistic skill to the
sultan. Landor here departs from Vasari, reinventing Lippi’s time in captivity as,
paradoxically, one of liberty; away from the inhibiting influence of the church, he
found himself in a sensual land, luxuriant in both flora and fauna and, he implies,
sexual freedom and possibility. It was a land, Landor’s Lippi discovered, where
people acted honestly, in accordance with their desires; he keenly felt the contrast with
the sterile and hypocritical repressiveness of Catholic Italy.

In some respects Landor’s Lippi is an important precursor to Browning’s Lippi of nine
years later. Both portray the painter as an early representative of an ideological
position, rather than the rogue monk found in Vasari. In their versions, his behaviour
cannot be explained simply by an unruly and hedonistic temperament; Lippi is fuelled
as much by a sense of rebellion against the established moral order as by his own lusty
nature. Landor communicates this through the creation of a utopia for Lippi to
describe fondly and then defend against the predictable attacks and accusations of the
Pope. The moment chosen is significant also, as the interview concludes with the
Pope’s offer to marry Lippi to Lucrezia, as mentioned by Vasari. This is essentially an

260 ibid., p.436.
261 ibid., p.389. Of the white doves in the sultan’s gardens he offers this description:
Lippi: A few of them examined me in every position their inquisitive eyes could
take; displaying all the advantages of their versatile necks, and pretending
querulous fear in the midst of petulant approaches.
Eugenius: It is of pigeons thou art talking, O Filippo? I hope it may be.
262 ibid., p.387. For example, the Pope describes the Turks as ‘obstinate, blind
reprobates’ who will be judged and punished accordingly. Lippi replies, ‘More’s the
pity! for they are hospitable, frank and courteous.’
offer of social and moral legitimacy, and Lippi's decision to refuse it suggests not merely the wish to stay unattached for the sake of his 'appetites', but a deeper commitment to remaining beyond the strictures of a religious system which he regards as dishonest and prohibitive. Landor does, however, follow the anecdotal style of Vasari, and embellishes incidents such as the meeting of Lippi and Lucrezia with a considerable amount of overtly romantic detail. His Lippi may be a pariah of sorts, but he is a man entirely at ease with himself, and one who possesses considerable charm and charisma. Recourse is thus made to the same argument given in the Lives to explain the favour the artist enjoyed with the men who represented the establishment he rebelled against. The Lippi that is found here is basically a loveable rogue, whose ingratiating openness, eloquence and ready wit, coupled of course with his great artistic talent, enable him to be tolerated by those in authority. Landor's conversation accordingly concludes with the bemused Eugenius, unable to comprehend that Lippi should love Lucrezia yet not wish to marry her, stating that he will continue to patronise and protect the artist despite being utterly unable to understand him.

Browning's conception of the situation would be far less simplistic.

Browning's 'painter poems' display a marked avoidance of the anecdotal tone that arguably defines a Vasarian view of art history, and also the works of fiction inspired by it. The dramatic monologue has the potential to support lengthy, rambling tales but Browning eschews this possibility in favour of a poetic approximation of speech. Both 'Andrea del Sarto' and 'Fra Lippo Lippi' are littered with allusions to past events, to the significant moments of the artists' careers, but these are presented in a fragmentary form, as lingering regrets or vague memories, very different to the considered narration of Landor's Lippi. All that occurs in both poems is the eponymous heroes' explanation of themselves, addressed to an anonymous night-watchman, in the case of Lippi, or the painter's indifferent wife, in that of Sarto; the contexts are relatively nondescript in comparison with moments of death or glory, or an audience with a Pope. Browning appears to have had humanist intentions, his poems attempting to
apply the complexity of human emotions and motivations to the simplified, idealised and demonised biographies of artists found in Vasari and elsewhere. This is at extreme variance to the approach of moral art historians to biographical material, which was assessed by them in conjunction with moralistic preconceptions regarding the mystic and naturalistic content of an artist’s work, and accepted or rejected forthwith. On the basis of his naturalistic painting, and the portrait given in Vasari, which included tales of human models being used for paintings of the Virgin, Lippi was identified by Rio, Jameson, Lindsay and Ruskin as both a depraved and decadent personality, and an iniquitous influence upon the progress of art.263

It has been claimed that ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’ was intended as a deliberate riposte to the condemnation of the artist by moral art historians,264 and it can certainly be interpreted on that level given Browning’s reservations regarding the discourse’s methodology and conclusions. The question of his choice of artists is relevant to this issue also. Lippi and Sarto are both liminal, existing at either end of the Italian Renaissance; Browning alludes to this symbolically by setting the former’s poem at early dawn, and the latter’s at dusk. As will be discussed later, there were thematic and philosophical issues involved in their pairing, but another possible contributory factor could be their previous identification with one another by Rio, due to their respective positions in a chronology of the Florentine school. Towards the end of De la Poésie Chrétienne, during his assessment of painting in Florence during the early sixteenth century, when he perceived the irreversible degeneracy of art truly to have set in, Sarto is identified by the French art historian as being guilty of using his wife as a model for the Virgin, and thus ‘reviving the scandal caused by the monk Lippi’ in his ‘moral degradation’.265 In the account of the progenitor of moral art history, Lippi and Sarto are connected through the turpitude of their practice across the whole of the...

263See chapter I, section IV, pp.58-61.
264Culler, The Victorian, p.211.
265Rio, De la, p.308.
Renaissance, joined by their immorality despite an intervening century of intense artistic activity. Therefore, in choosing them as the subjects of his two painter’s monologues, Browning was embarking on a reconsideration of the two painters who were believed by Rio and his followers to prove that the art of the Renaissance was corrupt from outset to conclusion.

‘Fra Lippo Lippi’ contains a lengthy defence of the artist who was so vilified by Rio, Jameson, Ruskin and others. This is most evident in Lippi’s relation of the difficulties he had finding acceptance of his work and recognition for his accomplishments, primarily with the prior of his Carmelite order. The painter remembers that upon seeing his pictures, this prior was appalled, and issued the following instructions:

Your business is not to catch men with show,
Wish homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget there’s such a thing as flesh.
Your business is to paint the souls of men—
Man’s soul, and it’s a fire, smoke...no, it’s not...
It’s vapour done up like a new-born babe—
(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
It’s...well, what matters talking, it’s the soul!
Give us no more of body than shows soul.
Here’s Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God!
That sets you praising,—why not stop with him?
Why put all thoughts of praise out of our heads
With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
Rub it all out, and try a second time.\textsuperscript{266}

The historical dichotomy is thus established, the clash between the prior and Lippi serving as a microcosmic representation of a wider conflict; as Korg points out, their differences indicate ‘the great historic contest between the medieval emphasis on order and the supernatural, and the Renaissance passion for naturalism and individuality’.\textsuperscript{267}

\textsuperscript{267}Korg, Browning, p.116.
I would argue that the opinions of the prior are also a harsh critique of the values which supported moral art history, demonstrating an awareness on Browning’s part of the arguments commonly employed against the discourse and its assertions. The prior attempts to tell the artist his business, to make him conform to the example of the past and resist any impulse towards innovation or development. The condemnation of naturalism and the glorification of an ineffable mysticism, which were the basis of moral art history, are here regarded as retrogressive; as with the prior, they make a critic hostile to progress. The particular element which they seek to praise is shown to be nebulous and essentially indefinable, as is demonstrated by the prior’s inability to describe the soul in the lines above. Lippi, in contrast, can provide a succinct justification for his naturalistic preferences:

If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents,-
That’s somewhat. And you’ll find the soul you have missed,
Within yourself when you return Him thanks.268

The naturalistic is for Browning’s Lippi a path to God rather than a step away from Him into depravity and sin. Just as he found the presence of reality in the art of Angelico, Browning here argues that piety lay at the foundation of Lippi’s painting. Lippi’s honesty compels him to paint the world in which he is immersed, and as in Landor’s imaginary conversation this is at odds with the expectations of the church, whose desire for mysticism in art and restraint in life is dependent on unnatural repression, the inevitable result of which is a latent hypocrisy.269 The language of Rio and his acolytes was then put into the mouths of this corrupt ecclesiastical establishment by Browning:

...the old grave eyes

269 ibid., p. 21. Lines 262-264. Of his critics Lippi comments: ‘You don’t like what you only like too much./You do like what, if given you at your word./You find abundantly detestable.’
Are peeping o’er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still—’tis Art’s decline, my son!
You’re not of the true painters, great and old:
Brother Angelico’s the man, you’ll find.

The notion of this decline was fundamental to moral art history, and Rio himself had identified it as beginning with Lippi; the opposition of Lippi and Angelico was also common, appearing perhaps most notably in a chapter of Jameson’s Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters in which the two are described as representing the ‘great schism in modern art’. That the eyes of the ecclesiastical establishment, used by Browning to represent symbolically moral art history, are described as ‘old’ and ‘solemn’ by Lippi is significant. It suggests a desire on Browning’s part for a new approach to art history which would avoid the limiting and retrogressive contrivance he saw in the tenets of Rio.

Browning’s suggestion that the divine can be accessed through the depiction of nature has obvious links with the philosophy of Pre-Raphaelism regarding religious painting discussed earlier in the chapter, particularly as expounded by William Rossetti in his article ‘The Externals of Sacred Art’; the connection between the poem and the naturalistic figures in the paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti has been noted by Riede. Also, the assertion that the great painter combines the human and the divine in his work is strikingly similar to the claims made for the ‘Naturalists’ by Ruskin in ‘The Nature of the Gothic’. Other more profound parallels exist between the work of Ruskin, and that of Browning, especially with regards to notions of imperfection.

Ruskin declared that:

‘to banish imperfection is to destroy expression, to check exertion, to paralyse vitality. All things are literally better, lovelier and more beloved for the

270 Ibid., Lines 231-235.
271 See chapter 1, section IV, pp.58-9.
273 Riede, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p.43.
imperfections which they have been divinely appointed...neither architecture nor any other noble work can be good unless it be imperfect.274

Imperfections were seen by him as a part of the flawed and sinful nature of all earthly things, which must be admitted and celebrated as an undeniable aspect of creation, and therefore one deemed necessary by God. This view can be understood as a counterpoint to the ‘need for the perfect’ identified as being at work in moral art history, to which Ruskin himself had contributed.275 As discussed in chapter one, and mentioned earlier in this chapter, the ‘need for the perfect’ manifested itself in the identification of examples of transcendental perfection among the pictures and personalities of mystic painting, and was essentially a reverence for what was believed to be the divine on earth, embodied in art and artists. The appreciation of the imperfect, however, was based on an assertion of the importance of human turmoil and mutability, rather than awe before the tranquil changelessness of heaven. Ruskin declared that the imperfect was ‘the sign of life in a mortal body, that is to say, of a state of progress and change’,276 a conception which enabled a Comic employment of the historical narrative, to use the terminology defined by Hayden White.277 Unlike the absolute Tragedy envisaged by Rio, it permitted the possibility of regeneration, or evolution, and allowed the valuation of partial or limited success, rather than making a fundamental distinction between the holy and the blasphemous; indeed, the completely successful artwork was regarded with some reservation by Ruskin, as will be discussed later.

