The Work of Beauty:

Aesthetic Discourse in the Victorian Novel

by

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For my father, whose memory continues to inspire me to pursue my dreams, and for my mother, whose love and support helps me reach them.

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Abstract

While the fields of art and criticism are often separated into two distinct spheres, this thesis seeks to demonstrate their convergence in nineteenth century aesthetic discourse. Taking for the subjects of its inquiry three Victorian novels—Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ouida's *Under Two Flags*, and George Meredith's *The Egoist*—it delineates their theories of beauty by examining them in conjunction with established aesthetic critics of the period, such as John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater. In part, this thesis suggests an alternative method of conceptualizing nineteenth-century Aestheticism, one that treats it as a non-linear discourse rather than a chronologically dictated historical movement. In so doing, it introduces not only the novel as a shaping force, but also the field of science, represented in this inquiry by Charles Darwin's theory of sexual selection and the nineteenth-century science of physiognomy.

Each chapter considers one of the three novels side-by-side with an established critic in order to highlight the points of contention and convergence and to tease out the novel's notion of beauty's meaning, purpose, and manner of perception. Chapter one takes up *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and looks at it with Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and nineteenth-century physiognomy. I suggest the novel challenges the notion of beauty's transparency and its ability to convey moral character. This unreliability, in turn, facilitates skepticism towards the division Ruskin establishes between aesthetic and theoretic, or sensual and moral, perception of beauty. A similar proclivity for skepticism toward the proscriptive nature of criticism shapes the approach of the other novels as well.

Chapter two deals with *Under Two Flags* and Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, both of which employ a binary construction—a gender binary and "Hellenism and Hebraism," respectively—in order to explore beauty's ability to reveal truth. Arnold promotes this notion while concurrently advocating for the importance of beauty in facilitating social progress and the cultivation of culture, whereas *Under Two Flags* collapses the gender binary in order to disrupt the notion that beauty reveals truth in addition to highlighting the necessity of beauty and honor in the development of an ideal citizen.

The final chapter explores *The Egoist* in relation to Darwin's *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* and Pater's *The Renaissance*. While the novel begins by envisioning beauty as purposeful, or acting as the means to a separate and tangible end, it soon adopts an understanding of beauty as its own end, very much like the one Pater posits. The focus then shifts from beauty to aesthetic judgment, which is considered within the frame of Darwinian sexual selection. What is ultimately framed as progressive is a refined aesthetic judgment that refuses a utilitarian view of beauty.

Taking these many texts into account, it becomes clear that a traditional conception of Aestheticism can overlook a number of important contributions to the nineteenth-century discussion of beauty. Re-envisioning Aestheticism as a non-linear discourse can elicit a comprehensive view that highlights questions, problems, and themes that arise from and shape it.

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Introduction

> GILBERT. …Who cares whether Mr. Ruskin's views on Turner are sound or not? What does it matter? That mighty and majestic prose of his, so fervid and so fiery-coloured in its noble eloquence, so rich in its elaborate symphonic music, so sure and certain, at its best, in subtle choice of word and epithet, is at least as great a work of art as any of those wonderful sunsets that bleach or rot on their corrupted canvases in England's Gallery; greater indeed, one is apt to think at times, not merely because its equal beauty is more enduring, but on account of the fuller variety of its appeal, soul speaking to soul in those long-cadenced lines, not through form and colour alone, though through these, indeed, completely and without loss, but with intellectual and emotional utterance, with lofty passion and with loftier thought, with imaginative insight, and with poetic aim…
> ERNEST. But is such work as you have talked about really criticism?
> GILBERT. It is the highest Criticism, for it criticises not merely the individual work of art, but Beauty itself…
> ERNEST. The highest Criticism, then, is more creative than creation.
>
> Oscar Wilde, *The Critic As Artist*[1]

Theories of beauty often treat art as the object of inquiry, and yet, as the passage from Oscar Wilde's *The Critic As Artist* demonstrates, the boundary between criticism and art in the nineteenth century were not as clearly delineated as we would be quick to assume. Gilbert speaks of the artistry manifest in the works of John Ruskin, one of the most influential art critics of the Victorian Era. His prose is, as Gilbert asserts, "mighty and majestic," with its sweeping, emotional language. Yet, it is not a few hyperbolic, flowery descriptions to which our attention is called; contrarily, it is Ruskin's "noble eloquence" and the "elaborate symphonic music" of his prose that Gilbert, and by extension Wilde, praises as a great work of art. Wilde's praise, then, is a matter of style: beauty can be found in verbal as well as visual forms. More importantly, however, Wilde opens the possibility for criticism such as Ruskin's—which he calls "the highest" and "more creative than creation" because it applies not to single works of art but seeks to understand "beauty itself"—to be considered "art" and even to define the boundaries of art.

[1] Oscar Wilde, *The Critic As Artist* (Kobenhavn: Green Integer Books, 1997), 65-66.

Wilde posits Criticism, with a capital C, as a critique of beauty and therefore as art of an even higher quality than the works in England's Gallery.

This thesis takes as its point of departure the themes outlined in *The Critic As Artist*. In particular, the question I pose is this: if criticism can be art, might the reverse also be true? The art in question here is the novel. Like painting and poetry, the novel is a fictive product of the imagination, and as such is often contrasted with the opinionated and argumentative nature of criticism. While Wilde proposes that criticism can be, in fact, as much a product of the creative mind as art, I hope to suggest that art, and the novel in particular, can present as coherent an argument about beauty as criticism. In order to move forward with this inquiry, a redefinition of Aestheticism as a discourse, as opposed to a movement, is necessary. This move is both historical and conceptual; other critics have already suggested a widening of temporal boundaries in relation to Aestheticism to elicit a more comprehensive view, but a further radicalization is necessary. Using Foucault's theory of discourse, we can conceptualize Aestheticism as a complex web of thought about beauty, rather than a strictly linear progression, and as one that incorporates a variety of fields of knowledge. This view helps to explain, for example, why Wilde—the champion of art for art's sake—praises John Ruskin—the champion of art for morality's sake—in our opening quote. Finally, the main project of this thesis is to demonstrate the manner in which the Victorian novel as an art form participates in this late nineteenth-century discourse about beauty by theorizing its meaning, perception, and purpose.

Aestheticism: Movement or Discourse?

The Aesthetic Movement was defined by Walter Hamilton in 1882 as a "union of persons of cultivated tastes to define, and to decide upon what is to be admired, and their followers must

aspire to that standard in their works and lives."[2] Hamilton identifies the roots of the movement in the 1840s with John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, and proceeds to evaluate the state of the movement proper, which he relegates to the 1870s and 1880s. While Hamilton acknowledges figures like Ruskin, he cites them as precursors to, rather than participants in, the Aesthetic Movement as such, which he confines to more familiar figures like Oscar Wilde and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.[3] What Hamilton gives us, then, is a movement with a clear genesis in the 1870s. This definition has been challenged by a number of critics who have expanded the temporal bounds, roughly the 1870s to the 1890s, traditionally associated with the Movement in order to ascertain a more comprehensive view of its cultural and intellectual position and effects.

In their book, *Women and British Aestheticism*, Talia Schaffer and Kathy Psomiades extend the historical boundaries of the Aesthetic Movement to reach from the 1850s to the 1930s in order to include female writers into a field ordinarily dominated by male figures. In their view, the Aesthetic Movement began to emerge with the work of John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, exactly those critics and artists that Hamilton posits as pre-cursors to the Movement, and reaches its apex with Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde in the 1870s and 1880s (3-4). Similarly, Lucy

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[2] Regarding the term "Aesthetic Movement": I have attempted to use "Aesthetic Movement" to refer to the historical and linear conception of this phenomena, and "Aestheticism" to refer to the non-linear discourse I am suggesting it is.
The quote is from Walter Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1882), vii. It is worth noting, as well, that Schaffer and Psomiades offer a slightly different definition of the term, explaining, "in the 1870s the word aestheticism came to be used to indicate not only a certain style of painting, or a way of writing, or set of ideas but also the popular manifestations of a belief in art's ability to make life more beautiful and allow the beholder to achieve transcendence"; see: Talia Schaffer and Kathy Psomiades, "Introduction" in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Psomiades (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 3. Henceforth cited in the text.

[3] It is worth noting that Hamilton includes Rossetti, a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as both a precursor to and participant in the Aesthetic Movement. What may account for this is a change in medium—Rossetti was a painter as a member of the Pre-Raphaelites and Hamilton cites his poetry as part of the movement proper.

Hartley has argued that when taking a "longer view of the [nineteenth] century, a complex picture emerges of the different forms of aesthetic theorizing in and of the novel."[4] Schaffer, Psomiades, and Hartley all advocate for an expansion of the historical framework traditionally associated with the Aesthetic Movement in order to complicate and widen our critical perspective in relation to it. This important work establishes a standard for including new figures within the boundaries of the Movement, and as such, allows this thesis to push beyond the existing paradigm of the Aesthetic Movement and the idea of "art for art's sake" to consider critics and forms of criticism that, traditionally, are not seen as participating in Aestheticism.[5]

The chronology of the Aesthetic Movement has been significantly modified by the expansion of historical boundaries, but I want to suggest that Aestheticism can also be understood as a non-linear discourse. I use the term "discourse" in the context of Michel Foucault's work, particularly in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. While Schaffer and Psomiades offer a great number of female authors as participants in the Aesthetic Movement, these figures still fit within the Ruskin-Pater-Wilde lineage, or progression of thought. Rethinking Aestheticism in this non-linear fashion offers the opportunity of seeing beyond a traditional heritage that leads us from Ruskin through Pater and culminates with Wilde. Admittedly, re-envisioning Aestheticism as a system of statements whose occurrences and presence are ruled

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[4] Lucy Hartley, "Chapter 31: Aesthetic Theories" in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, ed. John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor, vol. 3 (Forthcoming: Oxford University Press).

[5] A number of other critics have influenced my thinking about Aesthetics, Aestheticism, and the Aesthetic Movement, as well. See, for instance: Amanda Anderson's *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*, Richard Dellamora's *Masculine Desire: the Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism*, Kate Flint's *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, Marjorie Garson's *Moral Taste: Aesthetics, Subjectivity, and Social Power in the Nineteenth Century*, Regenia Gagnier's *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*, Kathy Alexis Psomiades's *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism*, Rachel Teukolsky's *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics*, and Linda's Dowling's work, but most notably *The Vulgarization of Art: the Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy*.

and shaped by participants in that discourse might not at first seem that radical a departure from a view of Aestheticism as a movement shaped by one or a limited group of governing ideas, like "art for art's sake." However, to view Aestheticism as a discourse opens it to the lines of inquiry Foucault describes as follows:

> We must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset; we must oust those forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one man with that of another; they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign… We must also question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar. Can one accept, as such, the distinction between the major types of discourse, or that between such forms or genres such as science, literature, philosophy, religion, history, fiction, etc., and which tend to create certain historical individualities?[6]

Foucault asks us to question the "ready-made syntheses" and groupings whose validity we are quick to accept, and in so doing, undermine existing categories of knowledge and discourse. While I do not offer this project as a strict Foucaultian discourse analysis, the concepts he outlines here are particularly useful in attempting to destabilize what have heretofore been strict boundaries separating fields of knowledge and historical periods, ones that restrict the topic of aesthetics to the field of criticism. It is impossible to deny that Aestheticism was shaped by critics such as John Ruskin and Walter Pater, both of whom we have already mentioned, as well as Matthew Arnold, all of whose work focuses on art and beauty in the vein of classical philosophy. Yet, I would contend that the discourse on beauty was also shaped by other fields of knowledge, of which this thesis primarily considers literature but also the realm of science. The

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[6] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 22.

Victorian novel, I argue, becomes an instantiation of this broadly defined aesthetic discourse in the final third of the nineteenth century.

The Victorian Novel and Discourse

It is worthwhile to bracket our discussion of Aestheticism for a moment in order to address the Victorian novel as a venue for intellectual debate. During the nineteenth century, the novel was gaining legitimacy as both an art form and a field for intellectual engagement.[7] As John Kucich has noted, there was an "influential branch of intellectual fiction sustained by a few major Victorian novelists," most notably George Eliot, and two of the novelists whose work this thesis examines in detail: George Meredith and Thomas Hardy.[8] Beneath the surface of what, according to Kucich, is often dismissed as domestic fiction, is a deep interest in intellectual debate, evident in terms of form and method; in the intrusion of other, non-literary discourses; and in novelists' "ambivalent fascination with the figure of the intellectual."[9] What allows fiction to carve out an interesting niche in these discourses is its deployment of the debates into social dramas. This, argues Kucich, "could reveal the dynamics of social power entwined with supposedly disinterested speculation… [The Victorian novel] embodied [intellectual debates] in the social relations that made up its primary subject matter."[10] While Kucich examines specifically the discourses of science and religion as they manifest in the Victorian novel, other critics have examined the Victorian novel's interaction with a number of intellectual fields. For

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[7] George Eliot cites "all literary production" as art; see George Eliot, "Notes on Form in Art" in *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 357.
[8] John Kucich, "Intellectual Debate in the Victorian Novel: Religion, Science, and the Profession" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Diedre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 212.
[9] Ibid. 212.
[10] Ibid. 213.

example, Elaine Hadley has considered the role of discourses around Liberalism in shaping Victorian fiction, while Angelique Richardson has looked at the discourse of eugenics in late nineteenth-century New Woman fiction. Additionally, Daniel Hack has examined materialist discourse in and of the novel. Uniquely bridging my inquiry with Hack's work on materialist discourse are Jonathan Freedman and Regenia Gagnier, who have linked literature of the Aesthetic Movement, notably work by Oscar Wilde, to commodity discourse. Through this thesis, I would like to identify the presence of another discourse in the novel: that of aesthetics. In the same way it became a form—a forum even—in which to engage in intellectual debate on a number of social and political issues, the Victorian novel also functioned as a space to debate the purpose, meaning, and perception of beauty. While this is most apparent during the fin de siècle, the presence of this discourse stretched back to the mid-1800s. Varying timelines have been suggested; Schaffer and Psomiades, for instance, cite the 1860s as the starting point, whereas Hartley points to the 1840s. These ambiguous boundaries provide fertile ground for a non-linear examination of aesthetic discourse as it presents itself in and through the novel.

As Schaffer and Psomiades suggest, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) is often considered the seminal text of the Aesthetic Movement (3). Schaffer has argued that this novel was deeply influenced by the work of "Ouida," the pen name of Marie Louise De La Ramée, a female aesthete and author who published works from the mid-1860s until the turn of the century. She highlights a range of formal aspects the works of Wilde and Ouida share, including the use of epigram and archaic language, as well as setting the narrative in a "fantasized locale" shaped by a romantic and ideal past or, alternatively, an aristocratic

environment made up of "rare and priceless artifacts."[11] Additionally, Schaffer cites as another shared element the presence of the "dandy," a character type that is often an effeminate male who shares "ambiguous but powerful relationships" with other male characters, and which gives these novels "strong homosexual undercurrents."[12] However, while Schaffer widens the historical boundaries in order to include female writers such as Ouida, she stays within the lineage long established that sees Oscar Wilde as the protégé of Pater, who was in turn, a student of Ruskin's. Schaffer demonstrates an alternative origin for some of the features of Wilde's texts often attributed to his own creation, and in doing so establishes the category of the "Aesthetic Novel." Notably, though, this does not mark a shift in the criteria, or the characteristics, of the Aesthetic Movement and its fictional texts, Aesthetic Novels. Ouida is already considered by modern and nineteenth century standards an "aesthete," as evidenced by the cartoon pictured from an issue of *Punch* (Fig. 1) in which she is pictured smoking in decadent dress and surroundings. As such, this thesis takes her work as only one example of a range of Victorian novels and genres that can be seen to engage in aesthetic discourse.

[11] Talia Schaffer, "The Origins of the Aesthetic Novel: Ouida, Wilde, and the Popular Romance" in *Wilde Writings: Contextual Conditions*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 213.
[12] Ibid. 212.

Figure 1 Edward Linley Sambourne, "Ouida," illustration, *Punch* (August 20, 1881), p. 83.

Alongside one of Ouida's most popular novels, *Under Two Flags* (1867), I will examine Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) and George Meredith's *The Egoist* (1879). Both are novels by authors little associated, if at all, with the Aesthetic Movement, and whose works are widely considered examples of realism, naturalism, and satire. During the course of this thesis, I will demonstrate the ways in which each of these novels exhibits a preoccupation with beauty. Indeed, ideas about beauty serve to organize major aspects of each work, such as plot and character development. Pairing the novels with the work of aesthetic theorists of the period will function as a means to highlight points of agreement and contention, and explain where each novel converges or diverges from more traditional aesthetic theory. Through this, I intend to show that each novel makes a unique argument concerning the meaning, purpose, and perception of beauty. Central to my argument is the claim that novels are not *only* aesthetic or art objects. On the contrary, novels independently theorize, and do so on a level that surpasses a regurgitation of existing conceptions of the beautiful by way of establishing new, unique understandings. Hartley has claimed that in the nineteenth century there was a variety of "different forms of aesthetic theorizing in and of the novel," and that "a defining aesthetic theory with respect to the novel did not exist."[13] It is this plurality of theories of beauty offered by the novel that this thesis will explore. I seek not only to identify the presence of aesthetic theorizing occurring in these novels, but also to delineate and situate those theories in relation to the broader aesthetic discourse occurring in the second half of the nineteenth century.

This thesis does not examine the aforementioned novels in chronological order. Instead, I propose the removal of a strict chronology in order to focus on themes, questions, and problems involved in aesthetic discourse as it surfaces in the novel. Thus, chapter one will look at Hardy's

[13] Hartley, "Chapter 31: Aesthetic Theories."

A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873) in conjunction with the second volume of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843-1860, volume two appeared in 1846). *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is the story of young Elfride Swancourt, the daughter of a country parson, and her failed romances with a pair of old friends, Stephen Smith and Henry Knight. I will suggest that the novel challenges Ruskin's notion that the beautiful reveals and is constituted by moral truth, one whose threads are picked up by the nineteenth-century science of physiognomy, which argues that the human face reveals the moral character of its owner. Viewed in this context, the novel represents an alternative conception of beauty, one that posits it as an unreliable medium for moral messages. At the same time, this raises serious questions about validity of the distinction Ruskin draws between sensual and moral perceptions of beauty.

