Олимпиада для студентов и выпускников – 2017 г.

Направление «История»

Профиль:
«История художественной культуры и рынок искусства» КОД – 321

Время выполнения задания –120 мин., язык – русский.

Задание для текста на английском языке:

I. Прочесть главу «Form and content» из книги Prettejohn E. Beauty and art: 1750-2000. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. P.142–155.

II. Дать развёрнутый ответ на следующие вопросы:

1. Какие художественные приёмы для раскрытия темы используют три художника, представившие картины на выставки 1867?
2. Как Вы считаете, почему эти картины были выбраны автором для раскрытия понятия «формализм» как оно понималась в искусстве XIX века?
3. Опишите при помощи каких приёмов Ф. Лейтон добивается отхода от нарративности в скульптуре?
4. На примере картины «Портрет моей матери «Дж. Уистлера опишите, как соотносятся разные прочтения содержания и формы?
5. Какой результат имело судебное разбирательство между художником Дж. Уистлером и критиком Дж. Рёскином для теории прекрасного?

Form and content

Of the artists Colvin mentioned, the one who has remained most closely identified with the motto 'art for art's sake' is the American artist, James McNeill Whistler. Trained in France, Whistler came to England at the beginning of the 1860s and was at first associated with Rossetti's circle [**74**]. Later in the decade, though, Whistler became close to Albert Moore. Indeed, Colvin was perceptive, in 1867, in linking Whistler with both Moore and Leighton, and in identifying their project as concerned with 'beauty without realism'. By this date the three artists seem to have taken a more extreme view of the 'purity' of the work of art than the artists closer to Rossetti.

Three pictures exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1867, Leighton's *Spanish Dancing Girl* [**87**], Moore's *The Musicians* [**88**], and Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 3* [**89**], experiment with a similar compositional type. All represent figures arranged on a bench in a shallow foreground space; in each a more upright figure on the left establishes an asymmetrical focus, while seated or reclining figures to the right look on, listen, or (in the case of the Whistler) seem lost in introspection. All three are ambiguous in period location. Leighton's 'Spanish' dancing girl wears draperies imitated from classical Greek sculpture, with crossing cords and a heavy overfold at the waist. Moore's classicizing setting includes palm fans and a Japanese-looking spray of flowers, and Whistler's combines a Japanese fan with another asymmetrical spray of foliage and curious dresses, reminiscent of early nineteenth-century Regency fashion, with high waists and puffed sleeves. In all three cases the blurring of period location prevents the spectator from interpreting the setting as a 'real' period or place. Even though the figures and objects are perfectly comprehensible in representational terms, the scenes are not realistic in the sense that they do not correspond to any particular historical 'reality'.

87 Frederic Leighton
Spanish Dancing Girl, 1867

88 Albert Moore
The Musicians, 1867

All three pictures make conspicuous reference to the art of music. In Moore's picture the male figure plays the lyre; in Leighton's the figures clap to accompany the dancer's movement. In Whistler's picture the musical reference is confined to the title, *Symphony in White, No. 3*. The picture does not represent music-making; instead, the title indicates that it is the picture itself that is the 'symphony'. It is a work of art,

89 James McNeill Whistler
Symphony in White, No. 3, 1865–7

analogous to a piece of music, and identified by its dominant colour (white), as a piece of music might be identified by its key ('Symphony in C'); moreover, it is the third of its kind in the artist's oeuvre, just as a musical composition might be designated by number (accordingly *The Little White Girl*, **74**, was retrospectively retitled *Symphony in White, No. 2*). Perhaps the implication of the particular musical term, 'symphony', is that the picture corresponds to absolute music rather than to programme music (music that dramatizes a story) or music set to words.

This equation between non-realist painting and absolute music is perhaps clearest in Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 3*, although Whistler relies on a verbal title to convey his meaning rather than suggesting it entirely in visual terms; indeed, he inscribes the title conspicuously along the bottom of the canvas, an indication of how important it is to the picture's meaning, and probably also of how novel the idea still was in 1867. However, all three pictures order their compositions on principles of rhythm or proportion that can be seen as analogous to the proportional relationships of musical intervals and chords. Thus the idea of an analogy with music can suggest a compositional method based on spatial measurements, as music is based on quantifiable acoustic vibrations. Such a method would use geometrical proportions to generate a composition, rather than letting the requirements either of subject-matter or of realistic representation dictate the placement of figures and objects. Moore would take this idea furthest in his works of succeeding years [**65**, **79**].

