This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

AESTHETIC VISION AS SOCIAL PROTEST
IN CARLYLE, RUSKIN AND MORRIS

presented by

Kurt Cobb

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

M.A. degree in History

Norman Pollack
Major professor

Date July 26, 1996

AESTHETIC VISION AS SOCIAL PROTEST

IN CARLYLE, RUSKIN AND MORRIS

By

Kurt Cobb

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

1996

ABSTRACT

AESTHETIC VISION AS SOCIAL PROTEST
IN CARLYLE, RUSKIN AND MORRIS

By

Kurt Cobb

Three nineteenth century British authors--Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and William Morris--taken together create a coherent aesthetic response to nineteenth century British society. This paper starts with their critique of work and moves outward to an aesthetic critique of society as a whole. It concludes with an alternate vision proposed by the authors of a society based on aesthetic principles. The two ideas which govern the logic of this paper are 1) that nature is the aesthetic guide for society and 2) that pleasure in labor is a necessary condition for the creation of beauty. Nineteenth century working and living conditions not only acted against the creation of beauty, but fostered its destruction and created ugliness in its place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A student can go through the entire educational system without ever hearing the word beauty. This omission has impoverished education and the world we live in. Against this and other omissions, my advisor, Dr. Norman Pollack, has raised his voice. He refuses to let beauty remain trapped in art and insists on bringing it both into the entire world of things and people and into a description of their relationships.

Dr. Pollack gave me both the insight and the freedom to produce this thesis of ideas. His confidence in me and his love of ideas allowed me to focus on important texts and to take the time necessary to draw out their meaning carefully and precisely.

My wife, Olga, was the first to suggest teaching as a career for me, and her instincts were proved absolutely correct once I started teaching. She supported my return to school and gave me valuable advice on how to navigate through graduate school. After I had finished the first draft of this thesis, she gave me some excellent ideas on reorganizing parts of it, and this helped to create a beginning and ending that were much more forceful and clear.

My parents also gave me support, both emotional and financial, without which I doubt I could have finished my graduate work.

Finally, I owe thanks to perhaps the greatest living American psychologist, James Hillman, whom I met only once, and who does not know how much I am indebted to his work and insight.

PREFACE

In a way the genesis of this paper goes back ten years to my first encounter with the work of psychologist James Hillman. Since that time I have read almost all of Hillman's work. I also had the good fortune to attend a seminar on beauty which he led. The seminar and his written work gave me two key insights which opened the way for my topic.

The first insight came in the seminar during which Hillman lamented the decline of beauty in our century. He said that this decline represents a kind of unconsciousness, as severe as any Victorian sexual repression.[1] In an age which regards itself (rightly or wrongly) as psychologically self-aware, the material sensuous world has become repressed. Hillman gives the example of marriage counseling to illustrate his point:

> Let's take a husband and wife in a modern suburb, and they fight about drink and money and in-laws and love and little habits. Then he goes to analysis and she goes to analysis and they work on the relationship, and they are good sincere patients who try--group therapy, team or office therapy, family therapy, sex therapy--they get it all together as human decent people. They may even go to Church. And still there is a terrible misery going on, because the room in which they're set, its low ceiling, thin hollow doors, the bed, the dishes, the TV programs, the magazines, the light tubes, the furniture they have around them, and so on and so on, the whole world of material things, verbal things, institutional things in which their marriage is set is nasty, brutish, ugly, cheap, shoddy, vicious--without soul at all. Fake. How can they possibly straighten out their

---

[1]James Hillman, "Seminar on Beauty," Leslie College, Cambridge, Mass., Jan. 24-26, 1990.

> situation if the whole stage including the lines in the script are fake?[2]

But the repression manifests itself on a larger scale as well. Hillman gives an architectural example:

> Look at the world of buildings: look at all that has been blown up and torn down, everything solid and well made and with memory--now if that happened in the forties, and it did happen--Dresden, Coventry, Rotterdam, Warsaw, all over--it was called bombing and destruction, and we mourned the loss of our cities. Now we call it development, and the people who do it are called "developers" and "planners." This is Orwell: 1984. Then it was terror: now, of course, people aren't firebombed and killed, but the civilization--the world of things that are their repositories of memory and beauty and love--these are gone, and I think this is a terror, an unconscious terror, an even worse terror to live in a city that has been destroyed and yet looks marvelous and new. The soul feels its loss but it can't tell what's wrong. It's schizogenic. We are getting two signals at once, because the actual destruction that is terrible is given wonderful names like "development" [and] "urban renewal"--and we wonder why the cities with their marvelous buildings and developments are full of crime, as if it were the fault of social factors or unemployment or fatherless families. Well, the crime begins in those buildings, on the drawing boards and planning commissions. One crime begats another.[3]

In these examples Hillman shows that the aesthetic affects our everyday lives in profound ways. This is so, he believes, because human beings are first and foremost "sensuously imagining animals." Hillman asks, "[W]hy not imagine a psychology that starts there, in the aesthetic nature of human beings and the aesthetic nature of the world which displays itself in sense events, to the senses, and the first reaction is to live a thing as a sense image?"[4]

---

[2]James Hillman, Inter Views (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1983), 135-36.

[3]Hillman, Inter Views, 139-40.

[4]Hillman, Inter Views, 144-45.

aes

Tho

goo

aes

inst

deve

dist

do w

and

work

as a

plea

one

work

Briti

part

and M

aesth

author

be mor

5

6

I seek to expand this idea, to approach society as whole from an aesthetic point of view. The three authors I study in this paper--Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and William Morris--taken together make a good start in that direction. They, too, see humans as profoundly aesthetic creatures.

The second insight I owe to Hillman is his idea of the "work instinct." He says, "I think there is a work instinct; it's what developed human civilization, and I think this instinct in itself can be disturbed, affected, pathologized."[5] Part of that disturbance has to do with the Old Testament view that work is a curse. "We moralize work and make it a problem," Hillman says, "forgetting that hands love to work and that in the hands is the mind." Hillman wants to imagine work as an "id" activity rather than a product of the superego, that is, as a pleasurable activity which functions autonomously, rather than a painful one performed under threat of punishment.[6]

Carlyle, Ruskin and Morris use this disturbance in the realm of work as one of their starting points for an aesthetic analysis of British society. They all believe that the "pathologies" of work form part of the basis for wider social and economic problems. For Ruskin and Morris the disturbance itself results from a degradation of the aesthetic aspect of work.

These ideas flow in many directions in the writings of the three authors, so many, in fact, that the scope of this thesis requires that I be more suggestive than exhaustive in order to keep its length within

---

[5]Hillman, Inter Views, 162.

[6]Hillman, Inter Views, 163.

the agreed bounds. Fortunately, the richness of the material allows me to focus on just those writings in which the relationship between beauty and the political, economic and social structures of nineteenth-century British society is most fully developed and aptly described. Using those writings I will focus on the authors' ideas: how these ideas fit together; how they differ; and how, when taken together, they create a coherent, if not complete, aesthetic response to the century.

I mention one problem in advance both to forewarn the reader and to enable me to keep the focus in the main text on the authors' ideas. To our modern sensibilities some of the authors' references to women seem derogatory, and in this respect, both Carlyle and Ruskin exhibit attitudes typical of their era. Morris, a dedicated socialist, believed in the equality of women, but occasionally fell prey to his Victorian conditioning.

If there is any message for us today in this paper, it is that many of the problems which these authors discussed more than a century ago persist; in some ways, they have only worsened. Yet, the message of the authors was not one of despair; they hoped that with nature as our guide humanity would find its way back to the path of pleasurable work, beautiful creation and just relations, both among members of society and between mankind and the earth itself.

IN

CH
NA

CH
WO

CH
AN

CH
TH

CH
CO

WO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....1

CHAPTER 1
NATURE: AESTHETIC GUIDE FOR SOCIETY.....7
Medieval Origins.....8
Organic Form.....10
The Pasture, The Garden and the Forest.....11

CHAPTER 2
WORK, PLEASURE AND BEAUTY.....16

CHAPTER 3
AN AESTHETIC CRITIQUE OF SOCIETY.....25
The Degradation of Work.....25
The Impoverishment of the Aesthetic Imagination.....32
The Destruction of Beauty.....37

CHAPTER 4
THE AESTHETIC POLITY.....47
Political Governance.....48
Workers and Owners.....51
Commerce and Wealth.....54
A New Probity.....55
A New Consumer Ethic.....57
The Accumulation of Wealth.....60
Education.....61

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION: AESTHETIC LIFE AND THE FATE OF CIVILIZATION.....65

WORKS CITED.....71

INTRODUCTION

To inculcate a love of beauty is one of the main aims of education in Plato's Republic. And, his philosopher-king is likened to "an artist working after a divine plan."[7] The main concern of the Republic, of course, is justice. Here, in the work of the Western tradition's primal political philosopher, the ideas of beauty and justice are inextricably intertwined.

From Plato forward, however, the two ideas are not often discussed together, and their relevance to one another sometimes seems obscure. To Plato the "beautiful" and the "just" both proceed from the "Good." Where there is beauty (that is, true beauty and not mere aestheticism), there is also justice, and vice versa.[8]

The relationship between beauty and a just society is an important theme for Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and William Morris, three nineteenth century British social critics. They all link a better society with a more beautiful society, and therefore represent a revival of the connection first made by Plato.

These three writers enunciated a common aesthetic vision of society as a protest against the industrialism and commercialism of

---

[7]Plato, The Republic of Plato, trans. with an Introduction by Francis MacDonald Cornford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 92, 209.

[8]Francis MacDonald Cornford, notes to The Republic of Plato, by Plato (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 221.

their age. In this paper, I examine four aspects of their protest with a chapter devoted to each of the following aspects: 1) nature as an aesthetic guide for society; 2) the link between work, pleasure and beauty; 3) an aesthetic critique of British society; and 4) an outline of a better society guided by aesthetic principles, an "aesthetic polity," if you will.

Throughout these chapters I employ an expansive three-fold definition of beauty. First, there is beauty in objects. This is the static beauty in things ranging from everyday household items, to the finest sculpture, to a rural landscape. Second, there is beauty in action. This is the dynamic beauty in skillful action. It might include something as breathtaking as a long, score-making pass on the football field; as practiced and flowing as a ballet; or as fine and studied as the movements of craftsman or a chef. Third, there is the beauty of relationships, both in the reciprocal ties of affection and loyalty between people and in the proper relationship between people and nature. Following Plato, beauty emanates from such relationships when they are just.

This broad definition provides the background for two key concepts developed in Chapters One and Two which drive the logic of this paper: 1) the correlation of nature and beauty and 2) the dependence of beauty in man-made work on pleasurable labor. The first concept is that nature is the guide to what is beautiful. Nature itself embodies beauty, and we create beauty when we give interpretation to nature's leafy imprecision and meandering movement. Geometric design with its perfect triangles, rectangles and circles relies on a mathematical precision not

found in nature and is therefore opposed to such an aesthetic. The second concept is that pleasure in labor is a necessary condition for the creation of man-made beauty. The craftsman unavoidably invests his design and workmanship with his emotional state; in this way, his pleasure or lack of it gets reflected as the beauty or ugliness of his creation. The pleasure in work depends on self-direction and variety. Decoration which follows nature allows for infinite variety and interpretation because nature itself is so varied. In following nature the craftsman has many decisions to make about interpretation. He is therefore obliged to direct his own work, and he finds ample opportunity for variation in it. Chapter Three, an aesthetic critique of society, and Chapter Four, an outline of a better society based on the principle of beauty, grow directly from these key concepts.

If this paper can be said to have a central character, it would be the craftsman. (The focus of Carlyle, Ruskin and Morris on the craftsman creates a masculine bias in the language they use and also, of necessity, in the language of this paper. However, their analysis, in its essentials, could apply equally to women.) The craftsman is at his peak while creating the organic sculptures and lines of Gothic architecture. But, he reaches his nadir when he is turned into a factory drudge in the nineteenth century world of mass production. The three authors use the relentless degradation of the craftsman from the Renaissance onward as the quintessential case for illustrating the decline of beauty.

Taken together, the authors were witnesses to an entire century of this decline: Carlyle lived from 1795 to 1881, Ruskin from 1819 to

1900, Morris from 1834 to 1896. In this paper I am treating them together because both their ideas and their lives were closely intertwined. Carlyle and Ruskin were close friends and carried on a lively and extensive correspondence. Ruskin considered himself a disciple of and son to Carlyle.[9] Morris, in turn, carried the torch previously handed down to Ruskin by Carlyle. Morris wrote: "I cannot help saying, by the way, how deadly dull the world would have been twenty years ago but for Ruskin! It was through him that I learned to give form to my discontent, which I must say was not by any means vague." Morris considered Ruskin's The Nature of the Gothic to be "one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century."[10]

Each of these men recognized that the political, social and economic arrangements of nineteenth-century British society produced a particular aesthetic, a degraded one in their view, and one which reflected the injustices of the age in its ugliness. In Carlyle this message is inchoate and must be drawn out by implication. Ruskin and Morris, however, were explicit about starting with an aesthetic viewpoint and working out the implications for society. They felt that Britain's dimmed and perverted view of art was as much to blame for its social and economic problems as other factors. For example, Ruskin believed the relationship between art and society was reflexive. Art

---

[9]Derrick Leon, Ruskin: The Great Victorian (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1949), 368.

