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Writing Beauty:
John Ruskin's Vision of Neural Imagination in the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne and George Eliot

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
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by

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For his love and inspiration I dedicate this work to my remarkable husband, Keith Berwick, and to the other beautiful people in my life, Karen, Paul, Rhema and Kaiya.

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VITA OF SHEENA BERWICK

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ABSTRACT

Writing Beauty:

John Ruskin's Vision of Neural Imagination in the Works of

Nathaniel Hawthorne and George Eliot

By

Sheena Berwick

This dissertation responds to a growing awareness of beauty and visual sensibility in mid-to-late 19th-century British and American novels. These works demonstrate the authors' appreciation of beauty as a condition of body, mind, soul, and culture, as well as their ability to create through the text an evocative technique of writing that creates an imaginative and sensual connection to beauty in the reader's neuro-visual experience of their art. In considering this development, the dissertation explores the human imagination of writer and reader: ideas, coded into neural transmissions between writer and reader through the medium of text, which create and recreate fictional worlds through mental images, and consequently produce emotional realities in the reader. I attribute this creative partnership in writing and reading to the perception, writing, and reading theories of John Ruskin, and especially his discussions of beauty, sensuality and imagination expressed throughout the early volumes of his master works, *Modern Painters*.

Ruskin thought of the experience of beauty in nature and art as an embodied product of the brain/mind, traveling freely through the mind and body changing one's perceptions of the world and our relations to it. The human response to art in this view is transmitted through the individual back into society affecting others and transforming institutions. If we think of beauty this way, we are thinking of it as a nueroaesthetic communications network circulating pleasure and delight and social enhancement—emotional, psychological, physical and moral enchancement moving as a personal gift to the soul of the community. Another way to understand this happy interchange would be as a neuro-hormone pleasure highway. Ruskin, after all, proposes his own version of this when he imagined the idea of the undefinable thing called beauty—what science has since discovered as hormonal and chemical products of the brain—distributing elixirs of pleasure from the mind through the body's mapped highways of veins and arteries. Ruskin's description of these sensations in reaction to beauty were based on his attention to his physio-biological processes. One hundred and fifty years later modern science put Ruskin's theory to a neurological test . Semir Zeki—a founder of the field of neuroaesthetics and the first scientist to study the effect of beauty and romantic love on the brain— discovered through fMRI technology that the experience of "beauty is part of a continuum [at the orbito-frontal cortex] representing a value attributed to it by the brain. The experience of the pleasure of beauty, he discovered, increases with neural activity associated with the individual brain's response. Zeki's work confirms Ruskin's deductions of the mysterious passage of beauty from the brain's response to perception channeled through the body. This opens up Ruskin's writings and those of the novelists influenced by him to a revelation of their early contributions in the field of neuroaesthetics.

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l. A New Perception of Vision: Revelations of Things Unseen

> A developed experience of the visible world is not an accidental pleasure, but something that involves the whole moral and emotional nature of man.[1]
>
> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*

Truth and Beauty. Linked for millenia, truth and beauty existed together as aesthetic twins, until the mid 19th-century when John Ruskin added an essential third sibling—perception. Charlotte Brontë was shocked into this recognition one night as she and Elizabeth Gaskell sat by the glowing fire in Gaskell's parlour. Reading aloud from *Modern Painters*, Ruskin's impassioned defence of J.M.W. Turner's expressionistic art, Brontë had an epiphany. Not a cognitive breakthrough as one would expect— the usual result of reading compelling words on a printed page. No, her exclamation and claim was that the "energy and beauty" of Ruskin's sentences had caused in her a visual epiphany. The *Modern Painters'* author, identified annoymously as by "A Graduate of Oxford" in the first volume (1843) of the 5-volume work, wrote sentences in a way that made Brontë see as she'd never seen before. In a letter to the book's editor remarking on the "beauty of the writer's style," Brontë said he made her feel "as if I had been walking blindfold — this book seems to give me eyes".[2]

Brontë's metaphoric description of a transformation from blindness to sight was an optical reality. It was as if some deficiency of attention, a "blindfold[edness]," had prevented her from seeing, not because the object wasn't there to be seen, but because she discovered

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[1] Ruskin. Complete Works (hereafter CW) *Modern Painters*, Vol 111, Part 1V, Ch. xvi.

[2] Brontë Quoted in Wettlaufer, 245. Letter to W.S. Williams, published in *MacMillan's Magazine* 64 (1891).

by reading Ruskin that *looking* is not the same as *seeing*. Seeing, as in *perceiving*, opens the eyes to revelations of previously unseen things. What's more, and even more important, Ruskin would argue, is that seeing leads to truth —and beauty.

This is Ruskin's mission in *Modern Painters*: to teach artists and writers to look and see. He defends Turner's art against the critics "ribald buffooneries"[3] because he believes that Turner's greatness lies in his ability to convey the "truth" of light, color, movement and atmosphere in his increasingly abstract, luminous paintings through his great powers of perception, a cultivated skill that his critics simply did not understand. The early passion of Ruskin's life is to open the eyes of painters and critics to the power of visual sensibility, to promote acute perception as the *sine qua non* of a fine mind and good art, and to elevate sight to its "proper place" in the hierarchy of human senses. "A developed experience of the visible world is not an accidental pleasure," Ruskin said, "but something that involves the whole moral and emotional nature of man."[4] Thus, elevating sight as the most powerful of human senses— even above *language*—Ruskin claimed:

> "The greatest thing a human soul ever does in the world is to *see* something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think. But thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion —all in one."[5]

This last sentence is at the heart of Ruskin's philosophy of the good society with art as its crowning jewel: all artists' (painters and writers) appreciation of beauty, through cultivated

[3] Ruskin.pref. 1st ed. CW *Modern Painters*, Vol.1, 6.

[4] Ruskin. CW. *Modern Painters*, Vol 111, Part 1V, Ch. xvi.

[5] *Ibid.*

visual sensibility, leads to superior art that inspires people and elevates their minds to the finer qualities of virtue, love and charity, improves lives, and transforms society.

The originality of Ruskin's views on sight and knowledge is both religiously and scientifically audacious. Religious, because by rearranging the sensual hierarchy to claim that *seeing* is the prerequisite of *knowing*, Ruskin is committing a heresy. By preempting *logos*—intellectual contemplation, knowledge and reason—as the highest expression of God's spirit in the world and replacing it with sight, he is defying 19th-century Christian orthodoxy. Furthermore, without benefit of science, Ruskin boldly also declared that sight was responsible for the "visual capacities of the mind [and also] of memory and imagination."[6]

This insight of the visuality of the mind also flew in the face of scientific knowledge at a time when the visual cortex—the back quarter of the brain consisting of seven distinct areas that receive, process and combine information from the eyes into whole images— is not yet thought to be part of the brain; visual and cognitive faculties, sight being passive and cognition being active, were considered separate entities. Not until almost a century later did scientists understand that the optic cortex was a vital cognitively functioning part of the human brain.[7] Yet**,** in 1843 Ruskin wrote: "[U]nless the minds of men are particularly directed to the impressions of sight, objects pass perpetually before the eyes without conveying any impression to the brain at all; and so pass actually unseen, not merely

[6] Qtd in Hugh Witemeyer's *George Eliot and the Visual Arts.* A Victorian Web Book. Yale UP, 1979, Ch. 10

[7] See Semir Zeki's *A Vision of the Brain*, Prologue, 3. Zeki writes that the genesis of the idea of the separation of seeing as a passive process and knowledge as active are difficult to trace, although Kant's belief in two faculties of Sensing (passive) and Knowing (active) by the end of the 19th century was accepted by neurologists. "[T]his doctrine retarded our present notion of the organization of the visual cortex and of brain function by over a century," Zeki says.

unnoticed, but in the full clear sense of the word unseen."[8] Unseen. In the case of Ruskin, that appears to be so. There's no record that the church fathers and great men of mind science paid any attention to the claims of the unnamed Oxford graduate.

Perhaps it was reading Ruskin's explanation of "true perception," a skill that transforms seeing into an " appreciation of the mystery, variety and beauty" in the natural world that jolted Brontë from her blindfoldedness. Weaving together the primary faculty of perception, "of color, and form, and bodily sensibility," "perception quickened by love, and judgment so tempered by veneration" leading to consequent "attributes of [a] noble mind" which he believed was the "chief spring of real poetry," Ruskin further associates this "higher sensitivity" with leading to "other pure feelings of our moral nature." [9] Ruskin's culminating point is that the path of perception leads to truth, a truth that leads to a deep apprehension of natural and spiritual beauty.

Ruskin was deeply religious, raised not on nursery tales but on the Holy Bible, which his evangelical Scottish mother insisted he read from beginning to end each year—and then start over. Thus, in his earliest writing, in his ubiquitous use of the words *eyes, see, sight, impressions, perception, brain, intelligence, mind, sense, emotions, pleasure, beauty, poetry, truth, prophecy and religion*, we see his uncanny instinct to straddle beauty's aesthetic divide between God and man. He deftly uses religious language to reaffirm the spiritual quality of beauty, creating a religion of beauty, while nevertheless retheorizing its value as residing in the mystery and power of art through visual sensibility. For Ruskin, the pleasure of beauty is not "mere sensuous gratification, but cultivated by higher senses [is] part of a scheme that is

[8] Ruskin. CW. *Modern Painters*, Vol.1, Part 11, Section.1, Ch. ii.

[9] Ibid.

exquisitely adapted to our nature and our desires."[10] But on beauty's provenance—believed to be a transmission to humanity as a gift from God—Ruskin straddles the God/man divide: "The pleasure of beauty is a co-production of [human] intellect, the emotions and sensuality," he says.[11] In his conception of the experience of beauty as the result of biological processes in the human mind, Ruskin, in effect, in anticipation of Darwin, channeled the God-given experience of beauty down a path from the spiritual kingdom to the biological roots of the moral and emotional nature of the Victorian mind. In either case, it is a spiritual experience.

If edging visual sensibility into contention with reason as the primary human faculty had been the sum total of Ruskin's contribution to 19th-century culture, it would still have caused a groundbreaking shift in artistic perception. Indeed, in *Strangeness and Beauty*, an anthology of 19th-century aesthetic criticism, the editors credit Ruskin's sight-and-knowledge insight as intellectually revolutionary, precipitating a " psychic revolution." [12] As Charlotte's Brontë's visual conversion suggests, Ruskin's campaign indeed changed the way at least one 19th-century writer looked at the world. But, as looking is different from seeing so Ruskin discovered that writing is different from expressing a truth in words. As he endeavored to express the intellectual stimulation of landscape art and his complex emotional reactions to the shapes, colors, and ideas of paintings he became frustrated by what Barbara Wettlaufer describes as " an awareness of language's expressive insufficiences" and his profound dissatisfaction "with the power of words to express ideas, emotions and experience."[13]

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[10]Warner. Introduction to John Ruskin, 12.

[11] Ruskin. CW.*Modern Painters*. Vol.11. Part 111.Sect. 1. Ch ii.

[12] Warner, 11.

[13] Wettlaufer, 217

His observation that language was moribund was a timely and astute cultural observation. Everything was changing in the revolution-wracked Victorian world, a world that historian Walter E. Houghton characterizes as moving from "the past to the future." All ages are ages of transition," he observes, "[but] never before had men and women thought of their own time as an era of change from the past to the future."[14] The life-altering experience Houghton is describing is a revolution of the mind and soul, the final act in an Age of Revolutions during which Victorian society transitioned from a feudal and agrarian order to a democratic and industrial society. At the same time, in the sciences the first steps were being taken towards the exploration of the human brain and its mysterious product, the mind. This new frontier–the beginning of mind studies, of the neurobiological connections between the mind and the body—resulted in a redefinition of the essence of the human condition and a dawning of the individual's innate source of self-definition.

The "expressive insufficiency" of language was not a new awareness for Ruskin. In 1841 in a lengthy letter from Naples to an Oxford college friend in which he discusses his use of particular poetic metaphors to capture the precise sensation he is trying to express, he questions how one "would undertake to convey to another person a perfectly distinct idea of any single emotion passing in your own heart:

> you have no actual expression for the simple idea . . . You can say . . . you feel depressed, delighted, dark, bright; are any of these expressions competent to illustrate the *whole* feeling? If you try to reach it you must heap metaphor after metaphor, and image after image, and you will feel that the most

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[14] Warner, 1.

> mysterious touch nearest and reach highest, but none will come up to the truth.[15]

Ruskin's frustration is palpable, somewhat equivalent to a painter wanting to paint a glorious sunset with only black and white paint in his paint box. With his close friend as a sounding board, he formulates his theories of an expressive language that will appear full-fledged two years later in *Modern Painters*: a visual language of metaphors and images and word impressions that he hopes will transport the reader to "the whole feeling of the truth." Still an undergraduate, Ruskin's astonishing vision is to make the reader a creative partner with the writer. How? "The object of all art," he tells his friend, "is not to inform, but to suggest, not to add to the knowledge but to kindle the imagination." The best poet Ruskin assesses as the one who "can by the fewest words touch the greatest number of secret chords of thought in his readers' mind and set them to work in their own way."[16] He wants to put readers "to work in [their] own way," using their "secret chords of thought." Chords of thought? The non-musical meaning, the dictionary tells us is 'Emotional feelings or responses.' Ruskin's idea is that a partnership of artistic imagination, driven by the writer's visual language, and then "work[ed]" on by the reader's imaginative capacities, is the key to a new kind of literature. A three-part process—a printed text that unites the imaginative labors of a creative artist and a creative reader. In 1841, in a hastily written note from vacation, 24-year-old Ruskin has reorganized the brain by adding the visual cortex as its driving force, reimagined linguistic and narrative theory, and

[15] Ruskin's *Letters to a College Friend*, 83.

[16] Ibid.

repositioned the reader from a passive receiver of a text to a creative laborer in a newly described function of reading that calls for seeing in the mind's-eye, imagining and feeling. The change in fiction produced by this engagment of the mind and the senses, Wolfgang Iser explains in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1980) happens, just as Ruskin imagined, when "meaning is no longer an object to be defined but an effect to be experienced." [17]

Charlotte Brontë seems to agree with Ruskin on contemporary language's expressive deficiency. In the finale of *Jane Eyre*, the new Mrs. Rochester says, "I hold myself supremely blest—blest beyond what language can express." Yet, elsewhere, Brontë takes the reader inside the stream of Jane's agitated mind, as she blurts out fractured phrases—"But where am I wandering, and what am I saying; and above all feeling? . . . fevered with delusive bliss one hour—suffocating with bitterest tears of shame and remorse the next"[18]—fragments of ideas, in an unending torrent of frenzied words that perfectly convey the "feeling of truth" that Ruskin speaks of. Elsewhere, throughout *Jane Eyre* there are copious examples of a Ruskinean perceptiveness, and especially a deep sensitivity to beauty. Aptly, for example, this description of a painting:

> The dim forehead was crowned with a star; the lineaments below were seen as through the suffusion of vapour; the eyes shone dark and wild; the hair streamed shadowy, like the beamless cloud torn by storm or electric travail. On the neck lay a pale reflection like moonlight; the same faint lustre touched the train of thin clouds from which rose and bowed this vision of the Evening Star. [19]

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[17] Iser, 10.

[18] Brontë,159.

[19] Ibid.

Charlotte Brontë seems to give the reader eyes.

Ruskin's contributions to painting, architecture, geology, ornithology, botany, education, the labor movement and politics, and his skills as a poet and painter are legendary and have been the subject of numerous of studies. I want to claim here that little critical attention has been paid to one of Ruskin's significant achievements: he encouraged writers to turn inwards to seek the essence of human sensibility in tune with scientific developments, and showed them in *Modern Painte*rs how to mirror in their words the mind's experience of consciousness, which we now know is transmitted by the billions of neurons crammed into the wrinkled mass under the skull. His influence helped transform how writers wrote.

As writers struggled, like Ruskin, to find expression for the new age of the embodied mind, his insight that language was exhausted and that verbal representation through images could revive it, burst open a vein of creative experimentation in British and American novelists. They began to produce expressive language imbued with meaning and experience that appealed both to intellect and emotions. By intuitively linking language as an inevitable expression of cultural change, especially in a time of advances in knowledge of the brain and the mind, Ruskin's elevation of sight as the primary sense and thus the key to mind-conscious writing, helped vivify the sensual experience of a different world view.

Brain and Mind. Sensing and Knowing. Reading and Seeing. Writing and Feeling. Pleasure and Beauty. All these transmitters of consciousness, conveyors of the sensations of aliveness in the world, converged uniquely on mid-century Victorians' apprehension of what it means to be human and, Ruskin's insights on sight and knowledge and the power of a new expressive medium, caused what Warner and Hough called a "psychic revolution." [20] Ruskin

[20] Warner ,11

greatly influenced other writers of his own era, such as George Eliot and Marcel Proust, who Richard A. Macksey writes, associated Ruskin's genius with what Carlyle saw as deciphering and translating an "inner reality."[21] Describing Ruskin as a "prophet," Eliot wrote: "I venerate him as one of the great teachers of the day."[22] Of course, the Decadent Oscar Wilde was famously opposed to Ruskin's aesthetic philosophy of art and was not particularly interested in Ruskin's views on Turner's genius. "Who cares," he wrote, but he was awed by Ruskin's powers of expression and explained why in this marvelously Wildean way:

> That mighty and magical prose of his, so fervid and fiery-colored in its noble eloquence, so rich in its elaborate symphonic music, so sure and certain, at its best, in subtle choices of word and epithet, is at least as great a work of art as any of those wonderful sunsets that bleach or rot on their corrupted canvases in England's Gallery.[23]

Virginia Woolf, embraced Ruskin's conviction that visual and literary art deals with two planes of reality, one visible, the other invisible," a practice that she perfected in her characters' stream-of-conscious mind talk.[24] Many decades after Ruskin's death, Virginia Woolf seconded Charlotte Brontë's visual epiphany revering him as, "someone who can teach us to see . . . better than anyone else." In a review of *Modern Painters* she wrote that Ruskin's writing style "takes our breath away. . . as if all the fountains of the English

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[21] Qtd in "Proust on the Margins of Ruskin". *The Ruskin Polygon*, 182.

[22] Qtd in "Belles Lettres", Westminster Review, 65 (1856).

[23] Wilde. "The Critic as Artist" in *The Portable Oscar Wilde*.

[24] Qtd in Hugh Witemeyer's *George Eliot and the Visual Arts*. A Victorian Web Book. Yale UP, 1979, Ch. 10

language had been set playing in the sunlight for our pleasure". [25] In a sentence that physically takes our breath away at the visually magical metaphor of words and sentences dancing in Vesuvian plumes of arcing, sun-spliced water, Virginia Woolf perfectly describes the effect of reading Ruskin's sentences. One of the physiological affects of encountering beauty is breathlessness. Woolf has produced with words a beauty that "takes our breath away," just as Ruskin's beautiful words had that power over her. That a reader's reimaginings of evocative metaphors to restate images first imagined by another writer at his desk can reproduce deep feelings of beauty is evidence of Elaine Scarry's words: "[Beauty] seems to incite, even to require, the act of replication. . . Beauty brings copies of itself into being."[26]

This longing for beauty comes as no surprise to visual neurobiologist Semir Zeki, the creator of the field of neuroaesthetics, and the world's leading researcher on the visual brain, who since the 1970s has been researching the brain's response to art and the neural basis of the experience of beauty and other emotional states such as romantic love in which visual input plays a prominent role.[27] Zeki and his research team in 2003 identified through fMRI technology that "beauty is part of a continuum [at the orbito-frontal cortex] representing a value attributed to it by the brain, a value that incidentally can change from one viewing to another and differs between individuals."[28] The team discovered to their surprise that judgments of beauty and ugliness of works of art —in categories of portraits, landscapes, still life and abstracts— are not found in separate areas of the brain, but are polar extremes of the

[25] Woolf, *The Captain's Death Bed.*

[26] Scarry, 3.

[27] Zeki is a founder of the Institute of Neuroesthetics which is associated with the Wellcome Laboratory of Neurobiology based at University College, London, UK., and at UC Berkeley, CA.

[28] Kawabata and Zeki. "Neural Correlates of Beauty."

same continuum: the "intensity of the neural activity reflects linearly the degree of beauty bestowed on the object by the viewer."[29] The emotional reward, the experience of the pleasure of beauty, increases with the neural activity. In all his writing, Zeki is at pains to point out that despite the explosion of neurological research how little is known about the higher functions of the brain and how tentative scientists have to be in their claims. However, among Zeki's underlying assumptions is that "all visual art must obey the laws of the visual brain"— in conception, execution and appreciation, and that artists [visual and literary] are, "in a sense, neurobiologists who study the capacities of the visual brain with techniques that are unique to them." [30]

In *A Vision of the Brain* (1993) Zeki thinks of Shakespeare and Wagner as among the greatest of neurobiologists, arguing that they "probe[d] the mind of man with the techniques of language and of music and understood perhaps better than most what it is that moves the mind of man."[31] Zeki's reasoning is that "if the primordial function of the brain is the seeking of knowledge," which he claims is done by the formation of concepts of both material objects (e.g. house) and abstract ideas (e.g. beauty) then, the brain's products —such as art and literature—must provide important insights to the working of the brain.[32] Zeki in *Splendors and Miseries of the Brain* unpacks this insight in the works of Dante, Rimbaud, Mann and Balzac. I see a meeting of the minds of Ruskin and Zeki: evidence from the fields of Zeki's research suggest a close relationship between Ruskin's great cause, perception, and art, beauty and love. In this search for insight into the neural bases of emotions — "the heights of

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Statement of aims of Institute of Neuroesthetics. http://neuroesthetics.org/institute.php.

[31] Zeki. *A Vision of the Brain*. Prologue,1.

[32] Zeki. *Splendors and Miseries of the Brain,* 3

joy and depths of despair," Zeki says, "in creative works of art, literature and music, provide not only enjoyment, but lead "to the enrichment of our understanding of ourselves."[33]

As the 19th-century's John Ruskin is to the understanding of the cognitive depth of visual power, the 21st-century's Semir Zeki is to the appreciation of literature's extraordinary brain-revealing power. I believe that together through their works they facilitate a dialogue on the source of the mind, beauty and literature across the centuries— Ruskin on what writing can express about the sensual experience flowing from the mind of man; neuroaethesist Zeki on how literature "has revealed one vast area of evidence [of brain function] that neurobiology has not yet tapped, or has done so to only a trivial extent."[34] It is into this dialog between literature and science, between the past and the present, that I am entering in this project.

This dissertation is a result of my growing awareness of beauty and visual sensibility in mid-to-late 19th-century British and American novels. What interests me most about these works is the authors' appreciation of beauty as a condition of body, mind, soul, and culture, as well as their creation of beauty in the reader's experience of their art. My claim is that there is an unusual flourishing of interest in beauty in this period, and that the narrative topic of characters, minds, and ideas that are founded in perceptions of beauty, is matched by an evocative technique of writing that creates an emotional reality that can be described as delight, pleasure or beauty. In narrower terms, this dissertation is an exploration of human imagination: ideas, coded into neural transmissions between writer and reader through the medium of text, which create and recreate fictional worlds through mental images. Further, I attribute these changes to the visual, sensual, and moral philosophies of John Ruskin.

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[33] Ibid, 3.

[34] Ibid.

I have claimed elsewhere that Ruskin's writing showed writers a new way to see the world, and a new way to express feelings, and thus, changed the expressive possibilities of the art of the novel. I point to Hawthorne's fascination with the beauty of adultress Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, and the picture he draws of the "delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace . . . those who knew her had expected to be dimmed and obscured by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out and illuminating her inner goodness, making a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped." [35] Or , I offer George Eliot's creation in *Daniel Deronda* of Gwendolen Harleth, whose physical beauty is pondered lavishly in hundreds of pages, yet her unlovely mind is captured in a moment of exposure when she is seen as "a sort of serpent now, all green and silver, [who] winds her neck about a little more than usual."The tempting quality of the beauty is in the details.[36]

My claim about Ruskin does not imply that all his contributions on perception, writing and reading are *sui generis.* Theories of beauty reaching at least back to Plato, literary theory back to Aristotle, Newton's theories of sight and color, and Locke's theories of senses as a source of knowledge occupied Ruskin's early reading, and the work of Wordsworth and the Romantics were part of his DNA. My claim about Ruskin's impact on writers, and on the future path of the novel that led to Virginia Woolf's modernism, is that his theory was a holistic treatment of artistic communication, some of it fresh expression from his brilliant mind. In a Romantic sense of man talking to man through the faculty of sense, mind and body, using skills of perception, and visual language, and the truth of emotional reactions, Ruskin was arguing, as no one before him, for a language that made the

[35]Hawthorne, 50.

[36]Eliot, *Deronda,* 12

reader see and feel. His age, a time of massive political, intellectual and scientific revolution, was fertile for the birth of a language that bespoke a new cultural dawning.

I approach the dissertation through the lens of intellectual history, considering science, narrative theory and the art of the novel prior to the publication of *Modern Painters*. Against this background, I use narrative, visual and aesthetics theories and emerging neuroscience to open up the inquiry into how Ruskin's art criticism and visual fervor transformed writing and reading. I examine to what extent these writers take up Ruskin's philosophy of a society-wide based economy of aesthetics— of perception, knowledge, truth, and beauty in the arts— and if so, how they interrogate the value of the beauty of nature, body, mind, character and community in Victorian life. Ruskin's emphasis is primarily on the two kinds of beauty he considers most significant to the quality of human life —the physical beauty of objects that transforms human experience of the world, and the beauty of mind and character that enriches other lives through empathy. With these two aspects of the perception of beauty in mind I have chosen Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* to examine his vivid creation of adulteress Hester Prynne's sensual physical beauty and her innate goodness in opposition to her sexual sin, and George Eliot's treatment of the two warring visions of human beauty in Gwendolen Harleth's body and mind in *Daniel Deronda,* Eliot's last novel before her death.

I evaluate both writers imaginitive processes to illuminate how the author creates the fictions of expressive language constructed more closely to the human thought process and enhanced with the visual sensibility that Ruskin demonstrated in *Modern Painters* claiming it was a channel to the world's often unseen mystery and beauty; I explore how Ruskin's theory of the role of the reader as an imaginative co-equal with the writer. turns reading into

seeing in the mind's eye, triggering neurobiological reactions and setting loose emotional experiences; And I hope to show how the mind that receives these fictions, the reader's mind, absorbs and reproduces visual expressions that through neuronal activity in the brain physiologically create for the reader the rewards of pleasure and beauty.

The answers to these questions on beauty, the mind and literature, or more properly the source of these answers, lie in the connections between and among the intensely complicated neuronal networks of the brain, the imaginative powerhouse of the mind, the multi-faceted sensual knowledge of the body, and in the material evidence of the brain/mind/sensual world-shaping creations —the literary productions that reveal the interior and exterior unfoldings of the human experience of beauty.

Two centuries of philosophy and aesthetics have debated beauty to a semantic standstill. In pursuit of its meaning one is drawn into an endless chain of connections of the transcendent and the earth-bound, synonyms that double for but don't capture the singularity of the meaning of beauty that philosophers and lexicographers have said is ineffable and inexpressible. Perhaps because meaning of beauty is considered inexpressible, the longing to express its precise quality is irresistible, and the descriptives used to do so are multitudinous and luxurious enough to match the capaciousness of the word's meaning and the abundance of the sensations that mark its presence.

If we think of the experience of beauty in nature and art as an embodied product of the brain and mind, as Ruskin believed and Seki's research studies have confirmed, with the power to travel freely through the mind and body, changing one's perception of the world and relation to it, and thus returning through the individual back into society affecting others and transforming institutions, if we think of beauty in this way, we are thinking of it as a

communication network circulating pleasure and delight. Another way to describe this happy interchange would be as a neuro-hormone pleasure highway. It is this highway, I want this project to demonstrate, that the reader walks along when she disappears inside the pages of a book in company with great 19th-century writers such as my subjects Hawthorne and Eliot, and, of course, with noteable others such as Charlotte Brontë, who deals with the pain of beauty through its absence in *Jane Eyre* and Thomas Hardy with his evocation of the beauty of nature mirrored in the face and body of his heroine *Tess of the D'Urbevilles*.

I claim that writers show an extraordinary interest in exposing the idea of Beauty in all its facets, material and spiritual, to an interrogation of its classical God-given provenance against the increasingly secular society and the emerging frontiers of mind science. It is not a coincidence that from the mid-1840s to the 1880s we can chart Ruskin's rise to the heights of cultural influence until his reign was overtaken by the rebellious cry of "art's for art's sake." This cultural soundbite initiated the beginnings of a new aesthetic sensibility, a view that once popularized, severed for a time the connection between art, virtue, society and spiritual transcendence that came so naturally to the deeply religious Ruskin. In contrast to Ruskin's encompassing sense of society-enriching art, this new aesthetic opened the doors to an artistic avant-garde which deliberately set itself against the social conventions and moral precepts of the late Victorian era. But, as modernist novels show, literary visual language would not disappear, and neither did the influence of Ruskin's belief in beauty's transcendent role in life and literature. The endless quest for the source of beauty from its classically understood presence as a manifestation of the beauty of God in the human senses to today's functional magnetic resonance imaging of neuropeptides and synapses, now seeks, and is slowly finding beauty's source in the shiny man-made laboratories of neuroscientists.

This is not to say that earlier writers and philosophers did not imagine these hidden sources of sensation without benefit of functional MRIs. Indeed, they did: That authors and philosophers moved inside the mind so many lifetimes before the advent of the neuroscientific advances that now make it possible to literally see the excited brain synapses' joyous responses, makes their Ruskinean perception all the more vivid.

ll. John Ruskin's Beautiful Revolution of the Mind

> The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion—all in one.
>
> John Ruskin. *Modern Painter*s[37]

In contrast to the "psychic revolution" stirred up by John Ruskin's bold theories of the brain, the mind, and language in *Modern Painters*, his visionary campaign to teach artists "to see something clearly" seemed banal. His assertion that "to see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion—all in one" was passed over as youthful extravagence —until its strange truth took hold. But, ironically, the revolutionary theories that turned Victorian scientific, religious and cultural certainty on its head were all born of his belief in the primacy of visual sensibility. Each of Ruskin's theories of visuality and language were instrumentally, intractably connected to the others:

1. Visual perception is the premier organ of knowledge. Therefore the visual cortex—not then considered part of the brain—is the brain's cognitive powerhouse and the gateway to a civilized mind. This means that visual sensibility is pre-eminent to language. **2.** Therefore, the centuries-old Adamic doctrine's theory of knowledge and language should be overturned as Locke had pointed out. This means that the relation of the signifier and the signified should become arbitrary, freeing the "double conformity" of communication

[37] Ruskin. Complete Works, *Modern Painters* Vol 111, Part lV, Ch xvi.

from its distortions and absurdities of trying to convey ideas with inadequate linguistic

2. tools.[38] **3**. As a consequence of both the above, the English language is moribund and no longer capable of expressing the dynamic realities of nineteenth-century life. This demands an expressive language and syntax alive with the intellectual advancements and changing consciousness of the age.

Ruskin believed these changes could transform language into a expressive medium of speech and writing capable of conveying the ever-changing aliveness of the cognitive and sensual experience of life in the 19th-century. Most important, he wanted language to spring from a new awareness of the power of sight. Driven by this belief in the transforming power of visual perception, Ruskin wanted to teach the world to do what they thought they already did effortlessly —to see.

Ruskin's "seeing" and telling in a "plain way," a way that is detailed and specific to evidence and effects, avoiding vagueness, sounds alluringly simple, even obvious, but is an ironically eye-opening observation of how the simply obvious is neither simple nor obvious. Looking is not seeing. We imagine that if we look at something in front of our eyes we see it.[39] Far from it. Looking is what the eyes do automatically during our waking hours —on guard, robot-like— unceasingly darting back and forth, side to side, up and down. Looking is a superficial acknowledgment that a person, an object, a landscape, is vaguely in our line of sight. Looking is the possibility of perception. It is the ignition key to seeing. Looking becomes seeing if, and only when, we are alerted to, or are attentive enough to the world to

[38] See Hans Aarleff. *From Locke to Saussure*. Intro. 24-28

[39] Ruskin. CW.Modern Painters Vol. 1. Part 2. Sect. 1 Ch.ii.

turn the key so the mindless function of looking engages mindfully with our neurological motor—the brain. It takes intention, and patience, as Ruskin explains:

> The great mistake that people make is the supposition that they must see a thing if it is before their eyes. They forget the great truth told to them by Locke . . . 'whatever alterations are made in the body, if they reach not the mind . . . if they are not taken notice of within, there is no perception . . .' And what is said here, which all must feel by their experience to be true, is more remarkably and necessarily the case with sight. . . . Thus, unless the minds of men are particularly directed to the impressions of sight, objects pass perpetually before the eyes without conveying any impression to the brain at all; and so pass actually unseen, not merely unnoticed, but in the full clear sense of the word unseen.[40]

The lack of impression Ruskin refers to, as neurologists have since discovered, is the absence of a neural connection between looking and attentive observation. The habit of "just" looking is the drug of a somnolent consciousness. It is the absence of a prick of interest, the lack of the desire to be surprised, the shutting down of the expandable mind. Just looking short-circuits the process that engages the cognitive operation that leads to knowledge. Without attention there are no visual impressions, what William James describes as "a sort of solemn sense of surrender to the empty passing of time."[41] Without visual impressions the essential uniqueness of the object is lost on the mind—is unseen. Thus, the consequences of not seeing in a perceptually aware sense, as Ruskin understands it, means cognitive loss: loss of knowledge, loss of intellectual benefit, and the needless deprivation of sensual experience.

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[40] Ibid.

[41] James. *Principles of Psychology.* See Chapter X1 on Attention.

Ruskin's passion to open artists' minds to the power of visual sensibility as the most powerful of all human senses was an audacious move. To question the belief in the Adamic theory of language was to defy the authority of the text of the Holy Bible: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."[42] That God was the author and creator of words was for centuries the Church's doctrine: language, the divine gift of God to man, was inviolable. The perfection of the Adamic language theory rested in the absolute certainty of the relationship between words and objects in contrast to the uncertainty of impressions gained through singularly capricious bodily senses that should not be trusted as a source of knowledge. In the Adamic language the signified and the signifier were not arbitrary."The linguistic sign is not double, but unitary."[43] If language is believed to be immutable, if the writer is balked by tradition, unable to express the rational and visceral truth of 19th-century reality, how is mankind to adjust to a changing cultural consciousness?

No one who knew Ruskin would believe that a child who loved Pope's *Homer* and Walter Scott, Pope's *The Illiad*, Byron, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Pilgrim's Progress* and who said that the Bible that he read every day gave him "the best part of my taste in literature," did not love language.[44] He was fascinated by the written word, and loved the evenings after dinner when his father read to him. But as he grew older, he came to understand that the marvel of language was in its ability to share ideas with others. It was clear to him that

[42] The Bible. King James. 1.1-3.

[43] Aarleff.The Adamic source of language was based on the belief that Adam in his prelapsarian state was given the gift of language by God. In the seventeeth century when Hebrew was thought to be the etymological root of all language throughout the world, the Adamic belief of the immutable language became more fervently followed.

[44] Ruskin. Praeterita. 13-14.

thought preceded speech, that thought was made possible by knowledge and imagination, that the raw components of knowledge came from the senses as Locke said, "from the external world through the senses," the most powerful of which is eyesight. Visual acuity, Ruskin reasoned, was therefore the gateway to knowledge. He wanted to promote perception as the path to cognition and intelligence and to elevate sight to its "proper place" in the hierarchy of human senses. As Ruskin writes in *Praeterita*, as a child he had learned "patience in looking," and "precision in feeling." Anticipating the delights he might discover by looking deeply at the world, he speaks of his yearning and intensity saying unselfconsciously, "I have never known one whose thirst for visible fact was at once so eager and so methodic."[45] Ruskin was on the path to discover that his "thirst for visible fact" was a longing for a deeper fusion of vision, cognition and knowledge with learning and language.

In the later half of the 18th-century Johann Gottfried von Herder had also puzzled over the connection between vision and cognition in relation to language. As befits one of the fathers of Romanticism, Herder takes an environmentally nuanced view of the "infinite complexity" of vision which he describes as an experience "so bright and over-resplendent, it supplies such a quality of attributes, that the soul succumbs to the manifoldness." Although overwhelmed by the "manifoldness" of sight —being "frightened" Herder calls it—like Ruskin, he says we can learn to focus, to master the overwhelming. Where Ruskin calls for attention; Herder calls for "reflection." They mean essentially the same thing. "Man gives proof of reflection," Herder explains, brilliantly describing the process of visual memory, the

[45] Ruskin. *Praeterita*, 45. Ruskin began writing poems and short stories when a child. He recounts in *Praeterita* that "the earliest incipient motion of brain molecules" he experienced was when he completed six poems. His little book of poems was inscribed by his mother as being begun around September 1826 and finished about January 1827, just before his eighth birthday.

"drifting dream of images that passes his senses," the flickering neuronal movie that the brain, we now know, calls up, refreshed from the past, for our reflection. Herder writes:

> Man gives proof of reflection when . . .[he] can segregate one wave in the entire ocean of sensations which rushes through all his senses—segregate it, stop it, direct his attention to it, and be conscious of his attention. He gives proof of reflection when out of the whole drifting dream of images that passes his senses he can collect himself in one moment of wakefulness, dwell voluntarily upon one image, observe it lucidly and more calmly and pick out for himself characteristics that this is the object and no other. [46]

Although undeniably astute, Herder holds the common 18th-century view that while the visual cortex—the back quarter of the brain consisting of seven distinct areas that receive, process and combine information from the eyes into whole images—lies in contact with the brain, it is not part of the brain. The "sense of vision" is "too subtle, says Herder. It is "confusing and empties our heads."[47] Eyesight's role, then, is to provide a passive delivery system of images from the retina to the brain, which through the development of language makes understanding of the chaotic world possible. Even in the early days of the 20th-century, Freud, whose medical training was in neurology, also believed that a "cogent thought process, to say nothing of conscious intellectual work, could not exist amidst the unruliness of visual experience."[48] The cognitive function Herder calls "segregation," visual neuroscientist Semir Zeki explains is the visual brain's routine cognitive operations of abstraction and concept formation that reduces the infinite complexity of the world to

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[46] Herder. 115-16. *On the Origin of Language*.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Jonathan Fineberg, qtd in Arnheim.

categoric simplicity.[49] The visual cortex enables us, for example, to identify objects instantly—that's a house, that's a car, that's a rampaging elephant—without which our world, as Herder feared, would be completely chaotic and extremely dangerous. In defending the concept of "the intelligence of visual perception" in 1969, Rudolph Arnheim, an art historian and a leading figure in the psychology of art and visual perception, pointed out the impossibility of withholding the name of "thinking" from the cognitive operations in perception. "Visual perception," he says, "is visual thinking." He defines "cognitive" as all mental operations involved in the receiving, storing, and processing of information—sensory perception, memory, thinking, imagining, learning.[50]

> [T]he cognitive operations called thinking are not the privilege of the mental processes above and beyond perception but the essential ingredients of perception itself. I am referring to such operations as active exploration, selection, grasping of essentials, simplification, abstraction, analysis, synthesis, correction, comparison . . . combining, separating, putting in context. These are not the prerogative of any one mental function; . . . There is no basic difference in this respect between what happens when a person looks at the world directly and when he sits with his eyes closed and "thinks." [51]

Arnheim's work, especially the groundbreaking *Visual Thinking*, published in the 1960s was, and still is, considered a revelation of the neglect of visual education in American schools. It updates and reargues Ruskin's argument for the cognitive supremacy of the sense of vision. It is a cry from the grave one hundred and twenty five years after the days when the separation of sight and the cognitive powers of the mind were not in serious doubt. In the

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 14.

[51] Ibid., 13.

1970s, visual neurobiology began to correct that error, but their attention to its cognitive claims is still lacklustre. [52]

The visual cortex's cognitive activities enumerated by Arnheim are the neural operations of perception and forthwith through selection, segregation, analysis, abstraction, and contextualization —the processes of the infinite complexity of the visual mind—to enable the possibility of cognition out of chaos. Arnheim's claim that there is no basic difference in the cognitive functions between looking at the mountains and sitting with eyes closed recalling the image of those mountains is essential to Ruskin's theory of vision and the visual capacities of mind, of memory and of imagination. His insistence is on seeing with intense curiosity because a visual experience of an object becomes the knowledge base of the image that appears when thinking with closed eyes, for imaginative creative endeavors, for potent memories of events, faces, feelings, objects driven on to lifelong autobiographic memories stored in the hippocampus. Ruskin always refused "to distinguish between mental and physical vision."[53] This is how he imagines an external experience becomes an interior image:

> Facts representing [an object we want to recall] exist in the brain in a visible form, not always visible, but visible at will, as it being of such a color, or having such and such a complicated shape; as the form of a rosebud, for instance, which would be difficult to express verbally, neither it is retained in the brain in a verbal form, but a visible one: that is, when we wish for

[52] Zeki. (1993) Intro.

[53] Timothy Pelatson. *Ruskin's Finale: Vision and Imagination in Praeterita*. English Literary History 57.3 (1900) 665-84

> knowledge of its form for immediate use, we summon up a vision, or image of the thing. [54]

"Truly productive thinking takes place in the realm of imagery," says Arnheim in frustration because he still has to argue the point. He finds himself in the position of having to persuade many educated professionals, even educators, that perceiving and thinking are "indivisibly intertwined." Artistic activity, he says, is a form of reasoning in which artists—painters, writers, composers, dancers—think with their senses."[55] His campaign for the arts to be recognized as an integral part of school curriculum is an echo of Ruskin's campaign to make people see and acquire knowledge with the cognitive power of their underused eyes.

In 1843 when Ruskin writes in *Modern Painters* that looking does not become seeing, because "the minds of men" are not "particularly directed to the impressions of sight," he is not entirely wrong. He accurately describes the conditions of the problem, but since what he knows of the brain is limited to empirical observation, he assumes the offending non-attentive visual agent is man. He is saying that people are too preoccupied or too apathetic to look carefully, or too caught up in life's trivialities to pay attention to devote time for the finer pursuits of the eye. Yet, in defining the problem as he understands it, Ruskin has unwittingly crafted ambiguous meaning that allows for a different reading of "the minds of men," prefiguring neurological discoveries of a century later when visual neurobiologists began to untangle the massive puzzle of how visuality functions.[56] It is the mind —the brain,

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[54] Ruskin. MP. Vol. l Part 1l, Sect,1, Ch.ii.

[55] Arnheim. Preface v

[56] Today, the visual cortex is the most studied part of the brain, but the work is still in its infancy," says Zeki.

not the person—that "is not particularly directed to the impression of sight."[57] It is the brain's programmed retinal neurons that are so intent on scanning the dangerous world that they cannot spare a millisecond to look for the pleasure in it. This mistaken reading causes 19th-century reader Charlotte Brontë to feel *she* was "walking as if blindfold," therefore responsible for her lack of visual conscientiousness. She thinks her mind is completely hers to control, and she's failed to do so. In a letter to W. S. Williams, Ruskin's publisher, Brontë says: "I like this author's style much; there is both energy and beauty in it . . . Hitherto I have only had an instinct to guide me in judging art; . . . this book seems to give me eyes."[58] In reading *Modern Painters* Brontë learns that seeing is a personal engagement with an object, one without the preconceptions that prevent the uncovering and discovering of the thing in front of her eyes. Unlike Brontë, however, a reader in this century absorbed in the mind might understand that "the minds of men," are hard-wired by evolution to operate independently for predestined purposes. Ruskin did not know that man's short attention span, the eyes' constant flirting in search of a more interesting object— interesting in terms of its evolutionary job description— was exactly what nature intended.[59] The brain's selectivity in restricting choice makes reactions faster and surer and makes us safer. Arnheim writes:

> The eye movement that helps to select the target of vision is somewhere between automatism and willful response. They must direct the eyes in such a way that the area of the visual field to be scrutinized comes within the narrow range of the sharpest vision. Because retinal sensitivity is so restricted the eye can, and must, single out a particular spot, which becomes isolated, dominant .

[57] Changeux. See Ch.1 and Ch.6 for thorough background on neurobiology of sight.

[58] Charlotte Brontë's letter to W.S. Williams, publisher, on the publication of Vol. 1 Modern Painters. Published in MacMillan's Magazine 64, 1891, 280

[59] Changeux. Ibid.

> . . At early organic levels, the stimulus compels the reaction. . . . The response is steered by the stimulus rather than by the initiative of the observer. [60]

Our eyes are neurobiologically programmed to scan small pieces of the environment at a time—for as little as a fraction of a second—looking for signs of danger. They are searching for things that move— ravenous animals, hostile neighbors, flying spears and falling rocks—so that the amygdala can send a panic signal throughout the body, alerting us to oncoming danger, pumping up the adrenaline so that we can run for our lives.[61] If no danger is evident, the eye dashes on, and on, a millisecond here and there— incessantly— never stopping to gaze at a beautiful red rose, uninterested in it actually, unless a wasp happens to be buzzing around among the petals. That stinging insect could be a problem. The multi-tasking visual cortex is also the body's security guard, a critical link in the evolutionary chain of survival. To appreciate the function of eyesight, Rudolph Arnheim points out, it is important to understand that the eyes did not come about as instruments of cognition for cognition's sake.