The second chapter will take up Ouida's *Under Two Flags* (1867) and Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). *Under Two Flags* details the life of a young English peer, Bertie Cecil, who flees England to enlist in the French forces in Algeria as a means to protect the reputation of his younger brother. My remarks focus on the ways in which the novel engages with Arnold's correlation of beauty and truth by physically embodying beauty in its two main characters, Bertie and a girl soldier named Cigarette. It is because their gender identity cannot be fixed that, I suggest, these characters serve to undermine Arnold's notion that beauty is a form of truth. Additionally, I hope to suggest that through this process, the novel raises a much larger question about beauty's ability to facilitate well-rounded social progress.

The final chapter will examine the understanding of beauty elucidated in *The Egoist* (1879). Meredith's novel focuses on the courtship and engagement of Sir Willoughby Patterne, the star of his county, and Clara Middleton, whom the novel christens a "rogue in porcelain." I contend, in the vein of a number of critics, that the novel is deeply influenced by the theory of

sexual selection Darwin delineates in *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1872). Beauty in this novel begins as the focal point, but it becomes increasingly clear that *The Egoist* is more concerned with the manner in which characters understand and react to beauty. I propose that the novel promotes a style of aesthetic judgment that sees beauty as "an end in itself," as Walter Pater so famously put it in his conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873) as opposed to the utilitarian conception presented by Darwin. The refinement of one's aesthetic judgment, thus defined, is indicative of the characters' evolutionary progress and desirability as a mate.

While in this introduction I have only called attention to the physical embodiment of beauty and gender in relation to *Under Two Flags*, it is an underlying issue present in my analysis of all of these novels, as I take for my subject of inquiry primarily the bodies and actions of their characters. I do not mean to argue that all novels participating in aesthetic discourse must deal with gender, forthrightly or implicitly, but my method of analysis lends itself to a consideration of it. Additionally, gender can be seen as a conceptual field on which these novels in particular are able to address the issues surrounding beauty, and as such, gender often forms a crux of my argument about each novel.

Let us briefly return to Wilde; if the "highest Criticism" critiques beauty, and is therefore art, the Victorian novel offers an instance of this triangulation just as valid as the prose of Ruskin's that Wilde praises. In their very existence, these novels make a theoretical claim: as works of art, they should be only that, according to a traditional understanding of the Aesthetic Movement as governed by the idea of "art for art's sake" and as a movement that privileges artistic form as its highest value. As art, they should fulfill their own ends by mere existence. However, as they exhibit substantive content *and* a beautiful form, they are able to undermine

the perpetual privileging of form over content and collapse the distinction between the two. These novels present the possibility for a work of art to be both aesthetic and critical, to have a beautiful form as well as substantive, intellectual, even theoretical content, a possibility evident in each novel's development of its own theory of the beautiful.

I.
A Pair of Blue Eyes and the Unreliability of Beauty

"Elfride Swancourt was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface."
– Thomas Hardy, A Pair of Blue Eyes[1]

These are the words that begin Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), a novel deeply interested in the relationship between surface appearances—or what seems to be—and that which lies within—what is.[2] The novel details the two failed love affairs of Elfride Swancourt, a young, beautiful country girl. The first suitor is a youthful architect, Stephen Smith, whose attractive features mislead Elfride and her father, the Parson, into thinking he is of an ancient noble line, when he is actually the son of the local master mason. She then begins a courtship with Henry Knight, the mentor of young Smith, and an intellectually and socially superior man. Unlike Smith, Knight is the one who is doing the misreading—the object of the misread being Elfride herself. I want to suggest that the novel uses seeming and being in order to examine whether the beautiful is capable of revealing the immaterial—in this case, the soul.

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[1] Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 7. Henceforth cited in the text.

[2] These words begin the New Wessex Edition of the novel. Hardy's novel was first published in 1872-3 in *Tinsley's Magazine* and in 1873 was published in novel form and heavily revised by Hardy. Subsequent publishings with revisions are also available. For the rest of this chapter, we will be referring to the first edition in volume form as reprinted by Penguin Books. The New Wessex version can be found thusly: Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (London: Macmillan, 1975).
Additionally, the notion of surface and depth is also explored by Kate Flint in *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* as a method of understanding Edward Burne-Jones's *The Mirror of Venus* (1877), a painting that pictures a group of young women looking at their own reflections in a pool of water. In exploring criticism of this painting by James Sully, Flint suggests the presence of an inescapable duality between the visible and invisible in the practice of spectatorship. In even closer similarity to what I argue in this chapter in regards to *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Flint highlights issues of "the variations between perception and judgment" that arise in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876); see: Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 251.

Looking at *A Pair of Blue Eyes* in conjunction with John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843), one of the most influential works of art criticism from the Victorian period, will allow us to highlight not only the novel's interest in disrupting the causal relationship Ruskin establishes between the moral and the beautiful, but challenging the distinction he makes between "aesthetic" and "theoretic," or sensual and moral, perceptions of beauty.[3] The novel ultimately suggests that these categories are not mutually exclusive, as Ruskin implies, but rather layered in the sense that reading the moral through the beautiful requires a perception of the physical as well as the moral, something for which Ruskin's theory fails to adequately account. However, Hardy's novel is not satisfied with this disruption alone, but also suggests that the beautiful thwarts the kind of moral interpretation Ruskin advocates.

Ruskin's Theory of the Beautiful

Modern Painters sets out a theory of the beautiful that relies heavily on Christian theology and attempts to reject a consideration of the sensual elements of beauty in favor of moral and intellectual ones. In opposition to the term "aesthetic," which Ruskin feels degrades beauty to a "mere operation of sense, or perhaps worse, of custom," he offers "theoretic" to denote the "moral perception and appreciation of ideas of beauty."[4] Ruskin's aim in the second volume of *Modern Painters* is to establish this theoretic understanding of beauty over and above an aesthetic understanding: "I wholly deny," he writes, "that the impressions of beauty are in any way sensual; they are neither sensual nor intellectual, but moral" (Ruskin 11). Aesthesis is only the "mere animal consciousness" of pleasantness, whereas Theoria is the "exulting, reverent, and

[3] The second volume of *Modern Painters*, with which this chapter primarily engages, was released in 1846.
[4] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 2 (Sunnyside, UK: George Allen, 1888), 10. Henceforth cited in the text.

grateful perception" of the same (Ruskin 15). By elevating beauty above sensuality to the level of moral perception, Ruskin is able to consciously and purposefully insert God into the equation, for if beauty is simply about sensual pleasure, the divine lacks a place. George Landow explains that "a pure aestheticism, or a theory divorced from morality, would not do for Ruskin since he was trying to demonstrate that the perception of beauty… has an important relationship to man's moral and religious nature."[5] Ruskin emphasizes the moral nature of the beautiful because "he believed that beauty was a reflection of God's nature in visible things" (Landow 91). This is not without contradiction, however. While Ruskin works diligently to posit the beautiful as something perceived morally, and in direct contradiction to a sensual perception, he is unable to fully accomplish this goal. He glosses this as follows: "It will now be understood why it was formerly said in the chapter respecting ideas of beauty, that those ideas were the subject of moral, and not of intellectual, nor *altogether* sensual perception" (Ruskin 15, emphasis mine). Ruskin's own language gives away his inability to fully separate these notions into mutually exclusive spheres. In the following sections of this chapter, I will show how Hardy's novel picks up on this, but a better understanding of Ruskin's bifurcated aesthetic theory, consisting of Typical and Vital Beauty, is necessary before proceeding with our discussion of the novel.

Ruskin's discussion of Typical Beauty is rooted in the concept of order, the importance of which to his thinking about beauty aligns him closely with classical philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle.[6] Yet, as opposed to reflecting universal order as ancients thought beauty did, Typical Beauty is, as Landow puts it, "symbolic of the order that is the nature of God" and

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[5] George Landow, *Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 90. Henceforth cited in the text.

[6] For an overview of classical thought on beauty, see Wladyslaw Tartarkiewicz, "Objectivity and Subjectivity in the History of Aesthetics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 24.2 (Dec. 1963): 157-173.

represents "divine order in material things" (109, 117). Unlike its counterpart, Vital Beauty, Typical Beauty can be understood as "material loveliness" (Ruskin 36). This loveliness is a property of the object itself, based on the object's form, and thus perception of this beauty becomes wholly objective. For Ruskin, all men receive "identical emotions from certain visual qualities much as everyone receives identical sensations of sweetness from sugar" (Landow 93). Therefore, Ruskin is able to identify a set of specific visual properties that elicit moral emotion in viewers, including Unity, Symmetry, Infinity, Repose, Purity, and Moderation. Collectively, Ruskin deems these characteristics, and a range of subcategories, "Typical Beauty." The brief glossing of a select few of these characteristics that follows will prove useful for the analysis of Hardy's novel.

The characteristics that will prove most useful in relation to the novel are Unity, Symmetry, and Moderation. The first of these, Unity, refers to "the unity of things separately imperfect into a perfect whole" (Ruskin 50).[7] Proportion and curves are manifestations of this broader category. Symmetry, though its own category, functions as a counterpart to proportion, and is defined as "reciprocal balance" (Ruskin 70). Lastly, Moderation, broadly understood as restraint, is perhaps most deeply rooted in Ruskin's Christian theology, as well as the one aspect he considered most necessary: "the least appearance of violence or extravagance, of the want of moderation and restraint is… destructive of all beauty whatsoever in everything, colour, form, motion, language, or thought" (Ruskin 81). Philosophers of antiquity saw similar attributes as reflective of order, but it is Ruskin who reframes this order as divine, and hailing from God.

[7] Ruskin elaborates on this concept at length in *Stones of Venice*, particularly in reference to Gothic architecture with the chapter, "Nature of the Gothic." Matthew Arnold addresses the link between beauty and perfection more directly in *Culture and Anarchy*, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

Whereas Typical Beauty is characterized by divine order and concentrates on form, Vital Beauty deals more directly with living things, and "is concerned not with form but expression—with the expression of the happiness and energy of life, and, in a different manner, with the representation of moral truths by living things" (Landow 148). While this quote from Landow would seem to divide Vital Beauty into two distinct parts, I would venture that happiness of living things and the moral truths they express are more closely aligned than this passage would suggest. First, let us address happiness. Ruskin emphasizes that Vital Beauty consists of the "appearance of felicitous fulfillment of function in living things" (Ruskin 86).[8] He continues:

> Throughout the whole of the organic creation every being in a perfect state exhibits certain appearances or evidences of happiness; and is in its nature, its desires, its modes of nourishment, habitation, and death, illustrative or expressive of certain moral dispositions and principles. Now, first, in the keenness of the sympathy which we feel in the happiness, real or apparent, of all organic beings, and which… invariably prompts us, from the joy we have in it, *to look upon those as most lovely which are most happy*; and, secondly, in the justness of the moral sense which rightly reads the lesson they are all intended to teach. (Ruskin 87, emphasis in original)

The energy of life that living things express is, for Ruskin, a direct indication of their "moral dispositions and principles." Just as with the theory of Typical Beauty, in which the morality lies in the viewer, this concept of Vital Beauty requires that same moral viewer, but also emphasizes the expression of morality issuing from the living thing that has become the beautiful object. In

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[8] "Felicity" and "happiness" being taken in the context of classical philosophy ("eudaimonia") and meaning not joy, but a longer-term, objective judgment of virtue, morality, and intelligence; see: "Aristotle's Ethics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 29 March 2010, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/. Ruskin directly cites Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics as a source for his aesthetic theory and we can therefore infer that he is utilizing an Aristotelian concept of happiness (Landow 134-136).

fact, the more moral the creature, the more beautiful it is—the most lovely are the most happy. Yet, it is not the object alone, as we have said, that is moral. Viewing the beautiful object also requires a moral disposition because "the perfection of beauty is… an act of [a] non-intellectual part of the mind," as beautiful objects are perceived as the "subjects of the moral, but not intellectual perception" (Landow 113, quoting Ruskin). Our impressions of beauty ultimately result from the ability to sympathize with the happiness of a given organism, and not from the utilitarian use-value they represent.

It is important to note one substantial difference between Typical and Vital Beauty. Whereas Typical Beauty is based on divine order, and requires a moral viewer to appreciate it, it is not *caused* by morality inherent in the object. A mountain is not beautiful because it is moral; rather, we appreciate the beauty of the mountain because *we* are moral. The mountain itself is only a reflection of the divine order, and this reflection of God's order requires moral perception. Vital Beauty, on the other hand, because it deals with living things, treats morality slightly differently. While the viewer must still be able to perceive the beauty of living things morally, the living thing itself is beautiful *because* it expresses morality. Ruskin explains:

> *These moral perfections indeed are the causes of beauty in proportion to their expression,* [and this] is best proved by comparing those features of animals in which they are more or less apparent; as, for instance, the eyes, of which we shall find those ugliest which have in them no expression nor life whatsoever… and of all creatures in which *the eye seems rather an external optical instrument, than a bodily member through which emotion and virtue of soul may be expressed*. (93-94, first emphasis mine, second emphasis original)

As Ruskin points out, moral perfections are the cause of beauty, and that beauty is dependent on the level of morality expressed. This is a key shift from Typical Beauty; for an object that exhibits Typical Beauty, its beauty is a fixed property of form caused by an object's reflection of divine order. On the other hand, Vitally Beautiful things and creatures are only as beautiful as they are moral, and this property is no longer fixed. The expression of morality of the object instead replaces the exhibition of features that reflect the divine order. Vital Beauty is, explains Ruskin, "the record of conscience, written in things external," (Landow 100, quoting Ruskin). Ruskin gives us the example here of the eye, and while he relates its potential ugliness to a utilitarian state in order to contrast it with the expression of life and morality or "virtue of soul" that would make it beautiful, we can also see this in terms that contrast Typical and Vital Beauty. An eye may have a beautiful form (e.g. moderation of color), but it requires an expression of virtue and emotion in order to be classified under "Vital Beauty." Ruskin emphasizes the causal relationship between morality and beauty a second time:

> Beauty of the animal form is in exact proportion to the amount of moral or intellectual virtue expressed by it; and wherever beauty exists at all, there is some kind of virtue to which it is owing…. and further be it noted, that of the intellectual or moral virtues, the moral are those which are attended with the most beauty. (95)

While this repeats much of what Ruskin asserts in the previous quote, he does newly introduce the issue of intellectual virtue. While he privileges moral virtue, intellectual virtue becomes an important element of Vital Beauty in Man. Beauty, Ruskin says, "consists… in gentleness and intellect both in man" (94). We can begin to see, in Ruskin's own words, the blurring of lines between morality and intellect, a feature that is revisited and amplified in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*.

The Unreliability of Beauty

Ruskin offers a theory of the beautiful in which the beautiful is a product, directly, of morality, and the surface of an object reflects its inner life, its soul. This notion is reflected in the nineteenth century science of physiognomy—the idea that the human face and its expressions were indicative of human character.[9] Graeme Tytler has noted the influence of physiognomy on Hardy's fiction at large, and has demonstrated the pervasiveness of this style of observation among his characters, including Henry Knight and others from *A Pair of Blue Eyes.*[10] Through Hardy's novels, Tytler argues, it becomes clear that "the human appearance was no doubt a phenomenon to be wondered at as much as interpreted."[11] *A Pair of Blue Eyes* presents a concept of beauty's transparency similar to that of Ruskin through the physiognomic readings of Elfride and Henry Knight. Elfride is introduced with an emphasis on the transparency of her emotions through her eyes:

> Elfride Swancourt was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface… In [her eyes] was seen a sublimation of all of her; it was not necessary to look farther: there she lived. These eyes were blue; heavenly blue… A misty and shady blue, that had no beginning or surface, and was looked *into* rather than *at*. (Hardy 7-8)

In a manner strikingly similar to Ruskin's explanation of the eye as a "bodily member through which emotion and virtue of soul may be expressed," the novel highlights Elfride's eyes as the place in which one could find a "sublimation of all of her." The novel's language characterizes this ability to see Elfride wholly through her eyes a as correspondence between surface and

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[9] For more on this, see: Lucy Hartley, *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[10] Graeme Tytler, "'Know How to Decipher a Countenance': Physiognomy in Thomas Hardy's Fiction" in *The Thomas Hardy Yearbook* 27 (1988).
[11] Ibid., 55.

depth. For example, her emotions "lay very near the surface," and more specifically, in her eyes. Her emotions are visible to any observer. And yet, at the same time, these eyes have "no beginning or surface" as they are "looked *into* rather than *at*." Elfride's eyes are the window to her soul, and there is thus no differentiation between Elfride's physical features and her soul; they are fluid. The face, it appears, indexes the soul.

Knight's countenance is also presented as having this quality of transparency. His eyes in particular, like Elfride's, reveal his character:

> Knight's mouth and eyes came to view now. Both features were good, and had the peculiarity of appearing younger and fresher then the brow and face they belonged to, which were getting sicklied o'er by the unmistakable pale cast. The mouth had not quite relinquished rotundity of curve for the firm angularities of middle life; and the eyes, though keen, permeated rather than penetrated: what they had lost of their boytime brightness by a dozen years of hard reading lending a quietness to their gaze which suited them well. (128)

The novel draws attention to, again, two of the features Ruskin cites in his discussion of Vital Beauty: the mouth and eyes. Like the description of Elfride, the attention is given to what can be read through the eyes. In Knight's case, the eyes reveal years of hard reading, but also a retention of youth and freshness. These eyes are passive, observant: they permeate rather than penetrate their subject of inquiry. The novel succinctly sums up the impression one receives from Knight's face as it observes him in Hyde Park: "try how you might, you could scarcely help supposing, on looking at his face, that your eyes were not far from a well-finished mind, instead of the well-

finished skin *et praeterea nihil*, which is by rights the Mark of the Row" (Hardy 146).[12] What can consistently be read in Knight's face is his intelligence. Just as Elfride's face appears to accurately index her soul, Knight's accurately indexes his mind. Both faces are characterized by the moral and intellectual virtues of their owners; they express the transparent Vital Beauty Ruskin explains in *Modern Painters*.

