From Aestheticism to Modernism, and back again

Elizabeth Prettejohn

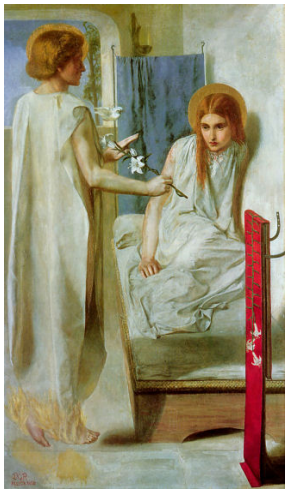

Fig 1 Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* Image Courtesy of ARC Art Center.

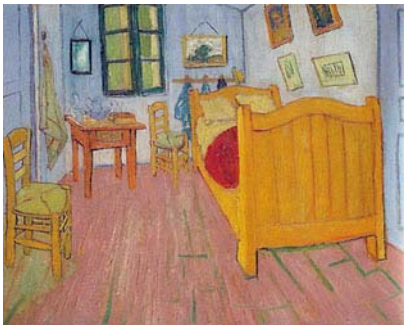

Fig 2 Van Gogh *Bedroom at Arles* **Scan courtesy of MyStudios**

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* of 1850 and Vincent Van Gogh's *Bedroom at Arles* of 1888 share an unconventional approach to perspective construction; in both paintings, the steep angle of the bedroom floor and the swift recession of the narrow bed on the right break the ordinary rules of post-Renaissance perspective. This visual comparison was suggested by the literary critic Richard L. Stein in his book of 1975, *The Ritual of Interpretation*,[1] but art historians have ignored it; so decisive is the art-historical cut between the Victorianism of Rossetti and the proto-modernism of Van Gogh that such a comparison is effectively inadmissible in current art history. Indeed, the similarity might be regarded as a pseudomorphism, since the Rossetti was immured in private collections between its first public exhibition in 1850 and 1886, when it entered the national collection – how could Van Gogh have seen it? However, a closer examination of the provenance shows that Rossetti's painting was sold at Christie's in 1874, during the period when Van Gogh was in London working for the art dealer Goupil.[2] It is quite possible, then, that Van Gogh would have seen it in the normal course of his professional duties in the London art trade. That small fact changes our estimate of both paintings. The Van Gogh no longer appears a naïve or childlike view of his own bedroom; instead it begins to look like a rather more complicated meditation on Van Gogh's self-positioning within the artistic traditions of his time. Moreover the unusual perspective of the Rossetti no longer appears simply inept or incorrect: the comparison with Van Gogh's painting brings out the expressive power of the way Rossetti bends the rules of traditional western perspective. If the earlier picture were one from the French trajectory towards modernism, for instance an early Cézanne, art historians would no doubt have delighted in drawing out the similarity. But because it is a 'Victorian' picture, it is simply invisible in the modernist history of art.

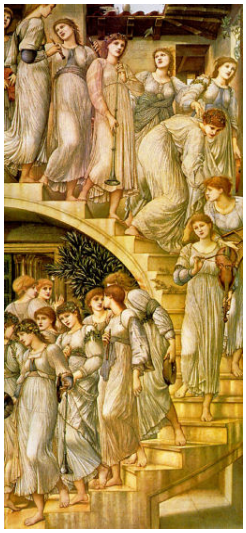

Fig 3 Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs* Image Courtesy of ARC Art Center.

We might consider other inadmissible comparisons, for example between Edward Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs* of 1880 and Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* of 1912, or between George Frederic Watts's triptych of paintings on the subject of *Eve,* executed over a long period from the 1860s to the 1890s, and Piet Mondrian's triptych, *Evolution* of 1911. Both of these comparisons, again, have been suggested more than once,[3] but have failed to enter the standard histories of modern art, even though historical research can easily demonstrate that the works of both Burne-Jones and Watts were widely familiar at the beginning of the twentieth century. These examples illustrate something that is commonplace in histories of modernism, in whatever medium: the repudiation of any inheritance from the previous generation, in order to assert a clean break from the past. David Perkins, in his book *Is Literary History Possible?*, notes that such repudiations may involve the pleasures of aggression.[4] And if we wish to enjoy the pleasures of aggression against the Victorians, we can do no better than to read Clive Bell's *Art* of 1914:

Fig 5 Watts *'She Shall Be Called Woman I* mage Courtesy of ARC Art Renewal Center.

