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Victorian Art Criticism and the Woman Writer

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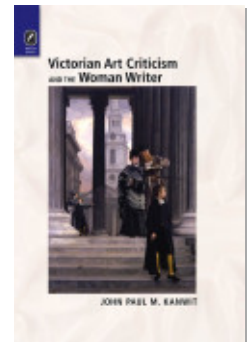
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NOTES



INTRODUCTION

1. Arguing against the emphasis on control through the aesthetic, David Kaiser and other scholars of “liberative” aesthetics have demonstrated that Kant hoped to balance the state and individual freedom—not privilege the former (Kaiser, *Romanticism, Aesthetics, and Nationalism* 26–27).

2. Though not a novelistic example, Elizabeth Eastlake’s considerable scholarship and connoisseurship certainly furthered the career of her husband Sir Charles, as I discuss in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 1

1. For recent discussions of the 1835–36 select committee and conceptions of art education, see Mervyn Romans, “An Analysis of the Political Complexion of the 1835/6 Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures” and Malcolm Quinn, “The Political Economic Necessity of the Art School 1835–52.” For the most influential book-length studies of Victorian art education, see Quentin Bell’s *The Schools of Design* (1963) and Stuart Macdonald’s *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (1970).

2. As Andy Green demonstrates, the idea of limited government involvement does not necessarily violate the principles of the classical political economists. In his *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith argues that the government should have a role in “erecting and maintaining those public institutions and those public works, which though they may be in the highest degree advantageous to a great society . . . could never repay the expense to any individual or small number of individuals” (qtd. in Green 253).

3. For parallel anxieties attendant on increased verbal literacy, see Patrick Brantlinger’s *The Reading Lesson*.

4. As Green notes, the decentralized model of the schools of design was informed by British ideology that shunned state intervention in technical and scientific education (294). Unlike Continental Europe, Britain industrialized without state direction; as a result, the apprenticeship system was believed sufficient to teach technical skills.

5. See Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader*, especially chapter 4, “The Social Background,” for difficulties faced by the working class in learning to read (such as few schooling opportunities, lack of leisure time, poor lighting conditions at home, and expense of reading glasses).

6. The literary subjects favored by the Westminster committee proved more accessible to middle-class viewers. But these already popular literary subjects needed little legislative encouragement (Altick, *Paintings from Books* 179).

CHAPTER 2

1. For a good discussion of twentieth- and twenty-first-century criticism of *North and South*, see Susan Johnston’s *Women and Domestic Experience in Victorian Political Fiction*, 103–5. Patsy Stoneman’s “Afterword: The Critical Debate, 1985–2004” in the second edition of her *Elizabeth Gaskell* provides a comprehensive overview of recent writing on Gaskell. Stoneman’s first chapter in the same book considers work on Gaskell before 1985.

2. The flowers are from Margaret’s country home in Helstone and thus demonstrate Thornton’s understanding of Margaret’s love for this nature—a nature neglected by other characters in the novel.

3. See Regenia Gagnier’s *The Insatiability of Human Wants*, 38–40, for Gaskell’s use of Edmund Burke’s categories of the beautiful and the sublime.

4. For a different and interesting reading of the novel, see Elizabeth Langland’s *Nobody’s Angels*, chapter 5. Langland argues that Clare cleverly manipulates the social codes of dress and taste to put her family, including Molly, into social circulation.

5. I am indebted to an anonymous reader’s report on an earlier version of this chapter for this suggestion.

6. The dynamic that Douglas describes was certainly active in Victorian aesthetics. Commentators on public galleries and museums worried that lower-class visitors would dirty works of art and the buildings in which they were housed. Artists often completely omitted or significantly marginalized the lower class and their filth in works of art. Ellen Handy, for instance, has described how photographers edited out working-class garbage and excrement in representations of Victorian cities.