This seeming transparency is disturbed throughout the novel, however. As Tytler has noted, some of Hardy's novels—*A Pair of Blue Eyes* among them—also explore the potential for physiognomy to deceive.[13] The first instance of this occurs when Stephen Smith's face is misinterpreted by Parson Swancourt, Elfride's father, as being indicative of Stephen's "blue blood": "You may be only a family of professional men now… but it is as *plain as the nose in your face* that there's [the Fitzmaurice Smiths of Caxbury Manor] your origin! And, Mr. Smith, I congratulate you upon your blood; blue blood, sir" (20, emphasis mine). The Parson, though speaking perhaps euphemistically, gestures toward the role that Stephen's facial features play in portraying his supposedly noble origins. Later, the novel draws attention again to Stephen's misleading features, calling his mouth a "triumph of the class" because of its "cleanly-cut, exquisitely pursed up" form (25). Indeed, the mouth Stephen possessed was "in itself a young man's fortune, if properly exercised" (25). It begins to become clear that the Parson's assertion is

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[12] The Latin translates "and nothing more," while the "Row" Hardy refers to is the fashionable London promenade also known as Hyde Park; see "Vox et praeterea nihil," *Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 8 March 2011, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vox%20et%20praeterea%20nihil>. However, the term "row" was also used to denote the populace, or the lower classes at this time, as well; see "Row," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., 10 March 2011, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/168141>. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to address it in detail, the class implications of beauty are highlighted here, as well as with Stephen and Mrs. Swancourt's observance of the other people in Hyde Park.

[13] Tytler, 55.

utterly wrong, which Stephen explains to Elfride shortly following. He is, he tells her, only the son of the local Lord's master-mason and a dairy woman (74). It is Stephen's tremendous good looks that allow him to keep this fact concealed, and, even further, to facilitate Parson Swancourt's inaccurate attribution of "blue blood" to him. In the case of Stephen Smith, then, beauty is no longer transparent; on the contrary, it actively conceals his class standing.

To explain the root of Stephen's deceptive countenance, we must return to Elfride. The correspondence demonstrated above between her face and soul is short lived. After she and Stephen plan their elopement, the former fluidity becomes disturbed, and is marked by the development of an "inner life":

> [She spent much of her time] walking by herself among the shrubs and trees, indulging sometimes in sanguine anticipations; more, far more, frequently, in misgivings. All her flowers seemed dull of hue; her pets seemed to look wistfully into her eyes, as if they no longer stood in the same friendly relation to her as formerly… It was the first time that she had had an inner and private world apart from the visible one about her. (Hardy 105)

Of note in this passage is the distinction made in the final line: not only has Elfride developed an inner life, but it is one that is "apart" from and does not correspond with the "visible one" surrounding her. Her pets look "wistfully" into eyes that once revealed her soul, and now reveal nothing but their color. The synchronicity of this separation of Elfride's inner life from her visible surface and her agreement to elope with Stephen is no accident. On the contrary, it is this act of moral indiscretion that necessitates the division. The lack of fluidity between surface and depth, or face and soul in Elfride results in the potential for her face to deceive in a manner similar to that we saw with Stephen.

Elfride and Stephen share a discrepancy between their surface and depth, causing their beauty to lack transparency. This is reemphasized by a scene that takes place in Hyde Park, in which Mrs. Swancourt, Elfride's step-mother, tells her young charge that she has "an extraordinary power in reading the features of our fellow creatures" (138). But rather than directly reading the beautiful faces that surround them in Hyde Park for their moral features, as Ruskin's theory suggests she should, Mrs. Swancourt instead draws attention to the artificiality of their beauty. No longer is beauty true to nature; no longer does it reflect the soul:

> I always am a listener in such places as these – not to the narratives told by my neighbours' tongues, but by their faces – the advantage of which is, that whether I am in Row, Boulevard, Rialto, or Prado, they all speak the same language… I have learnt the language of… artificiality; and the fibbing of eyes, the contempt of nose tips, the indignation of back hair. (138, 140)

What suddenly becomes clear through this scene is the unreliable nature of beauty. The people around Mrs. Swancourt and Elfride are all beautiful—Elfride, in fact, "could not but admire… her fellow countrywomen"—but this beauty is not a reflection of their beautiful souls or their beautiful minds, as with Knight. The eyes, the most reliable of features for Ruskin and the organs through which "virtue of soul" is expressed, now fib and mislead. Only Mrs. Swancourt, with years of practice, is able to identify this discrepancy, a point to which we will return shortly.

We can use the scene in Hyde Park as a means to explain Knight's transparency. While it is clear that the novel disrupts Ruskin's notion of beauty's transparency, it is at first unclear why this is not the case for Knight, whose countenance continues to reveal his virtue and the sharpness of his mind. This can, however, be explained by two attributes unique to Knight: he is of high moral character, and in stark contrast to Elfride and Stephen, he does not display Typical

Beauty. Elfride's beauty, on the other hand, is made obvious, reflecting perfectly the characteristics Ruskin cites as Typical Beauty. For example, Elfride is described as "the combination of very interesting particulars, whose rarity, however, lay in the combination itself rather than in the individual elements combined" (7). This calls to mind the aspect of Unity and the concept of the beautiful, perfect whole: the combination of imperfect elements unite to render her face rare in its beauty. Elfride's beauty is not limited to Unity, but instead reflects a range of the aspects Ruskin discusses:

> The profile is seen of young woman in a pale gray silk dress with trimmings of swan's-down, and opening up from a point in front, like a waistcoat without a shirt; the cool color contrasting admirably with the warm bloom of her neck and face. The furthermost candle on the piano comes immediately in line with her head, and half invisible itself, forms the accidentally frizzled hair into a nebulous haze of light, surrounding her crown like an aureola. Her hands are in their place on the keys, her lips parted, and trilling forth, in a tender *diminuendo,* the closing words of a sad apostrophe. (Hardy 22)

Most striking in this passage are the colors that reflect Ruskin's call for moderation. Elfride's dress is of "pale gray silk," a "cool color" that "contrasts admirably" with the "warm bloom" of her face and neck. The language describing these colors, such as "pale," "warm," and "cool" indicate states that are moderate. We do not see language like "bright," "cold," or "hot" in order to describe the color palette that characterizes Elfride in this scene. This moderation is also seen in terms of line and shape. For instance, the construction of her dress, which opens "from a point in front, like a waistcoat" implies a gradual widening, rather than a harsh contrast in line or change in shape. Even the description of the light, which "forms the accidentally frizzled hair [on her head] into a nebulous haze," and re-emphasizes moderation, as language like "haze" and

"nebulous" implies a blurring or a gradual contrast between light and dark. Both words indicate a vagueness of form—that is, a lack of definite lines that could be cause for sharp contrasts. Additionally, Elfride's movement is restrained: her lips only "part," and her hands are not shown to be moving rapidly—rather they "are in their place on the keys." Lastly, Elfride's singing, described as "trilling," indicates a timid noise, often compared to the singing of birds. The song she sings, the diminuendo, is also indicative of moderation: it is a type of song characterized by a gradual decrease in volume.[14] The entire passage calls attention to Elfride's beauty, which is characterized specifically by the aspect of Typical Beauty Ruskin calls the most basic.

Yet, Elfride is not the only character embodying Typical Beauty in Hardy's novel. The description of Stephen by the novel is strikingly similar to Elfride, and he exhibits some of the same aspects of Typical Beauty. Indeed, the novel draws explicit attention to such a similarity:

> [Stephen's] complexion was as fine as Elfride's own; the pink of his cheeks as delicate. His mouth as perfect as Cupid's bow in form, and as cherry-red in colour as hers. Bright curly hair; bright sparkling blue-gray eyes; a boy's blush and manner; neither whisker nor moustache, unless a little light-brown fur on his upper lip deserved the latter title. (16)

Like the pale grey of Elfride's dress, moderation characterizes the colors in this description, as well. Stephen's cheeks are of a "delicate" pink, and he looks out from "blue-grey eyes." His moustache, of "light-brown" is hardly a moustache at all. His lips, "as perfect as Cupid's bow" reflect the necessary symmetry and proportion, in the form of balanced, curved lines, which reappear with his "curly hair." The linguistic association between perfection and beauty in relation to Stephen's lips ("as perfect as Cupid's bow") echoes Ruskin's definition of unity, as

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[14] "Diminuendo," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed, 10 March 2011 <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/52913>.

well.[15] This mouth sits above a "round chin [whose] upper part turned inward [and] continued its perfect and full curve, seeming to press in to a point the bottom of his nether lip at their place of junction" (25). We see the novel's emphasis on the perfection, roundness, and curve of Stephen's mouth, an emphasis that corresponds nicely to *Modern Painters*: "no form can be beautiful which is not composed of curves" (Ruskin 59). It is clear, then, that Stephen and Elfride embody a number of characteristics Ruskin associates with Typical Beauty. Yet, this beauty is not highlighted in its association with other objects or characters of beauty, but its absence.

Stephen and Elfride's abundant beauty is in stark contrast with Knight's lack thereof. The novel draws attention to this contrast as Stephen, Elfride, and Knight meet in the Luxellian mausoleum:

> Physically not so handsome as either the youthful architect or the vicar's daughter, the thoroughness and integrity of Knight illuminated his features with a dignity not even incipient in the other two… if honesty is a virtue in itself, Elfride, having none of it now, seemed, being for being, scarcely good enough for Knight. Stephen, though deceptive for no unworthy purpose, was deceptive after all; and whatever good results grace such strategy if it succeed, it seldom draws admiration, especially when it fails. (Hardy 262)

Here, Knight's lack of physical attractiveness is most evident; compared to Elfride and Stephen, he is far less handsome. However, Knight's features are "illuminated… with a dignity" the others lack. Yet, Knight's transparency is not because of his morality, though this is what ultimately sets him apart from either Elfride or Stephen. Rather, it is Knight's lack of beauty that renders him transparent. It is worth keeping this contrast in mind when looking at the images from

[15] It is worth noting that Stephen's beauty is feminized. And while beyond the scope of this chapter, I discuss the role of gender in relation to beauty in the following chapter in greater detail.

Tinsley's Magazine: Elfride's face is often shown in full, whereas Stephen's and Knight's faces are only once shown in full. Yet, Stephen's face can be often discerned by a side-view. Knight's face, on the other hand, tends to remain hidden, often behind facial hair. This tendency is reflected in the text with the first description of Knight: "A man of thirty… with dark brown hair, curly beard, and crisp moustache: the latter running into the beard on each side of the mouth and, as usual, hiding the real expression of that organ under a chronic aspect of impassivity" (128). Both the images and the text seem to hide Knight's face from viewers and readers.

Figure 2 James Abbott Pasquier, *Elfride's Freak on Endelstow Tower*, illustration, *Tinsley's Magazine*, (January 1873), p. 164.

ON THE CLIFFS.

Figure 3 James Abbott Pasquier, *On the Cliffs*, illustration, *Tinsley's Magazine* (October 1872), p. 60.

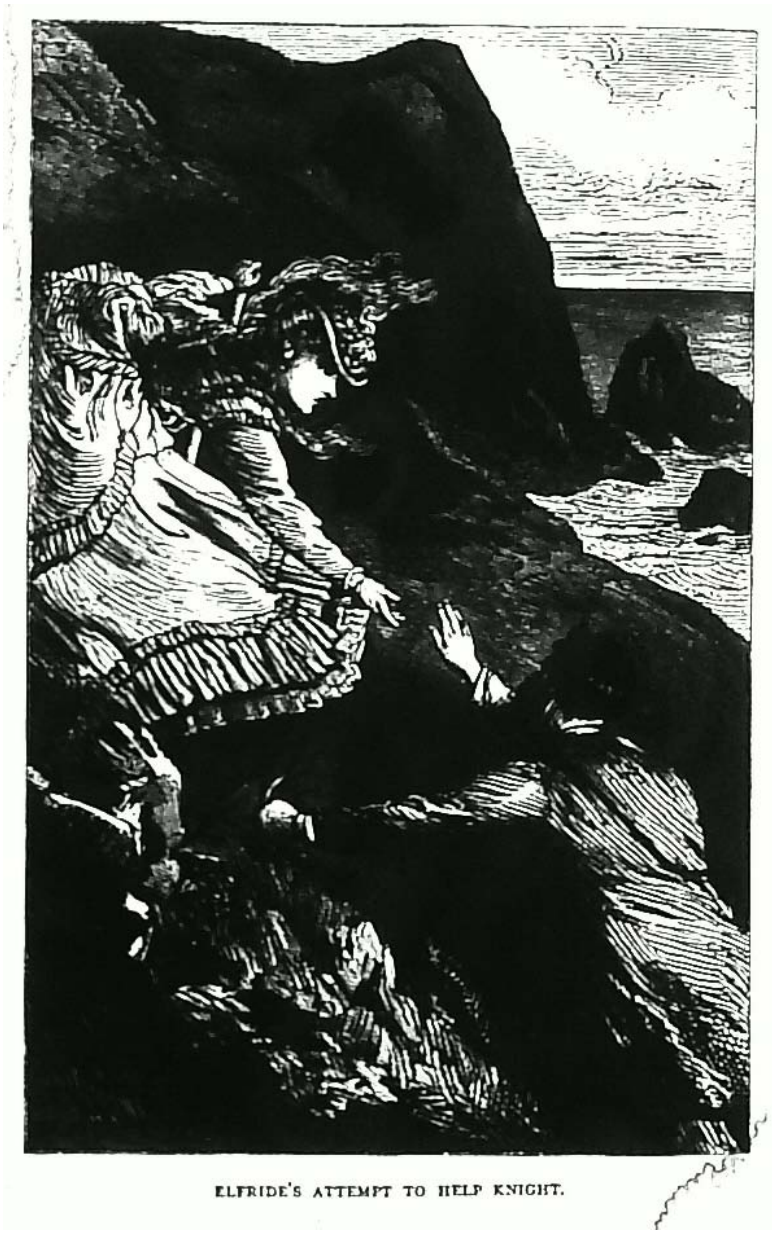

Figure 4 James Abbott Pasquier, *Elfride's Attempt to Help Knight*, illustration, *Tinsley's Magazine* (February 1873), p. 208.

Figure 5 James Abbott Pasquier, *The Vicar is Indignant*, illustration, *Tinsley's Magazine*, (November 1872), p. 82.

Figure 6 James Abbott Pasquier, *Knight Exacts Explanations*, illustration, *Tinsley's Magazine* (June 1873), p. 316.

Questioning Ruskin's Prescriptivism

As the novel disrupts the notion that beauty is transparent, it simultaneously calls into question the perceptual binary set up by Ruskin: the "aesthetic" and "theoretic," or sensual and moral, respectively. Knight is transparent, his virtue of soul and mind are reflected on his face, and his Vital Beauty can easily be determined, highlighted, and accounted for. Therefore, the theoretic perception of Vital Beauty, it seems, remains possible. Contrarily, because Stephen and Elfride exhibit Typical Beauty, or material loveliness only, one must read their soul through their face in such a way that it passes through the realm of the physical. It is this process of filtering necessary in the physiognomic reading of Stephen and Elfride that disrupts and questions the distinction Ruskin makes at the start of his discussion of beauty in *Modern Painters.* Using Elfride, the novel suggests the division between these two is not as stark as Ruskin's work implies. Rather, as the moral is filtered through the physical, this distinction is blurred.

The novel's suggestion of beauty's unreliability and its hesitancy to endorse such a strict distinction between aesthetic and theoretic perception converges in Knight's experience as Elfride's second suitor. *A Pair of Blue Eyes* at first attempts to position Knight as one who sees Elfride's beauty theoretically: compared to Stephen who "fell in love with Elfride by looking at her," Knight fell in love with her "by ceasing to do so" (188). Indeed, "Knight loved philosophically rather than with romance" (189). Stephen's love is characterized as romantic, even sensual, as he falls in love with Elfride for the way she looks. Knight, contrarily, loves "philosophically," intellectually; he does not fall in love with her body, but he falls "in love with her soul" (189). It would appear that the novel adopts the distinction put forth by Ruskin: Stephen looks at Elfride aesthetically, seeing her physical form and finding it pleasing, whereas Knight looks at Elfride theoretically, supposedly allowing him to see her soul.

However, this clear distinction between Stephen and Knight's methods of perceiving Elfride becomes muddied when considering the fact that Knight's only method of looking at Elfride's soul is his constant observation of her physical form. For instance, the novel explains that he "could not help looking at her" as the sun set behind her at Endelstow (161). During another encounter, Elfride herself attempts to "divert his thoughts from her body" (174). Knight's observations adopt the physiognomic method previously established by the novel, and thus, "Knight argued from Elfride's unwontedness of manner, which was matter of fact, to an unwontedness in love, which was matter of inference only" (190). Elfride's visible features and characteristics lead Knight to believe she is pure. For him, Elfride's beautiful face indicates the presence of a beautiful soul: "Elfride, there is one thing I do love to see in a woman – that is, a soul truthful and clear as heaven's light. I could put up with anything if I had that – forgive nothing if I had it not. Elfride, you have such a soul, if ever woman had" (270).

Knight must perceive Elfride aesthetically in order to perceive her theoretically; Elfride's moral and intellectual depth must filter through beautiful surface. This style of perception is further reflected in the illustration referenced previously. In Figures 2 and 7, Elfride's expression invites viewer speculation as to her thoughts, character, and moral nature. The images ask the reader-viewer to perform a process of perceiving Elfride eerily similar to the one the novel attributes to Knight, one that is able to disturb Ruskin's categories of aesthetic and theoretic. What results is the novel's suggestion that it is possible to reach a compromise between the mutually exclusive categories that Ruskin offers.

Figure 7 James Abbott Pasquier, *Elfride's Visit to the Widow's Cottage*, illustration, *Tinsley's Magazine* (May 1873), p. 302.

A Pair of Blue Eyes begins by offering a notion of the face as a reliable index of moral character, but revises this for the beautiful face, positing it as unreliable. At the same time, the novel avoids altogether dismissing beauty as negative or immoral. Elfride and Stephen *seem* to be what they are not, and the novel carries this instability, this uncertainty toward its close. It appears that Elfride, the beautiful girl, leaves a trail of destruction in her wake because her beauty concealed her moral character from others. Yet the novel refuses to explicitly endorse this judgment. For example, after receiving the damning note from the Widow Jethway detailing her own perception of Elfride's attempted elopement with Stephen, Knight sees Elfride in her window, "looking at her figure in the cheval-glass. She regarded herself long and attentively in front; turned, flung back her head, and observed her reflection over her shoulder" (331). While it would appear that he has caught Elfride in a moment of vanity, the novel challenges the certainty of this assessment: "Nobody can predicate as to her object or fancy; she may have done the deed in the very abstraction of deep sadness. She may have been moaning from the bottom of her heart, 'How unhappy am I!' But the *impression* produced on Knight was not a good one" (331, my emphasis). The novel draws explicit attention to the idea of impression and perception regarding Elfride's moral state—the "truth" of her motivation is utterly unknown, and the novel does not venture to speculate as to what it may be. This skepticism—if not distrust—of the perceptual pushes against Ruskin's prescriptivism regarding the perception of beauty. While Ruskin offers a theoretic perception of beauty that rejects the sensual while also emphasizing, at the close of volume two of *Modern Painters*, truth to nature as an imperative for beauty to exist, Hardy's novel questions what "truth to nature" means for Elfride, and for humanity more broadly.[16] Ruskin enters aesthetic debate promoting an artist's, specifically Turner's, truth to

[16] Ruskin speaks of "truth to nature" more specifically in his explicit defense of J.M.W. Turner

nature, and beauty's allegiance to God, but Hardy attempts to address the more nebulous world of man, asking instead, "what is human nature, and how does one remain true to this?"