As we have seen, Colvin's article of 1867 comes close to advancing a theory that we might call 'formalist': art should concern itself with forms and colours, the qualities proper to its visual medium. But for the nineteenth-century artists this did not mean moving towards total abstraction. Instead the artists wished to bring form and content closer together. They sought ways to make the picture generate its meanings in the terms of its own visual medium, rather than merely referring to meanings generated elsewhere, say in a literary source, or even in the natural world. This is similar to what Gautier meant by an 'idea in painting', as opposed to an 'idea in literature' (see above, p. 88). In the pictures of 1867 (and many other works associated with art for art's sake), the artists proposed the analogy with music as one way of moving away from dependence on narrative or 'literary' subject-matter. Pater extended this idea in an essay of 1877, 'The School of Giorgione':

> *All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.* For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it. . . . It is the art of music which most completely realises this artistic ideal, this perfect identification of matter and form. In its consummate moments, the end is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter,

the subject from the expression; they inhere in and completely saturate each other; and to it, therefore, to the condition of its perfect moments, all the arts may be supposed constantly to tend and aspire.[39]

For Pater music can stand as the ideal art form, not because it lacks content but because musical thought cannot be conceptualized separately from its sensuous embodiment as audible sound (this is less true, at any rate, of the literary or visual arts, whose subject-matter can be summarized in words). Moreover, it is not irrelevant that he introduces this discussion of music into an essay concerned with the painting of the Venetian Renaissance. Pater is perhaps thinking partly of Whistler, for the essay was first published in 1877 when Whistler's musical titles were intensively discussed in the press (see below, p. 152). But he is also thinking of Rossetti's explorations of Venetian style, which he specifically mentions.[40] Rossetti's paintings, often ingeniously, cast their 'literary' references into a form that is visual first of all. We have seen that in *Bocca Baciata* [**67**] Rossetti chose the subject-matter after the picture was painted, so that the visual form of the painting inspires and takes precedence over its 'literary' content. *Fazio's Mistress* [**75**] re-creates a poem by Fazio degli Uberti (*c.*1302–*c.*1367), in which the poet imagines looking at his beloved: the picture does not 'illustrate' the poem; rather, it realizes the poet's own visual experience. Later Leighton extended the project to the medium of sculpture. His *Athlete Wrestling with a Python* [**90**], exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1877, is a new meditation on the *Laocoön* [**3**], but Leighton eliminates the 'literary' context of the ancient sculpture (the Laocoön myth) to concentrate on the extension of the body in space. In this and a second sculpture with a contrasting subject, *The Sluggard* of *c.*1882–6 [**91**], Leighton also explored the special capabilities of the medium of polished bronze, exploiting the play of light on burnished metal and refining surface detail to emphasize the sensuous and tactile qualities of the medium.

Whistler never contemplated giving up the representation of figures and objects in his work. However, he was more strident than any of the other artists in declaring his antipathy to 'literary' subject-matter. His numerous letters to the press, pamphlets, and lectures present a witty and vivid account of his artistic project, oversimplified, perhaps, both to make it accessible to his readers and in spirited defiance of conventional opinions on art. An example is this excerpt from 'The Red Rag', first published in 1878:

Art should be independent of all clap-trap—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.'

90 Frederic Leighton
Athlete Wrestling with a Python, 1877

91 Frederic Leighton
The Sluggard, *c.*1882–6

92 James McNeill Whistler
Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother, 1871–2

Take the picture of my mother [**92**], 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?[41]

Whistler seems to offer us a crude choice between two antithetical ways of reading paintings. First there is an ideological reading, which refers to ideas such as 'devotion, pity, love, patriotism', and, we might add, motherhood; this reading is incompatible with 'art for art's sake', as Whistler indicates with the vivid observation 'art should be independent of all clap-trap'. Second there is a 'formalist' reading, which refers to form and colour alone. Whistler unequivocally opts for the second kind of reading, and he chooses an extreme example to make his point: the painting of his own mother, he insists, should be regarded as an *Arrangement in Grey and Black*—like a piece of pure instrumental music without subject-matter. Calling the picture *Arrangement in Grey and Black* leads us to experience it in a special way. We note the disposition of the black figure, marking a diagonal across a measured grid of