> These Victorians are intolerable: for now that they have lost the old craft and the old tradition of taste, the pictures that they make are no longer pleasantly insignificant; they bellow 'stinking mackerel.'[5]

The word 'insignificant' resonates against Bell's key term, 'significant form', the one quality common to all works of art; for Bell the works of the Victorians are not art at all, for they do not display 'significant form' and cannot, therefore, stir our 'aesthetic emotions' – Bell's other key term. In his first chapter, 'The Aesthetic Hypothesis', Bell writes:

> There must be some one quality without which a work of art cannot exist; possessing which, in the least degree, no work is altogether worthless. What is this quality? What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions? What quality is common to Sta. Sophia and the windows at Chartres, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto's frescoes at Padua, and the masterpieces of Poussin, Piero della Francesca, and Cézanne? Only one answer seems possible – significant form. In each, lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. These relations and combinations of lines and colours, these aesthetically moving

> forms, I call 'Significant Form'; and 'Significant Form' is the one quality common to all works of visual art.[6]

Bell is insistent on his own authorship of the terminology: 'I call' this 'one quality', 'Significant Form', he writes with characteristic bravura. A.C. Bradley was more circumspect thirteen years earlier, when he used the phrase in his inaugural lecture, 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake': 'what you apprehend' in a poem, Bradley writes, 'may be called indifferently an expressed meaning or a significant form'.[7] It could be said that Bell trivialises the import of the adjective 'significant', which in Bradley's formulation involves a serious point about the theoretical difficulty of severing form and content in any simplistic way; for Bell the word 'significant' seems more simply a value-term, roughly synonymous with 'important' or 'valuable'. Moreover the passage from Bradley's lecture shows that the phrase, 'significant form', was not Bell's coinage and was not, at first, associated with 'formalism' in its modernist version. The same turns out to be true of Bell's other key term, 'aesthetic emotion'. Here, though, the provenance is even more surprising, for it is conspicuous in the writing of the most eminent of Victorian painters, Frederic Leighton. As President of the Royal Academy, Leighton lectured to the students in 1881: 'I [exhort] you to work on in unwavering faith that the day is not at hand when the expression of aesthetic emotion through the forms of Art shall fail for lack of answering echo in the hearts of men'.[8] Later in the same lecture, Leighton argues that the visual arts should never attempt to convey meanings that can be better expressed in words, but that they may nonetheless express the most profound content in purely visual form:

> You will find, for instance, that, through this operation of Association, lines and forms and combinations of lines and forms, colours and combinations of colours have acquired a distinct expressional significance.[9]

Compare Bell: 'lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions'. Of course there may be common or intermediate sources for these two passages; nonetheless the similarity is as striking, and unexpected, as the visual one with which we began, between the perspective constructions of Rossetti and Van Gogh. The passage from Bell also includes another feature that is often found in the nineteenth-century texts we usually associate with Victorian Aestheticism: a list of objects of aesthetic delight. Compare Walter Pater, in the Preface to *The Renaissance*:

> To [the aesthetic critic], the picture, the landscape, the engaging personality in life or in a book, *La Gioconda*, the hills of Carrara, Pico of Mirandola, are valuable for their virtues, as we say, in speaking of a herb, a wine, a gem.

Or in the Conclusion:

> we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the

> senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend.[10]

As I have argued elsewhere, Bell's list is more prescriptive than Pater's, or others associated with Victorian Aestheticism; Bell's selection of 'tasteful' objects has an unpleasant counterpart in his exclusion of the vulgar, including, of course, Victorian art.[11] Nonetheless, Bell's text picks up verbal echoes and motifs from texts associated with Victorian Aestheticism. Indeed Bell's *Art*, despite all the modernist aggressiveness of its tone, is more like the texts of Aestheticism in the way that it weaves together words and phrases drawn from other writings on art.[12]