It has been repeatedly stated in recent criticism that Browning’s ‘painter poems’ express a ‘philosophy of the imperfect’,278 in that he did not attempt to elevate or

275See chapter 1, section IV, p.62.
277See chapter 1, section II, p.21.
idealise those he depicted, but rather portrayed their engagement with the world, and demonstrated far more interest in their frustrations and failures than their triumphs.

Thomas Phipps has asserted that Browning’s ‘philosophy of the imperfect’ was based in the poet’s preoccupation with human limitations, and his conviction that these limitations were the source of all religious, intellectual and artistic dynamism; there is a basic similarity between this view and that expressed by Ruskin in ‘The Nature of the Gothic’. Browning contended that man was driven on by an appetite for perfection which could never achieve satiety, locked in an endless and hopeless struggle, the cessation of which would result in death. ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’ and ‘Andrea del Sarto’ were both crucially informed by these beliefs, and accordingly portray the two painters as men who were oppressed rather than elevated by their talents.

Lippi recounts how part of his offence against the aesthetic standards of the ecclesiastical establishment (and indeed an aspect of his art which earned him the censure of Rio) was his attempt to ‘Take the prettiest face/The Prior’s niece...’ and include it in one of his religious scenes. The artist maintains that he was driven to such unconventional practice by the sheer monotony of his lot as a religious painter, being forced to paint ‘saints and saints/And saints again’. The charge of invariability, or conventionality, regarding both subject matter and the treatment of it is here levelled at mystic art, as it had been by both sides in the debate over Pre-Raphaelitism discussed earlier in the chapter. Browning’s Lippi can be seen as an artist who longed to assert ‘truth against tradition’ like the Giotto and Millais described by Ruskin. Unlike them, though, he is not free to follow the urgings of his original creative spirit. Lippi is bound by the restrictive conventions of devotional painting, which inhibit his development; this is presented by Browning as a source of frustration for one who stands on the threshold of a new artistic age. There are also implications beyond art.

279 Phipps, Browning’s, p. 61.
281 Ibid., p. 16. Lines 48-9.
which involved notions of the control of the individual by the ecclesiastical authorities, and the liberation from this control that came with the Renaissance in the form of a growing spirit of personal independence. Lippi can accordingly be regarded as a prototype Renaissance man not only in terms of the naturalism of his art, but also the licentious conduct of his life.

The artist monk, however, is divided; he is painfully aware that he is not only a part of the system against which he is rebelling, but also a representative of it due to his monastic status. The moment at which he is portrayed is an ignominious one, caught by the watch whilst creeping furtively around Florence after an illicit night of revelry. This had been embarked upon after an escape from the house of Cosimo de Medici, where he had been imprisoned in order to force him to complete a long-overdue commission. Confronted with the condemnation of the watchman whom he addresses, Lippi offers lengthy explanations in his defence, telling how, as a young orphan starving in the streets, his joining a holy order was a matter of necessity rather than choice, and pleading the ludicrousness of making a small boy take vows of celibacy. He also makes the arguments discussed above for his painterly preferences, pointing out in several blunt statements the hypocrisy of those who rally against him. Yet an all-pervasive guilt undercuts his self-justification, and ultimately he concurs with the watchman, admitting ‘I’m a beast, I know’. Jameson’s ‘great schism’ in painting may have occurred between the styles of Lippi and Angelico, but the conflicts and tensions of Italian culture as a whole can be seen battling in the personality of Browning’s friar. This, in terms of the ‘philosophy of the imperfect’, is what made him a worthwhile artist, the strife caused by his internal contradictions urging him on despite the lack of tolerance shown towards him. To resolve these contradictions, as Phipps points out, would be to destroy him; Browning’s Lippi is essentially defined

282 Ibid., p.22, Line 270. This echoes the description of his ‘amorous - nay, beastly - passion’ given in Vasari’s Lives (vol.1, p.437).
283 Phipps, Browning’s, p.190.
by his honesty in the face of hypocrisy, and by his fidelity to his artistic vision despite the adversity he encounters and the disparagement his work receives. In the terms of narrative emplotment established by White, the painter’s life is Tragic, but has a Comic significance on a grander scale; in this sense Browning can be understood as conforming to a Hegelian paradigm in his visualisation of the historical process.\textsuperscript{284} Despite his passionate anti-establishment feelings, and determination to persist in the following of his naturalistic artistic impulses, he still longs for an acceptance he will never find. However, his work represents a major advance for painting as a whole, and therefore renders the hardships and ignominy of his life worthwhile, as a valid contribution to the progress of mankind has been made.

If ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’ creates a positive exemplar of Browning’s aesthetic theories, then ‘Andrea del Sarto’ presents a negative one. Subheaded ‘The Faultless Painter’, the poem concerns one who has attained perfection in the eyes of his contemporaries, but at the expense of any real creative purpose. In ‘The Nature of the Gothic’, Ruskin interprets ‘perfection’, or completeness, as a sign of limitation, stating that although art must be motivated by a pursuit of an essentially unattainable end, mankind must be careful not to:

set the meaner thing, in its narrow accomplishment, above the nobler thing, in its mighty progress; not to esteem smooth minuteness above shattered majesty; not to prefer mean victory to honourable defeat; not to lower the level of our aim, that we may the more surely enjoy the complacency of success.\textsuperscript{285}

The tragedy of Andrea del Sarto in Browning’s poem is that he has built a career on ‘narrow accomplishment’, and in the later years of his life he is tortured by self-awareness regarding this fundamental painterly impotence:

Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp,

\textsuperscript{284} See chapter I, section II, p.21.
Or what’s a Heaven for? All is silver-grey
Placid and perfect with my art- the worse!  

As Martin remarks, here the term ‘perfect’ has become ‘an empty mark of value’; Del Sarto’s works are described in such a way as to make their lack of dynamism or artistic energy clear. They are sterile, borne only of sureness of touch, and have none of the strong feeling invested in them that goes into the creation of Lippi’s work. Having nothing to aspire to, he can only continue to churn out Madonnas and Magdalenes which have the face of his wife, and look back over his career with bitter regret whilst pedantically faulting the drawing of those who rose above him, such as Raphael. The biographical facts of ‘Andrea del Sarto’ were largely derived from Jameson’s Memoirs. As Rio’s comments quoted above indicate, Del Sarto was reviled by moral art historians for his naturalism and lack of devotional feeling, and Jameson’s portrait is accordingly wretched, matching the faults of the art with the faults of the man. She recounts the story of Del Sarto’s ill-advised marriage, and his abuse of the trust of the French king, supposedly at the instigation of his wife, for the sake of money:

But though he had been weak and wicked enough to commit this crime, he had a sufficient sensibility to feel acutely the disgrace which was the consequence; it preyed on his mind and embittered the rest of his life.

The later years of his career were reported to have been further soured by the infidelity and avarice of his wife Lucrezia. This information comes from later sources than the Lives, as Vasari, who was a pupil of Del Sarto, is very reluctant to defame him; the nature of his account was also presumably influenced by the fact that Lucrezia was still alive at the time he wrote. ‘Andrea del Sarto’ is set in this embittered period of the

286 Browning, ‘Andrea del Sarto’, p.113. Lines 96-98.
287 Martin, Browning’s, p.139.
289 Vasari, Lives, vol.1, pp.837-8. The betrayal of the French king is briefly dealt with amongst an account of a life of great artistic achievement. No criticism of Lucrezia is included at all.
artist's existence; the poem describes the unfaithfulness of the wife, her greedy exploitation of her husband and the blind uxoriousness in Andrea which allows her to behave in such a manner. This does not serve to engender sympathy for him, but is rather used by Browning as a metaphor for his artistic life. He idolises his wife, and invents excuses to rationalise her behaviour to himself so he does not have to confront the reality of the situation, just as he ascribes his failure to rise to the first rank of painters to his choice of marriage over fame, rather than addressing the flaws in his technique of which, as the above extract from the poem illustrates, he is only too aware. His basic belief in his own perfection, despite the presence of painful moments of uncertainty, doubt and regret, means that the narrator of 'Andrea del Sarto' has fallen prey to a static complacency that is the antithesis of the passion and dichotomy that spurs on Browning's Lippi, which, according to the 'philosophy of the imperfect', is the catalyst of all innovation and progress in art.

Del Sarto was appropriated almost straight from the pages of Jameson, with no augmentation or distortion by Browning; he was taken as a fully-formed example of the self-negating folly of a claim to perfection, requiring only effective dramatisation. Browning's engagement with Lippi was more complicated. Phipps argues that the poem constitutes a statement on Browning's own position within the British literary world, in that he was attempting innovation whilst toiling under the tyranny of restrictive artistic convention. Lippi's situation is certainly presented in the poem as something of extreme relevance to the artists of mid-nineteenth century England. The conversational style and avoidance of contrived anecdote in the 'painter poems' signals an attempt to make the characters more credible as actual people who, in Lippi's case at least, can generate sympathy in a Victorian reader. That as individuals they belong to the distant past is not evaded, and the language of both poems is thick with archaisms intended to signify the speech of the fifteenth century. Their dilemmas

Phipps, Browning's. p. 168.
are universal, however, and reflect timeless situations. In identifying his position with that of Lippi, Browning does not suggest that history is repeating itself, but rather seeks to represent the eternal struggle faced by the original creative artist. Historical accuracy came second in Browning’s work to the artistic agenda he was attempting to express: Ormond makes much of the various inaccuracies of ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’ concerning the paintings mentioned and several alterations to information given in Vasari, but cites Lippi’s identification of Masaccio as his pupil (a reversal of the commonly accepted relationship between the two) as ‘Browning’s most serious error of fact’. This particular aspect of the chronology of the Florentine school was a subject of debate, and the poet’s choice for the originator of realism in painting was deliberate. It was important to Browning’s utilisation of Lippi as a spokesman for his creative philosophy that the monk painter be an innovator, the first true Renaissance naturalist and therefore a man of great Comic significance. In the terminology of Jauss, ‘res fictae’ here dictated the interpretation of ‘res factae’; as a character, Lippi had far more potential than the layman Masaccio. His clerical status allowed for a complex and divided mind, weighed down by the traditions and conventions of an establishment to which he was formally linked. Browning perhaps found a closer correspondence with his own circumstances in the unique situation of the character he created.

