

## Lady Eastlake and the Characteristics of the Old Masters

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This article is concerned with the ideas, opinions, and assumptions that shaped Lady Eastlake's engagement with the old masters. In what follows, I argue that there were two interlocking aspects to her involvement in the field of old master scholarship. First, her role as a transmitter and supporter of Continental models of art history, especially as translator and editor of works by Passavant, Waagen, and Kugler, all of which can be cited as examples of canonization literature. The second aspect of her engagement with the old masters takes the form of spotlighting the relationship between artist and artwork via the mediating category of character. By concentrating on this aspect of Eastlake's writings, I aim to deepen our understanding of her way of writing, and to show how her evaluations of specific old masters relate to some of the broader critical and analytical concerns at work in Victorian letters.

### Formative writing

As I have shown elsewhere, Eastlake's status as an authority on art was not generally recognized until relatively late in her career.<sup>1</sup> In March 1867 she was introduced on the cover of the weekly *Lady's Own Paper*, somewhat cautiously, as a 'lesser known celebrity' but one who 'has nevertheless accomplished literary work that is known and valued by "the discerning few" and would have given, quite independently of her social position, a permanent importance to her name'.<sup>2</sup> For the readers of the *Lady's Own Paper* then, Lady Eastlake was primarily identified by her 'social position' — the widow of Sir Charles Eastlake — but the 'discerning few' who were able to attach her name to particular books and articles were now to be joined by the magazine's readership. Her (presumably consensual) appearance in the *Lady's Own Paper* was not just a public validation of her previously uncredited work, it also marked the start of her entry into the public realm as an authority on art, as someone who presented analytical constructs rather than mere opinions on art.

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<sup>1</sup> Julie Sheldon, "'In her own *métier*": The *Quarterly Review* of *Jane Eyre*', *Women's History Review*, 18 (2009), 835–47.

<sup>2</sup> 'Lady Eastlake', *Lady's Own Paper*, 9 March 1867, p. 1.

Although she had received practical training in drawing, both at home from local tutors in Norwich, including John Sell Cotman, and later at a private academy, in matters of the old masters (or the history of art) Eastlake was, for the most part, an autodidact.<sup>3</sup> She augmented her knowledge of the history of art by visiting private and public galleries, and by attending exhibitions of art throughout the 1830s and 1840s. Her marriage to Sir Charles Eastlake in 1849 undoubtedly gave her opportunities and experiences to extend her study of the old masters and, by the time of his death in 1865, she could claim to have had an ‘exceptional education in connoisseurship’.<sup>4</sup> However, this is to overlook her induction into old master art occasioned by her translations of three key texts written in German — by Passavant, Waagen, and Kugler.<sup>5</sup> Translators may be regarded as neutral service providers, creating faithful equivalents between two languages but, as Donata Levi and Susanne Stark have shown, women were often active agents in the textual and cultural translation between German and English texts.<sup>6</sup> Eastlake’s translations amply demonstrate her active agency, and they are replete with footnotes, some of which correct the original text and others which add first-hand observations.<sup>7</sup> Although contemporary reviewers sometimes judged her efforts harshly (one called her work on Passavant a ‘slatternly translation’), she was able to make factual corrections to Passavant’s text.<sup>8</sup> Her translations of Waagen’s *Treasures*

<sup>3</sup> Eastlake was rueful of what she called her ‘deficient education’. See letter to John Murray, 5 September 1843, in *The Letters of Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake*, ed. by Julie Sheldon (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), pp. 83–84 (p. 83).

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Hannah Brightwen, 14 October 1875, in *Letters*, ed. by Sheldon, pp. 406–08 (p. 407).

<sup>5</sup> J. D. Passavant, *Tour of a German Artist in England*, 2 vols (London: Saunders and Otley, 1836); *Kugler’s Hand-Book of Painting: The Schools of Painting in Italy*, trans. by a lady [Lady Eastlake], ed. by Sir Charles L. Eastlake, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1851); Gustav Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1854); and Gustav Waagen, *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain* (London: Murray, 1857).

