

The Awakening Conscience: Christian Sentiment, Salvation, and Spectatorship in Mid-Victorian Britain

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In the third volume of *Modern Painters* (1856), Victorian sage and evangelical John Ruskin interrogated the connection between art and faith but declared that pictorial representation does not have the power to promote belief. Art was a product or ‘fruit’ of ‘sincere Christianity’.¹ Like other sincere evangelicals Ruskin viewed the evangelizing role of art with distrust, but like other critics, artists, and clergy at mid-century, he was grappling with the form and function of religious painting and architecture.² New understandings of art as a medium of sensory effects and of spectatorship as a state of sensation were emerging. When Ruskin wrote to *The Times* in May 1854 to defend William Holman Hunt’s *The Awakening Conscience* (1853) (*Fig. 1*), on view at the Royal Academy, he did not ignore the painting’s religious agency. Restating the sequence of events at the centre of the narrative, he noted the protagonist’s dramatic conversion from fallen woman to convert, when she was roused by some ‘chance words’ from a song; observing that the music has ‘struck upon the numbed places of her heart’. Describing the spectator standing before Hunt’s painting as a ‘witness to human sorrow’, Ruskin elaborated the emotional transformation of the viewer who was awakened into compassion.³ His account of Hunt’s painting has often been interpreted as a restatement of patriarchal social norms but this reading overlooks Ruskin’s defence of the Christian artwork’s transactional power. The painting promoted an affective

¹ *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, Library Edition, 39 vols (London: Allen; New York: Longmans, Green, 1903–12), v: *Modern Painters*, vol. III (1904), p. 86.

² Michaela Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible: Representation and Belief in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), argues that the practice of religious painting was being rethought in the 1840s and 1850s (p. 11), and I include architecture in this reformation.

³ ‘The Awakening Conscience’, in *Works of Ruskin*, ed. by Cook and Wedderburn, xii: *Lectures on Architecture and Painting, etc.* (1904), pp. 333–35 (pp. 333, 334). As Ruskin noted on p. 333, n. 1, the painting had originally been titled *The Awakening Conscience* and was now usually called *The Awakened Conscience*. This name change attempts to reduce the ambiguity of the protagonist’s choice.

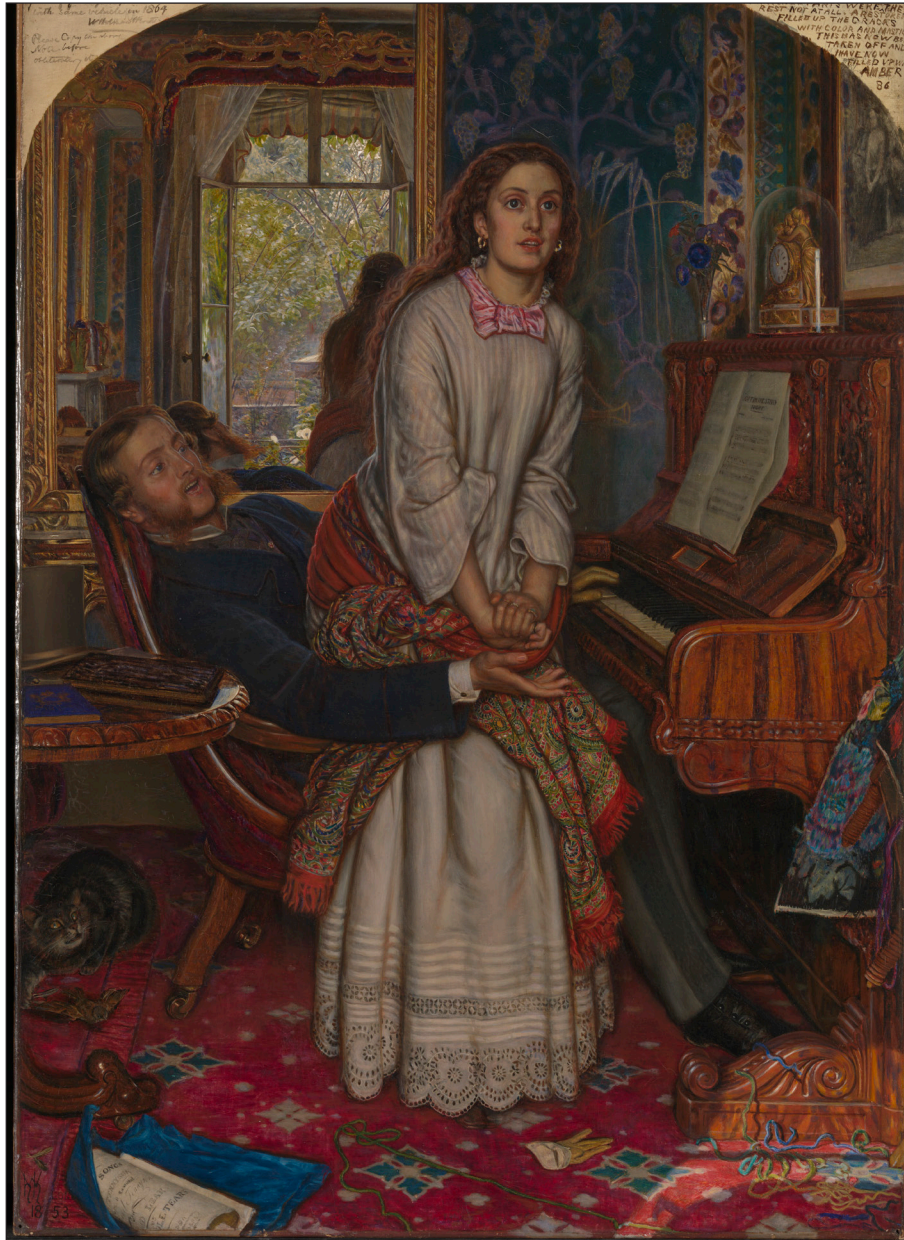


Fig. 1: William Holman Hunt, *The Awakening Conscience*, 1853, oil on canvas, 762 × 559 mm. © Tate CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported) <<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hunt-the-awakening-conscience-to2075>>.

connection between subject and viewer.⁴ Spectatorship was a transformative process in which the viewer was directly affected ‘through a sensory encounter with the art object’.⁵

This article explores the mid-century ideal of religious awakening to recover Victorian understandings of art and material culture as sensory media for regenerating Christian feeling. Fervent moments of salvation, conversion, or heightened devotion will be traced through an examination of three linked case studies: the paintings of Protestant evangelical painter William Holman Hunt, the built and illustrated environments of Catholic convert Augustus Welby Pugin, and the material technologies employed to proselytize prisoners in mainland Britain and the colonial penitentiary. Beginning with an examination of Hunt’s work, I set up this article’s key themes: the evangelizing function of the artwork, the role of the senses in Victorian conversion narratives, and the representation of inner and outer signs of religious affect. Following this, I offer new readings of Pugin’s work by examining his interiors as sensory instruments of religious awakening, amenable to absorption within the devotional and disciplinary environments of Victorian prisons. Pugin’s reformed Gothic environments were depicted in his illustrations for modest Catholic devotional books and these were carried by the first Catholic bishop of Van Diemen’s Land deep into the heart of the Antipodean penal system. These connections may seem startling, but recovering these threads reveals the broader environmental practices underpinning Victorian Christian culture. Understandings of interiors and artworks as proselytizing agents found an intellectual base in associationist ideals of sensory and perceptual stimulation as mechanisms for shaping reformed human subjects.

Holman Hunt, divine messages, and the psychology of Christian feeling

The story of Christian art from the medieval to the modern period has often been recounted as a history of the divestment of art’s devotional function. While not disagreeing with this overall narrative, historian Caroline Walker Bynum has observed that the transition from cult object to artwork was crowned by the triumph of art, but even then, new art objects retained something of ‘the late medieval understanding of the power of material’: of

⁴ See Caroline Arscott, ‘Employer, Husband, Spectator: Thomas Fairbairn’s Commission of *The Awakening Conscience*’, in *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class*, ed. by Janet Wolff and John Seed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 159–90 (pp. 171–80).

⁵ This article draws on a theory of the viewer’s sensory encounter with an artwork from Jill Bennett, ‘Stigmata and Sense Memory: St Francis and the Affective Image’, *Art History*, 24 (2001), 1–16; and Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

matter as powerful and alive.⁶ In a similar vein, Holman Hunt's late-life private comments on his art practice suggest that the supernatural, devotional function of an artwork was revived by the religious renewals of the nineteenth century. Writing privately to William Bell Scott in 1883, Hunt confided that his painting *The Light of the World* (1851–52), his companion piece to *The Awakening Conscience*, sprang from his own conversion to a new evangelical faith: 'I painted the picture with what I thought, unworthy though I was, to be divine command, and not simply as a good subject.'⁷ An inscription was painted in brushstrokes but hidden under the curved top of the frame. It read, 'Don't pass me by, Lord.' Hunt connected the public painting to his own private devotional practice.

The hidden epigram is symbolic, however, of larger mid-century controversies surrounding the revival of art as a medium for evangelizing faith. The early religious subjects of the Pre-Raphaelites from 1848 and 1851 were 'aligned with the sacramentalist ambitions and aesthetics of the Catholic Revivalists', but the idea of art as a devotional object was open to accusations of 'Romish' practice.⁸ Indeed, the initial reception of *The Light of the World* was coloured by the hostile reaction of Protestant critics such as Thomas Carlyle who denounced the painting as a 'papistical phantasy' (Mane-Wheoki, p. 116). The secret inscription carried Hunt's declaration of faith but hid it from the prying eyes of the world. This gesture and his letter to Scott affirmed the powerful reality of the supernatural when encountered through the intimate experience of conversion. Critic Mark Roskill describes the hidden text as 'a personal spiritual avowal', but the epigram is also a prayer.⁹ The painting is a public medium for personal access to the sacred.¹⁰

In his 1905 memoirs written towards the end of his life, Hunt publicly reiterated the analogy between religious painting and divine message.

⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), p. 121.

⁷ William Bell Scott, *Autobiographical Notes of the Life of William Bell Scott and Notices of his Artistic and Poetic Circle of Friends, 1830–1882*, ed. by W. Minto, 2 vols (London: Osgood, McIlvaine, 1892), II, 310–13. See also, George P. Landow, 'William Holman Hunt's "The Shadow of Death"', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 55 (1973), 197–239, for an extended discussion of the relations between Hunt's religious beliefs and his painting.

⁸ Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, 'The Light of the World: Mission and Message', in *Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, ed. by Katharine A. Lochnan and Carol Jacobi (Toronto: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 115–34 (p. 115); W. Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1905), II, 409–10 describes some of the mainstream objections to his religious depictions.

⁹ Mark Roskill, 'Holman Hunt's Differing Versions of the "Light of the World"', *Victorian Studies*, 6 (1963), 228–44 (p. 231).

¹⁰ Charles H. Lippy, *Being Religious American Style: A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1994), p. 11.

He observed that the artists of the past ‘diligently wrestled to express the higher truth, [that] their work bore the character of a message from heaven’ (Holman Hunt, 1, 40). In the same 1883 letter to Scott cited above, Hunt discussed *The Light of the World*, a work much reproduced, copied, and toured. Hunt confided an account of the painting’s affective power, claiming he had heard of

persons in sickness who knew not the painter’s name, and troubled themselves not at all about the manner of its production, or the artistic question, speaking of the picture as one that had haunted them and given them hope — the hope that makes death have no terrors.¹¹

In the face of hostile reviews, Hunt emphasized the devotional value of the painting over its art value, but the two spheres of art and devotion were not easily separated. Hunt’s term ‘haunting’ conjures up the presence of supernatural agency in the artwork itself.

Even if mid-century cultural critics were hostile, the intersection of art and devotion was promoted by some religious denominations, and they found common ground in ideas of associationism. In the late 1870s a member of the Anglo-Catholic vanguard evangelizing poor congregations in ‘slum’ districts claimed that visual and aural ceremonial, ritual and decor, were effective proselytizing agents because ‘most minds receive impressions more readily through the eye and ear than directly through the brain’.¹² A fairly crude theory of sense impressions was understood through the widely circulated trope of the ‘education of the eye’.¹³ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, conventional accounts of body and soul had placed faith in a hierarchical registry as a ‘higher faculty’, and relegated sensation to a lower faculty.¹⁴ The connection between faith and sensation broke across the division of higher and lower faculties even as it raised thorny questions about mechanistic accounts of the material basis of the body and

¹¹ Bell Scott, II, 310–13. Kate Flint notes that *The Awakening Conscience* hung in the middle room and *The Light of the World* in the west room of the 1854 Royal Academy exhibition. See Kate Flint, ‘Reading *The Awakening Conscience* Rightly’, in *Pre-Raphaelites Re-viewed*, ed. by Marcia Pointon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 45–65 (p. 52); Mane-Wheoki discusses the later copies by Hunt and the reproduction and circulation of the painting (Mane-Wheoki, pp. 115–34).

¹² John Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), p. 152.

¹³ The 1854 *Routledge Guide to the Crystal Palace* proclaimed, ‘The teachings of the Crystal Palace are intended to be conveyed through the best of media — the eyes.’ Quoted in Kate Nichols, *Greece and Rome at the Crystal Palace: Classical Sculpture and Modern Britain, 1854–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 37.

¹⁴ Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 24.

belief. The Anglo-Catholic missionaries of the late 1870s sidestepped fears about the sensual basis for conversion by emphasizing the strategic function of evangelizing strategies that could engage the corporeal appetites of a working-class constituency.

The notion of a sensory basis for conversion was a key strand in nineteenth-century devotional and disciplinary environments, but it remained controversial. The sense impressions explanation offered by the Anglo-Catholic mission was an expression of the ‘psychological associationism’ of the school of John Locke and his post-Enlightenment heirs (Rylance, p. 44). The school of Locke was also known as the experience philosophy and its adherents asserted that the mind was primarily developed by experience. Inherent ideas played a minimal role in shaping an individual’s faculties. Although seeds of this belief stretch back to Aristotle, a modern formulation of experience philosophy begins with Locke in the 1690s, before being fully developed into a physical theory of the mind by David Hartley in the eighteenth century. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, associationism had found fertile ground in social reform programmes. Diverse advocates included Owenite socialists, Benthamite utilitarians, a young Harriet Martineau, and feminists such as John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill. Proponents favoured a psychophysiological approach (Rylance, p. 40). Associationism presumed that mental life flowed from sensory and perceptual stimulation (Rylance, p. 57). Associationist philosophy was bitterly contested by the ‘Faculty Psychologists’, who asserted the innate cognitive faculties of the mind. Samuel Taylor Coleridge launched an early attack on the ‘mechanical’ experience doctrine and Dickens caricatured utilitarian experiments in moulding character.¹⁵ Key Scottish thinkers — Sir William Hamilton, Thomas Reid, and A. Campbell Fraser — were the leading exponents of the innate faculties doctrine. Throughout the nineteenth century the faculty psychology position remained the dominant approach. Nevertheless, reformist Christian practice from gallery to jail began to examine the role of sense impressions as mechanisms for salvation and conversion. They also asserted the role of sensation in dimensions of Christian spectatorship. The artwork and its sensory effects would play a role in these explorations.

¹⁵ Coleridge decried the ‘despotism of outward impressions and that of senseless and passive memory’. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. by George Watson, rev. edn (London: Dent, 1971), p. 64. Charles Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend* described the mind of schoolmaster Bradley Headstone in an unflattering comparison ‘as like a mental warehouse’. See Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp. 267–68.

Art, affect, and associationism

Concerns with art, affect, and associationism coalesce in Holman Hunt's *Awakening Conscience*. Hunt's contemporary, the critic William Michael Rossetti, declared that 'of all the pictures in the Academy' this painting is 'the one which most challenges, and most is painted for the express purpose of challenging, grave practical thought in the beholder'.¹⁶ In Hunt's painting, a young, unmarried woman rises suddenly from the lap of her profligate lover. Her awkward pose is suspended between sitting and standing. Her clasped hands are interlocked as if in prayer. The painting's subject matter, its title, and the symbols and inscriptions on the frame announce the artwork's engagement with the intensely felt, transformative state of religious 'awakening'.¹⁷ The protagonist's salvation is depicted as a series of corporeal affects, registered in her pose, her stare, and her tear-filled eyes. (Although her face was subsequently repainted.) The painting addresses key issues in Victorian art and faith by depicting religious conversion, by implying that art has a key role in generating Christian belief, and by exploring religious affect as a psychological state of changed inner perception and transformed external countenance.

Critical focus on the painting's Christian subject matter has grown steadily with the expansion of Pre-Raphaelite scholarship in the late twentieth century. Iconographic research into Victorian religious imagery in the late 1970s and early 1980s fostered Jeremy Maas's monograph study of *The Light of the World*, and *The Awakening Conscience* was included in George Landow's investigation of the artist's use of Ruskinian typological symbolism as a method for better reconciling realism with elaborate iconography.¹⁸ In the 1980s important feminist readings by Caroline Arscott and Kate Flint repositioned the painting within the context of fallen women narratives and Victorian social codes.¹⁹ In the last decade a revival of interest in nineteenth-century religious practice has begun to reorient critics to the painting's Christian import. *The Awakening Conscience* was included

¹⁶ William Michael Rossetti, *Fine Art, Chiefly Contemporary: Notices Re-Printed, with Revisions* (London: Macmillan, 1867), p. 241.

¹⁷ The painting is not always discussed in these terms. Hunt's exploration of the social codes governing sex, gender, and prostitution has dominated 1980s and 1990s scholarship. Carol Jacobi, 'William Holman Hunt (1827–1910)', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. by Elizabeth Prettejohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 116–32 (p. 124) discusses the work as a further development of Hunt's interest in female choice. The complexity of the painting allows different readings and foci.

¹⁸ Jeremy Maas, *Holman Hunt's "The Light of the World"* (London: Scholar Press, 1984); and George P. Landow, *Replete with Meaning: William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

¹⁹ Arscott, 'Employer, Husband, Spectator'; Flint, 'Reading *The Awakening Conscience* Rightly'.

in Michaela Giebelhausen's *Painting the Bible* monograph, and Tate's *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde* catalogue (2012) placed the painting in the 'Salvation' section. Greater attention to the connection between empire and religion has fuelled more research by Jonathan Mane-Wheoki into the public, devotional functions of Hunt's later religious works and the role of specific theological interests, such as prophecy, in shaping Hunt's personal and political vision of Palestine.²⁰ This article continues the renewal of interest in the painting's religious themes but expands beyond these readings. I examine the artwork's strategies for producing devotional affects in the viewing subject and investigate the painting's depiction of religious affect in the inner and outer life of its protagonists. In this way, the work of art establishes an affective relationship between painting and spectator.