7. Pamela Parker, in “From ‘Ladies’ Business to ‘Real Business,’” reads the distinction between the Hales and the Thorntons in this way, claiming that the Hales’ household decorations indicate their upper-class status (2). Parker usefully notes that many of the Hales’ decorations are signs of traditional upper-class gentility, but I would argue that Gaskell wants to emphasize the comfort of their decorations as well. Parker seems to exaggerate the amount of “surplus income” that the Hales have to spend on household decorations. The Hales explicitly lack, for example, the mirrors that Parker claims they possess in their Milton drawing room. As Mrs. Thornton demonstrates, too many mirrors are in bad taste, but the Hales probably cannot afford to buy any of them.

8. Judith Flanders provides a detailed description of the drawing room in her chapter “The Drawing Room” in *Inside the Victorian Home*.

9. Wallpaper was a much-discussed household good in the Victorian period and one that was, similar to draperies, associated with dirt and disease. Kate Flint notes that the Tennysons changed their wallpaper after developing “whooping-cough-like symptoms” and that the making of wallpaper put the lungs of workers in danger (*The Victorians* 45). Judith Flanders explains that the colors in wallpaper were particularly toxic: “Some wallpapers had concentrations of arsenious acid that ran as high as 59 percent. In addition, vermilion was adulterated with red lead” (190). Flanders speculates that seaside vacations may have actually improved homeowners’ health, as they were temporarily removed from these toxic furnishings.

10. Likewise, notes Jenny Uglow in *Elizabeth Gaskell*, Thornton shakes hands with Nicholas Higgins as he begins to realize the worker’s worth as a person: Margaret’s “refusal to give her hand, in both senses, to Thornton is paralleled by his refusal to allow personality to his ‘hands’—a term of disembodiment to which Margaret strongly objects” (374).

11. Joseph Kestner reads Gaskell’s use of roses and nature differently, remarking that “at the novel’s conclusion Thornton gives her a dead rose from Helstone, marking her assimilation to a new order, the dominance of agriculture by industry.” However, the appearance of roses throughout the novel, as well as Margaret’s remarks about the dead ones as connected especially with Helstone, suggest continuity rather than rupture.

CHAPTER 3

1. As an anonymous reviewer of my manuscript pointed out, the *Wellesley* does not index most art periodicals, and so Eastlake was undoubtedly not the only prolific female periodical writer on the arts. Still, her ability to focus on art writing in the periodicals indexed by the *Wellesley* is striking.

2. See, for example, Solveig Robinson for a focus on Eastlake’s literary reviews (especially on *Jane Eyre*), and Rosemary Mitchell for a listing of Eastlake’s art historical accomplishments.

3. See Pamela Nunn for an overview of nineteenth-century women art critics. Other good but brief studies of women’s art criticism can be found in Sherman with Holcomb, *Women As Interpreters of the Visual Arts, 1820–1979*. The standard account of the professionalization of women painters in the Victorian era is Deborah Cherry’s *Painting Women*. Cherry briefly discusses Dilke as a professional art historian and Jameson as a prominent intellectual writing about the arts, but does not mention Elizabeth Eastlake.

4. Julie Sheldon edited in 2009 a new version of Eastlake’s letters and published an essay reevaluating her review of *Jane Eyre*. A new biography of the Eastlakes, *Art for the Nation: The Eastlakes and the Victorian Art World*, co-written by Sheldon and Susanna Avery-Quash, appeared in 2011.

5. Adele Holcomb argues that Jameson was “the first professional English art historian,” beginning in the early 1840s (171). By contrast, Laurie Kane Lew describes Jameson as an “amateur in matters of art” because of her informal training and supposed reliance on other scholars (831).

6. Meaghan Clarke notes that art critics were eventually represented by journalistic organizations—the Institute of Journalists (1890) and the Society of Women Journalists (1895).

7. Please note that the names “Adele Holcomb” and “Adele Ernstrom,” used throughout this chapter and listed separately in the bibliography, refer to the same scholar.