<sup>6</sup> Donata Levi, ‘Fortuna di Morelli: appunti sui rapporti fra storiografia artistica tedesca e inglese’, in *La figura e l’opera di Giovanni Morelli: studi e ricerche*, ed. by Matteo Panzeri (Bergamo: Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai, 1987), pp. 19–54; Susanne Stark, ‘Behind Inverted Commas’: *Translation and Anglo-German Cultural Relations in the Nineteenth Century*, Topics in Translation, 15 (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999), p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> A lengthy footnote in Passavant’s *Tour of a German Artist* is one case in point: Eastlake provides a retort to Passavant’s offhand remark about the lack of respect shown by the English to private art collections with a reminder of the desecration of the decorations at Heidelberg Castle (1, 148–49).

<sup>8</sup> ‘Passavant’s Tour in England (Translated)’, *Athenaeum*, 2 July 1836, pp. 458–59 (p. 458); Neil MacGregor, ‘Passavant and Lady Eastlake: Art History, Friendship and Romance’, in *Correspondances: Festschrift für Margret Stufmann zum 24 November 1996*, ed. by Hildegard Bauereisen and Martin Sonnabend (Mainz: Schmidt, 1996), pp. 166–74 (pp. 168, 170).

of Art in Great Britain (1854) and his *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain* (1857) were, according to Frank Herrmann, ‘more detailed and probably more reliable’ than the original.<sup>9</sup> She also translated several editions of Franz Kugler’s *Handbook of Painting: The Italian Schools* (in 1851 and 1855) and she ‘prepared’ a new edition in 1874. In matters of translation, Eastlake entered into the commission as what Levi and Stark might call a ‘textual stakeholder’, amending points of fact and ironing out idiosyncrasies.

Eastlake’s formative experiences of old master scholarship came through the acts of verifying and construing equivalency of meaning in these texts. As a translator, she was not only accustomed to the close reading of others’ texts on old master art, she also had the confidence to make numerous editorial incursions. However, her opportunities for original thoughts and opinions were necessarily constrained by these commissions. The chance to become a more active, albeit incognito, agent of the opinion-forming press came in the early 1840s, when she was first commissioned to write for the *Quarterly Review*, conveying her house-inflected judgements on recent publications. Readers of the *Quarterly*, a Tory journal, would be steered towards traditional views of topical matters, often vehemently expressed by the house reviewers. Although not the most opinionated of these contributors, Eastlake was certainly valued for her strident, anti-reform reflections (‘she is of the right stuff’ was the opinion within the publisher’s circle).<sup>10</sup> In her lifetime, she would write some fifty anonymous articles, many for the *Quarterly*, expressing her views on diverse subjects, many related to the visual arts.

Following her marriage, Eastlake was able to put her name to her work (except for reviews, which remained, according to the convention of the period, unattributed during her lifetime). Her name first appeared, in print, on the title page of Waagen’s *Art Treasures* in 1854 and her future book publications appeared with her name on their title pages: *The History of Our Lord* (1864) was co-written with Anna Jameson; she compiled and supplied a memoir for Charles Eastlake’s *Contributions to the Literature of the Fine Arts* (1870), edited the *Life of John Gibson* (1870), revised the 1874 edition of Kugler’s *Handbook of Painting*, and edited *Dr Rigby’s Letters from France* (1880).<sup>11</sup> Despite Eastlake’s impressive literary back catalogue, the

<sup>9</sup> Frank Herrmann, ‘Dr Waagen’s Works of Art and Artists in England’, *Connoisseur*, 161 (1966), 173–77 (p. 174).

<sup>10</sup> *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, ed. by Charles Eastlake Smith, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1895), 1, 59.

<sup>11</sup> Sir Charles Eastlake, *Contributions to the Literature of the Fine Arts*, compiled by Lady Eastlake (London: Murray, 1869); *Life of John Gibson, R.A., Sculptor*, ed. by Lady Eastlake (London: Longmans, Green, 1870); *Handbook of Painting: The Italian Schools*, ed. by Sir Charles L. Eastlake, 4th edn, rev. by Lady Eastlake, 2 parts (London: Murray, 1874); *Dr Rigby’s Letters from France &c in 1789*, ed. by Lady Eastlake (London: Longmans, Green, 1880); and she also contributed descriptions