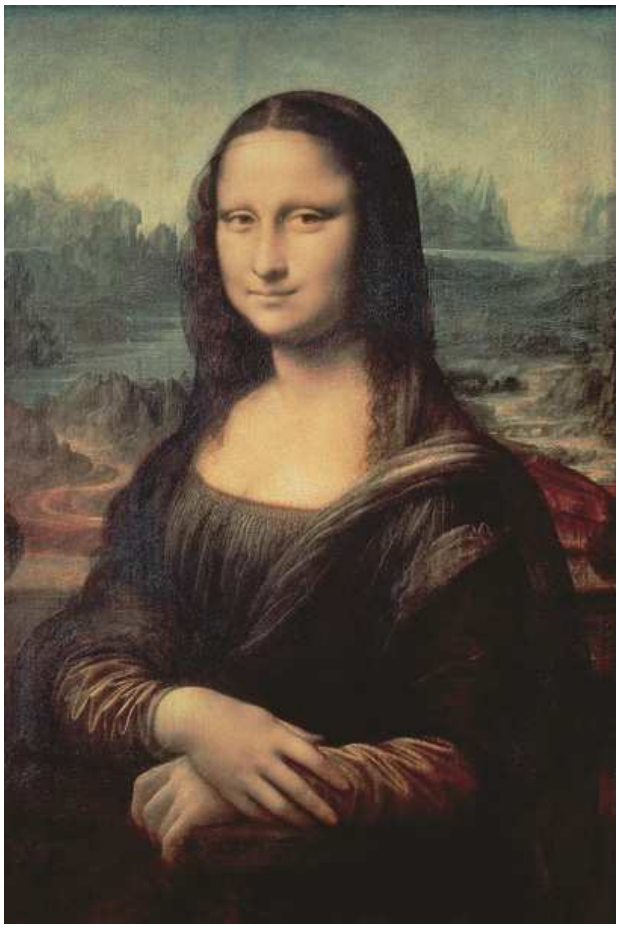
horizontal and vertical lines; the limitation of hue, virtually to a monochrome, emphasizes the simplification of forms. The delicate paint surface varies from an almost ethereal stain in the background greys, through the calligraphic waves and flecks at the left, to the transparent feathery whites towards the centre. We do not need to read these areas as a wall, a curtain, or a lace cap and cuffs to find them beautiful. In this reading Whistler's painting has a formal beauty similar to that of an abstract painting, such as one by Piet Mondrian (1872–1944).

But, despite Whistler's protestations, the public has always cared very much indeed about the 'identity of the portrait', so much so that—under the familiar title *Whistler's Mother*—it is still one of the most famous pictures in the world. We might even suspect Whistler, a consummate self-publicist, of raising the question to call attention to the painting's strangeness as a portrait. It is utterly memorable, partly because it is so unconventional as a representation of motherhood. The figure is anything but cuddly or nurturing; instead she is angular, stark in profile, immobile and unresponsive, dressed in the strict black and white of Protestant bourgeois rectitude. Suddenly 'devotion, pity, love, patriotism' come flooding back into the interpretation of the picture, together with piety, righteousness, and respect.

But is this reading, which takes account of the picture's content, inconsistent with art for art's sake? In fact Whistler was lying. At the Royal Academy he had exhibited the portrait with a double title: *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother*. Unlike the more strident statement in 'The Red Rag', the double title leaves us free to explore a richer set of possibilities, in which the formal elements of the picture (the 'arrangement' of lines and colours) and its content (the representation of the artist's elderly mother) are not mutually exclusive. This introduces the possibility of an aesthetic response that depends neither on a sentimental reaction to the depiction of motherhood, nor on abstracting away the portrait character of the image. The picture is compelling as a set of abstract, monochrome shapes; it is fascinating as an unconventional representation of a mother. But Whistler's project is perhaps more daring still. He asks us to make the judgement of taste—'This is beautiful'—in relation to a painting of an old woman in plain black against a grey background. To see beauty in form and content *together* in this picture is a more complex and interesting experiment than the formalist approach that Whistler seems superficially to espouse in 'The Red Rag' and other writings.