In the 1840s the evangelical narrative structure had emerged in the 'secular' novels of the Brontës, Thackeray, and early Dickens.²¹ These texts blended secular and sacred ways of seeing. In their wake Hunt explored the emotionally charged moments of error, crisis, and conversion. The Christian discourse of 'awakening' was particularly concerned with mechanisms that activate conversion, salvation, and devotion. Early reviewers of *The Awakening Conscience* identified the sheet music on the piano as the spark for the young woman's conversion, and Ruskin observed that 'some chance words' from Thomas Moore's song 'Oft, in the stilly night' 'have struck upon the numbed places of her heart'. Many years later, towards the end of his life, Hunt wrote of the painting and noted, 'my desire was to show how the still small voice speaks to a human soul in the turmoil of life' (Holman Hunt, 1, 347). Hunt's trope of the inner voice drew on a long Christian tradition — since Augustine — of sudden conversion sparked by the whisper of an 'inner word', an inner truth illuminated by grace.²² One musicologist has suggested that the sheet music on the piano and ground should be seen as sacramental, but the role of the song as a divine message and stimulant to salvation is implied rather than clearly spelled out in a causal sequence of events (O'Connell, p. 143). In this way

²⁰ See Mane-Wheoki, pp. 113–32; and Nicholas Tromans, 'Palestine: Picture of Prophecy', in *Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, ed. by Lochnan and Jacobi, pp. 135–60.

²¹ See Emily Walker Heady, *Victorian Conversion Narratives and Reading Communities* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 80.

²² See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 29–30. St Augustine famously heard a voice urging him to 'pick up and read, pick up and read', and opening the Bible he read the words of St Paul to the Romans. Julia Grella O'Connell picks up on this reference in her discussion of music in *The Awakening Conscience* in 'Of Music, Magdalenes, and Metanoia in *The Awakening Conscience*', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 24 (2005), 123–43 (p. 137).

the painting gives a role to the senses but avoids accusations of conversion as a mechanical reflex in response to sensory stimulation.

The woman's Christian awakening is coincident with the melancholic affect of the song. The song's lyrics describe a mournful narrator's remembrance of people and places past, including childhood, in the first verse:

Oft, in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond memory brings the light
Of other days around me;
The smiles, the tears,
Of boyhood years. (Landow, *Replete with Meaning*, p. 45)

Depictions of childhood memories were a popular leitmotif of the 'associationist romance' in Victorian culture, affirming children's early experiences as an emotional reservoir, provoking emotional association that resonated in later life (Rylance, p. 66). The song's scenes may have recalled the woman's own childhood memories and stimulated a cascade of associations including memories of her earlier Christian faith. From Aristotle on, associationism had worked with the idea of mental associations and claimed that the mind worked by linking ideas in chains of thought. This intellectual tradition contributed to the mid-nineteenth-century formulation of unconscious process.²³ By suggesting a chain of associations awakening a repressed but inherent inner conscience, the woman's conversion is driven by a sudden, mysterious Christian illumination rather than the purely sensory stimulant of music.

Elements of the painting assert a role for art in awakening Christian conscience.²⁴ The centre of the composition is filled with the interlinked bodies of the man and woman but the surrounding objects form a tight frame for their bodies; balanced on the right-hand side by the piano keyboard and sheet music, and framed on the left-hand side by a round rosewood table topped with a large, decorated book. The book is bound with imitation wood bindings in the 'missal style' of nineteenth-century reworkings of medieval devotional illuminated books. Hunt depicted Henry Noel Humphreys's then recently published book *The Origin and Progress of Writing*.²⁵ Humphreys's illustrated history described the rise and imminent decline of the picto-alphabetic script, ending with a triumphal

²³ 'Introduction: The Unconscious Mind and the Workings of Memory', in *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830–1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 67–72 (p. 67).

²⁴ For 'associationist romance' see Rylance, p. 66. For details on the setting of the poem to music, see 'Thomas Moore 1779–1852', <www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/thomas-moore> [accessed 7 November 2016].

²⁵ Henry Noel Humphreys, *The Origin and Progress of the Art of Writing* (London: Ingram Cooke, 1853).

celebration of the new Pitman shorthand method as the first truly faithful transcription of human speech. Humphreys's missal style was also an 'art book' — a form popularized by the designer and illustrator Owen Jones.²⁶ The sheet music also had art origins because it set to music a Gaelic ballad 'collected' by Byron biographer and Romantic poet Thomas Moore. The art book and art song sit on either side of the couple and might be interpreted to imply that art is a medium for divine and true messages. Even popular, medievalist forms of book and ballad could be steps on a pathway to more elevated forms of contemplation.²⁷

By linking objects to states of feeling and perception, the painting mobilizes non-human elements to depict the protagonist's newly religious state. A broad belief in the auratic power of things circulated in nineteenth-century discussions of commodities and personal property. From Marx's unmasking of the fetishizing effects of the commodity, to literary portraits of objects as 'ideal sites of sentiment', traces of people lingered in things.²⁸ Ruskin's careful reading of the painting suggested that its perception of objects could be linked to states of mind. Examining the picture's precise rendering of the interior, Ruskin observed:

Nothing is more notable than the way in which even the most trivial objects force themselves upon the attention of a mind which has been fevered by violent and distressful excitement. They thrust themselves forward with a ghastly and unendurable distinctness, as if they would compell [*sic*] the sufferer to count, or measure, or learn them by heart. (*Works*, ed. by Cook and Wedderburn, XII, 334)

Ruskin suggests that realism is a state of mind. The Victorian world of material goods offers a portal into the human mind's invisible interior states. The super-realism of Pre-Raphaelite painting, including its abundance of minute

²⁶ For Humphreys's work, see Claire Jones, 'Catalogue Entries 48 and 49', in *Sculpture Victorious: Art in an Age of Invention, 1837–1901*, ed. by Martina Droth, Jason Edwards, and Michael Hatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 169–71; Howard Leathlean, 'Henry Noel Humphreys and the Getting-Up of Books in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Book Collector*, 38 (1998), 182–209. For Owen Jones's book designs, see Carol A. Hrvol Flores, *Owen Jones: Design, Ornament, Architecture, and Theory in an Age of Transition* (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), pp. 36–67.

²⁷ J. F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 111.

²⁸ See John Plotz, *Personal Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), for 'ideal sites of sentiment' (p. 120); Christopher Linder, *Fictions of Commodity Culture: From the Victorian to the Postmodern* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); and for the material turn in Victorian cultural studies, see Victoria Mills, 'Introduction: Victorian Fiction and the Material Imagination', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 6 (2008) <<http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.468>>.

detail, is often linked to the representational systems of photography, but Ruskin dislocates this premise.²⁹ Key psychological conditions of distress, suffering, and excitement produce changes in perception and break down boundaries between bodies and objects. Under duress, the human subject becomes much more permeable to the external world of trivial things. Acquisitive impulses and cataloguing and collecting objects become signs of mental disorder; objects appear to force themselves on human subjects and demand to be counted and measured. In John Addington Symonds's work *Sleep and Dreams*, published three years before Ruskin's letter, a similar psychological condition of dramatically changed consciousness was described as 'double consciousness'.³⁰ Symonds recounts the story of a man waking after sleep, but no longer able to associate the objects which surrounded him with the associations they bore before he fell asleep. The loss of habitual memories and associations produces dramatic changes in the man's mental identity:

He looks out on a new world projected from his own inner being. By a melancholy power, a fatal gift, of appropriating and assimilating the real objects perceived by his senses, he takes possession of them, nay, disembodies them, and fuses them into his imaginary creation. (pp. 24–25)

Hunt's painting invites us to witness and perhaps identify with the protagonist's new world of consciousness, by erasing clear boundaries between the scene and the world of the viewer. The foreground of the painting falls away into our space, and in the mirror depicted at the back of the room we see a reflection of the sunlit garden scene the female protagonist looks towards. We see what she sees, and this distant scene is represented in a distinctly different, painterly mode. If the room space is rendered through the new visual clarity afforded by psychological double consciousness, the garden represents a dappled, more Edenic future.

Ruskin was the only contemporary reviewer to explore the convert's changed inner perception as a set of tangible effects in the world of the painting. Many more nineteenth-century reviewers were drawn to the artist's depiction of religious conversion as a set of signs observable as affects on the woman's face and body. These discussions focused gendered anxieties about displays of religious fervour. Ruskin describes the woman's sudden religious illumination as a physically painful effect, noting that

²⁹ See Elizabeth Prettejohn's use of new scholarship on photography and her challenge to conventional accounts of photographic realism in reading the Pre-Raphaelites, in *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Publishing, 2000), pp. 135–36.