Thus Bell's aggression against the Victorians may conceal a debt to Victorian thinking and writing on art. Again, it is by no means an original move, on my part, to point out the concealed continuities between a modernist text and the texts of the previous generation that it pretends to repudiate.[13] My approach might be called 'revisionist'.[14] And if the modernist narrative may involve pleasures of aggression, the revisionist one, as Perkins notes, may involve 'other emotional gratifications', gratifications he describes as more 'chivalrous'.[15] In the modernist history the 'hero', modern art, vanquishes or triumphs over the reactionary Victorian past; in the revisionist one, the historian may, like Perseus or St George, rescue the maiden (that is, Victorian art) from the evil modernist dragon or sea monster. Perhaps it is not irrelevant that the stories of Perseus and St George were particular favourites with Victorian painters; familiar examples include Leighton's *Perseus on Pegasus*, unfinished at his death in 1896, Rossetti's *The Wedding of St George and the Princess Sabra* of 1857, Burne-Jones's many representations of *St George*, and his monumental series of decorative paintings on the legend of Perseus from the 1870s and 80s.

Fig.7. **Leighton, Perseus on Pegasus**
Image Courtesy of ARC Art Renewal Center.

I do not, then, wish to claim intellectual superiority for my 'chivalrous' narrative over the modernist narrative of aggression; both are ways of narrating and emplotting a history of modern art, and both provide the historian with gratifications of various kinds. But there is something more at stake in this particular problem of periodization, something to which the rather obvious gendering of these two narratives points. In a long perspective, perhaps from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, it clearly makes sense to divide Victorian Aestheticism from Modernism. But in the shorter time frame of the very end of the

Victorian period and the first few years of the twentieth century, the divide is not one of period. Aestheticism and Modernism overlap at this historical moment, and both of them involve serious exploration of basic problems in aesthetics and art theory. The difference between them is not a matter of chronology; instead it is a question of art-historical valuation, of what will count (in Bell's term) as 'significant' in modern art. The masculine construction of Modernism has frequently come under scrutiny. I want to argue that this is bound up with a complementary construction of Aestheticism as feminine, effeminate, or feminized.

The feminized construction of Aestheticism has considerable explanatory power for a historical investigation. The beautiful or compelling female figure is by far the predominant image in Aesthetic artistic projects, however diverse they are in other respects; among the most famous monuments of Victorian Aestheticism are Whistler's portrait of his mother (to which we shall shortly return), Pater's description of the *Mona Lisa*, Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs*, Swinburne's poem 'Anactoria', in which he adopts the voice of Sappho, Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* (the painting often cited as an initiating monument for Aestheticism in the visual arts). From the point of view of the social historian – and, it should be noted, of many Victorian critics as well – the prevalence of the female figure clearly indicates an obsession with the role and status of women, whether this is moralized negatively, as an attempt to neutralize the growing prominence of women by aestheticizing them, or positively, as a defiant rejection of contemporary patriarchal assumptions.[16]

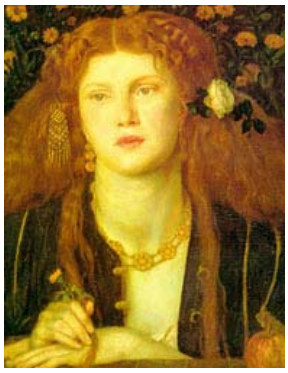

Fig 11 Rossetti *Bocca Baciata* Image Courtesy of ARC Art Renewal Center.

However, for countless critics from the Victorian period to the present day, the 'femininity' of Aestheticism goes far beyond its characteristic predilection for the female figure as subject, and takes the widest variety of aspects. There is, for example, the perceived 'effeminacy' of many of the male figures in the painting and writing of the movement (among countless visual examples one might cite the male figures of Simeon Solomon,[17] or Burne-Jones's depictions of St George). Then there is the dandified or effete self-presentation of many of Aestheticism's adherents, from Leighton to Wilde; the apparent appeal of Aestheticism to artists and writers known or presumed to have been homosexual; and, above all, the absence of manly political action in virtually all of the art associated with the movement. Even the technical or stylistic aspects of Aestheticism, in painting, have routinely been described in terms that imply femininity of some kind: the

apparent sacrifice of manly originality in favour of passive imitation of historical artistic styles; the frequent preference for smooth or reticent brushwork over the vigorous handling that characterises much French avant-garde painting; or the fascination with decorative elaboration rather than bold simplification of design. Indeed, the sense that there is something feminized about Victorian Aestheticism has perhaps been the underlying reason for its paranoid dismissal, not only by the early twentieth-century modernists in the aftermath of the Wilde trials, but by the many later critics who have castigated Aestheticism for its unmanly withdrawal from political or social action. In the historiography of modern art, Victorian Aestheticism has consistently been configured as the feminized 'other' of manly modernism, something that is clearly reflected in its lower status within twentieth-century art-historical canons.[18]