In an essay first published in 1869, and subsequently incorporated into *The Renaissance*, Pater explored similar ideas in relation to one of the most famous portraits of past art, Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* [**93**]. First Pater suggests that the 'unfathomable smile' derives from artistic tradition, from the designs of Leonardo's teacher Andrea del Verrocchio (*c.*1435–88), which the young artist copied in his student days. On the

93 Leonardo da Vinci
Mona Lisa, 1510–15



other hand, Pater notes, the picture is a portrait of a historical woman of late-fifteenth-century Florence. And he immediately introduces a third possibility: 'From childhood we see this image defining itself on the fabric of his dreams; and but for express historical testimony, we might fancy that this was but his ideal lady, embodied and beheld at last' (this recalls Raphael's famous letter, about painting an ideal he had in his mind). Pater does not wish to make a final choice among these various possibilities; rather, he keeps all of them in play as 'aesthetic ideas' stimulated by the contemplation of the work: 'What was the relationship of a living Florentine to this creature of his thought? By what strange affinities had the dream and the person grown up thus apart, and yet so closely together?'[42] We might ask such questions about *Whistler's Mother*, or indeed about Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata*: what was the relationship between the living Victorians (Mrs Whistler or Fanny Cornforth) and the images that have come to seem quintessential expressions of the 'personal ideals' (to use Delacroix's term) of Whistler and Rossetti?

Pater leaves his questions unanswered. Instead he writes what became the most famous passage in all his writing:

> The presence that rose thus so strangely beside the waters is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all 'the ends of the world are come,' and the eyelids are a little weary. It

is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity [**12**, **80**], and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed! . . . She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea.[43]

Pater has perhaps learned from Ruskin how the slightest visual sign can yield the widest meaning. But his method is altogether different. Ruskin analyses every last detail to pin down its meaning in an order of things understood to exist prior to the picture itself (necessarily so, since for Ruskin the origin of all meanings is God). Pater works in the opposite direction. He takes the visual cues of the picture as primary data—the water and rocks, the eyelids 'a little weary', the 'unfathomable smile'—and proceeds to elaborate the 'aesthetic ideas' to which they may give rise in the mind of the observer. Thus the beauty of the picture emerges from the consideration of form and content together. Moreover, Pater's account is 'for art's sake' in that it begins and ends in the aesthetic experience of the work of art. It does not, like Ruskin's, claim to reveal truths that go beyond that aesthetic experience; it does not even pretend to solve the questions raised by the picture itself. Yet Pater shows how this open-ended exploration of a work of art can, paradoxically, generate ideas even wider-ranging than a thought process that aims to link art to other areas of human endeavour. Furthermore, the aesthetic experience creates a new work of art. In the first edition of *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, which he compiled and published in 1936, the poet William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) printed part of Pater's passage on the *Mona Lisa* as the first poem of the collection. Thus Pater's meditation on Leonardo's painting became an initiating text for English literary modernism.