collaborative aspects of her writing rendered her a ‘lesser known celebrity’. The title pages of her books had lengthy credits, such as ‘continued and completed by’, ‘compiled by’, ‘revised and remodelled by’, ‘edited by’, and ‘translated by’. She showed signs of a mounting impatience with her compromised credits. For example, when she agreed to prepare the new edition of Kugler’s *Handbook* in 1874, which required a sizeable overhaul of the material (originally edited by her husband) in the light of new attributions of paintings, she lobbied for her name to appear as editor. The publisher, John Murray, was anxious to retain the name ‘Charles Eastlake’ on the title page, doubtless viewing it as important to sales. Lady Eastlake was affronted by the arrangement, complaining that ‘the labour I have bestowed on it [...] has been very arduous’ and she pushed without success to be named as the sole editor.<sup>12</sup> In the event Murray added an additional £50 to her fee to pacify her,<sup>13</sup> but she felt diminished by the wording of the title page, which she felt reduced her contribution to an afterthought: ‘Revised and remodelled from the latest researches, by Lady Eastlake.’ Around the same time, she had been publishing reviews of works on Leonardo, Michelangelo, Titian, Raphael, and Dürer for the *Edinburgh Review*, which she collected into the two-volume *Five Great Painters* (1883).<sup>14</sup> Although she acknowledged in her preface that *Five Great Painters* was the product of her ‘years by the side’ of Charles Eastlake, her name stood in isolation on a title page for the first time.

### ***Five Great Painters***

The fundamental feature of *Five Great Painters* is Eastlake’s desire — as the sole and named author — to create and perpetuate a sense of credibility. Classical rhetoricians called this *ethos*, a form of argumentation where the writer sets out to demonstrate why he or she is trustworthy, and why their conclusions should be taken seriously. Eastlake modified the discourse of *ethos* by imagining herself as what might be called a cultural

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to *Frescoes by Raphael on the Ceiling of the Stanza dell’Elidoro in the Vatican* (London: Virtue, 1875). She is reported to have co-authored two reviews with Harriet Grote: ‘Christian Art’, *Quarterly Review*, July 1864, pp. 143–76; and ‘The British Museum’, *Quarterly Review*, January 1868, pp. 147–79.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to John Murray, 22 June 1874, in *Letters*, ed. by Sheldon, p. 396.

<sup>13</sup> Julie Sheldon, “His Best Successor”: Lady Eastlake and the National Gallery’, in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. by Kate Hill (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 61–74. I am grateful to Adele Ernstom for prompting me to revisit my thoughts about the justice of Eastlake’s claim to be named as editor, by drawing my attention to the analogous experiences of Anna Jameson when John Murray published her *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* in 1858.

<sup>14</sup> Lady Eastlake, *Five Great Painters: Essays Reprinted from the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1883).

host, someone who introduced a select group of old masters to her readers. Her performance of expertise in *Five Great Painters* was coloured largely by her experiences of writing for the periodical press. The effect of Eastlake's unalloyed critical persona was not lost on the *Manchester Guardian*, whose reviewer remarked upon the 'fire' and 'masculine energy' of her 'acerbic' prose: 'Lady Eastlake, seemingly scorning quietude, at once enters the controversial arena [...] and almost in her first page begins a series of attacks upon all those who have been engaged in the same field as herself.'<sup>15</sup> Review was Eastlake's default form of commentary and she had numerous modes of critical address, but this article restricts itself to the most revealing: how she formulated a view of the cultural development of the old masters through a model of human character, one in which the individual artist, the true source of creative value, was pressed to engage with external forces.