> The functioning of the senses . . . from the beginning aimed at, and concentrated on, those features of the surroundings that made the difference between the enhancement and the impediment of life . . . Active selectivity is the basic trait of vision, as it is a trait of any other intelligent concern; the most elementary preference to be noted is that for change in the environment. The organism, to whose needs vision is geared, is naturally more interested in changes than in immobility. When something appears or disappears, moves

[60] Arnheim, 17

[61] Carter. 120-21. *Mapping the Mind.*

> from one place to another, changes its shape or color or brightness, the observing person or animal may find its own condition altered.[62]

Because the eye's retinal attention span is less than a micro-fraction of a blink, it will not stop and stare without some persuasion. This means if we want to see the intricacies of a peony's petal formation we have to keep luring our attention back to look again. The rewards of persistence are manifold: a forever image, a gift to memory, the beginning of a desire to repeat, to make a habit of seeking the beautiful or interesting. At the body's most elevated experience of pleasure, the astonishment and wonder of the "unselfing" experience of beauty, is often spoken of as an out-of-body experience in which the perceiver no longer feels attached to himself but is engulfed in an aura of of a reality that something matters more than the diurnal commonplace. Habit is a repetition, the copying of an action. Habit is way of copying, another example to add to Elaine Scarry's list of how "beauty brings copies of itself into being." In *On Beauty and Being Just* she cites as examples of the replication of beauty, "its unceasing generation," of begetting of children, taking photographs, making paintings and sculpture, writing sonnets, making laws, and the replication of sensation by staring and by distributing copies of images.[63] Visual acuity is the prize of practice. That's what Ruskin, who had the utmost patience while looking and no difficulty seeing the nuances in colors, textures and patterns that others missed, is urging Victorians to do —to take initiative, to pay attention, to diligently go back to look more closely at the object, so that the impressions reach the brain, create images, increase knowledge and cultivation, and stay vividly in their memory banks for future reference. Today, we know that paying visual attention for more than a few seconds at a time takes determination; it is a tug of war between good intentions

[62] Arnheim.*Visual Thinking*, 19.

[63] Scarry. *On Beauty and Being Just*, 3

and the superior eons-long neuronal habits. To combat those habits so that objects will not "pass perpetually before the eyes without conveying any impression to the brain at all," we can keep going back to look at an object. By sheer willpower we can retrain our willful, but remarkably malleable, brain to forge new pathways in the cortex, a habit that turns looking into the Ruskinean basic requirement of mindful seeing. Ruskin's well developed visual acuity raises an interesting question concerning his hyper-perceptive skills. If the normal human brain constantly has to be prodded to perform concentrated visual perception, how did Ruskin come to have the kind of all-knowing-seeing that Marcel Proust sought to acquire as he struggled in his own writing to achieve a "reading-experience of rich-memory"? [64] Did Ruskin arrive in the world with preternatural vision as a favor from the Creator or was he born with underactive retinal neurons that stayed around to gaze longingly at immobile objects? Why would he be so inclined to lecture others about their careless habits of perception if he also had experienced the same difficulties in focussing? We have no definitive answers, but there are some interesting clues if we go back to his beginnings.

> [T]he law was, that I should provide my own amusement. No toys of any kind were at first allowed:— . . . I had a bunch of keys to play with . . . and being always summarily whipped if I cried, did not do as I was bid, or tumbled on the stairs, I soon attained serene and secure methods of life and motion; and could pass my days contentedly in tracing the squares and comparing the colors of my carpet: John Ruskin[65]

To understand Ruskin's lifelong laser-like focus on perception and beauty, his certainty about sight as key to a cultivated mind and his moral philosophy, one has to go back

[64] Philip Davis. ed. *John Ruskin's Selected Writings*, xxv.

[65] Ruskin, *Praeterita, 19*

to the early years of his life under the tyrannical and well-tolerated child-rearing regime of his evangelical mother. With Calvinistic pleasure-squashing fervor, Margaret Ruskin disapproved of the "frivolous" toys designed to amuse small children.[66] Biographer Frederic Harrison, who had a 40-year friendship with the Ruskins, says of her: "The mother was a woman of great power, indomitable will, harsh nature and an almost saturnine religion."[67] Before her only child's birth, she prophesied his gender and tried to determine his future: she promised God that John would become a minister of the gospel. She set out to inculcate in him virtuous and abstemious habits of body, mind and soul. In preparation for his life in the pulpit, she decided he must be kept free of all worldly temptations and harmful influences, which she considered in this earliest years would come from attachment to playthings and playmates. She deprived him of both. She instilled in him what can only be described as saintly personal discipline and unquestioning obedience to his parents. He spent much of his time alone, and was not spared a thrashing when he whined for his mother's company and attention. Here's how Ruskin, as an older man, remembered those days:[68]

> My mother's general principles of first treatment were to guard me with steady watchfulness from all avoidable pain or danger; for the rest, to let me amuse myself as I liked provided I was neither fretful nor troublesome. But the law was, that I should provide my own amusement. No toys of any kind were at first allowed:— and the pity of my aunt for my monastic poverty in this respect was boundless. On one of my birthdays . . . she bought the most radiant Punch and Judy she could find in all the Soho bazaar—as big as a real

[66] Ibid

[67] Frederic Harrison, 8. "His father, John James Ruskin, "was a man of singular prudence, patience, practical talent, conventional view of life, and of fine taste." He ran a very successful wine business, took the family on extensive cultural vacations in Britain and Europe and collected the art of Turner. Mr. Ruskin, however, did not disapprove of, or interfere with his wife's child raising disciplines.

[68] Ruskin. *Praeterita*, 18

> Punch and Judy, dressed in scarlet and gold . . . [My] mother told me it was not right that I should have them; and I never saw them again. . . . Nor did I painfully wish, what I was never permitted for an instant to hope, or even imagine, the possession of such things as one saw in toy-shops. I had a bunch of keys to play with . . . and being always summarily whipped if I cried, did not do as I was bid, or tumbled on the stairs, I soon attained serene and secure methods of life and motion; and could pass my days contentedly in tracing the squares and comparing the colors of my carpet:— examining the knots in the wood of the floor, or counting the bricks in the opposite houses; with rapturous intervals of excitement during the filling of the water-cart, through its leathern pipe, from the dripping iron post at the pavement edge; . . . But the carpet, and what patterns I could find in bed-covers, dresses, or wall-papers to be examined, were my chief resources, and my attention to the particulars in these was soon so accurate that when I was three and a half and was taken to have my portrait painted by Mr. Northcote. . . . my formed habit of serenity was greatly pleasing to the old painter; for I sat contentedly motionless, counting the holes in his carpet, or watching him squeeze his paint out of its bladders, —a beautiful operation, indeed, to my thinking. [69]

This lonesome toddler's search for patterns to follow with his eyes and trace with fingers on the floors, walls, and fabrics in his home became his obsessive, "contented" and pleasurable daily pastime. In *Praeterita*, his memoir and final book, begun when he was 60, Ruskin recalls "comparing the colors of his carpet," tracing the patterns on carpets, wallpapers and curtain fabrics and bed covers, his fingers a substitute for a crayon. The carpets in his home were most likely Axminsters and Wiltons hand-knotted in luxurious thick wool, the undisputed choice for wealthy English families of that era. Their glorious colors—raspberry red, magenta, royal blue, olive, pink, cream, beige and green—and their exotic botany motifs and rococo designs—neo-classical diamonds, borders of hyacinths and

[69] Ibid.,19

carnations, gryphons, armorial bearings, palmette and leaf, acanthus scrolls and Greek key borders, were a sensual feast of touch and vision. The pleasure of seeing and comparing the bright colors, of focussing, of categorizing shapes, of following the lines and loops and identifying the patterns they formed, developing knowledge of space, abstracting the variety of shapes, sensing the stirring imagination of invisibly replicating the beauty he saw, these daily habits were undoubtedly etched into the growing neuronal patterns of his immature brain.

A child is born with 100 billion neurons—as many as an adult— but the immature brain does most of its growing outside the womb so that the baby's head can pass safely through the birth canal. During the first six months of life every microsecond neuronal nerve fibers link up with others in great bursts of chemical activity. Neuronal activity in the brain world means the creation of networks to transmit knowledge. The brain's primary function is to acquire knowledge, to analyze, organize and store it in the hypothalamus, which is the body's lifetime memory bank. The brain is a great categorizer. The brain loves patterns. Patterns are visual concepts used to categorize knowledge, categorization allows for abstraction and simplification of a chaotic world.[70] If we imagine the tiny Ruskin brain, its plasticity never more moldable, the axons and dendrites of his billions of neurons never more ready to be put to work, their synapses frantically making connections, crafting cognitive patterns and byways as he concentrates with delighted, desire driven, wide-open eyes on the shapes and colors of his carpet and their daily relationship to his small world, we can perhaps answer the question about Ruskin's perceptive precocity. The mind that the well-intentioned Mrs. Ruskin imagined was hers to fill with devout habits —John read and memorized the

[70] Zeki (2009) 13

Bible daily under his mother's tutelage until he left for college— was eventually diverted to a different end. Mrs. Ruskin helped create a brain tuned in to visual diligence and turned on to the myriad sensations of the earth's sensational omnipresent colors, shapes and patterns and textures. She had taught her son how to pre-empt the inevitable path of the flighty guardian neurons. Sitting quietly looking and looking again at his little world was a better choice than a beating; it later became his vocation—a religion of beauty, as Robert de Sizeranne[71] called it. Perhaps because she disdained toys and discouraged playmates, Margaret Ruskin inadvertently created a magic carpet out of an Axminster rug.

Seeing, as in perceiving, is a commitment to attention, an act of intention, a reaching out towards something or someone, in which the deeply conscious focus of the eyes, the external organs of perception and with them the whole powerful interior apparatus of the visual cortex—the seeing brain that occupies one quarter of the entire brain and handles half of all information sent to the brain—encounters objects, landscapes, people, the world, revealed in astonishingly fine detail never possible with a superficial look. It was mastery over this fine detail of life that Marcel Proust sought as he absorbed the sensual intelligence of Ruskin's writing on visual acuity as the way to capture the "very essence" of life, "its passions and creativity" to weave the record of those memories into an aesthetically satisfying narrative tapestry.[72] Indeed, Proust wrote *Remembrance of Things Past* wrapped in reverence for Ruskin's visual aesthetics. Artistically, he embraced Ruskin's belief in the childish innocence and purity of the eye.

[71] Sizeranne, (1866-1932), French author of *Ruskin and the Religion of Beauty* (1889) introduced Marcel Proust to Ruskin's work.

[72] Carter in *Proust in Perspective*, 34.Critics have observed that the height of Proust's creation came after he began studying Ruskin's work and discovered the fundamental difference between knowing and seeing.

By "childish innocence," Ruskin meant with a sense of wonder, looking as if seeing an object for the first time, without consciousness of what it is. In his work, Proust evangelized Ruskin's emphatic insistence on the "innocent eye" approach to visual perception. In *Le Temps Retrouve*, "[Proust's] narrator, following in Ruskin's footsteps, repeatedly criticizes photography and cinematography, declaring them inferior to the human eye, the art of writing, and [especially] the workings of memory."[73] Ruskin was an early adopter of the Daguerrotype. He used it to record the beauty of old, structually threatened buildings and to capture details of landscapes, not to copy in his paintings, but as an aide memoire, and for his historical records of buildings that were crumbling and would be lost to the eye.[74] Nevertheless, he denounced the use of most mechanical equipment as less effective for analysis of plants than the eyes "which the God who made them gave us." In *Praeterita* Ruskin explains his denunciation of mechanical visual aids for studying nature:

> On fine days when the grass was dry, I used to lie down on it and draw the blades as they grew, with the ground herbage of buttercup or hawkweed mixed with them, until every square foot of meadow, or mossy bank, became an infinite picture and possession to me, and the grace and adjustment to each other of growing leaves, a subject of more interest to me than the composition of any painter's masterpiece. . . . [The] use of instruments [microscopes and spectacles] for exaggerating the powers of sight necessarily deprives us of the best pleasures of sight. A flower is to be watched as it grows; its leaves are to be seen as they expand in the sunshine; its colors, as they embroider the field, or illumine the forest. Dissect or magnify them, and all you will learn or discover at last will be that oaks, roses, and daisies, are all made of fiber and bubbles; and these, again, of charcoal and water; but for all their peeping and

[73] See Sara Danius in *Proust in Perspective*, 228.

[74] *Praeterita*, 348 * Ruskin's Daguerrotypes hung side by side with his water colors of the same scene were (on exhibition at the National Gallery in Ottawa,Canada, from Mar-May, 2014.

> probing, nobody knows how. . . . [M]orning after morning did I rejoice in the traceries and the painted glass of the sky at sunrise. [75]

The profound difference between looking and seeing for Ruskin was mirrored in the contrast between two pictures, ostensibly of the same scene, one gripping, alive with the quality of the revelatory sensual experience of seeing, the other a listless, unexceptional pretty picture lacking the visual energy and detail that draws the viewer to engage. Ruskin wanted visual truth in paintings. The deadened images in landscape paintings preferred by the Academy infuriated him with their frozen unreal predictabily, what his student, Proust, called "numbing habitude."[76] The current painting techniques of centuries-old convention, sought art in a style of immutable perfection—a definitively ideal representation of the object. The academy disapproved of experimental styles of painting, which limiting free artistic expression except for artists such as Turner who revolted against the noose of convention in favor of the reality of the honest eye. For example: on a stormy day, we could imagine a painter on a cliff top overlooking the ocean watching a sail boat capsizing in a violent storm. What does the painter see? A boat more hidden than seen: a partial hull, tipped at a perilous angle, plunging into mast-high waves whipped by winds over the engulfed deck out of which reached a barely visible slim reed of a mast and the ghostly fragment of a white sail shrouded in mortal combat with the sea. The storm's watery and foamy elements and movement and the rain-laden clouds meeting the froth of the waves obscure the familiar lines, angles and curves of the vessel. Its structure is barely visible, consumed by the elements. The painter, if he is a devoted student of Ruskin, paints his impression of what he

[75] Ruskin. *Praeterita,* 348

[76] Proust's expression for the effect of knowing an object from an earlier time, but not seing as a fresh experience.

sees at that moment, what is visible, what he visually "knows" as he sketches that day, not details of the fine architectural superstructure he had seen days before in a safe harbor, details that are now obliterated from view in the storm. Most 19th-century academic painters schooled in the mode of the day, the perfect objective unchanging representative image, would have painted the boat they "knew" though unseen in the tempest. The example above of a subjective interpretation of a storm-swept boat, in all its terrible and beautiful drama, would be the dynamic performance of a painterly bearing witness to the truth of an uncertain moment in time. The painter's impression of the sailboat from a distance in a storm is the "knowing" that Ruskin exalts as visual knowledge, the creative difference between reality and an illusion. Turner's and Ruskin's quest for the "truthfulness" of art introduces viewers to something larger than a preference for tradition or a creative affection for a particular style of art, or purely an act of aesthetic rebellion.[77] It addresses the practice of art that involves the perceiving viewer and evokes feelings. Its importance as cultural artifact, naturally enough, reflects contemporary society's cultural realities. The attack by critics on Turner's impressionistic paintings that raised young Ruskin's ire and inspired him in protest to begin writing *Modern Painters* was consistent with the reaction against change, the anxiety of coming to terms with changing external and internal realities. Turner's techniques visually echoed a changing and storm-tossed uncertain Victorian world, not the preferred picture-perfect illusion.[78] The movement to Turner's and Ruskin's philosophy of art capturing the

[77] J.M.W. Turner 1829 landscape painting is being analyzed for details of its sunset inscientific research into meterology in the early19th-century before detailed records were kept. 1829 is the first year that Turner starts painting sunsets a little more reddish, compared to previous paintings. "When the Tambora volcano in Indonesia erupted in 1815, ash and gas spewed into the atmosphere, producing bright red and orange sunsets in Europe for several years. Red-hued clouds, an example of Turner's "truthfulness" is evident in the paintings of the British Master." Sinnya N. Bhanoo, NYT. Science Section. D.2, Apr. 1, 2014.

[78] See Hawthorne's similar reaction to the Transcendalist view of the world in the following chapter on *The Scarlet Letter*.

abundant sensory cavalcade of nature's colors and moods came into its fullest artistic expression in the last decade of Ruskin's life when Claude Monet, noted for his impressionistic series paintings —the Lilies at Giverny, for example— painted the 14th-century Gothic Cathedral at Rouen, Normandy, (1892-1893).[79] Working from morning light to sunset for six months over two years in different seasons and different light he completed thirty paintings. The show's curator described the paintings as a demonstration of the world's "instantaneousness."[80] Monet's close friend, Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, had often spent time in the studio watching Monet paint, but something happened when he saw the exhibition.[81] Experiencing the passing visions of light, the birth and death of the seasons, nature's changing face and the nuanced expression of the painter's emotional language expressed in the series of Rouen paintings made him "watch, perceive and feel." Those three verbs —watch, perceive, feel—are the motivations, actions, and feelings Clemenceau has identified as the emotions the Cathedral's images evoked in him. He received from Monet's work the gift of a different vision of the world and the insight of its importance in his life. Looking at those pictures changed his consciousness. In the future, he is unlikely to look and not see the world in front of his eyes. Emotions, says neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, are triggered from images, "[w]hether live, reconstructed from memory, or created from scratch

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[79] John Ruskin made a sketch of the Cathedral when a teenager. He returned in 1856 to paint the Cathedral and also took a Daguerrotype.

[80] The show's curator was from the D'Orsay Museum, Paris.

[81] Alan Riding. NY Times. August 15, 1994. Report on the 100th anniversary show of Monet's Cathedral series in Rouen, Normandy. In two of the paintings, the cathedral stands dark and menacing, solidly rooted to the ground as only appropriate for a vast Gothic edifice dating from the 14th century. But in others, Monet variously saw yellow, orange, pink, green, blue and white playing off the cathedral's facade as he sun moved across the sky or was suddenly lost behind clouds. In one, with mist swirling at street level, the building seems to be floating away.

in one's imagination, the images create a chain of events when signals from the processed images" are relayed to regions of the brain. Damasio says that responses from different regions of the brain can lead to words to describe objects, stir up other images from memory that add to our understanding, and trigger emotions from memory, from the response to a beautiful object, or dismay at its ugliness.[82] Clemenceau's encounter with the series of painting that documented in one building, in one spot in his land, the fragile moments of life passing before him in its infinite temporal drama, provoked him perhaps through a sense of loss to watch in the future, and by watching, "see" for himself. Monet had achieved in grand scope the truth, beauty and greatness that Ruskin saw in Turner's work.

It is our habit to substitute the second, third, or fourth-hand kind of knowing we pull lazily from our image bank of previous sightings as if the world and every object in it was locked in immutability, instead of preferring the discovery of "fresh-knowing" that comes from "the child's innocent eye." Ruskin's critics scoffed at his expression of "innocent eye" suggesting he literally calling for a vision of childish naivete, rather than the fresh observation of an object, with fascinated attention as if it had never been seen before. The innocent eye is the child's sense of wonder captured by Walt Whitman's poem,"There was a child went forth every day/ And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became/And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day/Or for many years or stretching cycles of years. [83] Whitman's child's seeing is a devouring act of visual experience, taking it inside himself to absorb the mysteries of its being, its purpose, essence, shape, color and extraordinary magical parts, imagining himself as it. He carries the image

[82] Antonio Damasio. *The Feeling of What Happens,*

[83] Walt Whitman. "There was a Child Went Forth." in *Leaves of Grass*.

home in his mind's eye; he may keep it inside himself forever, knowing it as *his*. It is a child's galvanized visual enchantment with something other, something that he makes intimate to his own being.[84] Knowing-like seeing is the product of a conscious act, a cognitive response to seeing stripped bare of what came before. This seeing-as-knowing neurobiological connection justifies our imprecise, but nonetheless accurate shorthand use of "sight" for "knowledge" when we say, "I see" when we mean, "I know."

> [It] is necessary to the existence of an idea of beauty, that the sensual pleasure that may be its basis should be accompanied first with joy, then with love of the object, then with the perception of kindness in a superior intelligence, finally with thankfulness and veneration towards the intelligence itself.[85]
>
> John Ruskin *Modern Painters*

It was Ruskin's two greatest passions —for the power of visual perception and for beauty, perception's "exulting, and reverent" gift of sensual pleasure—that drew Marcel Proust inexorably into his thrall as the 19th-century greatest cultural critic and author of *Modern Painters* lay dying at his home in the English Lake District. It was early October, 1899. Twenty-eight-year-old Proust's health was uncertain, his spirits were low, his writing career was stalled and he was "haunted by doubts of his vocation." His protonovel *Jean Santeuil* had hit a narrative brick wall, not a typical writer's creative block, but a collapse of faith—faith in his ability as a novelist. Proust was at Évian-les-Bâins, the spa town on the Rhône-Alps shore of Lake Geneva, seeking creative inspiration and trying to recover his

[84] "Roadkill" a recent poem in the New Yorker (Jan.9, 2014) written by Chase Twichell deals with the same longing for childhood innocence from the jaded eyes of an adult. "I want to look at death/with eyes like my own baby eyes/ not blinded by knowledge."

[85] Ruskin. Modern Painters. Vol ll. Part lll. Sec. l, Ch ii.

health. In this unsettled state, confronted by the indescribable grandeur of the mountains, his thoughts turned to John Ruskin whom he had never met, whose massive body of work he barely knew.[86] Proust had discovered Ruskin through French scholar Robert de la Sizeranne's *John Ruskin and His Religion of Beauty* (1897), an admiring study of Ruskin's aesthetic vision, but now he needed it and the book was at his home in Paris. Proust wrote to his mother— twice—urging her to send Sizeranne's book so that he would be able "to see mountains with the eyes of this great man."[87] Proust had already seen the Alps—it is not possible to be in Évian-les-Bâins without seeing the mountains—but he wanted to see with Ruskin's eyes, not mediated through them. Seeing "with" Ruskin's eyes would be an experience of perceptual transference, seeing as if he were inside Ruskin's consciousness. By holding Sizeranne's commentary on Ruskin's philosophy of beauty and his memories of 1833, the first time he saw the Alps, shouting his exultant — "Suddenly—behold—beyond," and this description of the mountains —

> [Its clouds] were clear as crystal, sharp on the pure horizon sky, and already tinged with rose by the sinking sun. Infinitely beyond all we had ever thought or dreamed,—the seen walls of lost Eden could not have been more beautiful to us; not more awful, round heaven, the walls of sacred Death. It is not possible to imagine, in any time in the world, a more blessed entrance into life, for a child with a temperament such as mine . . . Thus in perfect health of life and fire of heart, not wanting to be anything but the boy I was, not wanting to have anything more than what I had; and with so much of science mixed with feeling as to make the sight of the Alps not only the revelation of the beauty of the earth, but the opening of the first page of its volume, —I

[86] Proust. *On Reading Ruskin*. Intro. Macksey

[87] Ibid. Preface. Qtd by Richard Macksey from Proust's *Correspondence.*

> went down that evening from the garden-terrace of Schaffhausen with my destiny fixed in all of it that was to be sacred and useful.[88]

— would mean that John Ruskin would become a surrogate seer, his visual doppelganger: he wanted Ruskin to lend him his eyes, to gaze at the mountains on his behalf, to model for him how to cultivate his visual sensibility, to capture what he saw translated by his imagination, to teach him the inwardness of seeing, the cognitive and reflective complexities of perception, to share with him how to convey clearly in language the embodied experience of awe and beauty, of the visually affecting contingency of color, shape and movement of clouds, forests and a single blossom, and in this way to discover how to come close to understanding what Ruskin's words meant when he wrote that: "the best thing a human soul ever does in this world is to *see* something, and tell what it *saw* in a plain way."[89]

This Ruskinian seeing-knowledge was the "the very essence of life . . . the truth" that Proust sought. In France Proust had been recognized as an emerging talent; his essays and his bold, psychologically insightful short stories were praised by the critics. His venture into novel-writing with *Jean Santeuil* was to satisfy his need to tackle long-form literature. He wanted to write about life, to capture the "very essence" of life, the truth," of what he called the 'laws' that govern human behavior in all its passions and creativity."[90] What he lacked, though, Richard Mackesay explains, was the "ability to shape the fragmented *Jean Santeuil* into an intelligible, comprehensive narrative."[91] Proust recognized in Sizeranne's awe of

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[88] Ruskin. *Praeterita,* 97-98

[89] Ruskin. CW Modern Painters. Vol. 111. Part 1V."True Perception".

[90] William Carter. *In Proust in Perspective*, 34

[91] Ibid.

Ruskin the possibility of a teacher-guide; he also understood that his own powers of observation and visual retention were not yet equal to his aspirations. He went up the mountain "to see" with Ruskin. When a reinvented Proust returned, Ruskin's vision of perception as the kind of seeing and knowing that pierces consciousness was already embodied in him, or in Richard Mackesy's term, Ruskin was to him "an instrumentality of sight."[92] With Ruskin's vision of perception as a source of reflection and imagination "beginning to circulate in his veins,"[93] Proust put aside his novel, and began a six-year-long apprenticeship to Ruskin, first as student, then translator, and then critic.[94] On January 20, 1900, four months after their ghostly bonding as teacher and student on the mountain, the man whom Proust later called "one of the greatest writers of all times and of all countries "[95] died at age eighty at Brantwood, his home where he had descended into his last bout of madness and had lain silent for ten years. On that day Proust wrote his first essay on Ruskin—his obituary, published in the *Gazette des beaux-arts*. In the introduction to his translation of Ruskin's *The Bible of Amiens* (1902)[96] identifying "Ruskin's greatest personal gift," as his feeling for beauty Proust writes:

> [H] is feeling for beauty in nature and art, [was] a reality infinitely more important than life itself. It was in beauty that his nature led him to seek reality, and his entire religious life received from it an entirely aesthetic use. My admiration for Ruskin gave such an importance to the things he had made

[92] Richard Mackesay. Intro to *Reading Ruskin*.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Proust's translations of *The Bible of Amiens* and *Sesame and Lilies* and reference to *Praeterita.*

[95] *Bible of Amiens,* preface 54

[96] Proust also translated Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1904)

> me love that they seem to be charged with a value greater even than that of life. It is the power of genius to make us love a beauty more real than ourselves in those things which in the eyes of others are as particular and as perishable as themselves. [97]

Proust seems to be almost bewildered that he has succumbed to the wiles of beauty to such an extent that it has become more real than himself. Succombed, because in both references to his own sense of beauty he says Ruskin "*made* me love," "*made* us love," suggesting as if impelled by a powerful force that he attributes to Ruskin's "power of genius to make us love a beauty more real than ourselves," a beauty in which others place no value. As for Proust's belief that "It is the power of genius to make us love a beauty more than ourselves," if Ruskin had been alive when Proust penned these words he would certainly have insisted that it is not the quality of the teacher, but the power of beauty flowing through the body, that unselves us, lifts us out of our fascination with selfish preoccupations, frees us from the state of narcissistic consciousness, decenters us, transports us outside our heavy concerns attached to the material body to the out-of-body experience of losing ourselves in a pure sensation of awe: this makes it possible to say that beauty has made us love something more than ourselves.

If the pleasure of sight, and the beauty it reveals, ignites when the confluence of the desire and the essence of the thing desired meet as one within the human mind, then John Ruskin's endowment of visual acuity to Marcel Proust is the legacy of "poetry, prophecy and religion—all in one." Three in one —a trinity of art, vision and the sacred, one linked by the categories of beauty and truth to the others, all component parts of a unified vision, all essential parts of the whole. All, more plainly told, the exquisite, out-of-body sensation of the

[97] *Proust on Reading Ruskin*. Intro to *The Bible of Amiens*.

pleasure of ineffable beauty. Ruskin's "all in one" is a chain reaction from cultivated sight to knowledge, insight, eloquence, and the wisdom to speak to other men like a Wordsworthian prophet seeking to awaken humanity to spiritual perception. It makes possible an acute bodily sensibility to beauty that proffers joy, wonder and gratitude and the aura of transcendence. This Ruskin would call an encounter with the divine, what Sizerrane called the Religion of Beauty, what Proust suggests is in Ruskin the transformation of a religiously-inclined nature into an Aesthetics of Beauty.

Through his rereading of beauty, Ruskin moves the human to a place of agency, of owning those feelings which Ruskin describes as "awe, love and veneration"—all this from seeing clearly and telling plainly. More than fifty years after the publication of the first of five volumes of Modern Painters, (1843-1860), Ruskin's message of the cognitive and sensual power of vision had reached Marcel Proust whose creative abilities Proustian scholars say reached its "deepest levels" when he fully absorbed Ruskin's teaching about the "fundamental difference between seeing and knowing." Theorizing the apprehension of beauty as a series of "necessary" higher-level, open-hearted feelings that should be a requisite response to sensual pleasure, Ruskin writes:

> [It] is necessary to the existence of an idea of beauty, that the sensual pleasure that may be its basis should be accompanied first with joy, then with love of the object, then with the perception of kindness in a superior intelligence, finally with thankfulness and veneration towards the intelligence itself; and as no idea can at all be considered as in any way an idea of beauty, until it is made up of these emotions, any more than than we can be said to have an idea of a letter of which we receive the perfume and the fair writing, without understanding the contents of it, or intent of it; . . . it is evident that the sensation of beauty is not sensual on one hand, nor is it intellectual on the

> other, but is dependent on a pure, right and open state of the heart. Dependent both for its truth and for its intensity. . . dependent on the acuteness of the heart-feeling about them.[98]

There is in Ruskin's definition of an idea of beauty, a state of receiving the delight of beauty, the clear admonition that thoughtful and generous moral and intellectual responses will accompany the gift of pleasure. This experience Ruskin wants to stabilize and convert from an entirely body-centered sensation to one other-centered, feelings of gratitude building to "veneration towards the intelligence" of beauty. Ruskin's great contribution in this is his definition of responses and attitudes to the ecstatic experience of beauty that separates the self-centeredness of purely aesthetic pleasure from that of a reflection of one's being in relation to the world. His is not a classically expressed theory of beauty. Ruskin dismisses other attempts to define the meaning of the word. The word beauty is too ambiguous, he writes, "it stands in different people's minds for totally different sensations, for which there can be no common cause," [99] His non-definition is that the definition of the experience of beauty is a subjective response, it is embodied: the feeling of beauty is what the receiver says it is. He will, however, define the errors of four popular theories of beauty. *First,* he is no Keatsian. For him, Beauty is not Truth and Truth is not Beauty. That's tautological, he argues, "like asserting that propositions are matter and matter propositions . . . a stone looks as truly a stone as a rose looks like a rose, and yet it is not so beautiful." *Second*, the Useful is not Beautiful. That "is the most degrading and dangerous proposition . . . to assert that the human creature has no ideas and no feelings except" those referring to his own needs and appetites. *Third*, Beauty is not dependent on Familiarity. He finds the concept contradictory

[98] Ruskin. CW.MP. Vol. 11 Part lll, Sect. 1.

[99] Ruskin .CW MP. Vol ll. Ch .lll.

since the habit of custom is two-fold: either to "deaden the force of repeated impressions or to endear the familiar object to the affections . . .but both take place in some degree with all men." *Fourth*. Beauty is not dependent on the Association of Ideas. Again, the proposition is not universal. "I believe the eye cannot rest on a material form, in a moment of depression or exultation, without communicating to that form a spirit and a life,—a life which will make it afterwards in some degree loved or feared. "

Since beauty is not definable in Ruskin's terms, no other theory, including proportion and countenance, finds intellectual favor with him. In *Modern Painters* at first Ruskin tends to generalize the felt-sensation with the vague word "pleasure," but in his theory of the Idea of Beauty, he uses the more emotionally-warm sensuous "joy" which has a wide-enough range of feelings and synonyms—from intense and ecstatic or exultant happiness to light-heartedness—to satisfy the multiple senses of the sensation that can rise from a visual encounter with something of beautiful. "Joy," however, is not a casual choice. From the Latin gaudium (joy) and gaudere (to rejoice), it echoes the sacred anthems sung in Christian Cathedrals and churches thoughout Europe. There is an aura of purity in the word joy: it suggests something holy, a gift given, deserving of reverence. It is not surprising, then, that Ruskin's expection is that "veneration" is the final appropriate response to beauty. Following the sensation of Joy should come Love of the beautiful object.

How does one feel love for an alley of trees that we walk through, seek shade under, watch the sun shining off the leaves and rising over their tops, for we do love them in the sense that we cherish them, and that the greatest fear is that they might disappear from our sight? William Cowper, the 18th-Century poet who suffered from depression for much of his

life, sought solace under a bank of poplar trees that whispered in the wind, and whose filagreed branches he loved to gaze at reflected in the flowing River Ouse. The wound from the loss of the tree, cut down for reasons unexplained, drew from his sorrow these lines from a love-poem for beauty lost: "The poplars are fell'd, farewell to the shade/ And the whispering sounds of the cool colonnade/The winds play no longer, and sing in the leaves/Nor Ouse on his bosom their image receives."[100] Gerard Manley Hopkins, a priest whose love of the beauty of nature inspired much of his genius, also wrote a poetic obituary—Binsey Poplars (felled 1879) —for the industrial destruction of a stand of slender aspen trees, a loss he compares to the unimaginable personal loss, "like this sleek and seeing ball/But a prick will make no eye at all." He feels at one with the trees; their loss is as a loss of sight to him. Another grief he expresses, as did Cowper, is the loss for those not yet born—"Aftercomers cannot guess the beauty been." The primary dictionary description of love is: ". . . a deep, tender feeling of affection and solicitude for a person, such as that arising from kinship or a sense of oneness." If the reference to person and kinship is removed, it serves as a fine description for the feeling of a human deeply attuned to beauty. The two examples in Cowper and Hopkins of the love of beauty for itself, for self, and others, both steeped in feelings of gratitude and reverence, links strongly to the Perception of Kindness in a Superior Intelligence, and Thankfulness and Veneration towards the Intelligence itself. Ruskin's call here is for man to develop a spiritual awareness, for him this means one that is religiously-based acknowledging gratitude and veneration for the bounty and beauty of God's Creation. Ruskin often uses the term "moral" and some critics —Harold Bloom, for example—insist that moral values, not faith-based religiosity, were his main

[100] William Cowper. "The Poplar Field" (1784). Children's Treasury of Verse.

concern.[101] In either aspect, the encouragement of awareness of gratitude for a world that offers us great gifts of sustanence and the joys of nature and beauty, not only can ameliorate the expected portion of pain, but producing the firing of dopaminergic and endorphin action throughout the body it can transform our feeling about the world and our neighbors. Ruskin's Idea of the Intelligence of Beauty initiates a loop of receiving and giving, symbolic of generosity, of unselfishness, of goodness. His words on what beauty means to the body reminds me of passages in Elaine Scarry's work *On Beauty*. Speaking of an encounter with beauty, she writes: "At the moment we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentering." Elsewhere she writes of the experience of "unselfing" which, according to [Simone] Weil requires us "to give up our imaginery position at the center . . . A transformation then takes place in the very roots of our sensibility, in our immediate reception of sense impressions and psychological impressions." Weil's account of the experience of beauty, says Scarry, "is always deeply somatic: what happens, happens to our bodies. "[102]

At a time when religious orthodoxy is still considered Beauty as the gift of God to man, it is the particular genius of John Ruskin to apply the language of his religious heritage to transact a subtle reassignment of agency from God alone to a partnership between God and the human mind. He describes an embodied experience of beauty adapted to our desires that he intuits originates in the mind through perception and is transmitted in sensuous waves through the body. To beauty's previously mysterious provenance Ruskin creates a narrative of partnership between the Diety and human biology —an authentic expression of the truth as

[101] Bloom. Intro. xxiii.

[102] Scarry comments on Weil in *On Beauty and Being Just*, 27

he understood it: "The pleasure of beauty," he said, which is adapted to our desires" "is something of the divine" in a co-production "of [human] intellect, emotions and sensuality."[103]

> The pleasures of sight . . . are given as gifts . . . [And as] they have no function to perform, there is no limit to their continuance in the accomplishment of their end, for they are an end in themselves, and so may be perpetual with all of us; being in no way destructive, but rather increasing in exquisiteness by repetition. . . . in whatever may be infinitely and for itself desired, we may be sure there is something of divine . . . [and so] there is caused by them not only a feeling of strong affection towards the object in which they exist, but the perception of purpose and adaptation of it to our desires . . . out of which arise Joy, Admiration, and Gratitude. [T]his, and this only, is the full comprehension and contemplation of the Beautiful as a gift of God; a gift not necessary to our being, but added to, and elevating it, and twofold: first of the desire, and secondly of the thing desired.[104]

Engaging the patronage of the stern Victorian God as the giver of the "exquisite" pleasure of beauty, Ruskin then suggests that the delivery of the experience is through the body's unseen pathways and networks, descending from the rational mind down to the earthy sensibility of the body. The generosity of the sensation of beauty in our bodies is endless, Ruskin says, its possibilities in perpetuity are offered expansively, "increasing in exquisiteness by repetition," for if the sensation of beauty is "for itself desired," if we appreciate the beauty, feel love, gratitude and joy for the experience, but do not long to possess the object, we are touched by an emanation of the divine. Ruskin also describes, in effect, the neurotransmission of "the

[103] Ruskin, CW. MP Vol ll, Part lll, Sect.l, Ch.iii.

[104] Ruskin. Ibid.

gift of beauty" when he says that it is "two-fold: first of the desire, and secondly of the thing desired." We know this as the body's desire and reward system. It begins with a desire, a yearning for something one feels will bring pleasure or satisfaction: for instance to see the Alps. There are specific brain circuits linked to desire and its reward which is the feeling of pleasure. The anticipation of seeing the Alps stimulates the limbic system which releases opiod-like neurotransmitters. (The first sense of pleasure.) One then walks to the viewing platform to see the mountains at sunset: Neurotransmitters then generously raise the levels of our circulating dopamine which courses in waves through the body. (The second experience of Ruskin's "two-fold" pleasure.) [105]

In this way Ruskin provides a 19th-century explanation of the mysteries of beauty as a product of the mind, an experience ranging from pleasure to ecstasy that centuries of philosophy and aesthetics have debated to a semantic standstill. In pursuit of beauty's aesthetic source, one is (still) drawn into an endless chain of connections of the transcendent and the earth-bound— synonyms that double for but don't capture the singularity of the meaning of beauty that philosophers and lexicographers have said is indescribable. Perhaps because the definition of beauty is considered indescribable the longing to express its precise quality is irresistible and the descriptives used to do so are multitudinous and luxurious enough to match the capaciousness of the word's meaning and the abundance of the sensations that mark beauty's presence. Synonyms such as: lovely, enchanting, gorgeous, divine, exquisite, resplendent, sensational, dazzling, radiant, shining, lustrous, captivating, enthralling, alluring, bewitching, enticing, breath-taking, ravishing, blissful, heavenly, paradisacal, transcendent, angelic, rapturous, enrapturing, glorious. For Ruskin, the pleasure

[105] Carter.56, 63, 103

of beauty, "not mere sensuous gratification, but cultivated by the higher senses [is] part of a scheme that is exquisitely adapted to our nature and our desires."[106] This last sentence was at the heart of Ruskin's philosophy of the good society with art and culture as its crowning jewels: the appreciation of beauty through the cultivation of visual sensibility leads to superior art that inspires people and elevates their minds to the finer qualities of virtue, love and charity, improves lives, and transforms society.

If we think of the experience of beauty in nature and art as Ruskin did, as an embodied product of the brain/mind, traveling freely through the mind and body changing one's perceptions of the world and our relations to it, we think of it being transmitted through the individual back into society affecting others and transforming institutions. If we think of beauty this way, we are thinking of it as a communications network circulating pleasure and delight and social enhancement—emotional, psychological, physical and moral enchancement moving as a personal gift to the soul of the community. Another way to understand this happy interchange would be as a neuro-hormone pleasure highway. Ruskin, after all, proposes his own version of this when he imagined the idea of the undefinable thing called beauty, what science has since discovered as hormonal and chemical, distributing elixirs of pleasure from the mind through the body's mapped highways of veins and arteries. Ruskin's description of these sensations in reaction to beauty were based on his attention to his physiobiological processes. One hundred and fifty years later modern science put Ruskin's theory to a neurological test . Semir Zeki—a founder of the field of neuroaesthetics and the first scientist to study the effect of beauty and romantic love on the brain—discovered through fMRI technology that the experience of "beauty is part of a continuum [at

[106] Ruskin. CW. MP Vol ll, Part lll, Sect.l, Ch.iii.

the orbito-frontal cortex] representing a value attributed to it by the brain, a value that incidentally can change from one viewing to another and differs between individuals."[107] Zeki's research team at University College London, discovered to their surprise that judgments of beauty and ugliness in art —in categories of portraits, landscapes, still life and abstracts— are not found in separate areas of the brain, but are polar extremes of the same continuum: the "intensity of the neural activity reflects linearly the degree of beauty bestowed on the object by the viewer."[108] The emotional reward, the experience of the pleasure of beauty, increases with neural activity associated with the individual brain's response. Zeki's work confirms Ruskin's deductions of the mysterious passage of beauty from the brain's response to perception channeled through the body for our delight to be a close enough match.

Ruskin was deeply religious, raised not on fairy tales but on the Holy Bible's teaching that God created everything.[109] Yet, in the early chapters of *Modern Painters*, it is extraordinary to observe his instinct to build a bridge linking beauty's aesthetic divide between God's creation and the biology of Man. He defty uses spiritual language to reaffirm the spiritual quality of beauty, creating a religion of beauty, while nevertheless retheorizing its value as residing in the mystery of the power of art through visual sensibility. In his conception of the experience of beauty as the result of biological processes in the human mind, Ruskin, in anticipation of Darwin, channeled the traditional God-given experience of

[107] Kawabata, Hideaki and Semir Zeki. "The Neural Correlates of Beauty." Journal of Neurophysiology 91:1699-1705, 2004. Print.

[108] Ibid.

[109] His mother insisted he read the Bible over from beginning to end each year —and then over again from the beginning.

beauty down a path from the spiritual kingdom to the biological roots of the moral and emotional nature of the Victorian mind.

An experience that begins with a commitment to sight as the hierarchy of the human senses, to perception's cognitive power as the incubator of a fine mind, draws the perceiver towards beauty —and poetry, prophecy and religion. In the first volume of *Modern Painters* Ruskin takes his aesthetic belief system on vision and beauty an interesting step further—into the realm of the human psyche. His aim was to penetrate and alter his readers whole state of mind by legitimizing the intelligence of all their senses. He called his campaign for the supremacy of the sense of sight 'The Education of the Senses,' tenaciously attaching the idea of intelligence to the embodied feeling-responses of the senses, pushing them into an unacknowledged prominence in cognitive latitudes.

Ruskin scholars liken the effect of his call for recognition of visual acuity as the source of knowledge and its elevation above language as "intellectually revolutionary" though they doubted that Ruskin's readers had realized it at the time.[110] Perhaps not, but those who had read Newton and Locke, or Addison on the power of the senses, or Wordsworth and Coleridge, or Keats and Shelley on imagination and individual freedom could hardly have been surprised at the growing resistance to Victorian religious and cultural orthodoxy. Ruskin's "Psychic Revolution" is an accurate description as far as it goes, for his *Modern Painters* campaign linking sight, knowledge and beauty as a cooperative sensual pathway of pleasure firing between the mind and the body is yet another kind of revolution—a neuroaesthetic revolution. More than a century before its time, without its scientific coming

[110] Warner and Hough, 11

of age, and without its terminology, Ruskin creates out of his powers of perception a theory of the seeable, knowable and the feelable. He writes of pleasure that it is "a gift not necessary to our being, but added to, and elevating it, and twofold: first of the desire, and secondly of the thing desired,"[111]

When in the early 1840s Ruskin describes the body's experience of beauty through perception as coming in two waves of pleasure, first the pleasure of desire and of anticipation of the beauty and then later the increased pleasure of seeing the object desired he is describing what we now know as the brain's reward system in the neural reward system. The neurons in the dopamine-fired reward dash along pathways in the brain scouting out feel-good opportunities to spark into full-blown desire for our pleasure. A thought—the idea of a sunset, a garden, a painting,—produces a mind's eye image in the visual cortex to which the orbitofrontal complex responds by activating dopamine and the feeling of pleasure; the subsequent visual perception repeats the neural processes, confirmation of Ruskin's claim of the similarity between what the eye sees and the brain's subsequent imagery constructed from the original sighting. What is a brain image? Does the visual cortex construct an image like a picture book? When we see a tree, is there a tree-like picture in the brain? Emphatically not, says Nobel Laureate scientist Eric Kandel. "The eye does not work like a camera. A digital camera captures an image, be it a landscape or a face, pixel by pixel as it appears before us. The eye can not do that." [112] Kandel explains that the brain works from an hypothesis, "a symbolic representation—about a tree and other objects in the outside world."

[111] Ruskin. CW. MP. Vol. 11. Part 11. " Moral and Sensual Perception."

[112] Eric Kandel. *The Age of Insight*, 232

The brain creates an image, not like a photograph, but one rendered in the brain's language — in a neurally-coded image. Kandel explains:

> All the sensory information that comes into the brain—vision, hearing, touch—is converted into neural codes; that is, patterns of action potentials generated by nerve cells. Seeing a baby's face, watching it smile, looking at a great painting or out into the sunset—all these are the results of different firing patterns of neurons in different combinations of neural circuits in our brain. . . . The data emerging from specialized cells in the retina resemble the visual world in the same way that the pixels in the image on your laptop resemble the actual image you see on the screen. The biological system processes the information, like the electronic system. The visual system, however, creates representations in the brain in the form of neural codes . . . Although the raw data taken in by the eyes are not sufficient to form the content-rich hypothesis called vision, the brain generates a hypothesis that is remarkably accurate. Each of us is able to create a rich, meaningful image of the external world that is remarkably similar to the image seen by others.[113]

"Our perception of the world is a fantasy that coincides with reality," says cognitive psychologist Chris Frith of the process of mind imagery. " What I perceive are not the crude and ambiguous clues that impinge from the outside world onto my eyes, ears and fingers. I perceive something much richer—a picture that combines all these crude signals with a wealth of past experience [from memory].[114] The topic of mental imagery —is there such a thing and if so, in what form does the image appear?—has been hotly debated since the mid-19th century. Stephen Kosslyn's 2006 book *The Case for Mental Imagery* (2006) a history of the scientific research on the neural mechanism underlying mental imagery seems to have

[113] Ibid.