A similar utilisation of the figure of the early Italian painter for the purpose of exploring the author’s own artistic identity can be found in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘Hand and Soul’. This short story, which appeared in the first issue of the Germ, concerns the career of a fictional artist called Chiaro dell’Erma in thirteenth-century Pisa. The narrative falls into a series of phases, with a different creed or approach determining Chiaro’s output (or lack of it) in each, and culminates with a supernatural

292 Phipps, Browning’s, p.175. Browning was siding with Baldinucci, author of Delle Notizie de’ Professori del Disegno da Cimabue.
293 See chapter 1, section III, p.38.
encounter, when the artist is visited by a manifestation of his own soul; this experience provides him with a moment of profound realisation concerning the role and purpose of the artist in society. Riede states that 'Hand and Soul' is 'regarded by most critics as a Pre-Raphaelite manifesto', and there is evidence within the tale to support this interpretation. When describing the outset of Chiaro's artistic life in Arezzo, for example, Rossetti states that he strove in his formative years 'towards the imitation of any objects offered in nature'. Chiaro is also identified as one who asserted 'truth against tradition', as a man of Comic significance who transcended the conventional style of Pisa. Following his arrival in the city, he seeks out Giunta Pisano, its foremost painter, but upon seeing the 'lifeless and incomplete' forms which populate the works in Giunta's studio, 'a sudden exultation possessed him as he said within himself, "I am the master of this man."' However, the story also has aspects which appear to oppose or undermine the principles defined elsewhere by other members of the Brotherhood. As Helene Roberts has argued, Rossetti 'questions the imitation of nature and the moral purpose of art, values dear to the other Pre-Raphaelites' in the course of 'Hand and Soul', and offers instead 'the expression of the self as the goal of the artist.'

The stages or phases through which Chiaro passes can be interpreted as anticipations of the various classes of painter identified by Ruskin in 'The Nature of the Gothic'. Rossetti identifies the various governing philosophies available to a painter, which may be broadly termed those of the 'Sensualist, the 'Purist' and the 'Naturalist'; Chiaro must experience the first two in order to be able to follow the last. Upon realising his superiority to Giunta, Chiaro first goes through a 'Sensualist' phase, initially

294 Riede, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p.12.
296 Ibid., p.24.
neglecting his art in order to take advantage of the pleasures of Pisa, and then toiling for the sake of fame. Three years of such industry precipitates a loss of confidence in the painter, who suddenly realises the emptiness of his art, and that 'much of that reverence which he had mistaken for faith had been no more than the worship of beauty.' This conversion to a 'Purist' state is conceived of in language which recalls the objections to the conventional forms of Raphael made by the Pre-Raphaelites and their supporters; it is also deeply dyed in moral art history. Chiaro vows only to paint works which had 'for their end the presentment of some moral greatness that should impress the beholder'. The limitations of this class are revealed in the loss of popularity that results from the choice of 'cold symbolism and abstract impersonation' over 'the action and passion of human life'.

A second crisis prepares Chiaro for the state in which he is left at the conclusion of the story, which can be termed that of the 'Naturalist'. On a great Pisan feast day, he witnesses from the window of his studio a bloody battle between rival families in the porch of the Church of San Rocco, in which he had painted an allegory of peace; the fighting is so intense that blood 'ran in long streams down Chiaro's paintings'. The artist is plunged into despair by this grisly proof of his inability to influence the moral conduct of the people, and becomes so wracked with grief that he begins to sicken. It is then that his soul manifests before him in the image of a beautiful woman. This woman urges Chiaro to 'work from thine own heart, simply'; artistic truth, Rossetti argues, comes from within the artist. As Riede states, 'the implication is that the artist is entirely sufficient unto himself, that his art draws on nothing but his own inner self.' This seems to be in opposition to the Pre-Raphaelite project as it was defined in the writing of William Rossetti, F.G.Stephens and others; William Rossetti, for example, declared in 1851 that nature and the man constituted 'the two halves of

299 Ibid., p.28.
300 Riede, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p.13.
every true work of art”. His brother asserts in ‘Hand and Soul’ that the attainment of this truth is to be achieved through the relation of the self to its own experience, rather than to the natural world. Grandiose claims are made in the story for the status of the artist. The apparition informs Chiaro ‘that there is but this means whereby thou mayest serve God with man: set thine hand and soul to serve man with God.’ The artist is thus allocated quasi-divine power, as his experience of both the ‘Sensualist’ world of man, or his ‘hand’, and the ‘Purist’ region of God, or his ‘soul’, allows him to act as an intermediary between the two, ‘serving’ man like a ministering angel. This identification of the artist as a higher being makes the expression of his exalted soul a worthy subject for his art, at the very least, if not the ultimate creative act. The narrative accordingly concludes with Chiaro painting the form in which his soul has appeared before him. Rossetti, in the early years of his career, essentially seems to be proclaiming in ‘Hand and Soul’ that he will only be governed by his own artistic vision, which is sufficiently elevated in itself to require no further justification.

IX. The Visible Madonna: Romola as a ‘Naturalist’

George Eliot’s novel Romola, first published in instalments in the Cornhill Magazine between 1862-1863, was, like the majority of works discussed in this chapter, concerned with themes of progress, and the position of modern England in relation to the history of human civilisation which had preceded it. Late fifteenth-century Florence is made symbolically to represent mid nineteenth-century England within the novel; at its very outset, in the proem, Eliot stresses the essential continuity of human history, as if to emphasise the relevance of what is to come to the modern world:

The great river-courses which have shaped the lives of men have hardly changed; and those other streams, the life-currents that ebb and flow in human hearts, pulsate to the same great needs, the same great loves and terrors. As our

thought follows close in the slow wake of the dawn, we are impressed with the broad sameness of the human lot, which never alters in the main headings of its history—hunger and labour, seed-time and harvest, love and death. 303

This claim of kinship with figures of the past is similar to that which can be observed in ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’, and the choice of historical moment in both lends the connection added significance. With regards to Eliot, modern criticism is replete with theories to explain the choice of period. Julian Corner states that it was more or less arbitrary, due as much to the author’s ‘broad a priori assumption of human continuity than of any specific resemblance between the two ages’. 304 Others, however, including Gillian Beer, posit the more plausible explanation that the setting represents the deliberate choice of a particularly ‘pregnant moment’ in history; it was, she continues, the ‘just pre-Raphaelite moment of a religious revulsion against humanism’. 305 Special symbolic relevance to the condition of Victorian Britain as a whole could be easily extracted from such a moment, as Browning’s ‘painter poems’ also demonstrate.

Felicia Bonaparte asserts that the overall impression Eliot wished to give was that in the fifteenth century Florence was a place of turbulence and transition. In that it was ‘philosophically confused, morally uncertain and culturally uprooted, the city was a prototype of nineteenth-century England.’ 306

Romola is an extremely dense text, fertile in political, artistic and literary issues, capable of supporting a multitude of interpretations, as even a cursory examination of the large number of modern studies of it will testify. It has, as Caroline Levine has put it, a ‘rich historical complexity’, 307 due in no small part to the formidable quantity of

research Eliot engaged in before embarking upon the final draft. Lewes wrote to John Blackwood just after the couple had returned from their second trip to Italy to report that his common-law wife was ‘buried in the middle ages’.308 Although much of this research had consisted of the consultation of primary material, Eliot also familiarised herself with a wide range of historical works, including the most prominent examples of art history. She had read both Rio and Ruskin,309 and according to Bonaparte had been especially affected by the ‘acute sense of the symbolic’310 she encountered in the volumes of Anna Jameson. With regards to art itself, there is evidence that experiences in Florence may have provided the initial inspiration for Romola. Prior to her trip to the city, Eliot had proclaimed that her favourite artist was Rubens, on the grounds of his naturalism.311 Soon after her arrival in Florence in 1860, however, she made a comprehensive tour of all the major galleries with Lewes, and he noted in his journal that when in the Accademia Bella Arte they had found ‘the collection of early Tuscan painters of extreme interest’.312 Such experiences contributed towards the idea she formulated over the course of her stay, here related in a letter to her publisher:

There has been a crescendo of enjoyment in our travels, for Florence, from its relation to the history of modern art, has raised a keener interest in us even than Rome, and has stimulated me to entertain rather an ambitious project.313

Romola was thus grounded in art, in Eliot’s awareness of the contention between the classical and the Christian, or the naturalistic and the mystic, and her own witnessing of this opposition in the painting of quattrocento Florence. The galleries she visited

309 Bonaparte, The Triptych, p.35. Rio’s De la Poésie Chrétienne was no.1831 in the Eliot/Lewes library. 310 Ibid., p.69.
311 Haight, Letters, vol.2, p.451, George Eliot to Sarah Sophia Hennell, Munich, 17th April 1858. After visiting the Pinacoteca: ‘Rubens gives me more pleasure than any other painter...His are such real, breathing men and women’.
allowed her to observe the ‘pregnant moment’ in pictorial form, and the factors which were widely considered to have determined the course of Renaissance art were identified in her novel as those which had shaped modern civilisation. The resurgence of interest in the art of this period in the 1840s, the arguments formulated in its defence by moral art history, and the widespread denunciation or revision of these in the 1850s, suggested that this conflict was not tied to any particular historical situation, but was somehow timeless, of relevance to every era as it lay at the root of all human experience; it was, ultimately, the conflict between body and spirit, or the human and the divine.