The question of "truth to nature" is explored near the end of the novel. Knight demands the truth from Elfride before he leaves her for the last time—"Perfect truth is too much to expect, but ordinary truth I *will have*, or nothing at all"—but perhaps the truth Knight seeks, the truth of her nature, is indeterminate and therefore unattainable (333, original emphasis). This sense of indeterminacy also characterizes Knight's final judgment upon Elfride: "She is beyond our love, and let her be beyond our reproach. Since we don't know half the reasons that made her do as she did, Stephen, how can we say, even now, that she was not pure and true in heart?" (376). In this, it seems that Knight and Stephen have learned the lesson of the novel: that to seem is not necessarily to be. In the same way that Elfride's beauty hid her moral missteps, the appearance of those missteps may just as well conceal the truth and purity of her heart. And yet, it is important to note that it only *seems* as if Knight and Stephen have learned this lesson. The impression we are left with in the final scene does bode well for the two men; they recognize their incapability of judging Elfride as, upon seeing her coffin and her "bereaved husband," Lord Luxellian, they "feel themselves to be intruders" and admit "'We have no right to be there. Another stands before us—nearer to her than we!'"(Hardy 380). Recognizing their proximity to Elfride causes them also to realize their inability to accurately assess her morality. The novel's encouragement of our speculations as to the result of its lesson for Knight and Stephen mirrors the kind of speculation enacted by the two in relation to Elfride that the novel stymies with her death. Thus, the novel seemingly recognizes the inevitability of impression and perception, while also cautioning against taking those impressions for truth, as the truth will always lie just outside and

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in the first volume of *Modern Painters*. For more on this, see: Elizabeth K. Helsinger, *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 92, 169, 198.

beyond what one is able to perceive, just as the truth of Knight and Stephen, and even Elfride, lies beyond the pages of the text.

The work of Hardy's novel in raising questions about the reliability of beauty to convey moral meaning and its skepticism regarding Ruskin's prescriptivism in relation to perceptions of beauty sets the stage for the chapters of this thesis that follow. Both novels take a skeptical stance in relation to beauty's ability to carry meaning; Ouida undermines the connection Matthew Arnold establishes between truth and beauty, and George Meredith questions whether beauty is in fact the best indicator of superiority, as Darwin's *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* suggests.

II.
Under Two Flags: Beauty, Truth, and Gender

He wondered almost which he himself was—an English peer on whom the title of his line had fallen, or a Corporal of Chausseurs who must take his chief's insults as patiently as a cur takes the blows of his master; that he was both seemed to him. – Ouida, Under Two Flags

I argued in the previous chapter that *A Pair of Blue Eyes* questioned the reliability of beauty to convey moral character, a notion supported both by Ruskin and the nineteenth-century science of physiognomy. In so doing, the novel, I suggested, is able to disrupt the distinction Ruskin makes between aesthetic and theoretic perception. In this chapter, I will again be looking at whether beauty has the potential to reveal non-visible concepts, but rather than morality, the focus will be on truth. The novel in question, Ouida's *Under Two Flags* (1867), like *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, asks the question: what can beauty mean? However, where Hardy's novel is interested in whether beauty can reveal moral character, Ouida's novel explores notions of truth in relation to beauty by unsettling the masculine-feminine gender binary.

"Ouida" was the pen name of nineteenth century novelist Marie Louise de la Ramée, whose career spanned nearly forty years. A prolific writer, she published twenty-four novels, two volumes of essays, and a number of short stories and articles, and held an audience that covered a wide variety of people: men and women, youths and adults, upper- and lower-class readers, "canonical novelists and European statesmen."[1] As Natalie Schroeder and Shari Hodges Holt have noted, criticism regarding Ouida's novels, and particularly *Under Two Flags*—her best-selling novel—is relatively scarce. They do note, however, that there is a small but growing body of critical work that examines her novels' interest in Victorian social and gender norms. I will

[1] Background information on Ouida was collected from the following: Natalie Schroeder and Shari Hodges Holt, *Ouida the Phenomenon: Evolving Social, Political, and Gender Concerns in Her Fiction* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008) Eileen Bigland, *Ouida: The Passionate Victorian* (London: Jarrolds Publishers, Ltd., 1950), Monica Stirling. *The Fine and the Wicked: the Life and Times of Ouida* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1957).

consider the ways in which this interest in social and gender norms bled into her novels' considerations of beauty, its meaning, and purpose.

While some criticism envisions Ouida's playfulness in regards to gender categories as a result of her personal life and interactions with male literati and lovers, I hope to reframe this playfulness as a vehicle through which Ouida is able to explore not only social questions, but aesthetic ones.[2] In this chapter, we will explore *Under Two Flags* as a text that blurs the lines between gender categories often seen as fixed as a method of challenging assumptions that beauty reveals truth. While aesthetic theorists and thinkers contemporary to Ouida, such as John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, rested secure in the truthfulness of beauty, this text directly challenges that notion through characters whose gender identity is fluid. We can best bring to light the concern with the truthfulness of beauty by examining *Under Two Flags* in conjunction with Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), a work contemporary to Ouida's novel that is concerned with the relation between the social landscape and the role of aesthetic experience in that landscape. I would like to contend that Ouida and Arnold's arguments are contiguous: both explore the relationship between beauty and truth. But while their method is similar, they utilize a different set of terms. Arnold uses the binary of Hellenism and Hebraism in order to facilitate his argument for beauty's ability to reveal truth, whereas Ouida's novel uses existing gender categories to argue the opposite: beauty cannot reveal truth. This difference is most apparent in Arnold's insistence that beauty, located in an object, is experienced intellectually and

[2] Natalie Schroeder and Shari Hodges Holt, in the introduction to *Ouida the Phenomenon: Evolving Social, Political, and Gender concerns in Her Fiction*, state: "The cultural concerns of Ouida's fiction, from her preoccupations with commodification and spectacle in her society to her explorations of Victorian gender constructions, are founded in her personal life, particularly her complicated interactions with embodiments of patriarchy—her father, the artistic/literary establishment, and her male friends and lovers" (14).

understood objectively—that is, we are able to "see the object as in itself it really is."[3] *Under Two Flags,* on the other hand, repositions beauty into the bodies of its characters in order to highlight the inconsistencies between action and appearance that curtail the possibility of seeing these characters "as they really are." Doing so results in Bertie Cecil and Cigarette, two of the novel's main characters, inhabiting a gender duality that renders the perception of truth impossible. What the side-by-side examination of *Under Two Flags* and *Culture and Anarchy* can offer is a widened concept of the conversation in Victorian Britain regarding aesthetics, specifically about the nature of beauty as it relates to truth and physicality. Ouida's novel stands as a representation of a vibrant, alternate conception of the beautiful in the discourse of aesthetics that chronologically precedes the Aesthetic Movement with temporal boundaries traditionally defined as the 1870s through the 1890s. Before going any further, let us turn to Arnold's work in *Culture and Anarchy* and outline his theory of beauty before applying it to *Under Two Flags*.

Arnold's Hierarchical Antithesis: Hellenism and Hebraism in *Culture and Anarchy*

The essays that later became *Culture and Anarchy* were first published in *Cornhill Magazine* in 1867 and 1868, beginning the same year that Ouida published *Under Two Flags*. Arnold uses "Hellenism" and "Hebraism" to discuss the binary he sees at work during this period in Britain, the religious half (Hebraism) of which he felt was pulling human behavior and perception toward religious dogma. His work advocates for "culture," or "the study and pursuit of perfection" whose main characteristics are "beauty and intelligence, or, in other words,

[3] Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" in *Matthew Arnold's Essays in Criticism First Series*, ed. Sister Thomas Marion Hoctor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 8. This is the main idea behind "Hellenism," which Arnold elaborates on in *Culture and Anarchy*.

sweetness and light."[4] Beauty and intelligence are the means through which mankind is able to attain "culture," which leads to perfection.[5]

Arnold sees perfection as the "harmonious expansion of *all* the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature," and in order to explore this, he divides human nature into two sides: Hellenism and Hebraism (96). These categories act as the "two points of influence" between which the world moves (96). While the purpose of Hellenism and Hebraism is the same, the two reach the goal of man's perfection through very different routes (96-7). With a Hellenistic view of the world, it is beauty that reveals truth, and thus facilitates the perfection of man, as opposed to the strict laws of conduct offered by Hebraism. Hellenism is rooted in classical Greek ideas, as Arnold explains:

> Sweetness and light evidently have to do with the bent or side in humanity which we call Hellenic. Greek intelligence has obviously for its essence the instinct for what Plato calls the true, firm, intelligible law of things; the love of light, of seeing things as they are… Greek art, again, Greek beauty, have their root in the same impulse to see things as they really are, inasmuch as Greek art and beauty rest on fidelity to nature,—the best nature,—and on a delicate discrimination of what this best nature is. (108-109)

Greek beauty and art are informed by their intelligence or "light," whose main impulse is the identification of truth. Truth becomes, through this explication, defined as the result of "seeing

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[4] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy,* ed. Jane Garnett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 53. Henceforth cited in the text.

[5] Arnold's use of perfection is deeply rooted in 18th century German aesthetic philosophy, which understood perfection as the ideal form of truth. Christian Wolff, a German philosopher influenced by Gottfreid Wilhelm Liebniz, identified order with truth. Perfection is simply the ideal ordering of things, resulting therefore in truth. See: "18th Century German Aesthetics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 16 Jan. 2007, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-18th-german/.

things as they really are."[6] Additionally, the "fidelity to nature" that is inherent in seeing things as they "really are" is associated with "the best nature" or perfection. One can see that the notion of beauty for Arnold is intellectual, even rational, which allows him to link it with the perception of truth, and even perfection. It is the connection of these three concepts this section will attempt to decipher.

Arnold characterized Hellenism as a "spontaneity of consciousness" that allows us to identify "sweetness and light," which act as two methods through which truth is revealed (97). In doing so, he posits beauty and intelligence as capable of revealing truth, and this acts is the foothold of Hellenism. Hebraism, on the other hand, is characterized by a "strictness of conscience" that promotes "conduct and obedience" as the method of reaching man's perfection (97). The two categories are contrasted as "right thinking" and "right acting," respectively, and Arnold asserts that it is between these two worldviews that the society fluctuates (97). Yet, during the Victorian period in Britain, Arnold feels that the nation, broadly speaking, has a tendency to "regard in [itself], as the one thing needful, *strictness of conscience*, the staunch adherence to some fixed law of doing... instead of *spontaneity of consciousness*, which tends continually to enlarge our whole law of doing" (107). Arnold feels, however, that this "strictness of conscience" contributes to what he calls the "strange disease of modern life"; this "disease" is tantamount to the social transformations taking place under modernity and as a symptom of

[6] It is worth noting that Arnold uses a number of different terms to refer to roughly the same concept: objectivity. These include, for example, "seeing things as they really are" and "disinterestedness." While Arnold is understood by many critics as advocating for objectivity, Amanda Anderson has offered an alternative to this reading. She instead argues that Arnold attempts to reconcile objectivity and subjectivity. Additionally, she situates this reconciliation in relation to Pater who we will examine more closely in the following chapter; see: Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 116.

industrialization.[7] In response, he emphatically advocates for a return to the values of the Hellenistic period, which he describes as follows:

> To get rid of one's ignorance, to see things as they really are, and by seeing them as they are to see them in their beauty, is the simple and attractive ideal which Hellenism holds out before human nature; and from the simplicity and charm of this ideal, Hellenism, and human life in the hands of Hellenism, is invested with a kind of aerial ease, clearness, and radiancy; they are full of what we call sweetness and light. Difficulties are kept out of view, and the beauty and rationalness of the ideal have all our thoughts. (99)

In attempting to explain the benefits of Hellenism, Arnold establishes a three-point relational system consisting of truth, beauty, and perfection. It becomes difficult to track which gives rise to the other, or what the precise relationship between the three seems to be. But, in this passage specifically, Hellenism—"spontaneity of consciousness"—allows us to develop a rational mind capable of perceiving truth in beauty and, in turn, to reach perfection. This is particularly difficult to parse, as Arnold seems to conflate the terms "beauty," "perfection," and the notion of truth, which he denotes with the phrase "to see things as they really are." This conflation, particularly of beauty and truth, positions them in such a way that Arnold implicitly or explicitly, makes the argument that they are, in fact, the same.

While he offers Hellenism as the pursuit of truth and perfection by way of beauty, Arnold does not offer it as the only necessary element of human life. On the contrary, he speaks at length of the value of both Hellenism and Hebraism. In a lengthy explanation, he writes:

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[7] The phrase "strange disease of modern life" comes from a line near the end Arnold's 1853 poem, "The Scholar Gipsy." See: Matthew Arnold, "The Scholar Gipsy" in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold, 1849-1867,* ed. Arthur T. Quiller-Couch (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1924), 224.

> [Some say Hebraism has a] sufficiency co-extensive with all the wants of human nature. This might, no doubt, be so, if humanity were not the composite thing it is, if it had only, or in quite overpowering eminence, a moral side, and the group of instincts and power which we call moral. But it has besides, and in notable eminence, an intellectual side, and the group of instincts and power which we call intellectual. No doubt, mankind makes in general its progress in a fashion which gives at one time full swing to one of these groups of instincts, at another time to the other… But sooner or later it becomes manifest that when the two sides of humanity proceed in this fashion of alternate preponderance, and not of mutual understanding and balance, the side which is uppermost does not really provide in any satisfactory manner for the needs of the side which is undermost, and a state of confusion is sooner or later the result… The true and smooth order of humanity's development is not reached either way. (107-8)

It is clear, through this passage, that both Hellenism and Hebraism are necessary to reach human perfection. One does not provide for the needs of the other: Hellenism cannot satisfy the moral side, and Hebraism cannot satisfy the intellectual side. Assuming that one or the other does results in a "state of confusion," or a one-sided understanding that cannot lead to the perfection of man. Therefore, by advocating for *both* Hellenism and Hebraism, Arnold attempts to break apart the binary opposition between the two categories. And yet, Arnold's own language betrays him. He elevates the concerns of Hellenism over those of Hebraism when he asserts the "notable eminence" of the intellectual side of man. This is an example of what Richard Dellamora has cited as Arnold's reliance on "hierarchical antitheses."[8] Dellamora explains that contrary to Hegelian dialectics, which offers two terms, thesis and antithesis, that ultimately converge to

[8] Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 102. Henceforth cited in the text.

form a third term, the synthesis, Arnold's conceptual structure includes the third term in one of the first two (102). This results in an elevation of one of the original terms, rather than the creation of a new term.[9] We can see this with the binary of Hellenism and Hebraism, as Arnold sets the two at odds in the political, social, and religious context of Victorian Britain. While he stresses the importance of having both, and explains that the desirable approach would be to create a synthesis of the two, he implicitly privileges Hellenism as he cites the "notable eminence" of man's intellectual side.

By stressing the "eminence" of man's "intellectual side" Arnold also strips beauty—the "sweetness" of Hellenism—of its location in the physical world. In addition to highlighting his argumentative shortcomings, Dellamora has also argued that some of Arnold's oversights, particularly of erotic elements, are a "constructed ignorance": "When at the end of the 1864 essay ["The Function of Criticism at the Present Time"] he [Arnold] deflects the Greek ideal away from its acknowledged focus on male-male desire, the turn is not fortuitous or inadvertent but motivated" (104). Arnold, according to Dellamora, purposely ignores the implications of male-male desire in the Greek ideal. In order to accomplish this, Arnold leaves "intact the basic antithesis between spirit and flesh… he sets the body and its claims asunder from those of what he later refers to as 'the heart and imagination' and reason" (Dellamora 105, quoting Arnold). That is, Arnold, in much of his work, has a habit of discounting, or at the very least subsuming the physical to the intellectual or the spiritual, as he does in *Culture and Anarchy* in relation to his concept of Hellenism. It is this tendency that "has biased the entire subsequent discussion in an erotophobic direction," resulting in the total absence of the physical from Arnold's analysis of Hellenism and Hebraism, and of beauty more generally (Dellamora 105).

[9] This is not to say all of Arnold's work relies on the hierarchical antithesis structure, as he often uses the Hegelian dialectic, as well.

Like *Culture and Anarchy*, *Under Two Flags* relies on a binary opposition in order to facilitate its exploration of beauty's connection to truth, but reaches a very different conclusion. In the first place, while Arnold argues that beauty reveals truth by allowing us to see the object "as it really is," *Under Two Flags* pushes against this assumption by positioning beauty in the bodies of Bertie Cecil and Cigarette. Their beauty subsequently does not reveal truth because, through their appearance and behavior, they inhabit both sides of the masculine-feminine gender binary the novel employs. Through this duality, their beauty is rendered incapable of conveying a single "truth" in regards to their gender identity. In the second place, by repositioning beauty into physical bodies, *Under Two Flags* reinstates the importance of the physical, as opposed to solely the intellectual, and so beauty is no longer simply an intellectual exercise. And in the third place, because Bertie and Cigarette inhabit male and female bodies while projecting both masculine and feminine beauty, the discussion of beauty shifts to a more androgynous ideal. This represents a marked departure from the feminine ideal we saw in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and the masculine ideal we will see in *The Egoist*. It is true that despite the fact that Arnold's binary and the gender binary used in the novel do similar work, they may at first appear unrelated. Arnold is dealing with a binary of a purely ideological variety, whereas the binary in Ouida's novel corresponds to both the ideological and physical world. But, as I will explain, femininity and Hellenism are actually deeply intertwined when examined from an historical perspective.