[10]William Morris, How I Became a Socialist, in News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin, 1993), 381; idem, preface to The Nature of the Gothic, by John Ruskin, in News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin, 1993), 367.

both mirrored and influenced society: "In her own life and growth [art] partly implies, partly secures, that of the nation in the midst of which she is practiced[.]"[11] Morris was even more strident about the importance of art in relation to social and economic problems. He was explicit that the creation of beauty signalled the pleasure of the creator in his work and that "the lack of this pleasure in daily work...has made our towns and habitations sordid and hideous, insults to the beauty of the earth which they disfigure, and all the accessories of life mean, trivial, ugly--in a word, vulgar."[12] Bad art, in its broadest terms, resulted in a pleasureless and ugly existence. But, good art, Morris believed, had a crucial role to play even for those in the most desperate circumstances:

> [I]t must be remembered that civilization has reduced the workman to such a skinny and pitiful existence, that he scarcely knows how to frame a desire for any life much better than that which he now endures perforce. It is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before him, a life to which the perception and creation of beauty, the enjoyment of real pleasure that is, shall be as necessary to man as his daily bread[.][13]

To see why Morris believes that art is as necessary as daily bread, one must understand his very broad definition of art. It includes a continuum from the humblest decorative or expressive effort

---

[11]John Ruskin, The Two Paths, being Lectures on Art and its Application to Decoration and Manufacture, in Sesame & Lilies, The Two Paths & The King of the Golden River, ed. Ernest Rhys with an Introduction by Oliver Lodge (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1909), 96.

[12]William Morris, "The Worker's Share of Art," in Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 84-85.

[13]Morris, How I Became a Socialist, 383.

to the

definit

A
m
m
i
a
i
t
m
[

to the most refined painting, sculpture or poetry, and it is the definition to keep in mind while reading this paper:

> Art is man's embodied expression of interest in the life of man; it springs from man's pleasure in his life; pleasure we must call it, taking all human life together, however much it may be broken by the grief and trouble of individuals; and as it is the expression of pleasure in life generally, in the memory of the deeds of the past, and the hope of those of the future, so it is especially the expression of man's pleasure in the deeds of the present; in his work. [emphasis added][14]

[14]Morris, "The Worker's Share of Art," 84.

CHAPTER 1

NATURE: AESTHETIC GUIDE FOR SOCIETY

Carlyle, Ruskin and Morris were unanimous in their opinion that nature offered an aesthetic guide for society. For Carlyle nature was an immense source of beauty:

> The highest Voice ever heard on this earth said withal, "Consider the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." A glance, that, into the deepest deep of Beauty. "The lilies of the field,"--dressed finer than earthly princes, springing-up there in the humble furrow-field; a beautiful eye looking-out on you, from the great inner Sea of Beauty! How could the rude Earth make these, if her Essence, rugged as she looks and is, were not inwardly Beauty?[15]

Carlyle also believed that nature had a moral as well as aesthetic force for nature's laws could not be ignored without penalty. He wrote:

> Nature's Laws, I must repeat, are eternal: her small still voice, speaking from the inmost heart of us, shall not, under terrible penalties, be disregarded. No one man can depart from the truth without damage to himself.[16]

For Ruskin the contemplation of nature in art enriched and enhanced the life of society:

> So long as Art is steady in the contemplation and exhibition of natural facts, so long she herself lives and grows; and in her own life and growth partly implies, partly secures,

---

[15]Thomas Carlyle, On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, ed. with an Introduction by Carl Niemeyer (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 81.

[16]Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present, ed. with an Introduction by Richard D. Altick (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 145.

t
[

Morris

by the

which m

with Na

thwarts

realiz

period

a time

when t

which

clues

natur

outli

Writ
1993
234.

> that of the nation in the midst of which she is practiced. [emphasis added][17]

Morris echoes Ruskin in viewing nature as a model for all that is made by the hands of man: "[E]verything made by man's hands has a form, which must be either beautiful or ugly; beautiful if it is in accord with Nature, and helps her; ugly if it is discordant with Nature, and thwarts her[.]"[18] Nature's guidance in all art was essential for the realization of beauty.

Medieval Origins

Carlyle, Ruskin and Morris all looked backwards to the medieval period when seeking aesthetic models. In part, this was because it was a time when the landscape was yet unspoiled. But, it was also a time when the craftsman gave fullest expression to the natural aesthetic which the three authors espoused. For each of them this period held clues to the liberation of both art and society.

For Carlyle the medieval world was a simpler place, closer to nature and thus more in tune with its laws. Carlyle's description of it outlines many elements of the aesthetic which he is advancing:

> Behold therefore, this England of the Year 1200 was no chimerical vacuity or dreamland, peopled with mere vapourous Fantasms, Rymer's Fœdera, and Doctrines of the Constitution, but a green solid place, that grew corn and several other things. The Sun shone on it; the vicissitude of seasons and human fortunes. Cloth was woven and worn; ditches were dug, furrow-fields ploughed, and houses built.

---

[17]Ruskin, The Two Paths, 95-96.

[18]William Morris, The Lesser Arts, in News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin, 1993), 234.

Da
ni

Carlyle'

agricult

Ru

now-famo

this wo

progres

I
d
t
t
d
d
g
e
m
e
w

Like Ca

society

in whi

lectur

agains

---

is a '
foreig
relate

Other
(New

> Day by day all men and cattle rose to labour, and night by night returned home weary to their several lairs.[19]

Carlyle's aesthetic is drawn from a time which is pastoral and agricultural and which followed the rhythms of nature's diurnal cycle.

Ruskin's devotion to the medieval aesthetic took the form of the now-famous paean to Gothic architecture, The Nature of the Gothic. In this work he comments on the superior, highly aesthetic and culturally progressive human society implied by Gothic architecture:

> In that careful distinction of species, and richness of delicate and undisturbed organization, which characterize the Gothic design, there is the history of rural and thoughtful life, influenced by habitual tenderness, and devoted to subtle inquiry; and every discriminating and delicate touch of the chisel, as it rounds the petal or guides the branch, is a prophecy of the development of the entire body of the natural sciences, beginning with that of medicine, of the recovery of literature, and the establishment of the most necessary principles of domestic wisdom and national peace.[20]

Like Carlyle's medieval Britain, Ruskin's description discloses a society close to nature and its wisdom. It is also a conscious society in which men are devoted to "subtle inquiry" into nature.

Morris extended Ruskin's thinking. Morris states that his own lecture, Gothic Architecture, is a "contribution toward the revolt against utilitarianism." In it he explains that:

> [the] Harmonious Architectural unit, inclusive of the arts in general, is no mere dream....but it reached its fullest development in the Middle Ages...[I]f we are ever to have

---

[19]Carlyle, Past and Present, 50; Altick notes that Rymer's Fœdera is a "fifteen-volume collection of historical materials on Britain's foreign relations, published 1704-13." Doctrines of the Constitution relates to "various treatises on constitutional law."

[20]John Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, in Unto This Last and Other Writings by John Ruskin, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin, 1985), 104.

a
t

Thus, G

archite

this id

follow

form.

accord

own sa

artis

that

lifel

effor

any

appl

also

effe

"nat

Oth
Pen

> architecture at all, we must take up the thread of tradition there and nowhere else. [emphasis added][21]

Thus, Gothic architecture not only provides a guide for good architecture, but also for the "arts in general." Just how important this idea is to Morris's aesthetic outlook will become apparent in the following chapters.

Organic Form

The value of the Gothic aesthetic was its emphasis on organic form. A main "constituent element of the Gothic mind" is "naturalism," according to Ruskin. That mind has a "love of natural objects for their own sake" and wishes to "represent them frankly, unconstrained by artistical laws [i.e., conventions]."[22] Thus, it is not surprising that such a devotee to Gothic design as Ruskin would sum up his own lifelong aesthetic task as follows: "The law which it has been my effort chiefly to illustrate is the dependence of all noble design, in any kind, on the sculpture or painting of Organic Form."[23] This applied not only to such things as plants, animals and landscapes, but also to the human body, human emotions as portrayed in art and "the effect of colour and shade on all things[.]"[24] These were all "natural facts" and had their proper forms in art.

---

[21]William Morris, Gothic Architecture, in News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin, 1993), 332.

[22]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 99.

[23]Ruskin, The Two Paths, 83.

[24]Ruskin, The Two Paths, 97.

ou

ou

pa

th

ma

"'

Ca

us

"d

"h

ar

ar

re

co

th

co

—

Ne
(1

Ke
19

Natural facts were also important to Morris. He wanted "to clothe our daily and domestic walls with ornament that reminds us of the outward face of the earth, of the innocent love of animals, or of man passing his days between work and rest as he does."[25]

In Carlyle we can see the seed of this outlook. Carlyle agreed that nature and its forms are the basis of art. Speaking through his main character in Sartor Resartus, Professor Teufelsdröckh, he writes, "'Nature alone is antique, and the oldest Art a mushroom[.]'"[26] Carlyle also gives us a clue about his allegiance to the organic by his use of the word, "disorganic." He refers to contemporary Britain as "disorganic" equating disorganic with "quack-ridden," "hag-ridden," and "hell-ridden." He also describes the literary class as "disorganic" and says that it is "the heart of all other anomalies, at once product and parent," meaning that the disorganic state of this class both reflects and has contributed to the unnatural, ugly and inhumane conditions existing in Britain.[27]

The Pasture, the Garden and the Forest

Scenes from the pasture, the garden and the forest which appear in the work of all three authors are offered as models for improving contemporary conditions. In Carlyle and Ruskin these scenes refer to a

---

[25]William Morris, Some Hints on Pattern-Designing, in News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin, 1993), 259.

[26]Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, ed. with an Introduction by Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 80.

[27]Carlyle, Past and Present, 284; idem, On Heroes, 168.

lost past in which such scenes were the norm. But in Morris the scenes are offered as future possibilities, resulting from a revolution which overturns the existing order.

I have already shown that Carlyle's Britain of the year 1200 was "a green solid place, that grew corn and several other things" with "furrow-fields ploughed" and a schedule governed by circadian rhythms.[28] Carlyle extends this pastoral image later with clear approval for the aesthetic it implies:

> The wealth of a man is in the number of things which he loves and blesses, which he is loved and blessed by! The herdsman in his poor clay shealing, where his very cow and dog are friends to him, and not a cataract but carries memories for him, and not a mountain-top but nods old recognition: his life [is] all encircled as in blessed mother's-arms[.][29]

It is the simple things which are lovely, and the most quotidian events--encounters with a dog and cow and the sight of the mountain--which are fulfilling. This untroubled, unspoiled and sparsely populated landscape is a peaceable kingdom, where the streams

> [t]he Ribble and Aire roll down, as yet unpolluted by dyers' chemistry; tenanted by merry trouts and piscatory otters; the sunbeam and the vacant wind's blast alone traversing those moors. Side by side sleep the coal-strata and the iron-strata for so many ages; no Steam-Demon has yet risen smoking into being.[30]

This landscape had its forest, too, "for the country was still dark with wood in those days; and Scotland itself still rustled shaggy

---

[28]Carlyle, Past and Present, 50.

[29]Carlyle, Past and Present, 278.

[30]Carlyle, Past and Present, 71.

and leaf

spaces h

Ru

writes:

No
by
fu
ri
th
of
ir
ch
at
fl
wi
te
a
u

The pas

wild an

M

similar

convent

himself

case i

sweeps

While

Willia

3

3

of Po
Ruskin
1985),

and leafy, like a damp black American Forest, with cleared spots and spaces here and there."[31]

Ruskin is as laudatory as Carlyle about this aesthetic for he writes:

> No scene is continually and untiringly loved, but one rich by joyful human labour; smooth in field; fair in garden; full in orchard; trim, sweet, and frequent in homestead; ringing with voices of vivid existence. No air is sweet that is silent; it is only sweet when full of low currents of under sound--triplets of birds, and murmur and chirp of insects, and deep-toned words of men, and wayward trebles of childhood. As the art of life is learned, it will be found at last that all lovely things are also necessary;--the wild flower by the wayside, as well as the tended corn; and the wild birds and creatures of the forest, as well as the tended cattle; because man doth not live by bread only, but also by the desert manna; by every wondrous word and unknowable work of God.[32]

The pasture, the garden, and the fields are all included. Domestic and wild animals, wild flowers and the forest are all enumerated.

Morris, in his romance, News From Nowhere, describes a vision similar to that of Ruskin and Carlyle. In this work he uses a common convention of the period: a man wakes up from a night's sleep to find himself in a different time, in a waking dream, if you will. In this case it is Britain of 2102, some 150 years after a revolution which sweeps away the old order.