8. I am indebted to Ainslie Robinson for this quotation and for her discussion of Lady Eastlake’s supposed reliance on her husband.

9. Meaghan Clarke also describes how women writers, especially those writing near the end of the century, used the preface strategically.

10. In her edition of Eastlake’s letters, Julie Sheldon has reproduced Eastlake’s particular use of punctuation and spelling, which I maintain in quotations used in this book.

11. See Clarke for an interesting discussion of later women critics’ signing practices, especially her fifth chapter on Elizabeth Robins Pennell, whose writing was often anonymous and/or assumed to be the work of her husband, Joseph Pennell.

12. Similarly, in her *Renaissance Studies and Fancies*, Vernon Lee claims that Renaissance art progressed only as the Protestant ideal of free thought supplanted the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Catholic practice of creating mere “mechanical aids to devotion” (91).

CHAPTER 4

1. For example, an anonymous reviewer from the July 8, 1848, *Athenaeum* remarks, “The Bells must be warned against their fancy for dwelling upon what is disagreeable (Allott 251).

2. See also Derek Stanford, Garrett Stewart, and Edward Chitham who, in their respective works, compellingly argue for Anne’s originality. Stanford claims in *Anne Brontë: Her Life and Work* (co-written with Ada Harrison) that Anne is a “completely different sort” of writer who should not be compared with her sisters (230). Stewart details in “Narrative Economies” how *Tenant* should be considered a reworking of *Agnes Grey* rather than an adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*. Chitham argues in *A Life of Anne Brontë* that “Anne’s artistic and moral challenge to the content of her sisters’ novels comes in *Wildfell Hall*” (134), especially in the novel’s parody of *Wuthering Heights*.

3. Surely contributing also to Anne’s lowered reputation was Charlotte’s comparing her with Emily: “[Anne] wanted the power, the fire, the originality of her sister, but was well-endowed with quiet virtues of her own” (“Biographical Notice” 57). Anne’s “quiet virtues” do not seem the equal of Emily’s “power,” “fire,” and “originality.” Placing herself as the definitive interpreter of her dead sisters’ works, Charlotte seems clear about which was the greater artist.

4. The contrast between Mary and Agnes suggests a connection to the Brontë sisters: Though all three Brontë sisters were accomplished drawers, Charlotte was significantly more distinguished. Charlotte never sold her art, but she did exhibit; at the Brontës’ first recorded visit to an exhibition, at the Royal Northern Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Leeds in 1834, Charlotte had two paintings accepted and displayed (Alexander, “The Influence of the Visual Arts” 25–26). Through her depiction of Mary and Agnes, Anne demonstrates both her awareness that the artistic talents of siblings can differ and her desire that each be judged fairly according to her own merits.

5. By contrast, Stewart argues that Anne’s decision to introduce Helen’s diary into the long middle section of the novel was not a mistake, as Moore argued, but a conscious

aesthetic decision designed “to contrive a scene of reading . . . so intensely involving that no textual distance could dampen it” (84).

6. Milicent does make unsolicited comments on Helen’s paintings at one point after Arthur discovers his face on the back of them, but Helen is unable to attend to Milicent’s remarks because of her embarrassment (A. Brontë, *Tenant* 149).

7. Similarly, Anne Brontë, unhappy with her earlier career as a governess, sought to convince Charlotte in 1845 that her own poems were worthy for the sisters’ collection and revised them nightly in order to improve them (Nash and Suess x). Anne clearly understood firsthand the difficult work of aesthetic production.

CHAPTER 5

1. Ruskin’s two lectures at Manchester were originally published in 1857 under the title “The Political Economy of Art” and were reissued in 1880 under the title “A Joy Forever.” In *The Complete Works*, Volume 16, they are titled, “‘A Joy for Ever,’ Being the Substance (with Additions) of Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art.”