The Issue of Effeminacy: Defending the Polis and Defending Culture

Linda Dowling, in *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, examines the undercurrents and historical background that shaped, in part, what she calls the counterdiscourse of Hellenism at Oxford during the Victorian period. She explains that over the last two hundred

years, the original meaning of "effeminacy" as a term from "the classical republican vocabulary of civic alarm" has been lost.[10] She stresses the importance of drawing a distinction between this term in its historical sense and more modern gender categories, as "effeminacy" in this sense does not refer to those modern categories, but rather hearkens back "to a vanished archaic past in which the survival of a community was sustained in an almost metaphysical as well as wholly practical sense by the valor of its citizen soldiers" (Dowling 6). Thus, concerns about effeminacy historically had little to do with gender categories of masculine and feminine as they are physically embodied, but with social shortcomings on the part of "citizen soldiers"—an incapability of "discharging the martial obligation to the polis" (8). Dowling elaborates:

> The *effeminatus* in classical republican theory is thus always a composite or protean figure, the empty or negative symbol at once of civic enfeeblement and of the monstrous self-absorption that becomes visible in a society at just the moment at which… private interest has begun to prevail against those things that concern the public welfare… [Effeminacy] has not to do with sexual but civic incapacity, the dissolution of social categories which occurs when community itself has begun to dissolve into an aimless and self-regarding egoism. (8-9, original emphasis)

Effeminacy is therefore grounded as a social, rather than sexual concept. It was meant to indicate civic incapability in the form of "monstrous self-absorption" and "self-regarding egoism." These endanger not only the classical polis, but nineteenth-century society as it is shaped by industrialization and modernity and gives rise to capitalism—an economic system that transfers public welfare into the hands of private interest. While effeminacy as a social issue is

[10] Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 5. Dowling is discussing work by contemporary critic John Pocock (*Machiavellian Moment*) in which he examines the work of John Brown, *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* circa 1757. Henceforth cited in the text.

highlighted, elements of sexuality are not fully discarded in Dowling's definition of effeminacy. Instead, she asserts that eighteenth-century discourse, "operating all the while within the classical republican category of 'effeminacy' in its symbolic warrior ideal, had nonetheless been helping to produce 'homosexuality' in the twentieth-century sense as an unintended effect" (11). For example, eighteenth-century literature embodied effeminacy in the character of the "fop," and in doing so, "[supplied] a social depth" to previously unnoticed and unspoken men (11-12). What was once only referent to a man incapable of performing protective social duties came to represent men whose behavior was feminine, or whose desires were for other men. Therefore, in eighteenth-century discourse, civic and sexual fears of effeminacy become intimately intertwined. During the period of Victorian Hellenism a century later, a shift occurs in which "the older civic order within which 'effeminate' men were deemed incapable of martial citizenship [had]… come to seem… trite and outmoded" as a new concept of both civilization and the type of warfare in which the citizen soldier engaged began to form. This new warfare was not that of hand-to-hand, physical combat, but rather occurred on "a higher plane of ideas" (30-31). The transformation of civilization to culture, and the transfer of warfare from the physical battlefield to that of the mind also translated a "lingering Victorian dread of 'effeminacy' [into a] newer and more urgent fear of cultural stagnation," one I would suggest transpires with full force in *Culture and Anarchy* (31).[11]

Through Dowling's work we are able to situate Hellenism in its connection to effeminacy as a social *and* sexual concept. The effeminacy that threatens civilization in the eighteenth century is reframed positively as "Hellenism," the tool with which one can enter the war of ideas,

[11] Dowling additionally mentions that, through the work of such liberals as Matthew Arnold, who "explicitly embraced [Hellenism] as the solution to the problems raised by industrial modernity," Hellenism is imparted with "a public and civic orientation to a [concept] that might otherwise seem to be entirely private and aesthetic" (62).

the "new chivalry" (30). As such, this term begins to carry both civic and sexual meaning (30). Through Dowling's work, we gain a better understanding of the ways in which Hellenism and effeminacy are intimately intertwined, and in turning to Ouida's novel, it is clear that it builds upon these connections as it also connects masculinity to Hebraism by virtue of Bertie "Beauty" Cecil's transformation from a "monstrously self-absorbed," effeminate dandy to a literal and metaphorical citizen soldier. In *Under Two Flags*, Hebraism comes to represent the world of the soldier, representing the abilities "effeminate" men, in the classical sense, lacked.[12] While Arnold ultimately privileges Hellenism, as a method of facilitating his goal of intellectualizing beauty and, in turn, arguing that it can reveal truth, *Under Two Flags* dismantles the masculine/feminine binary as a means to actively contest Arnold's claims. In breaking down the binary opposition of masculine and feminine, the novel is able to reject Arnold's hierarchical antithesis, and, in doing so, contest the notion of beauty as intellectual, a concept that reveals truth.

Bertie Cecil and British Effeminacy

We are first introduced to Bertie "Beauty" Cecil as he sits in his dressing room in Britain. The novel avoids revealing Bertie's physical person at first, and thus resorts to imagining him through his possessions. This is accomplished through a relaying of a list of objects in his decadent dressing room, which include:

[12] It is worth noting that although Arnold discusses Hebraism in terms of religion—particularly Puritanism—the armed forces in *Under Two Flags* function in a similar fashion. Just as Puritanism gave a set of principles by which to live or fashion one's behavior, the French forces in Algeria demanded a similar level of obedience from Bertie (as the military does generally). Also, religion is conspicuously absent from Ouida's novel, and so the military serves as a functional stand-in.

> Bohemian class and gold-stoppered bottles, and all the perfumes of Araby represent by Breidenbach and Rimmel. The dressing-case was of silver, with the name studded on the lid in turquoises; the brushes, boot-jacks, boot-trees, whip-stands, were of ivory and tortoiseshell; a couple of tiger-skins were on the hearth with a retriever and a blue greyhound in possession.[13]

Though his physical person yet remains to be described, a concept of the protagonist has begun to form. These items testify not only to Bertie's wealth and position, but carry information about his gender identity: elegant glass and sweet perfumes are juxtaposed with whip-stands and spoils of the hunt. His effeminate refinement and his masculine instincts are simultaneously present, but, at this point, only exist in a series of objects, rather than in the subject himself. Soon, however, the novel makes this necessary shift:

> [Bertie was] known generally in the Brigades as 'beauty'… [and he had] a face of as much delicacy and brilliancy as a woman's, handsome, thoro'bred, languid, nonchalant, with a certain latent recklessness under the impassive calm of habit, and a singular softness given to the large, dark hazel eyes by the unusual length of the lashes over them. His features were exceedingly fair, fair as the fairest girl's; his hair was of the softest silkiest, brightest chestnut; his mouth very beautifully shaped. (3)

In addition to being introduced in the feminine space of his dressing room, Bertie is characterized physically as exceedingly feminine. We have already seen his collection of perfumes, and now we are shown the details of his own beauty, which is as delicate and brilliant as a woman's—"fair as the fairest girl." His hair and eyes are also described as soft, long, and silky, all adjectives tending to describe feminine beauty. Bertie is not only beautiful but

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[13] Ouida, *Under Two Flags* (New York: Stein and Day, 1967), 1-2. Henceforth cited in the text.

"languid" and "nonchalant," rendering him passive. Yet, the text is sure to reassure us of the "latent recklessness" that lurks beneath. As the chapter continues, his "tall, lithe limbs" are referenced and his body is described as "light-built and full of grace as a deer" (4). At one point he pockets "a dainty, filmy handkerchief, all perfume, point, and embroidery, with the interlaced B.C. and the crest on the corner" (4-5). There is no mistaking him for a man's man: "he was very girlish in his face and his ways" (5).

It would, however, be a mistake not to admit that standards of Alpha male masculinity have shifted since the nineteenth century. The "gentleman" as a concept of the ideal male was both moral and social in nature, and is characterized by an "elevation of respectability and good form over talent, energy, and imagination… [inherent are] the values of the leisured elite."[14] Indeed, the gentleman in Victorian society is not only a matter of birth but of the proper leisurely and formal behavior—a behavior that lacks, most notably for our purposes, energy and imagination, but holds a certain sort of social snobbery and aloofness.[15] However, we can still measure Bertie's "manliness" by a standard that has not changed much, if at all: virility. Though he is lauded as one of the "best men" in his circle, "best" is meant

> in the sense of fashion, flirting, waltzing, and general social distinction; in no other sense, for the newest of debutantes knew well that 'Beauty,' though the most perfect of flirts, would never be 'serious,' and had nothing to be serious with, on which understanding he was allowed by the sex to have the run of their boudoirs and drawing-rooms, much as if he were a little lion-dog; they counted him quite 'safe;' he made love to the married

[14] Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel.* Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1981. 1.
[15] Ibid., 1-2.

> women, to be sure, but he was quite certain not to run away with the marriageable daughters. (11)

It is clear that Bertie's lack of "seriousness" can be explained by his lack of anything "to be serious with," a phrase that can be read literally or euphemistically. This absence of proper masculinity, of virility, makes his company "quite safe" for the virgin daughters and even for the married women. There is virtually no risk of Bertie laying claim to any of these women, and if we read just further into the passage, the possibility for Bertie's lack of procreative ability renders him almost neuter.

The fleeting moments of Bertie's masculinity at the start of the novel are compromised and complicated by shifting masculine standards during its course. For example, before one of the horse races in which Bertie competes, another man remarks, "If a man will drink champagnes and burgundies as you do, and spend his time after women, I should like to know how he's to be in hard-riding condition, unless he expects a miracle" (19). Here, what we typically think of as the realm of masculine behavior—drinking and pursuing sex—is reframed as decidedly *not* masculine because these are characterized by excess and a lack of self-control. Bertie fails to demonstrate foresight and discipline, and thus has not, in this man's eyes, prepared well for the exercise of his masculine virtues in the form of horse racing. Similarly, the danger he experiences in the first race as Forest King, his horse, leaps over a formidable wall and wins the race is undercut by the reactions of others. The novel suggests that "a woman who was in love with him [Bertie], might well have felt a heartsick fear at the sight… But as [one woman] said [, "It was terrible!"], she was smiling, radiant, full of easy calm" (39). This woman's unconcern only serves to underscore Bertie's perceived lack of masculinity, and in turn, virility, as he is not masculine enough to elicit the real love of a woman—only her "racing interest" (39).

The construction of Bertie's gender thus far rests primarily on his appearance and his possessions, though a shift begins to take place as more of his actions are revealed. While Arnold asserts that we should strive to "see the object as in itself it really is," *Under Two Flags* undermines this approach by shifting the focus from Bertie's possessions to his person, and resituates beauty in relation to his own body. The novel further undermines Arnold's approach by giving information about Bertie's behavior and drives that conflict with conclusions based on his appearance in order to disrupt the "truth" of his effeminacy. For example, we find that "in all the Service there was not a man who loved hunting better than Bertie. Though he was incorrigibly lazy, and inconceivably effeminate in every one of his habits… 'Beauty' never failed to head the first flight, and adored a hard day cross country" (61). Here Bertie performs masculine behaviors that call into question the validity of the conception of Bertie as feminine. This is spoken of in the abstract, as well:

> Far down, very far down, so far that nobody had ever seen it, nor himself ever suspected it, there was a lurking instinct in 'Beauty'… which, out of the languor and pleasure-loving temper of his unruffled life, had a vague, restless impulse towards the fiery perils and nervous excitement of a sterner and more stirring career. (91)

It is clear that the impulse of Bertie's masculinity, buried deep beneath his effeminate insouciance, is revealed at key moments—such as during the hunt—and lurks beneath the visible (objective) portion of Bertie's person. In fact, his masculinity "only comes to light when the match of danger is applied to the touchhole" (91). This is the first forthright indication of a duality, or a lack of an identifiable truth, in Bertie's nature, as his inner life and outer form conflict by being masculine and feminine, respectively. The duality that *Under Two Flags* affords Bertie is diametrically opposed to the concept that we are able to see him "as he really

is." What is not visible—namely, this "instinct"—cannot be interpreted, cannot be beautiful, cannot be intelligible: it is only in a world in which there is true danger that we are able to see Bertie's full range of gender, and in which the novel is able to reveal the duality of his nature. Whereas Arnold ultimately privileges Hellenism and therefore negates the possibility for duality, *Under Two Flags* actively constructs a duality by embodying beauty in a physical body that is gendered in both visual and behavioral ways.

We can relate the binary of *Under Two Flags* to the terms Arnold uses, as well. The Hellenic world of Britain is posited as feminine by Bertie's effeminate characteristics, while Hebraism, the world characterized by "right acting," is offered as the masculine alternative. In order to do more than hint at the possibility of duality in Bertie, the novel must shift from a feminine (Hellenistic) setting to a masculine (Hebraic) one. Therefore, to facilitate this shift, Bertie is accused of forging his friend, the Seraph's, name to a loan document, and therefore flees to Algeria, where he enlists in the ranks of occupying French forces. Life in the army is characterized by the masculine virtues Bertie lacks: obedience, self-control, and asceticism. Good soldiers live by these (masculine) principles. Life in Algeria allows Bertie's duality, which existed a priori his shift in location, to be brought to light. Yet, before we move on to discussing the masculine characteristics of Bertie in detail, it will be worthwhile to first examine the character that functions as his female double in Algeria: Cigarette.

Cigarette, the Girl Soldier: Gender Duality and the Female Body

Cigarette blurs the lines between masculine and feminine in a manner similar to Bertie, and in doing so acts as another androgynous character through which *Under Two Flags* is able to explore notions of beauty and truth. Cigarette is described as

> very pretty, audaciously pretty, though her skin was burned to a bright sunny brown, and her hair was cut short as a boy's, and her face had not one regular feature in it… [She had] dark, dancing, challenging eyes, with that arch, brilliant, kitten-like face… and those scarlet lips like a bud of camellia that were never so handsome as when cigarette was between them. (177)

As opposed to a notion of proper feminine beauty, Cigarette's hair is cut short and frames an irregular, asymmetrical face.[16] Though she is pretty, she is audaciously so, which implies the same recklessness that is dormant in Bertie, but is now rising to the surface. Also, like Bertie, the presence of this recklessness has specifically gendered implications, as recklessness is associated with masculinity. At the same time, she has dark eyes, scarlet lips, and a "kitten-like" face, which call forth classic images of feminine beauty. In a manner that recalls our introduction to Bertie, Cigarette's gender remains rather fluid, a feature that the novel capitalizes on as the description of Cigarette continues:

> She was insolent… intolerably coquettish… mischievous as a marmoset… would swear if need be like a Zouave… she could toss off her brandy or her vermout [sic] like a trooper, she would on occasion clinch her little brown hand and deal a blow that the recipient would not covet twice… she would dance the *cancan* at the Salle de Mars. (177-178)

Cigarette's behavior is both masculine and feminine bringing the duality only implied by her appearance to fruition. As was hinted at in the previous passage, for example through her "scarlet lips," her femininity often presents itself as sexuality: she is described as coquettish and she

[16] The ancient Greeks supposed that beauty was mathematically explainable and resulted from perfect symmetry. For more on this, see Tartarkiewicz. To call attention to Cigarette's irregular features, then, is to assert that she is not beautiful in the classically accepted (perhaps objective) sense.

dances the *cancan*. However, immediately following the description, the novel states: "with all that she was not wholly unsexed, with all that she had the delicious fragrance of youth, and had not left a certain feminine grace behind her, though she wore a vivandière's uniform, and had been born in a barrack, and meant to die in battle" (178). Cigarette is not "wholly unsexed," indicating a position of tension that is forever in between masculine and feminine, as she is not wholly feminine, either. This tension is confirmed and suggested in relation to Bertie, as well, when Cigarette complains, "'Unsexed? Pouf! If you [Bertie] have a woman's face, may I not have a man's soul? It is only fair exchange'" (207). In this quote, Cigarette asserts the possibility, if not even the desirability, of a dual nature. She simultaneously identifies Bertie's dual nature and calls attention to his hypocrisy in critiquing her. From this point forward, the novel seems to encourage the drawing of comparisons between Cigarette and Bertie

Cigarette's relation to her femininity is similar to Bertie's relation to masculinity. While Bertie's masculinity is characterized by an absence of virility, Cigarette's femininity is characterized by an abundance of sexuality; both exhibit gendered sexuality gone awry. For example, Cigarette has taken male lovers, and this renders her "fallen."[17] She does not realize her state as fallen, however, until she comes in contact with Bertie and she begins to notice a change in her feelings, even a sense of shame. After a particular interaction, we find she wishes, "with an impatient scorn for the wish, that she knew how to read, and had not her hair cut short like a boy's—a weakness the little vivandière had never been visited with before" (184). Femininity, the "proper" kind that feels shame for its sexuality, reasserts itself and is, not surprisingly, characterized as a weakness. Yet, while Bertie's femininity is not seen as a harmful lack of

[17] For more on the discourse of fallenness in Victorian literature, see: Amanda Anderson *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

masculinity, Cigarette's masculinity is only staving off the inevitable: it is only a matter of time before the "womanhood she had defied would assert itself," causing her to be "doomed in a few years' time to become the yellow, battered, foul-mouthed, vulture-eyed camp follower that premature old age would surely render the darling of the tricolor" (262-263). The lack of a "proper" femininity has dire aesthetic consequences for the female body, as Cigarette will, presumably, transform from the "audaciously pretty" girl to a "yellow, battered… vulture-eyed" old woman. Whereas Bertie must "earn" his masculinity in the army, Cigarette cannot outrun the "vulture-eyed" old woman that she will become. She must instead acquiesce to more "proper" feminine behavior. Femininity is thus a force to be reckoned with and will assert itself, whereas masculinity is a virtue that must be earned.[18]

Shifting Conditions: Revealing Duality with Movement

Whereas Cigarette's duality is always-already present in her current surroundings, Bertie must leave the bounds of Britain in order to exhibit his own. Geographic and situational alterations give the novel space to explore Bertie's duality outside of the cultural constraints of Britain. The shifts in environment or circumstances reveal and highlight, rather than change, existing characteristics in ways that seemed unlikely, if not impossible, in Britain. In Britain, Bertie was insouciant and passive, and thus overly feminine. His passive, careless attitude, from the moment he steps into the ranks of the chausseurs, is reframed as utter manliness: "Whoever he is, that man will eat fire[!]" says Vicomte de Chanrellon, one of the most powerful men in the

[18] This is not to say, however, that Cigarette is always portrayed in a negative light. In fact, we are even told, of Cigarette, "her own sex would have seen no good in her; but her comrades-at-arms could and did. Of a surety, she missed virtues that women prize; but not less of a surety, had she caught some that they miss" (Ouida 183). From this perspective, Cigarette's androgynous nature is a source of praise.