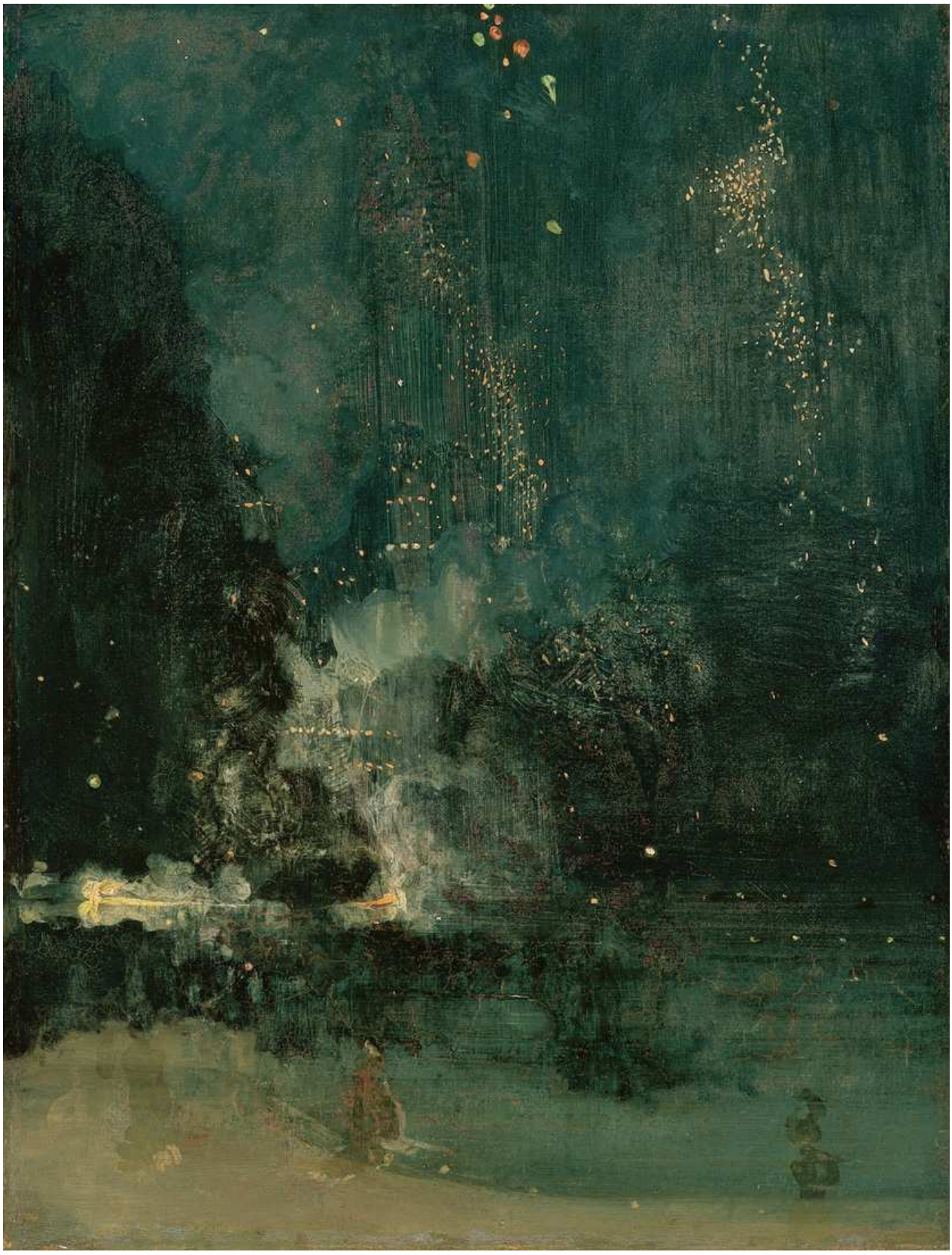
In the essay on Leonardo, Pater explored aesthetic issues that were central to current artistic experimentation; but he did so through the analysis of particular works of art, not in general theoretical terms. Indeed, both Swinburne and Pater, after introducing the phrase 'art for art's sake' in 1868, turned largely to practical criticism, and for good reasons. Having established basic terms for art's independence, theory

could go no further, since that would amount to providing a general concept or definition of beauty. Pater describes his critical approach at the beginning of the *Renaissance*, in terms strongly reminiscent of Kant: 'To define beauty, not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find, not its universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of aesthetics.'[44] 'To define beauty' would be tantamount to prescribing a rule for the artist, something that was anathema to both Swinburne and Pater.

This leaves complete freedom to artists; it also leaves them without guidance. It is simple enough to claim that art does *not* exist for the sake of preaching a moral lesson, of supporting a political cause, of making a fortune, or of a hundred other aims and objectives. But to say that it exists 'for art's sake' is merely to repeat oneself. 'To art, that is best which is most beautiful', Swinburne wrote; but that is no more helpful if we cannot define the beautiful. 'Art for art's sake' does not, then, authorize a particular kind of art, or provide criteria for critical judgement. Rather, it is the statement of an artistic question: what would art be like if it were not for the sake of anything else? In the absence of a general theory of art or beauty, the question can only be answered by seeing what art might be in a particular case; that is, in a particular work of art.