[114] Frith, qtd by Kandel, 234.

ended the debate by demonstrating that visual perception and visual imagery share underlying processes. Kosslyn's research includes a review of 60 studies of other scientific teams dealing with various aspects of mental imagery that document overlapping brain activity in visual perception and mental imagery and parallel defects in imagery and perception in patients with brain damage. It also demonstrates that patients with a condition that ignores half the space during perception, also only do see half the space during imagery, and evidence that patients with brain lesions who can't recognize faces also can't visualize them.[115]

In 1843 when John Ruskin, then a 23-year-old Oxford University graduate, anonymously published the first volume of *Modern Painters,* his "highly original" thinking historians Eric Warner and Graham Hough write in Strangeness and Beauty (1983) "had effects on the aesthetic, social and even political thinking that are still experienced to this day" caused what amounted to a "Psychic Revolution" in Victorian England."

* Ruskin asserted that the scientific community's understanding of the mind's cognitive processes was seriously in error: Visual perception, the sense of sight, he insisted, was the principal organ of intelligence, thought, memory, reading, imagination and creativity. This proposition was at odds with nineteenth-century certainty that the eyes automatically sent its images along to the brain which did the hard cognitive work of thinking, extracting information and categorizing knowledge. The visual cortex—the back quarter of the brain consisting of seven different areas that receive, process, and combine information from the eyes into whole images—was not yet thought to be part of the brain. The new theory called

[115] Kosslyn. *The Case for Mental Imagery,* 109

for a remapping of the brain to include its neighboring cortex as the primary organ of cognition. This suggested an entirely new way of looking, thinking, explaining and writing.

* Further, Ruskin insisted that the rigidity of the English language governed by the centuries-old Adamic theory of God's divine gift of the perfect language to Adam, limited intelligent discourse and should be overturned. His goal, considered heretical, was to elevate visual sensibility to its proper cognitive position superior to logos, thus releasing the cognitive stranglehold of language, in which "the relation between the signified and the signifier is not arbitrary; the linguistic sign is not double but unitary." This would mean accepting a subjective view of knowledge that would dramatically alter the interpretation of power, objects, ideas and feeling, and thus impact language, literature, law, the arts, and every cultural institution, especially the sciences, philosophy and religion.

*In addition, Ruskin argued that the English language was moribund— dead or dying as the cognitive soul of the vigorously changing Victorian zietgeist. Language no longer was capable of accurately reflecting the life lived. He proposed a reimagined theory of expressive language suited to the powerful visuality of the mind and a fresh syntax flowing from individual experience would express the new experience of a society in the constant flux of political, social, economical and industrial change, and particularly of expanding scientific advancements that explored human psychology and the mind.

Ruskin's work was intended to accelerate the slow transition from deductive to inductive methods of reasoning. In 1690 John Locke's empirical theories of knowledge in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ushered in the slow death of Rene Descartes' rationalism based on innate knowledge. Prior to this Sir Isaac Newton had also struck a blow for the

senses and experience by attributing color to the visual senses, not as an inherent property of the object. Rationalism's reign over the mind had dictated language as the expression of man's true and absolute reality, and the words themselves, the carrier of truth, far beyond the possibility of experience, or what the eyes saw, or the ears heard, or the body felt. The senses were not to be trusted. Language was in the vice-lock of the 17th-century traditional belief wherein words corresponded exactly with the objects they denoted. Understanding is corrupted through words, declared Locke, caught between "our Understanding and the Truth." Locke insisted that word-signs are not natural, but arbitrary. "No one has the power to make others have the same ideas in their minds as he has, when they use the same word as he does."[116] Language for Locke, in substance, was a speaker's personally considered expressions, flowing naturally from her life experiences and her interpretations of events especially in complicated areas of discourse such as philosophy and politics, and deeply private concerns of values and relationships. Given the fertility of the human mind, the assumption of similar realities in two speakers is a communications landmine. Lock-step understanding of meaning is fraught. Elsewhere in his argument for visuality and emotion in language Ruskin cited Jean-Jacques Rousseau's and Johann Gottfried Herder's writing on the nature and origin of language. Both philosophers "recognized language as a *sine qua non*, as the lifeblood of human culture and social demeanor in all forms."[117] It was not needs but passion that accounts for the origin of language, says Rousseau. "The natural effect of needs was to separate men, not to unite them. . . Whence, then, the origin? From moral needs, passions . . . It is neither hunger nor thirst but love, hatred, pity, anger, which drew from

[117]Rousseau and Herder. Introduction v.

them the first words. "[118] While still an animal, man already has a language, writes Herder, with overflowing feeling that reminds one of Ruskin's preacherly tone.

> "It was, as it were, the last motherly touch of the formative hand of nature that gave to all to take out into the world, the law, "Feel not for yourself alone. But rather: your feeling resound!: The sound of your feeling be of one kind to your species and be perceived by all in compassion as by one!" Do not touch this weak, this sentient being. However lonesome and alone it may seem to be, However exposed to every hostile storm of the universe, yet it is not alone: It stands allied with all nature![119]

Herder's soundings on language as a moral vehicle of unification and compassion in the 18th century is the pulpit that Ruskin stands on in *Modern Painters* to unite his fractured nation.

The readers of *Modern Painters'* first volume had no idea who its author was. Ruskin did not want his youth and neophyte status in the art world to detract from his message. He describes himself simply as "A Graduate of Oxford University." In this mysterious anonymity he launched himself boldly on to the startled art world as a critic of art, not only of the brilliant colorist Turner and his lesser contempories, but of the classical greats with whom he compared Turner's work. In the opening pages he dives into his prime concern of nurturing intelligence, through sight and insight and feeling, beauty and truth, and explains the range of possible levels of intellectual response to the work of artists, writers, and preachers. How does one respond intellectually to "Don Quixote for example" he wonders, and answers:

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[118] Ibid. Rousseau 11-12. Trans. John H.Moran. The invention of writing, once lauded by the Cartesians for its stabilizing effect, is seen by Rousseau as a contributing factor in the enervation of language.

[119]Herder 87-88.

> The lowest mind would find in it perpetual and brutal amusement in the misfortunes of the knight, and perpetual sympathy with the squire. A mind of average feeling would perceive the satirical meaning and force of the book, would appreciate its wit, its elegance and its truth. But only elevated and peculiar minds discover, in addition to all this, the full moral beauty of the love and the truth which are the constant associates of all that is even most weak and erring in the character of the hero . . . [120]

One could think of this as intellectual class grading from a Victorian scold, but far from it—it is a Ruskinian teaching moment. He sincerely believes in the perfection of the mind through man's own striving. He speaks like the evangelic preacher he refused to become, proselytizing for his philosophy of seeking beauty of the mind as an antidote for the soulless and mindless depradations of the Industrial Revolution. Ruskin was a "Wordsworthian from infancy, and throughout his life closer to Wordsworth than any other poet."[121] His term the "Education of the Senses" was a homage to Wordsworth, a campaign to urge Victorians to train and cultivate their higher senses not for utilitarian ends but to animate the desired ends of their good and true human nature. *Modern Painters*, intended to be a defence of Turner, was to be his instruction book on the power of sight and beauty. "[E]arly in his career we find him realizing that it is not his business to dispute about individual artists and their achievement; "it is to summon the moral energies of the nation to a forgotten duty, to display the use, force and function of a great body of neglected sympathies and desires."[122] The "forgotten duty" is visceral identification of the well-being of the nation and its people; the

[120] Ruskin. CW MP, Pt.1.Sec.1.Ch.1 Intro. Note.

[121] Warner, 12.

[122] Ibid., 11

"neglected sympathies and desires" are those qualities of moral character and feeling that have been quashed by spiraling materialism of the smokestacks and the growing loss of a spiritual connection to the green countryside.

The publication event is described as one of "startling originality." It was original in a way that startled the art world and its afficianados, because, as literary critics Eric Warner and Graham Hough explain in *Strangeness and Beauty*, nothing like it had happened before; never before had so much widespread attention been paid to the importance of art in English society.[123] "Our culture has been so dominantly literary," they write, "that when a man of first-rate intellectual powers devotes himself to a [an entire book on a] critique of the plastic and visual arts, the effect is one of startling originality."[124] Ruskin's original motivation in writing *Modern Painters*, was "to move the arts of painting, [and later] sculpture and architecture" into the centre of cultural awareness, a position long dominated by literature, most recently by the poetic works of the literary figures of the Romantic Revolution. Thus, bred on Wordsworth's Romantic philosophy, but obsessed with nature and art, and in particular with Turner whose sketches he'd first discovered in Rogers' *Italy* when he was thirteen, Ruskin began his campaign on behalf of the excellences of Turner, and with it, his philosophy of perception, knowledge, truth and the awareness of beauty as the centerpiece of his moral vision for the role of art in society. Frederic Harrison, who was a long time friend and fellow teacher of Ruskin's at the Working Men's College, at once a great admirer and a realistically tough critic, recalls the reaction to the publication:

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

"Sydney Smith, the acknowledged oracle of the "Edinburgh Review" and of cultured society is reported to have said that it was a work of transcendent talent, presented the most original views, and the most elegant and powerful language, and would work a complete revolation in the world of taste. And so it was," said Harrison.[125] And . . .

> The appearace of volume 1 of *Modern Painters* produced a real sensation in the artistic, and even the literary world. The recognised organs of criticism were hostile and contemptuous. . . . There was much in the outspoken heresy of the youthful reformer to scandalize the connoisseur, the veteran artist, the hack writer, and the Bible literalist. But men of insight saw in it a new idea. . . . Tennyson, who saw Nature so often in kindred ways, begged for the book. . . . Poets were the first to call into their company the prose poet of Nature who had placed the lasting crown on the head on [Turner] the color-poet of Nature."

Warner and Hough in *Strangeness and Beauty* describe Ruskin's declarations about sight and the mind as "intellectually revolutionary." The word for God's spirit in the world was Logos—the Word — and it was Ruskin's belief that the dominance of the word had caused an enormous imbalance. "It was time that other forms of symbolization should have their turn, bringing new insight and releasing new powers." They claim Ruskin's ideas about visual sensitivity's impact on the quality of minds and the impact on arts had precipitated what almost amounted to "a psychic revolution," a large claim, even in an Age of Revolution. Everything was changing in the revolution-wracked Victorian world — industrial, political, economic, social, religious, and scientific change—all rightly considered historical revolutions because of the radical upheavals that swept through society. External upheavals do not exist in isolation. Socially disruptive, they are not siloed safely outside an

[125] Harrison, 44.

impervious body; these endemic stresses infiltrate the innards and the mind. What had Ruskin stirred up in the Victorian Psyche? "[Ruskin's] mind," they write, "soon to be followed by others of similar cast, had reached one of those turning points described in Jungian psychology in which a buried or undervalued faculty is brought to light, bringing with it new and unsuspecting energies."[126] Jung's theory of a "buried,"or "undervalued" faculty "brought to light," releasing "unsuspecting energies,"[127] suggests Ruskin as cultural archaeologist, with *Modern Painters* as his pick axe, unearthing pent-up Newtonian and Lockean sensationalist wisdom from the 17th century." [128] What was different in 1843? Echoing Locke and anticipating Jung on the emergence of previously neglected ideas, William James observes that we embrace new ideas when they "account satisfactorily for our sensible experience," and appeal to our emotional, aesthetic and active needs.[129] James is describing the ah-ha moment when driven by our senses, intelligence, values and latent desires, there comes a time, when change becomes inevitable. He reinforces the embodied knowledge of our sensibilities and the cognitive base of what we call common sense. "If we ask what feature all great periods of revival, of the expansion of the human mind," have in common, he writes, " each and all have said to the human being:"The inmost nature of the reality is congenial to powers you possess."[130] The event speaks, James says, coining an idea

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[126] Quoted in *Warner.*

[127] Harold Bloom, who like Warner and Hough, credits Ruskin with Jungian insight, says he "was one of the first, if not indeed the first "myth" or "archetypal" critic, or more properly he is the linking and transitional figure" of Renaissance critics and Northrop Frye and Yeats.

[128] Locke attributes the origin of knowledge from two sources: from the observation of perceivable objects, which includes perception from all the senses; or the inspection and assessment of the working of men's own minds.

[129] Locke *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. (111.680-1)

[130] William James. *Principles of Psychology*. 1890.

for Guy Dubord, the Marxist philosopher,[131] you are ready to exercise your power. Clearly, Ruskin's assertion that men had immediate access to powers of mind through their senses, was not a new idea, though in 1843 it may have seemed so. "[W]hat men immediately perceive and what they reason about are always particular ideas existing in their minds," Locke writes in 1690.[132] Nonetheless, those ideas were heard as if for the first time, listened to, acted on, and sparked a newly-discovered confidence in the subjective awareness of destiny as self determination in a world moving from the immutable past into an exciting but uncertain future. Thomas Carlyle attributes Ruskin's influence to the exceptional public power of literature at that time. He writes:

> In the nineteenth century, the critic was a man of importance largely because literature promised solutions to problems that could not be solved by the religious, social or scientific systems of the day . . . [literature] was deemed to be of functional importance for it balanced the deficiencies resulting from systems that all claimed universal validity. In contrast to the previous eras, when there had been a more or less stable hierarchy of thought systems, the Nineteenth Century was lacking in such stability, owing to the increasing complexity and number of such systems[ranging from theological to scientific] and the resulting clashes between them. . . . It was only natural, then, for readers to seek messages in literature, for [it] could offer them precisely the orientation they felt they needed in view of the problems left behind by the various systems of the age.[133]

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[131] Thomas Carlyle. *On Heroes*. 391

[132] Locke. Ibid.

[133] Wolfgang Iser. *The Act of Reading*, 6. Thomas Carlyle also had prophetic faith in the power of literature, a view—"in no way out of the ordinary." "Literature," he writes in *On Heroes*, *Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* is an 'apocalyse of Nature.' It reveals the 'open secret.'

Ruskin's "Revolution" was, as he said, about "the whole moral and emotional nature of man." His aim is transformational. He is advocating for transformed subjectivity through the neglected human sense of perception. The development of visual power, for Ruskin, is the source of the well-being of the body, mind and soul through the natural pleasures of the senses —the experience of the world's beauty. His idealistic goal was that the manifestation of that beauty in the mind, the expression of beauty in the arts would transfuse all aspects of the psychological and material culture with all things excellent and a full-hearted concern for the quality of the lives of their fellow men.

Ruskin began the first draft of *Modern Painters* in Italy 1841 while on extended sick leave from Oxford. He came to the book with a concept that he had often discussed, of painting as simply another form of expression—in fact, a visual language. By the time he had finished the volume (1842) Ruskin has reached an equitable creative trade between the "sister arts" [134] by cross-pollinating the visual art of the painter with the language art of the poet. He explains:

> Painting, or art generally, as such, with all its technicalities, difficulties, and particular ends, is nothing but a noble and expressive language, invaluable as the vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing. He who has learned what is commonly considered the whole art of painting, that is, the art of representing any natural object faithfully, has as yet only learned the language by which his thoughts are to be expressed. He has done just as much towards being that which we ought to respect as a great painter, as a man who has learned to express himself grammatically and melodiously has towards being a great poet. . . It is not by the mode of representing and saying, but what is represented and said that the respective greatness of the painter is to be finally determined. . . . Therefore we should call a man a great painter only as he

> excelled in precision or force in the language of words. A great poet would then be a term strictly, and precisely in the same sense applicable to both, if warranted by the character of the images or thoughts which each in their respective languages convey.[135]

Painting is nothing but a language, though a distinguished and evocative language, he tells his audience of readers, as he sets out to explain what makes a great painter. While Ruskin appears to be focussing on the artist, he soon, predictably, introduces the writer as a fellow creator equally under scrutiny to show greatness.[136] He begins, again in the role of teacher, separating the basic technical skills of the painter and writer artists—the proficient use of the materials of the art and the competence of their craft, exhibited in the faithful representation of the lines of the art, and the melodiously rendered meters of the poetry. What makes the competent artist a great painter, says Ruskin, are the ideas carried in the language of his art. The greatness of a poet is also recognized "in the same sense applicable to both"—the sense of language—"by the images or thoughts which each of their respective languages convey."

Ruskin evolves his rule for the required elements of great art: the visual artist uses paint images that talk to the perceiver; the word artist uses words that make the reader create visual images. With that formula Ruskin has worked out the major problem he faces in writing *Modern Painters*. If a painting is a language, a form of visual communication in color and shapes that conveys important ideas, then, in addition to educating painters about the importance of developing visual sensibility, he will have to teach his reading audience how to "read" the ideas of a painting. And, if he is to do that, he has to make his readers see with his words, make them able to visualize a painting from words on a page. The reader's task is

[135] Ruskin. CW.MP. Vol 1. Ch.ii.

[136] Ruskin told his future biographer Derrick Leon that when he said "artists" he always "meant painters and writers, too." See Leon's. *The Great Victorian*.

thus two-fold: first to read, then to visualize. Visualization is a mental function, a function separate from reading. Now, he had another big problem— two problems in one, both concerning language.

Ruskin is depending on words to carry his visual message. The challenge he faces in trying to write about the meaning of a painting, the relationships between space and shapes, color and mood, is to be able to manipulate language in a way that would express the inexpressible. If he could find the vocabulary to do that it would resolve the writer's part of the task, but not the reader's problem. While reading, the ideas in the text stir up neural activity which triggers the neural activity in the visual cortex which calls up neural images in the mind's eye. Ruskin understood this process in its broad outlines. The problem he found insurmountable was that nineteenth-century language was governed by restrictive syntax, abstract language and the rigidly-framed composition of the rational mind. When he struggled to find the right detail, cadence and energy of language capable of describing the content of the art, of communicating the excitement, beauty, movement and mood of the art, and of analyzing the successes and failures of the painting, he felt that language in a word, was "moribund," all meaning wrung out of it. "Words are not accurate enough, nor delicate enough to express or trace the constant, all pervading influence of the finer and vaguer shadows, " he writes. His frustration in the "expressive insufficiency" of language boiled over in a letter to an Oxford friend. The letter is astonishing, certainly because of his youth, but particularly because of the content. He discusses trying to use poetic metaphors to capture the precise sensation he is trying to express; he questions how one "would undertake to convey to another person a perfectly distinct idea of any single emotion passing in your own heart:

> You cannot—you cannot fathom it yourself if have no actual expression for the simple idea . . . You can say . . . you feel depressed, delighted, dark, bright; are any of these expressions competent to illustrate the *whole* feeling? If you try to reach it you must heap metaphor after metaphor, and image after image, and you will feel that the most mysterious touch nearest and reach highest, but none will come up to the truth.[137]

Ruskin's frustration is palpable, somewhat equivalent to a painter wanting to paint a glorious sunset with only black and white paint in his paint box. With his close friend as a sounding board, he formulates his theories of an expressive language that will appear full-fledged two years later in *Modern Painters*: a visual language of metaphors and images and word impressions that he hopes will transport the reader to "the whole feeling of the truth." In this letter, 22-year-old Ruskin outlined his first rough draft of the theoretic elements of a rebirthed language. His two theoretical concerns expressed the relationship between the writer and the reader and the linguistic structure and energy that promoted mental images and emotional reactions in the reader. All this was bubbling up in Ruskin's mind before he began to write. His solution was a linguistic mix of trained perception, vital ideas, visually imaginative language and lively expressive construction that made the reader see —and feel. In practice, *Modern Painters* becomes the laboratory in which he develops the manner of style and visuality of description that he hopes will help the readers of *Modern Painters* see the paintings and landscapes he was describing, and feel the beauty, energy and ideas of the art through the visual expressiveness of his language. For example, in one section, to illustrate the use of text that makes the reader see he compares the failures of some art with the greatness of Turner's work. Alexandra Wettlaufer describes this in *In the Mind's Eye.* In

[137] Ruskin's *Letters to a College Friend*, 83.

his analysis of Turner's execution in *Upper Fall of the Tees* . . . he does not present an overview of the composition or narrative of the scene, but instead submerges the reader within the *motion* of the waterfall.:

> Though they make you understand the swiftness of the water, they never make you feel the weight of it; the stream in their hands looks active, not supine, as if it leaped, not as if it fell. Now water will leap a little down a weir or over a stone, but it tumbles over a high fall like this, and it is when we have lost the parabolic line, and arrived at the catenary, that we have lost the spring of the fall, and arrived at the plunge of it, that we begin to really feel its weight and wildness.

As the passage continues, Wettlaufer writes, Ruskin supresses the physical painting for a dramatic evocation of the power of water;

> It begins to writhe, and twist, and sweep out, zone after zone, in wilder stretching as it falls; and to send down the rocket-like, lance-pointed, whizzing shafts at its sides, sounding for the bottom. And it is this prostration, this hopeless abandonment of its ponderous power to the air, which is always expressed by Turner. [138]

It appears that the neural/biological demands of imagining a writing form that sparks the cortex to call up images resulted in a flash of cognitive magic for Ruskin. He replicates the biological rhythmic sensation of sight in the rhythmic meter of language. His visual prose dances along the line in tiny phrases of perception, one after another, capturing small pieces of images, connecting them like a jigsaw puzzle, building together the multiple sensations in a picture—exactly the way that the retinal neurons dash around sending clips of information for the visual cortex to asemble in its last act of creating the big picture. He finds

[138] Qtd by Wettlaufer, 276. MP 3:553-4. Diderot, Baudelaire and Ruskin's visual impulse. 1994.

physiological patterns as a way to mirror in words and narratives the mind's experience. This technique creates an important building block for the new writer/ reader relationship he will create. His theory of writing is this:

> The object of all art, is not to inform, but to suggest, not to add to the knowledge but to kindle the imagination. . . . The best poet is the one who can by the fewest words touch the greatest number secret chords of thought in his readers' mind and set them to work in their own way." [139]

Ruskin's vision is to make the reader a creative partner with the writer. How? "He wants to put readers "to work in [their] own way," using their "secret chords of thought." Chords of thought? The non-musical meaning, the dictionary tells us is 'Emotional feelings or responses.' Ruskin's idea is that a partnership of artistic imagination, driven by the writer's visual language, and then further opened up by the reader's imaginative capacities, is the key to a new kind of writing. It is a three-part process—a printed text that unites the imaginative labors of a creative artist and a creative, feeling reader. The text is suggestive, evocative, not representative. It stimulates the reader's imagination and the brain's irresistible impulse to fill in the gaps, to solve a cognitive puzzle, to complete the blanks in an empty scene with her ideas. One of Ruskin's most important concepts about writing is that the author should not hand out his wisdom on a platter. "Work is honorable, discovery is thrilling," he says, let the reader participate. As readers engage they becomes co-creators. As Wolfgang Iser reminds us, "There is no literature without a reader."[140]

By intuitively linking language as an inevitable expression of cultural change, especially in a time of scientific advances in the knowledge of the brain and the mind,

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[139] Ruskin. *Letters to a College Friend* 83.

[140]Iser, 10.

Ruskin's elevation of sight as the primary sense and thus the key to mind-conscious writing, helps vivify the sensual experience of a different world view. To make this happen, he must make his reader see pictures as she reads words. He wants the word-images of art and landscape to move off the page into the readers' brains so they can feel their bodies' emotional responses to the ideas in the text. This he believed would occur if the writing was vivid enough to prime the readers' visual imagination. And since in Ruskin's philosophy the senses were the primary source of beauty, the spirit of beauty was infused in the theory and practice of a new way of writing which was undoubtedly absorbed by the reader. Because Ruskin is learning to perform his own theoretical moves as he writes, an interesting dynamic evolves between Ruskin and the reader: as he is figuring out his visual strategies, he can't resist sharing his writing processes. Ruskin's tutoring is spontaneous. He's caught in the moment of his inspiration, thinking, writing, and being Ruskin, always moving in the direction of his imagination. And in a pre-modern move, as he writes about visual sensibility, landscape and artistic techniques he makes the writing process of visual realization a part of the text— indirectly saying to the reader, this is what I am trying to do; here's how I am doing it. He is teaching his reader to see and feel about art as an extraordinary calling. "The whole function of the artist in the world is to be a seeing and feeling creature," he says. Since Ruskin has set up the intimacy of talking to the reader, the reader wonders where he stands in the reckoning and knows himself a lazy looker and as blindfold a seer as Charlotte Brontë, and decides to change that. Ruskin's ideas on writing and reading evolve over the pages of a chapter of *Modern Painters*, tucked in here and there as they occur to him, then another piece later in another chapter or another volume, or a different book altogether, as he drops concepts like bread crumbs, or pieces of gold. He compares the act of reading to mining for

gold. He speaks of the meaning of truth: "There is a moral as well as a material truth—a truth of impression and thought as well as of matter; and the truth of impression is a thousand times the more important of the two." If you suspect he's leaving a trail for you to follow, like the reader he imagines you to be, you will have to provide your own map, dig into his meaning, dive into the deliberate gaps that lie in wait for your imagination to resolve for you the mystery of the writing journey. You will also learn that the lonely pastime of writing is not a one-person enterprise. It is a collaboration of two working minds— the person of the writer and the person of the reader —over a text that is created by the writer and passed into the reader's hands for its full realization as a work of art. Literature is an inseparable imaginitive venture of writer-text-reader[141] This concept of reading is by no means new. In the eighteenth century Laurence Sterne was already theorizing the writer/reader dyad: "The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this manner amicably, and leave him something to imagine in his turn. . . thus author and reader are to share the game of the imagination . . . the reader's enjoyment begins when he himself becomes productive, i.e. when the text allows him to bring his own faculties into play."[142]

As he writes, Ruskin constantly demonstrates how the writer can learn to see, to feel, to think in images and turn them into visual language. In wandering into the cascading sentences the reader gulps for air in the "visual overwhelm" that Herder worried about, though he was talking about the landscape, not words on a page. Then, the neurons in the curious brain kick in, and the imagery slows down as your imagination breathes freely in the

[141] Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1953), says "in every given period, the theory of the mind and the theory of art tend to be integrally related and to turn upon similar analogies, explicit or submerged" (69)

[142] Sterne. *Tristam Shandy*.

process of feeling the pictures in your mind and then seeing them. Here's a familiar word painting of Ruskin's, one of the first he wrote in the visual writing learning curve in *Modern Painters* in which he takes the reader through the glories of one of nature's "coloring fits." [143]

> The noonday sun came slanting down the rocky slopes of La Riccia, and their masses of entangled and tall foliage, whose autumnal tints were mixed with the wet verdure of a thousand evergreens, were penetrated with it as if with rain. I cannot call it color, it was conflagration. Purple, and crimson, and scarlet, like the curtains of God's tabernacle, the rejoicing trees sank into the valley in showers of light, every separate leaf quivering with bouyant and burning life; each, as it turned to reflect or to transmit the sunbeam, first a torch and then an emerald. Far up into the recesses of the valley, the green vistas arched like the hallows of mighty waves of some cristalline sea, with the arbutus flowers dashed along their banks for foam, and silver flakes of orange spray tossed into the air around them, breaking over the grey walls of rock into a thousand separate stars, fading and kindling alternately as the weak wind lifted and let them fall. Every blade of grass burned like the golden floor of heaven, opening in sudden gleams as the foliage broke and closed above it, as sheet-lightning opens in a cloud at sunset; the motionless masses of dark rock—dark though flushed with scarlet lichen, casting their quiet shadows across its restless radiance, the fountain underneath them filling its marble hollow with blue mist and fitful sound; and over all, the multitudinous bars of amber and rose, the sacred clouds that have no darkness, and only exist to illumine, were seen in fathomless intervals between the solemn orbed repose of the stone pines, passing to lose themselves in the last, white blinding lustre of the measureless line where the Campagna melted into the blaze of the sea.[144]

[143] Ruskin. CW. MP. Vol. 1. Part ll, Sect ll, Ch. ii.

[144] Ibid.

Ruskin's writing imagery tool-kit holds all the basic tricks and tropes for descriptive work, as well as workaday words that punch above their weight because of their unexpected use. Every line says "imagine this," think about this contrast, see it. Just as stopping to breathe is used as a dramatic break in poetry, an idea that stops you in your tracks, makes you stop to wonder. The metaphors are luxuriously considered and the mixed metaphors, too. Verbs with horse-power stutter thoughts between languid adjectives and the intended verbal action of driving the phrases on to keep up with the reader's dashing thoughts. The alliteration pleases the silent tongue and the sounds in the senses. And, the unifying satisfaction of light images tightly wraps a wild visual dance to a safe place in the delighted mind.

Here's how the Ruskin student might see the master's flashcards.

We meet the writer in the "Noonday sun," at its highest, brightest, fiercest, in the sky, so fierce that it "came" active mimicking the "slanting" angle of the "rocky slopes" of La Riccia. The sun is sharp, hot; the mountains are sharp because of their height, and "rocky," strewn with boulders, which means the earth has moved here.

Switching in contrast from sun, bright, and rocks, hard, to soft foliage, we encounter a gentler image of, wait! — "Masses of entangled foliage": sheer abundance, a profusion of intertwined ensnarled and tall foliage, different species, entangled together, contrasting the senuous intertwining with the tall, strong, straight, dominant "evergreens." Now we understand it's autumn, so we reinvisage the gleam of "autumnal sun" higher in the sky, more golden tints and hues, mixed with the "wet verdure," glaucous gleaming, wavy verdure, luxurious green vegetation, plant-covered, of a host a "thousand evergreens" orange, yellow red . . . lush shiny heavy thousands, penetrated active, fierce, as if penetrated by rain. The effect of the sun is "as if" rain. Sun and rain, although there is no rain.

"I can not call it color," he writes. What? Stop! Go back and soak up the color. What am I missing? He has just hinted at autumnal tints, evergreens. It's not enough. It was a conflagration. We imagine a sheet of flame. The mountainsides are on fire.

Now he finds the flames of color in the fire. Purple, and crimson, and scarlet, mauve, plum, like the curtains of God's tabernacle, the dwelling place of God, sacred, majestic, brilliant, radiant, resplendent. The simile stuns the senses. The curtains both contain and reveal God's kingdom in the Cathedral of the mountain. The rejoicing trees sank into the valley in showers of light. The trees are worshippers rejoicing, their branches waving into the sky and then bowing in prayer-like devotion down into the valley in showers of light, the moving of the conflagration the firey coloring creates imagery of showers sprinkling not rain, to quench a fire, but the sparkling offspring of a fire. The mind captures Dante entering heaven, awaiting the light infused image of his beloved Beatrice.

"Every separate leaf quivering," a vibrating, convulsion, "with bouyant and burning life." Quivering and bouyant? It's contradictory, and fascinating to imagine the opposites existing in the same little leaf, but every separate leaf quivering, unimaginable in its universal enormity, makes an imaginer quiver all over, too. The following image of "each leaf as it turned to reflect or to transmit the sunbeam, first a torch and then an emerald," also reflects Ruskin's moral mission: The leaves, all small parts of the great edifice of the nation, being the torchbearers of light, the receivers and givers of the great gift. Or, without this allusion, each leaf moving as it quivered, the sunbeam—a minature part of the sun as the leaf is to the tree, reflecting, sending back, as a mirror, reproducing, returning back out to the world or acting as a conduit, carrying the sunbeam to another leaf. Far up into the recesses of the valley, "the green vistas arched like the hallows of mighty waves of some cristalline sea,"

green arched horizons, like the "hallows of waves," a wave formation that we can imagine as the sanctified recesses of a revered holy place, those surging waves sparkle like diamonds. There's even more to add to this fairytale, picture book scene:The sweet smelling "arbutus" lying along the banks of trees becomes Ruskin's, and the readers', foam dashed into the air around the flowers, breaking over the grey walls of rock into a thousand separate stars. The solid fragments of liquid against the grey rocks, have become the sky. Again, we are drawn to celestial imaginings.

> Every blade of grass burned like the golden floor of heaven, opening in sudden gleams as the foliage broke and closed above it, as sheet-lightning electrifying, like a thunderbolt of Jove, opens in a cloud at sunset.

This is what Elaine Scarry would describe as beauty's "unselfing" moment. It is a transcendental experience for Ruskin. As he writes, he is reliving the ecstasy of one of the magnificent sunsets that marks nature's greatest gifts. This scene is a clash of symbols for the eye. It has taken the writer all afternoon to "read" the landscape, now as he finishes word-painting it, darkness is falling over the mountain and words lull us into a dreamscape . . .

> [A]nd over all, the multitudinous bars of amber and rose, the sacred clouds that have no darkness, and only exist to illumine, were seen in fathomless intervals between the solemn orbed repose of the stone pines, passing to lose themselves in the last, white blinding lustre of the measureless line where the Campagna melted into the blaze of the sea.[145]

The only ways to count Ruskin's perceptions of nature are multitudinous, fathomless and measureless. The last image he leaves is of illumined amber and rose striated clouds, passing

[145] Ruskin. MP, Vol. 1, Part ll, Chapter ll.

across the sky as the outline of the land melts into the sun-blazed sea. The eyes and the heart melts with the image of the land.

For John Ruskin to have pounced on the royalty of the English art world, a no-one out of nowhere, to tell them how to paint up to his elevated standards was a stunning event. That his youthful genius was acknowledged by some of the nation's great intellectuals; that he finished the five-volume work of *Modern Painters* to considerable acclaim, that surely could have accounted for a lifetime's achievement. He went on to write 40 books and many hundreds of articles on practically every subject known to man. By way of definition, John Ruskin has been described as the nineteenth-century's greatest cultural critic, one of his era's greatest writers, a fine artist[146] and a poet.[147] A few of his other notable accomplishments are in botany, ornithology, geology, meterology and philology "and in all these studies, not far short of the foremost of his day."[148] A.H.R. Ball, editor of *Ruskin as Literary Critic*, expresses surprise at the "neglect [of Ruskin's contributions]. . . of so much of permanent literary value" —citing Ruskin's survey of landscape in literature, study of the grotesque, the theory of the Pathetic Fallacy, analyses of writers' style, and treatises on aesthetics—that "provide a general background of culture not accessible elsewhere in so small a compass." Harold Bloom compares Ruskin's achievement as a literary critic to that of William Yeats and Northrop Frye: "There are three major areas of Ruskin's achievement," he writes, "art, social and literary criticism." Ruskin, he declares, was a great

[146] Gary Wills in NYRB, April, 2014 says Ruskin is "Probably the 19th-century's greatest water colorist.

[147] Newdigate Prize for Poetry at Oxford. Arthur Hugh Clough was second.

[and mostly unacknowledged] literary critic, one of the major critics of 19th-century England, whose "importance has been obscured by misapprehensions of him as a "moral critic." [149]

My interest is in another unmentioned Ruskin literary legacy —overlooked, yes, but hardly surprising because Ruskin himself obscured it in the margins of his consuming focus on perception and painting: it lies in the gauzy shadows of his lifelong campaign to teach artists to see. Its effect on painters was monumental and has been analyzed in hundreds of books and papers. What has not been studied, and what this dissertation addresses, are how his theories of language and writing evolved as the unintended consequence of his desire to defend Turner's unappreciated genius. His goal was to put the eye of art on a pedestal above the word of literature. As Ruskin's restless intelligence tackled the issues of how to tell the story of Turner's poetic vision of art, he stumbled into the protracted intellectual problem of the ebbing efficacy of his language. Language the living, and always renewing spirit of a nation's culture, had ceased to move with the times. He used his work on Turner's visual genius to write a treatise on the visuality of the human brain in cognition, imagination and memory. He saw that visuality was also the solution to the expressive failure of language.[150] His creation of a language of the eyes, paired with impressionistic word patterns, and his emphasis on the societal benefits from the experience of beauty through perception spoke to the lost values of the age. It also influenced writers to write with fresh insights using their senses of sight and feeling.

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[149] Bloom. Intro.xvi-xviii.

[150] Hough makes a claim in 1983 that Ruskin's "revolutionary" influence on visual perception, the mind and imagination had incited an intellectual revolution. It is interesting to find in 1995 a fascinating collection of sixteen essays in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination* in which there are eleven references to Ruskin, none of which mentions the century's most famous critic's preeminent role in elevating vision and literature to cultural importance.

Through the power of sight, Ruskin envisoned a language that entered the reader's body. Evidence of Ruskin's influence is seen in an unusual flourishing of interest in beauty in the literature in this period —1845-1890— in which narratives of nature, character, minds, and ideas are founded in perceptions of beauty, broadly understood as a sensuous aesthetic experience. The aesthetic of beauty is matched by an evocative technique of writing that creates an emotional reality for the reader. Novelists struggled, as did Ruskin, to find expression for the new age of the embodied mind. His insight that language was exhausted and that verbal representation through images could revive it, burst open a vein of creative experimentation in British and American novelists. The genesis of Ruskin's achievement, I claim, is his focus in the early volumes of *Modern Painters* in which he evolves and demonstrates theories of writing and reading and a visually imagined linguistic technique to discuss art through visual sensibility. In consequence, he showed how to convey the feeling of beauty from the text to the reader. In the chapters that follow I explore the different applications of the influence of Ruskin's theories of perception, writing and beauty in the work of two of the century's greatest novelists— Hawthorne and Eliot. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* are particularly fascinating, because together they capture the inclusiveness of Ruskin's focus on perception and beauty—the external and internal—the beauty we can see and the beauty that is hidden.

III. The Devil and Hester Prynne: The Grace of Beauty over Sin and Shame

> The greatest art includes much that small art excludes; humor, pain and evil. Much that is repulsive when alone becomes beautiful in its relation. To find the ennobling relation is the task of life and art.
>
> Oscar W. Firkins[151]

There are two contrary views of Nathaniel Hawthorne's artistic daemon, which does not, of course, mean that either one is completely wrong. One is that he is compulsively drawn to life's dark side. The other is that he has a sunny and tender sensibility. These two characterizations of Hawthorne's disposition coalesce around the discussion of the creative force driving the novel he began writing in 1849 in his loft-study in Salem, Massachusetts. He was at work on *The Scarlet Letter,* the grim seventeenth-century Puritan morality tale of the adulterous love of Hester Prynne and the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale.

Although the trauma of the Salem witch trials has long passed, the psychic weight of ingrained belief in original sin lies heavily on Nathaniel Hawthorne's mind. For him, the Puritan past seems ever-present in its lurking sense of sin and shame; this springs from the legacy of devout Puritan ancestors. His great-great-great grandfather, William Hathorne, a Massachusetts Bay Colony magistrate and judge, was notorious for his harsh sentencing, and Magistrate Hathorne's son, John, was one of the judges presiding over the Salem witch trials.[152] Because of his lineage he, too, is personally infected with this shadowy ghost of

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[151] Firkins (1934) 266. Essayist, playwright and critic, Oscar Wilde.Firkins (1864-1932) was professor of comparative literature at the University of Minnesota. The epigraph comes from his notebooks on a year-long course on literary criticism.

[152] The family name was later changed from Hathorne to Hawthorne perhaps, says Dan MaCall in *Citizens of Nowhere Else*, to distance the family from their notorious ancestors.

puritanical guilt that floats creepily over the purest soul. Fascinated by the roots of human behavior, Hawthorne bears witness to the deeply-inculcated text of the Fall of Man passed along in the evolutionary cultural chain. He fights its assumptions, but as a writer its darkness calls to him. "I wish that God had given me the faculty of writing a sunshiny book,"[153] he says, implying that writing about what most galvanized his imagination —a story of sin, pain and sorrow steeped in unbearable darkness— was his God-given literary fate. Although he thinks of himself as tender-hearted and compassionate, he admits that he was obsessed with the Calvinist-inspired "horror of what was created in my own brain."[154]

As he reflects on the secrets locked in the human mind, Hawthorne is philosophically at odds with the prevailing literary mood of transcendental lightness. While his neighbor Ralph Waldo Emerson exalts in "ecstasy" of life, Hawthorne gainsays the transcendentalism's optimistic belief "in the perpetual openness of the human mind to a new influx of light and power."[155] Where Emerson imagines open minds and light, Hawthorne experiences disturbing echoes of yesteryear when evil was in the air, and adultery was punishable by death.[156] And so, for the nineteenth-century's historical consciousness he is writing a seventeenth-century tragedy exploring the aftermath of punitive overreaching in the adulterous love of a beautiful young married woman whose elderly husband is missing— perhaps lost at sea— and her bachelor pastor. It is not a happy tale. As William James has

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[153] Qtd in McCall (1999) 43.

[154] Ibid.

155 Emerson (1842). Ed.Jone Johnson Lewis © 1996-2001 http://www.emersoncentral.com/transcendentalist.htm. 09/03/2009 18:36:29

The Price of Adultery in Puritan Massachusetts, 1641. www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2005).

said, "no story of love was surely ever less of a love story."[157] This tale's lack of romance is because Hawthorne's concerns lie elsewhere, not in the tenderness of their love and the commitment of their passion.

There is no reason that Hawthorne would romanticize adultery in nineteenth-century culture. His artistic quest is to pursue the human toll of guilt and shame. He begins in *medias res*, to examine the consequences of the sin, its corrosive toll of shame and retribution inspired by John Calvin's soul-damning legacy of "natural depravity." Calvin, the sixteenth-century Swiss theologian, founder of what became the Presbyterian Church and whose religious philosophy was law in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, had a malignant view of the inner life of all human beings. In *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*— Calvin's 1536 blueprint for orthodox Protestanism—his description of man's natural born "venom[ness],"and "rottenness," the consequence of Adam and Eve's expulsion from The Garden of Eden, is chilling. "Depravity is man's natural state," even goodness is sinful, he writes:

> [T]he mind of man is so entirely alienated from the righteousness of God that he cannot conceive, desire, or design anything but what is wicked, distorted, foul, impure, and iniquitous; and his heart is so thoroughly envenomed by sin that it can breathe out nothing but corruption and rottenness [158]

To his followers— with the notable exception of Michael Servetus, a Spanish physician and theologian, who was burned at the stake in 1553 because he disagreed with Calvin about the meaning of the Trinity—his theological ideology is unquestioned and

[157] James (1879) *Hawthorne*, Ch.V.

[158] John Calvin (1536) Book Second: Chapter 3 Everything Proceeding from the Corrupt Nature of Man Damnable. Trans: Henry Beveridge. MA: Peabody, 2011. Print.

unquestionable[159]. Calvin's thesaurus-like facility to connote evil is boundless, as this in *The Institutes* demonstrates. "Wicked," "distorted," "foul,"" impure," "depraved," "iniquitous," "envenomed," "corruption," "rottenness," "deceit,"and more "wickedness" spills from his mouth, recited from his copious writings of man's licenciousness from birth. Because of their natural depravity, Calvin declaims, human beings "are the authors of their own destruction." Thus, if the adulteress Hester Prynne's psyche should be destroyed by the cruelty of the magistrates' edicts, and if her child, Pearl, the product of the adultery, should suffer as a result— so be it: the magistrates, the ministers and the Meeting House congregants are indemnified by religious edict. Their cruelty is not spawned by an evil nature, but by concern for her soul. After all, as Calvin says, she has written her fate—her alienation from God—by her own willful sexual desires on her wicked body.

This sin-soaked environment is the narrative that engulfs Hawthorne's story of Hester Prynne. He worries obsessively about the darkness of the tale he "must" tell, particularly of the painful aftermath of the anguish of guilt, shame and social ostracism. Yet, as "author of her fate," the adultress accepts the doctrine and her punishment. If Hester Prynne and her accusers—one matron who screams for the penalty of death, another for "the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead"—embrace Calvin's holy screed of their "foul, impure and iniquitous" selves—then perhaps Hawthorne's fear that his novel would make intolerable reading, is not unreasonable. For him, the seventeenth-century world of *The Scarlet Letter* is unhappily devoid of compassion,. and given the transcendentalist writers' expansive "sunshiny" perspective of the human condition, this puts him at odds with the literary zeitgist. HIs fear of the novel's failure and penury for his family sits on his shoulder, but

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[159] For background on Servetus see Gonzalez Echeverria, Francisco Javier. (2011) *The Love of Truth: The Life and Work of Michael Servetus*. http:// www.michaelservetusresearch.com/English/profile/html

stubbornly, he stares down the gloom and writes on. Even the wild enthusiasm of his publisher, James T. Fields, for the "germ" of the novel confounded him. In *Yesterdays with Authors*, Field reminisces about his delighted reaction to the early draft:

> On my way back to Boston I read the germ of *The Scarlet Letter*; before I slept that night I wrote him a note all aglow with admiration for the marvellous story he had put into my hands. . . I went on in such an amazing state of excitement, when we met again . . . he seemed to think I was beside myself, and laughed sadly at my enthusiam.[160]

Hawthorne whose anxiety is not assuaged by Field's reassurance responds that the darkness of his book will " weary" many and "disgust" others:

> I found it impossible to relieve the shadows of the story with so much light as I would gladly have thrown in. Keeping so close to its point as the tale does, and diversified no otherwise than by turning different sides of the same dark idea to the reader's eye, it will weary very many people and disgust some.[161]

Nontheless, he is as compelled to explore the puritanical fervor of the seventeenth-century congregants, just as his own forefathers' were compelled to wage war on the omnipresent devil and witches.[162] The abhorrence of sexual sin drove the seventeenth-century Puritans to dispose of adulterers by inflicting the death sentence.[163] In Hawthorne's telling of Hester Prynne's case, since her husband sent her alone to the New World two years before and

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[160] Fields. (1871) ch. 5.

[161] Ibid.

[162] See n.2 on Judge Hathorne and his son, John

[163] Hawthorne (1850). Austin Warren's introduction, vii. 1947 edition. NY: Rinehard, 13th edition. 1947.; Governor Winthrop in a 1644 Journal chronicles the death of Mary Latham, 18, wife of "an ancient man" who committed adultery with "divers young men."

nothing has been heard of him since, her punishment is ostracism—banishment from the tightly-knit community.