French forces in Algeria, after Bertie nonchalantly approaches him and requests a position as a soldier (170). The novel explains Bertie's change during his time in Algeria thusly:

> There had always been in him a reckless dare-devilry, which had slept under the serene effeminate insouciance of his careless temper and his pampered habits. It had full rein now, and made him, as the army affirmed, one of the most intrepid, victorious, and chivalrous *lascars* of its fiery ranks. Fate had flung him off his couch of down into the tempest of war… ruled ever by an iron code, requiring at every step self-negation, fortitude, submission, courage, patience, the self-control which should take the uttermost provocation from those in command without even a look of reprisal… And he was not found wanting in it. (237)

Bertie's carelessness that was, in England, interpreted as feminine is now a value of a good—if not the best—soldier in the ranks. His behavior is interpreted and reinterpreted, according to his environment and the challenges at hand, to be at the height of masculinity. Even his fellow soldiers note his extreme self-control: they "could tell he suffered under these [necessary submissions to unjust commanders] as they never suffered themselves, yet he bore them and did his duty with a self-control and patience they had never attained" (253). This observation reframes Bertie's calm nature as masculine self-control rather than feminine passivity. Bertie breaks his role as a submissive as he responds to his colonel with "words [that] were calm, cold, a little languid, and a little haughty" (231). Indeed "the manner of the old habit, the instinct of buried pride spoke in [these words,]" and this gestures toward Bertie's duality by being both dominant and languid, masculine and feminine (231).

It is only in Algeria that Bertie's inner masculinity, formerly only hinted at, can see the light of day: "in his old world [Bertie] would have lounged listlessly through fashionable

seasons, and in an atmosphere that encouraged his profound negligence of everything and his natural nil admirari listlessness, would have glided from refinement to effeminacy, and from lazy grace to blasé inertia" (239). This passage, taken in the light of Dowling's discussion of effeminacy, seems to allude, on one level, to the risk Bertie ran within the bounds of British society of becoming an *effeminatus* unable to defend the polis. However, because of his spatial shift, he is able to realize his duality, defending the nation-state and his own Hellenistic values. The circumstances in Algeria, while they have left him outwardly "much the same in character, they changed him vitally. They developed him into a magnificent soldier—too true a soldier not to make thoroughly his the service he had adopted" (239). Algeria acts as an environment in which the "recklessness" that hid beneath Bertie's calm and passive exterior is able to assert itself. The masculine elements of his nature, though they preceded his time in Algeria, found there space and opportunity to flourish. Bertie is always-already both feminine and masculine, but he must travel to Algeria to fully reveal his masculine nature within the bounds of the novel.

In fact, while Bertie is in Algeria, the novel is constantly calling attention to his fully revealed dual nature. This is evident early, as one of Bertie's officers complains, "'He'd [Bertie] obey without a word if you ordered him to walk up to a canon's mouth, and be blown from it; but he gives you such a d-----d languid *grand seigneur* [fine gentleman] glance as he listens that one would think he commanded the regiment'" (190). Bertie, while he is obedient, cannot completely leave behind the part of him that is the "fine gentleman," despite the fact that the two sides are seemingly-at-odds, explaining the officer's frustration. While not spoken of in forthrightly gendered terms, this can be understood through Dowling's connection between effeminacy and an inability to protect the polis as a citizen soldier. The effeminacy of the fine gentleman disturbs and disrupts Bertie's masculine obedience in carrying out order. This can be

seen again as Bertie is described as "a French soldier at heart and in habit, in almost all things, though the English gentleman was not dead in him under the harness of a Chausseur d'Afrique" (Ouida 287). Bertie is both the French soldier (masculine) and the English gentleman (feminine), two categories that seem to be at odds in a number of ways, and simultaneously. This conundrum is presented a number of times throughout the novel as a method of challenging an Arnoldian notion of truth:

> [Bertie] wondered almost which was the dream and which was the truth; that old life that he had once led and that looked now so far away and so unreal, or this which had been about him for so many years in the camps and the bivouacs, the barracks and the battlefields. He wondered almost which he himself was—an English peer on whom the title of his line had fallen, or a Corporal of Chausseurs who must take his chief's insults as patiently as a cur takes the blows of his master; that he was *both* seemed to him. (330, original emphasis)

In this passage, the force of duality is felt in full. Bertie sets up the peer and chausseur as opposition terms, attempting to discern whether he is *either* "peer" *or* "Corporal." In contrast to the notion that the truth is one of these two identities, he is convinced that he is both at once. Similar language surrounds Cigarette: "her heart was… [the] heart of a girl and a soldier, of a hawk and a kitten, of a Bohemian and an epicurean, of a Lascar and a child, which beat so brightly and so boldly under the dainty gold aiglettes with which she laced her dashing little uniform" (197). Again, Cigarette simultaneously inhabits a number of binary oppositions: she is, at once, the masculine hawk, Lascar, and soldier and the feminine child, kitten, and girl. Also juxtaposed are the epicurean and the Bohemian, setting the refined, studied, and rational love of beauty at odds with the uneducated, emotional gypsy artist. The fact that this duality is possible

within the bounds of the novel, and in a single character, suggests not only that Ouida's novel plays with and collapses binaries, but also that it considers the inability for truth to be expressed physically when such a duality is embodied. This seems to be the natural side effect of embodying beauty, as Bertie and Cigarette show. Arnold claims that it is possible to see these characters "as they really are," but the novel's duality challenges this prescriptivism. A state of "really being" is not only difficult but impossible, as these characters are always-already both of these "oppositional" categories: masculine and feminine, English and French, peer and soldier.

Duality in the Social Landscape

I have demonstrated the duality of Bertie and Cigarette within *Under Two Flags*, but it is worth noting that one side of the binary has always given way to the other in that one gender identity has taken precedence over another thus far in my discussion. Similar to Arnold's explanation that a balance of Hellenism and Hebraism is necessary in order to reach the "true and smooth order of humanity's development," so is the balance of masculinity and femininity at given moments necessary for Bertie and Cigarette to develop as characters (108). It is only with the close of the novel that they are able to fully embody their masculinity and femininity simultaneously, rather than relegate their duality to the realm of language. Cigarette's moment comes with her self-sacrificial act of absorbing the bullet bound to execute Bertie. Then, and only then, is Bertie, and by extension readers, able to realize Cigarette's duality:

> The full strength, and nobility, and devotion of this passion he had disbelieved in and neglected rushed on him as he met her eyes[;] for the first time he saw her as she was, for the first time he saw all of which the splendid heroism of this untrained nature would have been capable under a different fate. And it struck him suddenly, heavily, as with a

> blow; it filled him with a passion of remorse. 'My darling!—my darling! what have I done to be worthy of such love?' he murmured, while the tears fell from his blinded eyes, and his head drooped until his lips met hers. (533)

Cigarette's self-sacrifice is an act at the height of femininity and masculinity at once. It is the utter renunciation of the self for another, traditionally a feminine act, but at the same time it is an act of supreme self-control and bravery, both masculine (and soldiers') attributes. Additionally, Cigarette is both the active sacrifice and the passive victim. The language of the novel facilitates these gendered conclusions. For instance, we see the act characterized as both strong and noble, but also as devoted and passionate, attributes that are contradictory in other portions of the novel. The feminine nature of the act is further confirmed by the kiss the two share at the close of this passage, as Bertie has rejected Cigarette throughout the novel on the basis of her perceived lack of, or compromised, femininity. The passage does use language similar to that of Arnold: "he saw her as she was," however, whereas Arnold associates this ability with an objective, rational, disinterested view of beauty, *Under Two Flags* posits this realization as emotional. It is a conclusion Bertie draws by seeing Cigarette's beauty as physically embodied in an active subject whose actions, as well as appearance, can be interpreted. Rather than Cigarette's beauty revealing truth, then, it is her "passion" that reveals the full potential—not the existing reality—of her dual nature. It is this that so disturbs Bertie, who has, up until this point, refused to see Cigarette as anything but a doomed woman playing men's games. Had she the opportunity to make the geographical shift Bertie has, perhaps her fate would have been different. Although many critics have read the death of Cigarette negatively, and as a condemnation of her character in favor of the more classically feminine and beautiful Lady Venetia, I would contend that this is a necessary element of the narrative that allows the text to explore the possibility of fully

embodying the gender duality it has heretofore exhibited only in turns. Rather than promoting stricter gender norms, as has been suggested, Cigarette's death can be re-envisioned as the turning point that facilitates a full realization of both genders and a collapse of the binary.

Taking Cigarette's death into consideration as the culmination of her duality, it makes sense to also consider the fate of Bertie's dual natures. As Bertie is only able to recognize Cigarette's fully feminine and masculine nature in her act of self-sacrifice, their coupling is rendered an impossibility, perhaps to the dismay of many readers. Yet, because she holds both a fully feminine and fully masculine existence, Bertie's marriage to Cigarette would render his own masculinity, within the bounds of Britain, complicated and even undermined. For Bertie, it is only by returning to Britain and marrying Venetia that his femininity and masculinity can simultaneously be expressed. He is able to re-enter the world in which his behavior is interpreted as feminine, while also having his masculinity confirmed by his marriage to Venetia. Marriage, in some sense, replaces the strict rules of soldiering, transferring them to religious and social mores. Therefore, marriage allows Bertie to implicitly, but visually, express the masculine virility invisible in Britain previously, without relinquishing his feminine looks and the languid behavior of an English peer.

Unlike Arnold's hierarchical antithesis, *Under Two Flags* does not resort to elevating one term of its gender binary over another. By giving the characters the potential to inhabit both genders, the novel effectively undermines the binary that shapes it, and in so doing challenges the fundamental assumption with which Arnold begins his work: beauty reveals truth. By relocating beauty into physical bodies that express features through both appearance and action, it becomes apparent that beauty, the visual form of life, is an insufficient medium for expressing or accessing truth. Not only does Ouida's text take issue with this, but it seems to disrupt the

notion that "truth" can exist for these characters in the world of binary gender constructions: Cigarette and Bertie are neither fully feminine nor fully masculine, and must inhabit both spheres. And yet, this is not the only duality of which we must take note. Arnold and *Under Two Flags* each deploy beauty into a social context, real or imagined. Whereas Arnold, in his discussion of Hellenism, seeks to raise it over and above Hebraism as the path to social progress and the cultivation of character, Ouida's novel seems to suggest an alternative: beauty does not lead to a fully developed social actor, evidenced by Bertie before he leaves Britain. Rather, Bertie's time in the army facilitates the development of the other side of Arnold's binary, Hebraism, and the sense of "right doing" with which he associates it. Beauty and honor become equally necessary to full social progress. The term "citizen soldier" thus takes on a dual meaning, promoting the "right doing" of Hebraism that facilitates protection of the polis while simultaneously protecting society from the denigrating effects of industrialization that Arnold so fears, and to which he offers Hellenism as the solution.

The Egoist, which I discuss in the following chapter, also takes an interest in the social role of beauty. It explores beauty in relation to Darwin's theory of sexual selection, which frames beauty as the catalyst for selection as well as a sign of biological superiority. Where *The Egoist* shifts from the discussion that threads through *Under Two Flags* and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is in its ultimate focus on aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgment as opposed to beauty itself.

III.

The Evolutionary Aesthetic Experience: Perceiving Beauty in *The Egoist*

From deep to deeper heavens of white, her eyes
perched and soared. Wonder lived in her. Happiness in the beauty
of the tree pressed to supplant it, and was more mortal and narrower
Reflection came, contracting her vision and weighing her to earth.
– George Meredith, The Egoist

The Egoist (1879) is, most simply put, an extended—and sometimes brutal—satire of Sir Willoughby Patterne. The novel revolves around the rapid acquisition and subsequent dissolution of a marriage engagement between Willoughby and Clara Middleton. Willoughby, the egoist of the title, has been jilted once before by a prospective wife when he pursues the young and beautiful Clara. She quickly agrees to marry him and pass the time before their marriage date at Patterne Hall with her father. While she is there, Willoughby's excessive egoism begins to drive a wedge between the two that ultimately results in the breaking of their engagement.

I argued in the previous chapter that *Under Two Flags* sought to disrupt the notion, posited by Arnold, that beauty reveals truth, and that this disruption, in turn, raised serious questions about beauty's ability to facilitate social development. Meredith's novel narrows the social field to that of a single marriage engagement as a means to explore beauty's meaning and purpose in a social and biological context. Critical readings of the novel have often documented the connections between *The Egoist* and Darwin's work in *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1872). For example, Jonathan Smith uses Darwin to "clarify the language and narrative" of Meredith's novel, but also uses Meredith to better understand Darwin's work on sexual competition and selection.[1] In the same vein, Carolyn Williams argues that "Darwinism

[1] Jonathan Smith, "'The Cock of Lordly Plume': Sexual Selection and *The Egoist*," *Nineteenth Century Literature* 50:1 (1995): 52-53.

works as a touchstone of the novel's dramatic irony when it is falsely understood" by Willoughby, but that the principle of natural selection, correctly understood by Meredith, organizes the novel's plot, character development, and rhetoric.[2] Thus, the connections between Darwin's work and the organization and development of Meredith's novel are, at this point, well-established. What is not as widely considered, however, is the role of beauty in Darwin and Meredith's works. Through the course of this chapter, I will suggest that an examination of Willoughby Patterne with Darwin's theory of sexual selection in birds can yield a better understanding of the failed marriage plot of *The Egoist*, one which is shaped by a discussion of the purpose of beauty. Because Willoughby's understanding of beauty is deeply informed by Darwinian sexual selection, beauty, for him, has a specific purpose that furthers his goals. Unlike sexual selection in the Darwinian sense, however, Willoughby is not seeking a mate in order to propagate his species. For Willoughby, the prospective mate, his fiancée Clara, serves as a means to assuage his own ego; his own beauty is supported, confirmed, and enhanced, he believes, by Clara's beauty. What Willoughby seeks is a worshipper in order to reverence and reflect his superior form, and, by implication, sustain the family name.

Additionally, this chapter will offer a consideration of the influence of Walter Pater's *The Renaissance* on *The Egoist*.[3] Vernon Whitford, Willoughby's cousin, acts as an antithesis to him, and, in doing so, highlights the ways in which their understandings of the purpose of beauty differ. Vernon's concept of beauty, as I will show, is an extension of Pater's work in *The*

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[2] Carolyn Williams, "Natural Selection and Narrative Form in *The Egoist*," *Victorian Studies* 27:1 (1983): 55.

[3] While there is little work connecting Pater to Meredith, there is a strong connection between Pater and Darwin, or nineteenth-century scientific discourse more generally; for more on this see Hartley "Chapter 31: Aesthetic Theories" and George Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 249.

Renaissance (1873). Vernon is able to see beauty as worth admiring for itself, which is in high contrast with Willoughby's utilitarian and Darwinian understanding of beauty. In fact, Vernon's admiration of beauty is far more focused on the value of beauty that lies in experience itself instead of what can be gained through it. To Willoughby's purposeful use of beauty, we have Vernon's account of beauty as purposeless, which seems to be endorsed by the novel when he secures Clara as his fiancée. Through Clara, however, the novel is able to highlight the experience of purposeless beauty as a purposeful process. The novel therefore diverges from the aesthetic theories laid out by Darwin (beauty as tangibly purposeful) and Pater (beauty admired for itself) by asserting that one can discern evolutionary progress by assessing the purity of an aesthetic judgment.[4] How we respond to the beautiful becomes the primary concern of the novel. Whereas Willoughby responds to the beautiful by asking what it can do for him, Vernon responds simply by enjoying it.

I would also like to explore the manner in which *The Egoist* is able to offer new theories of beauty, particularly in terms of the evolutionary significance of seeing beauty as its own end. In the end, it is Clara Middleton's assertion of Vernon's "goodness" that reveals the potential of Willoughby and Vernon's aesthetic judgments to inform us, not of their morality but their evolutionary progress. Through a detailed examination of Clara, I will show that, in order to make a claim for the progressive nature of this understanding of beauty, the novel imbues aesthetic experience with evolutionary significance. Unlike Darwin, who sees beauty itself as a mark of biological superiority, *The Egoist* reads aesthetic judgment as representative of progress

[4] I use "aesthetic judgment" here as defined by Immanuel Kant, which we will expand upon later.

of an evolutionary kind.[5] Willoughby's (mis)understanding of Darwinian aesthetics is rejected by the novel. Yet, and perhaps paradoxically, we must still rely on the process of sexual selection as given to us by Darwin in order to discern this favoritism, because the novel rewards Vernon with Clara's choice of him as a mate, while it punishes Willoughby with a sickly and possibly loveless union with Laetitia Dale. Thus, as this chapter will ultimately show, the novel is organized by Darwinian principles, but it nonetheless endorses aesthetic judgment—specifically one that sees beauty as "an end in itself"—as farther progressed evolutionarily than an utilitarian understanding of beauty. Let us first turn to Darwin before delving into the novel itself.

Beauty and Sexual Selection

Darwin's concept of sexual selection is deeply rooted in the way he understands the role of beauty. He goes so far as to call birds "the most aesthetic of all animals, excepting of course man" and asserts, "they have nearly the same taste for the beautiful as we have."[6] It becomes evident through passages such as these that the role of beauty, of aesthetics, was of particular interest and consideration to Darwin in the course of his examination of sexual selection in birds. Beauty is a catalyst for sexual selection: it is the means by which birds attract a mate. According to Angelique Richardson, "the language of biology… underpinned aesthetic discourses in the second half of the nineteenth century, equating the ugly with disease and beautiful with health."[7] In light of this distinction, it is important to consider not only the way beauty is important in Darwin's theory, but also to consider the role of Darwin's aesthetic in shaping the conversation

[5] "Progress" here could additionally be read in terms of industrial progress, but a detailed reading of the novel in these terms is beyond the scope of this thesis.
[6] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927), 366. Henceforth cited in the text.
[7] Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 80.

about beauty occurring in the novel and the later nineteenth century more broadly. Richardson's assertions have consequences that stretch beyond the novel into social reality and the role of beauty in shaping the social world. Considering these could help us better understand and discern the trajectories of conversations about such subjects as race and disease occurring in the nineteenth century.