The initial point to make about *Five Great Painters* is its unusual conceptualization of the Renaissance. For Ruskin, Eastlake's *bête noire*, to write a history of Renaissance painting is to be sensitive to the demotion of the principle of individual expression to a secondary function, the articulation of laws of composition. As such, this affirmed his theological account of Renaissance culture and society, which was a vision of extended cultural annihilation or catastrophic multifaceted fall involving the surrender of the human values to socialized formulas and cultural stereotypes. 'Life' — something discovered in the vitalized expressions of medieval culture — was normalized by the reduction of painting to the description of the regularity in the activity of art making. For Eastlake, the Renaissance was the product of a struggle of forces symbolized by two sets of dichotomies: the first, the tension between artist and social environment; the second, between different forms of character and different versions of invention. As will be seen, her favoured old masters were masters of the receptive faculty: they could imaginatively reconstruct experiences, especially those arising from natural observation. Progress consisted in the intensification of character in the realm of artistic practice and the complication of connections between artist and social milieu. In explicating aesthetic values in this way, she offered a revised interpretation of the history of painting where it is subsumed under sociological categories. From this viewpoint the story of the old masters was an expression of social history, as individual biographies revealed how subjects made artworks in cultures dominated and distorted by hierarchy and status. For Eastlake, the old master is at his most interesting when he is the source of strategies that favoured the development of systems of loyalty to self or community. In other words, the old master was a term positing an absolute law; when confronted with a

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<sup>15</sup> Review of Lady Eastlake, *Five Great Painters*, *Manchester Guardian*, 11 January 1884, p. 7.

violent social world, the Renaissance artist was forced back within himself: character affirmed the centrality of human interchange, for good or ill.<sup>16</sup>

As described above, this reciprocal intertwining of character and society seems to be close to Burckhardt's anti-metaphysical model of Renaissance development. After all, Burckhardt's thesis follows a broadly similar pattern, allowing for the appearance of a 'modernized' Renaissance, a process activated by the entrepreneurial activities of buccaneering merchants and soldier autocrats, and culminating in the fruitful collaboration between social individualism and the State.<sup>17</sup> As noted above, Eastlake's model is dichotomous: there are subjects (some with strong characters, some with weak characters), and there are social processes (some lawful, others anarchic). Her self-appointed task is to examine individual old masters as modulations of this pattern. The history of the old masters is the sum of these individual histories. From this perspective, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Titian, Raphael, and Dürer are subject to the fettering devices set in play by the agents of corrupt or criminal states, by forces that seek to control artistic labour and property. For her, the purpose of writing about the Renaissance art world is to offer a complete picture of the relationship between culture and society, one in which it is asserted that freely contracted commercial arrangements create the ideal conditions for the emergence of true civilization, which, it is believed, are realized in the liberal ethos of Victorian Britain; for Burckhardt, by contrast, to describe the Renaissance is to outline a network of proto-Nietzschean forces in which struggle makes the subject stronger.

In arguing that these claims about the nature of Renaissance demand our attention I want to indicate that Eastlake deployed a critical framework derived from two important areas of Victorian thought: firstly, popular discourses of political economy, as mediated by figures in her circle, most importantly her closest friend Mrs Grote, who discerned a specific type of development in art. In *Collected Papers* (1862), Grote asserts the belief that British commercial spirit — the celebration of markets and competition, and the appreciation of the laws of labour and capital — validated

<sup>16</sup> This view of the Renaissance of Ruskin's is the subject of his *Stones of Venice*, 3 vols (London: Smith, Elder, 1851–53). It is worth pointing out that Eastlake's idea of critical engagement with her contemporaries is formulated in terms of deficiency of character: Ruskin is little more than a liar and thief, as she wrote in a letter to Rawdon Brown, 12 July 1854: 'Of him we have heard nothing since he had the audacity to write to Sir Chas [Charles Eastlake]. He had borrowed some of Sir Chas' books & absconded without returning them' (*Letters*, ed. by Sheldon, pp. 162–65 (p. 164)). In a letter to A. H. Layard, 12 April 1881, she wrote that Carlyle's private papers demonstrate his 'wretched malice' and the 'sneers at most of those who were most kind to him'; she recollects that one could 'never trust him. He was too unequal in manners & temper — & as often very rude & quarrelsome' (pp. 502–03).  
<sup>17</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. by S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Allen & Unwin, 1878).