At her public trial before a rubbernecking crowd, among them people once her friends and acquaintances, she suffers pitiless condemnation, public shame and psychological torment. She is stripped of every thread of privacy and dignity at the revelation of her moral and sexual sin. The brutal institutionalized expulsion from society will deny her access to fundamental human needs, the life-giving human connections of identity and belonging, and so doubly alienate her—externally and internally—from her sense of self, and this fractured self from the arms of the community. No end of Hester Prynne's torment is in prospect. A victim of her youth and her desire, she is condemned as a marker of evil, and is cast out to carry the adultress's sexual stain, the Letter "A" on her breast for the rest of her life. She is to be cast out. The physical violence implicit in the term is doubly met in the devastating consequences of ostracism—being cut out, like a cancer, from the social body. In Hester's case, she is not *like* a cancer. Her sexual sin is a moral cancer. She is to be erased so that her sin will not be spread. Hers is a sentence of virtual social death. The psychic pain of ostracism is tormenting.We now know from scientific research that it is also "excruciating" in a physical sense. [164] Recent neurological studies show that social exclusion triggers the same neural network activated by physical pain. It also causes changes in the thalamus and the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, areas in the cortex that are key triggers for serious painful neurological and physiological disruptions in the body, even if the period of exclusion from society is limited. [165]

[164] K.D. Williams, S.A. Nida. "Ostracism: Consequences and Coping." Currrent Directions In Psychological Science, 2011; 20 (71) See also Louise C. Hawkley, Kiplinger D.Williams and John T. Cacioppo in Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, Vol. 6, issue 2, 2011.234-243.

Hawthorne imagines Hester Prynne's innermost thoughts in this bereft state, capturing her feeling as if being from another world, unacknowledged, wraith-like, as a shade from the underworld, a "repugnant" presence to her former friends and neighbors.

> Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, and often expressed, that she was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere, or communicated with the common nature by other organs and senses than the rest of human kind. She stood apart from moral interests, yet close beside them, like a ghost that revisits the family fireside, and can no longer make itself seen or felt; no more smile with the household joy, nor mourn with the kindred sorrow; or, should it succeed in manifesting its forbidden sympathy, awakening only terror and horrible repugnace (78-79).

To think of oneself as a ghost, the fearsome specteral presence of death, a bodyless, voiceless, social phantom, without physical or sensual substance, standing at the hearth, frozen out of society and longing for its recognition, is the explicitly planned torture of ostracism. To redouble the horror, her existence is a double-counscious hell: she is seen and not seen; she is present and not present; she is alive, and dead; she is of mankind, but from another sphere. Her taut body, frozen in shock, stretches out to connect to the comforting familiarity of the old belonging, longing for a silent token of a shared humanity, an acknowledgment that she still exists, that she shares in her friends' pleasures and sorrows, that someone cares for her. All, in vain. She is an object of disgust and "regugnance."

The obliteration of the glorious expression of God's creation of "beauty" and "elegance," that Hawthorne sees as Hester Prynne walks to the scaffold, to her dehumanization as the cipher of adultery, is imagined with uncanny insight into female psychology in a state of numbed trauma. He reveals her anguished mind, bravely disguised

from the public by her stoicism. Haughtily dignified to her hostile accusers, to the narrator who inhabits her mind, she is a lost and wounded creature, struggling to hold together her fragmented spirit, though she dreads that she might collapse or succomb to madness.

> The unhappy culprit sustained herself as best as a woman might, under the weight of a thousand unrelenting eyes, all fastened upon her, and concentrated at her bosom. Of an impulsive and passionate nature, she had fortified herself to endure the stings and venomous stabs of public contumel, wreaking itself in every variety of insult. . . But under the leaden infliction which was her doom to endure, she felt . . . she must shriek out with the full power of her lungs, until she might sink beneath its weight and cast herself from the scaffold down upon the ground, or else go mad at once (53-54).

Hawthorne's descriptive powers are a testament to the depth of his capacity to feel another's pain. We, his readers, reach into our experience, back into memory, to recent history and our own painful past, to reimagine this horror of screaming, prostrating ourselves, or going "mad at once." We try to absorb the real possibility of meaning by the brain's mental imagery of our own humiliating event, not comparable to Hester's but evocative of its pain, until we feel our body's intimate response. When we think about shame, the brain does not respond by spelling out the letters s-h-a-m-e; it flashes an image. We think in pictures. What we experience afresh in thinking about shame is a less severe version of the physiological conditions of a body in psychic trauma, the toxic mix of the affects of insult and repugnance in the body. [166]

[166] For full background on the debate on mental imagery, see Stephen M.Kosslyn et al (2006) While outlining the neuroscientific data that confirms that depictive representations are used in imagery, Kosslyn writes:Visual processing can be divided into two general types, "sensory" and "perceptual."Sensory visual processing is driven by primarily (if not purely) by sensory input, whereas perceptual processing makes use of stored information. . . . visual imagery evokes many of the same mechanisms used in visual perceptions.

While reading, the brain's neural networks seek out from various parts of the cortex objects, colors, shapes, sounds and emotions and assembles them like jigsaw puzzle pieces into a images we interpret as "seeing." More accurately, it is a sensual experience, a fuzzy film assembled from elements drawn from memory storage, not a replay of the an actual event, but an edited version of our visual and feeling perceptions of that event. For instance, in an attempt to imagine what Hester is going through, one might call up film images of Irish women seen during the "Troubles" their terrified eyes blinded by the stifling black tar covering their bodies, hair lying in severed chunks on the street, the crowds screaming "whore," "whore." The duration of the image is a blip, before it slips into an image seen years later in an exhibition in a Dublin museum of an adultress's mummified body, like one described in Seamus Heaney's Bog Poems— a girl pulled from an Irish bog where she'd been thrown in the long past. And those lines are heard, the images appear, and the body acknowledges the shock with tears:

> Her shaved head/like a stubble of black corn. . .
> Her noose a ring/to store/ the memories of love/
> Little adulteress/before they punished you/
> you were flaxen-haired/undernourished,
> and your tar-black face was beautiful.[167]

This is the everyday contribution of the mind's magic lantern we take with us to "see" literature and feel the life of a novel's character who has donned the flesh, bones, and mind of an artist's imagination.

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[167] Seamus Heaney. Bog Poems, Punishment (1975) Notes in the volume explain that "the naked, shaved and blindfolded girl is the so-called Windeby girl, who was found in 1952 in northern Germany – so-called, because subsequent DNA analysis has confirmed that she was in fact a young man; But whatever its true identity, Heaney saw in this body an image of the Catholic girls who were shaved tarred and feathered by Irish women as punishment for consorting with British soldiers, accounts of which were published by the Irish press in 1971. Most likely drowned, this body too was held down with birch branches and a large stone."

Out of this empathy, this shared knowledge of another's interior experience, the mirror neurons[168] built into the human organism's survival kit by evolution's wily unfolding, comes this question: Is there anywhere a shred of compassion for Hester Prynne plight? George Bailey Loring who in 1850 reviewed *The Scarlet Letter* in the Massachusetts Quarterly Review, answers that question. "It would be hard to conceive of a greater outrage upon the freezing and self-denying doctrines of that day, than the sin for which Hester Prynne was damned by society, and for which Arthur Dimmesdale condemned himself." Loring, a young surgeon, continues:

> There was no recognition of the intention or of the meaning of the sensuous element of human nature which, gilding life like a burnishing sunset, lays the foundation of all that beauty which seeks its expression in poetry and music and art . . . .He scorned his own flesh and blood.. . he had no sympathy, no tenderness, for any sinner, more especially for that hardened sinner who had failed to trample all his senses beneath his feet.[169]

Elsewhere Hawthorne has described the absence of compassion and empathy for others as a sign of malevolence. He says: "There are few uglier traits in human nature—which I now witness in men no worse than their selves." Of Hester Prynne's accusers, he adjudicates: "[O]ut of the whole human family, it would not have been easy to select the same number of wise and virtuous persons, who should be less capable of sitting in judgment on an erring woman's heart, and disentangling its mesh of good and evil, than the sages of rigid aspect towards Hester Prynne now turned her face" (60).

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[169] George Bailey Loring. The Massachusetts Quarterly Review, 1850.

Hawthorne's nuanced view of human nature as a mesh of good and evil, is all but lost in a theology of unquestionable depravity. For sin, in the all-encompassing meaning of the category in the Puritan world, is a rejection of God.[170] Given that it is impossible to be alive, to think one's thoughts, to be in the world, in fact, as Calvin says, even to breathe the air without falling into sinfulness, sin and its consequences are inescapable. Nonetheless, this is the tale that this writer "must" tell, and he will not tell it by digging vicariously into the voluptuous passions of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale. For him, these details are not the crux of this novel, neither are they necessary to illuminate his ends. They are a vulgar distraction.[171] The seeds of imagination are well-enough nurtured by the letter "A" embroidered on the breast of the sinner's gown—a lifetime symbol of a private act of fobidden desire that has been made public, or as Hawthorne says, "a secret thing in public."[172] In an unintended perversion of the attempt to stamp out societal-threatening adultery, the advertising of the sin on Hester's breast makes not just adultery, but the sexual act itself, an insistently provocative focus of attention and lurid imagination. Its symbol, the otherwise inoffensive "A," the first letter of the child's alphabet, now transfuses the community as a symbol of erotica. One letter, the first seen and heard in many hundreds of words, now communicates the beginning of a purient narrative in a sin-flashing shorthand. When the adultress's breast is branded, she becomes the brand; her brand is adultery. She becomes the walking, tantalizing embodiment of the act. It is neither Hawthorne's desire nor intent to take his reader on the titallating arc of the act of this forbidden love story; nor is it to

[170] Calvin, 15

[171] James (1879)

[172] Dan McCall writes that "The Puritan community has designed the letter to erase the sinner, to obliterate her individuality." Hester stands as an emblem of sin. "In his notebook Hawthorne had written in capital letters: 'A Secret Thing in Public.' It is a perfect description of The Scarlet Letter." 49.

explicitly condemn the lovers or to expose the Puritan past to his modern judgement. It is to expose the soul-corrosive humilation, the loss of human dignity and the accumulating toll of the wanton destruction of the sinner's ethical connection to the life of the community.

This final scene of three-grueling hours at the scaffold is emotionally brutal. What depths of religious self-righteousness, of disgust, of the fear of uncontrolled sexual desire on the close-knit community, is fueling the onslaught? Where is the pity for her pain, the forgiveness that Christ preached in the parable of the woman taken in adultery, that Hawthorne alludes to.?[173] It is a condition of humanity writes Adam Smith in 1759 in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that we feel pity or compassion for the misery of others. Smith explains the human doctrine of sympathy, the impulses that move a just and ethically correct society: When we see a fellow man suffering, he explains:

> By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person as him, and hence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something, which though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (4)

Smith is describing two recently discovered brain functions what we know now as theory of mind— the mind's ability to imagine the content of another's mind; and mirror neurons— a evoluntionary brain development in which our body mimics the emotions we see, imagine, or sense in others so that we share their experience and emphathize with them. This increases our ability to bond with others and create supportive societies.

[173] King James Bible. John 8:6 "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone," Jesus said to the mob ready to stone the woman taken in adultery**.** And seeing no one come forward. Jesus, forgave he saying: "Go, and sin no more."

Under the onslaught of shaming at the scaffold, exhausted after hours of standing holding her distressed child in her aching arms, Hester's consciousness is fragmented, but she refuses to offer up her shredded being to their condemning eyes. There is no suggestion of public redemption, except in demands to know the name of the father, which Hester Prynne refuses to reveal; no defence to be heard, no compassion proferred, no opportunity for forgiveness offered except as a final bribe, but only a conditional one, if she were to expose her lover. Absent from this world is the ideal of "virtue and happiness" that were the hopes and dreams of the religious liberation that drove the Puritans from England's tyranny. The tyranny of the powerful over the weak is now being played out in the Boston marketplace under the scaffold where Hester Prynne

> had borne that morning all that nature could endure; and as her temperament was not of the order that escapes from too intense suffering with a swoon, her spirit could only shelter itself beneath a stony crust of insensibility, while the animal faculties of animal life remained entire (65).

Hawthorne's says that Hester had been subjected to "all that nature could endure;" he did not say what "*her* nature could endure." He means that against all possible values, this is intolerable, to the extent that she is now "insensible" that she has been reduced to the condition of "animal," a primitive organism without mind or sensibility. Eric Kandel calls this imaginative act "entering the private theater of another's mind."[174] Hawthorne is trying to enter her "stony crust of insensibility," (65) the massive wall she has built between the market-place and her mind and senses, to protect the primitive operations that sustain life. He looks at her as she stands on the scaffold the platform of the pillory, alone, an object of derision for a self-righteous crowd, abandonned by her guilt-wracked, faint-hearted lover,

[174] Kandel (2012) , 394.

Reverend Dimmesdale, and her squalling baby, Pearl, hugged tightly to her bosom, enduring hours of listening to the fervid recitals "touching the vileness and blackness of [her] sin(61)." Close to insensibility, she refuses, as her secret lover tells the crowd, to "lay open her heart's secrets in such broad daylight and in the presence of so great a multitude" (61). The crowd now includes in its outskirts a stranger in the care of an Indian, a man who calls himself Roger Chillingworth and is known only to Hester Prynne as her husband. Pushing back against pressure, she has refused to divulge the name of the father of her child, who stands with other clergy on a balcony overlooking her.

Hawthorne captures the embodied nature of the pulsing cycle of emotions as a dynamic flood of affect. He feels it pouring out through the crowd, through the bodies of the stern-faced Bostonians. The hostile assault invades Hester Prynne's wounded being, and since the body of a mother and her nursing child are as one, its vehemence pulsing through the mother's body into the child swamping the tiny child's fragile organs. Hawthorne writes that the infant

> drawing its sustenance from the maternal bosom, seemed to have drank in with it all the turmoil, the anguish and despair, which pervaded the mother's system. It now writhed in convulsions of pain, and was a forcible type in its little frame, of the moral agony which Hester Prynne had borne throughout the day (66).

What Hawthorne describes is a well-known ninetenth-century psycho-physiological phenomenon resurrected a decade ago by the late Teresa Brennan in her study, *The Tranmission of Affect*. Brennan describes this as "a process wher. What Hawthorne imagines is Hester's psychic pain penetrating the body of her child. Hester's "moral agony" as a physical trauma violently reverberating in her child's "pain[ful] convulsions"(60). Already

the child's body is wrapped in *The Scarlet Letter's* mantle of sin. Its trauma has entered her life. This is only the beginning of the the relentless sorrow passed from one generation to the innocent offspring that Nathaniel Hawthorne fears he can not overcome.

> It is odd that my own individual taste is for quite another class of novels than those I myself am able to write. If I were to meet such books as mine by another writer, I don't believe I should be able to get through them.
>
> Nathaniel Hawthorne [175]

Emotionally swamped by hopelessness about the readability of *The Scarlet Letter* and with his typically hyper-critical assessments of his own work, Nathaniel Hawthorne fed his critics—and admirers— the dark and somber ephithets that characterized his work during his lifetime and still to this day. "It is odd," he admits, that he is only able to write books he probably wouldn't want to read. Henry Wardsworth Longfellow confessed that his friend's books were not wholly congenial to him "because of the old dull pain that runs through them all." Hawthorne's diffidence about his work— despite his admired qualities as a writer, notably his psychological insights into the complicated humanity of his characters—might explain why he disparages his own work in the same sentence as he expresses in brilliantly powerful tropes his enthusiasm for Anthony Trollope's work. Trollope's books, he remarks, are "written on the strength of beef and through the inspiration of ale, just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth." In a painful self-wounding admission, he says. "If I were to meet such books as mine by another writer, I don't believe I should be able to get through them."[176] Trollope was frequently depressed beyond measure by Hawthorne's

[175] Anthony Trollope (1879) The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne. North American Review. CCLXX1X. 203-22. www.eldritchpress.org/nh/nhtroll.htlm

[176] Ibid. Trollope. n.27

"weird" tales, and yet, in the act of reading them, he had become "conscious of a certain grandeur of nature in being susceptible of such suffering." Almost three decades later in 1879, by which time *The Scarlet Letter* was widely considered an artistic triumph —the first publishing run of ten thousand copies sold out immediately—the young ex-patriot Henry James, wrote: "[*The Scarlet Letter*] is densely dark, with a single spot of vivid color in it ; and it will probably long remain the most consistently gloomy of English novels of the first order."[177] The novel's single spot of vivid color, we must assume, is James's ironic reference to the novel's symbol of adultery —Hester Prynne's defiantly and gloriously embroidered scarlet and gold letter "A."

The critic F.O. Matthiessen also believed that Hawthorne was haunted by a dark sensibility. "The traits that dominate all [Hawthorne's] work," he writes in *American Renaissance* (1941) "are Sorrow, Hope, Disappointment, iron Fatality and Shame." Those bleak mental states, according to Matthiessen, were the self-same images that floated through the imaginative semi-conscious dream-life that Hawthorne described in his six-page sketch, "The Haunted Mind." However, rather than dismissing this as a fatal flaw, Matthiessen sees past the darkness in Hawthorne's work to its creative source—an artistic drive that reached towards the emotional depth of the human condition. This pyschological curiosity, after all, made possible the rendering of three of literature's most memorable characters—Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth—not to overlook the fourth character, the jewel-child of adultery, Pearl— even if we agree with James that their characters were not fully developed. [178] "[T]here was a desire [in Hawthorne]," Matthiessen explains, "to

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[177] James (1879)

record whatever he knew of human nature . . . and not to allow himself to be distracted by the transcendentalists' frequent confusions between what life was and what they hoped it to be."[179] It was the breadth of this awareness, after all, that drove Hawthorne to explore the effects of the toll of guilt and shame not only on the lovers, but also the attendant effects of the hypocrisy on those who felt compelled to condemn the sinner in stocks, even those whose own weaknesses breached the prohibitions of their faith in thought and deed, and who in their guilt turned icy and cruel, just as Hawthorne characterized those who condemned Hester Prynne.

It is hardly surprising that in *Main Currents of American Thought*[180] Vernon Louis Parrington wrote that Hawthorne was out of intellectual step with the Romantic and Transcendentalist tendencies of his times. He was—and openly so, as Matthiessen noted. Contrasted with the expansive, optimistic minds of fellow artists Emerson, Thoreau and Fuller, Parrington found Hawthorne's work dark and brooding. His enthusiasm The Hester's psychic pain has penetrated the body of her child. for the transcendentalists' new-found optimism, poured out in a paroxism of displeasure with Hawthorne's gloomier alternative reality in *The Scarlet Letter* calling it "intellectually [impoverished]." Parrington thinks Hawthorne's fixation with the Puritan world-view of his ancestors explains his obsession with the darkness of the human soul. However, as a renowned literary historian in the early 1900s Parrington's disparagement of Hawthorne's artistic contributions, particularly his expertise in exploring the "furtive" recesses of the human mind, as he characterized it, is puzzling. Especially so, since the publication of *The Scarlet Letter* coincided with a period of

[179] Matthiessen (1960), 231

[180] Two volumes of Parrington's trilogy published in 1927, won the Pulitzer Prize for History in 1928.

rapid scientific growth in studies of the mind. With benefit of hindsight, accusing Hawthorne of obsessing on the mysterious unknown mind of man, particularly "the secret impulses of the soul . . . [to lay] bare its dark workings . . . the long introspective brooding over human motives," [181] seems more like a tribute to the intellectual, scientific, artistic and cultural fellowship of minds for which the 19th-century was notable. Of course, Hawthorne's curiosity about "human motives," and his ability to explicate his characters internally-lived lives anticipated the novelistic move by the authors who followed in his footsteps—Henry James, one prominent example-—to move inside the minds of their characters. That Hawthorne does lay bare the "mind's dark workings," making the private public in literature, thus revealing the clues to the processes that precipitated his characters' behaviors, whether progressive or conservative, for evil ends or good, influenced western literary culture, a particular focus of Parrington's research.

It is certainly true that in *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne imagined a painfully dark tale, and with a few notable exceptions, it is also true most critics agreed with the meme of unrelenting Hawthornian darkness and gloom. It is true that *The Scarlet Letter* was, and still is, exceedlingly difficult to read because of the imagery and feelings of sorrow that fill the reader's mind and body. But, more importantly, it is also true that for this reader it is even more difficult to stop reading because of the "exquisite" quality of the writing that deepens the imagination and releases images we want to describe as beautifully-painful. This paradox, the emotionally rich discordant unity that comes from a writer who offers us authentic experiencies of searing darkness and genuine beauty that hybridizes pain and pleasure ennobling both, is Hawthorne's great gift.

[181] Parrington, 445

In *Hawthorne*, written almost thirty years after the publication of Hawthorne's masterpiece, despite his lengthy criticism of the flaws to which he devoted more space than for praise, James used these words—"exquisite" and "beautiful"— as his characterization of Hawthorne's work. "Exquisite," is a word that mines the imagination for synonyms of beauty and perfection. He writes:

> It is beautiful, admirable, extraordinary; it has in the highest degree that merit which I have spoken of as the mark of Hawthorne's best things—an indefinable purity and lightness of conception, a quality which in a work of art affects one in the same way as the absence of grossness does in a human being.. . . The book was the finest piece of imaginative writing yet put forth in the country. . . . Something might at last be sent to Europe as exquisite in a quality as anything that has been received, and the best of it was that the thing was absolutely American; it belonged to the soil, to the air; it came out of the very heart of New England.[182]

Thus, according to Henry James, Hawthorne's book is an "extraordinary" thing defined by its beautiful execution, excelling in artistic perfection of such beauty as to arouse the reader's senses to feelings of pleasure. This James first associates with the elements of earth, American earth, the heavy fundament of "the soil," and the transcendent lightness of New England's "air." He then places the sensation's source at the metaphorical "heart" of New England thus connecting the book's mind-originating beauty to the delicately misplaced organ of the human seat of passion — the heart—while glossing over the mind-generated location of the sexual desire and the beauty at the heart of the Hawthorne's success.

Who, in 1850, noticed the exquisite beauty in Hawthorne's book-length rendering of pain? Who perceived that pain and beauty are not literary terms but descriptions of emotions

[182] James (1879) **x**

and subjective responses, the qualities of a reader's intense neuronally-tiggered and physiologically-experienced reactions to the evocative nature of a text that meets the essential purpose of literature—to demonstrate with the fragility of powerful words what it means to be human? Few critiques have remarked on Hawthorne's concern with beauty despite his exclusive focus on the obsession with beauty in two of his shorter works, "The Birthmark," and "The Artist of the Beautiful. And, if the author himself in his over-attention to the painful did not feel the written beauty that softened and so often ameliorated the pain, the beauty that he wrote to satisfy his longing for tenderness in his art, who did notice that there was more, much more, than darknesses in Hawthorne's writing Not many. But those who did were prescient in their appreciation of what Hawthorne's breakthrough work into the mind had accomplished. His wife, Sophia did, but only after much worrying about the sorrow which made her weep. His publisher James Fields did. As we know, he was "aglow with admiration" and "in an amazing state of excitement" about the "marvellous story."[183] Emily Dickinson did. In her coruscating, knife-sharp way, the poet summed up the narrative style of her fellow writer this way: " Hawthorne appals, entices."[184] The sly comma— instead of "and"—that she uses as syntactical glue between" appals" and "entices" complicates meaning and introduces a poetic combination of opposing feelings bonded as unlikely components in a unified emotional response to Hawthorne's writing. There's not much descriptive air between the poet's "appals and entices," and, after all, entice is a seductive word, a tempting, beguiling, invitation that something desirable, something that speaks to the chemical pleasure network, is close at hand. Dickinson thought so.

[183] See n on page 4 for Fields reaction to *The Scarlet Letter.*

[184]Emily Dickinson in a letter to T.W. Higginson. Qtd in McCall **x**

Herman Melville did. Matthiessen tells us that as Melville—he was writing *Moby Dick,* at the time— became "fixed and fascinated by the haunting blackness in those tales. . . he became fully aware that there can be no authentic style unless it has been created by a meaning, by a close complexity of existence." Melville is talking about the complications of experience, the openness, "the big-hearted" wide-reaching perceptiveness of Hawthorne's connection to a perplexing world. Meaning, the negation of nothingness, comes from essential knowing, that which John Ruskin promised was the gift of true perception. Matthiessen writes that Melville understood that Hawthorne's sketches "with their delicate revelations of human nature could not have been produced by pure technical skill" alone. And as Melville conceived it, 'this power to sympathize with humanity could not exist [without] . . . a great, deep intellect which drops down into the universe like a plummet.' What Melville was feeling his way towards here was to remain his touchstone for major literature. "Both for its creation and its appreciation there must be such a union of thought and emotion as in Hawthorne . . . which sends few thoughts into circulation, except they be arterialized at his large warm lungs and expanded in his honest heart.[185]

Melville also understood the "great power of blackness" in Hawthorne's work and he had no delusions about the human capacity for evil. "In some shape or other," he said, no man "is always and wholly free from the darker "visitations " of that "Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin." The juxtaposition of the symbols of Darkness (evil) and Light (goodness and beauty) illustrates critic Oscar Firkin's idea that in art and life "[m]uch that is repulsive when alone becomes beautiful in its relation." [186] In its relationship with . . . what? That unfinished sentence, floating out there in search of a transformational relationship

[185] Matthiessen, 190.

[186] See epigraph Ch.3, 1

that will "enoble" the repulsive making it beautiful, says Firkins, is the product of the writer's heart and mind— "the range of beauty and art widens as the art grows in heart and mind." [187] The antithetical proposition that something that is in and of itself repulsive to a reader can be transformed in its loathsomeness by being considered in relation to, rather than in contrast with something admirable, is a difficult ethical and aesthetic position to grasp; it offers the mystery of the deep truth in a paradoxical statement. That was beyond the puritanical mindset of *The Scarlet Letter*'s sin-obsessed community when they obliterated Hester Prynne's multifold humanity, the co-existence of virtue and stain, and the reduction of her body to the definitive cipher of sexual degradation.

The achievement of the enobling relationship between the repulsive and its anodyne that Firkins[188] cites as "the task of life and art," is there, everywhere, to be found in the spaces of the *The Scarlet Letter's* sorrow and pain. Hawthorne, if we are to accept his protestations, is too close to the book's darkness, too locked into his role of writer to be free to release his readerly-mind to find signs of his unconscious drive to make us feel beauty. The reader must do it for him. Literature's power, the experience of the sensuous impact of words, John Ruskin says, does not exist without the reader. Thus begins the alliance: a consecutive imaginative interaction between the writer, the text, and the reader that John Ruskin theorized in 1843 is literature's creative partnership, and the reader's virtuous labor. (quote) It begins, with the artist's deeply appreciative connection to man and nature, and a highly–tuned sense of the intricate unfolding of revelation in the practice of visual intelligence. From these sources, the writer's imaginative powers call into existence word

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Firkins(1934) a professor of literature at the University of Minnesota was also a drama critic for the *New York Weekly Review* and the author of studies of Austen, Emerson and Howells.

images that spark a neural visual network response in the reader's visual cortex, for each reader, a different fleeting image sensation from their visual memory bank.

Back in the sorrowful world of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne is so compelled to produce compassion in his reader that he does an extraordinary thing: he steps outside his narration to connect *ex-cathedra* with his audience. Plaintively, he offers a gift of beauty, a rose from an ancient wild bush to ward off the reader's ensuing sorrow. How, one wonders, could someone so sensitive to tender-heartedness somehow so attuned to the wonders of the mind, discount his own writing style and creative techniques as a communication system that delivers the body's drive, and the human need, to give and receive compassion?

> Hawthorne's sketches, with their delicate revelations of human nature . . . argue such a depth of tenderness, such boundless sympathy with all forms of beings, such an omnipresent love, that we needs say that this Hawthorne is here alone in his generation—at least, in the artistic manifestation of these things. [189]
>
> Herman Melville

When Melville says that Hawthorne's writing "argue[s] such a depth of tenderness, such boundless sympathy with all forms of beings, such an omnipresent love . . ." we hear echoes of John Ruskin's voice in *Modern Painters*. Analyzing the qualities of the human spirit that nourish perception, the recognition of beauty, and the sensual joy that accompanies it, Ruskin writes:

> [I]t is necessary to the existence of an idea of beauty, that the sensual pleasure which may be its basis should be accompanied first with joy, then with love of the object, then with the perception of kindness in a superior Intelligence,

[189] Quoted in Matthiessen, 190.

> finally with thankfulness and veneration towards the Intelligence itself, and as no idea can be considered as in any way an idea of beauty until it be made up of these emotions.[190] John Ruskin

Melville is describing a man and his work. Ruskin is describing his theory of beauty and how it is manifested in the heart, senses, mind and soul. At the core of each is an emphasis on the idea of love and its emotional generations: omnipresent love, tenderness, compassion, boundless sympathy for all forms of beings, love of the object and gratitude. Both Ruskin and Hawthorne had moved past the classic philosophies of beauty and its religious origins as a God-given gift. They experience the transcendent feeling in the originating source of the body, in its flesh and blood organs and its networking arteries. Beauty's prime sensually felt-experience of beauty, Ruskin said, was not the result of "the sensual on one hand, nor is it intellectual on the other, but is dependent on a pure, right and open state of the heart. "[191] Melville, on the other hand, in is his viscerally vivid way decided that Hawthorne's "large lungs" were beauty's organ of generation.

> [T] here must be such a union of thought and emotion as in Hawthorne . . . which sends few thoughts into circulation, except they be arterialized at his large warm lungs and expanded in his honest heart. [192]

Melville felt the beauty on Hawthorne's pages, and believed that the written beauty reflected the qualities of the author's mind breathed out through his body on to the page. The idea of the mind's beauty and the tender emotions it produces, pulsing, as Melville says,

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[190] Ruskin CW, vol. 111, 237

[191] Ibid.

[192] Qtd in Matthiessen, 190.

through arteries into 'warm lungs' and 'expanding in his honest heart' is his informed understanding of art as the associated cadence of the brain, mind, and thought as a unified function embodied in the human. [193] "The great beauty in such a mind, " writes Melville, "is but the product of its strength." [194] It is this embrace of the idea of beauty as an emanation of a contagious love for man and nature theorized by Ruskin and attested to by Melville, that gives the potency to the reader's raw emotional responses to Hawthorne's art.

Obviously, the experience of beauty in Hawthorne's work, can hardly be credited solely to the quality of Hawthorne's compassion for his fellow man. When Ruskin said that the idea of beauty was dependent on "a pure, right and open state of the heart," he was theorizing specifically on the unfettered cognitive, physiological and emotional processes involved in a biological experience of pleasure in the presence of beauty. However, when discussing the techniques of writing, Ruskin is clear that while an open state of the heart is necessary, it is not sufficient. Melville's makes this point, too, in his comments on the artistic techniques that animated Hawthorne's "delicate revelations of human nature." There is another important feature—the writer's language. Writing alive with imagination that conveys images to the reader is the other necessity that makes the artistic partnership sufficient. Language, the living expression of a culture, creates and carries the culture's intellectual and emotional freight on the tracks of a writers imagination, ideas, vocabulary and syntax. Perception—deeply focussed visual attention— is the *sine qua non* of the vivid communication of ideas. The English language, as Ruskin claimed, was moribund—not expressively alive, not a living product of a dynamic culture. It was no longer capable of mirroring the culture's lived experience.

[193] Matthiessen

[194] Ibid

It was in his struggle as a college student to define the elements of a language fit to convey contemporary 19th-century realities that Ruskin theorized a way of writing that made people see.[195] What he urges writers towards is his new conception of sensually expressive composition that uses visual language— writing closely responsive to the brain's neural functioning, its image-based thought processes and the seeing-feeling responses of the reader. Perception, he writes, is the artist's greatest learned skill Why? Because the sense of sight is by far the greatest source of knowledge—70 percent of the neuronal connections in the brain originate in the visual cortex. Ruskin's campaign "to make people see,"was driven by his empirically-based conviction that we think in images. He was not wrong: modern neuroscience has confirmed it. The brain's cognitive operations, especially memory on which our sense of identity rests, are dependent on the brain's neural images. The writer's acute perception —of an object, a scene, a person, is key to its evocative detail. Attention paid to the relevance of choices, the consciousness of mood, the contrasts in weather and the skies, the shapes in flowers and foliage, the shades and variances of luminosity in colors and clouds, reveals an individual's imaginative consciousness and its creative impact on the reading experience for the reader.

To consider Hawthorne's art in this way— as a writer whose creative attention to the interior reality of the human mind, its emotionally dark experiences as well as its joyous and exhilarating moments—is to tap into the exposition of these extremities in *The Scarlet Letter.* (Quote) He creates in his writing, and facilitates in our reading, a profound experience of sorrow in its almost unbearable sensations, and of beauty in its transcendent qualities, the pain and joy, feeling as if our own, because it is, since we introduce our personal mental

[195] See Chaper 2 on Ruskin's Revolution of the Mind

associations onto the meaning of the text. Hawthorne's imaginitive ability to dig into the labrynthian pathways of the mind in the complicated case of Hester Prynne— a woman, barely adult in a loveless marriage with an older man, an émigré-wife, mother, adultress, abandoned-lover and criminal— makes it possible to turn fiction and abstraction into a compelling reality that a reader associates with the human condition. The close engagement with a character's circumstances (quote), our imaginative experience living through her woes, naturally triggers our associations, vague or vivid, in the past or presently occuring. This makes our experience of reading highly subjective— in fact unique. As Daniel Schacter reminds us, "our memories belong to us. They are uniquely ours . . . rooted in the ongoing series of episodes and incidents that uniquely constitute our everyday lives." [196] He explains:

> What has happened to us in the past determines what we take out of our daily encounters in life; memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves. Experiences are coded by brain networks whose connections have already been shaped by previous encounters in the world. The preexisting knowledge powerfully influences how we encode and store new memories. Thus contributing to the nature, texture and quality of what we recall.[197]

Although in the reader's case the intense, memory-activated emotions come easily, the writer's ability to create word pictures of of sorrow and a sense of beauty that incites an "ennobling" emotional metamorphosis does not come so easily; its sorcery is conjured up only in "the greatest art." [198] It is important, then, to acknowledge the techniques that make

[196] Schacter, 1996. 15-17. Also: "As evidence of the power of memory, researchers studying emotion found that subjects asked to think about happy or sad events in their lives within moments of remembering were brought to tears, or felt a sense of elation."

[198] Firkins' chapter opening epigraph.

possible this cognitive complexity, especially considering the darkness that confounded Hawthorne's desire for a "sunshiny" book

Hawthorne employs two literary devices: one, is a narrator who is pushed into the role of a veritable *deus ex machina* in the narrative format; the other, is the creation of a remarkable, type-defying character, a victim-heroine adulteress, whose physicality, gently-fierce courage, and uncowed-aquiescence stuns, shocks, dazzles, dumbfounds, disorients, jolts, confounds, and delights in all the enticing complexity of her nature. Out of these two strategic moves is built a relationship with the reader which suggests—and sustains—a counter narrative: one the degraded figure of sexual iniquity; the other a flawed young woman of classically-inspired beauty and essential goodness enveloped in a battle for personal redemption in the face of relentlessly punishing sorrows.

Think of the scene in which the narrator steps in to appeal for compassion for Hester Prynne's fate. Imagine her as a young and exotic, biblical female David with a few stones and a sling-shot facing down a gigantic mythology of human evil. Hawthorne's descriptions of the grim faces, the dun and grey mudiness of the cloth-encased bodies, the steepled hats, the leering carnivality of uncouth-mouthed females agitating for violence against one of their own women-folk, feels panoramic, like being behind the eye of a movie camera on a track. The sober visuality of the colors in the thrumming crowd in uniforms of like-mindedness, instead of suggesting a people of quiescent spirit, stirs up a feeling if not exactly of menace, then of threat. Hawthorne's perspective conveys the denial of beauty, the lack of nature's aesthetic across the mess of weeds in the marketplace. As the depressing scene moves across the reader's eye, its narrator moves forward, with hands outstretched in supplication, halting the flow of the narrative and, like a philosophizing member of a Greek chorus, he warns

readers of the painful darkness ahead—a mood he is privately certain will overwhelm their senses should they keep reading and is hoping to forestall.[199]

The narrator becomes a character in the drama offering commentary on the morality of compassion, one of the drama's burning issues. He plucks a blossom from a wild rose bush. The rose is a gift of fragility and delicacy because of its beauty; it is a legacy of tenacity because of its survival against the run of brutal years; it is both vulnerable and resilient, an affecting quality we are yet to discover in the victim-heroine. Its full meaning—in its Hawthornian symbolism—will become clear as we deep-breathe our way with Hester Prynne, as yet unknown to us, through a sorrow that is to become ours to share. But, strangely, for now, we are at this moment out of the novel, in a theatrical encounter with Hawthorne's narrator, who says: "Finding [the rose bush] so directly on the threshold of our narrative . . . we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers, and present it to the reader." Note the plural "*we* —[author and narrator?]—could hardly do otherwise." Before the next sentence is fully delivered, we (the readers) realize that we have been ensorcelled into participation as reader-players in an ordeal, not ours, affecting someone we know not, but one that we can't simply abandon—because— as the the narrator continues: "It may serve . . . to symbolize some sweet moral blossom that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow" (44-45). And, because we recognise our own frailties, he is no longer speaking to us, but for us, and about us. He makes the words, "Let us hope," symbols of mutal aspirations—his and ours. He is enlisting us in an action which includes two morally irresistible possibilities— a "sweet moral blossom" or something to soothe the harrowing imaginings of the "darkening close of a tale of human

[199] Hawthorne.

frailty and sorrow." [200] The tender inclinations of these ideas are antithetical to the threats of iron-spiked prison doors, allusions of doom and the ghost of Anne Hutchison, the most famous woman in colonial history, mother of fifteen, and a popular preacher, who was imprisoned and excommunicated from the Massachussetts Bay Colony because she fought for more religious freedom.

What Hawthorne is creating at this early stage of the work is a sympathetic partnership with his readers to help us envision alternative responses to the unfolding story. Envisioning the inner vision operation of the visual cortex-—is the operating intelligence he taps into—an act of contemplation, imagination, visualization, an engagement with our visual powers through the inward eye. This we imagine as the Puritan throng awaits Hester Prynne and her jailer's emergence from between the rusty doors of the prison. We are standing on a plot of land that in the first idealistic flush of religious freedom Puritan immigrants had dedicated to the future as a "Utopia of human virtue and happiness**"** Between the "building and the wheel-track of the street, was a grass plot, much overgrown with burdock, pigweed, apple peru, and such unsightly vegetation" that "had found something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilized society, a prison." It is a wild rose bush, a lone witness to the power of survival in unnourished soil. Hawthorne asks us to imagine the delicate blooms, their perfume, their fragility. He goes no further to describe the wild rose. Is it white? Pink? D.H. Lawrence wonderfully imagines his purple anemones for us: "purple anemones/Caverns/Little hells of color/caves of darkness" and Walt Whitman his lilacs, "delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green." But as Elaine Scarry tells us in *Dreaming by the Book* when a poet mentions a flower without fulsomely describing it, "it is offered as something which, after a brief stop in front of the face, can immediately pass

[200] Ibid., 44-45

through the resisting bone and lodge itself and light up the inside of the brain."[201] What Scarry is pointing to here is that our rapt observation of flowers, most particularly the rose, initiates us, as von Balthasar says, into the "mysteries" of nature because we are part of nature and "all the expressive laws of the macrocosm are at work in ourselves." [202]

How more likely that the brain will light up at the suggestion of a rose with no resistance from the mind than after the depressing images of the Puritan scene-setting. Instead of filling out the image of color and shape, Hawthorne leaves those details to our imagination. Our imagination comes alive in the mind's eye, the neural image bank that feeds our mind. First we see the rose's fragility, then we smell a waft of fragrance from the pale-pink heart, lying open-faced, like a tiny saucer composed of five petals, their saw-toothed edges barely attached to each other almost ready to fall to the earth. When we anticipate holding the bloom, touching its pink loveliness and its fuzzy underside which conceals the sharp thorny stalk, it is a warning that in the unity of nature where there is beauty, there can also be pain. So invited to pause, we are there, seeing the scene, feeling the scene, what he has written and has not written, and it unlocks in us questions of imaginative possibilities that we own in the process of inhabiting the experience of reading.

Since Hawthorne equates beauty with humanity and tenderness, delivering his narrator to pluck the only evidence of loveliness in sight, the ancient surviving rose-bloom from another century is his marker of the essential beauty of nature, of human nature. Now the reader's sensibilities are being guided from the bloom's fragile manifestation to consideration of the concepts of pity, kindness and beauty—human qualities missing from the "grim rigidity" of the crowd waiting on the same barren soil where the feet of the

[201] Scarry, Dreaming By the Book. 48

[202] Qtd by Thomas Dubay in *The Evidential Power of Beauty* (San Francisco:Ignatius, 2006) 65.

beautiful-souled Anne Hutchinson had earlier stood at the threshold of ”the black flower of civilized society, a prison.” As Ruskin shows us, descriptive contrast pushes the mind into visual overdrive. From the shock of ”the black flower of civilized society,” (44) we rebound to the beauty of the pink bloom, which Hawthorne makes material in an astonishing way. In this literary act, he personally walks into the page, across the portal, plucks a rose and gives it to me, the reader. We imagine this rose, “offer[ing its] fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of nature could pity and be kind to him” (45). It is the expression of nature’s pity and kindness that is otherwise to be denied. Now the reader is transformed into nature’s agent. The rose is now in the reader’s hand, not just in her imagination, and in this strange reality of seeing and holding this beautiful gift, her brain’s neurotransmitters are activated to spread the chemicals which transform the fictional “sweet moral blossom” into tender feeling, the felt relief from the approaching sorrow he wishes to soften for us. I read this intervention as an authorial expectation that the symbolic beauty of the rose has inherent anodyne qualities that will “relieve” the literary experience of “ human frailty and sorrow” throughout, and to the end of the dark and sorrowful tale.

Surely, this is Hawthorne’s confident expression of the effect on a human of the lasting memory of the beauty of a flower and the penetrating solace of its spiritually-elevating symbolism. The pull on the imagination of the power that Hawthorne ascribes to the plucked rose is breathtaking. As you absorb the poetry of the idea, for a breathless instant thought becomes emotion— it halts the steady pumping of the lungs. This is an intriguing narrative strategy in its assumptions of psychological mediation by what we can now understand as sensual neurology. It is as if the author is trying desperately, and as it happens,

brilliantly, to take control of the story's emotional gears to steady the ride to sorrow with a countervailing balance of the ennobling complexity of human nature. Yet, the narrator walks a fine line of reserve, as a sensitive, morally-anchored observer, neither overtly condemning nor sympathizing with Hester Prynne, nor demonizing the ministers and magistrates, but all the time speaking through his open-heartedness with a sympathy that is inescapable.

Hawthorne's next task is the construction of the extraordinary character of Hester Prynne. She is about to leave the dungeon that has held her and her child in its unholy darkness. The narrator could have told us how long she had languished there, that she suffered stoicly through labor pangs, that her minister had come there to vist, praying for her soul, for the baby's safe delivery. But he does not tell us. This narrative deprivation causes us to create our own, to fill it the gaps. No doubt, we surmise, the Puritan throng, scarcely disguising their schaudenfreude, know more than we do, but we can make up for that by taking seriously our role as creative partner in the story. The crowd have their expectations of seeing the gloriously beautiful woman properly-reduced to a contrite, grey-faced, shamed shell of her former self with the letter "A" of her sin stitched abjectly onto her colorless gown. As the first-order imaginer and creator of the intended object of everyone's eyes, Hawthorne plays with those expectations. And then . . .

> On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread appeared the letter "A". It was so artistically and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore; and which was of a splendor in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony (49).

Since the body of Hester Prynne is by fiat to be reduced to a symbol of her sin, the eyes in the sea of repressed browns and greys are stunned, the reader astonished, by the red, artistic "gorgeous[ness]" of the Letter "A" she has embroidered on the breast of her dress. The "luxuriance" of the art of the Letter "A" is a striking revelation of the mind-altering significance of the beauty of art. Prynne with the art of her own hand has created visual enticements and incitements that hold the crowd as if "spell[bound]." She makes of the intended unveiling of her debased status a glorious emblem of transfiguration. Hawthorne writes:

> [T]he point which drew all eyes, and, as it were, transfigured the wearer, —so that both men and women, who had been familiarly acquainted with Hester Prynne, were now impressed as if they beheld her for the first time— was that SCARLET LETTER, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere all by herself. (49-50)

We have not, yet "seen" Hester Prynne's face and body. That she should be "from another sphere," as Hawthorne suggests, is at first an unfathomable concept. If "another sphere" means out of this world, the temptation is to imagine what is unimaginable in this world, but not in the world of the fertile mind. The wildest image that comes is *Dante's* Empyrean where he meets his beloved Beatrice. Try to imagine seeing the face of God; it feels like that at first—so terrifyingly bright, that you only dare peek through fingers. Beatrice is not God. She is of the earth, transformed in a glow of even greater heavenly beauty than held in Dante's beatified childhood memory. She stands in golden glory surrounded by a host of angels in a plaza-size rose —the symbol of divine love; what

pleasure: imaginative serendipity has offered up the a heavenly version of Hawthorne's symbol of compassion for Hester Prynne. And then, it is gone.