³⁰ John Addington Symonds, *Sleep and Dreams: Two Lectures* (London: Murray; Bristol: Evans and Abbott, 1851), pp. 22–27. I would like to thank Victoria Mills for suggesting that I consider the Victorian idea of double consciousness.

she ‘has started up in agony’.³¹ Rossetti elaborated on the corporeal affect of conversion by observing, ‘she holds her hands hard together; a quick spasm is in her averted face; the eyes fill with bitter tears which do not fall, and a bitter pang sharpens the parted lips and the whole stricken countenance’ (Rossetti, p. 241). British religiosity had been highly feminized, and from around 1800 evangelicals had privileged women and their pivotal role in maintaining family sanctity (Heady, pp. 46–61). Hunt’s depiction of awakening as an agonizing moment of recognition visualized the charge of supernatural power surging through the young woman. His religious iconography, however, challenged aesthetic norms of female beauty and the social norm of a passive feminine body on display for an active male viewer. An *Art Journal* reviewer observed disapprovingly, ‘when the profound emotions of the soul are painted, the body is passive.’³² Other viewers were also troubled by Hunt’s female portrait and the painting’s purchaser directed the artist to repaint her face.³³

The painting’s public reception was framed by gendered aesthetic concerns over the appropriate depiction of heightened religious emotion in a female subject, but this art world conversation was connected to a broader Victorian interest in the role of religious environments and practices in generating and regulating religious feeling. Excessive religious fervour was a problem for nineteenth-century revivalists. Presbyterians and Congregationalists were preoccupied with the problem of how far the evangelical experience of emotion should be restrained by decorum and they attempted to repress emotional outbursts of piety.³⁴ Prohibitions against excessive religious displays or fervour had been linked in earlier periods to fears of women’s madness.³⁵ Nineteenth-century anxieties over fevered demonstrations of piety spanned the denominational spectrum

³¹ See Arscott, p. 174. Arscott has argued convincingly that Ruskin contains and mitigates the radicalism of identification between male beholder and male seducer by absorbing the scene within a conventional description of the life narrative of the prostituted woman that must end in her death rather than redemption. Ruskin’s description — ‘the countenance of the lost girl, rent from its beauty into sudden horror; the lips half-open, indistinct in their purple quivering, the teeth set hard, the eyes filled with the fearful light of futurity, and with tears of ancient days’ — cannot be taken as merely mimetic since it is entirely aligned with the discourse of prostitution, one that reads signs of disease and impending death on the face of the prostituted woman (*Works*, ed. by Cook and Wedderburn, xii, 335).

³² ‘The Progress of Painting’, *Art Journal*, September 1854, pp. 253–56 (p. 255).

³³ Alison Smith, ‘Catalogue Entry 98’, in *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde*, ed. by Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld, and Alison Smith (London: Tate, 2012), p. 134.

³⁴ David Bebbington, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 49.

³⁵ See Katherine Hodgkin, ‘Dionys Fitzherbert and the Anatomy of Madness’, in *Voicing Women: Gender and Sexuality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Kate Chedgzoy, Melanie Hansen, and Suzanne Trill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. 69–92 (p. 75).

from sensual Catholic ritual to Methodist ‘enthusiasm’.³⁶ Quietly engaged and decorous comportment were ideals for religion and art, but designers of devotional and disciplinary environments embraced the powerful psychological and sensory affects of interiors as instruments of religious awakening.³⁷

Pugin, Gothic, and religious feeling

The emergence of a religious mission for art was intimately linked to the religious renewals of the nineteenth century. Across many denominations, personal religious practices assumed new forms of fervent ‘religiosity’ rather than quiet piety, and the revival of medieval culture was central to heightened religious feeling.³⁸ From the mid-1830s clergy and architects scrutinized the role of environmental settings in promoting faith. A powerful early instance of this belief was the Catholic convert, designer, and architect Augustus Welby Pugin’s assertion that Gothic architecture had the power to ‘awaken’ Christian sentiment (*Fig. 2*). His 1836 manifesto *Contrasts* praised a medieval Gothic church by declaring: ‘What subjects for contemplation do not these majestic portals present to the Christian, as he approaches the house of prayer! And well are they calculated to awaken those sentiments of reverence and devotion, suited to the holy place.’³⁹

In mid-Victorian Britain, church decor, ritual, and ceremony were mobilized to proselytize non-believers, convert members of other

³⁶ Thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this article for this observation and phrasing.

³⁷ John Tallis, *Tallis’s History and Description of the Crystal Palace*, 3 vols (London: Tallis, 1852), caricatures Mrs St Giles and her husband: ‘staring wondrously, their dormant sense of the beautiful half evoked by the tapestries and the vases, in the Sèvres and Gobelins room; regarding with puzzled bewilderment the Bacchante and the Greek slave’ (III, 54). Peter Gurney explores representations of working-class spectatorship in ‘An Appropriated Space: The Great Exhibition, the Crystal Palace and the Working Class’, in *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Louise Purbrick (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 114–45. Mid-century caricatures of feminine consumption are contested by Lara Kriegel’s examination of the Museum of Ornamental Art, in Lara Kriegel, *Grand Designs: Labor, Empire, and the Museum in Victorian Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 126–59. The representations of class and gender in spectatorship at the Sydenham Crystal Palace are addressed by Kate Nichols, *Greece and Rome at the Crystal Palace*, pp. 27–52.

³⁸ Charles H. Lippy observes this distinction between religiosity and piety in *Being Religious*, p. 86.

³⁹ Augustus Welby Pugin, *Contrasts, and The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, intr. by Timothy Brittain-Catlin (Reading: Spire Books/Pugin Society, 2003), p. 4.

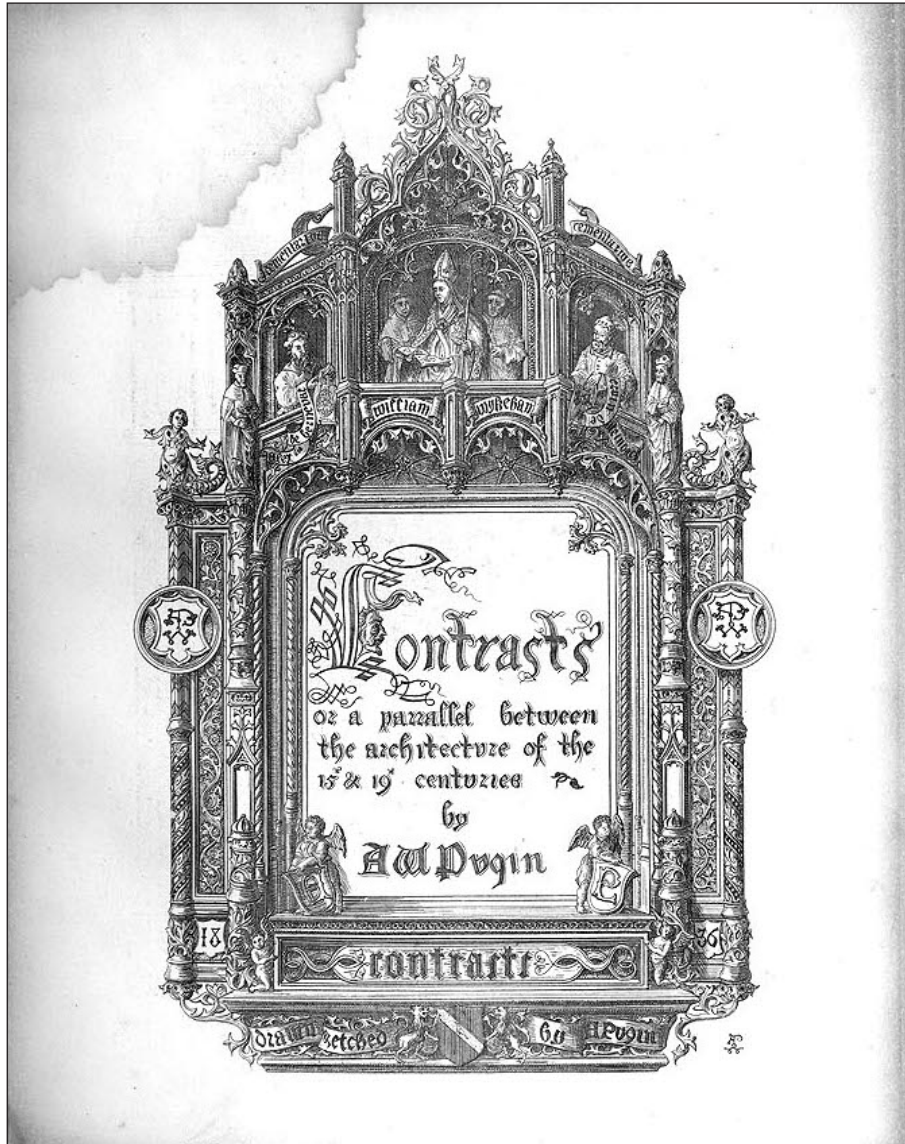


Fig. 2: Augustus Welby Pugin, *Contrasts*, 2nd edn (London: Dolman, 1841), frontispiece.

denominations, and renew the faithful.⁴⁰ Both Roman and Anglo-Catholics came to be interested in the efficacy of medieval material culture. Likewise, evangelical Protestantism advocated a wider missionary function for religious buildings and decoration, prompted by the revival of medieval

⁴⁰ Bebbington discusses the double meaning of awakening, as a term applicable to believers and unbelievers (pp. 1–2).

material culture. Sincere evangelicals, however, often viewed these aspects of Christian practice with distrust and Ruskin's assertion that art is the fruit not the agent of Christian belief was underpinned by evangelical scepticism. The established consensus of the period set the material practices of the Catholics and Protestant in opposition. Nonetheless, I challenge the Protestant/Catholic binary by tracing a shared belief in the evangelizing agency of Christian artworks.

Pugin's Gothic Revival practices have not been examined as reformist projects complementary to the disciplinary environments of State institutions, perhaps because his own writings pit his organic medieval vision against present-day State secularism. He conceived of Gothic interiors, design, and architecture as artworks at odds with the contemporary world of utilitarian ideology, State power, and the industrial city. In the revised 1841 edition of *Contrasts*, Pugin compared the benevolent Christian charity of the medieval hospital with the rigours of the contemporary workhouse (Fig. 3). Through a series of visual portraits he depicted the welfare institution's segregation of families and punishments. The Poor Law administrative system used the painful rigours of the workhouse to 'deter' poverty and reshape individual subjects. Driven by a utilitarian psychology that claimed individuals were engaged in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, workhouse detention used a regime of 'close supervision, segregation of family members, minimum diet, disciplined labour'.⁴¹ This system of deterrents and punishments harnessed a social function for psychology. Rick Rylance has described this function as 'the managerial component' of post-Enlightenment psychology (pp. 30–31). The physical fabric of the workhouse was built to enforce this discipline. Its drab, spare architecture was a startling contrast to the richly ornamented, hand-hewn building envisaged by Pugin's revival.

