CITIES BUILT TO MUSIC
INTRODUCTION

But it is nonetheless true that there are few authors who have considered architecture from the artistic point of view; what I mean is that few authors have attempted to study in depth that side of architecture that I term art, in the strict sense of the word. (Etienne-Louis Boullée, Architecture, Essai sur l'art)

Writing in 1907, Howard Maynadier introduced The Arthur of the English Poets by observing that because the Middle Ages had exerted such a powerful appeal from the time of Chatterton to the present “mediaevalism is likely to be one of the phenomena of the century just passed which will most attract the attention of historians and critics in the centuries to come.” Maynadier shared the self-conscious preoccupation of Victorians with what the future would think of the present, and also like them accurately perceived the dominant tendencies of the age, but he has proved no more capable than they in predicting either what would occur in the future age or what that age would think important about the nineteenth century. In those “centuries to come,” Maynadier's prophecy might well come true; but, for the present, modern writers have failed to be properly interested in a phenomenon that Maynadier correctly described as being such an extraordinarily important and pervasive feature of Victoria’s reign.

As befits a phenomenon that is essentially historical in nature, modern historians have perhaps dealt more fully with the nineteenth-century Medieval Revival than have scholars in other fields, and a fine example of recent historical scholarship is Mark Girouard’s The Return to Camelot. Yet even here the interest has been mainly limited to historiography and has not reached as far as is required to such areas of influence as, for example, the Young England movement. In religion, despite the voluminous scholarship devoted to the Oxford movement, relatively little has been said about its medieval aspect; and although James F. White has provided in The Cambridge Movement a thorough account of the connection between the Revival and the church for the middle and late parts of the century,
there remains much to be done on this matter for the writers of
the tracts themselves. Art historians have been even more
neglectful, for, apart from Roy Strong’s recent book, Recreating
the Past, they have paid scant attention relative to the im-
portance of the subject to medievalism in Victorian painting,
and even Strong’s book treats the matter only partially. The
influence of the Middle Ages on the Pre-Raphaelites has been
but indifferently dealt with, and we are left with discussions
that are either incomplete or superficial. In literature Alice
Chandler has done much in A Dream of Order, yet her book, like
Strong’s, is limited in its scope and does not begin to cover the
total range of medievalism in nineteenth-century literary
works. In brief, the Medieval Revival was of such vast signifi-
cance to the century and so permeated the entire substance of
British society that our full understanding of it is in very early
and tentative stages.

With the Gothic Revival, which term I shall use in con-
tradistinction to the Medieval Revival in order to differentiate
between the specifically architectural manifestation of
medievalism and the generally cultural aspects of it, the case is
somewhat different, as one would expect since architecture is at
once the most visible and important expression of medievalism
in the nineteenth century. Indeed, as early as 1872 Charles
Eastlake wrote his History of the Gothic Revival, and in the next
year T. G. Jackson followed with Modern Gothic Architecture.
Since that time there has been a continuing stream of books on
the subject, with no doubt the most popular being Kenneth
Clark’s The Gothic Revival although it is a somewhat biased
account (Clark admits that he does not much like the style). Yet,
for all this study of the Revival, Nikolaus Pevsner could write in
his contribution to Peter Ferriday’s Victorian Architecture that “as
far as the knowledge and appreciation of architecture goes, the
Victorian Age is the most neglected of all ages.” That was in
1963. During the interval between then and the present, there
have appeared as many books on Victorian architecture, all of
them dealing necessarily with the Gothic Revival, as there are
years since Pevsner made the statement, and this number of
books does not include those devoted to individual architects. We are, therefore, rather better off with architectural scholarship than we are with other areas influenced by medievalism, and we can be more optimistic about the study of Victorian architecture than Pevsner was twenty years ago.

However, it is nonetheless true that the majority of these books, by being either historical or descriptive, tend to ignore the theoretical principles that formed the foundation of the Revival. In saying this I do not mean to deprecate these approaches to nineteenth-century architecture, for both are essential to our understanding of it. We must know the historical sequence and circumstances in order to survey the whole and to see the relationship of its parts. We must have descriptions in architecture above all arts since a building cannot be placed before a student as can a poem, and neither can it be reproduced as adequately by illustrations as can a painting. History and description are, then, basic and essential first steps in our understanding of architecture; but they are, I suggest, first steps only, which by themselves fail to go the whole way. It strikes me that in our understanding of the Gothic Revival we are rather curiously at the same stage as the Revivalists themselves were toward the beginning of the nineteenth century in their understanding of the medieval Gothic, which is to say that we have pretty well mastered the facts but have yet to grasp the principles. This deficiency Pugin set about to put right then, and this deficiency we should attempt to correct now.