Nor is this simply a matter of the recidivist tendency to ascribe feminine characteristics to whatever is seen as hierarchically inferior. The perception that there is something feminine about Aestheticism responds genuinely to important aspects of Aesthetic artistic practice and theory. From our perspective in the twenty-first century, that is no reason to relegate it to secondary status, or to the pre-modernist past; on the contrary, it may well be a reason to take Aestheticism much more seriously. But what happened, in the process of dividing Aestheticism from Modernism, was a separation of spheres: 'significant' art belongs, in our histories, to Modernism, while aesthetic pleasure, the love of art or beauty, belongs to Aestheticism. Thus the narrative in which Modernism supersedes Aestheticism is only half of the story: alongside the perception that Modernism represents serious or 'significant' modern art we still have the complementary perception that there is something feminized, and vaguely disreputable, about loving art, or still worse, being an 'aesthete'. Some of the art-historical methods of the 1970s and beyond, such as the social and Marxist histories of art, have, if anything, exacerbated this divide by casting the love of art as pure ideological mystification. While this view may have been salutary under the particular circumstances of the 1970s and 80s, it is not only tinged with misogyny and homophobia; it is deeply uncritical. Aestheticism's exploration of what art, or indeed the love of art, might involve is neither mystification, nor an obsolete issue.[19] Nor again, as my preliminary visual comparisons indicated, is it easily to be separated from Modernism's explorations of the same questions. It is, then, worth looking more carefully at that complex moment at the end of the long nineteenth century, when Aestheticism and Modernism overlap.

These are broad claims, and to explore them comprehensively would require an extended historical analysis, with a plethora of examples. Perhaps it is possible to make a start, however, by looking at one example, from the work of James McNeill Whistler. It can be argued that in 1900 Whistler was the most influential artist in the world. In the exhibition called *1900*, which was held in London and New York in 2000, evanescent Whistlerian landscapes, and attenuated Whistlerian figures, were everywhere, in the art of Russia and Scandinavia, the Antipodes and the Americas.[20] By 1905 the French artist and theorist Maurice Denis was declaring, with evident relief, that the period of Whistler's sway over younger artists was at an end; for Denis Whistler's art, subtle and elegant as it was, lacked the strength and rigour of design that would make it a good example for students.[21] From about this date French art movements such as Fauvism and Cubism took the lead in the modernist mainstream. However, what Whistler himself called his 'theory in art' took firmer hold than his style in painting, and in particular his polemical insistence on the irreducible difference between the visual arts and literature, even though its origins in Whistler's multifarious lectures, lawsuits, and letters to the press often became obscured.[22]

Writing of Whistler's death in 1903, Roger Fry endorsed an earlier criticism, by the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, of Whistler's art theory:

> As a protest [Whistler's theory] was, or might have been, valuable, since it emphasized that side of art which, when once realistic representation is attainable, tends to be lost sight of; but as a working theory for an artist of extraordinary gifts it was unfortunate, since it cut away at a blow all those methods of appeal which depend on our complex relations to human beings and nature; it destroyed the humanity of art …. Moreover, the painter himself could not act up to his own theories. As Mr. Swinburne pointed out at the time, he infringed them flagrantly by expressing in his portrait of his mother a tenderly filial piety which transcends the facts of an arrangement in black and grey.[23]

Fry came strikingly to change his view within just a few years, although it was the art of Cézanne, not that of Whistler, that prompted him. Finding the work of Cézanne and the other French Post-Impressionists deeply satisfying in purely visual terms, without the expression of 'humanist' content, Fry and his close associate Clive Bell began by 1910 to advocate an art of 'significant form', rigorously divorced from 'associated ideas'; they posited an 'aesthetic emotion' that had nothing to do with the emotions of life.[24] As we have already seen, the terminology was borrowed from Aesthetic writing, but this inheritance was forgotten as the modernist generation of the early twentieth century declared a total break from the past.