Nonetheless, Christian Gothic Revivalists were interested in the agency of environments and how religious settings might trigger physical states and psychic effects. In February 1842 Pugin had argued in the Catholic *Dublin Review* that a 'salutary effect' 'on souls' would be achieved by building an 'ecclesiastical atmosphere' (the Gothic Revival) in populous towns.⁴² This ideology of environmentalism was transferred to Pugin's patrons. In 1842 Father Joseph Siddon, a Catholic priest who had

⁴¹ David Garland, *Punishment and Welfare: A History of Penal Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 47, 15. See also, Margaret Anne Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834–1929: The History of an English Social Institution* (London: Methuen, 1983).

⁴² [Augustus Welby Pugin], 'On the Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England', *Dublin Review*, February 1842, 80–183; repr. in Augustus Welby Pugin, *The Present State of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England and Some Remarks Relative to Ecclesiastical Architecture and Decoration*, intr. by Roderick O'Donnell (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004), p. 100.

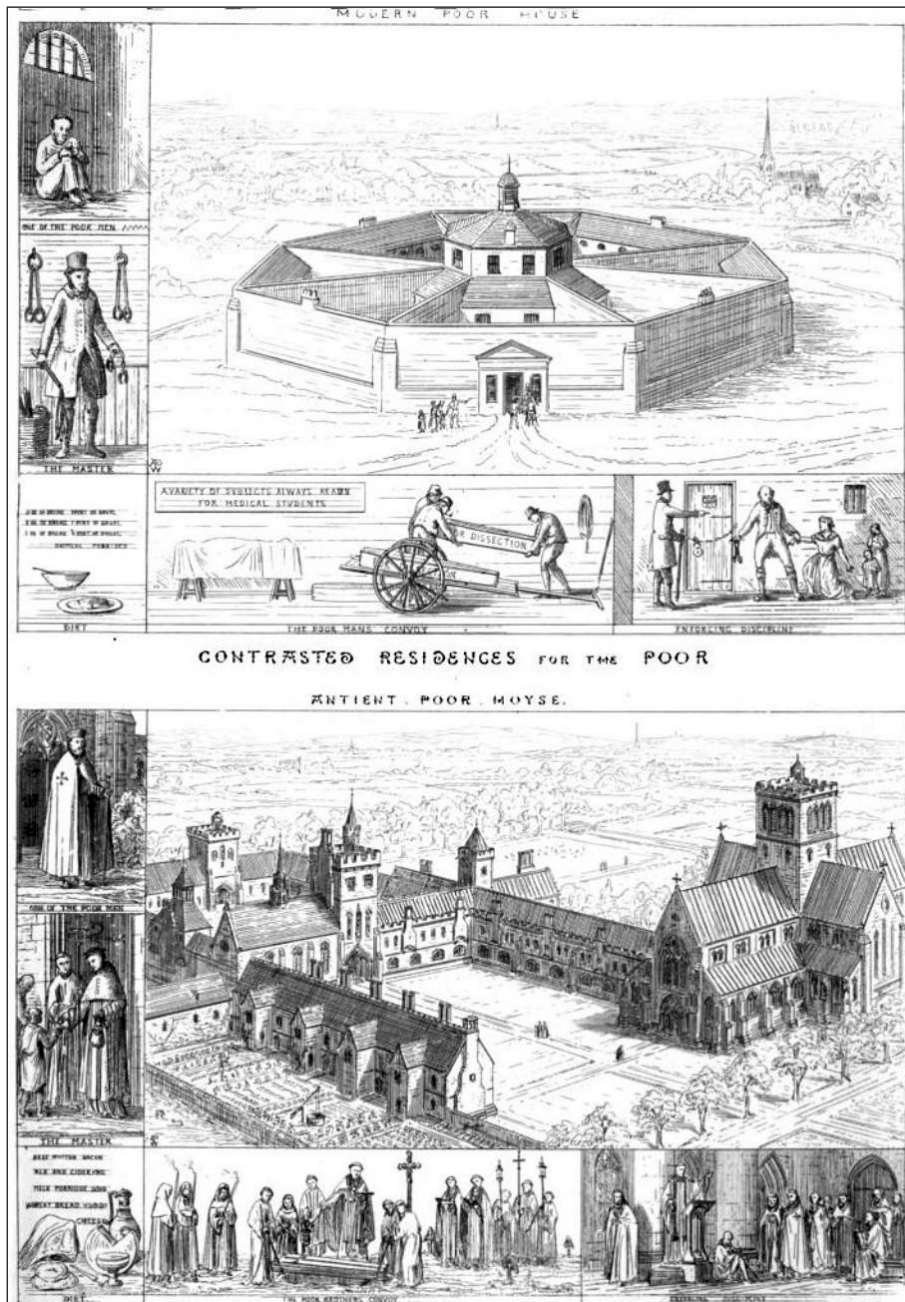


Fig. 3: Augustus Welby Pugin, 'Contrasted Residences', from *Contrasts*, 2nd edn (London: Dolman, 1841).

commissioned an interior scheme, decoration, and metalware for a church in Southampton from Pugin, wrote to Pugin and praised ‘the improved *religious* effect to arise from the proposed alterations’, claiming that the new design ‘will breathe the spirit of ancient Catholic devotion into every beholder who has Catholic faith’.⁴³ Siddon drew on a passage from Genesis to invoke the Christian creation myth of God breathing life into man.⁴⁴ His analogy laid out a vision of Christian spectatorship that was haptic, physically intimate, and supernatural. It was concerned with both content and affect and imagined a transfer of faith between building and body.

Siddon’s description of an animating agency lodged within religious vessels and settings echoed Pugin’s own metaphor in his 1842 *Dublin Review* essay. Pugin had written of

a green spot in the desert, where both the architecture and fittings of the edifice breathe the revered spirit of ancient days, and where man of God [. . .] may hold secret communion with the soul of those glorious churchmen of old, whose fervent and mortified soul he strives to imitate.⁴⁵

Replica environments were charged with psychic power. Pugin’s sectarian vision of the ‘churchmen of old’ alluded to the repression of English Catholics after the Reformation and allowed him to promote the revived Catholic church as the inheritor of an authentic English Christianity. Nevertheless, his insistence on place as a contact medium with past religious faith prolonged Romantic versions of history as feeling, although this ideal would eventually be contested by the professional notion of history as idea.⁴⁶

The importance of replica religious environments as crucibles for promoting faith was not limited to Catholic revivalism. Place, feeling, and fact were cherished by the evangelical Protestant approach to material culture. In 1860 Francis Palgrave connected archaeological methods with the evangelical agency of artworks when he reviewed Holman Hunt’s *Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1854–60). Hunt had modelled the temple interior on Owen Jones’s Alhambra Court at the Crystal Palace and his figures were informed by his own excursions to the Bible lands. Palgrave

⁴³ Father Joseph Siddon, letter to Pugin, in *The Collected Letters of A. W. N. Pugin*, ed. by Margaret Belcher, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001–15), II: 1843–1845 (2003), p. 109 (14 November 1842), emphasis in original.

⁴⁴ ‘Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being’ (Genesis 2. 7).

⁴⁵ Pugin, *Present State*, intr. by O’Donnell, p. 100.

⁴⁶ The classic account of Romantic historicism is Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (New York: Twayne, 1995). But see, more recently, Mike Goode, *Sentimental Masculinity and the Rise of History, 1790–1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

focused on the painting's revelatory moment in which Christ understands and accepts his religious mission:

It is the age in which he lives that has placed the artist at the point of view for a genuine evangelical treatment of scripture. Rendering all the other circumstances of the scene with an accuracy rarely reached in art and rarely aimed at, what he has mainly brought before us is the crisis in Our Saviour's earthly career, the first sense of superhuman nature and illumination, the ecstasy (to take a noble phrase from Sir Thomas Browne) of 'ingression into the Divine Shadow'.⁴⁷

Replica environments placed the audience in the historical scene, stimulating an inner experience of the original events. In his emphasis on the 'evangelical treatment of scripture' and Hunt's 'accuracy', Palgrave's approach was markedly evangelical. Fact and feeling were held together. Hunt's passion for biblical archaeology and excursions to Holy Lands emphasized an evangelical approach to Christian material culture. Protestants could bypass the 'accretions' of the medieval Catholic period by travelling to the East and experiencing the material remains of the Bible lands.⁴⁸

Pugin's Gothic connected Romantic conceptions of history with a Catholic investment in the supernatural power of material things. Religious artworks negotiated between the spiritual and material realms, reviving the medieval world's insistence on a holy presence in images and objects.⁴⁹ Nineteenth-century Catholic traditions continued to insist on the supernatural presence in material things, and these beliefs affronted mainstream religious practice. Catholic ritual, the veneration of saints and relics, and the presence of Christ in the Eucharist were regarded as backward superstitions.⁵⁰ In parallel to Pugin's work, however, the Oxford Movement's renewal of the Church of England revived medieval Gothic

⁴⁷ Francis Palgrave, 'The "Finding of Christ in the Temple," by Mr. Holman Hunt', *Fraser's Magazine*, May 1860, pp. 643–47 (p. 644), quoted by George P. Landow, 'Shadows Cast by *The Light of the World*: William Holman Hunt's Religious Paintings, 1893–1905', *Art Bulletin*, 65 (1983), 471–84 (p. 482).