by modern political economists, constitutes the zenith of civilization.<sup>18</sup> Eastlake reiterates Grote's critical idiom when she presents Titian as a master of 'the language of business and trade' who battles to assert his interests in an age when 'monopolies' and 'sinecures' stood in for 'regular contracts' (*Five Great Painters*, 11, 6). The second area is the diffuse body of writings, spanning multiple critical fields, where character is the matrix for the development of models of aspiration, achievement, and value.<sup>19</sup> This secondary matter allows her to define Italian Renaissance society as an example of 'social corruption' where 'all was cruel and selfish in government, artificial and insincere in manners, gross in passions, and false in sentiment', and where 'duplicity was an education, successful treachery an accomplishment. Never were the worst features of human nature so deeply studied and so thoroughly practised. The Italian character of the day lent itself to combinations we most abhor' (*Five Great Painters*, 11, 90, 96, 96–97). What unites these two strands of thought is the conviction that the purpose of writing about art is to reveal the moral phenomena that stand behind and give definition to all forms of human behaviour. In both cases we see how Eastlake's socializing vision of the Renaissance was formed in the discursive universe of Victorian intellectual culture.

### Character and the old masters

Next, we must consider how these forms of argument shaped her attitude to individual Renaissance masters in *Five Great Painters*. The first piece of evidence comes from her essay on Leonardo, where she notes his

devotion to the Actual and to the True [and] his [...] respect for the laws and facts of nature [...]. With a mind in which the positive predominated over the imaginative, the natural result was that he applied the methods of science to the practice of art. He observed, investigated, and analysed, as if each work he undertook were a new experiment. (1, 26–27)

<sup>18</sup> See Mrs Grote, *Collected Papers* (London: Murray, 1862), pp. 43–80, 189–204. Eastlake goes out of her way to demonstrate the reasonableness of Grote's social methodology in her *Mrs Grote: A Sketch* (London: Murray, 1880). See, for instance, the chapter entitled 'Notebook — Remarks on the Poor' (pp. 49–71).

<sup>19</sup> This topic is argued, with a full range of examples, in Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Again, Mrs Grote may have been a catalyst here, as she imagines the history of art as a history of character, the overcoming of formula by the core qualities of modern common experience: 'Pious ecstasies, eloquent agonies, are no longer in demand; the sober Protestant form of faith, conjoined with amiable and homely forms of sympathy — domestic incidents and every-day interests — such are the subjects which command [...] attention' (*Collected Papers*, pp. 197–98).

Here, and in subsequent parts of the essay, she goes out of her way to propose that Leonardo was most true to himself when he acted as an entrepreneur of empiricism, a collaborator with a world of things, not a speculator on metaphysical matters. Leonardo's positivism — his allegiance to the view that the laws of nature can be verified in and by observation — confirms his commitment to the ideal of civilization, which is a greater good than art itself; but the grotesque, demonstrated by his fascination with 'freaks and deformities' (1, 28), indicates a residual commitment to a condition of cultural and material formlessness, a space of excess beyond law and logic. What she is preoccupied with here is clearing the ground for the development of a larger claim, one that enables her to put forward the case that pictorial ugliness, by 'obliterating the stamp of humanity', constituted the victory of 'conceit, apathy, ignorance, stupidity, insolence, [and] vulgarity' over 'human character'.<sup>20</sup> This, in turn, relates to her version of Reynoldsian aesthetics, perhaps mediated by her husband Sir Charles Eastlake, as she goes out of her way to confirm that the true artist collaborates with Nature by concentrating on what she calls 'the average forms of beauty and symmetry' (1, 28). Over and over again, she distinguishes between what are called 'the permanent truths' and the 'accidental appearances' of Nature to insist that, at his best, Leonardo confirms the lawfulness of the relationship between pictorial and material forms (1, 30).

But this is not the whole story. There is also apparent in this essay an increasing interest in the vision of Leonardo as an enterprising master of life, a creator receptive to the productive energies of the world. Hence, she lavishes praise on a figure who was

less artist than physiologist, engineer, mathematician [...]. The skilled labourer in every department. The man of all work for this world, and therefore of incomparably more work than the world then could use. With practical purposes in all his researches; seeing, observing, noticing everything — the fall of the wave — the motion of the bird — the duration of the echo — the veins of the leaf — the bones of extinct animals — the scintillations of the stars — the conditions of the moon — the connexion of motion with heat [...]. And inventing everything; [...] his pages teem with every form of mercantile and even humblest domestic utility. (1, 87–88)

<sup>20</sup> *Five Great Painters*, 1, 28, 29. It should be noted that Eastlake's view, that the grotesque acts to suppress those forms of curiosity necessary for the development of independent thinking, was rejected by supporters of grotesque culture, for whom it constituted the victory of common experience over the kind of academicism Eastlake attacked. See, for instance, Thomas Wright, *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), where the grotesque represents the triumph of contract-based bourgeois values over the despotic culture of academies and kings.