As the above quotation indicates, Eliot was aware that Romola was an ‘ambitious project’ to undertake. Her determination from the outset was to adopt the ostensibly form of a historical romance, but produce a work that was, as she explained to John Blackwood, ‘rather different in character to what has been done before’.314 The sheer scope of events dealt with in the text was marvelled at by contemporary critics; the Saturday Review, for example, was impressed that Eliot had ‘set herself to paint Florence at the end of the fifteenth century, and to present the chief scenes of a decade of Florentine history’.315 The use of the verb ‘to paint’, which is found elsewhere in periodical reviews of the book,316 may signal an awareness of the artistic inspiration behind the novel’s central theme; it could also simply be the result of the powerful associations in the minds of critics between art and Florence in the age directly preceding the High Renaissance. An inclination to see painting openly present in Romola has endured, and can be found in modern criticism. Bonaparte, for example, argues that much of the narrative is pictorial, and although this phenomenon does not offer exact fits with single works, ‘echoes of paintings sometimes acknowledged or

316For example, Spectator, July-Dec.1863, p.2265: ‘There is not a more wonderful piece of painting in English Romance than this figure of Tito’.
suggest that haunt her descriptions and allusions. Eliot's experience of the art of the period certainly informed her imaginative conception of it; when advising Leighton, commissioned by the Cornhill Magazine to provide two illustrations for each episode of the novel, she gave very particular instructions concerning his use of the frescos of Ghirlandaio as a source of information on costume. She required as much veracity of detail as was possible, warning her illustrator of the artistic self-negation that results if one 'wades off into arbitrary falsehood'.

Eliot's insistence on accurate historical detail in Leighton's work was part of the same desire to create a credible setting for Romola which had inspired her own extensive research. This wish to avoid anachronism, vagueness and error can be seen as an attempt to establish a realistic environment in which various contests and evolutions of the spirit could be enacted. Despite the melodrama of its various confrontations, death and conversion scenes, the novel lacks the overt theatricality of other works of its genre, particularly those which take place in Italy. Edward Bulwer-Lytton's Rienzi: The Last of the Tribunes of 1835 is a typical example, and was actually read by Eliot in preparation for Romola, but she found it unsatisfactory, with little relevance or value to her project. As a historical romance, Rienzi offers a diverting but morally static spectacle of otherness to a reader, manipulating facts and blurring details in order to support its vision of the Italian past. It could be argued that it was similar

317 Bonaparte, The Triptych, p.35.
318 Haight, Letters, vol.4, p.43, George Eliot to Frederick Leighton, London, 10th June 1862. “If you are going to see Ghirlandaio’s frescoes - the engravings of them I mean - in the choir of Santa Maria Novella, I wish you would especially notice if the women in his groups have not that plain piece of opaque drapery over the head which haunts my memory...I am strongly impressed with a belief in the presence of my "white hood" there.” The white hood was a regular feature of Romola’s costume in part one of the novel.
319 Bonaparte, The Triptych, p.31.
320 Athenaeum, no.424, Sat. Dec.12th 1835, p.923. Lytton was actually criticised by the magazine in the context of an otherwise favourable review for including incidents which lack historical substantiation. Foremost among these was the assassination of Rienzi’s younger brother, and the tribune’s subsequent revenge on the killers.

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in this respect to the fictionalised artists' biographies around which several of the
principal works of moral art history were structured. Romola, in contrast, coupled
attention to detail and fidelity to the historical record with complex symbolic reference
to universal and timeless human concerns, thus stressing the bond between the
synchronic and the diachronic, or the moment and the continuum.

In the novel, the internal conflict of late quattrocento Florence provides the
background for the story of the eponymous heroine, whose movement between the
various factions vying for control in her native city symbolically represents the
evolution of mankind from the classical era to the mid-nineteenth century. This
evolution is quite explicitly a moral one; Bonaparte, whose book The Triptych and the
Cross contains an exhaustive reading of the symbolism of the text, asserts that Romola
represents 'the growing moral consciousness of civilisation'. Contemporary
reviews suggest that the novel was understood to have a sententious aspect at the time
of its publication. The Athenæum's reviewer certainly found reading it to be an
edifying experience:

It will be scarcely possible to rise from the perusal without being penetrated by
the joy of elevated thoughts; without feeling a desire to cease from a life of
self-pleasing and to embody in action that sense of obligation, of obedience to
duty, which is indeed the crowning distinction that has been bestowed on man,
the gift in which all others culminate.

Romola was thus read as a moral novel, experience of which would provoke good
deeds and an eschewal of selfishness in a reader. The sense of culmination mentioned
here is an important one. Romola's passage through the brief but turbulent period of
Florentine history which the novel charts sees her adopting and then discarding several
different philosophies, all of which have accompanying codes of conduct and thought.
From the outset of the narrative, she is on what Susan Bernardo terms a 'search for

322 Athenæum, No.1863, 11th July 1863, p.46.
significance', which leads her through a classical, a pagan or Bacchic and a Christian stage. Each stage involves her domination by a man who is the prime example of a particular philosophy. The first of these is her father Bardo, representative of the classical era, who is entombed in a library and obsessed with the idea of resurrecting the past through his learning rather than seeking to progress to any kind of future. Bardo's sterile philosophy is replaced by the more life-affirming one of the scheming and hedonistic Tito Melema, her suitor and then husband, a man of pure, self-serving Bacchic spirit. A commitment to Bacchus is fast revealed to entail great external beauty, but an internal vacuity; this is symbolised in the text by the altarpiece Tito presents to his wife, which features a painting of Tito and Romola as Bacchus and Ariadne on its exterior, but opens to reveal only emptiness. The Bacchic way of life, conducted solely for pleasure and personal expediency, is, in the words of Bonaparte, untenable to Romola due to the 'moral shadow' cast by her memory and imagination over acts which pose no difficulty to Tito at all, such as the selling of Bardo's library after his death. Her dramatic loss of faith in her husband and the way of life he represents drives her to her third mentor, Fra Girolamo Savonarola. Each stage can be defined in terms of the elements of Romola refines or acquires during it. The classical stage involves her development of a lucid intelligence; the Bacchic stage sees her awakening to nature and freedom, in her liberation from her father's library; but the final stage, when she adopts Christianity, concerns the nourishing of her soul. Savonarola immediately perceives the paucity of this aspect of Romola's being, and following his confrontation of her as she attempts to flee both Tito and Florence, he embraces her with the mystic power of his faith, which results in her prompt conversion:

324 Bonaparte, The Triptych, p.111. Tito is described as being merely 'a barren interruption in the progress of civilisation'.

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While Savonarola spoke with growing intensity, his arms tightly folded before him still, as they had been from the first, but his face alight as from an inward flame, Romola felt herself surrounded and possessed by the glow of his passionate faith. The chill doubts all melted away; she was subdued by the sense of something unspeakably great to which she was being called by a strong being who roused a new strength within herself. In a voice that was like a low, prayerful cry, she said -

"Father, I will be guided. Teach me! I will go back."325

This is the moment, symbolically, when the evolving moral consciousness of humanity finds its direction in the Christian faith, and as the passage illustrates, this is based in the discovery of powerful internal forces. This point in the text represents the stage in the evolution of human civilisation which was idealised and revered by moral art historians. Having abandoned the worldliness of intellect and sense, mankind instead embraces the spirit through its worship of God. Romola, however, does not conclude here, but goes on to deliver a considered critique of the limitations of this era of history.

Savonarola plays the largest role of any actual historical figure in Romola; most are in supporting parts of little significance to the figurative journey made by its heroine. He, however, has an enormous impact upon both Romola herself and the narrative as a whole, and the potency of Eliot's characterisation of him reflects a broader fascination in mid-Victorian Britain with the dissident friar of the San Marco. He was, as David Carroll has pointed out, at once the Church's victim and a 'sacred rebel',326 who found favour amongst English Protestants due to the stand he was believed to have taken against a Roman Catholic Church which, at the end of the fifteenth century, was sliding into the corruption which would ultimately catalyse the Reformation. Some saw a direct connection between Savonarola and the schism which was to come; in its review of Romola, the Spectator referred to him as a 'large-hearted Italian Luther'.327

325Eliot, Romola, p.362.
327Spectator, vol.37, July-December 1863, p.2266.
More common was the perception of him as the final vestige of a vanishing Catholic purity, a last trace of the ideal 'Church Eternal' on which many based their ideal visions of the Middle Ages. Romola herself certainly finds him to be a voice of truth when all others of his vocation are lapsing into empty ritualism and falsity:

Her enthusiasm was continually stirred to fresh vigour by the influence of Savonarola. In spite of the wearisome visions and allegories from which she recoiled in disgust when they came as stale repetitions from other lips than his, her strong affinity for his passionate sympathy and the splendour of his aims had lost none of its power. His burning indignation against the abuses and oppression that made the daily story of the Church and of States had kindled the ready fire in her too.328

Savonarola's 'burning indignation' against the manifold wrongs of the world included a fierce opposition to the depravity, sensuality and paganism he thought had extended into all areas of society and culture, including painting, which made him a hero of moral art history. In De la Poésie Chrétienne, Rio devotes more space to his laudation of Savonarola than he does to any one artist. Ignoring entirely the political side of his career, Rio styled Savonarola as one committed solely to the exorcism of the 'demon of paganism with which the arts were possessed'. By the late stage in the fifteenth century that he rose to prominence, this was a battle that needed 'nothing less than the genius of Savonarola, and his unshaken faith in the divinity of his mission'; as 'a courageous and irreproachable preacher', he made the bankers and commercial men of Florence who encouraged the further decline of the arts his mortal enemies.329 British commentators of both denominations concurred with this conception during the 1840s. Pugin, in the introduction to the second edition of Contrasts, reverentially describes Savonarola as 'that great champion and martyr for the truth', and identifies him as one who foresaw the schismatic consequences of corrupted Catholicism.330 Jameson, in the introduction to The Legends of the Madonna, tells of how the Friar

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328 Eliot, Romola, p.388.
329 Rio, De.Ja, pp.231-261.
‘thundered from his pulpit’ against the decadence of art, and embarked upon a quest for orthodoxy in the representation of the Madonna, as many of the recent examples were ‘perverting simple minds’. Art, then, was still regarded by him in Jameson’s account as a tool for religious instruction for the unlettered, rather than a diversion for the rich and intellectual. This attitude belongs to the pre-Renaissance, to a dreamy age of simplicity and piety, rather than to one already deeply inflected towards naturalistic tendencies in terms of style, and towards private ownership rather than public exhibition in terms of register.