From yet "another sphere," comes Cleopatra, in the imagery of Shakespeare's lines:

> The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
> Burned on the water, the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> The winds were lovesick with them; the oars were silver
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The watrer, which they beat, to follow faster,
> As amorous as their strokes. For her own person,
> It beggared all description: she die lie
> In her pavilion (cloth-of-gold of tissue),
> O'er picturing that Venus, where we see
> The fancy outwork nature;

What takes minutes to tell flashes by in split seconds in the mind's eye. Hoping to turn back the mind's neural "pages," our senses call up another encounter with Cleopatra's barge; the alliterative pleasure of the "burnished" and "burned;" the luxury of the gold" and "silver" for our eyes; the sensuous combination of color, perfume and gentle motion of the "purple" sails and the"perfumed" "winds;" and the "vision" of Cleopatra/Hester Prynne, "a vision "o'er-picturing" Venus. The extravagance of the description is a delight to the imaginative mind. Even anticipating the pleasure of the image is enough to activate the dopaminergic system, the brain's key to reward—in this case, the expectation of the pleasure of beauty. [203]

We tend to think of the brain's images as exact pictures of the visual world. They are not. "The brain is not a picture book," says Francis Crick, the co-discover of the structure of

[203] Kandel, p. 387.

DNA who spent several decades studying visual perception. [204]"The image the brain produces," Kandel explains, " is a symbolic representation—a hypothesis—of the world.[205] This hypothesis is constructed from the brain's analysis of information it receives from all the senses —sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch—converted into neural codes and stored in memory. The visual memories of Cleopatra and Hester Prynne, for example, miraculously appear "as a result of different firing patterns of neurons in different combinations of neural circuits in the brain,"[206] accessed from the images we imagined and reimagined when we read the text.

Every reader will experience his or her own unique responses to Hawthorne's image of the "fantastically embroidered" scarlet and gold letter A. One might see, feel and think: A Puritan? no! this can't be happening, as the emotionally intense red flashes into consciousness milli-seconds after it has announced itself in the brain. How can we ever define the experience of redness with words? The subjective nature of redness, like all emotional feelings can be explained only by neuroanatomical, neurochemical and neurophysiological actions and reactions in the brain. Redness, like all other subjective experiences is the nervous system's evolutionary-built automation to make us want nourishment when the organism's chemicals are depleted. The color red is is the perceptive, instinctual, prompt of the primal drives—for hunger, the ripeness of fruit, for reproduction, the redness of sexuality, for survival, the terror and danger of blood. For a second or two it sweeps us up in a red zone of affect, having read, no longer reading, now seeing a wall of

[204] Qtd in Kandel's *The Age of Insight*, 387

[205] Kandel, 231

[206] Ibid.

red, and reacting and feeling. The effect of the red A is a psychological jolt into the reality of our own responses: our sense of sorrow with its depleted bodily effect of a run-down battery, is now charged up. We are alive to action, more energetic; the color red, the color of blood, of life, is an alarm bell in the brain: it stimulates adrenal glands and makes neurons dance together, ready for connection, for action. Red? It triggers emotional intensity, raises metabolism, increases respiration rate, raises blood pressure. Surely, we think, Hester would prefer to disappear into the grey and dun crowds? Red? Gold? It's a provocation, a defiance of the sumptuary regulations. There's no such thing as a subdued red. In heraldry red indicates power: courage, vigor, willpower, rage, defiance. Unconsciously, the potency of those words sets off an emotional reaction that ripples away from a mere descriptive to define the essential qualities of the character to Hester Prynne.

The gold embroidery is not only fantastic; its threads are alive with affect. Hawthorne says it is fertile. Fertility. Sexuality. The word produces multiple images of fecundity: nature's exhuberant rebirth, human reproduction—that evidence of new life that exposed Hester's adultery—and prolific creativity. The creativity of the letter A in our mind is an expression of Hester Prynne's artful imagination and sense of beauty. We want to imagine it. The image that arrives is so red, whimsical, extravagant, bouyant, sensuous. The idea of fertility is attached to her art, the image under observation, but the suggestiveness of fertility returns as do the thought processes that William James describes as like a bird flying from branch to branch.

Instinctively, the idea of reproductive ripeness, female potency and lush forbidden sexuality screams out for recognition in the presence of a young mother holding a new-born. The splendor detailed in the creation of the Letter A spreads like a luminous cloak over the

as-yet-faceless woman whose presence transcends diminution. It elevates her above all. We have seen the symbol of the Letter A, which is meant to capture the eyes and make her faceless. Instead, her art, its statement of her potency, performs a different branding than intended: it "had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere all by herself" **(**50). Before we see her face we are engulfed in the recognition that we are in awe of this fiercely-independent woman.

In the Musée du Louvre there is a portrait by the French romantic painter Théodore Chassériau of his two beautiful dark-haired sisters, Adèle and Aline. Chassériau, famed for his historical and religious themes, painted the portrait in 1843, the year that John Ruskin, the anonymous Oxford graduate, published the first volume of *Modern Painters* and seven years before Hawthorne published *The Scarlet Letter*. Adèle and Aline have lustrous black hair, parted sedately, and pulled back out of sight behind their matching gold, shirred gowns. Over the gold fabric, their shoulders are draped in scarlet shawls, finely embroidered around the edges. Dark eyebrows draw attention to their large, intelligent eyes and the somber dignity of their beauty. They are 19th-century doppelgangers for Hawthorne's Hester Prynne. Here's Hawthorne:

> She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam, and a face which, besides being beautiful from regularity of features and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes. She was ladylike, too, after the manner of the feminine gentility of those days; . . . Those who had before known her, and had expected to behold her dimmed and obscured by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped. It may be true, that, to a sensible observer, there was something exquisitely painful in it. Her attire, which indeed she had wrought for the occasion, in prison, and had

> modelled much after her own fancy, seemed to express the attitude of her spirit, the desperate recklessness of her mood, by its wild and picturesque peculiarity (49-50).

What a powerful image. If beauty is a state of perfection, Hawthorne has imagined it. A woman whose crowning glory is so lustrous that it disarms the sun, "throw[ing] it off," just as she did the hand of her jailer who tried to assert control over her walk to the scaffold; a woman whose shining beauty, perfect features, and "richness of complexion," alchemizes "misfortune and ignominy' into an "[enveloping] halo." Assuming then, some susceptibility to beauty in the deep brain recesses of the Puritan throng, and of feelings of empathy activated in the mirror neurons at the plight of the lovely young woman with the wailing three-month-old baby at her breast, how do we account for the pitiless cries from women for the "brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead." and for the penalty of the new Puritanic code of law—her death for adultery"? (48) Hawthorne has warned us that Puritans consider the pursuit of beauty to be evil, and the adornment of the body to be "heathenish." Therefore, with the exception of spiritual experience, the beautiful is despised for the very reason that it is beautiful. Before he describes the compelling picture of Hester Prynne, Hawthorne soaks us in an ugly environment—a historic culture of punitive excess, peopled by course-featured, broad-shouldered country women whose "moral diet [was] not a whit more refined " than the beer and ale of their native land, " who could not forbear to get their hands on "such a malefactress as Hester Prynne" (47). The contrast between the cruel sanctimoniousness of the judges and the elegance of their victim is designed to stun our senses.

The halo around Hester is a foretoken of the portrait of Divine Maternity to follow.

> Had there been a papist among the crowd of Puritans, he might have seen in this beautiful woman, so picturesque in her attire and mien, and with the infant at her bosom, an object to remind him of the Divine Maternity, which so many illustrious painters have vyed with one another to represent; something which should remind him, indeed, only by contrast, of the sacred image of sinless motherhood, whose infant was to redeem the world. Here was the taint of the deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life, working such effect, that the world was only darker for this woman's beauty, and the more lost for the infant she had borne. [207]

Hawthorne's word-portrait of Hester Prynne in the novel's early pages is this: She is beautiful, is haughty, desperate, dignified, reckless, defiant, ladylike, bold, fanciful, wild, gentle, voluptuous, pictureque, tainted, a picture of sinless motherhood, an adulteress, a piece of iconic art, an image of Divine Maternity and a dark shadow on the face of the world. In the brilliant paragraph of "papist" fantasy, surely anathema to Puritan sensibilities, he finds it possible to see in her both a vision of the "Divine Maternity," and on the other hand "a woman taint[ed] of the deepest sin." In this portrait of sin and purity, Hester as Adulteress and Madonna, Hawthorne has created a wonder of opposites, contraries and paradoxes—a literary concoction of fascination and awe. Given the penalties for her reckless lack of sexual control and the jealousy, anxiety and desire triggered in women and men by her highly sensual beauty, Hester Prynne's body carries the repressed desires of the community. Her dignified refusal to accept assumptions about her female nature and her courage to defy tradition is role-breaking for one so young and so alone in the New World. Hawthorne has spared no effort in transforming Hester's beauty in our consciousness into something sacred, all the while suggesting the prevailing view of the opposite. He notes the contrast between

[207] Ibid.

the moral state of Hester Prynne and the Virgin Mary, but the power of the imagination he has called into play has done its work, we think of spell-binding Hester's martyred beauty and the desire that led to it and, "the experience of human beauty opens to our vision another realm—divine but no less human—in which beauty lies above and beyond desire, a symbol of redemption." [208]

The complexity Hawthorne embraces betokens his open-hearted acceptance of the profusion of family and societal influences, desires, anxieties, motivations, self-concepts, observations, ambitions, ideals, reactions, biases, and defences that define a single human being. Hawthorne did not claim to understand the chemistry of the brain. But his awareness of the complexity of the mind, his pre-Freudian move into psychoanalytical reading of his characters, and especially his aesthetic concern for love and beauty and his artistry of writing it into sensation, of understanding its value in illuminating and balancing the complications of human truth led Hawthorne to discover "an essential truth about the mind that [aesthetic]neuroscience is only now discovering." [209] Now, in our age of advances in neuroscientific research, we are gradually understanding how the expressions of our individual humanity emerges, especially the experiences of the pleasure and pain of being alive, through the brain's management of several billions of neurons and several trillion neuronal connections under our skulls. The brain's primary task is to help the human organism survive, which in evolutionary terms means to keep it alive and reproductive. One of the ways it does this is with reordained dispensing of carrot-and-stick chemicals that dole out pleasure and pain. The brain is motivated (rewarded) to pursue (seek) what enhances

[208]Emerson. Beauty, 55

[209] See Jonah Lehrer's *Proust was a Neuroscientist* on George Eliot, Proust, Cezanne, Whitman, Woolf and Gertrude Stein.

survival and motivated to avoid the unpleasant consequences of actions that disrupt the organism's healthy state of health —the condition of homeostasis. Bad would be eating putrid food or staying in the path of a rampaging bear; to avoid this the brain wires us to feel disgust and terror. Good would be feeling happy and staying healthy; to ensure this the brain provides copious supplies of the body's pleasure chemicals so that we feel elated when we experience beauty, ecstasy when we fall in love, joy when we have a child, comfort and connection in our friendships—all experiences that promote survival.

The philosophic theories of the human ecstatic response to what we call beauty has preoccupied philosophers for many centuries. Theories of beauty's form and essence are abundant; questions of its source are more focused. Is beauty a property of the beautiful person or of the beautiful object? Is beauty an interior condition—in the mind of the perceiver? Or does the experience of beauty come from the Supreme Deity, as a sign of God's presence in the world? Or, as John Ruskin believed, that all the theories of beauty from Plato on were flawed, because the apprehension of beauty comes from the receptive quality of the human loving spirit, through the body and mind of the person experiencing the joy.[210] We can now answer these questions definitively. Although knowledge of brain functioning is still in its infancy, the age-old search for the source of beauty was answered at a very basic level in 2003 in a functional MRI (fMRI) scanner study.[211] Visual neuroscientist Semir Zeki confirmed that beauty is in the eye (the mind) of the beholder. Zeki and his research team were the first scientists to watch how the the brain responds to beauty. The aesthetic judgment of beauty is recorded in the activity of neurotransmitters in the brain's

[210] See Chapter 2 on John Ruskin's Revolution of the Mind in which this is discussed in detail.

[211] Hideaki Kawabata and Semir Zeki study "The Neural Correlates of Beauty" Journal of Neurophysiology 91:1699-1705, 2004

orbito-frontal cortex and in the motor cortex. When we see a landscape, a painting, a person, or an object that we find beautiful and when we hear music, or a poem, or words that we find beautiful or even when we remember or imagine a beautiful sunset, our orbito-frontal cortex kicks in with full-reality intensity that activates the brain's reward system. The brain floods our bodies with neuro modulators—dopamine and serotonin—chemicals that produce emotions such as delight, pleasure, joy and ecstasy.

In *The Splendors and Miseries of the Brain*, Zeki describes the "evolutionary triumph of neural engineering" by which the brain produces the sensations of desire, love and beauty. The brain's central primordial function, he explains, is to collect knowledge about the world, which it does in the most efficient way by reducing categories to their essentials—by forming concepts. Our experiences in a complex world are managed by two different kinds of conceptual functions "supported by a neurological machinery of immense complexity"—*inherited* concepts and *acquired* concepts. The *inherited* concept arrives with the new-born baby, pre-installed and ready to power up in tune with the developing brain. It provides fixed knowledge. It applies to "simple perceptual experiences such as . . . a house, or a car, as well as to more abstract entities such as love and beauty." It makes it possible for a toddler to understand that a cat is a cat, no matter its color, size, or breed., or whether he sees from the head or the tail-end, even when it is the tail-less Manx. The *acquired* concept is a much more adventurous teacher. It seems to understand that human beings get excited about change, and so in the case of a car, for instance, it will pick up on all the things you love in the new car roll-outs —the color, the wheels, the sleek body, the design of the lights, the m.p.g. the 4-year-warrantee, the leather upholstery— and will create a composite of everything you must have. Of course, that car doesn't exist; It's an unattainable longing. The brain plays the same

trick in our concept of the ideal mate. The concept of beautiful or handsome, kind and witty formed by the brain is a synthesis of all our experiences over years and influences of family, culture and education. The brain concept of the perfect face, the perfect house, the perfect painting, since it is synthetic, does not bear much relation to reality. That's why desire for perfection results in disappointment or, as the title of Professor Zeki's book fore warns, "leads more often to misery." This must be why every actress playing the role of Hester in a movie version of *The Scarlet Letter* can't measure up to Hawthorne's imagination.

> Her mother in contriving the child's garb, had allowed the gorgeous tendencies of her imagination their full play; arraying her in a crimson velvet tunic, of a peculiar cut, abundantly embroidered with fantasies and flourishes of gold-thread.. . . was admirably adapted to Pearl's beauty, and made her the very brightest little jet of flame that every danced upon the earth. (95)
>
> *The Scarlet Letter*

There is so much evidence in this novel of Hawthorne's awareness of beauty and his fabulist imaginings of the "very brightest little jet of flame that every danced upon the earth" that one could dwell endlessly on the richly created scenes that ignite pleasure as we recreate them in our minds. Think of the Elizabethan delight in the geometrical perfection of the circle passed along to scientifically sophisticated generations like our own; it is perfection in its completeness and its flawlessness. [212] Is it only by chance that Hawthorne in his introductions of Hester and her child, Pearl, presents each of them encircled by a form that

[212] Marjorie H. Nicholson in *The Breaking of the Circle* (1950) writes that most [Elizabethans] actually believed that the circle existed in the perfect spheres of the planets, in the spheres of the globe , and in the round head of man. . . .This was more than an analogy to them; it was truth." p.xx. Qtd by Samuel I.Mintz in Galileo, Hobbes and the Circle of Perfection. U. Chicago Press for the History of Science Society. Isis. Vol. 43. No 2 (July 1952) pp.98-100. http:// j.stor.org. accessed: 07-03-2015 21.22 UTC.

symbolizes perfection? There are many pages between the transfigurement of Hester that took "her out of the ordinary relations with humanity . . . enclosing her in a sphere all by herself" (50) and the image of her child surrounded by "the absolute circle of radiance around her on the cottage floor" (86). In imagining the child's beauty vivid in velvet of red and lustrous embroidery of gold, he links the genetic and creative genius to the "gorgeous tendencies of Hester's imagination." The sphere that Hester inhabits alone and the radiant circle that encompasses only Pearl come together in our minds fusing the exotic and the radiant in an excess of verbal hyperbole that carries a perceptive truth. He prompts in us what we understand as the brain's capablity to generate a wide range of conscious experiences, including some that alter our perceptions and emotions to such an extent that the world seems dramatically different —an altered state, or an out of body experience, for instance, that imagines breathtaking beauty in the way that Hawthorne describes.

Here is another example in which Hawthorne captures Hester's sensuous beauty newly awakened from the torpor of shame and loss. Its initial power comes in her rebound from sorrow:

> There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. A crimson flush was glowing on her cheek, that had been so long pale. Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty, came back from what men call the irrevocable past, and clustered themselves with her maiden hope, and a happiness before unknown, within the magic circle of this hour (193).

Hawthorne's description of the resurrection of Hester Prynne's playful, incandescent, loving, flushing and overflowing womanhood collapses another perfect circle, the "magic circle" of Cinderella's childlike joy in her reunion with Arthur Dimmesdale into the religio-

sexual ecstasy of Bernini's Saint Teresa. Like Hawthorne's conception of Hester, it is a word-picture filled with innocence and voluptuousness. The first sentence's images of Hester's mouth and eyes, the faces expressive openings into the steate of her body, the effusion of her cheek's "flush," and the generosity of love "gushing" from the core of her female soul seem to deliver an instant exchange of powerful words leading to powerful feelings. The author's choice of evocative words stir up emotions that transfuse the meaning of the text— as if the symbol was not arbitrary after all. However, it is more complicated than that. According to Ruskin, it is the imaginative processes that writers evoke in the reader that trigger those feelings. The philosopher, John Dewey, suggests that the emotional response in our aesthetic reactions is a dynamic experience: emotions are not "as simple and compact as are the words by which we name them." "Emotion is not an entity that enters full-made upon the scene." An emotion —joy, sorrow, fear or anger —is a responsive activity tuned to milli-second fluctuations in an organism in which billion of neurons are always at play; an emotion as Dewey defines it "is a quality . . . of a complex experience that moves and changes."[213] This suggests that the neural dynamics of the experience of dread, for example, changed by new circumstances that bring relief will not be felt as dread switched off and relief switched on, but as a sliding scale of affect.

The brain's neural nimbleness in recording emotions and the conscious bodily feelings that emanate from them—this unstoppable process of the brain's movement and change in response to human experience—is a useful insight into how Hawthorne's writing will affect us, biologically move us, to feel the glow of beauty from the sweet moral blossom with which he plans to "relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow" (45). To wit, Hawthorne is faced with an unfolding series of grim relationships: How does

[213] Dewey, 43

he overcome the incesssant gloom of Hester's painful relationships with the clergy, the community, her revenging husband, and her fractured relationship with her self-abnegating lover Arthur Dimmesdale? In gloom sinking into the blackest evil, Reverend Dimmesdale is snared in a fateful connection with the sadistic cuckold Roger Chillingworth. Chillingworth's revenge plot plays out in excruciating malevalence as he orchestrates his hapless patient's descent into moral madness.

Where is the beauty in the Roger Chillingworth that Hawthorne has created? Can we perhaps find a scrap of decency in his admission that he was deluded to think that a beautiful girl in "her budding youth"—in other words, barely out of puberty— would "fantasi[ze]" being in the embrace of the "decaying" body of a physically deformed, scholarly man? Unlikely. When Hester admits she wronged him by her adultery, Chillingworth says, "we have wronged each other. Mine was the first wrong when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay." Not only has he stolen her "budding youth," her ripening womanhood, but he took— in the venial sense of the word—for his wife a girl who neither loved him nor pretended to, a dutiful daughter who had no agency to rebel against her parents. What he has admitted to is a flame-red sin, an appalling fracture in a covenant of love. To make good on his pretensions of shame for inflicting his selfish desires on Hester, he could have walked out of the colony and disappeared quietly from her life. Instead, dismissing all moral values as inconsequential to his ends whether right or wrong" of motivated by "love or hate." He vowed that he would "prove the ruin" of her lover's soul. D.H. Lawrence called *The Scarlet Letter* a "sort of parable, an earthly story with a hellish

meaning."[214] Hawthorne's assessment of Chillingworth is sufficient: After creating hell on earth for Hester and Dimmesdale, Chillingworth is "positively withered up, shrivelled away, and almost vanished from mortal sight, like an uprooted weed that lies wilting in the sun."

> This unhappy man had made the very principle of his life to consist in the pursuit and systemic exercise of revenge; and when by its completest triumph and consummation, that evil principal was left with no further material to support it, when there was no more Devil's work on earth for him to do, it only remained for the unhumanized mortal to betake himself whether his Master would find him tasks enough, and pay him his wages duly." (247)

There's something quite pleasant in the judicial sophistication of Chillingworth's sentence to hell, but not all pleasure comes in response to an aesthetic experience; schadenfreude— literally harm-joy in German—is its dark-side. Perhaps, knowing that a reader would feel this, Hawthorne waits paitiently to the end of the book to demonstrate that beauty can come from the unlikeliest sources, that even an evil person like Chillingworth can make a beautiful atonement. In his last will and testament, Chillingworth reaches out from the grave and changes Pearl's life. He "bequeathed a considerable amount of property" in England and America to Pearl. And so, reports Hawthorne's narrator, manufacturing a fairy-tale ending for Hester's elf-child, Pearl. . .became the richest heiress of her day in the New World" (248).

What of Pastor Dimmesdale, of his character in general, and more significantly on the state of his soul with which the reader must grapple? We have a choice to weigh in favor of the ecstatic effect of his "very striking affect . . . large brown, meloncholy eyes, and a mouth

[214] Lawrence (1972). Studies in Classic American Literature. New York: The Viking Press, 1972. p. 83.

which . . . apt to be tremulous . . . expressed both nervous sensibility and a vast opower of restraint" (62). We can lose ourselves in the those soulful eyes that fill young female parishioners with guilty longing or in the image of the pusillanimus and falsest of false souls who hides his relationship with Hester Prynne and refuses to stand hand-in-hand with the child who needs his love? We can acknowledge the soul connection felt by his adoring congregation who see him as at "the very proudest eminence of superiority, to which the gifts of intellect, rich lore, prevailing eloquence and are a reputation of the whitest sanctity" (237). We can honor the depth of Hester Prynne's commitment to him as a judgment of the worthinesss she saw in him and wants to regenerate. This Dimmesdale is the fine man Hawthorne revealed by delving into the young cleric's "dim interior," and finding there "many precious materials, in the shape of high aspirations for the welfare of his race, warm love of souls, pure sentiment and natural piety" (122). We could try to be like Hester and exhibit the compassion so absent in the Puritan throng's condemnation of her sin. We can feel anguish in his fear of accepting responsibility, as Hester does. We do feel pathos at his childlike helplessness in pleading with Hester:"Think of me, Hester! Thou are strong. Resolve for me. . . . Be thou strong for me. Advise me what to do"? (187). In truth, in thinking this way, it is easy to feel sorrow and pity, but difficult to experience a surge of beauty in the company of this Dimmesdale. To apply to him the words he uses to describe Pearl's effect on her mother—Dimmesdale's presence is a "torture . . . an ever recurring agony" (107). He has assigned that miserable role to a child whose being promises to be, as do all children raised in a secure world, the essence of delight and beauty. Hawthorne seems to be sighing in sorrow as he speaks of the anguish Dimmesdale felt "in his inmost soul" as all that gave him "real existence in the world. Of his hidden penance, Hawthorne writes: "

[He] began his penance,—which he afterwards, in so many futile methods, followed out,—by inflecting a hideous torture on himself" (245).

Among Dimmesdale's many sins of omission is his crippling inability to make decisions. In bracing contrast, there is in Hester Prynne's purposeful nature a more expansive vision—her unsuspected willingness to accept that resistance and retribution would not serve her desire to overcome her shame. And yet, it would be a mistake to assume that Hester Prynne arrived on the shores of the New World as self-directed as the dignified young woman who faced the hostile crowd in the market-place. Something happened to Hester Prynne. It was Arthur Dimmesdale that happened to her. In that time they were together of which we know nothing, Hester Prynne found, at great risk, what had been denied in her arranged loveless marriage to an old man — she found the self-affirming gift of passionate love, given and returned. It changed her, in much the same way as love transformed the author of her life. When Nathaniel Hawthorne fell in love with Sophia (in his middle thirties) he said this: "We are not endowed with real life . . . until the heart is touched. That touch creates us,—then we begin to be."[215] The love of and for Dimmesdale we can argue was the "beginning to be" of Hester Prynne's own self and she became a warrior against its denial. That makes the idea of Dimmesdale a beautiful thing. An idea of beauty that materializes out of Hawthorne's "boundless sympathy with all forms of beings" when he can not fail to make visible the magic of Dimmesdale the preacher: "Were there not the brilliant particles of the halo in the air about his head? So etherealized by spirits as he was, and so apotheosized by worshipping admirers, did his footsteps, in the procesion, really tread upon the dust of earth?" (238-9).

[215] Qtd in Matthiessen , 345.

In search of more certain beauty, we turn back to the mother and child. On the day Hester Prynne is released from prison, her heart "sick and morbid," she faces the interminably bleak future, day after day, year after year, "the very same that was now so unutterably grievous to be borne" (72-73). Ahead is a battle with the Puritan clergy who plan to take away her rambuctious child, her joyous reconnection in the woods with her erstwhile lover, and the hallucinating dream and nightmarish collapse of their escape with their child to a new life. This feels authentic, although given the tenacity of the woman Hawthorne has created, the grief to be borne is simply a condition to be faced in search of a resolution. Changing from defensive haughtiness to disarming humility, she enacts a resolution to work, of necessity—to feed her child—and to labor by choice —in the service of others. The latter, she thinks, may "purge her soul and work out another purity than that which she had lost;" the work will purify her and redefine her life (75). In its combination of self-definition and community spirit, Hester's decision introduces a definition of beauty beyond the obvious allure of face and body. In each aspect of this beauty is a biological compulsion: one, the empathetic concern for another's pain; the other, a mother's love for her child, "[t]he little creature whose innocent life had sprung, by the inscrutable degree of Providence, a lovely and immortal flower out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passsion (83). Reflecting the Puritan focus on the sin that led to Pearl's birth, zeroing in on the assumption that the ugliness, the "rank luxuriance" of her conception would likewise be reflected on the little body, Hawthorne interrogates the "inscrutable" power of God over man and the indivisible categories of evil and innocence. Using the Christian concept of Providence —the will of God—Hawthorne shows that a providential act is a blessing from God. Heaven has blessed Pearl with brilliant beauty and a joyous temperament. The fore-ordained curse of Adam

preoccupies Hester "who knew her deed was evil," but, nevertheless, she is puzzled, Hawthorne notes :

> How strange it seemed to the sad woman [that while] [m]an had marked [her] sin by a scarlet letter . . . God, as a direct consequence of the sin that Man had thus punished, had given her a lovely child . . . Day after day, she looked fearfully into the child's expanding nature, ever dreading to detect some dark and wild peculiarity, that should correspond with the guiltiness to which she owed her being. Certainly there was no physical defect. By its perfect shape, its vigor, and it natural dexterity in the use of all it suntried limbs, the infant was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden; worthy to have been left there to be the plaything of angels, after the world's first parents were driven out (83-4).

"How strange it seemed to the sad woman," begins Hawthorne, offering entry into a private mind state that in a few words illuminates an emotional state of sadness, indirectly conjures Hester's growing apprehension of an ambiguity, a "strangeness" in her world, and a sense of the familiar quiet contemplation that takes us to a place of knowledge. The ambiguity is not subtle. It shakes the belief in uniformity between God's law and the Puritan regulation of His law over their people. There is no correspondence between the one and the other.We knew that, but Hester did not. It's interesting to catch the beginning awareness of a "strangeness," a cognitive discrepancy that plays the debate out with a cast of imagined voices in the mind. The fear of a child marked by parental evil is swept away with the sheer pleasure of the images Hawthorne draws for us of Pearl's heavenly provenance with her playmates, the angels. No matter that the cherubs of my imaginings always have golden curls, they are immediately dyed into Pearl's lustrous brown.

We visualize the babe birthed in the verdant foliage of the Garden of Eden —an image that lights up the brain—a babe so beautiful that even the angels are mesmerized by her and become her playful, childlike versions. This suggestive description of the gaiety of the beautiful offspring of passionately erring parents, driven out of paradise, soothes one to believe, as Hester worries, that the child will not be marked by the sins of her parents. Hawthorne continues to attach the idea of "grace," a quality of goodness, to Pearl's beauty, a beauty that is "faultless," an adjective that describes one innocent of sin as well as a beauty that is perfection itself. And perfection? George Santayana in his outline of aesthetic theory, *The Sense of Beauty,* endorses the classic connection between beauty and goodness that echoes Hawthorne's own philosophy. According to James Fields' distillation of Hawthorne's view, "Beauty always captivated him. Where there was beauty he fancied other good gifts must naturally be in possession."[216] However, whenever Hawthorne unwraps the truth of a noble soul, as he sees it, its effect, as is Santayana's, is the consummation of an ideal:

> If perfection is, as it should be, the ultimate justification of being, we may understand the moral dignity of beauty. Beauty is a pledge of the possible conformity between the soul and nature, and consequently a ground of faith in the supremacy of the good. [217]

As Hawthorne layers beauty over the constant stain of sin, it inevitably leads to the concept of the sacred, and of necessity in the story of Hester Prynne's adultery, the violation of the sacred. The living reproduction, the replication of that sexual violation was little Pearl in her

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[216] Fields (Ch. 5)

[217] Santayana (1896) p.26
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red velvet tunic embroidered with fantasies and flourishes of gold. This causes Hawthorne to remark:

> Her mother in contriving the child's garb, had allowed the gorgeous tendencies of her imagination their full play; arraying her in a crimson velvet. it irresistibly and inevitably reminded the beholder of the token that Hester was doomed to wear upon her bosom. It was the scarlet letter in another form: the scarlet letter endowed with life (95).
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Scarry's delightful reminder that "beauty brings copies of itself into being,"[218] is true twice and thrice over in Hester and Pearl. In addition to applying this happy "replication" to a beautiful small copy of Hester, Hawthone replicates our images of Hester's gorgeous imagination in the wearable works of art she produces and reproduces in Pearl's outfit the glorious artistry of scarlet letter that marked her infamy and is to make her that Puritan phenomenon, the colony's first artist of the beautiful.[219] This Hawthorne wittily suggests will happen as he quotes an outraged matron, "[D]id ever a woman before this brazen hussy contrive" this display of her needlecraft "to laugh in the faces of the godly magistratres and make a pride out of what they, worthy gentleman, meant for a punishment" (50). And, then, when the beadle, in his overwheeming authority, bellows out: "Come along, Madam Hester, and show your scarlet letter in the market-place!" he is ushering Hester on stage as an artist-merchant. The letter "A", the symbol of her adultery, in its "fantastically" embroidered

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[218] Scarry (1999) p.3

[219] In Hawthorne's 1844 story titled "The Artist of the Beautiful" a young watch-repairer, with a great sensitivity for exquisite objects, devotes his life to the creation of beauty. His passion for beauty is not much admired by his employer or by his employer's daughter, Annie. After long and meticulous labor he gives Annie a beautiful tiny metal butterfly that perches on the hand, flies away, and then returns. Owen felt he had created nature's "ideal butterfly . . . .in all it's perfection." Annie's child excitedly grabs the butterfly in his fist and destroys it. Owen's creative soul is tortured by the destruction. When he deals with his disappointment, Owen comes to believe that though he suffers some mockery, what matters most is that he has a vision of beauty

beauty becomes an advertisement for an occupation as the matron forecast (51). Before long Hester's artistic talent —"which the dames of a court might gladly have availed themselves, to add the richer and more spiritual adornment of human ingenuity to their fabric of silk and gold"—is in demand in the market-place with Hawthorne's imprimatur of "spiritual adornment"[220] and another visual flight of fancy to see Hester's "creative ingenuity" as the ladies dance in the baronial hall in their silk and gold embroidered finery.

> And by degrees . . . her handiwork became what would now be termed the fashion. . . . her needlework was seen on the ruff of the Governor; military men wore it on their scarves, and the minister on his band; it decked the babies little cap; it was shut up to be mildewed and moulder away, in the coffins of the dead. But it is not recorded that, in a single instance, her skill was called in aid to embroider the white veil that was to cover the pure blushes of a bride (76-77).

Hawthorne's genius in envisioning the Letter "A", the sign of adultery, as a piece of iconic Puritan art doubles its function as a transgressive aesthetic object. The seductive beauty of the embroidered "A" coyly refuses to acknowledge the sin it is meant to represent. How extraordinary that Hester Prynne's art, whose genesis is the sign of adultery, should add dignity to the apparel of the most powerful and wealthy Puritan families. The hand they have refused to hold in friendship, has held their clothes, has pushed a sharp needle through and under the fabric that now holds the sweat of her hand next to their bodies. Art has brought them together because "art breaks through barriers that divide human beings," says Dewey. That union is "the source of the rituals that from the time of archaic man to the present have commemorated" the important ceremonies of human life —birth, death and marriage" (282).

[220] See Theresa Ann Starkey's Doctoral Dissertation (2010) "The Woman on the Scaffold," a study of how the lives of criminalized women are represented in popular culture. Hester Prynne's rare ability to earn a living in the 17th-century market-place is noted. http:///pid/emory.edu/ark:/25593/7zc4v https://etd.library.emory.edu/view/record/pid/emory:7zc4v

Art becomes the aesthetic memory of those rites. The language of its images slip silently into the beauty–aware neurons in the brain's frontal cortex and onwards into the region of the mind that welcomes beauty and creates joy, the mysterious place we call "soul." The expressive art of Hester's voluptuous and rich nature has become the alpha sign, what Hawthorne calls "the fashion" for religious dignitaries and on the community celebrations of birth, death, and —not marriage, though, the institution most wounded by Hester's adultery.

To this point in the novel Hawthorne has continued to embroider a narrative that embeds in our imagination, enters us, embroidering into our minds the details of the beauty of Hester Prynne's aura, the phenomenon of the art of her needlecraft, and the heavenly charm and elf-like mischieviousness of her child, Pearl. It is clear from his earlier intervention at the prison door that his philosophy of beauty includes the human moral, ethical, and compassionate life, and in the Ruskinian sense, a joyous commitment to connection in the aesthetic enterprise of art and civilization, including wild nature—all of which is in us, and we in it. In this endeavor, Hawthorne opens avenues of pleasure that run parallel with painful reminders of Hester's plight, renewed memories of her strength, and the idea that beauty is too persuasively shiny to be blotted out forever. He brings that generosity to the Puritan crowd who took long years to overcome the inflammation of the scarlet letter on Hester's breast and see the "blameless purity" that lay beneath it:

> It is a credit to human nature, that, except where its selfishness is brought into play, it loves more readily than it hates. Hatred, by a gradual and quiet process, will even be transformed in love . . . [Hester] never battled with the public, but submitted, uncomplainingly, to its worst usage; she made no claim upon it, in requital of what she suffered; she did not weigh upon its sympathies. Then, also, the blameless purity of her life during all these years

> in which she had been set apart to infamy, was reckoned largely in her favor. (151-2)

In Hawthorne's telling of Hester Prynne's journey from haughty "hussy" to a woman of loving suffering and "blameless purity," there are countless paragraphs, different in narrative aim but similar in character development, that elicit heart-felt response to the generosity of a nature that reflects a sweet saintliness, but not an unpleasant martyrdom. All have elements of sorrow and beauty, as this does, despite its dependence on so many categories of abstract qualities in a list of behavoirs that seldom are exhibited en masse in the "sphere of human nature." Semir Zeki's assurance that the brain categorizes abstract ideas, which means that they have visual and especially emotional resonance for us, explains the heft of words like "selfishsness," "love," "suffer," "sympathy," "blameless," "purity," and "infamy." We reach the last sentence in awe of Hester Prynne, to be flattened by this: "Then, also, the blameless purity of Hester's life during all these years in which she had been set apart to infamy, was reckoned largely in her favor." The ironic reminder of the harsh judgmentalism that trudged every step with her makes her goodness all the more exceptional. The following excerpt of a description of Hester soothing the sorrows, and healing the ills of those who disdained her is a chiaroscuro word painting— a darkened room, glimmering embroidery, unearthly ray, a sick-chamber taper, light of the earth becoming dim:

> None so ready as she to give of her little substance to every demand of poverty; even though the bitter-hearted pauper threw back a gibe . . . or garments wrought for him by the fingers that could have embroidered a monarch's robe; None so self-devoted as Hester when pestilence stalked through the town. . . . in all seasons of calamity . . . [s]he came] into the household that was darkened by trouble; . . . There glimmered the

> embroidered letter, with comfort in its unearthly ray. Elsewhere the token of sin, it was the taper of the sick chamber. . . .
> shown [the sufferer] where to set his foot, while the light of earth was fast becoming dim. . . Hester's nature showed itself warm and rich; a well-spring of human tenderness unfailing in every real demand . . . Such helpfulness was found in her—so much power to do, and power to sympathize so that many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said it mean Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength. (153)

"A" for Adultress, "A" for Artist, "A" for Able. "A" for Dimmesdale's better Angel and "A" for the grateful townsfolks' Angel of Mercy. In the Puritan discourse, Hester's role as "An Angel of Mercy" is quietly transforming the interpretation of Hawthorne's ingenius moral communication system—the Letter "A". Hester could be blamed for being haughty and defiant, and a victim of her passions, but the "blameless purity" of her nature—the nature that sought only to produce beauty—that same nature that governed her way of relating to others "showed itself , . . a well-spring of human tenderness" (153). This beautiful descriptive phrase of few words is abundantly rich in its evocation of beauty. The words mean not only a capacity for human tenderness, but its wellspring—the very source itself. This positions Hester as not so much the recipient of her neighbors' new-found love, but the reason for it—its source of communal redemption.

The idea of redemption is repeated in Hawthorne's lyrical depiction of Pearl's sublime unification with the "kindred wilderness" of the forest:

> [The] mother-forest, and those wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wilderness in the human child. And she was gentler here than in the . . . streets of the settlement. The flowers appeared to know it; and one and another whispered as she passed, "Adorn thyself with me, thou

> beautiful child, adorn thyself with me!" —and to please them, Pearl gathered the violets, the anemones, the columbines, and some twigs of the freshest green, which the old trees held down before her eyes. With these she decorated her hair, and her young waist, and became a nymph-child, or an infant dryad (196).

Pearl, a child of nature, is in the lulling embrace of "mother-forest." The "wild" little creature is now free from the anxiety-provoking stresses of the hostile settlement. The forest "nourishe[s]" her, quiets her agitation and fills her up with uncomplicated childish delight. She is a blossom, kin with the the wild and beautiful blossoms she wraps around her body and disappears inside. What Hawthorne imaginatively observes through the green bower of his mind reverbrates in its tenderness and love for the imagined child with the essence of Herman Melville's appreciation that "there must be such a union of thought and emotion as in Hawthorne . . . which sends few thoughts into circulation, except they be arterialized at his large warm lungs and expanded in his honest heart".[221] The union of thought and emotion in Melville's expression suggests a mental and physiological space of peace, an equilibrium of intelligence and feeling that mirrors Antonio Damasio's descriptive for the organism's perfected regulation for survival — homeostasis. Hawthorne takes up this idea in finding a corrective for the turmoil in Pearl's life. The distress and social deprivation in the child's life is acting out in predictable ways that her mother's Puritan foes decode as evil. In a setting of acceptance —"all recognized the kindred wilderness in the human child"—we find a "gentler" even more beautiful child than the beleaguered imp who shared her mother's shame on the settlement's streets. Sophia Hawthorne has referred to her husband as an "affable angel." "I ever found him, like Milton's Raphael, an "affable" angel,"

[221] Matthiessen, p.190.

she said, “and inclined to converse on whatever was human and good in life.”[222] This puts Hawthorne as one with the nymph-child who earlier played with the angels in the Garden of Eden. He cannot resist any gorgeously visual grandiloquence to transport his reader-partner into Pearl’s fairy-tale world of talking violets, anemones and columbines which he mixes with florist-like design into bouquet of pinks and purples with “twigs of the freshest green that old trees held down before her eyes.” Why does Hawthorne choose old trees to hold down the branches for his nymph-child? Is it meant to suggest the ancient origins of mother-forest? Is it for the visual effect it conjures of the gnarled old life of nature and the dewey freshness of childhood? Is it the pleasure to help the child at play complete her perfect piece of art? Who knows. The imagining is everything.

As Pearl adorns her hair with the a crown of flowers and twigs, Hawthorne tells us, “she heard her mother’s voice, and came back slowly. Slowly; for she saw the clergyman” (196). As the nature-gentled Pearl played in the forest that was “the playmate of the lonely child,” (195) the great romantic drama that Henry James says he missed had begun to unfold. Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne had met in private for the first time in seven years. In this work, which Hawthorne has said is so dark that it will be unbearable to readers, he gives over three chapters, close to 7,000 words, to exquisitely beautiful writing that carries the recurrent pain and transport of the tragic love affair that Hawthorne breathes into his tale. The languorous pace of these chapters allows a deeply felt connection to the characters at the most emotionally heightened moments of separation and connection. Since “they were so long estranged by fate and circumstances,” they felt like” disembodied beings. Each a ghost”(181). The process of dragging their consciously-relating selves out to breathe free in

each others presence begins as "Arthur Dimmesdale put forth his hand, chill as death, and touched the chill hand of Hester Prynne"(181). A hand chill as death reaches towards another waiting chill hand. Hawthorne's sensory acuity, exaggerates a condition of bone-chilling weather into a metaphoric scene of deadened ghost souls awaiting a remembered warmth. In time, when their blood flows again, they weep, they hold each other. "Do I feel joy again? cried he, wondering at himself. Methought the germ of it was dead in me! O Hester, thou are my better angel! (192). All the tenderness in the great empty chasm Hawthorne left to be filled only by our romantic fantasies is now here—sorrow, fear, indecision and a crushing sense of the inevitability of more sorrow. As eavesdroppers and sensation-invaders of their most holy intimacies, we are initiated into the sacred rites of their union, their love's consecration.

In one of literature's most tragic, painfully beautiful love scenes Arthur Dimmesdale, "out of an abyss of sadness, and no anger," forgives Hester for withholding that his tormentor is her husband:

> 'That old man's revenge has been blacker than my sin, He has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of the human heart, Thou and I, Hester, never did so!'
> 'Never, never,' whispered she. "What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so. We said so to each other. Have thou forgotten it?'
> '*Hush*, Hester!' said Arthur Dimmesdale, rising from the ground.
> 'No. I have not forgotten!' (186).

Hester reframes the meaning of their relationship as a purification of their sin: it was a consecretion, their "marriage" consecration before God. Its reinterpretation is fitted to the liberating spirit of the forest in which the acts of man are of nature. "What we did had a consecretation of its own, " Hester said, and paused. But there was no affirmation from him.

She seems distressed: “We felt it so,” she urges. “We said so to each other.” Hester remembers their love as first “felt” — the feeling that arises from deep within the brain to the viscera, calling its truth to the mind —and then “expressed,” the discovery shared in the world with another in search of confirmation of a new reality. She raises the question again: “Have thou forgotten it?” Dimmesdale responds to the beauty of her affirmation: “Hush.” Hawthorne could have written anything he pleased. Dimmesdale could have said: “Yes, Hester, what we did was sacred. I felt it, too. I feel it so.” But he first said. “Hush.” And the next word out in his mouth was “No.” Nothing that comes after “No” really matters.

The rumblings of blackness in *The Scarlet Letter* are never far-off, though Hawthorne always coaxes out the sunbeams with sensory detail to spark beautiful visions that erase the gloom with its “ethereal medium of joy,” (250) the otherworldly, unearthly state he calls up out of the darkness of beauty.

lV. Gwendolen Harleth's Dangerous Beauty: The Mind Behind the Beautiful Face

> Beauty is a sacred thing . . . [it] springs from God and is like a circle in the centre of which is goodness. . . . one cannot have beauty without goodness, so outward beauty is a true sign of inner goodness.
>
> Baldessare Castiglione *The Book of the Courtier*[223]

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'
>
> John Keats "Ode on a Grecian Urn"[224]

> Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue.
>
> Ralph Waldo Emerson. *Nature*[225]

The wisdom of Castiglione, Emerson and Keats notwithstanding, the neurosensory truth is that the brain loves beauty. It has its reasons. What our eyes tell us is beautiful—what is "essentially symmetrical," Plotinus writes, and likewise St. Augustine who says "geometric form and balance" is the key to beauty—is biologically synonymous with fertility, reproduction, and the survival of species. The human organism has rigged the system by evolving a winning scheme using hormones and chemicals to eroticize symmetry into a beautiful mating dance of love— and an over-crowded planet. The incessant call of

[223] Castiglione. *The Book of the Courtier*. Bk 1V, 342 In this translation by Charles S. Singleton of *The Book of the Courtier*, first published in 1528 in Venice, Castiglione, the Duke of Urbino, explains what "constitutes the perfect Courtier and his ideal counterpart, the Court Lady . . . [and the] social life, ethics, politics, humor, sports and relations between the sexes." In consequence of these views on beauty and goodness Castiglione writes, "only rare does an evil soul dwell in a beautiful body."

[224] Keats. "Ode on a Grecian Urn", 853. Norton Anthology of English Literature Vol. 2. 7th Edition. NewYork, NY; Norton, 2000.

[225] Emerson. Nature, Ch. 3. Emerson continues: "There is still another aspect under which the beauty of the world may be viewed, namely, as it becomes an object of the intellect.

this primitive and eternal passion for fertility is the brain's undiscriminating commitment to send out sensations that alert the body with a chemical announcement when our idealized version of male or female beauty is nearby.[226] These hormonal prompts entice our senses with longing and desire for mates and lovers. The attraction to what we find physically appealing in a non-romantic form also biases our choice of friends, workmates, business and political leaders towards those who happen to be handsomely privileged by their genes.