The pasture, garden and forest motifs appear here with regularity. While eating lunch on the bank of the Thames, Morris's main character, William Guest, takes note of the scene:

---

[31]Carlyle, Past and Present, 102.

[32]John Ruskin, Unto This Last: Four Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy, in Unto This Last and Other Writings by John Ruskin, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin, 1985), 226.

[T]he
was t
quiet
with
was r
tree
were
well
Thame
have
litt
westw
narro
north
the r

As a prospe

trajectory

melting of

elbow-room

Hammond, t

"'[Britai

spoilt, w

and down

separate

like the

elevatin

Th

for both

33

from No

Wilmer

34

35

> [T]he wide meadows spread before us, and already the scythe was busy amidst the hay. One change I noticed amidst the quiet beauty of the fields--to wit, that they were planted with trees here and there, often fruit-trees, and that there was none of the niggardly begrudging of space to a handsome tree which I remembered too well...To be short, the fields were everywhere treated as a garden made for the pleasure as well as the livelihood of all...[T]he slender stream of the Thames [wound] below us between the garden of a country I have been telling of; a furlong from us was a beautiful little islet begrown of graceful trees; on the slopes westward of us was a wood of varied growth overhanging the narrow meadow on the south side of the river; while to the north was a wide stretch of mead rising very gradually from the river's edge.[33]

As a prospective vision it implied a change from the then current trajectory of Britain's development. The revolution resulted in the melting of the suburbs into the countryside and reclaiming of "space and elbow-room" in the remaining towns as population spread out. As Mr. Hammond, the 105-year-old historian, explained to William Guest, "'[Britain] is now a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, sheds, and workshops scattered up and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty.'"[34] And, in a separate lecture, Morris imagines that even the city will become more like the countryside with "streets as beautiful as the woods, as elevating as the mountain-sides[.]"[35]

This newly reopened expanse, both urban and rural, would make room for both man and nature in balance, Morris believed. It represented a

---

[33]William Morris, News from Nowhere or An Epoch of Rest, in News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin, 1993), 211.

[34]Morris, News from Nowhere, 102, 105.

[35]William Morris, The Lesser Arts, 254.

redressing

mankind to

To m

aesthetic

have its g

redressing of the misunderstanding that nature was something outside of mankind to be made a "slave" rather than accepted as a partner.[36]

To make nature a partner meant first and foremost that its aesthetic guidance had to be brought to bear in work. There it could have its greatest impact on society as a whole.

---

[36]Morris, News from Nowhere, 200.

CHAPTER 2

WORK, PLEASURE AND BEAUTY

In this chapter I will show that both Ruskin and Morris believed that beauty is the expression of pleasure in labor and that pleasure is a necessary condition for the creation of that beauty. Then, I will outline the conditions of work which both felt were consistent with pleasurable labor. Finally, I will show some seeds of their thought in Carlyle's thinking.

Whenever labor resulted in art--keeping in mind the broadest meaning of the word--Morris believed that the labor producing it was necessarily pleasurable:

> [T]he chief source of art is man's pleasure in his daily necessary work, which expresses itself and is embodied in the work itself; nothing else can make the common surroundings of life beautiful, and whenever they are beautiful it is a sign that men's work has pleasure in it, however they may suffer otherwise.[37]

The pleasure in labor "expresses itself and is embodied in the work itself." To repeat from this paper's introduction: The craftsman unavoidably invests his design and workmanship with his emotional state; in this way, his pleasure or lack of it gets reflected as the beauty or ugliness of his creation. Morris also states above that "nothing else can make the common surroundings of life beautiful[.]" That is, pleasure in labor is a necessary condition for producing beauty.

---

[37]Morris, "The Worker's Share of Art," 84.

Although Ruskin never formulates the connection so explicitly, he does say in The Nature of the Gothic that the "foundations of society were never yet shaken as they are at this day. It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread" [emphasis added].[38] Later, he says that the evils of industrialism "can be met only by a right understanding, on the part of all classes, of what kinds of labour are good for men, raising them, and making them happy" and by creating a demand "for the products and results of healthy and ennobling labour" [emphasis added].[39] Thus, it is no leap for Morris to claim in his preface to an edition of Ruskin's The Nature of the Gothic that Ruskin was making the same connection he was. Morris wrote:

> Ruskin here teaches us that [beauty in] art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour; that it is possible for man to rejoice in his work, for, strange as it may seem to us to-day, there have been times when he did rejoice in it; and lastly, that unless man's work once again becomes a pleasure to him, the token of which change will be that beauty is once again a natural and necessary accompaniment of productive labour, all but the worthless must toil in pain, and therefore live in pain." [emphasis added][40]

All of this begs the question of what makes work pleasurable. First, writes Morris, "[nature] takes care to make the acts necessary to the continuance of life in the individual and the race not only endurable, but even pleasurable."[41] Work is naturally pleasurable.

---

[38]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 86.

[39]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 86.

[40]Morris, preface to The Nature of the Gothic, 367.

[41]William Morris, Useful Work versus Useless Toil, in News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin, 1993), 287.

To this Ruskin clearly gives his assent: "God has connected the labour which is essential to the bodily sustenance with the pleasures which are healthiest for the heart[.]"[42]

But, not any kind of work under any conditions will result in that pleasure. Morris gives four conditions necessary for pleasurable work: usefulness, short duration, variety, and pleasurable surroundings.[43]

Except for pastimes pursued privately, work must produce something useful to society. For context it is worth noting that Morris felt that most of what was being produced by industry at the time was simply "rubbish."[44] In his opinion the labor of most working men was taken up with making useless objects--useless because they were poorly made and therefore unserviceable or useless because they were pointless trinkets or showpieces.

Thus, Morris reasoned that if the working men of England were all set to making truly useful things, the workday could be considerably shortened; yet, production could still meet everyone's genuine needs. With this change his second condition, shorter work hours, could easily be met.

Variety, his third condition, meant that "[a] man might easily learn and practise at least three crafts, varying sedentary occupation with outdoor-occupation[.]" Morris believed that the desire for variety in humans is so strong that "[t]o compel a man to do day after day the same task, without any hope of escape or change, means nothing short of

---

[42]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 105.

[43]Morris, Useful Work versus Useless Toil, 299-301.

[44]Morris, Useful Work versus Useless Toil, 294.

turning life into a prison-torment." In fact, this very desire for variety is the origin of popular art which Morris insists has been "killed by commercialism."[45] He explained:

> [F]rom the beginning of man's contest with Nature till the rise of the present capitalistic system, [popular art] was alive, and generally flourished. While it lasted, everything that was made by man was adorned by man, just as everything made by Nature is adorned by her. The craftsman, as he fashioned the thing he had under his hand, ornamented it so naturally and so entirely without conscious effort, that it is often difficult to distinguish where the mere utilitarian part of his work ended and the ornamental began. Now the origin of this art was the necessity that the workman felt for variety in his work, and though the beauty produced by this desire was a great gift to the world, yet the obtaining variety and pleasure in the work by the workman was a matter of more importance still, for it stamped all labour with the impress of pleasure. [emphasis added][46]

The fourth condition for pleasure in work is pleasant surroundings. In saying this Morris was thinking of a commercial system that forced most workmen to live "in places so squalid and hideous that no one could live in them and keep his sanity without losing all sense of beauty and enjoyment of life." In short, "[m]en living amidst such ugliness cannot conceive of beauty, and, therefore, cannot express it."[47] Unable either to conceive of or express beauty, they could not find pleasure in their work, he reasoned.

One additional condition for pleasurable work which Morris implies is a deliberate, unhurried pace. In comparing work in contemporary Britain with work in the Middle Ages, Morris writes that "[our

---

[45]Morris, Useful Work versus Useless Toil, 299-301.

[46]Morris, Useful Work versus Useless Toil, 301.

[47]Morris, "The Worker's Share of Art," 84.

forefathers] worked deliberately and thoughtfully as all artists do." He adds that this unhurried pace even helped mitigate the long hours of labor of the medieval workman: "As long as the workman could sit at home, working easily and quietly, his long hours of labour mattered little to him, and other evils could be borne."[48]

For Morris the issue of pleasurable work all boils down to one word: hope. What is the difference between good work and bad work? he asks. One embodies hope, and the other does not. The hope is threefold and corresponds roughly to his conditions of pleasurable work: hope of rest, hope of product, hope of pleasure in the work. By hope of rest he means the hope that the work will come to an end and that when it does, the leisure obtained will not merely allow the worker to recover his strength, but also to pursue other pleasurable activities. This corresponds to shortened hours of daily work. By hope of product, he means one must really produce something and not just engage in mere activity. This corresponds to his condition that work produce something useful. Finally, by hope of pleasure, he means the pleasure in "exercising the energies of [a man's] mind and soul as well as his body. Memory and imagination help him as he works." This corresponds not only to variety in work, but also to pleasant surroundings which provide inspiration for the creation of beautiful things.[49]

---

[48]William Morris, "Unattractive Labour," in Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 90; Ibid., 91.

[49]Morris, Useful Work versus Useless Toil, 288-89.

All of Morris's expansive thinking finds its seed in Ruskin. Of particular importance is Ruskin's distinction between the "servile" and the "revolutionary" in work. Servile work is directed by a superior who wishes the worker only to follow directions precisely. Servile work aims at duplication and therefore, repetition. Its perfection "can only be reached by exercising [the workman] in doing one thing, and giving him nothing else to do."[50] In revolutionary work the workman has been assigned a task, but nevertheless directs its completion himself. Gothic architecture is the best example of this because "there is perpetual change both in design [the mental work] and execution [the physical work], [and therefore] the workman must have been altogether set free." In other words, the workman has the opportunity for variety in his work, and this coincides with one of Morris's conditions of pleasurable labor.

Ruskin certainly agrees that the product of labor should be useful as well as beautiful: "It should be one of the first objects of all manufacturers to produce stuffs not only beautiful and quaint in design, but also adapted for every-day service[.]"[51]

Ruskin also agrees that leisure (which may be said to correspond to Morris's shortened working day) and pleasant surroundings are essential for the creation of beauty and, by extension, the pleasure in labor which it implies. He writes that under the then current conditions in England

---

[50]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 82-83, 93.

[51]Ruskin, The Two Paths, 158.

> no designing or any other development of beautiful art will be possible....Beautiful art can only be produced by people who have beautiful things about them, and leisure to look at them; and unless you provide some elements of beauty for your workmen to be surrounded by, you will find that no elements of beauty can be invented by them.[52]

Finally, Ruskin concurs with Morris that good work--that is, work that retains its aesthetic value--cannot be hurried: "But of one thing you may be sure, that art which is produced hastily will also perish hastily; and that what is cheapest to you now, is likely to be dearest in the end."[53]

Reaching back to Carlyle we find that he, too, has a deep respect for work. He writes, "[T]here is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in Work."[54] For Carlyle work is not so much a route to pleasure as it is to self-improvement because "man perfects himself by working."[55] But, he also sees that work has both religious and aesthetic aspects. Carlyle writes that "all true Work is Religion," and he quotes the monks of St. Edmunds who say that "'Laborare est Orare, Work is Worship.'" He also says, "[A] small Poet every Worker is."[56] By this he means that every worker is making art even if only on a humble scale.

---

[52]Ruskin, The Two Paths, 153.

[53]John Ruskin, The Works of John Ruskin, vol. 11, "A Joy For Ever;" (and Its Price in the Market): Being the Substance (with additions) of Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art (Kent, England: George Allen, 1880), 38-39.

[54]Carlyle, Past and Present, 196.

[55]Carlyle, Past and Present, 196.

[56]Carlyle, Past and Present, 201, 205.

Carlyle shares Ruskin's and Morris's reverence for manual labor and the work of the artist. Once again, Carlyle speaks through Professor Teufelsdröckh, the main character in Sartor Resartus:

> "Two men I honour, and no third. First, the toilworn Craftsman that with earth-made Implement laboriously conquers the Earth, and makes her man's....A Second man I honour, and still more highly [,the Artist]...These two, in all their degrees, I honour: all else is chaff and dust[.]"[57]

When these attitudes are combined with Carlyle's clear reverence for the pastoral life and the variety in work and pleasant surroundings that it implies, it seems no leap to imagine that he felt that work could and should be pleasurable. Not to be able to work, in Carlyle's estimation, is "the one unhappiness of a man."[58]

Although Carlyle recognizes the generally poor quality of manufactured goods,[59] he doesn't imply that the products made are wasteful as does Morris and Ruskin. That is, he doesn't question the usefulness of manufactures, but rather questions whether society as a whole is wasteful because of its chaotic, disorganized condition:

> Complaint is often made, in these times, of what we call the disorganized condition of society: how ill many arranged forces of society fulfil their work; how many powerful forces are seen working in a wasteful, chaotic, altogether unarranged manner. It is too just a complaint, as we all know.[60]

Presumably, if society were better arranged it would not be so wasteful, and if it were not so wasteful, shorter working hours with higher living

---

[57]Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, 172-73.