It can be argued that, as with Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘Hand and Soul’, there is a broad similarity between the stages Romola moves through and the classes of painters described by Ruskin in ‘The Nature of the Gothic’, with which Eliot was familiar. The mapping of the critical system onto the narrative of the novel is not exact; at commencement of the novel, Romola is in her classical stage, an era of civilisation which Ruskin identifies as essentially ‘Purist’. Subsequent to this, however, she moves into her pagan stage, which can be equated with ‘Sensuality’, in its disregard for the concerns of morality and religion; it is entirely human, and therefore ‘evil’. The Christian stage is that of absolute ‘Purity’, and Savonarola himself the ultimate ‘Purist’, unswerving in his devotion to the ideal ‘good’ represented by the divine. Accordingly, the limitations of this class, as identified by Ruskin and others during the 1850s, become glaringly apparent in him. Río’s glowing estimate of Savonarola is dependent upon his disregard for the political aspects of the Friar’s career. In the estimation of the majority of nineteenth-century commentators, the mysticism of Savonarola’s faith proved incompatible with the necessary worldliness of a practical system of government. This conflict is represented in the novel as a further clash.

331 Jameson, Legends of the Madonna, introduction, p.xxxi.
332 Booaparte, The Triptych, p.35. Copious notes from The Stones of Venice were included in the Eliot/Lewes library.
between the concerns of the spirit, and those of the body. The 'weakness' and
'narrowness of understanding' associated with the 'Purists' by Ruskin in 'The Nature
of the Gothic' are evident in Savonarola's dramatic failure to impose his pure vision of
an idyllic society united in its adoration of God upon Florentine reality. This manifests
itself not only in the collapse of the city into anarchy as his lofty idealisms are rejected
by a depraved populace, but also in the change that comes about in the Friar himself.
Savonarola falls prey to egotism, and comes to see himself as the voice of God's will
on earth; his desire to ameliorate the condition of man through a revival of love for
God becomes coupled with what Carroll terms an 'imperious need for ascendancy'.

His nature, the text tells us, is one in which 'opposing tendencies coexist in almost
equal strength'. This leads to the two crucial events of the final phase of the
narrative: Romola's abandonment of Savonarola, and his subsequent martyrdom.

If the story of Romola is taken as a symbolic telling of the story of human civilisation,
then Savonarola, as the mentor who awakens her soul, is the representation of the
Christian faith, or at least the Church it established. His relationship with Romola is
thus a metaphor for the one that existed between this Church and the progress of
mankind. Her time under his influence prior to his corruption can be seen as that of the
pre-Reformation 'Church Eternal', when mankind and Church were commonly
believed to have existed in complete harmony. This was the period of religious history
idealised by moral art historians as the one which produced the finest and purest
examples of religious paintings in the years before the advent, or at least dominance,
of Renaissance views in Italian society. Part of Romola's moral growth under
Savonarola involves the development of a sense of community; his influence had

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335 Eliot, Romola, p.523.
shown her that 'her lot was vitally united with the general lot'.

There is a connection here with the practice of fresco painting, regarded by many Victorian art historians and critics as representative of the wider sense of Christian fellowship that existed in the age in which it was prevalent, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Romola engages fully with this sense of fellowship during her Christian stage, and entirely embraces a religious identity through the ministration of Savonarola.

Romola's break with Savonarola occurs when she realises that this emphasis on the collective means that the individual becomes expendable, even at the cost of doctrinal consistency. She sees his refusal to intervene when five Mediceans, including her godfather Bernardo del Nero, are condemned to die for their part in a conspiracy to reinstate Piero de' Medici, as a political decision devoid of any trace of Christian mercy or justice. This fundamental contradiction between the grand design of Savonarola's schemes and the compassion supposedly inherent to the faith that initially inspired him drives her from his influence, and also from Florence, and ultimately from Italy. Like Browning's Lippi, she recoils from the blatant hypocrisy of the ecclesiastical establishment; unlike him, she is not shackled to it and thus removes herself entirely from its jurisdiction. The departure of Romola can be understood to represent the Reformation. The motives of Savonarola had been slowly becoming corrupted before Romola's rejection of him, and the gestures of his movement are often highly questionable from a Christian point of view. As Bonaparte has argued, with the Pyramid of Vanities, the friar's regime lapses into a ritualism of a fundamentally pagan nature. Savonarola, like the Catholic Church, is transformed from a bastion of purity and Christian didacticism, to being a calculating and devious political manipulator. His case as Eliot presents it seems to prove that the attempt to apply principles of religious purity to a complex social situation with many moral and

336 Ibid., p.468.
337 See this chapter, section 1, p.283.
cultural divisions can result only in the rapid pollution of that purity, and the immersion of its advocates in the chaos they sought to correct. A parallel here exists with the experience of Rossetti’s Chiaro dell’Erma, who saw frescoes from his ‘Purist’ stage literally polluted by the blood spilt in fighting between the warring factions of Pisa. The assertion of some moral art historians, notably Lindsay, that the path forward for modern art lay in a return to the qualities of pre-Renaissance painting is here refuted. The purity of the ‘primitives’, like the purity Romola briefly enjoys, was unique to one moment of history and thus cannot be repeated, as it is simply insufficient to address the complexity of the problems of the modern era.

As with Browning’s ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’, Rossetti’s ‘Hand and Soul’, and Ruskin’s ‘The Nature of the Gothic’, the narrative employment of Romola can be regarded as Comic, in accordance with the Hegelian paradigm. Each stage of Romola’s development, and the failure of her relationship with each mentor, is presented as a minor Tragedy, involving an elevation and a sudden fall as she realises the limitations and faults of each creed. She can, however, be seen to absorb certain key elements from the dominant philosophy of each stage, despite the decisive breaks made from the men themselves; all contribute to her Comic progress through the events of the novel, and therefore mankind’s progression through history. That which she assimilates from her final mentor can be described as purity of motive, which is observable in her behaviour after her departure from Florence, even though she has rejected his religious dogmas and the prescribed code of conduct attached to them.

The episode in the mysterious plague village, which occurs in the final chapters of Romola, sees the heroine removed from Florence and its conflicts, and is entirely distinct from the rest of the novel, having what Beer terms a ‘testamental simplicity’339 alongside the complications of life in the city. It is during this phase of

the novel that she becomes, in the terminology of Ruskin, a ‘Naturalist’, in that she arrives at a deeper understanding of her existence and her relation to others as a result of her experiences of both ‘Purity’ and ‘Sensuality’; the episode has an unreality akin to Chiaro dell’Erma’s encounter with his soul in the ‘Naturalist’ stage of ‘Hand and Soul’. The boat journey has something of the nature of an inverted baptism, being a passage through water away from faith, over the course of which religious belief is transmuted into instinctive action. In the village, Romola becomes both the fruit of Savonarola’s teachings, and a refutation of them. This is illustrated by the identification of her with the Madonna, which occurs regularly in the text in the wake of her conversion and performance of acts of charity, but does not cease in the wake of her abandonment of the Christian faith. In the plague village, in fact, it intensifies, as Romola is known by the villagers as the ‘Blessed Lady’, and becomes a source of holy legend. Two points are raised by this. Firstly, it is proof of the preservation of the compassionate and charitable impulse of Christianity in Romola despite her abandonment of its outward forms. Secondly, it emphasises the human origin and significance of religious forms. She is, quite literally, a Madonna sketched from life, of the sort Savonarola was supposed to have denounced from his pulpit in his efforts to erect formal barriers of codified faith around the figures of his religion. Romola as Madonna removes these barriers, and her foundation in reality only enhances the effect she has on those she helps; she provides an image of charity to which people can relate and aspire, rather than one made inaccessible through rigidly defined practice and dogma. In her, as in the art of Ruskin’s ‘Naturalists’ and (by the

340 Two adjacent chapters, ‘The Unseen Madonna’ and ‘The Visible Madonna’ juxtapose the procession of The Unseen Madonna with the charitable actions of Romola. From the latter chapter: ‘“Bless you, Madonna! bless you!” said the faint chorus, in much the same tone as that in which they had a few minutes before praised and thanked the unseen Madonna.’ (Eliot, Romola, p.387)

341 Eliot, Romola, p.559. ‘Many legends were afterwards told in that valley about the Blessed Lady who came over the sea, but they were legends by which all who heard might know that in times gone by a woman had done beautiful loving deeds there, rescuing those who were ready to perish.’
end of his tale) Rossetti's Chiaro dell'Erma, the divine and the human are combined, and each enhanced through its coexistence with the other.

X. Incompleteness and Imperfection: The Celebration of the Mortal Work

Both *Men and Women* and *Romola* were commercial disappointments; in Browning's case, this was matched with a widespread critical hostility. The *Spectator*, for example, praised many of the ideas the poems displayed, only to state that they were marred by 'symptoms of perversity, carelessness and bad taste.' The general tone of the review is one of regret at the commixture of admirable and deplorable elements; the poems are said to 'at once delight us by their evidences of power, and distress us by their incompleteness of conception and their faults of execution.' An important issue is raised here. The opinion that Browning's verse was somehow incomplete was also expressed elsewhere, notably in the review published in the *Athenaeum*. The poet was there accused of expecting his audience to participate in his poetry, to supply its deficiencies and give it 'an effect of concrete strength'. Browning's personal identification with the plight of Lippi is here justified by the magazine's assertion that his 'incompleteness' shows him to be 'less masterly' than the poets of old, whose works could be appreciated for 'a charm of music, a charm of imagery', even if the actual meaning of the verse was understood only by a few. He is criticised for attempting realism of speech, and for concentrating on specific individuals rather than subjects who could elicit more universal sympathy; the debate is virtually that of 'Fra Lippo Lippi', transposed to Victorian Britain.