For George Eliot, whose literary creation of Gwendolen Harleth's physical beauty and its intoxicating effect on others is on record throughout *Daniel Deronda,* the narrative development of her beautiful heroine's eventual misery is driven, paradoxically, by an absence of beauty. What is missing is not physical loveliness, but a different kind of beauty. What is this beauty? Eliot simply calls it "that other beauty, too."[227] Her vagueness is apt, especially for a beauty which is equally important yet so different that it is not often seen: a private beauty, hidden from sight, its intrinsic sum and substance is embedded in the words of Eliot's parallel description—that "*other beauty, too*." Its beauty is there in the difference suggested in "*other*," the appreciation felt in "*beauty*," and the connection made in "*too*." The embrace of recognition found in difference, appreciation, and connection to the other is in the other beauty, the inner beauty that she defines as "deep human sympathy." She writes:

> All honor and reverence to the divine beauty of form! Let us cultivate it to the utmost in men and women and children—in our gardens and in our houses. But let us love that other beauty

[226] See Neurobiologist Semir Zeki's *The Splendors and Miseries of the Brain*, Ch, 15. "The Brain's Concepts of Love" and Ch. 16 "The Neural Correlates of Love." Zeki who is credited by Nobel Laureate Eric Kandel in *The Age of Insight* as the pioneer of the modern study of visual perception, opened up the new field of neuroaesthetics in an exploration of biology and the human response to art.

[227] Eliot, *Adam Bede,* Ch. 17, 2-3.

too, which lies in no secret proportion but in the secret of deep human sympathy.

Eliot introduced this concept of human beauty in her first novel, *Adam Bede* (1859), and explores it extensively in *Daniel Deronda,* the last novel before her death. This expression of Eliot's interest in the philosophical underpinings of beauty meets with the contemporary Victorian fascination with all things visually beautiful, especially the beautiful face and its symbolic connection to goodness and virtue. Not surprisingly then, Emerson's words, "Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue," echoing that moral certitude some 300 years after Castiglione wrote "outward beauty is a true sign of inner goodness,"[228] suggests it is time for a discussion around the presumption.

The character Gwendolen Harleth's storied beauty and her imperious treatment of others—what is lovely about her and what is ugly in her— is the subject under Eliot's incisive narrative excavation.[229] The task of unearthing the how and why of Gwendolen's life involves Eliot in a mining beneath the beautiful exterior into the mind of a character whose public adoration and social privilege co-exists undiminished by social criticism and the bemused toleration of her self-importance tolerated as if arrogance is only to be expected in one so beautiful. Eliot's narrator wonders why the importance of inner beauty pales in comparison to the insatiable attention given to the beautiful face and body. This questioning of the deeper meanings of human beauty and the mysteries of human character in *Daniel Deronda* moves the discussion of beauty and goodness into the Victorian world of the

[228] Ibid.

[229] The interlocking narrative in the novel is that of the character Daniel Deronda's, raised by his aristocratic guardian as an English gentleman. Deronda's life changes dramatically with his discovery of his own obscured birth into a Jewish family in Italy.

Sciences of the Mind, of biology and behavioral studies that supply some early clues to the neglected realm of "that other beauty, too."

Despite its copious cognates, the common preference for the word "beautiful" suggests a commonplace acceptance of its meaning. But, how can the measure of perfection recognized across unlimited categories of things concrete and abstract be thought of as commonplace? How do we wrestle cognitive precision from a word that becomes code for the experience of exciting sensations, responses, and actions ignited by the beautiful face of Helen of Troy when the same word denotes the selfless legacy of a beautiful soul, or the mathematical perfection of a beautiful proof?

If this is a dilemma for some, it does not perplex George Eliot. She finds beauty as common, as ubiquitous as it is paradoxical because beauty, as Ruskin taught, is a production of the mind, a quality of open-hearted imagination that can transfigure the commonplace into the exceptional. That is what Eliot is claiming when she argues for sympathy as the act of unearthing and illuminating unnoticed beauty.[230] Insisting that this is the artist's responsibility, she writes in *Adam Bede*: "Therefore, let Art always remind us of . . . . men. who see beauty in these commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them." (17: 2-3)

Who better than Ruskin to give testimony to Eliot's commitment to the mundane truths of the common folks whose description of their "blotches, burrs and pimples" we recognized because "they resemble our own"[231] faults and imperfections. Implicit in Ruskin's observation, is that the upper class pay so little attention to the commonplace folks that it

[230] Sympathy and sympathize were the commonly used words from 1579 and 1588 to express "to suffer with or like an other empathy. In 1912 the word empathy was introduced as a psychological term defined as "a feeling or frame of mind evoked by or responsive to some external influence." Oxford Universal Dictionary.

[231] Ruskin. "Fair and Foul"

takes a mediated description of their physiognomy or social practices —in a novel or painting—to break through the class barrier to recognize the flaws and frailties, "blotches, burrs and pimples" common to all humanity. Eliot's "The *Mill on the Floss*," says Ruskin, "is perhaps the most striking instance extant of this," in contrast to Sir Walter Scott in whose "total method of conception, only lofty character is worth describing at all."[232] Here's Ruskin writing in his essay *Fair and Foul*:

> There is not a single person in the book of the smallest importance to anyone in the world but themselves, or whose qualities deserved so much as a line of printer's type in their description. There is no girl alive, fairly clever, half educated and unluckily related, whose life has not as much in it as Maggie's to be described and to be pitied. Tom is a clumsy and cruel lout, with the makings of better things in him (and the same may be said of nearly every Englishman at present smoking and elbowing his way through the ugly world his blunders have contributed to the making of);[233]

Eliot's genius, Ruskin recognizes, is in her humanity, her sympathy for others. She elevates the common and democratizes the elevated. She finds joy in art that demonstrates the perception that leads to the pleasure, the "delight" in being able to "show" what others fail to see —the glow of goodness on the commonplace faces which she calls the "light of heaven." Her appreciation of that "other beauty" is one that cultivates a different kind of perception than the casually, wandering eye. It is another way of seeing, seeing as contemplation that grows out of thoughtful observation, a gateway to knowledge that enables movement away from ingrained assumptions to a richer awareness of the beauty that exists in the ordinary.

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[232] Ruskin's observation here of Scott's class consciousness is no more than an affectionate observation of one of his literary idols. As a boy, Ruskin recalls in *Praeterita*, he had to read the Bible for hours every morning, but he recalls with delight the regular family gatherings after supper when his father read Sir Walter Scott's novels to him and his mother..

[233] Ruskin. *Fair and Foul*. Ibid.

The new perception that Eliot speaks of is the *sine qua non* of another kind of beauty that is the driving cause of John Ruskin's life—to teach artists to see. "The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world," says Ruskin, is to see. "[234] By seeing he means looking, observing, witnessing, perceiving, examining, apprehending, discerning—knowing. Seeing is an act of consummate brain engagement—a covenant with the world that is the key to rich experience, what Ruskin famously calls "poetry, prophecy and religion—all in one." [235] In relationships with others, the "deep secret of sympathy" that leads to enlightened perception lies in the private, mostly unnoticed emotional transactions of recognition and identification between one person and another. It is the "big-heartedness tenderness" that Eliot recognized in Nathaniel Hawthorne's work that made him one of her favorite writers.

As a student and follower of Ruskin's theories of the all-encompassing, transforming nature of beauty—nothing in Ruskin's world-view is untouched by beauty—here's how Eliot expresses her personal experience of its power:

> Our caresses, our tender words, our still rapture under the influence of autumn sunsets, or pillared vistas, or calm majestic statues, or Beethoven symphonies, all bring with them the consciousness that they are mere waves and ripples in an unfathomable ocean of love and beauty; our emotion in its keenest moment passes from expression to silence, our love at its highest flood rushes beyond its object, and loses itself in the sense of divine mystery. (Adam Bede, xx)

Eliot slowly drowns metaphorically and literally in an oceanic experience of beauty. As she looks skywards at an "autumn sunset," she is first lulled in the pleasureable consciousness of the ocean's "mere waves and ripples," then carried away in a deluge of a pure sensation,

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[234] Ruskin. MP. Vol 3, Ch. 16

[235] Ruskin. Ibid

"love" no longer located in the the sunset, the objectified source of pleasure, but replaced with awe and wonder "in the inexpressible sense of a divine mystery." Her cognitive expression of the source of beauty is numbed into inchoate astonishment as the sweeping sensation of joy expands beyond the boundary of mind and body, beyond the marked space of her physical presence and its connection to the setting sun. The feeling that she describes, as she translates it, is not of this earthly world.

Ruskin has said in *Modern Painters* that beauty is always available to us for it is "inexhaustible." Eliot captures its limitlessness as an "unfathomable ocean of love." As a follower of Ruskin's aesthetic theories, beauty for Eliot seems to be what Ruskin calls "an eternal and inexhaustible . . . object of life" (MP Vol 2:3.) It penetrates every part of the sensual experience of her being: seeing, touching, listening, imagining, speaking, feeling, thinking. The beauty of sunsets, landscapes, statuary, symphonies and the love of that beauty passes through Eliot in what she describes as a rapture, the transport of her mind to a place outside the body, detached from the self, attached to the "eternal."

Ruskin has written that the experience of beauty comes only when the love of the object and our awe and gratitude for its presence moves us to a state of "exultant, reverent and grateful perception" of the beautiful. Ruskin explains:

> [T]he higher estimation of these delights first in their being eternal and inexhaustible, and secondly in their being evidently no means or instrument of life but an object of life . . infinitely and for itself desired, we may be sure there is something of the divine; . . . And so, though we were to regard the pleasures of sight merely as the highest of sensual pleasures, and though they were of a rare occurrence. . . there would still be a supernatural character about them, owing to their self-sufficiency. But when . . . they are gathered together, and so arranged to enhance each other . . . is caused . . . not only a

> feeling of strong affection towards the object in which they exist, but a perception of purpose and adaptation of it to our desires. . . out of which perception arise Joy, Admiration and Gratitude.[236]

Eliot's way of expressing this is that "our love at its highest flood rushes beyond its object, and loses itself in the sense of divine mystery." Finding beauty, she tells us, means losing yourself in the sublime aesthetic celebration of a human in intense connection with nature. Our emotion in its keenest moment passes from expression to silence, our love at its highest flood rushes beyond its object, " and looses itself in the sense of divine mystery."

Free of historical religiously-weighted speculations, Ruskin liberated the divine experience of beauty from its heavenly categorization and humanized the complicated intellectualized theorizing to declare it a human sensation, a property of the body delivered by the brain's networks thoughout the body to rest there as an embodied sensation of joy. If we think of beauty as a physical experience, Ruskin's theory of the stirrings of beauty come in an undulating wave of pleasure that soars free, changing, moving through different registers of affect, bringing with it the experience of joy (in), love (for), gratitude (for), and awe (of) the beautiful object. It transports us outside the narrow concerns of the self, Ruskin tells us, into elevated connections with the noblest qualities of the mind and spirit. The refining experience, he suggests, is as close to heaven as a human comes. Without these introspective experiences pleasure is not beauty, says Ruskin, but "mere animal consciousness of pleasant sensations" (236).

Because the question of Gwendolen Harleth's's beauty is Eliot's entry into the novel—"Is she beautiful or not beautiful?" are the narrator's first words— we are drawn by

[236] Ruskin. MP. Vol. 2. Part 111. Sect. 1. Ch. 2. p.237

Eliot to ask, what is the function of beauty in this narrative? What does beauty do to us, for us? And so, what does beauty do for Gwendolen? If beauty transforms, in what way? What mysterious energy passes over the aesthetic bridge between the public and private human worlds? What lies beyond the threshold of the *sub rosa* world of mental life that holds the key to Gwendolen's consciousness in relation to her external world and others in it. What is the key? How will Eliot use it to imagine her way into the capricious pathways of the mind. Eliot believes that artists must remind us of the "other" beauty, too. Is the "other beauty" an aesthetic experience? If it is, how does she create for us the experience, thought processes, motivations, and affects of the short-circuited consciousness of a beautiful character whose visual presence evokes awe and desire and whose awareness of feelings and concerns of others in her world is confined to its consequences for herself? Eliot becomes artist as human bio-archeologist, an artist of the psyche. See this scene at the novel's opening:

Daniel Deronda, a thoughtful young man, watches Gwendolen at the roulette table at the Leubrunn spa in Germany where she has fled to escape the marriage proposal of Mr. Henleigh Grandcourt, an aristocrat of unquestionable wealth and questionable morality. As Deronda gazes at her, his thoughts—the opening lines of the novel—pose this question:

> Was she beautiful or not beautiful? And what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? (7)

"Was she beautiful or not beautiful?" The doubt implicit in the question plunges the reader into an untimely confrontation with the text. How are we to engage with this question without a shred of evidence? To make a judgment about beauty we either have to see the

object under discussion, or be able to imagine it. Eliot, a keen student of visual perception, knows this, and no doubt, has her reasons for provoking us by asking a question we cannot answer, and we immediately understand that this is not about visual acuity or our aesthetic taste. Before Eliot's accustomed vivid scene-setter, before the beginnings of her incisive detection of human dispositions —interior significations analysed through external signs— comes the first either/or question and then another more intriguing one: "What was the secret of form or expression that gave the dynamic quality to her glance?" Before the possibility of an "aha" moment when the reader can ace the reading game by decoding the writer's clues, Eliot's narrator reveals what is bothering the character Daniel Deronda about the undefinable meaning of beauty that causes him to wonder: if the face is beautiful how deep does that beauty go? What he asks is this: "Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams?" His answer? "Probably the Evil." Fifty-one words into the novel — Eliot says in her introduction (xxxi) that "everything is connected to everything else" — she has put us on notice that the question of beauty will permeate this work. Her question: Is there a relation between beauty and goodness?

Gwendolen Harleth, the young woman whose presence raised these questions in Daniel Deronda's mind was jubilantly winning at roulette in the crowded, smoke-filled room.[237] At first, the object of his question appears to be, or we assume it to be, the relative beauty of Gwendolen's face and the body seen through Deronda's eyes. It is; and it is not. What significantly interests him is something other than her physical charms— and all the

[237] In his introduction to Eliot's novel, Terence Cave, writes that "the genesis of *Daniel Deronda* is often traced back" to an episode in 1872 when George Eliot and George Lewes witnessed Lord Byron's grand-niece gambling at Homburg. "The saddest thing to be witnessed," wrote Eliot in a letter to her publisher John Blackwood,"is the play of Miss Leigh, who is only 26 years old, and is completely in the grip of this mean, money-raking demon. It made me cry to see her fresh young face among the hags and brutally stupid men around her." The George Eliot Lettters, 1955. Ed. Gordon. S. Haight, Vol. V. London: Oxford UP., 314.

more interesting for us because of that. His gaze is not one of heightened longing; it is a lingering look in search of what lies beneath the surface of her skin—her ethical life.

Looking past the alluring face, he wants to know what drives her disturbingly assertive presentation and the nature of the intense inclinations that dominate her thoughts. A sense of discomfort creeps over Deronda's body. He feels a strange dis-ease. It comes from something outside of himself he believes—an emanation, perhaps, of the woman's energy. "Probably evil," he thinks, otherwise if it were good "he would be experiencing the relaxed sense of pleasure or "undisturbed charm" rather than the disquiet of agitation." This thought disturbs him. Seeking confirmation of his embodied reaction that "the evil genius" was in her, he finds it in another question: "Why was the wish to look again felt as a coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents"(7).

Even as he is struggles with his ambivalence, Deronda is operating in full conscious awareness of his own conflicting responses to desire. He admits implicitly that he is no stranger to the impulse of fixing his eyes on a beautiful face, for as Roger Scruton write in *Beauty*, "beauty invites us to focus on the beautiful object, so as to relish his or her presence. But, Scruton also points out that " beauty in not just an invitation to desire, but also a call to renounce it" (45). Deronda is caught in this tangle of responses. This sense of "coercion" in him is unfamiliar—a compulsion to look, a struggle against his will—the insistent activity of his body response to beauty almost overriding his more disciplined instincts. A disquieting voice of conscience has stepped in to influence the struggle over the irrestible power of beauty.

Deronda's mental questioning and his awareness of his body absorbing Gwendolen's emotional energy carries him across the invisible barrier from the public to the into the

private world of the mind.. His speculation takes him away from the visible body over a threshold into the processes of the woman's consciousness to imagine the qualities of her mind, "to think [himself]imaginatively into [her] experience," to probe the reality of a beauty that is based so uncritically on a superficial glance. He has noticed her compelling physicality, of course, but he questions whether it is a philosopher's signifier of her "soul's" beauty. Deronda is typical of well-educated Victorians in the last quarter of the century at the cultural intersection where the religious idea of soul and the scientific mind meets. The soulfulness of her mind is on his questing mind—the nature of her character and consciousness interests him. He feels uneasy. His body has connected energetically with an unsettling darkness in her. For Daniel Deronda this darkness is not an act of imagination, it comes from the "dynamic energy," the emotion he saw in her face, emanating from her body and experienced in his body as "unrest."

Teresa Brennan has called this experience "the transmission of affect." The phenomonology of group and crowd psychology claims that feelings such as anger and anxiety, exhilaration and sadness, are carried from individuals into the atmosphere. "In other words," writes Brennan, "the transmission of affect is social in origin" and even if only for an instant,"alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject."[238] In describing Deronda's stream of consciousness, Eliot is anticipating science by formulating what we now recognize as theory of mind (TofM). This process of imagining and speculating on the thoughts, feelings, motivations, and possible actions of others –friends, strangers or enemies—is the brain's survival adaptation to aid bonding, build supportive communities and avoid hostile encounters. Eliot's natural empathetic response to people and her elevated artistic practice of mind theory in building authentically-minded characters allows her to use the twin

[238] Brennan (2004). *The Transmission of Affect*, 1. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004

intelligences of the mind and the body to open richer possibilities of exploring and unfolding nature. In this case, her interest in opening a discussion of the two human beauties: the exultation of the beautiful face and body, in contrast to the cultivation and admiration of sympathy, the beauty within, a topic that has long been on her mind.

There is great poignancy in Eliot's statement of giving "reverence to the divine beauty of form!" Here is her response to a man who dismisses the importance of the effort in painting the truth in the "homely," "irregular " faces of Dutch peasants at a wedding, who says: "Foh! What good is there in taking all these pains to give an exact likeness of old women and clowns?" Eliot argues that there is good in *Adam Bede*:

> But bless us, things may be lovable that are not altogether handsome, I hope? . I am not at all sure that the majority of the human race have not been ugly, and even among those "lords of their kind," the British, squat figures, ill-shapen nostrils, and dingy complexions are not startling exceptions. Yet there is a great deal of family love amongst us. Thank God; human feeling is like the mighty rivers that bless the earth: it does not wait for beauty—it flows with resistless force and brings beauty with it.
>
> All honor and reverence to the divine beauty of form! Let us cultivate it to the utmost in men and women and children—in our gardens and in our houses.. . . But let us love that other beauty too, which lies in no secret of proportion but in the secret of deep human sympathy. (Ch.17. 2-3)

When she uses the inclusive "us" and the personal "I" she speaks from the heart. Moving from the practical argument that we all know people who are not physically beautiful but whom we love because they are good and lovable, Eliot makes short work of the flawed and fanciful philosophy that is the crux of pernitious injustice. Turning again to the life-force of primordial waters to capture generative power of shared human feeling, Eliot writes:

"[Human feeling] is like the mighty rivers that bless the earth: It does not wait for beauty—it flows with resistless force and brings beauty with it." Whichever mighty river comes to mind, we understand with awe its unstoppable power to carry anything along on its mighty moving back until is carries it into the ocean leaving it free to move where it will. Eliot so believes in the distributive algorithm of human sympathy she sees it coursing through the body that creates it, carrying it on from one to another, endlessly propagating seeds of compassion in life after life.

In the nature of this call for this other beauty, Eliot is demanding attention be paid to what is beautiful in a human other than the sensually dazzling, publicly conscious display of face and body. Look instead on the quiet love and generosity of "delicious" human sympathy for others, she urges, see the beauty of "contentment" and the spirit of "goodwill" between common folks and regard it with the same "honor and reverence" given to the beautiful face. Eliot is not discounting the brain's hard-wired delight of visual and physical beauty; she urges that we fool the beauty-idolators by "cultivating" beauty in ourselves, in the same way that we can tranform a weedy patch of earth —like the one outside Hester Prynne's prison— into something beautiful to look at. Eliot is trying to expand the effect of beauty by campaigning for the "honor and reverence" of the beauty of human sympathy, as a first among beauty's equals. If for the ancients Beauty is goodness and virtue, for Eliot, Deep Sympathy is a beautiful soul and a better world.

The relationship of physical beauty's secular advantages in social, career and sexual relationships is a topic that was painfully familiar to Eliot. She was not so privileged. She was shy, thought herself socially awkward and lacking in beauty. Herbert Spencer, the polymath, who relished her brilliant intellectual companionship and with whom she was in

love in 1852, broke her heart when he could not return her passion.[239] "Marian showed . . . that innocence of conventionalities . . . and embarassed Spencer with her ardour," writes Rosemary Ashton, " In reponse to a note send by Spencer which had clearly been intended to dampen her ardour," she replied: "I felt disappointed rather than 'hurt' that you should not have sufficiently divined my character to perceive how remote it is from my habitual state of mind to imagine that anyone was falling in love with me (98).

Eliot loves generously but says she is too circumspect to expect love in return. Because of her homeliness, she does not even "imagine that *anyone* (italics added) was falling in love" with her. All Spencer's letters to her have disappeared,[240] but it seems that as Ashton suggests, she waves off Spencer's concerns that she imagined he was in love with her She chides Spencer for this lack of awareness of her "habitual state of mind," which is a denial of herself as an object of any man's erotic interest. She seems more concerned with losing his friendship and companionship than wooing him. In a later startlingly brave letter she begs him not to forsake her, and asks that:

> [Y]ou will always be with me as much as you can and share your thoughts and feelings with me. If you become attached to some on else, then I must die . . . Those who have known me best have said that if ever I love anyone thoroughly my whole life must turn upon that feeling, and I find they said truly. You curse the destiny which has made that feeling concentrate itself on you—but if you will only have patience with me you . . . will find that I can be satisfied by very little, if I am delivered from the dread of losing it.
> I suppose that no woman ever before wrote such a letter as this —but I am not ashamed of it, for I am conscious that in the light of reason and true

[239] In his autobiography Herbert Spencer recalled that he and Eliot were so often in one another's company 'there were reports that I was in love with her, and that we were about to be married.'" Qtd in Ashton, 97.

[240] Ashton, 99-100.

> refinement I am worthy of your respect and tenderness, whatever gross men or vulgar-minded women might think of me. (100)

While modest about her romantic prospects, she has a healthy sense of self-esteem.

In an essay in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1919, Virginia Woolf notes that the unpleasant descriptions of Eliot's face came mostly from "the opposite sex, [who] have resented half consciously perhaps, her deficiency in a quality which is held to be supremely desirable in women."[241] Woolf's idea that men might resent women who are not lovely to look at—they disappoint the male expectation, or rather the desire for the heightened erotic sensation that comes with the male gaze—suggests the perversely disordered male/ female order. Reduced to a face and a body, both prize and quarry, the womanly function is to provide delight and fantasy for the consuming eye, every male gaze that chooses or discards with resentment, she who is, or is not ,"supremely desirable." What is "supremely desirable" is the supreme desire of the male. This comes, as John Berger says, in *Ways of Seeing* "at the cost of the woman's self being split into two, in contrast to the male's unified sense of self":

> A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies . . . The promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economoic, social, sexual—but the object is always exterior to the man. A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. . . .By contrast a woman's presence expresses her attitude to herself, and defines what can and what cannot be done to her. Her presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, taste —indeed there is nothing she can do that does not contribute to her presence. Presence for a woman is so intrinsic to her person that men tend to think of it as an almost physical emanation, a kind of heat or smell, or aura. A woman must continually watch herself. . . . She is almost continually accompanied by her

[241] Woolf's essay on George Eliot appeared in the series "A Celebration of Women Writers."

> own image of herself. . . . And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituents yet always as distinct elements of her identity as a woman. (45-6)

One such man was Henry James. In a note to his father after meeting George Eliot, drops all pretense of upper-class British manners and describes her as: '[M]agnificently ugly—deliciously hideous. She has a low forehead, a dull grey eye, a vast pendulous nose, a huge mouth full of uneven teeth and a chin and jaw-bone *qui n'en finissent pas.* [242] But, he admits to falling in love with her. Because . . ." [I]n this vast ugliness resides a powerful beauty, which in a very few minutes steals forth and charms the mind, so that you end as I ended, in falling in love with her."[243] After all the ugly words, he is smitten with George Eliot's appealing beauty. But in the impact of first appearances, she is: Magnificently ugly"—"deliciously hideous," a "vast pendulous nose, a huge mouth . . . and a jaw-bone" that (in the English translation) never ends. Fantasizing these features into a cohesive image requires a monstrously imaginative mind-set. One wonders what psychological pathology the more mature critic Henry James might have ascribed to a writer who so described a woman whose only offence was her terrifying brilliance and her undisputed homeliness. His description of the "powerful beauty" of her being, the "other beauty" of her presence, the beauty of her shining intelligence, can be considered an expression of awe, but it is a compliment delivered with what must be unconscious irony, for Henry James is no stranger to the ironic. He experiences her "powerful beauty" as "steal[ing] forth." Why he considers that the "power" of Eliot's otherwise noble attributes should have to sneak out like a intruder from behind a

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Edel, Leon, ed. *Henry James Selected Letters*, 35. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987.

wall to "steal" his unwillingly given attention and "charm" away, like a snake handler, his perceptions of the vastness of her ugliness, suggests one of two interpretations: Eliot's reticence or James's imperiousness. Portraits and drawings of Eliot in her twenties, thirties and forties show James's description of "vast ugliness" as a grotesque caricature of someone who according to Leslie Stephens (Virginia Woolf's father) was "intensely feminine, "[244] and whose gentle deep-set eyes, strong chin and nose— certainly prominent in profile— dominated her serious face when she was observed in deep thought.[245] If Henry James's thoughts are typical of the attitudes of Eliot's male contemporaries how could she remain unconscious of the heavy significance of the male glance? How could she respond to the sour rejection of the male practicing his patriarchal right to consider the female charms presented for his delight and delectation?

Imagine if this description from James represents even a smattering of what Eliot experienced in her day. Think about what it might mean to be painfully conscious that you are an object of conspicuous attention because you are seen as physically unusual in some way— a woman with a nose too large, or a man whose nose is blasted away by a war. Each pitying or appraising eye fixed on your face becomes an assault to defend against by looking neither left or right, but straight ahead. Even then the stare pierces your peripheral vision and your consciousness. If you think of yourself as ugly, as Eliot did herself, you already know what *they* are thinking. For every time you look in a mirror you think it, too. You agree. This

[244]Stephen, Leslie (1902). University of Toronto English Library. Web. www.library.utoronto.ca/utelcriticism/stephenl_geliot/gel

[245] Woolf quotes another passage from Edmund Gosse. Many years after Eliot's death, he recalls her "driving through London in a victoria." What he remembers was: [A] large, thick-set sybil, dreamy and immobile, whose massive features, somewhat grim when seen in profile, were incongruously bordered by a hat, always in the height of Paris fashion . . ."[245] At least, Gosse acknowledges her oracular literary status by naming her a "sybil," but sybils—even those "thick-set" ones— are not made to appear ludicrous for the wearing of a fashionable chapeau.

means you join with them in demeaning yourself and thus are doubly diminished. Being made smaller is one of this metaphor's body-based analogies that captures a physical and psychological reality to diminish: to lessen, reduce, shrink, truncate, cut down, crop, lop, curtail, fade away, contract, belittle. Perversely, as the defences disintegrate, you internalize your literal relation to the metaphoric meaning. The experience? You feel shamed, writes Léon Wurzer. Shame is the "intense consciousness of being the object of severe and universal observation."[246] You might try to camouflage your flaws under a large hat like George Eliot's. Or you might shrink away from the world and become reclusive as some critics have proposed that Eliot did. However, that is not so.

According to Kathleen McCormack's recent revisionist account of Eliot's social life, "after a period of social ostracism in reaction to their non-marital union, Eliot and George Lewes were very socially active, in and out of their home. The Lewes's were sought-after guests at "concerts, opera, dinners, weekends, recitals, excusions and salons. And in the summer months they hosted a weekly salon "famously known as Sundays at the Priory," which were "crowded with many of the most important and respected of Victorian Contemporaries." [247] Referring back to *Adam Bede*, Eliot's words on physical appearance and lovability captures her warmth and affection for her many friends—men and women—"my every-day fellow-men whose faces I know." And for whom she reserved "a great deal of [those feelings of] love and reverence for whose hands" she held as they sat chatting on Sunday afternoons at The Priory. Of course, these details contradict the promulgated portrait

[246] Wurzer. *The Mask of Shame*. Qtd in *Scenes of Shame*, 59. Eds: Adamson Joseph and Hilary Clark. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999.

[247] Kathleen McCormack. *George Eliot in Society: Travels Abroad and Sundays at the Priory*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2013. 1-3.

of Eliot (and Lewes) as unlovely and socially ostracized and replace it with a warm and loving woman who nurtures her friends and is cherished by them.

Or instead, imagine the experience of a young woman like Gwendolen Harleth, a "sylph" who has a "graceful figure"[and] . . . could hardly be passed with indifference (10). She is "intensely conscious" that she was the object of Daniel Deronda's "severe . . . observation," she returned his stare. This is how Eliot imagines what Harleth imagines Deronda's "severe" look implies:

> Her eyes met Deronda's. . . The darting sense that he was measuring her, and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of a different quality from the human dross around her, that he felt himself in a region outside and above her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order, roused a tingling resentment which stretched the moment with conflict. It did not bring the blood to her cheeks, but sent it away from her lips. She controlled herself by the help of an inward defiance . . . But Deronda's gaze seemed to have acted as an evil eye. (12)

She feels judged. She thinks "he [is] measuring her," "look[ing] down on her, and finding her "inferior." She decides that he sees her as one among the lower class, the "dross" around the table, a nonentity, beneath him. The imagined intensity of his scrutiny traps the flow of her breath, tightening her face and draining the blood "from her lips." She tries to hide her distress by appearing equal to him—"defiant" before his gaze. But, she is unnerved by its penetration: it has the effect of paralysis —an "evil eye." Each sees evil in the other's eye. Gwendolen Harleth is imagining what he thinks of her and she is unnerved by the startling experience of discomfort. Deronda's gaze is a painful experience for her; it has the force of blackness —as if a malevolent power has overtaken her.

Why her reflected response to a stranger's look should take her so quickly into a dark hole of doubt is strange. She had been seen a few minutes before as having "an air of firm choice" (10) but suddenly she seems undone. At this point in the novel we know little about her. It is as if Eliot were using Gwendolen as a "blank slate" to demonstrate the power of the first impressions on the visual brain, the chemical jolt of a beautiful face, and what beauty translates to in the personal and social blendings of significance in late nineteenth-century life. Eliot is writing at a time when the institution of aristocracy is crumbling in irrelevance, and with it the calcified English regimes of class, gender, religion, education and the repressive political, economic and social apparatus that limits the expansion of the individual's development as agents of their own aspirations.[248]

Out of the 19th century world of philosopy and the sciences, the fascinations of the mechanism of the human organism and the mysteries of the brain and the mind comes George Eliot who, writes Terence Cave, "combined a formidable intelligence with imaginative sympathy, and acute powers of observation."[249] Eliot's interests in the mind sciences, he adds, "widened the horizons of the novel and her psychological insights radically influenced the novelist's approach to characterization." Following Ruskin's criterion of truthfulness of representation in the arts, Eliot sees her task as an author in capturing, as in a "portrait," her characters' true nature by close observation of their expressions, and by making that truth alive to the reader through the descriptive mastery of images, the visual language Ruskin modeled in *Modern Painters*. "Examine your words well," Eliot warned,"and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a

[248] See the following works on Victorian culture: Walter E.Houghton.*The American Frame of Mind, 1830-1870;* Laura Otis, ed. *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century*; Anne Stiles, ed.*Neurology and Literature, 1850-1910.*

[249] Terence Cave, editor of the Penguin Classic *Daniel Deronda* (1995) Frontispiece essay.

hard thing to say the exact truth." Eliot wrote of the quality of truthfulness in the representation in the faces of the "homely" villagers in Dutch genre painting as a "rare, precious quality of truthfulness I delight in." "There is," she wrote,

> [A] source of delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence, which has been the fate of so many more among my fellow mortals or I turn to the village wedding . . . where an awkward bridegroom opens the dance with a high-shouldered, broad-faced bride, while elderly and middle-aged folk look on, with very irregular noses and lips . . .

And:

> There are few prophets in the world; few sublimely beautiful women; few heroes. I can't afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities: I want a great deal of those feeling for my every-day fellow-men whose faces I know, whose hands I touch, for whom I make way with kindly courtesy.
>
> *Adam Bede*

Eliot's expression of "delicious" in her sympathetic connection to the "precious quality of truthfulness" in the Dutch artists' honest appreciation of the common lives of their subjects suggests it is a nourishing experience. She is filled up with the pleasure felt in the acknowledged significance of their ordinary lives. Sympathy clearly is not unidirectional. It is first felt at its source, then by the receiver, and also by an observer such as Eliot, whose perceptive acuity for human sympathy is emotionally intuitive. The intimacy of Eliot's imaginative connection reflects her authentic response to the reception and representation of the different other. Eliot makes clear her view that the artist has a responsibility to mirror in art the real human experience. The carefully studied face speaks volumes. Hugh Witemeyer observes in *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* the influence of Ruskin's expressive theories in Eliot's writing:

> To her nineteenth-century eyes, expression was the gateway to the soul, the mind, the passions, the sentiments, transmitting the invisible life through a visible language of facial and corporal signs. [250]

This is true to Ruskin's teaching that "the expression of the thoughts of persons represented will always be the first thing considered" by an artist.[251] "Considered" is a gigantically important word in Ruskin's language of artistic morality. Atttaching the word "morality" to a discussion of Ruskin's views is irresistible because of his preacherly voice, and associating the morality to his evangelical Christian religious belief is commonplace. But, Harold Bloom argues that is a mistaken assumption. Ruskin's morality is integrity —fairness, justness, honest dealing—the right way for any human being to behave. When Ruskin says "the expression of the thoughts will always be the first thing considered" by an artist, he means that it is first, not a "should," it is a priority, that it must be paid attention to and reflected on. When Ruskin says "considered" it is not a euphemism. His "considered" means that thoughtful, sympathetic attention must be paid. This is the same kind of sympathetic consideration of the commonplace that Eliot insists fulfills the true promise of art, a truth which "is the nearest thing to life." Art, she continues, "is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contract with our fellow man beyond the bonds of our personal lot." Introducing the concept of a "contract with our fellow man," elevates the consideration of treating others with "dignity" as a human right, not a personal courtesy:

> All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the people. Falsification here is far more pernicious than in the more artifiicial aspects of life. It is not so very serious that we should have false

[250] Witemeyer. http://torianwweb.org/authors/eliot/hw/3.1html. 3/22/15. Ruskin made clear in Modern Painters that when he used the term artist he was adressing the art of both writers and painters.

[251]Ruskin MP 5.51

> ideas about evanescent fashions—about the manners and conversation of beaux and duchesses; but it is serious that our sympathy with the perennial joys and struggles, the toil, the tragedy, and the humour in life of our more heavily-laden fellow men, should be perverted, and turned towards a false object instead of a true one. (*Adam Bede*, 445)

Eliot's vehement language in condemning as "perverted" the false represention of life so vividly expressed on the faces and the hard-worked bodies of "heavily-laden fellow men" and women reaches deeply into the belief in the sacredness of every human life. For an artist to reduce a fellow man to insignificance by obliterating his essential being Eliot believes is in effect, a moral lapse, the willful desecration of truth.

p—and frustration— of Eliot's cautiousness in writing "the exact truth," is the carefulness of her characterization of her heroine, Gwendolen Harleth. This scrupulous gentleness, a definite reserve of judgment, is in some ways typical of Eliot's preference to allow the reader to join her in her process of absorbing and weighing the import of scattered character vignettes before reaching conclusions. Not that Eliot might have had a motive to be false to the character she created—why would she?— but rather that (from this reader's point of view) Gwendolen's behavior is often so intolerable that it argues against the restraint a reader might want to use to make sense of the beautiful girl's ugly behavior. But one feels there is something more definitive in Eliot's reticence, perhaps, a yet unstated sympathetic attachment to the young woman—a step beyond sympathetic observation. When we pause to ponder this, we recall that now significant clue —the title Eliot gives to Book 1 of the novel:*The Spoiled Child*— and you wonder why she calls a 20-year-old a child, and who or what spoiled her? Spoiled is a quagmire of a word, not an innocent adjective, as it suggests posed next to "child." Objectively, its meaning stretches endlessly from a small flaw to utter

despoliation. What does this mean about Gwendolen? It becomes clear that the story is in Eliot's hands and that truth sometimes has to be unearthed, even though what seems like the truth has erupted on the page with a shocking jolt. Echoing Ruskin, Eliot biographer Rosemary Ashton, throws light on this technique:

> We are to be brought by the artist into sympathy with flawed, sometimes stupid characters because we are made to see . . . that we belong to the same species, share our humanity with them. George Eliot's early fiction sets out to achieve such an extension of our sympathies by imaginitively involving us in the difficulties if the lives she creates for her characters. (156)

If this analysis holds up, we may recognize some of the "just like me" in Gwendolen's character —since we all are flawed— and may find ourselves understanding and feeling empathy for the "Spoiled Child."

With centuries-old preconceptions of the physical beauty firmly in place, the author is taking us on a journey to an interior encounter with Gwendolen Harleth. In ironic coincidence, Gwendolen is coming along on the same journey: she will eventually discover herself through her relationships with the vastly different characters Eliot has created to be part of her world, and the agents of her torment and enlightenment. As Eliot begins to color in the picture of Gwendolen Harleth from the outside in, we experience the process from three perspectives—the narrator's, Gwendolen's and our own—a process of triple insight. Eliot makes some surprising revelations.

Gwendolen's private thoughts suggest a fragile self-esteem. Her fearful imaginings of Daniel Deronda's thoughts, her construction of his mind, reveals her own self-consciousness in contrast to her usual preening self-confidence. She is hyper-sensitive, easily offended. Part of her insecurity relates to social status by which she measures others—and especially

herself: superior or inferior, or worse, a nonentity, the squirming, "dross," like insects pinned and trapped on a lab table, specimen[s] of a lower order. " These images are conjured out of Harleth's fertile imagination. But their chilling effect on her, her humiliation, which she projects onto Deronda as his audacity in reducing her to this commonplace status, halts her body's systemic life-giving flow of blood, bleaching the rosiness from her lips. Meanwhile, gazing at the "problematic sylph," (10) Deronda's thoughts are elsewhere —not on her class or status, but analyzing her "cold and neutral look," an attempt he imagines she is making to "conceal an inward exultation" at her winning streak at the table. While his perception is of her imagined triumph at the table; her imagined humiliation is in her interpretation of the message she sees in his gaze. Here's Eliot's interpretation of Gwendolen's interior struggle to understand:

> [I]t was at least better that he should have kept his attention fixed on her than he should have disregarded her as one of an insect swarm that had no individual physiognomy. Beside, in spite of his superciliousness and irony, it was difficult to believe that he did not admire her spirit as well as her person: he was young, handsome, distinguished in appearance—not one of those dowdy Philistines who thought it incumbent on them to blight the gaming-table with a sour look of protest as they passed by it. The general conviction that we are admirable does not easily give way before a single negative. . . . In Gwendolen's normal habits of mind it had been taken for granted that she knew she was admirable and that she herself was admired. This basis of her thinking had received disagreeable concussion, and reeled a little, but was not easily to be overthrown. (11-12)

She knew he was still watching her. Locked into her mind's reading of his opinion of her as a nonentity, "as one of an insect swarm that had no individual physiognomy," she tries to take

some comfort in his continuing attention which proves, to her that, indeed, she is interesting to him. She begins the psychic effort to shore up her shaky self-esteem. She cannot "believe that [this man, a stranger across the room] did not admire her." After all, given her life experience, she takes "for granted" that she is admirable, and that "she herself [is] admired." But, she is not wondering why her "admirable" self disappears at this very moment when the admiration she expects is missing. The destruction of this "admirable" self is not Deronda's. It is a demolition of self —self-demolition. Deronda's stern gaze has stirred up a wounded self. It had the physical effect of a blow to her head, "a disagreeable concussion," an assault on her mind. Her description of bodily violence, of a concussion, as her personal experience of this imagined attack punches home how brutal is the loss of her perfect self. Like the experience of intense shame that psychologists say is physically painful, she is "reeling" from the blow — that sickening fear of the loss of an idealized self, a disorienting feeling-based cognitive state of pitching and rolling as you hang on to the idea of who you think you are. But, Gwendolen Harleth "was not easily to be overthrown." She feels humiliated, but she rallies. She will fight back. The fateful connection of Deronda's and Harleth's eyes across the smoke-filled room is over. No words have passed between them, but the conversation of eyes, of imagined minds, of felt affect is well-advanced—each has imagined the other's life of the mind. We have encountered the fragile identity behind Gwendolen's confident mask. What comes next? How does she fight back to pick up pieces of her shattered image, to recreate her idealized self ? When Gwendolen Harleth appears in the hotel's salon that evening, she has wrapped herself in a costume of other-world imagery.

The uprooted Gwendolen has plunged herself into the costume of a watery world and with it a new personna. Eliot is now at work writing into flesh her face and body, or painting

the portrait of Gwendolen Harleth as Eliot prefers to think of it. Here is the image, the impressionistic visual assemblage Eliot begins to create. It lures our eyes into the portrait she paints, first, as a beginning of familiarity, to absorb the outside of a beautiful woman— the color, the texture, the detail, the attitude of the body. We, as readers, are audience surrogates, gaping at a woman's fantasy alter-ego :

> The Nereid in sea-green robes and silver ornaments, with a pale green feather fastened in silver falling backward over her green hat and light brown hair was Gwendolen Harleth. She was under the wing or rather soared by the shoulder of the lady who had sat by her at the roulette table . . . They were walking about or standing to chat with acquaintances; and Gwendolen was much observed by the seated guests. (12)

This is what we might imagine, our eyes prompted by Eliot's powerful visuals, of colors, textures, and actions: All eyes are on 20-year-old Gwendolen, just as she intended. The seated guests look up at the elegant, slender frame, soaring over her older companion. She is draped in robes of oceanic hues of pale-green decorated with ornaments of silver that ripple as she moves. Her light brown hair is set off with a green hat and a silver clasp from which is suspended at the back a pale green feather. The solidity of the earth in the silver and the ethereal plumage of the feather teases the visual cortex with the pleasures of contrasts, and the marvel of different spheres of deep dark geology and the lightness of the heavens. That Eliot should choose to have her either "under the wing of" or "rather soared by" her companion is a visual gift of two avian metaphors offering different interpretations.

There is no settled mental space for Gwendolen. We sense she is in flux. This is how Eliot pulls us from the visual feast into the real nourishment of seeing—to wonder, as in

feeling awe, and to wonder, as in the process of what comes after attentive seeing that engages the brain: thinking. Looking at the outside as Eliot shows, is not a dead-end activity. When it involves the mind as well as the eye, it has questions to ask. Gwendolen is either protected "under the wing" of a mother substitute or is "soar[ing] by," breaking free of her. Although Eliot's use of "rather" indicates her choice, the ambivalence suggests an allusion to child-woman is in the unsure process of breaking out of the nest. The effect of the body, floating in the salon's airless atmosphere in a mermaid outfit of pale green and silver scales is that of a Nereid, a mythical sea nymph. She does not walk like others, she appears elevated, "soaring." No longer just Miss Harleth, she is on an imaginative wave as princess of the sea, her feet barely touching the floor, her feather fluttering behind her, alive in her wake. The sea-green gown and silvery scales flash in the candlelight as she glides through the hotel salon which is now her sparkling silver and green underwater kingdom. She is, in every sense, it seems, in her element—in her sense of herself and in the environment Eliot has imagined as the backdrop for Gwendolen's carefully created costume drama. It is a mirage of her pretentions. In the mysterious effect of the subdued lighting, she is to the human eye shimmeringly beautiful enough to spark the image of one of the fifty daughters of the all-powerful sea god Nereus, the son of Oceanus who rules the seas, and Gaia, the goddess of the earth.

Eliot's Gwendolen is no ordinary creature. She is an object for the eye, an object of desire, an object for discussion. Here, Eliot draws us in as eavesdroppers to a nineteenth-century conversation about the irresistible physical elements that evoke the mind's and body's sensations of awe in the presence of female beauty. The gossipy onlookers are cast as amateur analysts:

"A striking girl—that Miss Harleth—unlike others," says one guest, setting her apart from all the other young women in the room. Her beauty is *sui generis*, 'unlike others." It is not a gentle, caressing beauty that safely draws you into its aura. Instead, it assaults him, "striking" him, knocking him down dead in its provocation. Her looks have pummelled him breathless with excitement, or anxiety.

His companion picks up the scent of danger. "Yes, she has got herself up as a sort of serpent now, all green and silver, and winds her neck about a little more than usual." She is dangerous, a "sort of serpent," a monster, poised to attack her victim, her neck winding to watch her prey, who might be Deronda, or, more likely, a large audience of admiring eyes.

"Oh," observes another, "she *must* be doing something extraordinary. She is *that* kind of girl." He sees Gwendolen's performance as too obvious, she's a show-off, feeding off attention, staging a optic event to galvanize attention. "She's certanly eye-catching in her green and silver gown, but "do you find her pretty?"