What Eastlake means in this commendation is that Leonardo excels at those things that result in the development of the comforts associated with polite society. Notice how the passage fuses the extraordinary and the ordinary, culminating in an image of a homely or utilitarian visionary devoted to fostering and directing growth in civil society.

On another plane, however, Leonardo is a resounding failure, as immediately after her panegyric Eastlake announces, ‘we linger over the course and character of Leonardo [...] with an absence of satisfaction painful to ourselves’ (I, 89). She goes on to explain that

much of what we feel to be defective in Leonardo must inexorably be laid to himself. For no less strange and rare than the range of his intellectual gifts were the extremes obvious in his character. In his art he reaches from the subtlest and sweetest beauty to the most unnatural and hideous deformity; [...] from the clearest methods of reasoning and closest accuracy of observation as regards cause and effect to all the sure consequences of reckless expenditure, disorder, and social degradation — debts, fawning, unpaid salary, and humiliating beggings, even for clothes; in his life from the illustrious philosopher who commands the wonder and admiration of all enlightened ages, to the hireling who knew not the meaning of the word patriot; who shifted with every wind of fortune, executed *chefs d’oeuvre* or invented toys, equally to flatter the French invader or the Milanese usurper; and placed himself, like the mercenary troops of the time, at the disposal of whomsoever happened to be in power, no matter how obtained; principally serving two of the most iniquitous princes of the age, Lodovico Sforza and Caesar Borgia.<sup>21</sup>

She reaches this conclusion because the force of her argument lies in the conviction that any explanation of the old masters must concentrate on human qualities of experience and engagement, as well as pictorial achievements. In this sense, pictorial interpretation is always pointing to forms of authority and engagement that go beyond the standard interpretative methods of connoisseurship. Once again, the principal means through which she reaches this conclusion is by utilizing ideas taken from Victorian discourses on the relationship between character and society, the best-known example being Samuel Smiles, whose hugely popular works on self-improvement appeared from the late 1850s.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Five Great Painters*, I, 91–93. This motivation, the need to read art via character, is evident in the preparation of her thoughts on the old masters, as illustrated in a letter to A. H. Layard on 4 May 1874: ‘I am looking a little into Leo: da V.’s nature & character as connected with the state of Italy at this time, & hope to make something of it for an article in *Edinr*’ (*Letters*, ed. by Sheldon, p. 391).

<sup>22</sup> Smiles and Eastlake were both published by John Murray. Smiles’s publications include *Self-Help* (London: Murray, 1859), *Character* (London: Murray, 1871), and *A*

When seen in the round, it is the capacity of the old master to make individualism a general principle of creativity that enchants her, as this is taken to offer a point of contact with the modern subject. Naturally, a full survey of this attitude is beyond the scope of a short article. All the same, the following statements on Michelangelo from *Five Great Painters* indicate the clarity of arrangement evident in a critical model where character is the operative value in the expression of human creativity:

The figure of Michael Angelo, as man and artist, is a salient feature in the history not only of Art, but of mankind. (1, 101)

Sternness and austerity [...] were the natural armour of a great soul against the folly and ignorance which beset him on all sides. (1, 102)

No man more truly and pathetically knew himself to be unknown. Under these circumstances his character suffered [an] injustice. (1, 111)

His private character [was] [...] affectionate, [...] abrupt, alternately patient and impatient, and strong alike in all moods. (1, 124–25)

[His] art [...] is one difficult broadly to define, unless by negatives; not religious, nor romantic, not classic, not even strictly Italian. [...] Nevertheless, it stands alone as the expression of the grandest and most energetic individuality the world has ever known. (1, 135)

His own individuality was so overwhelmingly strong that no other individuality could be transmitted through it. In all he represented he infused *himself*; where he aimed to do more like others [...] he has simply no character. (1, 137, emphasis in original)