Darwin understood beauty as an element of sexual selection, primarily as a means to attract a mate. In his discussion of the mating habits of birds, Darwin explains:

> When the sexes differ in beauty or in the power of singing, or in producing what I have called instrumental music, it is almost invariably the male who surpasses the female. These qualities, as we have just seen, are evidently of high importance to the male… It is the male alone who elaborately displays his varied attractions, and often performs strange antics on the ground, or in the air, in the presence of the female… Hence we may conclude that it is the object of the male to induce the female to pair with him, and for this purpose he tries to excite or charm her in various ways. (412)

It is evident that the male's aesthetically pleasing actions serve as a means to attract the attention of a potential mate. This is not only a side effect of the male's beauty, but its biological purpose. Darwin brings science to bear on the concept of the beautiful, propelling an understanding of beauty as purposeful and useful. At the same time, Darwin establishes masculine beauty as the vehicle for sexual selection, as is emphasized in Figure 8, which shows the male polyplectron, or peacock, with its decorative feathers. This contrasts with the world of art, in which the focus is on feminine beauty.[8] We will bracket the discussion of gender for the time being, but it remains

[8] Psomiades asserts: "representations of femininity in aestheticist writing and artworks are neither merely incidental nor purely decorative, but rather play an integral part in the cultural work aestheticism does… Aestheticist ideology… is grounded in the logic of aestheticism's

an important element of the novel and Aestheticism more generally, and one to which I will return later.

iconic feminine images"; see: Kathy Alexis Psomiades, *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 2.

Fig. 51.—Polyplectron chinquis, male (T. W. Wood).

Figure 8 T.W. Wood, *Polyplectron chinquis, male*, (1872), illustration, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* by Charles Darwin, 2nd ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927), p. 404.

Darwin confirms the purpose of beauty as a means to attract a mate when he asserts, "ornaments of all kinds, whether permanently or temporarily gained, are sedulously displayed by the males, and apparently serve to excite, attract, or fascinate the females" (401). However, he goes on to give alternative circumstances of the males' display of their beauty:

> But the males will sometimes display their ornaments, when not in the presence of the females… as may be noticed with the peacock; this… bird… evidently wishes for a spectator of some kind, and, as I have often seen, will show off his finery before poultry, or even pigs. All naturalists who have closely attended the habits of birds, whether in a state of nature or under confinement, are unanimously of opinion that the males take delight in displaying their beauty. (Darwin 401)

Here, Darwin introduces the possibility of vanity being a motivating factor for males to display their beauty. The peacock is more interested in the presence of a spectator before whom to show off his "finery," which serves no biological purpose. Yet Darwin is quick to return to his assertion that males display their plumage in order to attract females in order to, perhaps, divert attention from this seemingly purposeless behavior. He further dismisses the possibility of vanity as a motivating factor for birds' display when he explains:

> Sufficient facts have now been given to shew with what care male birds display their various charms, and this they do with the utmost skill. Whilst preening their feathers, they have frequent opportunities for admiring themselves, and of studying how to best exhibit their beauty. But as all the males of the same species display themselves in exactly the same manner, it appears that actions, at first perhaps intentional, have become instinctive. If so, we ought not to accuse birds of conscious vanity; yet when we see a

> peacock strutting about, with expanded and quivering tail feathers, he seems the very emblem of pride and vanity. (410)

Darwin reconciles what could be perceived as vanity—beauty without biological purpose—on the part of male birds with his theory of sexual selection by reading the behavior not as cognizant, but as instinctual. Vanity, for Darwin, needs to be a conscious act; it requires an intent. He seems to dismiss the possibility of vanity in birds, perhaps because it would render beauty purposeless, and in a world shaped by sexual selection, this could undermine his argument. It is at this point of contention at which we can see *The Egoist* picking up the threads of beauty, vanity, and sexual selection.

Willoughby Patterne and the Purpose of Beauty

The plot of *The Egoist* is framed by the understanding that beauty is used to attract a mate; that is, the novel understands the process of sexual selection in properly Darwinian terms. It sets up a situation in which the male protagonist uses his physical charm to attract and secure a viable female mate. However, Willoughby's understanding, indeed misapplication of sexual selection functions as an exploration of the role of vanity in a Darwinian world, purposeful and biologically driven. *The Egoist* begins with a prelude that muses on the roles of science and art in the social world and establishes a connection between the two that is carried throughout the novel. This prelude also briefly discusses egoism in the abstract and frames it in terms of evolution and sexual selection:

> Aforetime a grand old Egoism built the house. It would appear that ever finer essences of it are demanded to sustain the structure; but especially would it appear that a reversion to the gross original, beneath a mask and in a vein of fineness, is an earthquake at the

> foundations of the house. Better that it should not have consented to motion, and have held stubbornly to all ancestral ways, than have bred that anachronistic specter.[9]

If we understand this passage to be an abstract reference to Willoughby and the Patterne line, we see that egoism, once upon a time, was the tool that built the Patterne house and fortune. Finer essences of this egoism, like the beauty of birds refined through evolution, is required to sustain the structure by attracting quality mates. However, Willoughby's egoism, "under a mask and in a vein of fineness," is a reversion: it makes him an "anachronistic specter" unable to support the Patterne line. Rather than the productive egoism that we see in Darwin where vanity is not vanity at all but a study of the best ways to display one's beauty to attain a quality mate, Willoughby's egoism by contrast fails to support the structure of the house and ultimately destroys even him. The prelude makes this plain with its final lines: "Through very love of self himself he slew, let it be admitted for his epitaph" (7). Willoughby's uncontrolled egoism, an admiration of his own beauty that violates the necessity purposeful admiration, facilitates his social downfall.

The narrative proper details Willoughby's downfall, but begins with a discussion of his attractiveness and its usefulness in garnering the attention of women in terms that recall Darwin's reading of the peacocks' "vanity." Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson asserts that Willoughby "has a leg," one that is "obvious"

> for ladies who have eyes. You *see* it; or, you see *he* has it… And the ladies knew for a fact that Willoughby's leg was exquisite… the leg was to be seen because it was a burning leg. There it is, and it *will* shine through… the leg that smiles, that winks, it obsequious to you, yet perforce of beauty self-satisfied; that twinkles to a tender midway between imperiousness and seductiveness, audacity and discretion; between "you shall

[9] George Meredith, *The Egoist* (New York: The Modern Library, 1951), 7. Henceforth cited in the text.

> worship me" and "I am devoted to you"… Such a leg, when it has done with pretending to retire, will walk straight into the hearts of women. Nothing so fatal to them. (13, original emphasis)

This passage furthers the ideas put forth by Darwin: beauty is a means to attract a mate, and a proper level of egoism is necessary to accomplish this goal (the leg is "perforce of beauty self-satisfied"). This self-satisfaction is necessary, for "humbleness does not win multitudes or the sex. [The leg] must be vain to have a sheen" (13). The novel frames both beauty and egoism as crucial elements in the process of sexual selection. Egoism is necessary, even desirable, in order to showcase one's beauty for the opposite sex. Yet Willoughby's egoism oversteps the boundaries of productivity, as we see when he pursues the attentions of Clara Middleton.

Willoughby had "great need of a worshipper," and Clara Middleton is the character who is able to fit this bill (145). Clara herself is greatly admired; she has "money and health and beauty, the triune of perfect starriness," making her a desirable mate (37). Willoughby's desire to gain her attention reflects the process of sexual selection and is related in those terms. For example, Willoughby is described as "one of a pack of admirers cavorting for Clara's attention," and it is her beauty that hurries him "with all his might into the heat of the chase, while yet he knew no more of her than that he was competing for a prize" (38). This description seems perfectly in line with the process of sexual selection described by Darwin, but Willoughby soon shifts, reflecting his misunderstanding of sexual selection as a means to confirm his own superiority and beauty. Rather than using his beauty as a means to attain the best mate, securing a mate becomes a confirmation of his beauty. This shift becomes clear as the process of gaining Clara's attention is explained:

> A deeper student of science than his rivals, he appreciated Nature's compliment in the fair one's choice of you. We now scientifically know that in this department of the universal struggle, success is awarded to the bettermost. You spread a handsomer tail than your fellows, you dress a finer top-knot, you pipe a newer note, have a longer stride; she reviews you in competition, and selects you. The superlative is magnetic to her… She cannot help herself; it is her nature, and her nature is the guarantee for the noblest races of men to come of her… Consequently a successful pursuit and a wresting of her from a body of competitors, tells you that you are the best man. What is more, it tells the world so. (38)

The process of sexual selection is thus framed as a means of confirming one's own superiority to himself and to "the world." The prize is no longer the female who will bring forth "the noblest races of men"; instead, it is the "compliment" behind the female's choice of you. The beauty of the female and the offspring she will bear are not of primary importance. Willoughby's focus is on what Clara's choice of him will tell him and his social circle about his own beauty in comparison to other men (that he is the "best man").

Willoughby's focus on the opinion of his social circle becomes clearer as he relates the experience of wooing Clara to one of his admirers, Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson. This conversation is prefaced by the novel's relatively impartial narration of events and by the assertion, "Thus did Miss Middleton acquiesce in the principle of selection. And then did the best man of a host blow his triumphant horn, and loudly" (40). Again, beauty's purpose is not to gain a mate in order to further the Patterne line as the prelude suggests it should be. Beauty's use-value here is framed as a source of confirmation, through the process of sexual selection, of

Willoughby's superiority in relation to other men. Indeed, as the triumphant blowing of his own horn suggests, Willoughby sees himself as

> the fittest; he justified the dictum of science. The survival of the Patternes was assured. "I would," he said to his admirer, Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, "have bargained for health above everything, but she [Clara] has everything besides—lineage, beauty, breeding; is what they call an heiress, and is the most accomplished of her sex." With a delicate art he conveyed to the lady's understanding that Miss Middleton had been snatched from a crowd, without a breath of the crowd having offended his niceness. (40)

Clara's beauty is confirmed by Willoughby, but it is his emphasis on his choice and acquisition of her that are the main focus of his narration of events. In his competition with other men for her attention, he is able to gain it without stooping or "offending his niceness," actions which would render him equal to or lesser than his competitors. He acquires the beautiful, and therefore desired, woman because he desires her beauty as an affirmation of his own. That is, Willoughby's appreciation is not of Clara or her aesthetic appeal; rather, he desires the positive attention her beauty will provide him and, in turn, its confirmation of his social superiority. This is confirmed once again as the novel explains that "to flatter Sir Willoughby, it was the fashion to exalt [Clara] as one of the types of beauty; the one providentially selected to set off his masculine type" (42). As before, the focus is not on Clara's own beauty, but its ability to prove the superior nature of Willoughby's beauty in relation to that of all other men. The process of wooing Clara confirms Willoughby's opinion of himself as superior, and is therefore able to reinforce this already intense self-love. The acquisition of Clara metonymically functions as a confirmation of Willoughby's illusion of his own pre-eminence.

Instead of exhibiting a proper understanding of sexual selection, Willoughby embodies the vanity of the peacock that Darwin chalks up to instinct. Willoughby's understanding of sexual selection as a way to glorify himself shows the breakdown of a (re)productive understanding of beauty. Its purpose is actually detrimental to his house and to himself (recall the prelude: "Through love of self himself he slew"). Instead of desiring a healthy, quality female mate to further his line, his ultimate goal is the "possession of an adoring female's worship" (135). He hopes for "a marriage with a lady of so glowing a fame for beauty and attachment to her lord that the world perforce must take her for witness to the merits which would silence detraction and almost, not quite (it was undesirable), extinguish envy" (294). Willoughby's goal is thus twofold: he wants to possess an admirer in the form of a wife as well as admirers in his social circle, which he seeks to attain through the acquisition of an adoring and beautiful wife. The private and public aspects of Willoughby's desires are deeply connected and, at times, difficult to separate. The prospective wife serves a tripartite role as an admirer, a means to gain admiration from the wider social circle, and as a means to confirm Willoughby's inflated self-concept. Willoughby wishes for a spectator, but also enjoys admiring himself. He is vain because, unlike the peacocks who function by instinct, he exhibits an intent to use his beauty for the sole purpose of gaining admiration. His vanity and egoism depend on a deep love of self which is confirmed and reinforced by social admirers who act as the spectators to his peacock-like display of beauty. To put it slightly differently, Willoughby reads beauty as a vehicle to social superiority, regardless of whether this is his own beauty, or another's that he uses to reinforce his own.

When Clara ultimately rejects Willoughby, and he is no longer able to deny that the engagement is over, he turns his attentions to Laetitia Dale, a woman who lacks the youth and

beauty of Clara, but whom Willoughby believes adores and worships him. Because of this, Laetitia presents the best (albeit still substantially lacking) alternative in order to maintain the admiration of his social circle. Willoughby's need for public confirmation of his superiority becomes increasingly emphasized, particularly when the names of the women of his social circle punctuate his love ravings for Laetitia:

> [He was] burning with an ardour for Laetitia, [which] incited him to frantic excesses of language and comportment, [and] he was aware of shouts of the names of Lady Busshe and Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, the which, freezing him as they did, were directly the cause of his hurrying to a wilder extravagance and more head-long determination to subdue before break of day the woman he almost dreaded to behold by daylight, though he now passionately persuaded himself of his love for her. (522)

It is clear that Willoughby deludes himself into emotions of love for Laetitia that are caused not by any real desire for her, but by a fearfulness of the negative opinion of his social circle and a loss of their admiration. Laetitia effectively allows Willoughby to save face publicly—he will not be blatantly humiliated by a second broken engagement, which is what he is ultimately afraid of, as it will disturb and undermine his sense of superiority. The opinion of society clearly overtakes desirability or biological superiority as a motivation for choosing a mate. While it is worth noting that Willoughby will not command the same superior social standing if he marries Laetitia, he remains willing to sacrifice this in order not to disturb his vanity. Willoughby *must* be able to consider himself superior to all other men, an opinion reinforced through the admiration of his social circle. If Willoughby is humiliated publicly, his egoism cannot survive. Yet, even with a weakened social standing, there is still room for him to delude himself as to his

superior status. Thus, Willoughby chooses a marriage with Laetitia Dale in order to retain a semblance of public respectability that he is able to interpret as admiration.

For Willoughby as for Darwin, beauty has a definite purpose. However, unlike Darwin, who sees beauty as a means to secure a quality mate, Willoughby understands beauty as a means to garner worship. This, in turn, confirms his own egoistic assessment of himself. It is his egoism that drives his understanding of beauty. For both Darwin and Willoughby, beauty is a means to an end, despite the fact that these ends differ substantially. Yet, *The Egoist* is not content to only reject Willoughby's understanding of Darwinian principles with regard to beauty; instead, it proposes an alternative understanding, in which beauty is an end in itself, a concept that I want to suggest is influenced by the thinking of Walter Pater.

Vernon Whitford and Beauty as an End in Itself

Vernon Whitford, who lacks the physical appeal and social flourish of his cousin, acts as the novel's antithesis to Willoughby's understanding of beauty. Instead of a Darwinian influence, Vernon's understanding of beauty appears to be influenced by the aesthetic theory of Walter Pater. Pater's work focuses on the experience of beauty, rather than properties of beauty itself, or some inherent purpose. His analysis stresses beauty's relative nature, as well as knowing "not the universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of [beauty]."[10] For Pater, each manifestation of beauty has an individual formula, and there is no universal, monolithic conception of the beautiful. Therefore, the first step in Pater's analysis of beauty is discerning the manner in which it manifests itself in a particular object. He then calls for viewers to examine their "own impression as it really is, to discriminate

[10] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xxix. Henceforth cited in the text.

it, to realize it distinctly" (xxix). What interests Pater primarily is the idea of experiencing beauty as a "drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought" (151). Beauty is subjective, fleeting. In his conclusion to *The Renaissance*, he famously asserts, "not the fruit of the experience, but experience itself is the end… [and] to burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstacy, is success in life" (152). For Pater, the experience of beauty is itself the goal. This contradicts Darwin's understanding of beauty that serves a specific, tangible, biological purpose. Pater sees beauty as important on its own terms, as the process of experiencing beauty is its own end, there is no tangible result. Instead, beauty and art "[come] to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake" (153). Beauty can offer the viewer no benefit outside of itself, and it is this style of experiencing beauty on its own terms that Vernon exemplifies.

Vernon is not framed as aesthetically appealing. A stark contrast is drawn between his appearance and behavior and that of his cousin, Willoughby:

> You could hardly take them for relatives traveling together, or Vernon Whitford for a born and bred Englishman… Vernon had no irony. He had nothing of Willoughby's epistolary creative power… Vernon seemed a sheepish fellow, without stature abroad, glad of a compliment, grateful for a dinner, endeavoring sadly to digest all he saw and heard. But one was a Patterne; the other a Whitford. One had genius; the other pottered after him with the title of student. One was an English gentleman wherever he went; the other was a new kind of thing, nondescript, produced in England as of late, and not likely to come to much good himself, or do much good to the country. (25-26)

The cousins could not be more different. Vernon is quiet, reserved, a bookish sort of man while Willoughby is the light and excitement of every drawing room; recall that it is Willoughby who

has the "leg." Here, Willoughby is praised for his intelligence, his creativity, and his gentlemanly manners whereas Vernon is effectively denounced as a poor comparison—a man incapable of doing well for himself or for Britain. He is the "new kind of thing, nondescript, produced in England," a description that utilizes the language of mass production and commodification in order to emphasize his lack of individuality on the aesthetic level. Whereas Willoughby is the individual consumer, in this case of women, Vernon acts as a producer. But it is Vernon who is able to produce something beautiful, as his creation of the double blossom cherry tree suggests.

The contrast of Willoughby and Vernon as consumer and producer respectively provides a sharp contrast that is reinforced by the discussion of the double blossom cherry tree Vernon creates. Upon seeing a "branch bearing [a] thick white blossom, so thick and of so pure a whiteness" Clara was "at a loss to name the tree" her father, Dr. Middleton, says:

> It is a gardener's improvement on the vestal of the forest, the wild cherry tree… and in this case… I believe, that with his gift of double blossom, he has improved away the fruit. Call this the vestal of civilization, then; he has at least done something to vindicate the beauty of the office as well as the justness of the title. (78)

We find that Vernon has improved the wild cherry tree by creating a more beautiful blossom; in the process however, he has disabled the tree from producing fruit, effectively rendering it sterile. The barrenness of the tree leaves it without biological purpose. Compared to the standard wild cherry, the double blossom is far more majestic, with a grandeur and splendor far surpassing the original. At the same time, the tree Vernon has created through hybridization lacks the ability to reproduce, evidenced by its lack of fruit. Its purpose is intangible in the sense that it is beautiful without being productive. This is, however, spoken of in terms of progress. Vernon's hybrid is framed as an "improvement" on the original tree through science. This

becomes readily apparent when considering that the tree shifts from being the "vestal of the forest" (nature) to the "vestal of civilization" (science). Through science, man has harnessed the forces of nature and improved it by increasing the tree's beauty and, in turn, by making its beauty self-contained. No longer can the tree have a purpose other than beauty. It is at this point, quite early in the novel, that it becomes plain that part of the work of the text is to consider two alternative possibilities for understanding beauty: on the one hand purposeful and the other purposeless.