⁴⁸ I thank the anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this important point. On the Bible and nineteenth-century archaeology, see *Cities of God: The Bible and Archaeology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by David Gange and Michael Ledger-Lomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Eitan Bar-Yosef, in *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799–1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), notes that Holman Hunt shared David Wilkie's belief that 'the painting of historically accurate biblical pictures was a distinctly Protestant endeavor' (p. 84).

⁴⁹ Herbert L. Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2004), p. 29.

⁵⁰ Julie Melnyk, *Victorian Religion: Faith and Life in Victorian Britain* (London: Praeger, 2008), p. 45.

heritage. In 1839 Thomas Pusey, one of the movement's leaders, offered counsel to an Anglican reverend who had requested advice on the reinstatement of medieval church practice. Pusey advised him to forgo vestments and 'to begin with that which is furthest removed from the self [. . .]: painted windows, rich altar cloths or Communion plate' (Reed, p. 21). What was the material efficacy of the revived Gothic? Medieval art had been underwritten by a fundamental theory of art's appeal to the senses as a means of attracting and exciting 'religious desire' (Kessler, p. 170). In the next section I turn to one building — Pugin's St Giles's, Cheadle in Staffordshire — and its public reception, to understand how a religious decorative scheme produced nascent psychological states. The anxieties that had attended Holman Hunt's depiction of fervent religious emotion surfaced in reviews of Pugin's building, as critics linked the agitated emotional states of religious spectators to the interior's decorative excess. Neglecting the details of ritual, ceremony, and modes of worship, reviewers tended to focus on the building as a work of art and neglected its particular devotional techniques.

Sense and spectacle at Pugin's St Giles's Church

On 1 September 1846 an elaborate opening ceremony was held for the Pugin-designed St Giles's Church in the village of Cheadle (*Fig. 4*). The opening spectacle was a carefully contrived event. In the sermon preached at the opening ceremony by Bishop James Gillis, Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern District of Scotland, Pugin's church was lauded as an example to the 'Oxford men', meaning the Tractarians. Gillis 'recalled the time when Oxford was once Catholic' on this now 'long-lost island'.⁵¹ The Earl of Shrewsbury had commissioned the building in 1840 and six years of construction and decoration had finally brought a richly finished building to fruition. Architect and patron cherished the building as an evangelical instrument; for Pugin and his circle hoped for the corporate reunion of England's two churches. In this they were almost effective. After John Henry Newman had toured the church and nearby Pugin buildings he declared that these brilliantly decorated Gothic works were 'enough to convert a person'.⁵²

Nevertheless, newspaper reviews of the opening ceremony were more exercised by the building as an exemplar of the country's decorative arts revival than as an evangelizing instrument. The interior was sumptuous

⁵¹ 'The Catholic Church Opening of a Catholic Chapel at Cheadle, Staffordshire from the *Morning Post* of Thursday', *Cork Examiner*, 7 September 1846, p. 2.

⁵² Rosemary Hill, *God's Architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain* (London: Lane, 2007), p. 359.



Fig. 4: Augustus Welby Pugin, St Giles's, Cheadle, Staffordshire, 1841–46.
Photograph by the author.

and contained almost every imaginable decorative mode, including carved and turned wooden pews, printed and painted wall and floor tiles, architectural gilding, brass work, stained-glass windows, statuary, and paintings. Brilliant blue and red diaper patterns line the side aisles and the view to the altar is framed by a series of pillars decorated in herringbone pattern, and at mid-point a high chancel arch is topped with a painting of the Last Judgement by a Nazarene artist. The distant alabaster altar is partly veiled by a gilded, oaken perforated rood screen. The *Illustrated London News* report lauded the building's 'decorated' Gothic 'as progressive of the Decorative Arts in this country' and printed its account in the Arts and Sports section of the paper.⁵³ However, even laudatory descriptions linked decorative and religious excess and this theme surfaced in all reviews.

The long *Illustrated London News* report was mostly a descriptive account with very little overt critical assessment. Nevertheless, the reporter paused to consider the impact of the 'magnificent and impressive' interior. He praised the stained-glass scheme because its coloured windows regulated the building's light levels, acting to dim 'the brilliancy of the daylight in the church, [and] destroy that tendency to *glare* which so much decoration would otherwise produce' (p. 28, emphasis in original). Other correspondents engaged more directly with the idea that the relentless decorative scheme produced physical and psychic disturbances in the spectator. A syndicated review in the English and Irish provincial papers noted:

Such is the description of this splendid chapel; but it is not so easy to convey by words any idea of its general effect. Bright and glittering colours, gorgeous decorations, beautiful paintings meet the eye on every side, till the senses become dazzled; and perhaps if there be a fault, it is that the eye seeks in vain for any repose from the splendour with which it is surrounded. ('The Catholic Church Opening', p. 2.)

In this account the spectator is overstimulated and the term 'dazzle' invokes a scene of a beholder overpowered with intense light, whose vision is temporarily dimmed. A temporary failure to see clearly is accompanied by agitation, an eye seeking in vain for repose. A longer review in the *Tablet* suggests that the initial strong sensations could be regulated and the viewer and body returned to equilibrium:

The first view, while it elevates and exalts, overpowers the mind alike by its novelty and magnificence. When it becomes more familiar, and the disturbance, (from a sense of novelty in ecclesiastical decoration), vanishes, the refining grandeur and

⁵³ 'Decorative Arts — The Earl of Shrewsbury's Church, at Cheadle', *Illustrated London News*, 9 September 1847, pp. 28–30 (p. 28).

beauty, elevating, and sublimating the thoughts and feelings of the soul, remains behind.⁵⁴

In the final lines of the passage the reviewer returns to conventional aesthetic language of refinement, grandeur, beauty, and the safer ground of disembodied mind and soul. Newman's horror at the 'emotionalism of Catholics' suggests that Victorians lacked a publicly available language and vocabulary to describe the emotional effect of the interior.⁵⁵ The *Illustrated London News* accompanied its report with an image of the building's side aisle peopled with chatting visitors. The illustration avoided the spectacle of Catholic Christians at worship. A close reading of the building, however, can recover the embodied spectators of religious environments.⁵⁶ Particular spaces and their liturgical functions seem deliberately designed to stimulate the viewer's 'senses' and awaken a participatory Christian spectatorship.

Examining particular spaces during ritual ceremony and worship unlocks the building as a devotional device. One space was particularly highly decorated. The right aisle led to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, a revivalist innovation that restored a medieval liturgical rite (*Fig. 5*). The Eucharist was placed in a separate chapel where it could be worshipped before being moved to the main altar. Pugin's chapel is separated from the side aisle and transept area by pillars and a brass screen, and the new liturgical zone is marked out in tile patterns on the floor. Interlocking elements of space, prayer, song, and incantation create devotional participation as the Eucharist is worshipped here before being taken to the main altar.

The sidewalls and altar wall of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel are tiled and stencilled in a blaze of coloured patterns. At first these surfaces resist easy, immediate legibility — they are indeed overwhelming — but each element of the chapel demands a separate act of absorbed looking, one closely tied to the ritualistic function of the space. The sidewalls are tiled with a key word from the Eucharistic Mass: 'SANCTUS SANCTUS SANCTUS'. Scanning, speaking, or chanting the repeated inscription accelerates a worshipper's rising emotion.⁵⁷ Tiled inscriptions were features of medieval

⁵⁴ 'The Opening of St. Giles, Cheadle', *Tablet*, 5 September 1846, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Cited in Hill, p. 360. Architectural and liturgical differences between Pugin and Newman are described in James Patrick, 'Newman, Pugin, and Gothic', *Victorian Studies*, 24 (1981), 185–207; and Sheridan Gilley, 'Newman, Pugin and the Architecture of the English Oratory', in *Modern Christianity and Cultural Aspirations*, ed. by David Bebbington and Timothy Larsen (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), pp. 98–123.

⁵⁶ See, for example, the studies by Carol Walker Bynum, Herbert L. Kessler, and J. F. Hamburger cited in these notes; and Jill Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁵⁷ John Corrigan, 'Introduction: The Study of Religion and Emotion', in *The Oxford Handbook to Religion and Emotion*, ed. by John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 3–13 (p. 5).



Fig. 5: Augustus Welby Pugin, Blessed Sacrament Chapel, in St Giles's, Cheadle, Staffordshire. © Jacqueline Banerjee <<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/architecture/pugin/4.html>>.

churches and were designed to be used as aids to devotion and contemplation. Decorative tiles extended the techniques used in manuscript illustration and the tile was both an image and a text, or a 'worded image' (Kessler, pp. 42, 101). As the worshipper scans these wall texts, repeating the words of the Mass, the repetition — as in prayer — produces a transitional inner state. Participants move away from present-day concerns into a meditative, transformative state of devotion.⁵⁸ Absorptive looking leads to transcendent devotional states of inner contemplation and religious feeling.