"Very," says the distinguished Mr. Vandernoodt, "a man might risk hanging for her." And then, thinking better of it, adds: "I mean a fool might." Mr. Vandernoodt, who was first struck by her beauty, now daringly imagines it worth risking his neck to have the pleasure of embracing hers. A quick look at the penal code would zero in on the criminal offense that might end in a rope around his neck. This is what Mr. Vandernodt has in mind, even if for a few seconds, but the joking that obscures that desire, the moral sleight of tongue citing the punishment of hanging and not the crime of rape passes for what it is. It's time to move back to Gwendolen's face.

Another asks: "You like a *nez retroussé* then, and long narrow eyes?"
"When they go with such an *ensemble*," quips Mr.Vandernoodt, retreating a little.

"*The ensemble du serpent*?" his friend pushes back to what scares him, the monster temptress Gwendolen with the long neck.

Vandernoodt's friend says:"Woman was tempted by a serpent."

The tempted Mr. Vandernoodt admits of it, therefore "Why not man?"

His companion quibbles. Miss Harleth is "certainly very graceful," but not to his taste, "a bit too pale. She has a sort of Lamia beauty," he says, reaching for the Keatsian reptilian symbol that squeezes him in the tight grasp of Gwendolen's dangerously beautiful allure.

The transfiguration from floating Neirid to writhing "Lamia,"of the beautiful snake/woman with breasts and female face and scaly snake body below, and a reputation for devouring her own children —causes Mr. Vandenoodt to defend her. He finds his evidence in her skin tone and the distracting curves of nose and lips.

"On the contrary, I think her complexion one of her chief charms. It is a warm paleness . . . And that delicate nose with its gradual little upward curve is distracting." Mr. Vandenoodt's eyes are devouring Gwendolen's face—bite by bite. The detail: the nose, delicate, its upward curve so subtle that the eye must reach out to feel its profile to be able describe it with precision. Then, slipping down to the bow below, even more distracted by the sight of her mouth, he asks: 'there was never a prettier mouth, the lips curl backward so finely, eh . . . ? "

"Think so?" disagrees his companion. "I cannot endure that sort of mouth. It looks so self-complacent, as if it knew its own beauty —the curves are too immovable. I like a mouth that trembles more." This speaker, no doubt familiar with the age's interest in phrenology, seems to prefer the signs of psychology written on the face. Those lovely lips don't "tremble" with insecurity and modesty. Instead, to him, they speak to the "complacency," the smug assurance of beauty that presumes male adulation. Ah, the trembling mouth, a sign of girlish

vulnerability, is the preferred presentation for the man who conjures up a snaky, child-devouring woman in a 20-year-old spoiled child.

In the academy of beauty, everyone is an expert. The last word goes to an eavesdropping dowager. "For my part I think her odious," she says dismissively of Gwendolen. This private, but public, conversation about the obvious points of female beauty, the grace of the body, the clothes that cover it, the analogizing of female types, the delicacy of the complexion, the shape of the eyes, the tip of the nose, the curl of the lips, ends with another answer to Daniel Deronda's question of whether Gwendolen Harleth is beautful or not beautful. But, for Gwendolen's judge and jury it a question of a different order. The dowager, whose aesthetic tastes were perhaps frozen in styles of yesteryear, reports her considered opinion of that face and body—"Odious." And then, " It is wonderful what unpleasant girls get into vogue." (all quotations, *Daniel Deronda*,12)

As eavesdroppers and analysts in a set-piece of the objectification and dissection of a visually kidnapped body, we can judge this as fascinating, banal, inconsequential, bad mannered, or obscene, because it is all of these. It is also a societal normality in that it is the gossipy pleasure of the vapid observer to strip an attractive woman of her humanity, and lay her on their peculiarly-tilted female specimen table for dissection. The purpose, in this case, is its frivolous pleasure. We've experienced the deconstruction by beauty by the invaders of Gwendolen, the object.

Now let's follow Eliot's technique in thinking about beauty's meaning. She first deals with physical beauty, its heart-stopping sensations, and its powerfully corrupting influence, false assumptions, misleading theories, deceptive promises and cruel consequences. With Gwendolen under scutinty, we see how Eliot chooses to represent her physical beauty and the

meaning it has for her and for the world she moves in. Next, we dive into the delicacy of mental life as Eliot illuminates the measure of her character's spiritual beauty through her young consciousnesss, the stress of life's unpredictibilities, and her estimation of herself in relation to others. This leads Eliot to the exposure of Harleth's dark side—the inversion of beauty—the side that her beauty made possible, to become habitual without criticism or protest because her enchanting beauty sometimes creates the awe that silences tongues.

The question "Is she beautiful or not beautiful," focuses on a deeply ingrained cultural mindset, one that controls society's views of women and, by insidious corollary, the adored woman's and spoiled child's view of herself.

> Always she was the princess in exile, who in time of famine was to have her breakfast roll made of the finest-bolted flour from the seven thin ears of wheat, and in a general decampment was to have her silver fork kept out of the baggage. How was this to be accounted for? The answer may seem to lie quite on the surface: — in her beauty. A certain unusualness about her, a decision of will which made itself felt in her graceful movements and clear unhesitating tones, so that when she came into the room on a rainy day when everyone else was flaccid and the use of things in general was not apparent to them, there seemed to be a sudden, sufficient reason for keeping up the forms of life; and even the waiters at hotels showed the more alacrity in doing away with the crumbs and creases and dregs with struggling fliers in them. This potent charm, added to the fact that she was the eldest daughter for whom her mamma had always been in an apologetic state of mind for the evils brought on her by a step-father,[252] may seem so full a reason for Gwendolen's

[252]Gwendolen's mother had made a disastrous marriage to seafaring Captain Davilow, who was seldom home, who stole her jewelry, and when he died left her with another four daughters (superfluous, as Eliot ironically calls them in reference to their also-ran position in the family). Gwendolen was the only child of the first happy marriage that also ended in the husband's death. Louise Penner speculates in Unmapped Country: Uncovering the Hidden Wounds in "Daniel Deronda." Victorian Literature and Culture, Vol. 30. #1 (2002) (77-97) that Gwendolen's stepfather may have molested her, thus accounting for her dislike of men. Given George Eliot's narrative practices, it seems highly unlikely that she would have withheld critical information that would have had a major bearing on her character's psychic life.

> domestic empire, that to look for any other would be to ask the reason of daylight when the sun is shining. (41)

"How can one "account" for this?" asks Eliot. This is an implicit demand to explain why Gwendolen places herself above other members of her family, expecting better food and finer considerations for her comforts—an ethical observation that demands a just reckoning. In the level playing fields of familial fair-mindedness, Gwendolen assumes the role of the honored royal presence, complete with the silver-fork of privilege at the ready, too refined for the provisions and the humble abode of those who shelter her. Why this desire, or perhaps anxiety, of the family and the servants to attend to her stated preferences and her unspoken but intuited desires? What causes an otherwise lackadaisical staff and family to jump to their feet to perform for her, and for slovenly waiters in hotels to dance attention to clear away the "dregs" when Gwendolen appears? Why is Gwendolen's lack of inner beauty ignored? Eliot with a pinch of reasonableness and a dollop of irony says "the answer may *seem* to *lie quite on the surface*: —in her beauty." (emphasis added.) She is preferred because of her beauty. Of this commodity, Eliot says "it lie[s] quite on the surface." The truth about Gwendolen's surface, her face and body, is that "on the surface" it is a beautiful lie. Nevertheless this package of beauty, gracefulness, commanding presence, and "potent charms" is verifiably the flesh-and-blood attitude of a real princess to mother, sisters, servants and hotel waiters —all those who wait on her, wait until she is ready, until she wishes, until she requires the services of all these who find her beauty and its power irresistible. With that, and "mamma['s]" perpetual "apologetic" appeasing guilt for inflicting Gwendolen with "evils brought on" by a scoundrel of a step-father, the reason for the child's imperious control of her "empire" is

easily explained. It seems clear "as daylight," which as likely means that it is as complicated as the darkness of night.

The idea of Gwendolen, as a commoner-princess, beautiful in comparison to all around, is again impressed on our eye as we take in her regal entrance, alone in the spotlight, at the aristocratic Mrs. Arrowpoint's evening soiree;

> No youthful figure there was comparable to Gwendolen's as she passed through the long suite of rooms adorned with light and flowers, and, visible at first as a slim figure floating along in white drapery, approached through one wide doorway after another into fuller illumination and definiteness. She had never had that sort of promenade before, and she felt exultingly that it befitted her: any one looking at her for the first time might have supposed that long galleries and lackeys had always been a matter of course in her life. (43)

As a phantasm of the night, she arrives in our presence, a ghostly emanation from a gauzy distance. The narration moves from the onlookers' perspective and slides so smoothly into Gwendolen's exquisite sensations that suggest control of the dramatic moment as she "exultingly" floats slowly out of the diffused white distance, through the long rooms into the "illumination and definiteness" of her presence as embraced by her audience.The definiteness of her form, the certainty of her beauty, the indisputable superiority of her personhood is solidified by the admiring onlookers who provide the certainty of the exceptional presence that she exults in. It is a theatrical performance. It is also an idealized portrait of a 19th-century princess—a "princess in exile" or the "Vandyke Duchess" as her cousin jokes (Intro xx). As the subject of an imagined portrait she is perfectly posed for effect. Follow the descriptive imagery of the vanishing-point architectural perspective of the elegant long rooms, the gauzy focus of vases of tall flowers and soft lights backlighting Gwendolen's

swaying body as her onward movement through the arch takes her in front of the wide doorway that frames her body, all the while that body declaring as in the act of portraiture, her right to be there. All that is missing in the picture are the imagined "lackeys," the inferiors, her imagined servile followers.

Implicit in this scene is the aura of the social and sexual preference given the beautiful female face— eyes glued to the image, then swivelling from head down and across the body with awe and longing. To recreate the effect of the promiscuous eye, Eliot flashes edited images of Gwendolen as the pages turn, glimpses that we want to hold on to, but find difficult to assemble into a whole vision —although that is what the brain always strives to do, to complete the picture and solve the mystery — because just pieces of Gwendolen are selected out for observation—slices of the hair, the body, the throat, the eyes, the lashes, the mouth, caught as she appears and disappears, as the eyes move seeking more of her the idea of her as a fragmented woman struggling with physic disconnection between a beautiful outside and a lovely mind, becomes imprinted in memory. The author's recurring images are compulsive to the point of obsession, a mimesis of the human response, the inability to take our eyes away from grasping the beautiful thing by "trying to keep the thing sensorily present,"[253] like Leonardo following beautiful people "as though half-crazed" around the streets of Florence, as Elaine Scarry describes in *On Beauty* (6).[254] Eliot echoes this desire by

[253] Scarry, *On Beauty*, 6.

[254] Pater qtd by Scarry in *On Beauty*, 6. In *The Renaissance* (204-5) describing Leonardo's early influences, Pater writes: "Two ideas were especially confirmed in him as reflexes of things that had touched his brain in childhood beyond the depth of other impressions — the smiling of women and the motion of great waters. And in such studies some interfusion of the extremes of beauty and terror shaped itself, as an image that might be seen and touched, in the mind of this gracious youth, so fixed that for the rest of his life it never left him. As if catching glimpses of it in the strange eyes or hair of chance people, he would follow such about the streets of Florence till the sun went down, of whom many sketches of his remain. Some of these are full of a curious beauty, that remote beauty which may be apprehended only by those who have sought it carefully; who,

fetishizing Gwendolen's beauty. Her charms are not described in a discreet paragraph; that would be too much to absorb and not as effective. The impression is of visual fragmentation dispensed for us in sensual ideas to gather up in a word here, a phrase there, a sentence of exquisiteness that triggers a flood of images in the visual cortex, followed by more — and yet more—while the effect of her beauty on others is noted in every encounter.

Eliot's visual technique is not properly appreciated by a dictionary definition of fragment as the "incomplete or isolated portion," of an object, for this fragmentation, as well as a comment on Gwendolen's psychic condition, it is a classic perceptive exercise in concentrated observation that leads to visual acuity. Donald Hoffman observes that "[t]he fundamental problem of vision is the image at the eye has countless possible interpretations," (*Visual Intelligence*, 13). He explains why:

> Without exception, everything you see you[r brain] construct[s]: color, shading, texture, motion, shape, visual objects and entire visual scenes . . . are simple demonstrations of your visual intelligence and its genius to construct. . . . We use the phrase 'what you see' in at least two ways [in the phenomenal sense]. Sometimes we use it to mean 'the way things look to you,' 'the way they visually appear to you,' 'the way you visually experience them.' . . .[In the relational sense] we also use the phrase 'what you see' to mean roughly 'what you interact with when you look.' (5-6).

There is a world of sensation and meaning in a face, like the eons of the world's history lurking in a rock face in Death Valley. Trying to "take-in" the whole face in a careless glance is as vapid a use of the eye as is an insoucient wave at the "fantastic puzzle"[255] of Joseph

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starting with acknowledged types of beauty, have refined as far upon these, as these refine upon the world of common forms." http://victorianweb.org/authors/pater/renaissance/6.html.10/16/15.

[255] See Piper. "Illustrated History of Art."

Mallord William Turner's "Snow Storm: Steam Boat off a Harbour's Mouth" (1842) the belief that you "get it." The visual cortex is the most complicated machine in our world, but its best work is done, as John Ruskin insists, in the head of a patiently perceptive observer. Eliot is guiding us to interact visually and cognitively—usually an unconscious process—with Gwendolen's face and body so that we can experience our own unique visual construction as well as the impact of her beauty on the novel's characters. But there is more to Eliot's practice of visualization: it is her vehicle of sight leading to contemplation of the "body as a sensory interface between the interior and exterior world," as Lehrer says.

Here are some images of Gwendolen from the first hundred pages of an 800- page novel. If this list seems extravagant, it is only because the visual spotlight on Eliot's heroine is extravagant— evidence to support the contention that the obsessive reference to Gwendolen's appearance is a narrative seduction to the power of the image and of imagination's endless fancy. It becomes impossible to read about her, to think of her, to imagine her without a somewhat ethereal vision of her flashing across the mind's eye. These descriptions provide only a fraction of the imaginings of her beauty that continue through the work until later in the novel before the harrowing scene when her despotic husband Henleigh Grandcourt drowns in a boating accident in the waters off Genoa that "certainly, her troubles had not marred her beauty."As for the aesthetic of face and body? Is she beautiful? What follows is Eliot's narrator's responsive evidence to the opening question:

"She showed the full height of a graceful figure . . . " (9)."Gwendolen might have looked lingeringly at herself for pleasure (surely an allowable indulgence); but now she took no conscious note of her reflected beauty" (16)."Her beautiful lips curled into a more and

more decided smile, till at last she took off her hat, and kissed the warm glass that has looked so cold" (18).“[S] he walked on with her usual floating movement, every line in her figure and drapery falling in gentle curves atttractive to all eyes . . . ”(19).“[I]magine [Gwendolen compared to the other females] a young racehorse in the paddock among untrimmed ponies and patient hacks”(25). “Jocosa took out one comb which fastened the coil of [Gwendolen’s] hair, and then shook out the mass till it fell in a smooth light-brown stream far below its owner’s slim waist ”(27). “Certainly, a fine woman never looks better than on horseback, and Gwendolen has the figure for it ”(36). “This girl is worth some expense: you don’t often see her equal” (37). “She appeared with her freshly brushed light-brown hair streaming backward . . . her long brown eyes glancing bright as a wave-washed onyx from under her long lashes. . .” (40). “By George! Who is that girl with the awfully well-set up head and jolly figure?” (44).“[T]o a mind of general benevolence, wishing everyone to look well, it was exasperating to see how Gwendolen eclipsed the others” (44).“She had the rare advantage of looking almost prettier when she was singing than at other times” (48).“That because Gwendolen was the most perfect creature in the world she was to make a grand match, had not occurred to him “(58). “[Gwendolen] had never looked so lovely before; her figure, her long white throat, the curves of her cheeks and her chin were set off to perfection by the compact simplicity of her riding dress” (66-7).‘He could not conceive a more perfect girl; and to a youthful lover like Rex it seems that the fundamental identity of the good, the true, and the beautiful is already extant and manifest in the object of his love” (68).“ Gwendolen, simple as she stood there, in her black silk, cut square about the white pillar of her throat, a black band fastening her hair which streamed back in smooth silky abundance, seemed more

queenly than usual ”(80). “[A]mong the male judges in the ranks immediately surrounding [Gwendolen] there was unusual unanimity in pronouncing her the finest girl present” (100).

The descriptive narrative translated to tantalizing images colonizes the reader’s mind, a drug-like visible effect that further stimulates the imaginative process. At the same time, it is not lost on the reader that everyone in Gwendolen’s world is preoccupied by her appearance and most elevate her as a queen among women, most admired, most desired, “the finest girl present.” Real judgment of her qualities—the look below the surface into the human soul—is lost to everyone’s detriment, especially that of the subject who has become the object. This is is why Deronda’s question: is she beautiful or not beautiful? is so provocative.

Here is Eliot entering the self-reflective mind processes of Gwendolen to answer that question:

> Then catching the reflection of her movements in the glass panel, she was diverted to the contemplation of the image there and walked towards it. Dressed in black without a single ornament, and with the warm whiteness of her skin set off between the light-brown coronet of her hair and the square-cut bodice, she might have tempted an artist to try again the Roman trick of statue in black, white, and tawny marble. Seeing her image slowy advancing, she thought, I *am* beautiful—not exultingly, but with grave decision. Being beautiful was after all the condition on which she most needed external testimony. If any one objected to the turn of her nose or the form of her neck and chin, she has not the sense that she could presently show her power of attainment in these branches of feminine perfection. (251)

There is no closer observer of her own beauty and of its impact on her audience than Gwendolen herself. Daniel Deronda may have doubts about her beauty— that it may be only

skin-deep— but nothing deeper than the "external" verification of her dazzling impact concerns her. "I am beautiful," she assures herself, "I am beautiful." The only excitement she experiences on her arrival to live at Offendene is "the effect of her beauty on a first presentation" (54). Her anxiety about maestro Klesmer's opinion of her singing "turned towards complacency" as she "cherished the idea that now he was struck with her talent as well as her beauty" (62).

As Eliot explores Gwendolen, we meet a young woman so preoccupied with her own beauty, magnificence, desirability, excellence, and entitlement that the people in her world—with the sometime exception of her widowed-mother, a dependable source of comfort and devotion—exist only to feed her love of admiration and her need of it. There is a clinical term, "once [and still] applied with pejorative connotations describing those," like Gwendolen, "who behave in a conceited, self-centered, insufferably entitled manner, unaware of or unconcerned about their effect on relationships with others and yet demanding recognition or some form of tribute from them":[256] Narcissists.

In 1876 when George Eliot created Gwendolen neither the word narcissist nor the psychiatric condition, Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), existed. The term narcissim was first coined by Havelock Ellis 22 years later in 1898. The description was brought to public attention with Freud's 1914 publication *On Narcissism* in which he wrote that *"*in rare cases" he observed patients whose " ego has taken itself as an object and is behaving as though it were in love with itself. Hence the term 'narcissism' borrowed from the Greek myth.*"*[257]

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[256] Frank M. Lachmann. *Transforming Narcissism*, 7

[257] Sigmund Freud's *On Narcissism*. 1914. In Freudian psychiatry and psychoanalysis, the term *narcissism* denotes an excessive degree of self-esteem or self-involvement, a condition that he described as a

No one should be surprised that insufferably self-centered men and women, famously known as being—like the mythical Narcissus—"in love with themselves" were shunned and taunted. This shaming, according to Frank Lachmann, author of *Transforming Narcissism*, was eventually challenged by Heinz Kohut, founder of the Self-Psychology movement, who like Freud was first a neurologist and then a psychoanalyst. Of Kohurt's seminal paper on narcissism, Lachmann observes:

> In a sense, it is a philosophical paper. It speaks of and to the human condition on a grand scale. Through maturation we can come to view ourselves and our world with empathy, humor, creativity, wisdom and an acceptance of transience. Clinically, the paper envisioned a novel fate for archaic narcissism [which] Kohut defined as referring to the childhood narcissism, which had not yet been met with favorable parental responses and had therefore been retained in its archaic form, into adulthood. It had remained in a childlike grandiose and peremptory form, unavailable for tension regulation and self-esteem maintenance. Life's experiences had not muted or transformed it into more mature forms of narcissism, so now it was up to psychoanalysis to do so. Kohut proposed that archaic narcissism be transformed into a mature form of narcissism: the traits that Kohut expected a patient to develop through analytic treatment. More generally, these can be thought of as the hallmarks of successful maturation and development over the course of life.
> (Lachmann, 8)

The transformational treatment of narcissism is the introduction and integration of missing qualities— empathy, a sense of humor, creativity, transience, and wisdom—into the patient's cognitive, emotional, psychological and social relationship practices. Kohut's identification

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form of emotional immaturity. Freud makes a crucial statement that is solidified by later researchers in child development: "I may point out that we are bound to suppose that a unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed" (76-77).

of narcissism as a psychiatric condition caused by a trauma in childhood Lachmann claims, "uprooted narcissism from its moorings in pathology and moralistic judgment (76)."[258] In this departure from classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Kohut moved the clinical approach to narcissism away from the instinctual drives of Freudian theory to Self Psychology's developing focus on affect; he diagnosed narcissism as a disorder of a damaged self. His theory of the narcissistic patient emphasizes that narcissism is a normal condition of early childhood, part of the process through which a child develops a realistic sense of self and the capacity for good relationships with others as the result of an integrated and healthy self in a close relationship with a loving, attentive parental figure. The narcissistic patient is a victim of a childhood development trauma caused by dysfunctional parenting—abuse, neglect, or the inability to guide the child through the grandiose stage of narcissism to a healthy ego that is built on the self in partnership others. As a consequence, due to neglect or intemperate adoration, the child remains psychologically, and emotionally stuck in an infantile past. The self-centeredness and grandiosity is evidence of, and unconscious defense against the sense of worthlessness, and the arrogance is compensatory exaggerated behavior to hide the shame of being "less than" others. Kohut's breakthrough treatment is a therapy of empathy, by which he means in the fullest terms of Eliot's mission of deep sympathy, a compassionate response to all humanity that grows from the insights of "seeing" others as Nathaniel Hawthorne characterizes it —"with tenderness."

It was not until 1974 — almost a century after *Daniel Deronda* was published —that the condition of narcissism was described by Theodore Millon for the DSM-lll Taskforce. All the more remarkable that Eliot's narrative of Gwendolen's interpersonal actions and interior

[258] Lachmann, Ibid. Also, see Lachmann's *Transforming Narcissism*, for a discussion and examples of therapy of Narcissistic Personality Disorder partients based on Kohut's *Psychology of the Self* series of groundbreaking theoretical works that included *Forms and Transformations of Narcissism* in 1966.

dialogue captures the aspects of the disordered personality of a narcissist. This Eliot engages without judgment, without pathologizing or demonizing Gwendolen, with sensitivity and empathy, just as Kohut suggested to his trainee analysts. Kohurt, for instance, teaches "that the patient's motivation should be regarded first as one of an intense childlike wish."[259]

In a meeting of minds across time, we discover Gwendolen in the chapter headed "The Spoiled Child." The title suggests emotional and psychological infantilizing, a major motif that is continued throughout the novel. Eliot often refers to Gwendolen as child, childish, and childlike. At age twenty, she is afraid to sleep alone in her room. She is physically miniaturized as "a delicate-limbed sylph" (39) whose tiny hands make her appear helpless. The result, along with the continuous narrative ribbon of her compelling beauty, is that the reader begins to relate to her as a victim, a tiny, helpless, beautiful child, and with this imagery comes an insistent desire to want to protect her, too, to get to an understanding of what has happened to her, who or what has damaged her. Our empathy surges, the disgust for her softens, our ambivalence towards her, our queasiness at feeling protective towards the child-woman crosses into acceptance of her wounded innocence and expectation of another's guilt. However, close by in the text are these reports of Gwendolen's fierce determination for personal power:

> Other people allowed themselves to be made slaves of, and to have their lives blown hither and thither like empty ships in which no will was present: it was not to be so with her, she would no longer be sacrificed to creatures worth less than herself, and would make the best of the chances life offered her, and conquer circumstances by her exceptional cleverness. Certainly, to be settled at Offendene, with the notice of Lady Brackenshaw, the archery club, and the invitations to dine with the Arrowpoints, was not a position that seemed to

[259] Miller, (1985) *How Kohut Actually Worked*. Qtd in Lachmann, 15-16

> offer remarkable chances; but Gwendolen's confidence lay chiefly in herself. She felt well equipped for the mastery of life. (39-40)

The mind engaged in the text spins from compassion to confusion comparing these two pictures: the one of a frightened child climbing into the comfort of her mama's bed, the other of a haughty grown-up sister considering herself "sacrificed" if asked to help her docile younger siblings with their schoolwork, thus exhibiting her ferocious will to self-determination and control of her environment. It is emotionally destabilizing to be repelled and strongly attracted to the same character. Eliot has moved us into this state of discomfort. And, of course, that's the heightened experience of ambivalent "unrest" that Daniel Deronda experiences. Eliot's psychological art causes the reader to feel what we imagine the character Daniel Deronda feels as he watches Gwendolen at the sordid game of gambling.

If we think of narcissism in its limited understanding as love of self and disregard for others, Eliot's astute observation of Gwendolen's condition, and her deliberation in portraying her behavior with bifocal specificity —the unpleasant details detached from derisive damning—is remarkably in tune with Heinz Kohut's breakthrough work. Kohut redefine[d] the therapeutic task as one of empathetic understanding of a vulnerable patient's life experiences rather than "judgmentally viewing narcissism as a character structure to be confronted (4)."[260]

> Although Kohut explicitly acknowleged that analysts from various theoretical perspectives have relied on empathy as a means of accessing the experience of their patients, he nonetheless placed it at the center of his own definition of psychoanalysis. That is, for Kohut, psychoanalysis concerns itself only with

[260] "Empathy" was American psychologist Edward Tichener's translation of the German word *einfühlng* which indicates a mental process of feeling oneself into the experience of another person. Lachmann defines empathy as a state "co-created by by one partner who conveys empathegetic understanding and another who presents a readiness to be empathetically understood (204).

> what is accessible through introspection and empathy. Clearly, empathy was around before Kohut, but to him empathy was the royal road to the inner life of another person.

As patient and therapist together share understanding from the psychic clues that reach back to childhood, the work of restructuring and integrating the stunted archaic narcissistic structures can lead the patient to a mature expression of selfhood. Eliot, understanding the perversity of the behavior of character she has created, observes: "It is possible to have a strong self-love without any self-satisfaction, rather with a self-discontent which is the more intense because one's own little core of egoistic sensibility is a supreme care;" And, aware of the victim's cognitive deficit of self-awareness, she explains, "but Gwendolen knew nothing of such inward strife" (18).

The correspondences between Gwendolen's words, thoughts, actions, and attitudes checked against the description of the pathology of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is sufficient to propose that Gwendolen suffers from the disorder: Eliot's portrait of the spoiled child/narcissist is text-book accurate. What follows is Millon's list of the behaviors of NPD prepared for the American Psychiatric Association in 1974; under the characteristic behaviors are examples of what George Eliot reveals as she takes us inside the troubled mind of her character.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder[261]

American Diagnostic Criteria from DSM-IV-TR

1. Has a grandiose sense of self-importance: exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements

[261] Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing. American Diagnostic Criteria from DSM-lV-TR (1974)

●Having passed two years at a showy school, where on all occasions of display she had been put foremost, had only deepened her sense that so exceptional a person as herself could hardly remain in ordinary circumstances or in a social position less than advantageous. (23-4)

●The hastening of her toilet, the way in which Bugle used the brush, the quality of the shilling serial mistakenly written for her amusement, the probabilities of the coming day, and in short, the social institutions generally, were objectionable to her. It was not that she was out of temper, but the world was not equal to her fine organism. (80)

2. Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.

● [Her] confidence lay chiefly in herself. She felt well equipped for the mastery of life (46). She fantasizes fame as an actress, as a singer, as an explorer, she basks in her beauty, thinks of herself as a goddess, kisses her own reflection in a mirror, she imagines herself a leader, speaks incessantly of having power over men, but on the last count of ideal love, she has limited demands. She wants to be adored, catered to, denied nothing, but is incapable of giving in return— except the gift of her beauty and her presence.

●How I pity all the other girls at the Archery Meeting —all thinking of Mr. Grandcourt! And they have not a shadow of a chance (94).

●Her ideal was to be daring in speech and reckless in braving dangers, both moral and physical, and though her practice fell behind her ideal, this shortcoming seemed to be due to the pettiness of circumstances, the narrow theatre which life offered to a girl of twenty who cannot conceive herself as anything else than a lady, or as in any position which could lack the tribute of respect (63).

● She rejoiced to feel her self-exceptional; but her horizon was that of a genteel romance where the heroine's soul poured out of her journal is full of vague power, originality, and general rebellion (53).

3. Believes he or she is so "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or associate with, other special or high-status people

●Gwendolen's relationship with Daniel Deronda begins with hostility because she senses he is disturbed by her enthusiasm for the corrupt and greedy activity of gambling. But she recognizes him as enlightened and interesting while finding everyone else inferior, or boring, or dull, or ugly, He is the person she seeks out as a spiritual counselor. "He was unique to her among men, because he had impressed her as not being her admirer but her superior; in some mysterious way he was becoming part of her conscience (415).

●When faced with the family's bankruptcy, she thought her voice and theatrical talent would lead to a career on the stage. To expedite this dream, she sent a letter to the influential pianist Maestro Klesmer "a great musician in the fullest sense of the word." asking for his help.[262] She viewed Maestro Klesmer as an especially talented person who would recognize her as a kindred spirit, but she is greatly mistaken.

●In spite of her self-confidence, she dreaded Klesmer as part of the unmanageable world, which was independent of her wishes. . . . Gwendolen met him with unusual gravity, and holding out her hand, said, it is most kind of you to come, Herr Klesmer. I hope you have not thought me presumptuous. (252)

4. Has a sense of entitlement, expectation of unreasonable and favorable treatment.

●When she learns her mother's fortune has been lost: "The implicit confidence that her destiny must be one of luxurious ease, where any trouble that occurred would be well clad and provided for had been stronger in her mind than in her mama's being fed there . . . by that sense of superior claims which made a large part of her consciousness (16).

●There was no inward exclamation of "poor mama! . . . if Gwendolen had at this moment been disposed to feel pity she would have bestowed it on herself. (16).

5. Is interpersonally exploitive: takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends.

●The genial Reverend Gascoigne takes care of the financial decisions for his family and that of his widowed, sister-in-law, Fanny Davilow, Gwendolen's mother. When the two

families face financial ruin following the collapse of the financial institution that managed their wealth, they must survive on Rev. Gascoigne's benefice. Following a discussion of the new realities and the difficulty of meeting expenses, Gwendolen is told that she could share her cousin's Shetland pony. But, she counters: "I intend to have a horse and ride a great deal." Her aunt points out that with her four children growing up she has "to cut and contrive" and that her husband allows himself "no extras" but Gwendolen insists. "I cannot endure ponies. I would rather give up some other indulgence and have a horse." Her mother, afraid to incur her daughter's anger, wheedles and pleads in her behalf (34-36).

6. Lacks empathy; is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.

●At the fox hunt, Gwendolen on her spirited little chestnut was up with the best, and felt as secure as an immortal goddess, having, if she had thought of risk, a core confidence that no ill luck would happen to her. But she thought of no such thing, and certainly not of any risk that might befall her cousin. If she thought of him, it would have stuck her as a droll picture that he should be gradually falling behind, and looking round in search of gates: a fine lithe youth, whose heart must be panting with all the spirit of a beagle, stuck as if under a wizard's spell on a stiff clerical hackney, would have made her laugh with a sense of fun much too strong for her to reflect on his mortification. (72) Later when she was told that her cousin had been tossed over old Primrose's head, had put his shoulder out, and that his horse had broken both knees, Gwendolen, instead of such symptoms as pallor and silence . . . became contented again, since Rex's arm had been reset . . . the smiles broke forth, and finally a descending scale of laughter. . . .
Pray, Forgive me uncle. Now that Rex is safe, it is so droll to fancy the figure he and Primrose would cut — in a lane all be themselves—only a blacksmith running up. It would make a capital caricature of "Following the hounds." (77)

7. Reacts to Criticism with Feelings of Rage, Shame or Humiliation.

●Across the smoky gambling salon, Daniel Deronda unnerves her as he disapprovingly watches her at the roulette table. Full of bravado despite big losses, she plays

on until penniless, then leaves to pawn an heirloom necklace. When the pawned jewels are returned to her by hotel staff, she suspects Deronda redeemed her jewels. She deeply resents his thoughtfulness which she sees as more evidence of his disapproval of her gambling:

●He knew he was entangling her in a helpless humiliation; it was another way of smiling at her ironically, and taking the air of a supercilious mentor. Gwendolen felt the bitter tears of mortification rising and rolling down her cheeks. No one had ever before dared to treat her with irony and contempt." (20).

●Gwendolen screamed again and again with hysterical violence. [When she opened the honeymoon gift of the Henleigh family diamonds, passed on from Lydia Glasher and read this note:]'He was meant to marry me. . . You will have your punishment. . . . The willing wrong you have done me will be your curse.' [Grandcourt] had expected to see her dressed and smiling, ready to be led down [to dinner]. He saw her pallid, shrieking, as it seemed with terror, the jewels scattered around her on the floor. Was it a fit of madness? In some form or other the Furies had crossed his threshold (359). [263]

Two questions arise in considering Gwendolen's plight. One: what is Eliot telling us about Gwendolen's early childhood? The other: Is personal transformation possible? If so, how would this happen? First, in trying to make sense of her disturbed behavior we seek a cause outside of the subject and turn to the mother out of whose mouth has come this admission: her 'child had been her ruler.' Mrs. Fanny Davilow, the fluttering, indecisive, guilt-ridden widow, who bent down to her idolized child by allowing Gwendolen's normal toddler grandiosity to soar forever unfettered, early turned her little daughter into the "strong man" that her family lacked following the deaths of two husbands. "It must be remembered," Eliot tells us, "that no one disputed [Gwendolen's] power or her general superiority . . . .the first thought [of mother, sisters, and domestic staff was] 'what will Gwendolen think?' (40).

[263] Following Millon's description of NPD, the following symptoms were added to later editions of the DSM: shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes; requires excessive admiration; is often envious of others or believes that they are envious of her.

If we apply developmental psychology to the child's subjective self in relation to the outside world to speculate on the Mama Davilow-Gwendolen dyad, we recall the parent-child role reversal with Mrs. Davilow denying that she ever thwarted her daughter's wishes, saying defensively—"I am sure I have never crossed you, Gwendolen" (29). Poor Fanny is completely under her child's thumb" (78), indulging her "beautiful darling's" every whim (as does everyone else in the family) bowing down to her "princess in exile" charms while also fearing her temper— "You were always too strong for me . . . (96).

How can this be accounted for? Eliot's narrator asks: "The answer may seem to lie on the surface—in her beauty, a certain unusualness in her, a decision of will that made itself felt, or her graceful movements and clear unhesitating tones . . ." (41). It's not that simple the narrator warns. More likely "it was her power "of inspiring fear as to what she might say or do" (41). What Eliot's narrator is reminding us is that Gwendolen's beauty is a distraction and, although it is uncommonly powerful, it is no match for the "evil genius that drives her" (Deronda 7). She is an avenging force of nature when she is crossed which is why her mother would protest: "I am sure I have never crossed you." With that short sentence Eliot has spelled out all we need to know about the upside-down power relationship in that family.

Eliot categorized the root of Gwendolen's problem in the world as "spoiled." This same descriptor Kohut uses in his 1960 course for psychoanalysts in the context of Freud's reality principle: "In persons who tend to be "spoiled" one finds fixated primary process, omnipotence delusions."[264] Eliot demonstrates that Gwendolen's omnipotence has become a reality. Her will was not thwarted. But there is an earlier thwarting that preempts a child's

[264] Qtd in Allen M.Siegel, 28. Unpublished Lecture Series. Kohut, H. and Sietz, P. (ed.) "The Kohut Seminar on Self Psychology and Psychotherapy with Adolescents and Young Adults." New York and London: WW Norton.

development. This happens when a too-good mother "automatically" anticipates a child's needs without waiting for that synchronous moment when the child is ready for the next small step towards selfhood. That's the moment of a "dawning awareness" that the child is ready to leave behind the normal narcissistic grandiosity to learn with help a way to "bridge the internal sense of self to the external world." Failing that development, she becomes the grandiose Gwendolen Harleth, the supreme ruler of her kingdom.

A necessary function for the healthy development of an infant's sense of self is the awakening awareness of the separation between "me" and "not me." This recognition of "the not me" which shapes the infant's relationships with others is what child psychoanalysts call the "psychological dialectic."[265] The "dialectic" is the instinctive emotional and psychological (non-verbal) attachment processes of the mother's (or caregiver's) facial expressions, especially the eyes, with the infant. "It is now well established that the infant's personality development emanates from the mother-infant dyad," says Dr. Margot Beattie, citing James F. Masterson's work that "the quality of the infant-mother attachment— secure, insecure or disorganized—has far-reaching impact on later adult mental and emotional functioning."[266]

Daniel Stern, a psychoanalyst and expert in developmental psychology, says in *The Interpersonal Life of the Child*, that the "infant's major development task is . . . the creation of ties with others—that is, increasing relatedness" (xiii).[267] Stern says he came to realize that women "create a new mental/psychic organization upon becoming mothers . . . a unique,

[265] See Siegel, above, for background on Kohut's theoretical development of the new field of Self Psychology and the theory and treatment of Narcissism. Siegel, Allen M. (2007). *Heinz Kohut and the Psychology of the Self*. New York:NY Routledge.

[266] Masterson, James. ed. "Personality Disorders through the Lens of Attachment Disorders and the Neurobiologic Development of the Self." (2005) Perfect Paperback. Amazon.com.

[267] Stern xiii The Interpersonal World of the Infant (1985) Basic Books. KY: Lexington.

independent, fundamental organization of the mind, and not, as many people have assumed, a derivative or new version of old complexes" (xxxiii-iv)."[268] And, indeed, this would equip a mother for her intense bonding with her child conducted through the galvanizing connection of the eyes and facial expressions in the psychological dialectic in which the mother in deep empathy with the infant mirrors and reflects back and affirms the child's inner state. Stern explains:

> Mirroring when used in this sense, implies that the mother is helping to create something within the infant that was only dimly or partially there until her reflection acted somehow to solidify its existence. This concept goes far beyond just participating in another's subjective experience. It involves changing the other by providing something that the other did not have before or, if it was present, by consolidating it. (144) [269]

The felt experience of Gwendolen's self-centered egomaniacal drives captured in the catalog of symptoms assembled above makes disturbing reading, but Eliot does not lance that boil for us. She puts her character under her microscope, but she does not pathologize her, as we might want to—against Kohut's admonition—and, admittedly, with some ambivalence. Eliot has drawn her as a victim of Mrs. Davilow's ineffectual mothering that appears to have taken the form of over-indulgence.

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[268] Stern xxxiii-iv.

[269] Infants as young as 42 minutes old can imitate the facial expressions of an adult. Citing the research of Meltzoff (1985,1990) Lachmann tells of a study "in which the infant looked at an adult sticking out her tongue. During the following one minute the infant made successive approximations of the adult's action until he finally stuck his tongue out. Sticking out the tongue is not a reflex. Thus, the infants from birth can already perceive the correspondence between what he sees in the face of an adult, and what he feels proprioceptively in his own face."(Lachmann, 58) Lachmann also writes that based on other studies (Davidson and Fox) the infant doesn't actually have to match the adult's action to be affected by the adult's facial expression. What the infant perceives on the face is sufficient to alter his or her internal state. . . . In effect, the facial expression remains with the infant even after the adult leaves . . . the link between perception of the facial expression and brain activation patterns of the infant provides one way of coordinating the emotional state of the caretaker and the infant. Other studies Lachmann cites (Ekman, Freisen and Ancoli, 1980) "offer evidence of the role of nonverbal communication as a precursor of empathy" (61).

Eliot's partner, George Henry Lewes, philosopher, literary critic and man of science, was working on *The Problems of Life and Mind* series in the 1870s when *Daniel Deronda* was taking shape. Eliot was an avid student of science and a welcome intellectual equal engaged in an elite community involved in science's cutting edge ideas in the fields of biology, psychology, physics and philosophy which included Lewes and Herbert Spencer. "Lewes was in advance of the stream . . . in anticipating later nineteenth-and twentieth-century developments," writes Sally Shuttleworth *in George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science.* "Mind," she writes, "defined for Lewes not a separate controlling principle but rather the activities of the whole organism in correspondence with the physical and social medium" (20). Thus, to be human for Lewes and Eliot, at a time when popular scientific thought considered human character immutable, meant to be able to change, to integrate new ideas and ways of being as society changes, even demands. Shuttleworth observes that "Lewes' theories of organicism profoundly affected not only George Eliot's social analysis, but also her psychological conceptions " making possible the knowledge and imagination to create complicated characters such as Gwendolen Harleth (19).

Jonathan Lehrer tells us in his study of neuro-biologically incipient geniuses in *Proust was a Neuroscientist* that in an age when the question of human freedom was at the center of scientific debate Eliot's purpose as a novelist was to give us a vision of ourselves "more sure than shifting theory." Of Eliot's belief in the plasticity of the human brain, he wrote: "While scientists were searching for our biological constraints—they believed we were prisoners of our hereditary inheritance—Eliot's art argued that the mind was "not cut in marble." She believed that the most essential element of human nature was its malleability; the way each of us can "will ourselves to change." (26)

In a character such as Gwendolen, the transformation of a self-centered nature may be possible, Eliot shows, and the path to change—at least the desire for change, to seek an empathetic connection with others—is through the gift of an enlightened guide and mind-changing social experience. As Dr. Lachmann explains in discussing the psychoanalytic process, it requires an act of neural tinkering through the "therapeutic" partnership of a patient seeking an integrated self with an empathetic listener and guide. Eliot's narrative of Gwendolen's striving to escape the misery of alienation from others provides the ebbs and flows of unpredictable human existence that fuels the cognitive and emotional experiences and the desire to find a new relationship with self and the world. This emotional bonding of self and other, is in line with Kohut's simple but apparently necessary assertion : "The oxygen of psychological life is to be found in an affirming, supportive and validating milieu and the need for such an atmosphere exists from birth to death."[270]

The life paths Eliot creates for Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda present two examples of the possibilities of change: in Deronda, a sweeping familial, cultural and religious transformation that can be seen as a human metamorphosis, no less; and in Gwendolen, a converting psychic shift that suggests the process of Gwendolen discovering how to integrate empathy into her life. The narrative of change is critical to the sweep of the novel. It links, and indeed unlinks these two characters. In each case the interior change comes in part from exterior human and social forces. Daniel's material identity as an English gentleman is changed by the disclosure of his birth into an Italian Jewish family. His life's purpose is engendered by the transmission to him of the dying Mordecai's passion to help establish a Jewish homeland which he sets out to do with his wife, Mira, Mordecai's sister.

[270] Allen M. Siegel. Acknowledgments, 1. *Heinz Kohut and the Psychology of the Self*. NewYork: Routledge, 2007.

Although the change in Daniel's life is astonishing, it is not surprising. He has a questing mind, is receptive to new ideas, is open to incorporate difference into his consciousness, eager to understand and imagine the lives of others —all critical steps in a movement towards change. But this is not so for Gwendolen. The process of change in Gwendolen is a painful struggle to imagine mental and emotional processes that, I suggest, have been biologically denied her.

> No chemical process shows a more wonderful activity than the transforming influence in the thoughts we imagine to be going on in another. Changes in theory, religion, admirations, may begin with a suspicion of dissent or disapproval, even when the grounds for disapproval are but a matter of searching conjecture. (*Deronda* 423)

George Eliot's understanding of the mind, writes Michael Davis, lay "in her very faith in the individual as an agent of change." As such, she believed that the conditions that could fire Gwendolen's already stirring awareness was the psychological function of her "inner life."[271] However, a deeper consciousness of the necessity of change "could only be achieved [through] "individual action, which might run counter in opposition to dominant social and cultural formalities."[272] This opposition to the *status quo* seemed problematic given the pressures of Gwendolen's family in her making a fortuitous marriage and successfully negotiating the prescribed social and cultural codes of the English upper classes, especially since Gwendolen's prospects, with Grandcourt in the wings, set her determination for the fitting life of "palaces and coaches."As it happens, Eliot's plan for her heroine's transformation from Gwendolen-before to Gwendolen-after is realistically true to the slow and difficult psychological processes of the human struggle to change, often further

[271] Michael Davis. (2006), 47. George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country. VT: Burlington. Ashgate Publishing.The metaphor of mind, "Unmapped Country" is used by Eliot in *Daniel Deronda*

[272] Ibid.

complicated—and sometimes clarified— when life intervenes with its unexpected and brutal consequences.

To follow Eliot's insight into her character's first hesitant steps towards a true-self in relationship with others, we return to the first scene in which Gwendolen, after brutally dismissing her sweet cousin's declaration of love, looks into his face and sees something she is usually blind to—his feelings marked on his face. This is the first time Gwendolen shows a hint of compassionate affect in imagining another's pain—the effect of her lack of empathy for him. Rex, her constant source of companionship and amusement, smitten by her beauty, is scarred by her unresponsiveness to his affectionate schoolboy romancing. She has brutally dismissed his loving and impulsive declaration that, "All the happiness of my life depends on your loving me—if only a little." Brave in spite of rejection, he tries again. "Will it always be so?" he asks. To her surprise, her reaction to Rex's infatuation felt as a bitter offence to her —and it was. It released in her a flood of powerful emotion, bringing in its wake a recognition that crashed through to her consciousness, and with it came the shock of tragic self-knowledge: She could not help seeing his wretchedness and feeling a little regret for the old Rex who had never before offended her. Decisively, but yet, with "some return of kindliness," she said—'About making love? Yes. But I don't dislike you for anything else' (81-82).