Soon after Dr. Middleton's explanation of the double blossom cherry, Willoughby informs the group that it is "Vernon's Holy Tree" which he worshipped (78). This tree becomes the manner through which Clara's love for Vernon quite literally blossoms, as the end of the novel eventually confirms. It is hinted at, however, when Clara discovers Vernon asleep with a book under the cherry tree. Though the quotation is long, its function as the turning point in the novel's conception of aesthetic experience makes it worth referencing nearly in full:

> [Attempting to catch a glimpse of the book's title, Clara] turned her face to where the load of virginal blossom, whiter than summer-cloud on the sky, showered and drooped and clustered so thick as to claim color and seem, like higher Alpine snows in noon-sunlight, a flush of white. From deep to deeper heavens of white, her eyes perched and soared. Wonder lived in her. Happiness in the beauty of the tree pressed to supplant it, and was more mortal and narrower. Reflection came, contracting her vision and weighing her to earth. Her reflection was: "He must be good who loves to lie and sleep beneath the branches of this tree!" She would rather have clung to her first impression: wonder so divine, so unbounded, was like soaring… but the thought of it was no recovery of it… The sensation of happiness promised to be less short-lived in memory, and would have

> been had not her present disease of the longing for happiness ravaged every corner of it for the secret of its existence. The reflection took root. "He must be good!" That reflection vowed to endure. Poor by comparison with what it displaced, it presented itself to her as conferring something on him, and she would not have had it absent though it robbed her. (116)

This passage addresses two distinct issues. The first is the experience of beauty, and the second is the notion of improvement and progress. Through her contact with the double blossom cherry tree, Clara is able to experience beauty as "an end in itself." But rather than the tree's beauty, the novel focuses on Clara's experience, which is described in three stages: wonder, happiness, and reflection. Her experience of the tree's pure beauty recalls Pater's assertion that it is "not the fruit of the experience, but the experience [of beauty] itself [that] is the end" (Pater 152). This Paterian influence explains as well the emphasis on Clara's transcendent wonder as contrasted with the "more mortal and narrower" experience of happiness. As Clara experiences the "wonder" of beauty in the form of a tree that literally lacks fruit, her experience, at first, yields nothing tangible. Soon, however, she discovers it to be everything. Happiness follows and causes what was originally an experience of beauty to take on external meaning, and thus no longer be purely "aesthetic."[11] Turning to Clara's reflection that Vernon "must be good," it becomes clear that it does not function as a connection between the beautiful and the moral but acts as a connection between the pure experience of beauty and the notion of improvement. Goodness

[11] In his *Critique of Judgement*, Immanuel Kant explains the difference between aesthetic judgment and other forms of judging beauty that account for more than the "mere experience" of the beautiful thing: "The exclusion of [other] ways of experiencing an object is part of what is meant by aesthetic [judgment] being based being based upon the 'mere experience' of something. In short, that here experience excludes any experience conditioned by either sensible or intellectual interest, or by any objective concept"; see: Douglas Burnham, *Introduction to Kant's* Critique of Judgement, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 45.

here is not in reference to the tree, so it is not the beautiful that is good. This is further confirmed by the fact that Vernon who is not beautiful, is good, and Willoughby, who is beautiful, is not framed in the same way. Clara is not making a moral judgment but one of progress based on the level of refinement of Vernon's aesthetic judgment. Therefore, not beauty but aesthetic judgment is the catalyst for her reflection. Progress ("goodness"), because it is shifted to a classification of aesthetic judgment therefore is a matter not of propagation, but of refinement. Propagation is represented by the beautiful Willoughby (and therefore biologically superior, according to Darwin), who, for Clara, is not thought of as "good." Vernon's refined aesthetic judgment, measured by his understanding of beauty as its own end is "good," improved, progressive.[12]

When goodness is framed as improvement, Vernon's reaction to or experience of beauty as progress can be thought of as a "civilized" understanding of beauty. Willoughby, on the other hand, remains stuck in a misunderstood Darwinian model that sees beauty as tangibly purposeful, but rather than for the purposes of reproduction, he uses it for the maintenance of his egoism. It thus becomes clear, through the eyes of Clara Middleton, that it is not the evolutionary value of beauty as physically embodied—say, in Willoughby as the more beautiful and thus biologically superior mate—that is important. Instead, the refinement of one's aesthetic judgment—as seen in Vernon's enjoyment of beauty as its own end, for example—becomes the method of measuring progress. Clara uses Vernon's enjoyment of the beautiful in order to reach

[12] The move from moral judgment to a judgment of progress was reflected in society at large as an effect of Darwinism (Richardson 1). Because Darwin's work "dealt a body blow to anthropocentrism, calling into public question the idea of God" goodness becomes measured not by a moral standard, but one of progress (Richardson 1). Darwin sums this up succinctly when he says: "progress is no invariable rule" in modern society (Darwin 143).

a conclusion about his evolutionary status.[13] Whereas Willoughby *uses* beauty, Vernon *relishes in* beauty. The novel uses these different reactions to beauty as a means of framing Willoughby, the egoist, as regressive and uncivilized. We need only recall the Prelude, which describes Willoughby as a "reversion to the gross original" and "an anachronistic specter" and emphasizes his less evolved state (7).

Theorizing Beauty in *The Egoist*

In this novel, beauty works on two levels: physical and abstract, and while our discussion has focused on the abstract, it remains necessary to briefly address the physical. On the surface, it seems that *The Egoist* is concerned with physical beauty. Often, comparisons are drawn between Willoughby and Vernon, or Clara and Laetitia, emphasizing Willoughby and Clara's superior physical beauty. In this discussion, it is hard to escape the fact that this beauty is located in physical (and therefore sexed and gendered) bodies. In fact, when considering the gendered nature of beauty, it becomes clear that both Clara and Willoughby embody feminized beauty. As Kathy Psomiades asserts, aestheticist art and writing uses the female body and feminine beauty as an anchor of its ideological project. Aestheticism was deeply invested in iconic images of beautiful women.[14] This investment runs counter to the Darwinian investment in masculine beauty in his discussion of birds. In order to reconcile these competing notions, the novel reframes Willoughby's feminine beauty as virile masculinity.

Similarly, in order to make sense of Clara's beauty it must be denied sexual desirability as a method of maintaining the system Darwin establishes and the novel utilizes, in which only

[13] I use the term "evolutionary standing" here to denote evolution in Darwinian or Social Darwinian terms: As Vernon has a non-utilitarian view of beauty, he is more evolved, more civilized than Willoughby.
[14] Psomiades, 2.

masculine sexuality is desirable. Willoughby's understanding of sexual selection and evolution is in the words of Williams, "ridiculed in the novel as a symptom of his male-egotistical, sexist sentimentality."[15] In fact, "the ideology of the novel supports the view of women as natural facilitators of evolution in the male line," resulting in a view of women as the vehicles for a masculine process.[16] As a means of rectifying these competing gendered installations of beauty, the novel seeks to temper Clara's sexual desirability through Willoughby's efforts to "utterly possess" her: "[Willoughby] had won Miss Middleton's hand; he believed he had captured her heart, but he was not so certain of his possession of her soul, and he went after it" (45). Similarly, we find Willoughby musing: "Was it possible that he did not possess her utterly? He frowned up. Clara saw the lift of his brows, and thought, 'My mind is my own, married or not.' It was the point in dispute" (77). Willoughby must possess Clara's body, mind, and soul in order to neutralize her sexual desirability, which females cannot exhibit in the process of sexual selection.[17] The "point in dispute," then, is Clara's adherence to standards regarding both gender and beauty facilitated by Willoughby's misunderstanding of sexual selection. If Willoughby possesses Clara fully, she becomes an extension of him. In turn, she is no longer sexually desired, only aesthetically admired. Williams explains that "in the plot of the novel, [Clara develops] self-consciousness, and that development parallels, in reverse, the social plot of disengagement from Willoughby: as Clara becomes more conscious of herself, Willoughby's

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[15] Carolyn Williams, "Unbroken Patternes: Gender, Culture, and Voice in *The Egoist*," *Browning Institute Studies* 13 (1985), 65.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Recall Darwin's explanation of the mating habits of birds. It is the males "who [surpass] the female [in beauty and the ability for song]… We may conclude that it is the object of the male to induce the female to pair with him, and for this purpose he tries to excite or charm her in various ways" (412). The female does not, and *cannot*, attract the male because she cannot elicit his desire for her in a sexual way.

dominance lessens in force."[18] But this self-consciousness does not renege the control the novel exerts over Clara's sexual desirability. Clara may be coupled with Vernon, who admires the beautiful, but this is not to say she regains desirability. Rather, because beauty must be appreciated as its own end, the notion of sexual desirability in relation to Clara and Vernon is nullified. However, Willoughby's efforts backfire so far as to leave him with the sickly and no longer beautiful Laetitia Dale—a woman who is none of the attributes Willoughby wants. She is not sexually desirable, nor admirable as a beautiful object, and is by virtue of her sickliness, even possibly detrimental to the continuation of Willoughby's line.

Even given that the novel takes a distinct interest in gender and sexuality and their relation to beauty, it ultimately foregoes these considerations in order to focus on the abstract notion of the experience of beauty as its determining factor. Clara's assertion that Vernon "must be good" because he appreciates the double blossom cherry tree for its beauty rather than its usefulness, allows the novel to shift the focus from asking what the purpose of beauty might be to a question of what a particular understanding of beauty might mean. The reflection Clara has after seeing Vernon beneath the tree—"he must be good"—is only a poor replacement for the transcendent feelings of wonder she experiences. It even fails to surpass the "mortal" and "narrow" feeling of happiness in the pure beauty of the cherry blossoms. The reflection on Vernon's goodness weighs Clara to earth, bringing her back to the reality of life, rather than letting her float free in transcendent wonder that forms the basis of her reflection. Even so, this reflection carries great importance. Clara would "not have had it absent though it robbed her" of transcendence. Yet, as mentioned previously, the reflection is not directly regarding the tree—she reflects on Vernon and his experience of the beauty of the tree. He appreciates it; asks

[18] Williams, "Unbroken Patternes: Gender, Culture and Voice in *The Egoist*," 53.

nothing concrete or tangible of it; lives, lies, and sleeps beneath it, surrounding himself in beauty *for the sake of* beauty. It is this reaction that holds evolutionary significance in a novel organized by Darwinian principles. *The Egoist* expands an analysis of beauty beyond a dichotomous purposefulness and purposelessness debate by making the purposeless admiration of the cherry tree solely for its beauty into the purposeful carrying of evolutionary significance.

In comparing Willoughby's and Vernon's responses to beauty, the novel proposes that pure aesthetic experience is an evolutionary advance, an improvement. While Willoughby concerns himself with what purpose beauty can serve for him, Vernon is concerned with what Kant calls "free beauty," a beauty that is self-subsisting and serves no particular, pre-supposed end, and was, in the nineteenth century, the kind of experience advocated by Pater.[19] Clara's choice between the two cousins becomes the novel's method of confirming the refinement of Vernon's aesthetic judgment, while remaining organized by notions of sexual selection. Willoughby loses Clara because his reaction to beauty reveals his regressed state, particularly in the form of his unrefined, uncontrolled, unproductive, and therefore destructive, self-interestedness. Vernon, on the other hand, is characterized as further evolved because of his disinterested approach to beauty as its own end. Interestingly, it is only through her own experience of beauty that Clara is able to subsequently reflect and reach the conclusion that Vernon is "good," or further evolved. Her choice is based not on beauty, but on evolutionary status as demonstrated by the way in which these men relate to beauty.

By shifting the focus from beauty itself to aesthetic judgment, *The Egoist* is able to go beyond Darwin and Pater's lines of inquiry in investigating the purpose of beauty. It both examines beauty's purpose and posits aesthetic judgment as a method of gauging progress. In so

[19] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 76.

doing, the novel, like *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *Under Two Flags*, demonstrates a skepticism of established critical argument about beauty and suggests a compromise between what could be understood as oppositional notions of beauty and the experience of it. In this way, *The Egoist* is able to carve a theoretical space of its own in aesthetic discourse.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined *A Pair of Blue Eyes, Under Two Flags,* and *The Egoist* in order to delineate their unique theories of beauty. In doing so, my goal has been to demonstrate the ability of the novel as an art form to think through questions, problems, and possibilities as to what beauty can mean, how it can be used, and in what manner we perceive it. I have suggested that the novel's consideration of beauty in this manner enables it to engage with established aesthetic critics, such as John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, and Walter Pater. Additionally, I sought to widen the boundaries of the Aesthetic Movement by re-envisioning it as a non-linear discourse, an historical and conceptual departure from the definition Walter Hamilton provided in 1882, and which has shaped, in part, the discussion of Aestheticism since. Through this process of re-envisioning, I was able to consider, in addition to the three novels I have discussed, the role of science—specifically Darwinian sexual selection and nineteenth-century physiognomy—in shaping Aestheticism. What readers of this thesis are, I hope, left with is a sense of Aestheticism as a complex, multivalent discourse shaped, in part, by the novel.

In order to accomplish this goal, my first chapter examined *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and its relation to notions of beauty and moral truth established both by Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and by nineteenth-century physiognomy. While Ruskin and physiognomists trust in beauty's transparency and subsequent ability to reveal the moral character of a person, Hardy's novel actively disrupts this notion. Through the character of Elfride, the novel stresses the unreliability of beauty to convey moral character, as she is beautiful but simultaneously deceptive. Through the suggestion that beauty is unreliable, the novel disrupts Ruskin's distinction between aesthetic and theoretic perceptions of beauty, which reflects the novel's skepticism, a characteristic that was reflected in both of the texts that followed.

With skepticism strikingly akin to *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, *Under Two Flags* questions beauty's ability to convey truth. In chapter two, I suggested that *Under Two Flags* is contiguous to Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* in that the two utilize a similar argumentative structure. Yet, where Arnold constructs a hierarchical antithesis that privileges Hellenism over Hebraism, the novel collapses a masculine-feminine gender binary embodied in Bertie and Cigarette. In so doing, *Under Two Flags* contests the relationship that Arnold upholds between truth and beauty. At the same time, in deploying beauty into a social world, the novel is able to suggest, contrary to Arnold, that beauty is not the only necessary element in the creation of a well-rounded citizen.

My examination of *The Egoist* shifted our focus from the meaning of beauty to the meaning of aesthetic judgment. The novel challenges a Darwinian notion that posits beauty as purposeful and instead turns to Walter Pater's conception of beauty as self-contained pleasure. In the course of this repositioning, the novel transfers purpose and meaning from beauty to aesthetic judgment. In turn, aesthetic judgment is considered in a social world governed by the laws of evolution, where refined aesthetic judgment is correlated with evolutionary progress. I suggested, in closing, that the shift from beauty to judgment effectively functioned as a compromise between two seemingly oppositional notions—beauty as purposeful and purposeless—which, like *Under Two Flags* and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* reflected a rejection of critics' prescriptive views of beauty.

This project has required a tracing of influence and interaction between not only these novels and aesthetic discourse, but between these novels and discourses of science and morality. In turn, I hope what has resulted is an expanded notion of what "counts" as aesthetic discourse, and perhaps a more complete understanding of the manner in which this wider range of

contributors, in the form of novels and thinkers from other fields, actively shaped the boundaries of that discourse.

A chronological analysis of Aestheticism would now turn to its "seminal text," Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the perceived product of a lineage that hails from Ruskin down through Pater. This is demonstrated in Isobel Murray's "Introduction" to the novel:

> At this most basic level, it is easy to trace Wilde's indebtedness to his master Walter Pater, or at least his desire to follow him… Indeed, the book that Wilde echoes most frequently and significantly in *Dorian Gray* is Pater's *Renaissance,* the Conclusion to which poor Pater suppressed, because it was taken to justify a heedless hedonism the unworldly don had never dreamed of… I suggest it is helpful to a reading of *Dorian Gray* to see that Pater's two novels [*Marius the Epicurean* (1885) and the unfinished *Gaston de Latour*] are models for Wilde.[1]

Wilde's texts are often understood in terms of Pater, as Murray suggests. Indeed, Pater is identified as their prime—and seemingly only—influence. This effectively frames Pater as the genesis of Aestheticism and relegates its beginnings to the late 1860s. Furthermore, this downplays relationships Wilde's texts share with other critics and dismisses references such as the one Wilde makes in *The Critic As Artist* to Ruskin. Taking this praise of Ruskin seriously lends itself to a view of Aestheticism as a non-linear discourse, one characterized by the interaction between such fields as art criticism, aesthetic theory, science, and the novel. What surfaces when thinking of *Dorian Gray* in the context of the work of our three texts, is no longer a headfirst dive into the "heedless hedonism" in which Pater naively dipped his feet. Rather, it becomes a multilayered interaction between a number of sources and fields of knowledge, which

[1] Isobel Murray, "Introduction" in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, ed. Isobel Murray (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), x.

can help to explain both its skepticism and optimism about the potential for beauty and art to be everything and nothing at once.

Nevertheless, given that we are dealing with the work of Wilde, an author who famously relishes in the spaces between seeming and being, we must simultaneously caution ourselves against the danger of taking this nod toward Ruskin seriously. It is this kind of skepticism with which the three novels we have examined provide us. These works of fiction contest the singular approach of critics, offering an array of perspectives on beauty. Where the critic often purports to have the one, singular solution, the realm of fiction is a space in which this absolutism is troubled. Novels engage with the debate about beauty on the same level as criticism, but in a different way. What these novels seek is not a concrete answer to the meaning of beauty, nor its purpose, and not even the manner in which we perceive it. In lieu of this prescriptivism, these novels, and on a broader scale the novel as a form, offer a non-linear field in which questions, problems, and possibilities regarding beauty are simultaneously complicated and simplified—complicated by the offering of alternative conceptions, but simplified by its concurrent lack of rigidity. At the same time, this is not to suggest that the novel is reductive. Rather, it lives within and reacts to aesthetic debate. The novel embodies and engages with questions of beauty without defending or denying absolutely the position of critical texts. This simultaneous complication and simplification was true for the Victorians, and remains true for us, and it has been the claim of this thesis that this enigmatic quality makes looking at the Victorian novel in the context of its life within and contribution to aesthetic discourse important, necessary, and fruitful.

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