[58]Carlyle, Past and Present, 157.

[59]Carlyle, Past and Present, 143-44, 206.

[60]Carlyle, On Heroes, 158.

standards might be possible. Carlyle is not explicit about this, but it is reasonable to assume this result given the premise he embraces.

Finally, while Carlyle is not explicit about the hurried pace of modern life, and presumably of modern work, his love of the medieval life and the descriptions he gives suggest that he believes the proper pace for work would be unhurried and deliberate.

From all that Carlyle says, it is clear then that he lays a basis for two conditions of pleasure in work as Morris and Ruskin saw them: variety and pleasant surroundings. Carlyle also hints at a basis for a third, shorter working hours, by lamenting the disorganized condition of society. Furthermore, it seems also that work, under the right conditions, can be ennobling and even pleasurable, especially if, as he suggests, every worker is a "small poet." After all, the writing of poetry is ordinarily thought of as a pleasurable activity. Carlyle's thinking then provided a beginning from which Ruskin and Morris were able to elaborate their ideas about work.

For all three authors work is central to human life. This centrality makes their ideas about the aesthetic nature of work a good starting point for their broader aesthetic critique of society which I pursue in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

AN AESTHETIC CRITIQUE OF SOCIETY

The authors' natural aesthetic and their explanation of the relationship of work, beauty and pleasure form the basis for an aesthetic critique of British society. In this chapter, I will discuss three aspects of that critique: 1) the degradation of work, 2) the impoverishment of the aesthetic imagination and 3) the destruction of beauty.

The Degradation of Work

Not surprisingly, working conditions in Britain in the nineteenth century violated all the principles laid out as necessary for pleasurable labor, according to Morris:

> It is no exaggeration to say that our civilization has destroyed the attractiveness of labour, and that by more means than one: by lengthening the hours of labour; by intensifying the labour during its continuance; by the forcing of the workmen into noisy, dirty, crowded factories...by the levelling [of] all intelligence and excellence of workmanship by means of machinery, and consequent gradual extinction of the skilled craftsman. All this is the exact contrary of the conditions under which the spontaneous art of past ages was produced.[61]

Work was long and fast-paced (intensified), it was carried on in deplorable and miserable surroundings, and its mechanical nature resulted in monotony rather than variety in work. The skilled craftsman was becoming extinct because his varied and subtle abilities were no

---

[61]Morris, "Unattractive Labour," 89-90.

longer called for in the modern factory. And, the beauty that the craftsman put into his handicrafts was replaced by the ugliness of mass produced items.

As regards the usefulness of what was produced, Mr. Hammond, the historian in News from Nowhere, acts as Morris's mouthpiece:

> "[H]ow could they possibly attend to such trifles as the quality of the wares they sold? The best of them were of a lowish average, the worst were transparent makeshifts for the things asked for, which nobody would have put up with if they could have got anything else. It was a current jest of the time that the wares were made to sell and not to use[.]"[62]

Hence, the criterion of usefulness was also violated so frequently that its violation was the rule.

The above quotation also suggests yet another reason for the degradation of work, namely, that the selling of goods took precedence over the making of them. Hammond again comments that in the nineteenth century "'the only admitted test of utility in wares was the finding of buyers for them--wise men or fools, as it might chance.'"[63] As a result, even the ornamentation of objects was adulterated as ornamentation became part of "machine labour" and reduced to a mere commodity, produced for sale and not for use.[64] And, the pleasure that the workman took in ornamenting and decorating his products was lost since adorning them was now a burden rather than an inherent blessing:

---

[62]Morris, News from Nowhere, 126.

[63]Morris, News from Nowhere, 126.

[64]Morris, "Unattractive Labour," 89.

> If you wish to have ornament, you must pay specially for it, and the workman is compelled to produce ornament, as he is to produce other wares. He is compelled to pretend happiness in his work, so that the beauty produced by man's hand, which was once a solace to his labour, has now become an extra burden to him, and ornament is now but one of the follies of useless toil[.][65]

The compulsion of the profit system crushed any love of beauty and reduced almost to zero the workman's ability to produce it. It drained work of its pleasure by lowering work to a "mere bitter struggle for life called competition for wages, and...[by subjecting the workman] to a master who also is struggling for profit against other competitors."[66] In the end, Morris realized, not only the workers, but also the managers and owners were compelled by incentives in the system to degrade labor and degrade the laborer.

Ruskin agreed that labor and the laborer had been degraded. He wrote that employers were making workers into mere tools which "unhumanize[d] them."[67] He gave the example of the manufacture of glass beads. First, he calls such beads "utterly unnecessary." So, it immediately meets Morris's first test of degraded work--the product is useless. Also, "there is no design or thought employed in their manufacture." This was especially important to Ruskin because it indicated that the workmen were merely taking orders rather than imparting their own ideas to the work. This took them down the scale

---

[65]Morris, Useful Work versus Useless Toil, 301.

[66]William Morris, "Art or No Art? Who Shall Settle It?", in Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 19-20.

[67]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 84.

from free expression and interpretation back to slavery.[68] Just as clearly, there was no variety in their work, a necessary condition for pleasure, and this also degraded it. Ruskin describes their work this way:

> The men who chop up the rods [of glass from which the beads are made] sit at their work all day, their hands vibrating with perpetual and exquisitely timed palsy, and the beads dropping beneath their vibration like hail. Neither they, nor the men who draw out the rods or fuse the fragments, have the smallest occasion for the use of any single human faculty; and every young lady, therefore, who buys glass beads is engaged in the slave-trade, and in a much more cruel one than that which we have so long been endeavouring to put down.[69]

Ruskin was especially concerned about the lack of the use of mental powers in contemporary work. He cited the example of cutting precious stones saying it requires "little exertion of any mental faculty; [but only] some tact and judgment in avoiding flaws, and so on, but nothing to bring out the whole mind." He adds that merely cutting jewels "for the sake of their value" is slave's work. In this example, once again the mental powers needed for design are dormant, and there is no variety in the work.[70]

Ruskin also believed that to work merely to meet demand in the marketplace was degrading. But, rather than criticize the businessman for promoting goods he knows to be substandard as Morris does, Ruskin criticized the public taste. He then put responsibility back on the manufacturer to lead rather than follow in matters of taste. By merely

---

[68]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 88.

[69]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 88.

[70]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 88.

pandering to public taste, Ruskin said that "no good design will ever be possible to you [the manufacturer], or perceived by you."[71] In short, the manufacturer will not only produce inferior design, but will also eventually forget what good design is. All of this means that to the degree that design is dictated by changing public fancy rather than the craftsman's self-direction, his work will be degraded.

Ruskin takes up the question of competition for profits and wages as does Morris, but again, Ruskin takes a slightly different tack. First, he agrees with Morris that money gets in the way of good artistic production. Ruskin discusses its effect on painting: "[N]o good work in this world was ever done for money, nor while the slightest thought of money affected the painter's mind. Whatever idea of pecuniary values enters into his thoughts as he works, will, in proportion to the distinctness of its presence, shorten his power."[72] But, while Morris decries the employer's preoccupation with profits, Ruskin seems as much concerned about the greed and ambition of the workman:

> The healthy sense of progress, which is necessary to the strength and happiness of men, does not consist in the anxiety of a struggle to attain higher place, or rank, but in gradually perfecting the manner, and accomplishing the ends, of the life which we have chosen, or which circumstances have determined for us. Thus, I think the object of a workman's ambition should not be to become a master; but to attain daily more subtle and exemplary skill in his own craft[.][73]

---

[71]Ruskin, The Two Paths, 158-59.

[72]Ruskin, Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art, 100.

[73]John Ruskin, The Works of John Ruskin, vol. 5, Time and Tide, By Weare and Tyne (Sunnyside, Great Britain: George Allen, 1882), 8-9.

By implication, ambition for advancement would degrade work because there would be less time and energy to attain "more subtle and exemplary skill" as Ruskin would like.

Finally, Ruskin sees that work is degraded for two additional reasons: 1) Work is so poorly organized, and 2) there is so little loyalty of employer to employee. He uses the analogy of a household run by a farmer's wife who could not figure out how to use her hired hands properly and then complains because she is obliged to "give them their dinner for nothing." This, Ruskin says, is "the kind of political economy we practice too often in England."[74] He suggests not only better organization, but that the relationship between worker and employer be made more sound and permanent:

> [T]he real type of a well-organized nation must be presented...by a farm in which all the servants were sons; which implied, therefore, in all its regulations, not merely the order of expediency, but the bonds of affection and responsibilities of relationship; and in which all acts and services were not only to be sweetened by brotherly concord, but to be enforced by fatherly authority. [emphasis added][75]

The seed of this and other views held by Morris and Ruskin on the degradation of work is again apparent in Carlyle's writing. To Carlyle as well as Ruskin the unwillingness of employers to give workers job security degrades the work itself by creating an atmosphere of mistrust, anxiety, even mutiny. Workers not bound to the employer are apt to

---

[74]Ruskin, Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art, 10-11.

[75]Ruskin, Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art, 15.

obstruct their employer, steal from him, and waste much time in idleness.[76]

Carlyle, too, lamented the "Age of Machinery" which has made it so that "[n]othing is now done directly, or by hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance."[77] Here, the craftsman is eliminated and the machine replaces him. If all is done "by rule and calculated contrivance[,]" then there is doubtless little creativity on the part of the workman and no self-direction.[78]

Carlyle precedes Ruskin and Morris in his disdain for advertising and notes its deleterious effect on quality:

> The Hatter in the Strand of London, instead of making better felt-hats than another, mounts a huge lath-and-plaster Hat, seven-feet high, upon wheels; sends a man to drive it through the streets; hoping to be saved thereby; He has not attempted to make better hats, as he was appointed by the Universe to do, and as with this ingenuity of his he could very probably have done; but his whole industry is turned to persuade us that he has made such![79]

Efforts to promote products take away attention better focused on workmanship and design.

The degradation of work even reached into the highest levels of the fine arts and literature. Carlyle noted that poetry had become mechanical: "The building of the lofty rhyme is like any other masonry or bricklaying: we have theories of its rise, height, decline and

---

[76]Carlyle, Past and Present, 276-77.

[77]Thomas Carlyle, Signs of the Times, in Thomas Carlyle: Selected Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Alan Shelston (New York: Penguin, 1971), 64.

[78]Carlyle, Signs of the Times, 79.

[79]Carlyle, Past and Present, 144.

fall,--which latter, it would seem, is now near, among all people."[80] Ruskin has above spoken about the effects of this degradation on the painter. Morris explains another reason for this degradation. The workshop of the fine artist, and by extension the literary artist, is the world at large. The work of all higher artists is degraded as much as that of industrial artists because they are "deprived of the materials for their works in real life, since all around them is ugly and vulgar."[81]

All of this degradation of work was gradually undermining the conditions necessary to pleasure in labor. The inevitable outcome was a decline in the beauty of labor's produce. That decline was also caused by the impoverishment of the aesthetic imagination which accompanied these degraded conditions.

The Impoverishment of the Aesthetic Imagination

Perhaps the most deep-seated effect of industrialization which the three authors railed against was the impoverishment of the aesthetic imagination. Carlyle derided the "Age of Machinery" for its mechanistic influence on every area of life. Ruskin ridiculed the aesthetic assumptions which accompanied industrial capitalism both by challenging their validity and by taking them aesthetically to ridiculous, but nevertheless logical extremes. Morris joined in the ridicule by using analogy, describing life as it might be in the home if the same

---

[80]Carlyle, Signs of the Times, 79.

[81]Morris, "The Worker's Share of Art," 85.

aesthetic standards were exercised there as in society at large. I will detail their arguments.

Carlyle saw the mechanistic aesthetic reaching far beyond the economic life of Britain into the areas of education, religion, politics and, of course, art. He complains that "nothing follows its spontaneous course, nothing is left to be accomplished by old natural methods." For instance, in education the old method is "an indefinable tentative process, requiring a study of individual aptitudes, and a perpetual variation of means and methods, to attain the same end[.]" (This sounds so very much like the approach of the medieval craftsman to his work, an approach so lauded by Ruskin and Morris.) But, the new method of education is "but a secure universal, straightforward business, to be conducted in the gross, by proper mechanism, with such intellect as comes to hand." It is mass education on the factory model which takes no account of the individual circumstances and aims at a single level of achievement. In religion, for example, he notes a Bible society which is expanding at the time, but in the manner of a modern organization with its public meetings, committees and prospectuses. To Carlyle this Bible society is more "a machine for converting the Heathen."[82] Carlyle also believes that much of government has become mechanical and that the "the mighty interest taken in mere political arrangements [is] itself a sign of a mechanical age." The emphasis is on structure and reform, not on character in leadership.[83] It's no surprise that this aesthetic makes its way into art as well. Carlyle asks: "Of our

---

[82]Carlyle, Signs of the Times, 64.

[83]Carlyle, Signs of the Times, 70.