Despite poor sales, *Romola* met with a degree of critical approbation, but was recognised to be of a decidedly intellectual nature. This was taken by many, including

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342 *Spectator*, vol.28, 1855, p.1346.
343 *Athenaeum*, No.1464, 17th November 1855, p.1327.
Eliot herself, as an explanation for its lack of popularity.\textsuperscript{344} The \textit{Saturday Review} saw the scrupulous attitude taken towards period detail as impairing the novel’s readability to an extent, remarking that ‘sometimes the antiquarian quite drowns the novelist’; it also made unfavourable comparisons with Walter Scott with regards to the character of Savonarola, not viewing Eliot’s Savonarola as engrossing enough as a man.\textsuperscript{345}

Great admiration is nonetheless expressed for the scope and complexity of the novel, especially its conclusion, and the portrait provided of ‘a noble soul after contact with a pure and visionary enthusiasm.’\textsuperscript{346} Despite general praise for, as the \textit{Spectator} put it, ‘the high purpose and calm imaginative severity’\textsuperscript{347} of \textit{Romola}, there is a sense that, like \textit{Men and Women}, it was somehow incomplete. The \textit{Athenaeum} declared that:

\begin{quote}
As a novel, \textit{Romola} cannot be called entertaining; it requires sustained attention, and is by no means light reading; but those who do not seek the mere amusement of an exciting story will find noble things in \textit{Romola}- eloquent and beautiful pages- subtle utterances and lovely thoughts. It has not the powerful interest that is to be found in the author’s former novels; but there are indications of much higher powers of mind.\textsuperscript{348}
\end{quote}

A reader, it is here suggested, will have to participate fully and engage with the text in order to derive complete satisfaction from it. The \textit{Spectator} objected to the unambiguous defeat of Savonarola as both man and martyr in the novel, and went on to describe its concluding chapter as ‘feeble and womanish’.\textsuperscript{349} This demonstrates the indistinct nature of the morality in \textit{Romola}, which clearly offered no firm direction to a

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\textsuperscript{344} Haight, \textit{Letters}, vol.4, p.49. George Eliot to Sarah Sophia Henrell: ‘Of necessity, the book is addressed to fewer readers than my previous works, and I myself have never expected- I might rather say \textit{intended}- that the book should be as “popular” in the same sense as the others. If one is to have freedom to write out one’s varying unfolding self, and not be a machine always grinding out the same material or spinning the same web, one cannot always write for the same public.’
\textsuperscript{345} \textit{Saturday Review}, vol.16, 1863, p.124. ‘He is merely a study, clever, original and faithful’.
\textsuperscript{346} \textit{Ibid.}, p.125.
\textsuperscript{347} \textit{Spectator}, vol.37, July-December 1863, p.2267.
\textsuperscript{348} \textit{Athenaeum}, No.1863, 11th July 1863, p.46.
\textsuperscript{349} \textit{Ibid.}, vol.37, July-December 1863, p.2267.
\end{flushright}
reader’s sympathy, and was open to a variety of interpretations and conclusions. The martyrdom of Savonarola is the prime example of a major event left undescribed in the narrative; the reader is not ‘shown’ all that occurs by any means, and must imaginatively supply the many incidents which are alluded to, but not described in the text.

This incompleteness in the work of both Eliot and Browning can be regarded as a manifestation of ‘the philosophy of the imperfect’, with the omissions of the text signalling a greater aim on the part of the author than the mere gratification of his or her readership. In an article on Men and Women in the Westminster Review, Eliot issued a thorough defence of Browning on this subject:

To read poems is often a substitute for thought: fine-sounding conventional phrases and the sing-song of verse demand no co-operation in the reader; they glide over his mind with the agreeable unmeaningness of the ‘compliments of the season’, or a speaker’s exordium on ‘feelings too deep for expression’. But let him expect no such drowsy passivity in reading Browning. Here he will find no conventionality, no melodious commonplace, but freshness, originality, sometimes eccentricity of expression; no didactic laying out of a subject, but dramatic indication, which requires the reader to trace by his own mental activity the underground stream of thought that jets out in elliptical and pithy verse. To read Browning he must exert himself, but he will exert himself to some purpose. If he finds the meaning difficult of access, it is always worth his effort— if he has to dive deep, ‘he rises with his pearl’. Indeed, in Browning’s best poems he makes us feel that what we took for obscurity in him was superficiality in ourselves.350

She here adopts the opposite stance to that of the Athenæum’s reviewer quoted above in perceiving incompleteness as innovation, something vigorous, fresh and challenging in the face of a tradition which, it is implied, is veering towards a formulaic complacency. The similarities with ‘The Nature of the Gothic’ are once again marked; Ruskin decreed that ‘the finer the nature, the more flaws it will show through the

clearness of it; the best things are seldomest seen in their best form. Eliot and Ruskin assert that the superficial qualities of a work, be it poetry, art or architecture, are unimportant next to a consideration of its contribution to human progress, and the extent to which it strives to express noble sentiments. It is possible that Browning’s example exerted some influence over Eliot when she came to write Romola. Upon its publication, Browning wrote to her with congratulations on having written ‘the noblest and most heroic prose-poem I have ever read’, the blurring of their respective literary forms suggesting the recognition of a kinship between them.

This principle of the imperfect enabled Ruskin to praise the truthfulness of Tintoretto and Veronese as much as that of the Pre-Raphaelites. In 1854, he identified the Venetians as belonging to another class of truthful painters, no less admirable than the first, who express themselves habitually with speed and power, rather than with finish, and give abstracts of truth rather than total truth. Ruskin even declares it ‘regrettable’ that Millais won’t try the methods of Tintoretto, given his ‘enormous powers of imagination, as well as of realisation’; this is perhaps a suggestion that the finish and detail of Pre-Raphaelism seemed, on occasion, a touch too perfect.

It could be argued that there are potential parallels between the tenets of moral art history and the values described above; Rio did encourage art enthusiasts to look beyond the technical defects of the early art he championed in order to appreciate its spiritual foundation. This approach, however, was irreducibly ‘Purist’ in nature, as the sentiment perceived within the works of the ‘primitives’ was divine, which made it both perfect and entirely complete. The mystic school contained none of the mortal striving valued by those who viewed the imperfect as an essential element of great and

353 Ruskin, ‘Pre-Raphaelitism (Lecture)’, p.146.
progressive art; indeed, its placidity was understood by Ruskin to be at variance with the demands of 'true' creation. The unappealing appearance of many mystic works did mean that the advocacy of a strident work ethic became incorporated into the appreciation of early Italian art in English spaces of display in the 1840s and 1850s, which could be seen as similar to the demands made of a reader by the works of Browning and Eliot. Their basic inaccessibility meant that study was deemed necessary before any level of comprehension could be reached. No allowance was made in this process for direct audience participation, however, as the discourse which established the nature of the worth of painting was complete; the public were expected simply to learn, and then subsequently exhibit a moral improvement, rather than imaginatively engage with what was before them. This was a significant factor in the failure of attempts at public art education, such as the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition, which lucidly demonstrates the manifold problems involved in the presentation of completeness in the gallery of ancient art. The 'philosophy of the imperfect' called for an attitude towards art in general that was less rigid, less grounded in critical formality, and more open to the involvement of an audience or reader. Moral art history was identified by adherents to the imperfect, and indeed by numerous other commentators, as an inadequate and inhibiting discourse. As with the progress of civilisation charted through Romola, the study of old master painting in Victorian England was inspired to action by a movement founded in religious idealism, from which it assimilated direction and motivation, but then abandoned when its spiritual doctrines proved insufficient to resolve the complex earthbound problems encountered.
Conclusion

‘Neither for God Nor for His Enemies’: Walter Pater’s ‘Sandro Botticelli’ and the Liberation from Criticism

British attitudes towards old master painting in general, and the relative merits of the various eras of Italian art in particular, underwent further significant developments during the decade that followed the publication of *Romola*. The association of the ‘primitives’, or artists from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with the qualities defined by Ruskin as ‘Purism’ in ‘The Nature of the Gothic’ was firmly established by the outset of the 1860s. The names of certain Italian painters were firmly incorporated into the artistic lexicon of Victorian Britain, in that they were taken to signify distinct goals, practices and limitations. In Alexander Gilchrist’s *Life of William Blake* of 1863, for example, the author emphasises the spiritual otherworldliness of his subject’s art by comparing it with that of a range of early Italian painters, including the ‘artist-saint’ of moral art history: Blake’s pictures are said to be as ‘pure and tender as Fra Angelico, and with an austerer sweetness’.¹ This concentration on the pure and the good, however, is also taken to explain the inaccessibility of his art to the more complex (and unreflecting) modern mind, and a certain immaturity to his style in general. In ‘some aspects of his art’, Blake is said to have ‘never emerged from infancy’.²

¹ Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake, “Pictor Ignocetus”*, London and Cambridge, Macmillan and Co., 1863, p.4. Blake’s identification with the ‘Purists’ is at times explicit; he is declared, for example, ‘the most spiritual of artists, a mystic poet and painter’ (p.5).
² ibid., p.4. Regarding the accessibility of his art, it is stated that ‘he neither wrote nor drew for the many, hardly for work’y-day men at all, rather for children and angels; himself “a divine child”, whose playthings were sun, moon, and stars, the heavens and
Ruskin himself experienced a loss of sympathy for the 'Purists' over the course of the 1850s, privately concluding that he 'had to give up all the old monkish pictures' in favour of the sixteenth-century Venetians. He wrote in a letter to the Brownings in 1859 that 'it seems intended that strong and frank animality, rejecting all tendency to asceticism, monachism, pietism and so on, should be connected with the strongest intellects.' This essentially meant the deposition of the 'Purists' from Ruskin's personal canon of greatness, due to their blatant inferiority when compared with the secular power of 'Naturalists' such as Tintoretto and Veronese; he goes on to conclude that 'Fra Angelico, and all the purists, however beautiful...are poor weak creatures'. The two had always coexisted in this personal canon, even when he was declaring Angelico to be 'an inspired saint', but the development of his ideas of naturalism during the 1850s finally forced the relegation of the 'Purists' to a lesser rank in Ruskin's estimation. His 'unconversion' in Turin in 1858, which according to (self-crafted) legend was partly catalysed by Veronese's Queen of Sheba, may well have been involved in this new perception of weakness in 'Christian' painting. This sudden loss of faith involved a complex shift in Ruskin's outlook; it can be said that it inspired questioning of the respective 'godliness' of art devoted solely to the service of religion, such as that of the mystic school, and 'ungodliness' of art which was more concerned with the condition of man, such as that of Veronese.

Certain former members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were also left deeply impressed by the vitality and strength of Veronese, and underwhelmed by the Italian 'primitives', after experiences with art on continental tours undertaken in the early

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years of the 1860s. Dante Gabriel Rossetti visited the Louvre in 1860, and upon his return told his brother that *The Marriage Feast at Cana* was ‘the greatest picture in the world beyond a doubt’. He went on to compare Hunt’s *The Finding of Our Saviour in the Temple* unfavourably with the Venetian painting, stating emphatically that he preferred the ‘flesh and blood’ of Veronese. The first-hand knowledge of the earlier schools which William Rossetti gained whilst touring Italy in 1863 does not seem to have stimulated any new enthusiasm for their work in him. Whilst in Pisa, he visited the Campo Santo, of whose frescoes he already had limited experience due to the engravings of Lasino; after having seen the originals, however, he remarked in his diary that ‘I do not find my impression of the Gozzolis enhanced’.