It was, however, in the writings of the American art critic, Clement Greenberg, that the Whistlerian notion of the independence of visual art reached its logical extreme. In an essay of 1940, Greenberg argued that modern art needed above all to free itself from the dominance of the literary. But for Greenberg this was only the first step: he argued that each of the arts needed to establish its own autonomy relative to all of the others; in a gesture of startling literalism, he reasoned that the only feature that was truly unique to any art form was its physical medium – pigment on canvas, in the case of painting, stone or bronze in sculpture, pure sound in music, words in poetry (and here he drew explicitly on the writings of Mallarmé, the poet who had translated Whistler's 'Ten O'Clock' lecture into French).[25] The simplifying logic of this argument has come under heavy attack in recent years, but its consistency is nonetheless compelling. In 'Modernist Painting' of 1960 Greenberg reaches the logical endpoint of his theory by narrowing the criteria for excellence in painting to a single one: 'It was the stressing of the ineluctable flatness of the surface that remained, however, more fundamental than anything else to the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism. For flatness alone was unique and exclusive to pictorial art.'[26] Whistler is not an acknowledged point of reference for Greenberg. But it is Whistler's theory, no doubt refracted through numerous intermediary sources, that provides the basis for Greenberg's extreme position on the independence of the individual art forms.

Thus Whistler's theory triumphed, at least for a time, in modernism; arguably, it helped to make possible the great twentieth-century flourishing of the visual arts. But modernist criticism divorced the theory from the link to Whistler's own art that gave it cogency and vitality. 'Art should be independent of all clap-trap', wrote Whistler, 'should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like. All these have no kind of concern with it, and that is why I insist on calling my works "arrangements" and "harmonies."' Taken on its own, this statement is overwhelmingly negative; it seems merely to refuse art's potential to convey meanings of any wider significance. But Whistler immediately goes on to juxtapose the statement with a painting:

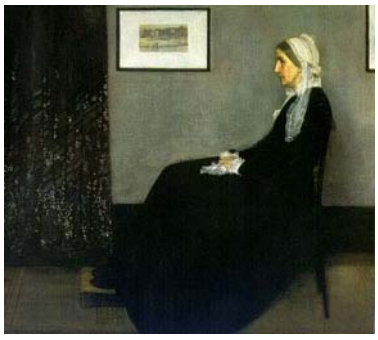

Fig 1 Whistler Arrangement in Grey and Black Image Courtesy of ARC Art Renewal Center.

> Take the picture of my mother, exhibited at the Royal Academy as an 'Arrangement in Grey and Black.' Now that is what it is. To me it is interesting as a picture of my mother; but what can or ought the public to care about the identity of the portrait?[27]

Here again, Whistler seems, at first thought, merely to limit interpretation; we are forbidden, apparently, to speculate on the character, biography, or feelings of the sitter, and told peremptorily to consider her merely as an 'arrangement'. A feminist critic might denounce the comment as misogynistic; a psychological critic might accuse Whistler of repressing his own deepest feelings about his mother. Yet we may read the passage another way: Whistler is offering to set aside his own interest in the painting, as a representation of his beloved mother. He also asks us to set aside the ideas that, on other occasions, we may hold dear, 'devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like' (and, we might add, the 'family values' so prominent in the politics of our own day). But all of this is just a preliminary, a clearing of the way so that we can begin to look. What might happen, if we were prepared to embark on this experiment with Whistler, and contemplate the painting as an 'arrangement in grey and black'?

Immediately we are in a different world from that of Whistler's pugnacious words. Grey and black are the quietest colours imaginable, and they are accompanied by white, another neutral hue. The canvas is barely covered by its ethereal film of pigment, and the weave of the fabric almost imperceptibly varies the texture of the fluid supervening layers. The framed picture on the wall, perhaps an etching, repeats the same tints. Its forms are too faint to permit a certain identification, but Whistler licences us to make up our own minds about what it represents. It seems to resemble a Nocturne, or one of Whistler's etchings of the Thames;[28] thus the bright oblongs towards the top may be lighted windows on the farther bank, beyond delicate striations that we may choose to see as the barely trembling waters of the river. Besides, the framed picture is a landscape: together the landscape and the portrait explore the range of Whistler's art, or perhaps, schematically, of visual art in general. The painting and the picture within the painting share not only a colour harmony, but also an approach to space; in both there is a measured interval curtailed by a backdrop flat to the picture surface. The landscape is itself a defining feature of the flat backdrop of the main painting, as if to reiterate the point that painting's illusions happen on a flat surface. Overall the flat pattern is a matter of the most delicate balance: the swinging diagonal of the figure, an incisive black edge, is in counterpoint with an asymmetrical pattern of horizontal and vertical elements. Yet the illusions also fascinate: the curtain that forms the left portion of the flat backdrop falls in numerous irregular folds,