By the same token there is no reason why any particular case should resemble any other; this helps to account for the diversity of approaches among the English artists and writers involved in these aesthetic experiments. In 1877 the first exhibition was held at the Grosvenor Gallery, founded to offer a more sympathetic environment than the Academy; among those invited to exhibit were virtually all of the artists associated with what critics were beginning to call 'Aestheticism'. Thus the exhibition included works as different as Whistler's moody landscape, *Nocturne in Black and Gold* [**94**], and Burne-Jones's mythological fantasy, *Venus' Mirror* [**95**]. Ruskin, whose critical word was still powerful, loved Burne-Jones's work and hated Whistler's: 'I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face', he wrote with obvious reference to the *Nocturne*.[45] Whistler sued Ruskin for libel.

The ensuing courtroom drama brought into public the aesthetic debates that had been going on in artistic circles for two decades; Albert Moore testified for Whistler, and Burne-Jones for Ruskin. Burne-Jones seems genuinely to have agreed with Ruskin, that Whistler was setting a bad example by putting too little labour into his pictures. This ought to have been straightforward to argue in court; members of the special jury of property-holding men were likely to be sympathetic with the work ethic. Moreover, the amount of labour expended in the



94 James McNeill Whistler
Nocturne in Black and Gold (The Falling Rocket), 1875

95 Edward Burne-Jones
Venus' Mirror, 1877

making of a picture is quantifiable, at least in broad terms. Ruskin's counsel had no difficulty in proving that Whistler had spent less than two days making his *Nocturne*; by contrast Burne-Jones's *Venus' Mirror* must have required months of careful labour. Little wonder, then, that Burne-Jones agreed with Ruskin.

But something singular happened when Burne-Jones gave his testimony. He was resolute in response to all questions about the finish, completeness, composition, detail, and value-for-money of Whistler's pictures: in all of these respects he believed that Whistler had skimped his labour. But he found himself utterly unable to deny, under oath, that Whistler's work might be called 'beautiful'. Burne-Jones has been harshly criticized for his apparent weakness as a witness. But his testimony was not inconsistent, if we remember the aesthetic debates of the preceding years. The quantity of an artist's labour, the amount of finish or detail, are matters of fact; the importance of such things is an ethical issue. These matters belong to 'science' and 'morality', in Swinburne's tripartite scheme: they have nothing to do with beauty. As Burne-Jones found under cross-examination, any number of logical and moral objections cannot prevent us from finding something beautiful.

By the same token a court of law is not the place to decide aesthetic questions; the court can deal only with questions of truth and falsehood, or with right and wrong as defined by the law (Swinburne's 'science' and 'morality', again). Perhaps this helps to account for the jury's equivocal verdict: they found that Ruskin had libelled Whistler, but awarded only the derisory sum of a farthing in damages, as a signal that the case ought never to have been taken to court in the first place.

In effect the jury conceded the autonomy of art, by declaring it none of their business.[46]

Posterity has delivered its own judgement, tending to condemn Burne-Jones and Ruskin for conservatism, and to applaud Whistler's foresight and courage, in fighting to free art from its ties to representational accuracy and didacticism alike, and leading the way towards twentieth-century modernism. The wit and flair with which Whistler argued his case are indeed inspiring. But this judgement is no more justifiable than Ruskin's, aesthetically. As Burne-Jones discovered under cross-examination, to find *Venus' Mirror* beautiful does not mean that *Nocturne in Black and Gold* is not beautiful, or vice versa. Each may be judged beautiful in a judgement of taste, but to rank them would require a logical or moral argument. Each painting makes its own exploration of what it might mean to be 'for art's sake', rather than for the sake of something else: Whistler gives us the excitement of the artist's inspiration, in the very instant of his response to the bursting of a firework; Burne-Jones offers a compelling image of the contemplation or attentiveness that distinguishes aesthetic experience. Whistler catches the instant in its utmost contingency, over before we have time to take it in, and before the artist can make the shapes on the canvas cohere as recognizable form. Burne-Jones, instead, makes the world stand still, in an exquisite pause that leaves the passage of time out of the question, as the figures gaze on their own beauty in the unbroken surface of the crystalline pool. The two pictures have very little in common, but each of the two encapsulates a 'moment' in Pater's sense. Who would deny us either the one or the other? It is the special virtue of the aesthetic that we are not required to choose.