'Theories of Taste,' as they are called, wherein the deep, infinite, unspeakable Love of Wisdom and Beauty, which dwells in all men, is 'explained,' made mechanically visible, from 'Association' and the like, why should we say anything?"[84]

Ruskin, for his part, takes on two contemporary aesthetic assumptions. First, he deplores the desire for perfection. He asks his readers to look about their English rooms and "[e]xamine again all those accurate mouldings, and perfect polishings, and unerring adjustments of the seasoned wood and tempered steel." The perfectionism exhibited in these "are signs of slavery in our England a thousand times more bitter and more degrading than that of the scourged African, or helot Greek." He believes this because it is a sign that the work has been largely done by machine; there is no self-direction, conscious design or variety in such work, and this qualifies it as mere degradation. In Ruskin's view "no good work whatever can be perfect, and the demand for perfection is always a sign of a misunderstanding of the ends of art."[85] Second, he attacks the love of order: "[D]o not let us suppose that love of order is love of art." It "allows us to yield our faith unhesitatingly to architectural theories which fix form for everything, and forbid variation from it."[86] Lack of variation and rigid adherence to old forms not only degrade art but also the work that produces it. They indicate that art has lost its vitality and is no longer flexible enough to provide an avenue for the perpetual discovery

---

[84]Carlyle, Signs of the Times, 79.

[85]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 91.

[86]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 93.

of truth, but only for the slavish imitation of the past.[87] Ruskin concedes that this love of order is appropriate in purely practical matters and in many cases involving morality, but in art it cannot be ceded the same primacy:

> It is true that order, in its highest sense, is one of the necessities of art, just as time is a necessity of music; but love of order has no more to do with our right enjoyment of architecture or painting, than love of punctuality with the appreciation of opera.[88]

The lack of variety in mass production is another factor degrading the aesthetic imagination. The endless stream of identical objects works like a drug on aesthetic perception, according to Ruskin. He writes:

> If you see things of the same kind and of equal value very frequently, your reverence for them is infallibly diminished, your powers of attention get gradually wearied, and your interest and enthusiasm worn out; and you cannot in that state bring to any given work the energy necessary to enjoy it.[89]

This emphasis on mass production implied a worrisome trajectory for the development of British industry, one which Ruskin ridiculed by taking to absurd extremes. What he criticizes is the inability to look at a landscape as anything other than a set of resources to exploit. It is yet another failure of the aesthetic imagination. He conjures up a Britain 50 years in the future based on this outlook:

> I will suppose your success absolute [in exploiting all the land of Britain]: that from shore to shore the whole of the island is to be set as thick with chimneys as the masts stand in the docks of Liverpool: and there shall be no

---

[87]Ruskin, The Two Paths, 96.

[88]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 93.

[89]Ruskin, Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art, 62.

> meadows in it; no trees; no gardens; only a little corn grown upon the housetops, reaped and threshed by steam: that you do not leave even room for roads, but travel either over the roofs of your mills, on viaducts; or under their floors, in tunnels: that, the smoke having rendered the light of the sun unserviceable, you work always by the light of your own gas: that no acre of English ground shall be without its shaft and its engine; and therefore, no spot of English ground left, on which it shall be possible to stand, without a definite and calculable chance of being blown off it, at any moment, into small pieces.[90]

Morris, too, conjures up an absurd hypothetical to illustrate a point. If the aesthetic degradation of the lower classes were brought into the homes of the rich, the rich would at once experience that general degradation that exists beyond their view and pronounce it mad:

> The misery and squalor which we people of civilization bear with so much complacency as a necessary part of the manufacturing system, is just as necessary to the community at large as a proportionate amount of filth would be in the house of a private rich man. If such a man were to allow the cinders to be raked all over his drawing-room, and a privy to be established in each corner of his dining-room, if he habitually made a dust and refuse heap of his once beautiful garden, never washed his sheets or changed his tablecloth, and made his family sleep five in a bed, he would surely find himself in the claws of a commission _de lunatico_. But such acts of miserly folly are just what our present society is doing daily under the compulsion of a supposed necessity, which is nothing short of madness.[91]

Given the depth of the poverty of Britain's aesthetic imagination, Carlyle and Ruskin might have joined Morris in asking whether the situation in contemporary Britain was only the logical result of a process which started in the Renaissance. The Renaissance for Morris marked the beginning of the end of art because it was the beginning of the end of self-direction and variety in the work of the craftsman. He

---

[90]Ruskin, _The Two Paths_, 152-53.

[91]Morris, _Useful Work versus Useless Toil_, 301.

mused that perhaps it was not that ideas about beauty changed in that period, but that "beauty, however unconsciously, was no longer an object of attainment with the men of that epoch" [emphasis added].[92] Perhaps this was also now true of Britain in the nineteenth century. In the same vein, Carlyle earlier had written:

> [I]t is no longer a worship of the Beautiful and the Good [that is important]; but a calculation of the Profitable....We are no longer instinctively driven to apprehend, and lay to heart, what is Good and Lovely, but rather to inquire, as onlookers, how it is produced, whence it comes, whither it goes.[93]

The Destruction of Beauty

The effects of this poverty in the British aesthetic imagination could be witnessed all over the nation: in the country and the city, in the home and the public square, in the decorative and fine arts, and in literature. From all these places, Carlyle, Ruskin and Morris summoned examples.

Carlyle refers to the first deforestation of Britain which resulted from an increase in grazing. Perhaps he was thinking of it as a foreshadowing of the profit-mongering of his own century. "A sorrowful waste of noble wood and umbrage!" he calls it. "Why will men destroy noble Forests, even when in part a nuisance, in such reckless manner; turning loose four-footed cattle and Henry-the-Eighths into them!" he asks.[94]

---

[92]Morris, Gothic Architecture, 344.

[93]Carlyle, Signs of the Times, 77.

[94]Carlyle, Past and Present, 102.

Carlyle considered Britain's industrial life "unregulated" and "chaotic." Order is an important theme in Carlyle, and he felt that if some order didn't come to that industrial life, Britain could only expect to see the world reduced to "ashes and ruin."[95] As it was, the manufacturing towns were already filled with "soot and darkness."[96] And, what came with that industrial life was overpopulation, making Britain an "overcrowded little western nook of Europe." Britain was no longer the open, sparsely peopled land which he described in Past and Present.[97]

Carlyle also laments the state of the literary arts because of what he considers their central role in society. He writes that the "Man-of-Letters...must be regarded as our most important modern person. He, such as he may be, is the soul of all. What he teaches, the whole world will do and make." As mentioned above, the literary class has become "disorganic," and, as such, is not serving its proper prophetic role in society. He also says of poetry that "beauty is no longer the god it worships."[98]

Ruskin also criticized the arts looking at them primarily through architecture. He felt compelled to respond to the rash of Gothic and Romanesque buildings that were springing up in Britain at the time. He writes that they "merely serve to caricature the noble buildings of past

---

[95]Thomas Carlyle, Chartism, in Thomas Carlyle: Selected Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Alan Shelston (New York: Penguin, 1971), 223.

[96]Carlyle, Past and Present, 262.

[97]Carlyle, Chartism, 231.

[98]Carlyle, On Heroes, 155, 168; idem, Signs of the Times, 80.

ages, and to bring their form into dishonour by leaving out their soul."[99] Furthermore, for Ruskin it is a truism

> that great art, whether expressing itself in words, colours, or stones, does not say the same thing over and over again; that the merit of architectural, as of every other art, consists in its saying new and different things; that to repeat itself is no more a characteristic of genius in marble than it is of genius in print.[100]

Though some bad architecture was simply misguided, slavish imitation (and poor imitation at that), behind other architectural follies Ruskin saw more sinister motives. Ruskin felt that the public should

> not be induced to pay the smallest fraction of higher fare to Rochester or Dover [railroads] because the ironwork of the bridge which carries them over the Thames is covered with floral cockades, and the piers of it edged with ornamental cornices. All that work is simply put there by the builders that they may put the per-centage upon it into their own pockets; and, the rest of the money being thrown into the floral form, there is an end of it, as far as the shareholders are concerned. Millions upon millions have thus been spent, within the last twenty years, on ornamental arrangements of zig-zag bricks, black and blue tiles, cast-iron foliage, and the like; of which millions, as I said, not a penny can ever return into the shareholders' pockets, nor contribute to public speed or safety on the line. It is all sunk for ever in ornamental architecture, and (trust me for this!) all that architecture is bad. [first emphasis added][101]

It is as Ruskin tells us it would be: Where money is the main consideration, art suffers.

Art not only suffers for financial reasons in large projects such as railroads and buildings, but also in more humble realms. Ruskin

---

[99]Ruskin, The Two Paths, 84.

[100]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 94.

[101]Ruskin, Time and Tide, 95.

laments the "vast quantity of intellect and of labour consumed annually in our cheap illustrated publications." That shabby work accustomed the public to a low aesthetic level. The result was that "when we are tired of one bad cheap thing, we throw it aside and buy another bad cheap thing; and so keep looking at bad things all our lives." He compares a relatively expensive woodcut with a set of cheap ones to illustrate his point. He assumes that the more expensive woodcut costing a shilling is "as good as art can be, so that you will never tire of looking at it; and is struck on good paper with good ink, so that you will never wear it out by handling it[.]" This he compares to twelve woodcuts for a penny each which are so hastily and poorly designed that the owner will soon tire of them. The woodcuts are also easily destroyed by mere handling because they are made with inferior inks on poor quality paper. The public, Ruskin says, does not generally see the expensive woodcut as the true bargain.[102]

With specific reference to forcing artists and workmen to work with impermanent, if not cheap, materials, Ruskin compares it to "forcing our Michael Angelos to carve in snow." And, this very lack of permanence discourages even the capable craftsman. Ruskin asks, "Do you suppose any workman worthy [of] the name will put his brains into a cup, or an urn, which he knows is to go to the melting-pot in half a score years?"[103]

---

[102]Ruskin, Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art, 39-40.

[103]Ruskin, Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art, 36, 45.

Ruskin also sees that the countryside has been diminished by this debased aesthetic. The sweet and beautiful pastoral life of the past has been corrupted and destroyed by industrial life:

> Just outside the [large manufacturing] town I came upon an old English cottage, or mansion, I hardly know which to call it, set close under the hill, and beside the river, perhaps built somewhere in the Charles's times, with mullioned windows and a low arched porch; round which, in the little triangular garden, one can imagine the family as they used to sit in old summer times, the ripple of the river heard faintly through the sweetbriar hedge, and the sheep on the far-off wolds shining in the evening sunlight. There, uninhabited for many and many a year, it had been left in unregarded havoc of ruin; the garden-gate still swung loose to its latch; the garden blighted utterly into a field of ashes, not even a weed taking root there; the roof torn into shapeless rents; the shutters hanging about the windows in rags of rotten wood; before its gate, the stream which had gladdened it now soaking slowly by, black as ebony, and thick with curdling scum; the bank above it trodden into unctuous, sooty slime: far in front of it, between it and the old hills, the furnaces of the city foaming forth perpetual plague of sulphurous darkness; the volumes of their storm clouds coiling low over a waste of grassless fields, fenced from each other, not by hedges, but by slabs of square stone, like gravestones, riveted together with iron.[104]

Not only was the property neglected, but it was besmirched by the polluted water in the stream "black as ebony, and thick with curdling scum" and the "unctuous, sooty slime" on the banks. The smoke from the nearby city seemed as "storm clouds," and the slabs of stone dividing the "grassless" fields were like gravestones marking the death of man's relationship to nature as it was.

Ruskin further illustrated the damage done to nature by those who can only see it as either an economic resource or a source of entertainment. He notes not only the industrial blight, but also the

---

[104]Ruskin, The Two Paths, 153-54.

commercial blight of hotels and shops. That which remains of nature is for thrills rather than quiet appreciation:

> You have despised nature; that is to say, all the deep and sacred sensations of natural scenery. The French revolutionist made stables of the cathedrals of France; you have made racecourses of the cathedrals of the earth. Your one conception of pleasure is to drive in railroad carriages round their aisles, and eat off their altars. You have put a railroad bridge over the fall of Schaffhausen. You have tunnelled the cliffs of Lucerne by Tell's chapel; you have destroyed the Clarens shore of the Lake of Geneva; there is not a quiet valley in England that you have not filled with bellowing fire; there is no particle left of English land which you have not trampled coal ashes into--nor any foreign city in which the spread of your presence is not marked among its fair old streets and happy gardens by a consuming white leprosy of new hotels and perfumers' shops: the Alps themselves, which your own poets used to love so reverently, you look upon as soaped poles in a bear-garden, which you set yourselves to climb, and slide down again, with "shrieks of delight." When you are past shrieking, having no human articulate voice to say you are glad with, you fill the quietude of their valleys with gunpowder blasts, and rush home, red with cutaneous eruption of conceit, and voluble with convulsive hiccough of self-satisfaction.[105]

Morris shares Ruskin's concern about the impact of this attitude. He asks whether it makes sense to

> cut down the pleasant trees among the houses, pull down ancient and venerable buildings for the money that a few square yards of London dirt will fetch; blacken rivers, hide the sun and poison the air with smoke and worse, and it's nobody's business to see to it or mend it: that is all that modern commerce, the counting-house forgetful of the workshop, will do for us herein.[106]

Elaborating this theme of nature as a source of profit, Ruskin asks a presumably upper class audience attending one of his lectures whether doubling or quadrupling their income "by digging a coal shaft in

---

[105]John Ruskin, Sesame and Lilies, in Sesame & Lilies, The Two Paths & The King of the Golden River, ed. Ernest Rhys with an Introduction by Oliver Lodge (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1909), 33-34.