I propose, further, that such a study should aim at an etiological explanation of the Gothic Revival since our understanding of any such cultural phenomenon lies to a great extent in its origins. What is it about the nineteenth century, one should ask, that led so many of its foremost architects back to a style of building whose heyday was some five hundred years distant? But the attribution of origins in the history of ideas is a treacherous affair, for there is a reciprocal relationship between ideas and their outward manifestations that often prevents one from knowing how far the idea determined its manifest expression and how far the expression reciprocally
affected the idea. In short, and more specifically, when one is dealing with ideas and their artistic forms, does the idea create the form or does the form influence the idea? Which is the cause, which the effect? I dare say it is impossible to be sure in answering the question, and to be somewhat safer, although by no means avoiding the problem entirely, I shall equivocate by substituting the word “popularity” for “origins” and conclude with the proposition that an understanding of the popularity of the Gothic Revival in the nineteenth century is the chief goal toward which one should aspire.

Perhaps the most apparent explanation for its popularity is a religious one. James Fergusson advocated this theory in *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture*, and the intimate relations between Revival architects and Ecclesiologists, as well as between Pugin and the Roman church, surely argue forcefully for it. Had not the Church Building Act of 1818 provided one million pounds for the erection of 214 churches, 174 of which were in the Gothic style, and thus given occasion for architects to work with the type of building traditionally associated with Gothic, the Revival might never have made headway. Had not, further, the Tractarians returned to pre-Reformation doctrine and had not their followers restored pre-Reformation forms of worship, architects would not have been called upon to furnish churches suitable for the old ways. In fact, the original Gothic had its source in the church, and the neo-Gothic continued to derive its most steadfast and nourishing support there. George Gilbert Scott, principally, sought to extend the Revival to encompass secular architecture, but in the end it was always the church that carried the movement and made for its success.

The next most widely accepted explanation is a literary one. Eastlake, William Morris, and Clark believe that the groundwork for the Revival was laid by poets and novelists; and without exception they, along with others afterward, regard the immense popularity of Sir Walter Scott as in large part responsible for the mania about all things medieval, architecture among them, that characterized the century. Scott it was, more than anyone else, who reversed the neoclassic prejudice against
the Middle Ages as a rude and barbarous era and who thereby created in the general population a favorable and receptive climate in which Gothic architecture might flourish.

These two explanations, as well as a number of other less far-reaching ones, are valid enough; but they are only partially satisfactory, for with them all there is something either wholly missing or else but briefly touched on, and that is the matter of taste. After one has reviewed the religious explanation or the literary one, the historical or the social, the political or the whatever, one still asks oneself, “But why, aesthetically, did Gothic architecture appeal to the Victorians?” These various other explanations are insufficient to account for the popularity of the Revival, for no matter how compelling they may have been, if a people do not find a particular style artistically pleasing no amount of other motives will induce them to accept it. No age other than our own, so far as I can determine, has set about to produce quite consciously art that is ugly; and thus it seems to me inconceivable that Victorian artists, architects, and the people who appreciated their works could embrace so enthusiastically a style of art incompatible with their tastes. Much has been made of the ugliness of Victorian art, of Butterfield’s churches, for example; but, as Paul Thompson has said in his recent biography of the architect, Butterfield did not think his churches were ugly, nor, we may add, did the majority of others. Certainly there were such charges made by Butterfield’s contemporaries, but these amount to little more than the criticism all artists who attempt new things have always endured, and to take them as a starting point in arguing that no one at the time found these churches beautiful is to impose modern aesthetic values on art that follows entirely different rules.

I begin, therefore, with the simple assumption that Victorians liked Gothic architecture—liked it, that is to say, because they found it artistically pleasing—and my task becomes the discovery of how this particular style fulfilled their artistic expectations. The rhetorical approach demanded by the purpose is comparative: to assess on the one hand the fundamental and common aesthetic values of the age, and on the other to eval-
uate the theories behind the Gothic Revival, at each point drawing parallels between the two. By this method I hope to show that the architectural theories correspond quite closely to the aesthetic theories of art in general, that architects were trying to do in buildings what writers and painters were attempting in their special modes, and that the audience approved Gothic architecture for the same reasons it responded to contemporary literature and painting.

In discussing nineteenth-century aesthetics, I have relied principally upon literary examples. In addition to knowing more about literature than about the other arts and having the references more readily at hand, I have done so because architecture in the nineteenth century seeks out poetry as an artistic analogy far more frequently than any other art form, even than its traditional sister arts of painting and sculpture. Since chapter 2 is largely a matter of supporting this point, I shall not dwell on it here other than to remark that Ruskin's *The Poetry of Architecture* is but one example of many in which architecture is likened to poetry and seen to have similar ends. Because of this popularly conceived kinship between the two art forms, it seems logical to choose literature as the primary reference in explaining aesthetic theory. The main title of the book is meant to suggest this relationship between the two, requiring only that the reader accept the common equation of poetry and music. "The Poetry of Architecture" would have been a less misleading title, but it was unacceptable as having a meaning too restricted by use in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