"[S]ome return of kindliness" describes a small effort to show concern. It is unheard of for Gwendolen to pay attention to others feelings, and therefore its significance is in her perception of Rex's humanity. She sees that he is suffering, which is a first step toward feeling compassion, but at this point that is as far as it goes. She does not stay with Rex's distress. She returns to her self- preoccupation. What occupies her is not her cousin's

wretchedness and humiliation, but a "little regret" for the expected loss of the considerable attention he lavished on her before his infatuation exploded into embarassment for both. At least, her "kindliness" was there to assure him that although a romance with him "offended her," she liked him for "anything else." This blunt honesty followed by the tiny step to soothe his pride is no comfort for the spurned Rex, but strangely enough, for Gwendolen it opens up the reciprical flow-back that comes from allowing another's self to meet with her's.

Something touched her—the awareness of her emptiness of feeling. She realizes that something is wrong with her—she can't feel love—and she speaks those words to her mother, the only person she feels can trust to protect her. If, as now in her misery, she believes that without love life is not worth living, what can she do to make her life worthwhile? (82). Although she doesn't yet identify her longing for the joy and comfort of love as something she must give without negotiation of return, she is on the path to understanding that it is sympathy, that "other beauty, too" that makes life worth living. In a rare moment of emotional turmoil, there is a chastening crack in Gwendolen's defences, just wide enough for self-knowledge to penetrate her consciousness.

> [H]er mother found her on a sofa sobbing bitterly, her hair falling over her figure like a garment. 'My, child, my child, what is it? cried her mother who had never seen her darling struck down in this way, and felt something of the alarmed anguish that women feel at the sight of overpowering sorrow in a strong man; for this child had been her ruler." . . . She cried out sobbingly, 'Oh mama what can become of my life? there is nothing worth living for. . . . I shall never love anybody. I can't love people. I hate them.' (82)

Even the image of Gwendolen's weeping is conditioned by the cascading image of her beautiful hair draping her body "like a garment." Eliot's detail of the sobbing child, her face

hidden, shut inside a blanket of hair, impels you to part the hair, to draw it back to wipe the tears away. Mrs. Davilow may have done that, we don't know, but we are told that for her, the experience of her daughter's emotional collapse was like the "alarmed anguish" women feel when they see a strong man weep. Mrs. Davilow felt that helplessness because her child had been her "strong man." The chilling reality: Gwendolen was her mother's ruler. The emptiness Gwendolen discovers, this lack of connective sympathy, is not the drive of her ferocious will, but is symptomatic of the supreme tragedy that makes her life not "worth living" —the malfunctioning of the biologically-engineered human response to feel love and desire for another.

"Fighting against love is fighting against biology," says Semir Zeki, who with research partner Andreas Bartels, were the first scientists to see the normal brain's neurons dance in delighted response to the visual prompt of a lover. [273] Zeki observes in the *The Splendors and Miseries of the Brain* that it is "part of our biological make-up to fall in love," that in the metaphoric piercing of Cupid's arrow, we fall into it pushed by the biological Cupid, and often do so with the "least likely" person who magically becomes faultless in our eyes. "This suspension of judgment in affairs of the heart," says Zeki "is so common that it is not unreasonable to suppose that it has a sound neurobiological basis."

Saying that "it is not unreasonable to suppose," is typical of Dr. Zeki's cautiousness in making definitive claims about the workings of the world's most complicated machine— the human brain — still in the early stages of discovery. The result of a successful study in brain science, neurologists say, invariably means that the new knowledge is only a first peek through a doorway that leads to many connecting neural networks in the cortex, calling for

[273] Bartels, A, Zeki, S (2000) The Neural Basis of Romantic Love. Neuro Report 11 (17:3829-3834)

further research. Bartel's and Zeki's breakthrough research in 2000 showed that when both males and females "look at the face of someone we are . . . in love with, a limited number of areas in the brain are especially engaged."[274] These are in the medial insula, anterior cingulate, the hippocampus, and parts of the striatum and the nucleus accumbens, which together constitute the core regions of the brain's reward system. Zeki was not surprised to discover that the "areas that are activated in reponse to romantic feelings—this also includes physical desire—are largely co-extensive with those brain regions that contain high concentrations of dopamine, a neuro-modulator associated with reward, desire, addiction and euphoric states."[275]

It is difficult to imagine the alienation, loneliness, and loss if deprived of the empathetic experiences that bond us to others in the warm connection of friendship and love. Beattie, a clinical psychologist and narcissism researcher, explains: "Although these [narcissistic] individuals are often highly functioning professionally, they live with pervasive inner sorrow and anxiety."[276] It is hard to associate the torment of the complicated affect-mix of "pervasive inner sorrow and anxiety" with the bouyant self-confident-centered, attention-seeking sufferer of narcisissm. That is why their sorrow is "inner sorrow" —because, in spite of advances in the perception of narcissism, the stigma of the disorder still exists and they dread anyone knowing or seeing what they perceive as a personal weakness.

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[274] Zeki (2009) 137. Splendors and Miseries of the Brain, 2009.

[275] Ibid.,138-9. Increase in dopamine causes a drop in serotonin similar to that of patients with obsessive-compulsive disorder. After all, "love is a kind of obsession, " says Zeki.

[276] Beattie, Margo T. "Early Development of Personality Disorders—Mother-Infant Dyad Formation of the Infant Mind."

That perception may change. A group of scientists has for the first time seen the evidence of narcissism in brain structures. In 2013, the "Journal of Psychiatric Research" reported that a team of German neurologists in an fMRI study of NPD patients and a control group of healthy individuals found that all the NPD patients had significant structural abnormalities—limited gray matter brain development— in the areas of the left interior insula, part of the cerebral cortex associated with emotional empathy: these areas of the brain were starved of neuronal development. The scientists concluded that the degree of lack of empathy is relative to the thinness of the abnormal area of the cortex. Dr.Stefan Roepke, head of personality disorders, PTSD, and the autism branch at Berlin's Universitätsmedizin, says of the study: "This was already a region of interest for empathy, but for the first time, we were able to show that it is structurally correlated in the brain.[277] Neurologically, the necessary change to ease the suffering of NPD patients, may be made possible by the biologic magic that builds the brain's networks, in this case, by supplementing through active therapeutic treatments the sparse collection of empathy neurons, the gray matter that Dr. Roepke points out is missing 'in the left anterior insula that plays an important role in feeling and expressing compassion."[278] This supports the theories of neural development failure in the growing infant that Beattie writes, "leads to narcissism [caused by the limits] of the child's ability to be able to move freely back and forth between internal and external realities." [279]

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[277] Schultze, L., et al Journal of Psychiatric Research, 2013 Oct; 47 (10) 1363-9. doi: 10.1016/ j.psychiatric.Res.2013.05.017.Epub 2013 June 15. (http://www.journalofpsychiatricresearch.com/article/S0022-3956%2813%2900157-X/abstract.

[278] Dr. Stefan Roepke, in summation of findings of above abstract.

[279] Beattie, Ibid.

Here, in her reference to internal and external realities, Dr. Beattie is pointing to the critical development of the two separate psychic domains that are precursers to a cohesive human reality— the child's sense of "self" and the child's awareness of the "the other," who is "not me." The irony of this binary is that without their co-existence the human psyche is fragmented. To focus on the over-simplified binary categories of the internal and external, the inside and the outside, the mind and the body, first is to acknowledge the metaphoric embodiment of the psychological, neurological, and biological state of what it means to be human. As Nathan Sheppard writes of George Eliot*:*

> [I]f this is a great mind fascinated with the insoluble enigma of human motives, it is a mind profoundly in sympathy with those who are puzzzling over the riddle or are struggling hopelessly in its toils. . . . She says, 'The only true knowledge of our fellows is that which enables us to feel with them, which gives us a finer ear for the heart pulses that are beating under the mere clothes of circumstance and opinion.'[280]

That the human internal and external realities are at the heart of Eliot's literary project, is never so visible as in *Daniel Deronda*, in which she makes clear in an assessment of self and the other that "true knowledge of our fellows," makes it possible for "us to feel *with* them," a moment of togetherness that provides us with the acute understanding of "the heart pulses," the fact of our common humanity so often speciously denied. The "profound sympathy" Sheppard's claims for Eliot as an artist is acutely observed as she takes the elements of Gwendolen's narcissitic need —to obtain the admiration of Daniel Deronda—the consequence of which is a plot-twist that provides a scenario for change. Daniel Deronda

[280]. Sheppard, Nathan 15. *The Essays of George Eliot.*

becomes the "terrible-browed angel . . . whose power over her had begun in the rising of a self-discontent which could be satisfied only by genuine change" (673).

The unfolding of the possibility of change begins with the arrival of Mr. Grandcourt, handsome, rich, and heir to titles and estates, who seems "to be in want of a wife," as Jane Austen would say.[281] The wife he wants is the most desirable— because the most beautiful —Gwendolen Harleth. The event that promises to offer the marriage proposal is the Archery Club contest, and with the clever earlier allusion to Cupid's piercing weapons, Eliot writes— "[W]ho can deny that bows and arrows are among the prettiest weapons in the world for feminine forms to play with? (100)"—Eliot returns our attention to the powerful sexual weapon of the beautiful female form:

> Gwendolen looked lovely and vigorous as a tall, newly-opened lily . . . she felt herself moving about like a wood-nymph under the beeches (in appreciative company), and the imagined scene lent a charm to further advances on the part of Grandcourt. . . . Today Gwendolen foresaw him making slow conversational approaches to a declaration, and foresaw herself awaiting and encouraging it. . . . (145)

The appalling discovery that chased Gwendolen away from her home, away from the suitor who was continually by her side., drove her away towards a like-altering encounter in a smoky gambling den in Germany with a stranger called Daniel Deronda. In the twist of Eliot-created fate, it was Deronda to whom she would in time turn to help find her way towards a "life worth living." But first, there was the archery event and the wooing by Mr. Grandcourt to occupy her with "merr[y] thoughts of palaces and coaches," (146) —fantasies that crumble when Gwendolen finds herself in front of a woman and two children (151).

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[281] Austen. *Pride and Prejudice*'s opening paragraph.

The "once-handsome"woman says:

> "I am Lydia Glasher. Mr Grandcourt ought not to marry anyone but me." I left my husband and child for him nine years ago. These two children are his and we have two others —girls—who are older. My husband is dead now, and Mr Grandcourt ought to marry me. He ought to make [our son] his heir. . . You are very are attractive Miss Harleth. But when he first knew me, I was young too. Since then my life has been broken up and embittered. (152)

Gwendolen "watching Mrs Glasher's face while she spoke felt a sort of terror;" even shocked into a trance-like state, the mind's defence against horror, her numbed consciousness failed to block out a "ghastly vision." She was enveloped in a dream that said: 'I am a woman's life.'" Acknowledging that she has become another "woman's life" means that Gwendolen is engaging with Mrs. Glasher's words, interpreting the tone of her voice and her expressions, feeling through these signs how betrayal feels, "as a sort of terror." Gwendolen is in the process of reading another's mind, a new experience of imagining herself into that mind, and sharing the turmoil of her affect. She has connected emotionally. She feels Lydia's fury as if it were hers. Her body has absorbed another's intense feeling; she has been initiated into sympathy for another. Her awakening sense of right and wrong action was moving her to a decision. In tones cold and proud, she said: "I will not interfere with your wishes." And, on that day, she meant she would not accept a proposal of marriage from Grandcourt.

She fled from Grandcourt's seductive grasp to Leubronn where she encountered Daniel Deronda. The meeting with Lydia Glasher and with Daniel Deronda at the roulette table became the separate but contingent events that agitated the smooth surface of Gwendolen's conscience and raised in her the anxiety that she might not be an exemplary person. Although previously innocent of the knowledge of Grandcourt's past, she feels

herself a participant in Mrs Glasher's anguish. Both betrayed, Lydia hugely, Gwendolen prospectively, their lives intertwined by Grandcourt's manoeuverings.

> I will not clothe myself in wreck-wear gems
> Sawed from cramped finger-bones of women drowned;
> Feel chilly vaporous hands of ireful ghosts
> Clutching my necklace; trick my maiden breast
> With orphans heritage. Let your dead love
> Marry its dead.
>
> George Eliot, epigram Ch. 14.

Eliot's poetic verse captures the dimensions of Gwendolen's moral distress, her deepening connection with Lydia Glasher's life, of the temptation she has and acknowledges—the lure of wealth and position—without the thought of love. The words capture the terrors of a nightmare of dread and remorse. The life she covets will be achieved, in effect, only by the destruction of another; sawing off the "cramped finger bones" the ring fingers of the drowned, despairing mother, to claim the symbolic richness as her own. She will be haunted by "ireful ghosts/Clutching" at her neck to snatch back that life, and the jewels, not rightfully hers. She condemns "a trick"of her uncontrolled desire in which she stands between the innocent Glasher children and the heritage due them. In resolution, she declaims, "Let your dead love/Marry its dead." At some level she knows that Grandcourt's love is as deadly to her as is the image of Lydia's watery grave. In a prophecy of dream-work Gwendolen's unconscious delivers the message of her own potential fate: Grandcourt is the kiss of death.

Eliot reveals the growing depths of Gwendolen's remorse for her untrammeled desire of a life of distinction and privilege. The discomfort of remorse roils up the placid façade of her unquestionable perfection —the precurser emotion for her encounter with Daniel Deronda at the gambling table where she goes to chase away the ghosts of "wreck-wear gems"[282] by indulging in gambling that echoes similar moral turpitude.

She teeters on the brink of selfish desire.The only moral voice that could have reached her, that could have supported her own growing consciousness of the consequences of that misalliance, had gone over to the other side. Her uncle, the Reverend Gascoigne had with his ecclesiastical ministering skills tapped into the "dread" that afflicted her—the strong argument of unwanted marriage for the sake of her mother and sisters. On the other hand, her personal longing for "the dignities, the luxuries, the power of doing a great deal of what she liked to do . . . .and within her choice to secure or lose, took hold of her nature . . . " She decided to accept him. She agrees to become Mrs. Grandcourt, the young bride of the powerful, 35-year-old aristocrat about whom she knows so little, but we readers are told "whose other relations in life are carried on without the luxury of sympathetic feeling (425).

Grandcourt's "strongest wish was to be completely master of this creature . . . : that she knew things which had made her start away from him, spurred him to triumph over that repugnance. . . . And she —ah, piteous equality in the need to dominate!—she was overcome like the thirsty one who is drawn to the seeing water in the desert, overcome by the suffused sense that here in this man's homage to her lay the rescue from helpless subjection to an oppressive lot. (301-2)

[282] Ibid.

Yet, "appalled by the idea that she was going to do what she had once started away from with repugnance," she faced a nightmare of that reckoning:

> It was new to her that a question of right or wrong in her conduct should arouse her terror . . . But here had come a moment when some thing like a new consciousness was awakened. . . In the darkness and loneliness of her little bed, her more resistent self could not act against the the onslaught of dread after her irrevocable decision. The unhappy-faced woman and her children —Grandcourt and his relations with her—kept repeating themselves in her imagination like the clinging memory of a disgrace, and gradually obliterated all other thought, leaving only the consciousness that she had taken those scenes into her life. (311-12)

This can only be possible if she has entered into another's experience. She has begun what Eliot calls "the habit of thinking [herself] imaginatively into the experience of others." Admittedly, the desperation of self-preservation may have pushed biology's neuronal action through the cracks of her terror. To feel another's intensely emotional pain is a hard thing to share. If this is a brand-new experience—as it is in a narcissist's depleted emotional repertoire—the feeling of being occupied by an overwhelming sensation unconnected to your cognitive processes, may take on aspects of being terrorized. Something critical has happened to Gwendolen in her confrontations with Lydia Glasher and Daniel Deronda, something about the uncrossable line between right and wrong that challenged her actions. She knew the foundation of perverse dishonesty in a marriage to Grandcourt; she acknowledged the disgrace; she had run from it to the spa at Leubrunn; she was consumed with disgust and loathing and indignation that in a union with Grandcourt she "should have been expected to unite herself with an outworn life, full of backward secrets which must have

been more keenly felt than any associations with her." Despite her innocence of the reality of marital relationships, she has been plunged into the catalyzing experience of the past's hold on the future through indelible memory. Worse,"the question of love on her own part had occupied her scarcely at all" (298). For as she had admitted to her mother, she feared she could not love. But, she listened to her uncle's unpriestly advice and to her own strong desire and when the propitious time came, said "yes" to Grandcourt.

> No chemical process shows a more wonderful activity than the transforming influence of the thoughts we imagine to be going on in another. Changes in theory, religion, admirations, may begin with a suspicion of dissent or disapproval, even when the grounds for dispproval are but a matter of searching conjecture. (423)

So the narrator begins the discussion of Gwendolen's descent into abnegation in her marriage to Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt. The "chemical process" referred to as mind theory—reading or imagining the minds of others—which leads to understanding and sharing of emotions and feelings of others through mirror neurons— the chemical activity that mimics another's affect. Eliot introduces us to this powerful transmission of one person's imagined consciousness to another when Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda encounter each other across the casino. The "transforming influence of Daniel's thoughts, as imagined by Gwendolen begins the chain effect of consciousness that changed her life. She became aware of "the darting sense that he was measuring her, and looking down on her as an inferior (10). This interior dialog marks perhaps the first time in her life that her sense of superiority had been breached. It was the first small crack in her consciousness. Her encounter with Deronda is startling. She felt "[h]e was unique to her among men, because he

had impressed her as being not her admirer, but her superior: in some mysterious way he was becoming part of her conscience." Their relationship was not tainted by her physical beauty or the lap-dog adoration that came with it; his attention towards her had a different meaning for her. His concern was for her moral relationships; those shamed her and touched her conscience. That conscience exploded in hysterical shame during their honeymoon when Lydia delivered for Gwendolen, as ordered, Grandcourt's heirloom diamonds. Nestling beside the jewels that Grandcourt will fasten around Gwendolen's neck is this note:

> The man you have married has a withered heart. His best young love was mine; you could not take that from me when you took the rest. It is dead; but I am the grave in which your chance of happiness is buried as well as mine. . . . You took him with your eyes open. The willing wrong you have done me will be your curse. (359)

Lydia has diabolically inserted herself as the deathly other in the first minutes of the Grandcourt's marriage. The fury is amped up, but one simple sentence that breaks the verbal invective, is the reasonable assertion of Gwendolen's agency: "You took him with your eyes open." Eliot's use of "eyes open" as the visible organ of sight is a deliberate double-play on sight that is insight, seeing that is knowing, the 'wrong' that is a 'willing' act. That corrosive guilt that haunts her and the hard-hearted man who plans to control her were the elements of a fate she could not overcome. It takes only seven weeks into the marriage for Lydia's curse to consume the new bride's life. Eliot decribes Gwendolen's unraveling under the effect of Grandcourt's malignant power.

> Gwendolen was conscious of an uneasy, transforming process—all the old nature shaken to its roots. . . After every new shock of humiliation she tried to

> to adjust herself and seize her old supports—proud concealment, trust in new excitements that would make her life go by without much thinking; trust in some deed of reparation to nullify her self-blame . . . and the ever-visiting dread of some horrible calamity. . . .
>
> One belief which had accompanied her through her unmarried life as a self-cajoling superstition, encouraged by the subordination of eveyone about her—the belief in her own power of dominationing—was utterly gone. Already, in seven short weeks. . . her husband had gained a mastery, which she could no more resist than she could have resisted the benumbing effect from the touch of a torpedo. . . .[Grandcourt] had a surprising acuteness in mak[ing] Gwendolen's proud and rebellious spirit dumb and helpless before him. (432)

Eliot's insights into Gwendolen's character, especially in how she handles the humiliation of Grandcourt's mastery over her, are brilliant in their detail and clarity in accord with current psychiatric understanding of the narcissitic disorder. She identifies humiliation as a consistent blow to Gwendolen's fragile sense of self; she underscores the effort to shore up her unraveling core by trying to "adjust herself," to adapt by attempting to reconstruct a facsimile of wholeness and then 'seize her old supports." Experts on narcissism such as Kohut, Lachmann, Stein and Beattie, have written of the "old supports" in language similar to Eliot's "proud concealment, trust in new excitements that would make her life go by without much thinking; trust in some deed of reparation to nullify her self-blame . . . and the ever-visiting dread of some horrible calamity." Eliot's use of the forcefully active "seize" in accessing the "old supports" captures the incipient panic that grabs to right the flailing ego structure. Grandcourt "meant to be master" of Gwendolen, ironically, "who would have liked to master him," just as she had dominated everyone who crossed her path. Grandcourt's view

of this was that that "her pride and spirit were suited to command everyone but himself." He had no doubt of the outcome. She must submit (320).

Eliot's depiction of Gwendolen's speedy disintegration from glowing bride thrilled by the dream of the new life she craved, free of financial imposition, rich in adventure and luxurious pleasures, came as an assault on the fragile structure of her sense of herself at the moment when the affectionate resources of her adoring family had disappeared from her daily life. She was in the cold embrace of a man who planned to tame his beautiful wife as he trained his magnificent horses to the slightest touch of the reins. As she collapsed into misery, which she believed was punishment for her selfishness, she turned to the only person she felt she could trust to help her find away through the darkness and fear that was suffocating her—Daniel Deronda. "Her confidence in herself and her destiny had turned into remorse and dread . . . this hidden helplessness gave fresh force to the hold Deronda had from the start taken on her mind as one who had an unknown standard by which he judged her. He had some way of looking at things which might be a new footing for her" (430).

We discovered Deronda's "new way of looking at things" when he asked us whether Gwendolen—by the reader, unknown and unseen—was "beautiful or not beautiful" (7). Asking us to judge what is invisible is intriguing, but, that, we soon realize is the task George Eliot sets for us—to think about what is unseen. The beauty that is unseen, is "that other beauty, too," inner beauty, the goodness of soul, that Castiglione and Emerson thought came in a perfect parcel with physical beauty. The beautiful Gwendolen Harleth's self-obsession and lack of sympathy for others gives the lie to that aphorism. She now knows and confesses to Deronda: "I am . . . in deep trouble and want to be something better if I could!" Without the aid of sacred ceremony or costume, her feeling had turned this man [Daniel Deronda]

only a few years older than herself into a priest; a sort of trust less rare than the fidelity that guards it" (430). He did not want to be her confessor. It was too sacred burden to bear, but his heart opened to her and he listened.

Gwendolen and Deronda—the priest as therapist, the confession, the angst, confusion, helplessness, empathy, philosophies of living a life worthwhile, the tedious slow process of change—is recorded by Eliot over several meetings as Gwendolen sought out Deronda at social gatherings, out of her husband's sight, and asked him for advice to rid herself of remorse for her errors. The words that stumbled or rushed out of her spoke to her guilt, her sorrow, her fears, her hopelessness, were vague in detail, but precise in context.

> I can't help feeling remorse for having injured others. I am punished, but I can't alter it . . . You told me I could do many things. Tell me again. . . What should you do—what should you feel, if you were in my place? . . . I am selfish. I have never thought much of anyone's feelings, except my mother's. I have not been fond of people-but what can I do?. . . You must tell me then what to think and what to do; . . . I have thrust out others—I have my gain out of their loss—tried to make it—tried.(449-50)

Pained by her helplessness, her inability to think or act on her own behalf, Deronda tried to guide her to a new way of thinking and being, but she seemed lost, unable to see the actions that would rid her of her guilt. Deronda was patient, trying to explain the simple processes of guilt, remorse, and resolve as processes of thinking in sympathy for and with others. He counseled her:

> Feeling what it is to have spoiled one life may make us long to save other lives from being spoiled. . . . I suppose our keen feeling for ourselves might end in giving us a keen feeling for others, if, when we are suffering acutely,

> we were to consider that others go through the same sharp experience. That is a kind of remorse before commission. Can't you understand that?
> I think I do—now, she replied. But you were right—I am selfish. I have never thought of anyone's feeling, except my mother's. I have not been fond of people—But what can I do? (452)

And so it continued. Eliot, faithful to her understanding of the disordered mind of her character knows that eventually [Gwendolen's] "present suffering" will be "the painful letting in of light." Deronda suggests she broaden her interests by reading which would open her eyes to the world "beyond the small drama of personal desire." "Then tell me what better I can do," Gwendolen said again, still "obsessing on her own small dramas:" "Try to care about something in this vast world beside the gratification of small selfish desires." He contrasts the vastness of the world to the smallness of her interests. Yet, he recognizes that because of her recent experiences she has been touched in real ways with others, and "knows more of the way in which [her] life presses on others, their life on [hers]."

That summer, Grandcourt, whom Gwendolen had grown to fear and hate, took her against her will on a boating expedition off the coast of Italy. He "suspected a growing spirit of opposition in her" was determined to make her feel that "she was his to do as he liked with." Gwendolen, "[F]ound herself with the . . . husband to whom she felt she had sold herself. . . her truthfulness and sense of justice, so that he held them throttled into silence, collared and dragged behind him . . . (668-9) And: "Side by side with the dread of her husband had grown the self-dread which urged her to flee from the pursuing images wrought by her pent-up impulse (763. The "pent-up impulse" in its "intensest form of hatred" was an unspoken wish, so definitively evil, so unthinkable because her former omnipotent will, though enfeebled, still lurked there in her imagination to exert its power over her desire. That

was the day that Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt was swept off his yacht and drowned, and Gwendolen, plucked from the waters, whispered the resolution of her "pent-up impulse." 'It is come, it is come! He is dead!' (686) She was bent on confession, and Deronda dreaded hearing her confession. . . . He was not a priest. He dreaded the weight of this woman's soul flung upon his own with imploring dependence. (689)

Gwendolen began: 'Do you think that a woman who cried, and prayed and struggled to be saved from herself, could be a murderess?' 'Great God,' said Deronda . . . 'You have not murdered him. . . . This death was an accident that you could not have hindered.'

> The tremor, the childlike beseeching in those words compelled Deronda to turn his head and look at her face. The poor quivering lips went on: 'You said—you used to say—you felt more for those who had done some wicked and were miserable, you said they might get better—they might be scourged into something better. If you had not spoken tin that way, everything would have been worse. I *did* remember everything you said to me. It came to me always. It came to me at the very last—that was the reason why I—but now, if you cannot bear with me when I tell you everything—if you will turn away and forsake me, what shall I do? Am I worse than I was when you found me and wanted to make me better? All the wrong I have done was in me then—and more—and more—if you had not come and been patient with me. And now—will you forsake me?' . . .
>
> He took one of her hands, and clasped it as if they were going to walk together like two children: it was the only way he could answer. . . . The grasp was an entirely new experince to Gwendolen: she had never before had from any man a sign of tenderness which her own being had needed . . . (690)

George Eliot's child Gwendolen has returned—inconsolable, in a dark place of terrors. The self she loved in its large place in her life has been replaced by a larger unlovable other-self.

That is the other who wanted to kill Grandcourt with a desire "as strong as a thirst," but conscience-stricken, fought it off by locking away her sharp, silver sheath and throwing the key in "deep water"(691). Gone is the grandiosity; in its place is the "bright rash girlhood in an agony of remorse . . . timid, forlorn, " (694). The certainty of her perfection is gone. She believes herself wicked. She thought only of her own gain, no matter the cost of another's loss. Grown up secure that everyone's attention is on her beauty, Gwendolen now believes that the whole world is looking on her evil—"it was not my own knowledge, it was God's that entered into me. There was no place to hide". She was compelled to tell Deronda everything "as God knows it." "I knew it all —I knew I was guilty." "I am a guilty woman" (692). She laid bare her soul, but "Deronda could not utter one word to diminish that sacred version of her worst self. Yet, if she did not know, he knew that there was an "awakening of a new life within her" (697).

Gwendolen wondered about that new life. She was going to be reunited with her mother and sisters. "I want to be kind to them all—they can be happier that I can (769). She felt different. She asked if Deronda would recognize her now as the exultant gambler, " the one you saw at Leubronn?" "Yes," he said. Although, he saw on her beautiful face the sorrow she had suffered. But, "the outside change is not great." (701). He was obliquely saying that something else had changed, something that might change the answer to the question that opened the novel— "Was she beautiful or not beautiful?"

Has the remorse that shook her to the core changed her and brought with it sympathy for others, and the possibility of "that other beauty, too." Deronda's belief that she could become the kind of woman who "make others glad they have been born," answers that

question in the affirmative. As for Gwendolen, with Deronda's assurance her body filled with a "strength that seemed the beginning of a new existence" (769).

Eliot has taken us with her on a journey into the mind in which she explores the numbing lack of empathetic consciousness that causes the inability to care about the lives of others. She imagines the possibility of an altered experience imagining ourselves into others lives and with it another reality of what it means to be beautiful. The transformation of a narrow consciousness may be possible through a gift of deep human empathy—a reverberation of Eliot's "other beauty, too," passing in a human chain on a path to change, or at least the desire for change, through the gift of an enlightened guide and mind-changing experience. What this novel of consciousness provides through Eliot's psychological insight and "that other beauty, too" is a narrative that rides on two tracks of aesthetic reponse: one the poetic, intellectual, visual and emotional demands of the reader, the other that holds steady the novelist's commitment to the more obscure aesthetic of Ruskin's belief —and that of many other Victorians—that great art gives the experience of the many beauties that enhance society and helps heal its discontents.

Coda. Ruskin's Wilderness Conversion: Discovering 'The Human Mind and All Things Beautiful'

> 'He hath made everything beautiful, in his time,' became
> for me henceforward the interpretation of the bond
> between the human mind and all visible things.
>
> John Ruskin, *Praeterita*[283]

Incomprehensible as it may seem, there was a time that John Ruskin looked and did not see beauty. There was a time when he did not believe that God had "made everything beautiful in his time."[284] This confession of an enormous blind spot in his much vaunted visual perception of beauty is tucked away in *Praeterita,* his autobiography. *Praeterita* was published forty-two years after *Modern Painters* catapulted young Ruskin into the cultural headlines as the 19th-century's Apostle of Beauty. Marcel Proust's moving tribute to Ruskin —"the things he had made me love . . . seemed to be charged with a value greater than life itself"[285] captures the mythical stature of Ruskin as the prophet of the ineffable and exponential experience of delight in nature's omnipresent beauty. Proust says the first thing that he learned from reading Ruskin was respect for the preciseness of vision. Out of this visual acuity came what Proust revered most about Ruskin: the importance of seeking beauty in the everday experiences of life. Imbued with Ruskin's theory of aesthetic perception "in

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[283] Eccles 3:11. King James Bible. "He hath made everything beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end."

[284] Ruskin. *Praeterita,* 251-253.

[285] Proust. On Readin Ruskin, 59

which the artist's act of seeing takes precedence over any received ideas or symbols,"[286] Proust writes this of Ruskin's aesthetic philosophy:

> The most beautiful portrait, the most studied and the most striking and the most famous, and thus far the only one, is the Ruskin who during his whole life knew but one religion: that of Beauty . . . . Beauty was his sole religion, because, in fact, he loved it all his life. . . . the [opinion] that the adoration of Beauty was, in fact, the perpetual act of his life may be literally true. . . . This Beauty to which he thus happened to dedicate his life was not conceived by him as an object of enjoyment made to charm, but as a reality more important than life, for which he would have given his own life.[287]

Proust, who studied Ruskin's work for six years before he began writing *Remembrance of Things Past*, believed that Beauty was Ruskin's "whole life, "the perpetual act of his life," a reality more important than life." But it is not until late in his life —1885— when writing his memoir, between periods of madness, that Ruskin admits he did not love rampaging forest-covered mountains. In 1842, a year before exhorting his readers to "reject nothing"[288] in nature, Ruskin himself, was rejecting the green profusion of the wilderness. He admits being blind to its beauty. An epiphany— a conversion really, since beauty was Ruskin's religion—on an "utterly dull cart-road" near his Fountainebleau inn, unexpectedly opened his eyes to the forest's beauty. This visual revelation is likely responsible for Ruskin's much-quoted exhortation to his readers "to go to Nature in all singleness of heart. . .

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[286] Richard Macksey in his introduction to *Marcel Proust On Reading Ruskin* which includes Proust's *La Bible d'Amiens*, his translation of Ruskin's *The Bible of Amiens*.

[287] Proust. On Reading Ruskin. 32-33.

[288] Ruskin. Artists Ed. MP.Vol 1, 123.

rejecting nothing, selecting nothing and scorning nothing,"[289] and especially, for his insistent—and personal— insight that men look but don't see what's in front of their eyes.[290]

On leave from Oxford University because of illness, Ruskin was traveling in Europe through Rouen, Chartres, Fountainebleau and Auxerre en route to Chamouni's bracing mountain air.[291] While walking in Fountainebleau, he became tired and lay down at the side of the road. He was hoping to sleep "among young trees, [since, he said] there was *nothing to see* but blue sky through thin branches." Then, he writes, "the branches against the blue sky began to interest me, motionless as the branches of a tree . . . on a painted window."[292] So begins twenty-three year-old Ruskin's testimony of the profound perception that bonded him to a total vision of nature that was to lead him to become the nineteenth-century's apostle of the religion of beauty. [293] His account continues:

> Feeling gradually somewhat livelier, and that I wasn't going to die this time, and be buried in the sand, though I couldn't for the present walk any farther, I took out my book, and began to draw a little aspen tree, on the other side of the cart-road. . . .
>
> And as I drew . . . the beautiful lines insisted on being traced-without weariness. More and more beautiful they became, as each rose out of the rest, and took its place in the air. With wonder increasing every instant, I saw that

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[289] Ibid.

[290] Ruskin. Artists Ed. Vol.1, 129

[291] Ruskin. *Praeterita*, 251.

[292] Ibid.

[293] Qtd in *The Desire of Mine Eyes: The Life and Work of John Ruskin*, p.6. Wolfgang Kemp writes: "The Victorians, while reviewing their lives, had a great fondness for interspersing them with dramatic conversion episodes. Originally, a Romantic tradition . . . [T]he conversation experience always tended to follow the same pattern. Personal distress, coupled with the distress at the course of modern society, would cast the person into a deep depression, a state of emotional and physical ill-being . . . whereupon a sudden inspiration, or an unexpected encounter with some new concept of live, would bring change."

> they "composed" themselves, by finer laws than any known of men. At last, the tree was there, and everything I had thought of trees, nowhere . . . .
> That all the trees of the wood (for I saw surely that my little aspen was only one of their millions) should be beautiful—more than Gothic tracery, more than Greek vase-imagery, more than the daintiest embroiderers of the East could embroider, or the artfullest painters of the West could limn,—this was indeed an end to all former thoughts with me, an insight into a new sylvan world.
> Not sylvan only. The woods, which I had only looked on as wilderness, fulfilled I then saw, in their beauty, the same laws that guided the clouds, divided the light, and balanced the wave. "He had made everything beautiful, in his time,"[294] became for me henceforward the interpretation of the bond between the human mind and all visible things; and I returned along the wood-road feeling that it had led me far;—farther than even fancy had reached, or theodolite measured.

There came this moment for Ruskin when low in spirits, worn out by illness, unmotivated to seek other visual distraction, when he looked at what there was to see, what he previously had scorned, and saw it for what it now was for him—beautiful. As an old man writing his memoir, remembering the days of his far-off youth, he adds his lifetime-earned appreciation of "Gothic tracery" in stone and its equivalent in embroidery as fine as that Nathaniel Hawthorne stitched into his creation of the beautiful Hester Prynne. The even finer art of nature fills Ruskin's imagination, with the joy and gratitude he has written comes when the mind opens up to the perception of beauty. He knows now, as he did not know then that it is the mind that has reinterpreted the once-rejected wilderness into the luxurious sylvan beauty; nothing else has changed, not the skinny lines of the trunks or the scalloped leaves. Looking

[294] Ecclesiastes 3:11. King James Bible.

back, Ruskin says he then had the feeling as he walked back to his inn that he had gone a "far way." His description of "far" in terms of the mind's copious capacity for imagination that grows from experience, and his reference to the theodolite, the surveyor's scientific tool, means he has traveled an immeasurable distance from a dull earth-bound, cart-rutted road to the ethereal world of green tracery.

Ruskin's inability to see the wilderness as classifiably beautiful was influenced by Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime and the beautiful. In the first volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin seems to suggest that his youthful problem with the wilderness may have stemmed from Burke's philosophy "Beauty is not so often felt to be sublime," Ruskin writes, "because in many kinds of purely material beauty there is some truth in Burke's assertion that "littleness" is one of its elements." The enormity of the wild land, its awesomeness, precluded it from the category of beautiful. However, in his status as a roadside convert to the beauty of things sublime, Ruskin, chiding those that hold Burkean views, continues:

> But he who has not felt that there may be beauty without littleness, and that such beauty is a source of the sublime, is yet ignorant of the meaning of the ideal of art. . . sublimity is found where anything elevates the mind (119).

Ruskin's sophisticated view of the subjective experience of beauty as a brain-centered biological function ttransporting pleasure throughout the body, takes Burke's separist theory of Beauty and the Sublime and unites them. The blended sum of their parts combines the delight of beauty and the sensation of sublimity into an experience sometimes difficult to encompass; we experience it as transcendence. This change in Ruskin's point-of-view gifts us with some sublimely glorious descriptions of forests as places of nature's powerful fecundity and alternately of luxuriant sanctuaries.

The example, below, from *Modern Painters* Vol. ll, of Ruskin's visually evocative and transcendent prose which Virginia Woolf says "takes our breath away," follows part of a paragraph of an example of the intense learning experience of the "visual precision" that Ruskin modeled for Marcel Proust. First, here is Ruskin's observation of the variety and symmetry of tree leaf patterns.

> One of the most remarkable characters of natural leafage is the constancy with which, while the leaves are arranged on the spray with exquisite regularity, that regularity is modified in their actual effect. For in every group of leaves some are seen sideways, forming merely long lines, some foreshortened, some crossing each other, everyone differently turned and placed from all the others, the forms of leaves, though in themselves similar, give rise to a thousand strange and differing forms in the group; and the shadows of some passing over the others, still farther disguise and confuse the mass, until the eye can distinguish nothing but a graceful and flexible disorder of innumerable forms, with here and there a perfect leaf on the extremity, or a symmetrical association of one or two, just enough to mark the specific character and to give unity and grace, but never enough to repeat in one group what was done in another—never enough to prevent the eye from feeling, that however regular and mathematical may be the structure of the parts, what is composed out of them is as varied and infinite as any other part of nature.
>
> (*Modern Painters*, Vol.ll, 176)

If an artist thinks that having seen one elm leaf he has seen them all, he falls into the Ruskinian category of those who look but don't see. This painstaking description of the particularity of the paradox of similarity in the leaves on the branches of a tree is Ruskin in his most meticulous inculcation of showing what it means to see. In detailing the paradoxical diversity and symmetry of leaves, his purpose is to illustrate how far the so-called great

landscape painters fell below the truth of nature when painting a tree. Here is his assessment of the revered 18th-century painter, Gaspar Poussin:

> [T]ake one of his sprays where they all come together against the sky; you may count it all round, one, two, three, four, one bunch; five, six, seven, eight, two bunches; nine, ten eleven, twelve, three bunches; with four leaves each, —and such leaves! Every one precisely the same as its neighbor, blunt and round at the end, (where every forest leaf is sharp, except that of the fig tree,) tied together by the roots, and so fastened on to the demoniacal claws above described, one bunch to each claw. (*Modern Painters*,Vol. 11, 177)

Ruskin's purpose is to compare Poussin's "house-painter" art to the virtuoso brilliance of Turner whose light-inspired vision and the precise visual truth and beauty was "attained by a humble and faithful study of nature and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality." [295] The artists Ruskin refers to are, as he points out, both painters and writers, and his method is especially instructive to writers who sought to follow his technique of transforming the reader's experience of their art by using language that made them see; writers such as Charlotte Brontë, who said that until she read Ruskin, she had been "walking through life as if blindfold";[296] and Edith Wharton, who wrote that "Ruskin gave her back the beautiful Europe she lost when she returned to New York as a young girl, and awakened in her the habit of precise visual observation."[297]

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[295] Eliot, Westminster Review April, 1856.

[296] Brontë Quoted in Wettlaufer, 245. Letter to W.S. Williams, published in *MacMillan's Magazine* 64 (1891).

[297] Wharton in *The Italian Spectacle*, 59.

With that example of his post-epiphany leafy observation, above, Ruskin sets us up for a *tour de force* of description of those leaves we have seen close-up, now seen at a distance on their sprays, on the branches of the trunks of "the mass and multitudes" of millions of members of their own family tree in a forest. (177) Here is what Ruskin sees the year after his epiphany on the rutted cart-track.

> The leaves then at the extremities become as fine as dust, a mere confusion of points and lines between you and the sky, a confusion you might as well hope to draw seasand particle by particle, as to imitate leaf for leaf. This, as it comes down into the body of the tree, gets closer, but never opaque; it is always transparent, with crumbling lights in it letting you through to the sky; then, out of this comes, heavier and heavier, the masses of illumined foliage, all dazzling and inextricable, save here and there a single leaf on the extremities; then, under these, you get deep passages of broken, irregular gloom, passing into transparent, green-lighted, misty hollows, the twisted stems glancing through them in their pale and entangled infinity, and the shafted sunbeams rained from above, running along the lustrous leaves for an instant; then lost, then caught again on some emerald bank or knotted root, to be sent up again with a faint reflex on the white under-sides of dim groups of drooping foliage, the shadows of the upper boughs running in gray network down the glossy stems, and resting in quiet checkers upon the glittering earth; but all penetrable, and transparent, and, in proportion, inextricable and incomprehensible, except where across the labyrinth and the mystery of the dazzling light and dream-like shadow, falls, close to us, some solitary spray, some wreath of two or three motionless large leaves, the type and embodying of all that in the rest we feel and imagine, but can never see.
>
> (*Modern Painters*. Vol. ll. 177-8)

Those leaves that Ruskin described so distinctly are now indescribable, for at their extremities as you gaze up into the mountainous reaches they are as fine as dust. Dust—that irritating powdery material of anonymous, mostly suspect microscopic waste that coats the world and everything in it. It would be as easy to draw or describe that confusion as to draw seasand particle by particle, he says. Ruskin loves the cognitive and mental power of contrast in art. He advises its use in writing because contrast tantalizes the reader's imagination, opening up the world of metaphor for neuronal candy. The comparisons he evokes takes us from leafy greenness to dust to sand. Dust? Dust is grime and grimace, but seasand is the confounding result of eons of geology, of minerals becoming rocks—igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic— through heat and pressure of earthquakes and volcanic magma, being torn off mountains around the world, tossed and smashed by glaciers, in streams and river currents until smaller and yet smaller they arrive through concrete pipes onto a beach that looks the color of sand but is a mixture of miniscule jewels of all colors, black to shiny white crystals, ruby reds and greens, and micas and feldspars, gneiss and shales, of different hardness, density, cleavage and magnetic properties. From the hot beach the seasand is swept into the cold oceans' sedimentary basins to rest for many lifetimes, one layer over another lying like a gigantic bolt of glittering striped cloth that catches the calcium shells of oysters and scallops and the wondrously-formed nautilus shells that appear millenium later as metamophosized marble on a palace floor or on a kitchen counter that we daily scrub free of dust. Ruskin's choice of contrast is as magnetic as the properties of some of the infintesimal magnetic grains of sand on the beach that cling to you: they pull and drag at you, attaching you to your self-created vision.

Next, Ruskin pulls your eye down to larger parts of the tree. He plays word-games with the light that changes the perceptions of nature. The openings in the foliage gives us light that is never opaque. It is always transparent, with crumbling lights through the trees, he says, that let us through to the sky. It is a diaphonous light, crumbling, as friable sedimentarty rock crumbles into sand. Try to imagine that light. Not a flicker, which is too obvious a movement, but a disintegration of light, so nuanced that only close attention tracks its demise. Below that are masses of illumined foliage, he writes, calling the luminosity, dazzling, and the twisted bonding of the trees in the mountainscape inextricable. In our mind's eye the vision of a gleaming mass of lacey tracery is a sky-wide painting of nature's compendium of wild green exhuberance. From the dazzle Ruskin slips back to the contrast of deep passages of irregular gloom and misty hollows. He gives the twisted stems eyes that glance through their entanglement and then, again in contrast, pierces the gloom with shafts of sunbeams that rain from above. Magically, as if turning his eye into a moving camera, he captures the sunbeam transforming from a shaft to run along the lustrous leaves, then to disappear, to flash on a knotted root, and then rebound to hit the undersides, seen as white, of drooping foliage. That sunbeam highlights the shadows of the gray network of boughs that Ruskin describes as resting in quiet checkers upon the glittering earth.

His use of "rest" and "quiet" to qualify his shadowy checkers, seems odd, but not for long. This descriptive passage, like most of his brilliant visions, begs almost conversationally in low gear, then switches to the speeded up pace of the brain absorbing flashes of perception, of shape, of color, of movement, and dashing from one image, the rush of word images flee on until one feels that breathlessness that Virginia Woolf talks about when she

says that Ruskin's writing takes your breath away. This is why he lets us stop for breath in the suggestive place of "rest" and "quiet" where the orderly shape of checkers lies quietly. From this place, Ruskin takes us back to his green wilderness peroration by flash repetition: Inextricable, incomprehensible, labyrinth, mystery, dazzling light until. . .

> . . . a dream-like shadow falls close to us, some solitary spray, some wreath of two or three motionless large leaves the type and embodying of all that in the rest we feel and imagine, but can never see.

If that be so, we know that John Ruskin had a revelation, saw it, and felt it, and found the words to describe it, and so, made it beautiful for us in his time.

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