[106]Morris, The Lesser Arts, 252.

the middle of the lawn, and turning the flower-beds into heaps of coke," would be worth it. He answers for them:

> I think not....Yet this is what you are doing with all England. The whole country is but a little garden, not more than enough for your children to run on the lawns of, if you would let them all run there. And this little garden you will turn into furnace-ground, and fill with heaps of cinders, if you can; and those children of yours, not you, will suffer for it.[107]

Despite the distance that the upper classes felt from the ugliness of the age, both Ruskin and Morris believed that ugliness did make its way right into their homes. They simply failed to perceive it. The ugliness didn't come from the squalor of their surroundings, but from an aesthetic driven by desire for show and a misunderstanding about the nature of art. Ruskin admonished his readers "never [to] imagine there is reason to be proud of anything that may be accomplished by patience and sand-paper."[108] He claimed that most of the money spent by the upper classes was spent for reasons of pride:

> Why are your carriages nicely painted and finished outside? You don't see the outsides as you sit in them--the outsides are for other people to see. Why are your exteriors of houses so well finished, your furniture so polished and costly, but for other people to see?[109]

Morris agreed saying the much of the art and decoration in wealthy homes was useless except for the purpose of show:

> To my mind it is only here and there (out of the kitchen) that you can find in a well-to-do house things that are of any use at all: as a rule all decoration (so called) that has got there is there for the sake of show, not because anybody likes it....[T]he silk curtains in my Lord's

---

[107]Ruskin, Sesame and Lilies, 69-70.

[108]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 89.

[109]Ruskin, Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art, 79.

> drawing-room are no more a matter of art to him than the powder in his footman's hair; the kitchen in a country farmhouse is most commonly a pleasant homelike place, the parlour dreary and useless.[110]

To those who said that a truly aesthetic environment for all people was not possible, Morris reminded them that "most factories sustain to-day large and handsome gardens, and not seldom parks and woods of many acres in extent." But these garden-parks "are kept for one member of the factory only," namely, the owner. Nevertheless the "palaces" that grace such parks and everything around them are for the most part "beastly ugly."[111] In News From Nowhere one of the characters explains why this should be so:

> "[I]t was an essential condition of life of these rich men that they should not themselves make what they wanted for adornment of their lives, but should force those to make them whom they forced to live pinched and sordid lives; and that as a necessary consequence the sordidness and pinching, the ugly barrenness of those ruined lives, were worked up into the adornment of the lives of the rich[.]"[112]

This again confirms Morris's dictum that degraded working and living conditions translate themselves into ugly design and workmanship. Work done by people in such conditions can only lead to something other than beauty, something other than art. And, once again the role that money has played is a negative one. Even the rich cannot have art for all their money in such a degraded society.

---

[110]Morris, The Lesser Arts, 251.

[111]William Morris, "A Factory As It Might Be," in Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 33, 35.

[112]Morris, News from Nowhere, 212-213.

Of course, ordinary lower-class people suffered ugliness for different reasons. Morris noted that their living quarters were no better than "dog-hutches." He asks why the air should be "so stifled and poisoned with smoke that over the greater part of Yorkshire (for instance) the general idea must be that sheep are naturally black? and why must Yorkshire and Lancashire rivers run mere filth and dye?"[113] In both city and country alike things were growing uglier:

> Even in the commonest things, such as fences in fields and other simple agricultural appliances, except for a few survivals, matters which have accidently clung to old traditions, ugliness is the rule. An ordinary house, or piece of furniture or of attire, is not only not beautiful, it is aggressively and actively ugly, and we assume as a matter of course that it must be so.[114]

The factories were likewise "nightmare buildings" which "look what they are, temples of overcrowding and adulteration and over-work, of unrest in a word[.]"[115] Even the schoolrooms (for those who had access to them) were ugly, according to Ruskin. They contained nothing but "cheap furniture and bare walls." The result was that "many a study appears dull or painful to a boy, when it is pursued on a blotted deal desk, under a wall with nothing on it but scratches and pegs."[116]

What beauty remains takes time and considerable money to obtain. The rich, if they have any good taste, may get it by spending enough

---

[113]William Morris, "Why Not?", in Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 25-26.

[114]Morris, "Unattractive Labour," 88.

[115]Morris, "A Factory As It Might Be," 34.

[116]Ruskin, Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art, 108-09.

money. Those of moderate means may be able to obtain some of it, but not without considerable trouble. But for the working man who has neither time nor money, all beauty is beyond attainment, and he is forced to live without it.[117]

The underlying theme of this aesthetic critique of society is lack of restraint. "Development" and profit are pursued at all costs. Because natural resources are largely the basis for this profit, it is no wonder that the natural aesthetic prized by all three authors is violated at every turn. In response, Ruskin sounds a warning about the importance of understanding the limits of development:

> Man can neither drink steam, nor eat stone. The maximum of population on a given space of land implies also the relative maximum of edible vegetable, whether for men or cattle; it implies a maximum of pure air; and of pure water. Therefore: a maximum of wood, to transmute air, and of sloping ground, protected by herbage from the extreme heat of the sun, to feed the streams. All England may, if it so chooses, become one manufacturing town; and Englishmen, sacrificing themselves to the good of general humanity, may live diminished lives in the midst of noise, of darkness, and of deadly exhalation. But the world cannot become a factory nor a mine. No amount of ingenuity will ever make iron digestible by the million, nor substitute hydrogen for wine. Neither the avarice nor the rage of men will ever feed them[.][118]

Rather, it is restraint, coupled with an understanding of the true source of life's joys, that underpins the hopes of Carlyle, Ruskin and Morris for a new society, one that may rightly be called an "aesthetic polity."

---

[117]Morris, "Unattractive Labour," 89.

[118]Ruskin, Unto This Last, 225.

CHAPTER 4

THE AESTHETIC POLITY

Carlyle, Ruskin and Morris all regarded beauty as a guiding, if not ruling, principle in the affairs of society. Carlyle wrote quoting Goethe: "'The Beautiful,' [Goethe] intimates, 'is higher than the Good; the Beautiful includes in it the Good.'" Carlyle explains that what we are supposed to love (the Beautiful) and what we are supposed to do (the Good) are one and the same.[119] Ruskin tells us that "[t]he sensibility of the nation is indicated by the fineness of its customs...By sensibility I mean its natural perception of beauty, fitness, and rightness; or of what is lovely, decent, and just...."[120] For Ruskin beauty ranks high as a principle for a society to follow, on the same plane with "rightness" by which he means justice. For Morris the perception and creation of beauty is the prime source of pleasure. He advocated reforms that would establish a radical equality in all areas of society, an equality he felt would ensure the enjoyment of beauty in work and leisure for all.[121]

Here again the authors link justice and beauty as Plato did. They believe that new political, industrial, commercial and educational

---

[119]Carlyle, On Heroes, 81.

[120]John Ruskin, Munera Pulveris: Six Essays on the Elements of Political Economy, in John Ruskin's Works, vol. 15 (Boston: Dana Estes & Company, n.d.), 181.

[121]Morris, The Lesser Arts, 253-54.

arrangements would promote justice and underpin the conditions for the creation and preservation of beauty in society and in nature. To the extent such arrangements succeed in their tasks they might be said to be "beautiful." This is in keeping with third part of the broad definition of beauty offered in the introduction of this paper which says that there is beauty in the reciprocal ties of affection and loyalty between people. Following Plato, beauty emanates from such relationships when they are just. To this view Carlyle gives explicit consent below; surely, Ruskin and Morris would not disagree with such a label for their own ideas.

Political Governance

In the matter of political governance Carlyle and Ruskin fall into one camp and Morris into another. Both Carlyle and Ruskin feel that people need strong, but enlightened leaders to govern them. Morris, a radical socialist, called for complete equality among all members of society and believed in decentralized self-government.

Carlyle was clear about the necessity for hierarchy for the stability and cohesiveness of society. He wrote:

> The relation of the taught to their teacher, of the loyal subject to his guiding king, is under one shape or another, the vital element of human Society; indispensable to it, perennial in it; without which, as a body reft of its soul, it falls down into death, and with horrid noisome dissolution passes away and disappears.[122]

Carlyle prefers the model of the feudal baron who watched over the lives of those under him "with rigour yet with love." He is even explicit

---

[122]Carlyle, Chartism, 191.

about the aesthetic dimension of this relationship saying that it was "beautiful."[123] This aesthetic dimension is further expanded when he exclaims that the Chinese "make their Men of Letters their Governors!" Carlyle wished to see the "man of intellect" in charge describing him as "noblehearted...true, just, humane and valiant[.]" "Get him for governor," he writes, "all is got; fail to get him, though you had Constitutions plentiful as blackberries, and a Parliament in every village, there is nothing yet got!" For Carlyle, structure was less important than character. The great man should guide the citizenry.[124]

Ruskin, like Carlyle, believes that equality is impossible:

> My continual aim has been to show the eternal superiority of some men to others, sometimes even of one man to all others, and to show also the advisability of appointing such persons, or person to guide, to lead, or on occasion even to compel and subdue, their inferiors according to their own better knowledge and wiser will.[125]

That guidance even takes the form of extensive surveillance of the population by "overseers." Ruskin proposes this so that no one will "suffer from unknown want, or live in unrecognized crime[.]" These overseers would act with the "patient and gentle watchfulness" of "true Christian pastors." High officers of state are to act as judges in cases involving misconduct and as administrators who collect taxes to be

---

[123]Carlyle, Past and Present, 270.

[124]Carlyle, On Heroes, 168-69.

[125]Ruskin, Unto This Last, 202.

used for public infrastructure and education. These officers would be elected to office for life.[126]

Morris, as I said, was a radical socialist. He championed complete equality of condition and stressed that there would be no masters.[127] His tentative scheme for government was a "system of federalized communities" which would "take the place of rival nationalities." Each community would carry on its own affairs. The federal body would be the guardian of the "acknowledged principles of society" so that labor could no longer be exploited for private advantage and no "vindictive criminal laws" could be adopted by the local communities. Intermediate districts formed because of "natural circumstances such as language, climate and physical geography" might also arise. The aim of the federation would be to reduce the "complexity in political and administrative matters to a minimum."[128] The hand of government would rest very lightly on the population. In the utopian world which Morris creates in News From Nowhere, Mr. Hammond explains to his time-traveling guest from the nineteenth century, "'[I]n your sense of the word we have no government.'"[129]

---

[126]Ruskin, Time and Tide, 81-84.

[127]Morris, How I Became a Socialist, 379.

[128]William Morris, "Socialism Triumphant [Part I]," in Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 612-13.

[129]Morris, News from Nowhere, 111.

Workers and Owners

Each author has a distinguishable view on the relationship of workers to owners. Carlyle retains the relationship between master and worker, but allows that ownership could conceivably be shared. For Ruskin the hierarchy remains as well, but ownership stays vested in the master. Morris would do away with the role of the master and vest ownership of the means of production in the community as a whole. All three authors, however, call for vast improvements in working conditions and redistribution of the fruits of labor in an effort to make work and living conditions more pleasurable and beautiful and therefore conducive to the perception and creation of beauty.

Carlyle believes that a just wage and better working conditions ought to be mandated by law.[130] Wages should not be determined by the "lawless anarchy of supply-and-demand" but by legislation. Better working conditions and environmental controls should also be mandated by legislation:

> The Legislature, even as it now is, could order all dingy Manufacturing Towns to cease from their soot and darkness; to let in the blessed sunlight, the blue of Heaven, and become clear and clean; to burn their coal-smoke, namely, and make flame of it. Baths, free air, a wholesome temperature, ceilings twenty feet high, might be ordained, by Act of Parliament, in all establishments licensed as Mills.[131]

Carlyle also believed that workers should be guided by "a superior that should lovingly and wisely govern[.]" The wise governance of workers includes permanent rather than at-will employment. Ownership of

---

[130]Carlyle, Chartism, 166.