2. Ruskin makes a similar argument about what he calls “the plague of cheap literature” (*Works* 16: 59) in Britain. In his lecture titled “The Accumulation and Distribution of Art,” Ruskin argues that “we ought not to get books too cheaply. No book, I believe is ever worth half so much to its reader as one that has been coveted for a year at a book-stall, and bought out of saved halfpence; and perhaps a day or two’s fasting” (*Works* 16: 59).

CHAPTER 6

1. For more on this representation of Cleopatra, see Jill Matus, “Confession, Secrecy, and Exhibition,” in *Unstable Bodies*, 131–45.

2. As a child in the Bretton home, Lucy had unhooked this painting (hung “somewhat too high”) from the wall and held it—an intimacy not available to public gallery visitors (C. Brontë, *Villette* 213, chap. 16).

CHAPTER 7

1. I cite Merrill in this chapter because she is the best source for the reconstructed transcripts of the *Whistler v. Ruskin* trial. The original transcripts were destroyed soon after the trial.

2. Several years later, these assumptions would be famously illustrated by William Powell Frith’s satirical painting *A Private View at the Royal Academy, 1881* (1883), in which three women admiringly surround Oscar Wilde.

3. Modern scholars have in fact attributed the angel to Leonardo (Hill 365).

4. See Walter Seiler, ed., *Walter Pater, The Critical Heritage*.

5. Dilke’s other writings make clear that the increased freedom of the artist since the Renaissance should extend to a more complete democratization for all members of society. In an unsigned article on “Art” for the *Westminster Review* in 1869, Dilke claims

that the “essentially aristocratic” nature of the arts reflects a larger problem in Victorian society (592).

6. While Whistler sought to distance himself from French impressionism—and did differ from it in some significant ways—he was often connected with that movement (Parkes 597–98). See also Anna Gruetzner Robins, *A Fragile Modernism*, and Kenneth McConkey, *Impressionism in Britain*.

7. In her own painting, Dilke depicted women engaged in serious pursuits. For example, an 1864 painting shows Lady Pauline Trevelyan absorbed in creating her own painting.

8. See also Shearer West for the function of humor during the trial. West notes that Holker’s comment about the Cremorne Gardens was a “prepared . . . innuendo,” which prompted “prurient giggles from the audience” (45).

CONCLUSION

1. My example is not meant to suggest that no modern studies consider the arts in their social contexts. Art historians including Susan Casteras, Lynda Nead, Leonard Bell, Joseph Kestner, Griselda Pollock, and Deborah Cherry have usefully examined Victorian art in terms of race, class, gender, and imperialism.

2. There was also a heightened public interest in the arts independent of art critical intervention. Poems discussing grief and loss were shared and reshared over the Internet. Makeshift memorials were established at Ground Zero. People visited museums hoping for a restored sense of order and beauty.

3. Similarly, a pamphlet distributed before Libeskind’s speech at Indiana University highlights his individual achievements: “Designer of some of the world’s most provocative buildings, including his first project, the Jewish Museum Berlin, he has virtually re-invented architecture, transforming sand and stone into spiritual structures that resonate profoundly.” Nowhere in Libeskind’s list of projects is his team of architects—Studio Daniel Libeskind—mentioned.

4. Muschamp’s worries about emotion seem confirmed by other commentators, who have widely attributed Libeskind’s success in winning the commission to the sentimental ways in which he talked about his design. “Mr. Libeskind had a moving pedigree,” writes Robin Pogrebin in the *New York Times*. “His parents had survived the Holocaust; he had designed the Jewish Museum in Berlin—and [he had] a way of talking about both his own experience as an immigrant and his ideas for the site that was heavy-handed but affecting” (2).

5. Representing another interesting solution to the World Trade Center site problem, Casey Nelson Blake argues in “Mourning and Modernism After 9/11” that a modernist style should be considered for the site because it would allow visitors to express their grief individually. While the site would feature a permanent structure similar to the Hiroshima Peace Park or Vietnam Veterans Memorial, it would also allow visitors to leave their own memorials for the lost.