so that its patterns (themselves flat in design) ripple in and out of the crevices. And the sitter's face and hands introduce the tint – after all – of humanity, just enough warmer than the prevailing colour harmony to read as human flesh. Does this nuance simply save the colour harmony from too severe an austerity? Or does it suggest that an 'arrangement' may be something more than an abstract pattern of line and colour?

In ancient legend, the origin of the representational arts is a portrait, indeed a portrait in profile: the daughter of Dibutades, a potter of Sikyon, traced the outline of the shadow cast on the wall by her lover's face as he slept.[29] Thus love may be, not indeed an association of painting, but its very motive power, and Whistler's painting surely recapitulates the desires of countless artists to make a representation that may be worthy of a human being. These desires in Rembrandt, or in Velázquez, artists Whistler specially loved, resonate in the solemn colour harmony, with its immense mass of black, but also in the representation of old age. If Whistler wishes us to forget, for the moment, his mother's identity, and any sentimental associations that may have for us, he cannot be asking us to forget also old age, for that is indelibly inscribed in the infinitely delicate lines of the face and the soft grey shadows that mark the sagging of the chin. But there is no trace of the sentimental: the balance of the design, the sobriety of the colour harmony, the stillness of the figure, the level gaze that makes no conceivable appeal to our emotions are all necessary to prevent any mistake in this respect. Instead of the sentimental, there is something else that comes as a surprise: a play between the reticent signs of old age and the exact justice of the design that we may wish to call beautiful in the philosophical sense of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, involving a play among our sensory and intellectual capacities that cannot be reduced to a logical proposition. The beauty is that of modernism, either in the near-abstract simplification of the design, or in the unidealized portrayal of old age. But it is also that of antiquity in the Hegelian sense of perfect interpenetration of sensuous shape with spiritual meaning.

In histories of modern art, Whistler has been characterized both as the supreme aesthete, and as a proto-modernist, and the example of *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother* suggests that both characterizations may have their merits. The exhibition *Turner Whistler Monet*, held in Toronto, Paris, and London in 2004-05, perhaps went further, to question the conventional art-historical boundaries at both ends of the 'long nineteenth century'; the first item in the catalogue is dated 1797, the last 1908.[30] The exhibition might also be seen as quintessentially 'modernist' in that it made its argument primarily on the basis of formal resemblances among the works on

view. Many art historians were unpersuaded that the visual argument had any purchase on the historical development of modern art, and some even saw the exhibition's visual pleasures as a cynical exercise in crowd-pleasing at the expense of rigorous historical investigation.[31] But that is to accept the divide between the hedonism of the aesthete and the 'significance' of modern art. In retrospect it was a striking achievement of modernist criticism to persuade us, for a century, that 'significant form' could apply, for example, to Picasso but not to Burne-Jones, or that Leighton is a dead end in the history of art, while Gustav Klimt points onwards to twentieth-century Expressionism. Some of Picasso's female figures from the first decade of the twentieth century, such as *Girl with a Fan* or *Girl in a Chemise* of 1905, may readily be compared with the emaciated bodies, drooping necks, and melancholic coloration in earlier paintings by Burne-Jones, widely disseminated in reproduction as well as in international exhibitions around 1900. The oversized thigh, as well as the array of golden colours, in Gustav Klimt's *Danaë* of 1907-08 irresistibly recall Leighton's *Flaming June* of 1895 (interestingly, Klimt reinstates the mythological subject-matter, characteristic of nineteenth-century academic classicism, but sometimes suppressed in Leighton's 'Symbolist' work of the end of his career).[32] Perhaps formal resemblance might, after all, be part of a rigorous history. If so it might show that the 'long nineteenth century' is longer than we thought. Indeed, since we still see Victorian art with the eyes of Fry and Bell – is the 'long nineteenth century' over yet?