Theological programmes and techniques of embodied spectatorship are interlocked in the decorative programme. The altar is the decorative, liturgical, and visual focus of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. A cluster of printed and hand-painted tiles surrounds the altar and these form a visually complex pattern of diagonal and chequered designs superimposed over

⁵⁸ The phrase is used by Lucy Freeman Sandler in 'Word and Wordless Images: Biblical Narratives in the Psalters of Humphrey de Bohun, in *The Social Life of Illumination: Manuscripts, Images and Communities in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Joyce Coleman, Mark Cruse, and Kathryn A. Smith, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, 21 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 83–120 (p. 84).

each other. The tension between the two directions of the tiled surface produces uncertainty in the viewer since neither pattern sits comfortably in a foreground or background plane. This flouting of conventional codes of depth of field makes the decorative patterns seem animate, alive, and restless. Pugin's dynamic wall plane forms the perfect backdrop to the Eucharist altar, for the gilded, oscillating surfaces appear to vibrate, as if with divine agency. A spectator gazing at the interlocking patterns and attempting to resolve their visual puzzle could also be taken into an absorptive, devotional state. If they were 'overpowered' by the sensory effects they were also moving along a chain of contemplation.

Devotional and decorative techniques are not separate from each other, but most reviewers assessed the interior as a work of art rather than as a temporal, performative, religious event. Pugin's writings are not much help here. For this reason, detailed examination of his church interiors provides important evidence of his keen attention to particular decorative and spatial strategies. Pugin understood how space, theological programme, religious ritual, and decorative instructions for worship could direct and regulate the behaviour of worshippers in ecclesiastical environments. His careful division of the church into particular liturgical programmes locked decoration and use together. The sensory elements of the chapel stimulated psychological states. His attention to minute architectural details as agents of behavioural states aligns him with other professional experts who desired to use environments to shape human subjects. Not surprisingly then, some of those reformist experts found that Pugin's devotional interiors were congruent with their disciplinary interiors. So Pugin's revived Gothic interiors found their way into the colonial penitentiary.

Devotion and discipline: Pugin and the penitentiary

In parallel with the environmentalism of the Gothic church interior, other disciplinary environments sought to meticulously detail the physical and emotional conditions conducive to Christian sentiment. In different ways, architects and prison chaplains were keen to explore the powerful sensory psychologies of environments as instruments of religious awakening. Across a broad geography of religious spaces inside the prison system, ecclesiastical and penal professionals contested the art world ideal of a reposeful religious spectator and actively sought to inculcate strong emotions. In this final section I explore the sensory psychologies of the penal system as the inverse of Pugin's sensory excess. Inside the jail, environments were conceived as instruments of sensory deprivation.

The material culture of Christian salvation and sensation traversed a wide geography. When Hunt's *Awakening Conscience* was exhibited in 1854 in the grand and relatively new spaces of the National Gallery on Trafalgar

Square, the Pentonville prison in north London was being reported for its reformatory effects in awakening Christian conscience. In 1854 Joseph Kingsmill, chaplain of Pentonville, published a third edition of his 1852 book *Chapters on Prisons and Prisoners and the Prevention of Crime*. Here he exhorted the effectiveness of separate confinement of prisoners at Pentonville, claiming that their 'hitherto dormant or unconscious conscience is aroused and enlightened by the word of God'.⁵⁹ In the mid-nineteenth century, gallery and jail were connected by a belief in the deterministic capacities of objects and environments to improve or exert influence upon inhabitants. Indeed, by a quirk of history, Jeremy Bentham's model prison, Millbank, situated on the bank of the Thames, would eventually be demolished and the site occupied by the Tate Gallery.

This Christian, reformist ideal of transformational environments had been embedded from the earliest days of penal reform discourse.⁶⁰ In 1792 the darkened cell and awakening conscience were described in an aesthetic language of the sublime by John Brewster, vicar of Greatham in County Durham:

To be abstracted from a world where he has endeavoured to confound the order of society, to be buried in solitude where he has no companion but reflection [. . .]. The sudden change of scene that he experiences, the window which admits but a few rays of light, the midnight silence which surround him, all inspire him with a degree of horror which he has never felt before. The impression is greatly heightened by his being obliged to think.⁶¹

The solitary ideal was gradually transformed into a detailed disciplinary system of sensory deprivation. In the silent system, an alternative model to the separate system or solitary confinement regime, all sound was forbidden. Communication between prisoners, or between prisoners and guards, was expunged. Only the speech of the clergy at chapel rang out,

⁵⁹ Joseph Kingsmill, *Chapters on Prisons and Prisoners and the Prevention of Crime*, 3rd edn (London: Longmans, 1854), p. 115.

⁶⁰ The field of penal literature is vast. Specific studies of the role of religious activists and clergy in the prison system include: U. R. Q. Henriques, 'The Rise and Decline of the Separate System of Prison Discipline', *Past and Present*, 54 (1972), 61–93; Andrew Skotnicki, *Religion and the Development of the American Penal System* (Langham, MD: University Press of America, 2000); Randall McGowan, 'The Well-Ordered Prison', in *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, ed. by Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 86–94; Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution 1750–1850* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pp. 44–79.

⁶¹ John Brewster, *On the Prevention of Crimes, and on the Advantage of Solitary Imprisonment* (London: [n. pub.], 1792), quoted by Ignatieff, p. 78.

to be poured into the ears and souls of the penitent.⁶² Silent and separate models shared an elaborated doctrine of associationism. A prisoner's mind, organizations, and development are entirely derived from interaction with the environment. In his memoirs the Reverend John Clay described his work as the Preston House of Correction chaplain and he eulogized his own role in successful conversions:

A few months in the solitary cell renders a prisoner strangely impressible. The chaplain can make the brawny navy cry like a child; he can work on the feelings in almost any way he pleases; he can, so to speak, photograph his thoughts, wishes and opinions on his patient's mind, and fill his mouth with his own phrases and language.⁶³

The chaplain photographically imprints the prisoner's mind and fills his mouth and body. In the 1840s the physical mechanics of conversion would be extrapolated into an elaborate penal machinery in the hands of military engineers, particularly under the guidance of the Surveyor General Joshua Jebb. His 1844 report on the new Pentonville prison described a new system of containment and confinement. Jebb declared that religious penal ideals were inadequate:

[The] present system of preachings and exhortations and denunciation was not enough while in confinement the convicts are removed from temptation; and the simple diet and regular life of a prisoner lower the tone of their physical frame, and reduce the violence of their animal appetites and passions. In this condition they are more susceptible of moral and religious impressions, and they often become unaffectedly penitent.⁶⁴

Disciplinary, rather than devotional environments, would be the way forward. Surprisingly, Pugin's reformed Gothic environments found their way into one of these reformist penal spaces. In 1843 Pugin had been commissioned by his friend and future bishop Robert Willson to illustrate cheaply priced Catholic devotional books (*Fig. 6*).⁶⁵ Pugin provided richly

⁶² See McGowan, pp. 90–92, on the development of the silent system.

⁶³ W. L. Clay, *The Prison Chaplain: Memoirs of the Reverend John Clay* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1861), p. 386.

⁶⁴ Joshua Jebb, *Report of the Surveyor General of Prisons on the Construction, Ventilation and Details of Pentonville Prison* (London: Clowes for HMSO, 1844), p. 11.

⁶⁵ See Brian Andrews, *Creating a Gothic Paradise: Pugin at the Antipodes* (Hobart: Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, 2002), pp. 78–81. The Archdiocese of Hobart Museum and Archives (AHMA) holds a number of devotional books purchased for the penal settlements and these were examined for this paper. The *Tablet* (18 April 1846) carries an advertisement for the *Lives of the Saints* 'designed by Pugin' for



Fig. 6: Right Revd Richard Challoner D.D., *The Catholic Christian Instructed in the Sacraments, Sacrifice, Ceremonies and Observances of the Church* (Derby: Richardson, for the Catholic Book Society, 1843). © Archdiocese of Hobart Archives and Heritage Collection.

detailed ecclesiastical settings or modest domestic interiors as backgrounds for figures at worship. In 1843 Willson became the first Catholic bishop of the Van Diemen's Land penal colony and purchased Pugin's devotional books for use at the Darlington probationary station on Maria Island, off the coast of present-day Tasmania (Fig. 7). Darlington was part of the new

1 shilling neatly bound, and then lists higher prices for more expensively bound books (p. 8). One Irish study has confirmed that women were the principal readers of Catholic devotional books. See Cormac Begadon, 'Catholic Devotional Literature in Dublin, 1800–1830', in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006–), iv: *The Irish Book in English, 1800–1891* (2011), ed. by James H. Murphy, pp. 371–78 (p. 373).



Fig. 7: John Watt Beattie, Photograph of Interior of Prisoners' Barracks, Maria Island, Tasmania, c. 1900. © National Library of Australia <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-140386489/view>> PIC/7816/5 LOCALBUM 225.

British penal system introduced in 1839. The new regime conceived of punishment and rehabilitation as a series of stages. A prisoner would spend a period of separate, solitary confinement in a British mainland prison like Pentonville, before passing into a colonial probationary station. Here, his release would be dependent on his conduct and then, after leaving the jail, he completed the final part of his penal sentence by working as an assigned convict servant for free settlers.⁶⁶ Prison chaplains were assigned to minister to the inmates. The swelling numbers of Irish Catholic prisoners, particularly in the wake of the 1848 Irish rebellion, bolstered the demands of the Catholic bishop to minister to their own penal flock.⁶⁷

Darlington had been founded in 1825 and then abandoned. It was revived in 1842 to realize the new penal ideal of separate cell confinement. Prisoners were locked in their darkened cells, with walls thickened with sawdust to prevent the transmission of sound, with minimal ventilation

⁶⁶ James Semple Kerr, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Australia's Places of Confinement, 1788–1988* (Sydney: National Trust of Australia, 1988), pp. 50–65.