Impetuous [...] and indignant he could be [...] but as to the wilfulness and uncontrollability with which he has been charged, his life displays, on the contrary, one course of meek submission of his opinions, wishes, and interests to authority which, by any artist worthy the name, would now be defied with equal contempt and safety. (1, 212)

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*Publisher and His Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of the Late John Murray*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1891). In a letter to A. H. Layard on 13 October 1883, Eastlake was typically sniping about Smiles's literary skills: 'I am reading a rather remarkable book. Nasmyth's life — rather egotistical as all autobiographies must be — nor do I see what good Mr Smiles has done in editing it — except to give it an ill-written preface' (*Letters*, ed. by Sheldon, pp. 526–28 (p. 527)).

Once more, the art of the old master is little more than a filtering device for framing general propositions that allow Eastlake to demonstrate how artistic principles arise from or relate to ethical qualities. Character, not culture, is the true subject of a text dedicated to explaining how moral values are what holds civilization together. In her world, individualism, which enriches character by propagating trust, is the source of all true human development.<sup>23</sup>

Similar reflections on the scope, purpose, and value of art, as revealed in the study of the Renaissance, inform her accounts of Titian and Raphael:

The 'Bacchus and Ariadne' [...] represents Titian in his true character [...] transporting us to spheres wherein, however extravagant the seeming discord, the allegiance to Nature preserves the keynote. [...] Fable is only Nature that has passed through a certain heat of the mind. (II, 46–48)

It would be a mistake to imagine that Raphael's art was of that distinctive and pronounced character which marks the subjective painter. [...] Far from being strongly individual in bias, the peculiar receptiveness of his nature inclined him to adopt even too easily the manner of a new master. (II, 129)

The basis of all [Raphael's] character, his inward life [...] was Umbrian. (II, 168)

Raphael's powers of receptivity and assimilation were boundless. (II, 173)

[The times] in which Raphael [were] cast were not favourable to the exhibition of genuine individual character. (II, 177)

In that worldliness of character which made [Raphael] equally ready to serve friend and foe he may be [...] compared to Leonardo. (II, 179)

This line of reasoning, as I have already hinted, was due in large measure to Eastlake's desire to lead public opinion, to create a critical framework in which her analytical constructs were presented as facts rather than anything as vulgar as mere opinions. What we see at work here is a critical activity in which the positivist spirit of connoisseurship (observation and examination of artworks rather than categorization based on the principle of style) is obliged to collaborate with the world of human expression, which is governed by moral sensibility. Character, and not genius, is what elevates the artist to a condition of enlightened individualism. Once more, we see how

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<sup>23</sup> For instance, in the twenty-seven pages devoted to the Sistine ceiling she avoids discussing any of Michelangelo's designs.

Eastlake, eschewing high argument for practical criticism, concentrates on explaining the impulses towards self-realization in art.

In the final instance, then, Eastlake's engagements with the old masters reveal a consistent pattern of thought in which art is the vehicle for the discussion of values that belong to, and express the concerns and assumptions of, Victorian culture and society. It comes as no surprise, then, that her letters are peppered with glowing observations on the glorious character of modern British art, as is seen in this observation:

I went about no studios before the pictures were sent to the R. Academy, only to Millais' who particularly requested me to come, & he never had a finer roomful [...]. Right is a fine portrait, his own head with just a hand & palette, for the Uffizi portrait room is really magnificent — the Italians will stare at it. If Leighton & Watts send as fine versions of their respective heads our painters will be thought a fine race.<sup>24</sup>

This is a statement that comes close to the view that it is the character of the modern British artist that the Italians will 'stare at', as they contemplate a race of modern masters destined to supplant the old masters, those prototypes of modern individualism with their oscillating and unreliable grasp of character.

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<sup>24</sup> Letter to A. H. Layard, 15 April 1880, in *Letters*, ed. by Sheldon, pp. 488–90 (p. 490). An earlier letter to Layard on 4 May 1874 had made a similar observation about Watts's capacity to reveal character: 'a head of J. S. Mill — quite fit to be a frontispiece to a memoir, compressed and even extinguished in feeling, & unnaturally expanded in intellect. The mouth tight shut, the eyes not [looking] at you, the cranium immense' (p. 390).