Fig 13 Picasso *Girl with a Fan* Image courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington

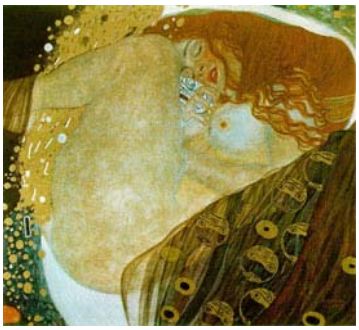

Fig 17 Klimt *Danaë* Image courtesy of Mark Harden

Paintings Cited in the Text

1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, 1849-50, oil on canvas, 72.4 x 41.9 cm, Tate
2. Vincent Van Gogh, *The Artist's Bedroom at Arles*, 1888, oil on canvas, 72 x 90 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam
3. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Golden Stairs*, 1876-80, oil on canvas, 269.2 x 116.8 cm, Tate
4. Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, no. 2*, 1912, oil on canvas, 146 x 89 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection
5. George Frederic Watts, *Eve* triptych, Tate (*'She Shall Be Called Woman'*, c. 1875-92, oil on canvas, 257.8 x 116.8 cm; *Eve Tempted*, exh. 1884, oil on canvas, 257.8 x 116.8 cm; *Eve Repentant*, c. 1865-97, oil on canvas, 259.1 x 119.4 cm)
6. Piet Mondrian, *Evolution* (triptych), 1911, oil on canvas, two panels 178 x 84.9 cm, one panel 183 x 87.6 cm, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague
7. Frederic Leighton, *Perseus on Pegasus Hastening to the Rescue of Andromeda*, c. 1895-96, oil on canvas, 184 x 189.6 cm (circular), Leicestershire Museums, Arts & Records Service
8. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Wedding of St George and the Princess Sabra*, 1857, watercolour on paper, 36.5 x 36.5 cm, Tate
9. Edward Burne-Jones, *St George*, 1873-77, oil on canvas, 155 x 57 cm, Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund.
10. Edward Burne-Jones, *Perseus and the Rock of Doom*, c. 1884-85, bodycolour, 154 x 128.6 cm, Southampton City Art Gallery, from Burne-Jones's *Perseus Series* (full-scale cartoons, 1877-85, Southampton City Art Gallery; partial series of oils, c. 1885-92, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart)
11. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Bocca Baciata*, 1859, oil on panel, 32.2 x 27 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of James Lawrence 1980.261.

12. James McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother*, 1871, oil on canvas, 144.3 x 162.5 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris
13. Pablo Picasso, *Girl with a Fan*, 1905, oil on canvas, 99 x 81.3 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (Gift of the W. Averell Harriman Foundation in memory of Marie D. Harriman)
14. Pablo Picasso, *Girl in a Chemise*, c. 1905, oil on canvas, 72.7 x 60, Tate
15. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Briar Rose: Study for 'The Garden Court'*, 1889, bodycolour, 91.2 x 60.6 cm, Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery
16. Frederic Leighton, *Flaming June*, 1895, oil on canvas, 119 x 119 cm, Museo de Arte, Ponce, Puerto Rico
17. Gustav Klimt, *Danaë*, 1907-08, oil on canvas, 77 x 83 cm, Graz, private collection

[1] Richard L. Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation: The Fine Arts As Literature in Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pater* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 184.

[2] Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I, 14; Martin Bailey, *Van Gogh in England: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, exhibition catalogue (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1992), pp. 11-12. Van Gogh referred briefly to Rossetti in a letter of November 1889, but without citing any particular work; see *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*, 3 vols. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958), III, 229.

[3] Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone, eds., *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860-1910*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1997), p. 272 (see also the catalogue entry on *The Golden Stairs* by Christopher Newall, p. 190).

[4] David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 32-3.

[5] Clive Bell, *Art*, first published 1914 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927), p. 177.

[6] Bell, *Art*, pp. 7-8.

[7] A.C. Bradley, 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake' (1901), in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1909), p. 19.

[8] *Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy: By the late Lord Leighton* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896), p. 37.

[9] *Addresses*, pp. 56-7.

[10] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1980), pp. xx, 189.

[11] Elizabeth Prettejohn, ed., *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 11-12.