[131]Carlyle, Past and Present, 262.

the enterprise might even be shared with the workers without, however, disrupting the existing authority relationships.[132]

Ruskin, too, believes that those authority relationships should not be disrupted. But, the masters would be expected to treat workers more as "sons" than servants. As such their relationship would be governed by "bonds of affection and responsibilities of relationship." Ruskin certainly means that employment should be more secure, and not managed by the "order of expediency."[133]

He also agrees with Carlyle that workers deserve better wages, though Ruskin mandates no legislation but rather relies on moral suasion to convince owners to pay more. The owners should also include provision for the disabled and retired. If an owner does this, Ruskin feels, he maintains his moral claim on the "surplus profits of the business" which result from his superior organizational and intellectual skills.[134] Finally, Ruskin certainly believes that working conditions need to improve so that every worker may lead the "healthiest life."[135]

Morris would completely eliminate the distinction between workers and owners. The people would hold machinery, factories, mines and land in common and administer them "for the benefit of the community."[136] The level of wages is moot since all products would be made for "use"

---

[132]Carlyle, Chartism, 166; idem, Past and Present, 274, 278.

[133]Ruskin, Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art, 15-16.

[134]Ruskin, Time and Tide, 3, 7.

[135]Ruskin, Munera Pulveris, 215.

[136]Morris, "Why Not?", 25.

and not for sale, each person able to obtain what he needs from the common stores.[137]

Working conditions would be nothing short of pleasing. Factories would have beautiful gardens kept by the workers themselves, and inside they would have properly adorned workshops. The factory would not only be a place of production, but also of learning, recreation and social life.[138] The character of Mr. Hammond in News From Nowhere explains that the proper role of machines in society is to do work which "'would be irksome to do by hand.'" He adds, "'[I]n all work which it is a pleasure to do by hand[,] machinery is done without.'" Morris adds elsewhere that no one person would be required to do machine-tending only. Everyone in the factory would take his turn.[139] Outdoor and farm labor would become one of the two or three occupations which all men would have. At harvest such farm work might even take on the complexion of a festival.[140]

In the choice of work, people would gravitate toward those activities for which they had the best aptitude "since everyone likes to do what he can do well." People, Morris believed, ought to be able to

---

[137]Morris, News from Nowhere, 127.

[138]Morris, "A Factory As It Might Be," 33-34; idem, "Why Not?", 26.

[139]Morris, News from Nowhere, 127; idem, "Work In A Factory As It Might Be II," in Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 40.

[140]William Morris, "Attractive Labour," in Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 94-95.

engage in work fitting for their capacities rather than fitting themselves to whatever work is available.[141]

Besides the elimination of "unnecessary" manufactures, Morris felt that the burden of labor could be greatly reduced if everyone worked. Shortened working hours would give everyone greater leisure to pursue pleasurable and creative activities. Here he was in agreement with Ruskin who believed that the upper classes ought to do a "large portion" of the agricultural work, not only out of fairness for the good of society, but also for their own good. No one can doubt that Carlyle felt the same way though he did not necessarily link this with greater leisure for the lower classes. "A life of ease is not for any man[,]" he wrote.[142]

Commerce and Wealth

For all three authors these altered relations between workers and owners were but one side of the societal coin. They implied a vastly different commercial system and a different attitude toward the accumulation of wealth. First, they implied a new probity in the dealings of sellers with buyers. Second, they implied a new consumer ethic which would encourage this new probity and which would be consistent with new and better industrial conditions. Finally, they suggested that the accumulation of wealth for its own sake be

---

[141]Morris, "Attractive Labour," 94-95.

[142]Morris, "Work In A Factory As It Might Be II," 40; Ruskin, Munera Pulveris, 184; Carlyle, Past and Present, 155.

discouraged. Changes in these areas would be a prop to the production and sale of beautiful, well-made goods by keeping the workman's, the owner's and the consumer's focus on quality and beauty rather than money.

A New Probity

A new probity among merchants would mean among other things more attention to quality and beauty in the objects made for sale and the muting or elimination of competition that might force a lowering of standards.

Carlyle thought that this new probity might begin with less emphasis on promotion and more on the quality of the product. He felt that good workmanship speaks for itself: "[A man] is degrading himself if he speak of his excellencies and prowesses, and supremacy in his craft: his inmost heart says to him, 'Leave thy friends to speak of these[.]'"[143]

Ruskin's views were more detailed. He wanted laws against the adulteration of goods and vigorous enforcement of those laws. He thought guilds should fix standards for quality; however, those merchants and craftsmen who chose not to join the guild would not be held liable for the quality standards. In this way, Ruskin believed, people would be fairly warned that they were not necessarily getting a good product if they bought from such sellers. He also felt that the manufacturers had a duty "to form the market, as much as to supply it." They should not chase every consumer preference in a race for market

---

[143]Carlyle, Past and Present, 144-45.

share and profit, but rather produce useful and beautiful goods with the intention of educating the public's taste and increasing its ability to discern good quality. In addition, he advocated price controls and fixed salaries for merchants to curb what he felt was ruinous competition. And, he believed that nations had no more right to undersell one another than merchants. Finally, he opposed the concentration of trade in too few hands as a patent injustice because it inevitably led to underselling and thereby took "bread out the mouths of all the other men in the town who are of the same trade."[144]

Morris's position on the role of the merchant was, of course, colored by his desire for community ownership of the means of production and distribution. There would, in effect, be no merchants or commerce as such. Since there would be no competition, there would be no advantage to keeping new processes and inventions secret or protected, and these would be shared with all who wished to know them in the way that say, new medical procedures are freely shared between medical doctors today. Secondly, the decentralized scheme of government and minimally mechanized manufacture which Morris advocates means that the market for any factory or workshop would be more local than national or international. Because of this, mass production, with the lowering of standards it implies, would be de-emphasized.[145]

---

[144]Ruskin, Time and Tide 86, 88-89; idem, The Two Paths, 158-59; idem, Time and Tide, 4-5, 147; idem, Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art, 125.

[145]William Morris, "Work In A Factory As It Might Be III," in Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 43; idem, News from Nowhere, 101.

A New Consumer Ethic

Both Ruskin and Morris formulated a new consumer ethic which they proposed as a response to the conditions of their day. This new ethic would serve as an agent of reform and lay the foundation for tastes and habits appropriate to a more just and more beautiful society.

Ruskin believed that the first and most beneficial move a consumer could make is to live on less:

> It is popularly supposed that it benefits a nation to invent a want. But the fact is, that the true benefit is in extinguishing a want--in living with as few wants as possible.
>
> I cannot tell you the contempt I feel for the common writers on political economy, in their stupefied missing of this first principle of all human economy--individual or political--to live, namely, with as few wants as possible, and to waste nothing of what is given you to supply them.[146]

Morris certainly agrees with this. His character, Mr. Hammond, in News From Nowhere explains that in the new society, "'[W]e have now found out what we want, so we make no more than we want[.]'"[147] What this means is that with fewer things to make there would be a slower pace of work, and this would allow more attention to be paid to the quality and beauty of each item.

To encourage the principles of work and beauty which Ruskin advocates, he lays down three rules for purchases:

> 1. Never encourage the manufacture of any article not absolutely necessary, in the production of which Invention has no share.
>
> 2. Never demand an exact finish for its own sake, but only for some practical or noble end.

---

[146]Ruskin, Time and Tide, 143.

[147]Morris, News from Nowhere, 127.

> 3. Never encourage imitation or copying of any kind, except for the sake of preserving records of great works.[148]

"Invention" means that the mind of the craftsman was exercised in the design. Exact finishes require only mindless sanding and lacquering and are done chiefly for show. Mere copying, of course, defeats the mind of the craftsman turning him into a slave who follows orders.

Morris's guidelines echo Ruskin's. Morris abhors machine work where it is unnecessary and eschews exact finishes:

> We ought to get to understand the value of intelligent work, the work of men's hands guided by their brains, and to take that, though it be rough, rather than the unintelligent work of machines or slaves, though it be delicate; to refuse altogether to use machine-made work unless where the nature of thing made compels it, or where the machine does what mere human suffering would otherwise have to do: to have a high standard of excellence in wares and not to accept makeshifts for the real thing, but rather to go without; to have no ornament merely for fashion's sake, but only because we really think it beautiful, otherwise to go without it; not to live in an ugly and squalid place (such as London) for the sake of mere excitement or the like, but only because our duties bind us to it[.][149]

Even one's lodging ought to be chosen with beauty in mind and not the desire for advancement and "excitement" as Morris says. Having a "high standard of excellence in wares" is a sincere hope for Morris since he believes that in the socialist society to come everyone will work and thus have some acquaintance with what good workmanship means. In addition, the factories and workshops would be places where people can

---

[148]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 88.

[149]Morris, Some Hints on Pattern-Designing, 282.

learn about how things are made (since there will be no trade secrets to hide). In short, the consumer will be vastly better informed.[150]

Morris proposes three additional rules beyond this with the hope that a broader audience, one beyond those immediately concerned with the arts, will adopt them:

> [1] To have as little as possible to do with middlemen, but to bring together the makers and the buyers of goods as closely as possible. [2] To do our best to further the independence and reasonable leisure of all handicraftsmen. [3] To eschew all bargains, real or imaginary (they are mostly the latter), and to be anxious to pay and to get what a piece of goods is really worth.[151]

Rules one and three may be seen as adjuncts to two since giving the craftsman his due compensation directly will tend to increase his independence and leisure. These rules would also reduce competition, especially in price.

Ruskin again shows his thought to be antecedent for such rules; he reiterates the necessity for conscious inquiry into the conditions of the workman, sound purposes for all purchases, informed judgment about quality and service, and a simple lifestyle:

> In all buying, consider, first, what condition of existence you cause in the producers of what you buy; secondly, whether the sum you have paid is just to the producer, and in due proportion, lodged in his hands; thirdly, to how much clear use, for food, knowledge, or joy, this that you have bought can be put; and fourthly, to whom and in what way it can be most speedily and serviceably distributed; in all dealings whatsoever insisting on entire openness and stern fulfillment; and in all doings, on perfection and loveliness of accomplishment; especially on fineness and purity of all marketable commodity: watching at the same time for all

---

[150]Morris, "Work In A Factory As It Might Be III," 43.

[151]Morris, Some Hints on Pattern-Designing, 282-83.

ways of gaining, or teaching, powers of simple pleasure[.][152]

The Accumulation of Wealth

Finally, each of the three authors believes that wealth should be redistributed, its accumulation restrained, or both. They wanted this either because the then current distribution degraded the lower classes making their lives miserable and ugly or because the pursuit of wealth among manufacturers often led them to focus on price rather than quality and beauty.

Carlyle wanted businessmen to find ways not of simply making goods cheaper, but of making "a fairer distribution of the produce at its present cheapness!" He admonishes the business class that wealth is as much a burden as it is a blessing.[153]

Ruskin believes that absolute limits should be put on wealth accumulation, not so much because wealth accumulation creates relative inequality, but because of the positive effect such limits would have on the ideals of the nation: "The temptation to use every energy in the accumulation of wealth being thus removed, another, and a higher ideal of the duties of advanced life would be necessarily created in the national mind[.]" No doubt, he believes, justice and beauty would be among them. He gives similar advice to the workman. Too much striving degrades accomplishment in work and leads to the search for expedients to hasten one's trajectory upward.

---

[152]Ruskin, Unto This Last, 227-28.

[153]Carlyle, Past and Present, 268, 277-78.

In addition, Ruskin believes that in using property already owned, people must be cognizant of the needs of the community, neither wasting the productivity of the property or land nor fouling the air and water to gain its produce.[154]

Morris's response to this issue is entirely predictable. Community ownership of the means of production and distribution as discussed above would address the problem of the accumulation and distribution of wealth in a most radical way. Such arrangements would give everyone opportunities for pursuing beauty in their leisure and work by giving them control over both.

Education

Carlyle, Ruskin and Morris all agreed on the importance of education and its reformative power. Carlyle called for wider education to awaken the intellect of the mass of people, but for Ruskin and Morris education would become the springboard to the aesthetic life for all.

By awakening the intellect of the people, Carlyle hoped to sharpen their sense of order and thereby lead to a better order in society:

> Intellect, insight, is the discernment of order in disorder; it is the discovery of the will of Nature, of God's will; the beginning of the capability to walk according to that. With perfect intellect, were such possible without perfect morality, the world would be perfect; its efforts unerringly correct, its results continually successful, its condition faultless. Intellect is like light; the Chaos becomes a World under it: fiat lux.[155]

---

[154]Ruskin, Time and Tide, 11; idem, Munera Pulveris, 187-88.

[155]Carlyle, Chartism, 223.

This task of cultivating the intellect of the uneducated is "the first function a government [ought] to set about discharging." And, the first task is literacy.[156]

Ruskin extends the task of education beyond getting people to do the "right things" and into bringing them to an aesthetic enjoyment in doing them:

> [T]he entire object of true education is to make people not merely do the right things, but enjoy the right things--not merely industrious, but to love industry--not merely learned, but to love knowledge--not merely pure, but to love purity--not merely just, but to hunger and thirst after justice.[157]

The beauty of the world--in the form of handicraft, knowledge and justice--draws a person toward it because it creates enjoyment. This is because, as Ruskin believed, beauty is a sign of pleasure in the activity creating it, and therefore the pursuit of beauty necessitates a process which must be in some way pleasurable. To get people to enjoy the right things was to align their moral and aesthetic lives.