Pre-Raphaelitism, in the form repeatedly defined by its members and supporters during the early 1850s, had effectively ceased to exist by the beginning of the 1860s. Millais had long been within the fold of the conventional at the Royal Academy. Hunt was the only founder member to adhere to the original style and intent of Pre-Raphaelitism, which, as Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s opinion of *The Finding of Our Saviour in the Temple* indicates, led to his work being perceived as outdated and somewhat lifeless by his former Brethren. Rossetti himself stood at the head of a ‘second wave’ of Pre-Raphaelitism, which had very different ideals to the first, and centred around his personal artistic vision; Riede remarks that by the late 1850s ‘the term “Pre-Raphaelite” had almost come to mean, simply, “Rossettian.”’ This group, which included Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris and others, was now the avant-garde movement in British painting. The Aesthetes, as they would become known during the 1870s, were dedicated to the pursuit of exotic beauty and voluptuous colour; Bullen states that they ‘stressed the decorative rather than the realist, the pictorial rather than

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the didactic or sentimental', which meant that by the end of the 1860s 'moral value in art was on the decline and form was in the ascendency. Artistic truth for this movement was to be attained not through the study of nature, but the creation of beauty.

As with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, some reacted to the movement with suspicion, scorn and even outrage. A particularly virulent attack against Rossetti and the group in general was published in the Contemporary Review in 1871, in an article entitled 'The Fleshly School of Poetry' by the aspiring writer William Buchanan. The level of hostility is similar to that found in the negative accounts of Pre-Raphaelitism from the early 1850s, but the accusations made are very different. Buchanan declares that:

the fleshly gentlemen have bound themselves by solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art; to aver that poetic expression is greater than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense.

Suspicious held among the artistic establishment regarding the avant-garde movement, revealed at the time of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, are here openly pandered to. The group are accused not of attempting to revive 'Purism' and its various archaisms of style and sentiment, but of degrading art through their descent into 'Sensualism'. The increasing amorality of the avant-garde is illustrated by the moralistic complaints it provoked; the concentration on the body as an object of beauty, Buchanan noted with disapproval, even took the form of 'spasmodic ramifications in the erotic direction.9

Walter Pater was closely associated with the philosophy of this incipient Aesthetic movement, in a sense constituting its critical dimension, as Ruskin had done in relation

8 Bullen, The Pre-Raphaelite Body, p.151.
to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, a compendium of articles written for the *Fortnightly Review* over the course of the previous six years, was published in 1873. This volume proved highly influential, and established Pater as a major critical voice, whose work would contribute to the process described at length by Dwight Culler, whereby the Renaissance came to replace the Middle Ages as the dominant post-antique era in the historical consciousness of England during the second half of the nineteenth century.\(^\text{10}\)

Accordingly, the intellectual principles of Pater's *Renaissance* differed considerably from those which underlay the discourse of moral art history, as he sought to present the High Renaissance as the pinnacle of all human artistic achievement, rather than an ignoble fall into degeneracy. Pater can generally be said to exhibit an aversion to critical systems which led him away from the rigidity of moral art history, and even (albeit to a lesser extent) from the texts of the 1850s which attempted to replace the strict polar distinction made by Río in *De la Poésie Chrétienne* with a more balanced and gradated approach, such as 'The Nature of the Gothic' from the second volume of Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*. Pater's emphasis, in the words of Bullen, was 'upon the primacy of mental sensations over philosophical systems';\(^\text{11}\) rather than demand obedience from his readers, and attempt to impart a set of laws to guide and structure their judgement of old master painting, he repeatedly stresses the importance of the individual mind in the process of art appreciation. The distinction between these generations of criticism is similar to that drawn by Browning in 'Fra Lippo Lippi' between the Renaissance itself and the period of the late Middle Ages which directly preceded it; the former seeks to assert a liberating individuality over the restrictive orthodoxies and dogmas of the latter.

Direct challenges to the theories of Río are issued over the course of Pater's *Renaissance*. Primarily, these involve characterisations of the Renaissance as 'the

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\(^{10}\)Culler, *The Victorian*, pp.249-253.

\(^{11}\)Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p.183.
breaking down of those limits which the religious system of the middle age imposed on the heart and the imagination'.

The conception of the 'great schism' in fifteenth-century Italian art envisaged by moral art historians is dismissed in favour of a vision of a co-operative society inspired by the spirit of the Renaissance, in which the different aspects of art and culture interacted, and enhanced one another. Pater declared that it is 'the unity of this spirit which gives unity to all the various products of the Renaissance'.

He was able to imagine such an alliance by a conscious conceptual broadening of the 'Renaissance' as a historical term. Pater explains in his introduction that it has been given:

...a much wider scope than was intended by those who originally used it to denote only that revival of classical antiquity in the fifteenth century, which was but one of many results of a general stimulus and enlightening of the human mind, and of which the great aim and achievements of what, as Christian art, is often falsely opposed to the Renaissance, were another result.

This false opposition is clearly that made by moral art history; Pater here claims the 'pure' art of the fifteenth century as a part of the process Rio and his followers understood it to contrast with so absolutely.

The three painters celebrated in the Renaissance are Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Sandro Botticelli, who each have a chapter devoted to them. None were championed by moral art history; Leonardo and Michelangelo were too firmly identified with the High Renaissance to be eligible for even a qualified membership of the mystic school. Botticelli is a more interesting case, as he was perceived as something of a transitional figure, who belonged to an earlier artistic generation despite being a near contemporary of Leonardo. Rio describes him as a disciple and

13 Ibid., p.xiv.
14 Ibid., p.xi.
student of the reviled Lippi, who was therefore deserving of censure, but he was nonetheless prepared to accept that traces of a dwindling mysticism could still be detected in his best Madonnas. In her Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters, Jameson also commented on Botticelli’s unworthy tutelage, and alerted her readers to the fact that he had been among the first supposedly Christian artists to treat mythological subjects. She criticised the ‘fanciful and capricious style’ which was evident in all his works, the implication being that his departure from the established mystical pattern of representation and subject matter was indecorous. The artist received further denigration in Jameson’s later works. In Sacred and Legendary Art, for example, he is accused, along with his master, of the characteristic crime of degenerate naturalism in the eyes of moral art history: using the portraits of living people to represent the countenances of religious personages, in this case angels. Such condemnation doubtless contributed to the extremely marginal critical status assigned to Botticelli throughout the 1840s and 1850s, with several writers even omitting him altogether from their surveys of old master painting. Most notably, he is not mentioned in either Modern Painters II or ‘The Nature of the Gothic’, and did not appear in Ruskin’s criticism until 1872, when a lecture in the series entitled Ariadne Florentina was devoted to his engravings.

Despite this lack of attention in works of art history, the number of paintings attributed to Botticelli in both private and public collections increased considerably during the 1850s; in 1857, Austen Layard described him as an artist ‘whose works have of late

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15Rio, De la, p.99.
17Jameson, Sacred, p.78.
18Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), The Complete Works, vol.22. The lecture in question was no.6, ‘Design in the Florentine Schools of Engraving (Sandro Botticelli)’, which was delivered in 1872, and then published between 1873-6. Ruskin later acknowledged his ignorance of Botticelli prior to the 1870s; reviewing a passage from chapter 4 of Modern Painters III (1856) in 1875, he wrote ‘I knew nothing, when I wrote this passage, of Luini, Filippo Lippi, or Sandro Botticelli’ (editorial note, vol.5, p.87).
years become very popular amongst collectors in this country. Charles Eastlake acquired two pictures attributed to the artist for the National Gallery whilst in Italy in 1855 and supposed examples of his work were also lent to the British Institution summer exhibition by specialist collectors of the ‘primitives’ such as Alexander Barker, William Davenport-Bromley and William Fuller-Maitland during the decade. Several Botticellis were included in the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition, and as mentioned in chapter three, the Mystic Nativity lent by Fuller-Maitland attracted some approving comments, in which the influence of moral art history was clear. However, Layard judged that Botticelli could not be thought of as a member of the mystic school, as he ‘holds so important a position in the transition period, if we may so term it, of the fifteenth century’, going on to praise the ‘original fancy and life’ of the Nativity. Many other critics also reacted to this new and unknown quality in the painting, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The Manchester Guardian lauded its ‘wildness and energy of expression’, the Athenaeum remarked on the ‘tattered dresses and gypsy features’ which were featured, perhaps not altogether appropriately, in the scene; the Saturday Review found the effect of the work to be ‘strange, grotesque’. I would argue that it was this unfamiliar, seemingly unique aspect identified in Botticelli’s art, and the influence it exerted upon certain Aesthetes, which made him an apposite choice of subject for Pater.

Pater’s ‘Sandro Botticelli’ was originally published in the Fortnightly Review in August 1870, making it the first lengthy consideration and defence of Botticelli in

20See chapter 2, section??????????.
21For example, see chapter 2, p.146.
22See chapter 3, p.181.
27Fraser, The Victorians, p.126. Fraser here describes Burne-Jones’ ‘fascination’ with Botticelli.
British art criticism. The figure presented in this essay was a mighty one, credited with directly anticipating the splendours of the High Renaissance, and imbuing his painting with an intellectual acuity beyond anything previously seen in art. Elsewhere in the Renaissance, Pater disparaged the ‘mystical unreality’ of the school of Perugino, and therefore the works of the young Raphael. Botticelli’s perceived divergence from the abstractions and limitations of spiritual art is described in what initially appear to be similar terms to those defined by Ruskin in ‘The Nature of the Gothic’. Pater explains that:

His interest is neither in the untempered goodness of Angelico’s saints, nor the untempered evil of Orcagna’s Inferno; but with men and women, in their mixed and uncertain condition, always attractive, clothed sometimes by passion with a character of loveliness and energy, but saddened perpetually by the shadow upon them of the great things from which they shrink.

Botticelli’s worth derives in part from his commixture of good and evil, from his establishment of a balance in his work between the absolute concerns of either in order to create art with an explicitly human emphasis. Like the heroine of Eliot’s Romola, or Rossetti’s Chiaro dell’Erma, Botticelli’s attainment of this condition is enabled by his experience of a variety of conflicting influences; Pater stresses the artist’s engagement with the classics, his study and adaptation of the writing of Dante and Boccaccio, and his fervid devotion to Savonarola, which are taken to indicate both the breadth of his intellect and the receptiveness of his spirit. That the condition with which Botticelli is concerned is ‘uncertain’, and that he is even described as a ‘second-rate painter’, also allies Pater’s conception with the notions of the imperfect discussed in chapter four. Botticelli’s greatness, it is implied, is evident because of the flaws in his painting, rather than despite of them.