[12] On intertextuality in Aestheticism see Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'Walter Pater and Aesthetic Painting', in Prettejohn, *After the Pre-Raphaelites*, pp. 36-58.

[13] For a fascinating example in another context (book design and printing) see Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[14] For an exploration of problems involved in such 'revisionism' see Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'The Modernism of Frederic Leighton', in David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry, eds., *English Art 1860-1914: Modern Artists and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 31-48.

[15] Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?*, p. 33.

[16] For a Victorian example see Alfred Austin, 'Mr. Swinburne' (1870), repr. in *Swinburne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Clyde K. Hyder (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), esp. pp. 103-05. For an important recent discussion, see Kathy Alexis Psomiades, *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995).

[17] Solomon's work suffered particular neglect in the first three quarters of the twentieth century, principally due to his homosexuality (although anti-Semitism may also have played a part). Changing gender politics since the 1960s, together with the rise of scholarly methodologies such as gay and lesbian studies and queer theory, have led to a notable revision of opinion on Solomon, culminating in a major retrospective exhibition

still underway at the time of this article's publication, held at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (1 October 2005-15 January 2006), Museum Villa Stuck, Munich (9 March-18 June 2006), and Ben Uri Gallery, The London Jewish Museum of Art (11 September-26 November 2006). The exhibition catalogue reassesses and illustrates Solomon's work: Colin Cruise with others, *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites* (London and New York: Merrell, 2005). See also Roberto C. Ferrari, Simeon Solomon Research Archive, at http://www.simeonsolomon.org/.

[18] For examples from the criticism of Leighton, including responses to the Royal Academy retrospective of his work in 1996, see the Introduction to Tim Barringer and Elizabeth Prettejohn, eds., *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. xiii-xvi.

[19] For a discussion of Victorian Aestheticism in relation to philosophical aesthetics see Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art 1750-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 3.

[20] Robert Rosenblum, MaryAnne Stevens, and Ann Dumas, *1900: Art at the Crossroads*, exhibition catalogue (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2000).

[21] Maurice Denis, 'La peinture' (1905), repr. in *Le Ciel et l'Arcadie* (Paris: Hermann, 1993), pp. 86-7.

[22] For Whistler's phrase, 'my theory in art', see his letter to George Lucas, 18 January 1873, repr. in Robin Spencer, ed., *Whistler: A Retrospective* (New York: Wings Books, 1989), p. 107.

[23] Anonymous [Roger Fry], 'Mr. Whistler', *Athenaeum* no. 3952 (25 July 1903), p. 133.

[24] For Fry's own account of the shift see 'Retrospect', in Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*, first published 1920 (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 199-211.

[25] Clement Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocoon' (1940), repr. in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, 4 vols. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986-93), I, 23-38. As the title indicates, Greenberg was drawing on a longer history of thinking on the differences between the arts, stemming from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoön, or On the Limits of Painting and Poetry* of 1766; Walter Pater's essay, 'The School of Giorgione' of 1877, is a crucial intermediary, acknowledged by Greenberg in a note (p. 32).

[26] *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays*, IV, 87.

[27] *The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler*, on-line edition, Centre for Whistler Studies, University of Glasgow, 2004. Edited by Margaret F. MacDonald, Patricia de Montfort and Nigel Thorp, at http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence, rec. no. 13153, accessed on 26/8/05; first published in *The World*, 22 May 1878, pp. 4-5; repr. as 'The Red Rag' in James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, facsimile of 2nd ed. 1892 (New York: Dover, 1967), pp. 127-28.

[28] It is plausibly identified as Whistler's etching of 1858, *Black Lion Wharf*, in Margaret F. MacDonald, 'The Painting of Whistler's *Mother*', in *Whistler's Mother: An American Icon* (Aldershot, Hants. and Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2003), p. 47.

[29] Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXV.151; there are several versions of this story, which was often represented in nineteenth-century painting.

[30] Katharine Lochnan and others, *Turner Whistler Monet*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Publishing, 2004).

[31] See for example Adrian Lewis, 'Turner, Whistler, Monet: Lineage and its Function', *The Art Book*, vol. 12, issue 1 (February 2005): 6-8.

[32] This comparison, as well as Picasso's general interest in Burne-Jones, is suggested in Wilton and Upstone, *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts*, p. 272.