An interdisciplinary study of this kind is basically a comparison and as such may be likened to figurative language, also basically comparative. In both cases the writer must concern himself with the essence or general truth of the objects before him rather than with their accidents or peculiarities. When, therefore, Shakespeare describes the barren limbs of trees as "bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang," he is drawing upon immediate and predictable impressions of the two parts separately. So too here I have tried to outline the essential ideas of architecture on the one hand and of literary
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and artistic theory on the other. It has not really been my purpose to discover troves of new material in either area, if such exist, although I hope the reader will perhaps encounter unfamiliar matters within his special field of knowledge. This has not been my purpose because a comparison must necessarily treat its two parts in this way, for its success depends upon the subservience of the parts to the whole. The success of Shakespeare's metaphor relies not on new insights into the separate natures of choirs and trees, insights of little value to the ecclesiologist and botanist alike, but instead on the combination or synthesis of the two. Here is where the delight in the metaphor springs, and here, in the mutually reflecting light of the two parts, one with the other, do we come to see each in a new way. It is this kind of mutually informative relationship that I have attempted to create in joining architecture and literature.

In dealing broadly with architectural theory, I am not, then, interested in pointing out exceptions to the generalizations with which I work as long as they truly remain relatively insignificant exceptions and do not assume the proportions of a major opposition. Neither am I concerned with variations on an idea that may appear in several writers or within one writer, for I am interested in common and widespread principles, not with individual writers and architects. Nor should the reader expect much about the buildings themselves since the subject is architectural theory rather than architectural practice. At the same time, the approach is not so abstract as Roger Scruton's *The Aesthetics of Architecture*, taking, as it were, a kind of middle course between heaven and earth. Chronologically I have taken liberties by drawing upon writers who lie somewhat beyond the final limits of the Revival—Ralph Adams Cram, for instance. The inclusion of Cram reveals, furthermore, that I have allowed myself some geographical license in using foreign sources. Such liberties may be justified in that the influence of the Gothic Revival extended far beyond chronological and geographical boundaries, and when the ideas of those so influenced accord as nearly to principal tenets of the Revival and
are expressed as articulately as are Cram’s, then I have no qualms about a liberal policy. The reader will notice, in addition, that I have sometimes violated the limits of the Revival itself by using statements from writers antipathetical to Gothic architecture; but such writers—James Fergusson, for instance—quite frequently shared certain ideals with the Revivalists even while being opposed to their ultimate goal; and when, therefore, I have found the ideals to be common, I have employed these statements not only because they are apt illustrations but also because they indicate the pervasive influence of the Revival. In brief, I have attempted throughout to present the central and dominant ideals by which the architects of the Gothic Revival were guided, and have not always demanded
that my sources be card-carrying members of the Revival if their beliefs correspond to these ideals.

The first two chapters are introductory. Chapter 1 shows that the dynamics of the Revival, that is, the basic motives for artistic retrospection, were as much aesthetic as historical, religious, or social. In other words, there was a specific and urgent aesthetic reason for returning to the Gothic style that explains the initial impulse of the Revival as satisfactorily as the various other causes that have been traditionally put forward. Chapter 2 has two introductory purposes. The first is to justify the method of the entire book by pointing out how, during the nineteenth century, it was an ordinary practice to draw analogies between the different art forms and to say, for example, that architecture was like poetry, or like painting, or like music. Since the Victorians themselves were in the habit of seeing correspondences between the various art forms, my attempt to place architecture within the general aesthetic context by indicating similarities between architectural theory and the theories of the other arts employs the point of view of Victorian artists and critics. My object here, in Coleridge’s words, “is to enable the spectator to judge in the same spirit in which the artist produced, or ought to have produced” (“On the Principles of Genial Criticism”). The second purpose is to introduce the organizational principle of the subsequent chapters by basing this discussion of artistic analogies on the aesthetic categories suggested by M. H. Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp. I have chosen this organizational approach, first, because it provides considerable latitude and, second, because Abrams developed it to explain the same Romantic aesthetic theories with which I am dealing. Chapter 3, therefore, has to do with the theory of art original with Romanticism and overriding importance to it, expressionism; chapter 4 concerns the traditional theory of mimesis; and chapters 5, 6, and 7 discuss the subdivisions of pragmatism: pleasure, instruction, and function. I have added the last of these subcategories to Abrams’s scheme in order to accommodate the special nature of architecture as an applied art.
Wishing to keep the footnotes to a minimum, I have not annotated some quotations, literary for the most part but also from well-known aesthetic works, beyond title references within the text. The general reader will likely be familiar with most of them, and, also, they do not constitute the focal point of the book. On the other hand, I have used footnotes for most direct references to architecture, less famous works on aesthetics, and all modern books and articles.