28 Pater, Renaissance, p. 114. The comment is made in the course of ‘Leonardo da Vinci’.
29 Pater. ibid., p. 45.
30 ibid., p. 50.
However, Pater's Botticelli does not neatly fall into the central category of painting outlined by Ruskin; although he lived amongst 'a generation of naturalists', he did not become 'a mere naturalist' himself. He is both a 'poetical' and a 'visionary' painter, who stands apart from his naturalistic peers and precedents. Whereas artists such as Giotto and Masaccio are 'almost impassive spectators' of the world, who 'but transcribe with more or less refining the outward image', the genius of Botticelli 'usurps the data before it as the exponents of ideas, moods, visions of its own.' Pater claimed that good and evil were not simply presented by Botticelli as unavoidable elements of human existence, combined in art in the interests of truthfulness; they were rather influences which merged in the individual mind of the artist, to produce paintings which were entirely unique. This assertion of the supreme value of individual self-expression in art finds a parallel in the creative philosophy expounded over twenty years earlier by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 'Hand and Soul'. The story provides a clear indication of the direction its author would take Pre-Raphaelitism following the disintegration of the Brotherhood.

For Ruskin, the greatness of a 'naturalist' lay in his ability to admit evil in his work, yet still assert good as the dominant force. In 'Sandro Botticelli', Pater removed this moral aspect from art criticism, creating an account which demonstrates a certain amorality in its assessment of its subject's 'visionary' interpretations of his iconographic sources. In his discussion of Botticelli's Madonnas, for example, Pater describes 'their unique expression and charm', despite the fact that they conform to 'no acknowledged or obvious type of beauty', and indeed have a 'distinct and peculiar type' of their own. They are said to have an attraction beyond that of Madonnas by Raphael and Fra Angelico, and, in acknowledgement of the controversial nature of such an assertion, the following explanation is given:

31Ibid., pp.42-5.
32See chapter 4, p.311.
At first, contrasting them with those, you may have thought that there was even something in them mean or abject, for the abstract lines of the face have little nobleness, and the colour is wan. For with Botticelli she, though she holds in her hands the 'Desire of all Nations', is one of those who are neither for God nor for his enemies; and her choice is on her face.33

The admiration of a Madonna who was not 'for God' would have been positively blasphemous to a moral art historian, and unthinkable even for those who sought to challenge the creed of Rio in the 1850s. Pater enlarges upon this concept later in his essay, identifying a seam of melancholy and fear which runs through Botticelli's entire oeuvre. The Virgins 'shrink from the pressure of the divine child, and plead in unmistakable undertones for a warmer, lower humanity'; they are filled with apprehension and anxiety by the role which has been divinely designated to them. Mortal weakness and uncertainty were assigned to mythological as well as holy figures. Pater comments on the 'sadness' with which the artist portrayed the goddess Venus, who is said to have 'the shadow of death' about her in the numerous representations he created. This same shadow was seen to be cast across all mankind by the Botticelli of the Renaissance; his acute awareness of this limitation allowed his painting to encapsulate an unusually profound vision of 'the true complexion of humanity.34

This concern with mortality was as prominent in the Renaissance as Pater claimed it was in the paintings of Botticelli. Nowhere is this more evident than in his conclusion, when he states that:

Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses?35

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33 Pater, Renaissance, p. 46.
34 Ibid., pp. 49-50.
As this quotation illustrates, Pater's response to the ephemeral nature of existence was to advocate what was essentially hedonism, or the living of one's life in order to accrue the greatest number of pleasurable experiences possible. Art appreciation, as he defined it, was entirely compatible with this philosophy, as it primarily involved the enjoyment of pleasurable sensations produced by paintings; the Aesthetic painters accordingly sought to produce pictures which were full of variegated beauty, regardless of any moral implications. Works of ancient art were also believed to lend themselves to such interpretation; for instance, it was claimed that the wealth of details in The Birth of Venus were included by Botticelli in order to make the painting more 'pleasurable' to the viewer. The final justification offered by Pater for his lengthy consideration of the merits of this painter was that, in his distinctive artistic character, he conveys 'a peculiar quality of pleasure which we cannot get elsewhere'.

Many of the texts discussed in this thesis reflect the theories they expound, and Pater's work is no exception. As with the moralistic tone adopted by moral art historians, or the 'incomplete' works produced by exponents of the 'philosophy of the imperfect', the Renaissance clearly attempts to provide a pleasurable history for its readers' consumption. An ostensible similarity with moral art history exists in the fact that Pater's principal means of enlivening his account, at least with regard to painters, was the inclusion of a mass of biographical anecdote that related to the figures he discussed, which was taken from Vasari and elsewhere. Like many other Victorian critics, he was suspicious of Vasari's tendency to 'gossip', and provide biased stories which had little or no foundation in fact, but this did not prevent him from creating histories which drew heavily upon what he termed 'the legend' of the painter in question. Accordingly, the chapters on Michelangelo and Leonardo are

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36 ibid., pp.49-51.  
37 ibid., p.40.  
38 ibid., p.92.
heavily romanticised, and of Botticelli it is lamented that 'in an age where the lives of the artists were full of adventure, his is almost colourless.' However, unlike the revisionist approach of Rio and his followers, there was no moral agenda to Pater's utilisation of this fictionalised material; he rather employs the paradigm of the 'artist-hero' in a more or less straightforward manner, for the purposes of enjoyable imaginative stimulation.

Pater's emphasis on pleasure and individuality in the Renaissance marks a departure from the criticism of fifteenth-century Italian art, and indeed old master painting in general, which had preceded it. There is a new concentration on the concerns of ego, which is divergent from the authoritarianism which characterises the various evaluative systems laid down in the critical discourses of the 1840s and 1850s. As I have contended throughout this thesis, critical and educational approaches to old master painting in these decades were grounded in a strident work ethic, which required a viewing or reading public to consider, for example, both historical context and original function in its assessment of art. This process invariably involved the absorbing of certain received arguments and theories, and the application of these to the pictures one encountered. Pater refuted this subservience to fixed set of theories as a basis for art appreciation, and sought to establish what he called an 'aesthetic criticism', in which the questions a viewer needed to ask before a painting were 'what effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? And if so, what sort of pleasure?'

The moral dimension of earlier conceptions of an experience with art has been entirely

39 Ibid., p.67. For example, in 'The Poetry of Michelangelo', it is said that 'he was born in an interval of a rapid midnight journey in March, at a place in the neighbourhood of Arezzo, the thin, clear air of which it was then thought was favourable to the birth of children of great parts. He came of a race of grave and dignified men, who, claiming kinship with the family of Canossa, and some colour of imperial blood in their veins, had, generation after generation, received honourable employment under the government of Florence.'

40 Ibid., p.40.

41 See chapter 1, pp.44-6.

42 Pater, Renaissance, introduction p.viii.
removed. It could be argued that after the failures of art education in the 1850s, of which the Art Treasures Exhibition is a significant example, critics came to doubt the pedagogic stance they had taken; in 1860, for instance, Ruskin privately expressed reservations concerning the efficacy of art as an instructive tool in the 'moral education of the people'.

The stance adopted by Pater in his *Renaissance* appears to signal a retreat from active social endeavour in the field of art appreciation, and indeed a degree of reservation concerning the imposition of any regimented theoretical system upon it. In his conclusion, he declares that to graft an order of classification onto the experience of art or anything else was to inhibit it, and that whilst new opinions and impressions should be tested, one should never fall into exclusive obedience to any 'facile orthodoxy' of thought. The brevity of human existence impelled a continual state of intellectual change in Pater's view, in order to maximise the experience that could be obtained, and the 'theory, or idea, or system' which requires the sacrifice of any part of this experience, 'in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some abstract morality we have not identified with ourselves, or what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us'. It is possible that Pater is making here an indirect reference to the doctrines of moral art history, which attempted to overcome the sense of 'otherness' instinctively felt before the devotional paintings of the early Italian schools by English viewers. The arguments of the *Renaissance* seem founded in a desire to emancipate the public from obeisance to such critical doctrine, to liberate them from the repressive formality with which art appreciation had been burdened by moral art history and even responses to it such as Ruskin's 'The Nature of the Gothic'.

43Cook and Wedderburn (eds.), *The Complete Works*, vol.36, p.348. In a letter to Elizabeth Barrett Browning of 5th November 1860 he wrote of his melancholy and disillusionment, and how, after a bout of hard work, he had 'fallen into the lassitude of surrendered effort and the disappointment of discovered uselessness, having come to see the great fact that great art is of no real use to anybody but the next great artist (and) that it is wholly invisible to people in general'.

Pater openly distinguished between specialist art criticism and 'general criticism',\textsuperscript{45} which was more popular in emphasis, and identified his volume as an example of the latter category despite his subject matter. In doing so, I would contend that he was attempting to deliver a measure of authority to the public themselves, in a manner not seen in any of the earlier works of criticism discussed in this thesis. By establishing that theories and critical systems were not absolute, existing only to guide or stimulate one's personal faculties rather than shape them entirely, and that art's primary value to the mortal mind lay in its provision of a fleeting pleasure, Pater effectively encouraged his readers to seek liberation from the overbearing influence of formal art criticism, and to judge and enjoy paintings for themselves.

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{ibid.}, p. 51. It is claimed here that Botticelli is a painter who deserves inclusion in 'general criticism' along with the handful of masters whose genius was undisputed, such as Leonardo and Michelangelo.
Figures
Figure 1: Saints, after Taddeo Gaddi (now attributed to Lorenzo Monaco), engraving. Illustrated London News, 11th November 1848.
Figure 2: Ball to Her Majesty at Grosvenor House - The Queen Entering the Supper-Room, engraving, Illustrated London News, 5th July 1856.
Figure 3: The Art Treasures Exhibition Building, Manchester - Exterior, engraving. Illustrated London News, 2nd May 1857.
Figure 4: Floorplan of the Art Treasures Exhibition Building, engraving, from the Art Treasures Examiner, May 1857.
ORIGINAL IN COLOUR
Figure 5: The Interior of the Arena Chapel, Padua, with Dante and Giotto, chromolithograph after a water-colour by Mrs. Higford Burr, 1856.
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