⁶⁷ On the evolution of the chaplaincy system in both Great Britain and the Australian colonies, see Hilary M. Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801–1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 45–57.

and no view of the outward world. In this quiet, black space the prisoner would be forced inwards, to be aroused and enlightened by the word of God. Prisoners had shared evening educational instruction in the dining room and devotional books could be read here, as a supplement or stimulant to their individual personal revelation.

Pugin's Catholic devotional books were a kind of poor man's medieval manuscript. They depicted families at prayer or the faithful participating in formal ritual at church. In these scenes worshippers prayed under the watchful eyes of clergy and fathers led domestic prayers under the gaze of small statuary depictions of Christ's Crucifixion. The books sought to extend the reach of the church into everyday life and establish church hierarchy and regularity of observance within the family's daily routines.⁶⁸ Anglican and Catholic clergy chafed at the State's use of religion as a disciplinary and reformatory device in the colonial penal system. In the Van Diemen's Land colony, clergy were not necessarily career penal servants or 'emergent subaltern professionals' but missionaries ministering to believer and potential convert inside and outside the jail's walls as the denominations struggled to establish their presence.⁶⁹ That Pugin's books would find their way into this system is testament to the ways in which the particular circumstances of colonies produced different social and cultural conditions for religious practice.⁷⁰

Clergy had complex agency within the colonial penal system and they contested the regime as well as complying with its methods.⁷¹ They were expected to fill out weekly conduct registers for the prison administration, and clerics were required to diagnose their prisoners and scan their conduct for signs of faith. The register reduced these signs to a column of marks, where dashes or crosses indicated good or bad conduct.⁷²

⁶⁸ See Cardinal Wiseman, 'On Prayers and Prayer Books', *Dublin Review*, November 1842, pp. 448–85; 'The family united in prayer should speak the very language of the Church; should observe the forms of decoration and devotion which she has herself drawn up and approved' (p. 461).

⁶⁹ Rylance describes the prison professionals 'brought up through associationist programmes, like Dickens's schoolmaster Bradley Headstone in *Our Mutual Friend*' (p. 68).

⁷⁰ See Carey, *God's Empire*; and Alex Bremner, *Imperial Gothic: Religious Architecture and High Anglican Culture in the British Empire c. 1840–70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), for explorations of the ways in which local conditions allowed particular religious issues, including finer points of doctrinal law, to become dominant forces in colonial territories.

⁷¹ The Willson papers at the AHMA contain rebukes from penal administrators over the conduct of his clergy. For example, in an 1846 despatch to the Secretary of State, the Lieutenant Governor complained that the three clergy at the Norfolk Island penal settlement rarely visited prisoners in the infirmary. See AHMA, Willson papers, CA.6/WIL291.

⁷² A sample conduct register is reproduced in Ian Brand, *The Convict Probation System: Van Diemen's Land, 1839–1854* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1990), p. 236.

Not surprisingly, colonial church leaders argued against some terms of the transportation system and asserted the value of traditional forms of social control and salvation.

In 1847 the Anglican and Catholic bishops of Van Diemen's Land travelled back to England to testify at the 1847 Select Committee on Transportation. They took their place among a crowded gallery of penal reformers. Jebb, Clay, and Kingsmill also testified. Bishop Willson argued for a more forceful role for the church in the third stage of the penal system when prisoners were released to become assigned convicts or free labour for settlers. He declared that the village setting — village priest and church — produced a more successful system of community and self-governed moral surveillance.⁷³ Willson had carried Pugin's small-scale models for Gothic churches and Pugin's publications and devotional books in his luggage on the original voyage to Van Diemen's Land. In October 1844, in a public speech in Hobart, he declared that these exemplars were transported from England 'in order to introduce the proper church style into this distant land'.⁷⁴ Willson placed his faith in Pugin's revived Gothic.

The Anglican bishop of Hobart Town, Bishop Willis, mounted a much more serious challenge to the penal ideal of enforced devotion as a successful method of conversion. He confessed that he doubted the value of religious practice which was 'of a compulsory character', and it was unsurprising that freed convicts would 'cast off Attendance at the House of God with every other Mark of their Bondage'. Willis preferred one-on-one conversation between clergy and convict in the privacy of the cell.⁷⁵

By the late 1840s public opinion was turning against Pentonville and the mental disorders produced by the separate system, although others argued that the system was not severe enough.⁷⁶ Bishop Willis's testimony raised the question that dogged religious opponents of associationism: could faith be produced by mechanistic means alone? The physical punishments and sensory and emotional deprivations of the penal system mixed body, mind, and soul. Eager reformers like Jebb aimed for pacification of the flesh and a mind overpowered. The active role of Christian agency in crisis and salvation was diminished. Bishops Willson and Willis did not

The idea of the 'diagnostic gaze' is drawn from Meegan Kennedy, 'The Victorian Novel and Medicine', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Lisa Rodensky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 459–82 (pp. 468–75).

⁷³ *British Parliamentary Papers: Crime and Punishment: Juvenile Offenders*, 6 vols (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1970), 1: *Reports from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Execution of Criminal Law Especially Respecting Juvenile Offenders and Transportation, 1847*, p. 493 (11 May 1847).

⁷⁴ Quoted in Andrews, p. 55.

⁷⁵ *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1, 247, 252 (23 March 1847).

⁷⁶ See Helen Johnston, *Crime in England 1815–1880: Experiencing the Criminal Justice System* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 88–105.

reject penal notions of discipline or labour but the Roman Catholic bishop reasserted the clergy and village community's role in invigilation, and Willis repudiated a punitive basis for the wellsprings of faith. Their testimony exposed the faults of a mechanical approach to enforced Christian sentiment.

Nevertheless, the Christian trope of 'awakening' participated in the widespread mid-century belief in environmentalism, and in the power of physical and emotional settings and sensations to shape behaviour and feelings. Corporeality was a central topic of penal reform: an enthusiastic Jebb sought to subdue the 'violence' of the prisoner's 'animal appetites and passions' (p. 11). His words revealed a sublimated violence of the State. Prison regime and supernatural agency would dominate and overpower the convict's mind and body. New ideals of fervent feeling and heightened religiosity threatened a well-regulated balance between sentiment and sensation. Even sympathetic reviewers of Pugin's St Giles's suggested that the church interior's sensory overload might produce mental disturbance in the viewer. Medical personnel in the penal system calibrated the exact number of months of sensory deprivation that a convict could be subjected to before madness or life-threatening depression ensued.

The Christian bishops rejected the penal ideal of emotion and religion physically impressed on the body of the prisoner. Penal technologies laid bare the dangerous materialism of associationism — the 'dirt philosophy of French revolutionaries' — in which, as Campbell Fraser averred, 'the mind becomes a reflex of matter' (Rylance, p. 45). Pugin's environmentally determinist approach was centred on the parish church ideal. God's House sat at the centre of the village and land; and buildings contained the embodied memory of the British nation, a nation that would be renewed through a revisiting of its own religious memory. In the art and architectural narratives of the fervent Christian body, memory and conscience could be stimulated by sensation, but penal reformers seemed less inclined to view conscience and soul as transcendental substances and more inclined to see them as reformatory effects inscribed on weakened bodies. Pugin and Jebb were both concerned with the environmental mechanisms of religious practice, but Pugin's sensory strategies of decorative excess are the inverse of Jebb's tactics of sensory deprivation.

Conclusion

In the mid-nineteenth century, Christian writers, painters, and architects asserted the evangelizing function of the work of art. Transformations in aesthetic ideals marched in step with changing forms of religious observance. New expressions of intense religiosity battled ideals of quiet piety. Literary, architectural, and painted conversion narratives focused on

fervent states of Christian feeling: on salvation, conversion, and heightened devotion. In turn, the Christian body became the locus of inner and outer signs of religious affect. Christian art explored the human senses and states of sensation as key elements of religious feeling. Across a range of Christian material culture, from paintings to religious interiors, artists and designers became newly attentive to the sensory capacities of their chosen media. Medieval revivals helped furnish an armoury of rich, decorative effects, and realist attention to detail also promoted the sensual features of furnishings, dress, and objects. Christian artworks could use these sensory forms and depictions of Christian subjects in heightened states of emotion to promote an affective connection with the viewer. The sensory encounter with a religious work of art would be a transformative, spiritual process.

Contemporary associationist ideals of sensory and perceptual stimulation as key drivers of individual experience could be trimmed into loose explanations of the artistic interest in sense, sensation, and subjectivity. In the hands of Christian reformers, associationist ideals became strong, ideological mechanisms for shaping improved human subjects. Aesthetes and penal reformers were concerned with the powerful sensory and psychological role of environments in setting human behaviour. Interiors, objects, and artworks could become instruments of religious awakening. Environmentalism occurred across a broad spectrum, from parish church devotion to penal colony discipline. But the role of sense impressions as stimulants to salvation and sentiment varied, from loose suggestion to the penal system's enforced Christian sentiment. Devotional and disciplinary environments formed part of a spectrum of belief in the deterministic capacities of objects or settings to exert an improving Christian force. Across a broad range of geographies, the boundaries between Christian feeling and fervour were remapped by connecting the senses to sentiment, salvation, and spectatorship. The sensory excess of Pugin's church interiors found their religious counterpart in the sensory deprivation of the penitentiary. The Christian subject's transformed state varied, from the physical register of the convert's sudden tearful illumination to the weakened convict body, assaulted with reformatory penitence. Art, interiors, and bodies became the medium for divine and earthly messages.