Ruskin believed that transmitting a true understanding of the nature of beauty, then, is of great importance in education:

> [I]t is not an indifferent nor optional thing whether we love this or that; but it is just the vital function of all our being. What we like determines what we are, and is the sign of what we are; and to teach taste is inevitably to form character. [final emphasis added][158]

---

[156]Carlyle, Chartism, 222.

[157]John Ruskin, The Crown of Wild Olive: Three Lectures on Work, Traffic and War, in John Ruskin's Works, vol. 15 (Boston: Dana Estes & Company, n.d.), 46.

[158]Ruskin, The Crown of Wild Olive, 47.

To make this possible Ruskin thought "[t]here ought to be free libraries in every quarter of London, with large and complete reading-rooms attached; so also free educational museums should open in every quarter of London, all day long, until late at night, well lighted, well catalogued, and rich in contents both of art and natural history." In addition, all youths "should learn to do something finely and thoroughly with [their] hands, so as to let [them] know what touch meant; and what stout craftsmanship meant" with the idea that all persons throughout their lives would participate in crafts even if they didn't have the capabilities of the master craftsman. Finally, the school environment for these youths should be aesthetically pleasing because in such an environment they will "feel more capable of certain efforts of mind with beautiful and refined forms about [them] than with ugly ones."[159]

Morris agrees that young people should be taught handicrafts with an eye toward fitting their training to their aptitudes and interests. But youths would not be alone because "adults would also have opportunities of learning in the same schools[.]" Not just handicrafts, but science, literature, the fine arts and other things which the community felt were necessary would also be taught. The community which Morris refers to is, of course, the socialist community of the future. Under socialism education would be universal.[160]

---

[159]Ruskin, Munera Pulveris, 188; idem, Time and Tide, 146-47; idem, Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art, 109.

[160]Morris, Useful Work versus Useless Toil, 300; idem, "The Dull Level of Life," in Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 30.

The school should not be the only center of education, Morris believed. The new socialist factory would be a center for apprenticeship, and it would contain resources, such as a library, to aid in lifelong learning for the adult. Also, the factory could be a place for educating the public about how goods are made. Finally, because the factory would no longer be a place associated with mere drudgery, it might also become a place for musical and dramatic presentations because of its role as a social center for the people who work in it.[161]

The education suggested by all three authors when taken together would make possible the dream: every person, an artist. It implies that art is a continuum from the humblest domestic object or entertainment all the way to finest painting or dramatic presentation. Imagined this way, the work of every person becomes at least that of a "small poet" as Carlyle suggests. If artistic expression is the basis for pleasurable activity, then such educational schemes would offer the possibility that all persons could come to enjoy pleasure in the creation and perception of beauty and that artistic pursuits would not be compartmentalized activities, but would entirely suffuse everyday life and work.

---

[161]Morris, "Work In A Factory As It Might Be III," 42-44.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: AESTHETIC LIFE AND THE FATE OF CIVILIZATION

Nothing less than the fate of civilization was at stake for Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and William Morris. All three believed that the political, economic and social arrangements of their day were the basis of great upheaval and suffering in British society. Although Carlyle, as seen above, acknowledged the connection between the beautiful and the good, Ruskin developed this link into a full-fledged historical theory about the rise and fall of civilizations. Morris believed that the degradation of art would only end with a complete overthrow of the current system. In short, the aesthetic life of a civilization both reflected and fatefully influenced the course of that civilization.

Carlyle believed that nature, the basis of his aesthetics and morality, could not be defied without consequences. The terrible suffering of British working people and blighted landscape of Britain were the type of consequences he meant. And, this was not specifically a British problem; Carlyle saw the crisis in England as "a microcosm of the whole condition of man in the modern world."[162]

Ruskin believed that this condition was reflected in the art and architecture of the age. The widespread imitation of classical and neoclassical styles for Ruskin indicated a downward trajectory for

---

[162]Richard D. Altick, introduction to Past and Present, by Thomas Carlyle, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), xiv.

contemporary civilization. The classical style focused on geometric perfection, rather than natural beauty. It thus violated one of the prime tenets of his aesthetic. This quest for perfection reduced the workman to a mere unthinking "cog-wheel." This was a decline from Gothic art and architecture in which the workman had been involved in creating, on his own volition, variations and novelties in his work. Such involvement meant that he exercised his full powers of interpretation and execution.[163] But an insistence on the systematization of any style and adherence to rigid rules of interpretation spells trouble not only for the workman, but also for the nation in which he lives. Ruskin described the process this way:

> [A] time has always hitherto come, in which, having thus reached a singular perfection, [art] begins to contemplate that perfection, and to imitate it, and deduce rules and forms from it; and thus to forget her duty and ministry as the interpreter and discoverer of Truth. And in the very instant when this diversion of her purpose and forgetfulness of her function take place--forgetfulness generally coincident with her apparent perfection--in that instant, I say, begins her actual catastrophe; and by her own fall--so far as she has influence--she accelerates the ruin of the nation by which she is practiced.[164]

Moreover, since Ruskin claims that art both reflects and instructs society and that "to teach taste is to form character," the character of a nation's art also affects its virtues and the virtues of its citizens. To illustrate this he separated artists into two categories: "[T]hose who seek for the pleasure of art, in the relations of its colours and lines, without caring to convey any truth with it; and those who seek

---

[163]Ruskin, The Nature of the Gothic, 84; idem, The Two Paths, 84, 95.

[164]Ruskin, The Two Paths, 96.

for the truth first, and then go down from the truth to the pleasure of colour and line." By truth he means fidelity to the natural world. For example, in Arab and Indian art he found an emphasis on pleasure first without much concern for truth, if any. He states that "art whose end is pleasure only is pre-eminently the gift of cruel and savage nations, cruel in temper, savage in habits and conception[.]" But, art

> dedicated to natural fact always indicates a peculiar gentleness and tenderness of mind, and...all great and successful work of that kind will assuredly be the production of thoughtful, sensitive, earnest, kind men, large in their views of life, and full of various intellectual power.[165]

Hence, it is no small matter on which aesthetic road a nation or civilization embarks.

Morris like Ruskin traced a decline in Western civilization back to the Renaissance. Beauty was intrinsic to the work of the medieval craftsman because of the organization and nature of his work. But the commercial system which arose at the end of that age led to "a transference of the interest of civilized men from the development of the human and intellectual energies of the race to the development of its mechanical energies." Morris warned that "[i]f this tendency is to go along the logical road of development, it must be said that it will destroy the arts of design and all that is analogous to them in literature[.]" This was of great importance to Morris for the destruction of art meant nothing less than the destruction of pleasure in living. All that would remain would be "unrelieved anxiety"

---

[165]Ruskin, The Two Paths, 127.

associated with "profit-grinding" and degraded labor, and this would be certain death for art if it continued.[166]

But Morris did not believe that capitalism would survive. As a socialist he affirmed that revolution was inevitable and that it would overturn the capitalist system worldwide replacing it with a highly decentralized and radically egalitarian socialist society. The revolution would halt the destruction of beauty, reform the nature of work and shatter the barriers to the creation and ownership of art in its broadest sense. So fervently did he believe in the necessity of this revolution that he sometimes adopted a chiliastic tone reminiscent of Carlyle:

> For my part, having regard to the general happiness of the race, I say without shirking that the bloodiest of violent revolutions would be a light price to pay for the righting of [the wrongs against men and art].[167]

Morris believed that "not only the worker, but the world in general, will have no share in art till our present commercial society gives place to real society--to Socialism."[168]

Carlyle, though no socialist, also believed a dramatic change was in the offing. Speaking through Professor Teufelsdröckh, the main character in Sartor Resartus, he writes: "'The World,' says [the professor], 'as it needs must, is under a process of devastation and waste, which, whether by silent assiduous corrosion, or open quicker

---

[166]Morris, "Art or No Art? Who Shall Settle It?", 19-20; idem, Gothic Architecture, 331-32; idem, "The Worker's Share of Art," 86-87.

[167]Morris, "Unattractive Labour," 89.

[168]Morris, "The Worker's Share of Art," 87.

combustion, as the case chances, will effectually enough annihilate the past Forms of Society.'"[169]

The hope of great change is a theme in all three authors. Though their aesthetic eye looked backward for guidance, their reformist eye looked forward to a new society profoundly different in its values and its structure from the one in which they lived. Some of the reforms which they championed such as universal education, expansion of public spending on infrastructure, social welfare programs including pensions and disability pay, improved working conditions and shorter working hours have all come to pass in industrialized countries. Yet, the aesthetic which grew up around industrialism and its attendant utilitarian philosophy still dominates the world. And, the deplorable conditions which Carlyle, Ruskin and Morris witnessed in Britain in their own century have been reproduced in ours on different shores in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The same deskilled, slave-like, repetitive work which nineteenth century manual laborers endured has persisted and has been spreading rapidly throughout the so-called developing world. And even in the industrialized world, "knowledge workers" are facing a seductive electronic tedium imposed on them by the computer.

A cursory glance at our city streets, our landscapes and our neighborhoods will reveal that contemporary working and living conditions have hardly created a new aesthetic paradise. Rather, as a society, our aesthetic sensitivity has been so blunted that we live with ugliness that sometimes exceeds the worst of Victorian England.

---

[169]Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, 178.

Even in our hardened state we might take our aesthetic lives more seriously, the three Victorians would say, if we only knew that what's at stake is nothing less than the fate of our civilization.

WORKS CITED

Carlyle, Thomas. Chartism. In Thomas Carlyle: Selected Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Alan Shelston. New York: Penguin, 1971.

_____. On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, ed. with an Introduction by Carl Niemeyer. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

_____. Past and Present, ed. with an Introduction by Richard D. Altick. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.

_____. Sartor Resartus, ed. with an Introduction by Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

_____. Signs of the Times. In Thomas Carlyle: Selected Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Alan Shelston. New York: Penguin, 1971.

Hillman, James. Inter Views. Dallas: Spring Publications, 1983.

_____. "Seminar on Beauty." Leslie College, Cambridge, Mass. Jan. 24-26, 1990.

Leon, Derrick. Ruskin: The Great Victorian. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1949.

Morris, William. "Art or No Art? Who Shall Settle It?" In Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994.

_____. "Attractive Labour." In Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994.

_____. "The Dull Level of Life." In Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994.

_____. "A Factory As It Might Be." In Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994.

_____. Gothic Architecture. In News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer. New York: Penguin, 1993.

_____. How I Became a Socialist. In News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer. New York: Penguin, 1993.

_____. The Lesser Arts. In News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer. New York: Penguin, 1993.

_____. News from Nowhere or An Epoch of Rest. In News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer. New York: Penguin, 1993.

_____. Preface to The Nature of the Gothic, by John Ruskin. In News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer. New York: Penguin, 1993.

_____. "Socialism Triumphant [Part I]." In Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994.

_____. Some Hints on Pattern-Designing. In News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer. New York: Penguin, 1993.

_____. "Why Not?" In Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994.

_____. "The Worker's Share of Art." In Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994.

_____. "Work In A Factory As It Might Be II." In Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994.

_____. "Work In A Factory As It Might Be III." In Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994.

_____. "Unattractive Labour." In Political Writings: Contributions to "Justice" and "Commonweal" 1883-1890, ed. with an Introduction by Nicholas Salmon. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1994.

_____. Useful Work versus Useless Toil. In News from Nowhere and Other Writings, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer. New York: Penguin, 1993.

Plato. The Republic of Plato. Trans. with an Introduction by Francis MacDonald Cornford. New York: Oxford University Press, 1941.

Ruskin, John. The Crown of Wild Olive: Three Lectures on Work, Traffic and War. In John Ruskin's Works, vol. 15. Boston: Dana Estes & Company, n.d.

_____. Munera Pulveris: Six Essays on the Elements of Political Economy. In John Ruskin's Works, vol. 15. Boston: Dana Estes & Company, n.d.

_____. The Nature of the Gothic. In Unto This Last and Other Writings by John Ruskin, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer. New York: Penguin, 1985.

_____. Sesame and Lilies. In Sesame & Lilies, The Two Paths & The King of the Golden River, ed. Ernest Rhys with an Introduction by Oliver Lodge. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1909.

_____. The Two Paths, being Lectures on Art and its Application to Decoration and Manufacture. In Sesame & Lilies, The Two Paths & The King of the Golden River, ed. Ernest Rhys with an Introduction by Oliver Lodge. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1909.

_____. The Works of John Ruskin. Vol. 11, "A Joy For Ever;" (and Its Price in the Market): Being the Substance (with additions) of Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art. Kent, England: George Allen, 1880.

_____. The Works of John Ruskin. Vol. 15, Time and Tide, By Weare and Tyne. Sunnyside, Great Britain: George Allen, 1882.

_____. Unto This Last: Four Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy. In Unto This Last and Other Writings by John Ruskin, ed. with an Introduction by Clive Wilmer. New York: Penguin, 1985.