III. EXPRESSIONISM

I. SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE EXPRESSIONISM

[Expression] may mean the expression which resides in the object itself, which the artist seeks to seize and to render as powerfully as he can—the expression which belongs to a good portrait. Or it may mean the expression of subjective thought and feeling, not inherent in the object, for which the forms of art are vehicles. (John Addington Symonds, “Beauty, Composition, Expression, Characterization”)

In showing how the mimetic concept of art as mirror gave way during the Romantic age to the expressive concept of art as lamp, M. H. Abrams treats expressionism as a unified doctrine, but there were in fact two types of expressionism current during this time. The one with which Abrams is concerned focuses not upon external reality as with the mimetic approach, nor on the audience as with the pragmatic, but on the artist himself, whose purpose is to express his own thoughts and feelings. We shall look more carefully at the origin of this doctrine when we consider associative aesthetics in chapter 5; for the moment we need only recall that when associationism removed reality and beauty from the external world to the world of the mind, in order to portray reality and beauty the artist found that he must express his thoughts and feelings rather than imitate the somewhat insubstantial object that served merely to arouse those thoughts. This kind of expressionism is the subjective type and is best exemplified by Wordsworth, whose poetry Keats called the "egotistical sublime" because of the extent to which the elder poet impressed his personality upon his work.

The other form of expressionism is objective in that, rather than emphasizing the artist's associative reaction to an object and thereby diminishing the value of the object to a mere stimulus, it conversely emphasizes the object in its attempt to express the inherent and definitive essence of the object. Objective expressionism is obviously more in keeping with traditional
mimetic aesthetics since the focus in both is the object to be portrayed in art, but it differs from earlier artistic theory by requiring that the artist express the peculiar characteristic of the object from within as it were rather than that he imitate the general form of the object from without.¹ To express an object in this way, an artist needed above all things to be capable of sympathy—or better still, empathy—by means of which he could join imaginatively with the object and thus, having become a part of it, express from within its very nature. By emphasizing the independent identity of the object and by calling upon the artist to project his personality sympathetically into the object and so be absorbed by it, objective expressionism diminishes the artist’s sense of selfhood and leads Keats to remark that the poet is a chameleon with no identity of his own. This form of the expressive theory was discussed by Hazlitt in his lectures, practiced by Keats, who was very likely influenced by Hazlitt, and later embodied in Hopkins’s theory of inscape.

These two types of expressionism depend upon their own particular form of the imagination. Objective expressionism requires what Ruskin calls in Modern Painters the penetrative imagination and what a later writer defines as “the imagination which pierces right to the heart of things, seizes hold of their most characteristic and life-giving quality, and reveals it in language as simple as it is pregnant.”² Subjective expressionism, on the other hand, occurs when “the poet plays round his subject rather than penetrates it, contemplates it rather than interprets it. Thus, sometimes his imagination, instead of remaining concentrated on the object which has inspired the poem, flies off to fresh images, and so becomes creative instead of penetrative.”³

When applied to architecture, subjective expressionism means that buildings express the thoughts and feelings of those who erected them. This is the subject of the first part of the chapter. Objective expressionism in architecture means that a building expresses its purpose or function. This is the subject with which the chapter concludes.
II. ARCHITECTURE AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE AGE

The architect
Built his great heart into these sculptured stones.
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,
“The Golden Legend”

Artists reveal themselves so vividly in their pictures . . . that scanning their life-work is like reading a confession or autobiography. (J. B. Atkinson, “Mr. Holman Hunt: His Work and Career”)

Each country of the globe presents the record of its own history, its manners, wealth, and especially its religion, in the contemplation of its architecture. (A. F. Ashton, “Architectural Reflections”)

The artist who abides by the doctrine of subjective expressionism and takes for his subject his own thoughts and feelings is in effect writing autobiography, and his audience is invited to regard his work as an extension of his personality and to so identify the man and work as to evaluate the worth of one according to the worth of the other. This had not formerly been so. In the middle of the eighteenth century, Lessing took Milton’s remark about some fallen angels praising Pandemonium and some praising its architect to mean that “praise of one, then, does not always mean praise of the other. A work of art may deserve all possible esteem without bringing the artist any special renown. On the other hand, an artist may justly claim our admiration even when his work does not entirely satisfy us.”4 Less than a hundred years later, the artist and work had been so totally merged that such distinctions were no longer possible. Ruskin says that the most important principle to be derived from The Stones of Venice is, “Art is valuable or otherwise, only as it expresses the personality, activity, and living perception of a good and great human soul. . . .”5 Buffon’s axiom, “Le style c’est l’homme même,” had been carried far beyond the intent of its author.

But the nineteenth century took the axiom further yet by contending that style is not only the man but the age and society to which he belongs, and that the work of art reflects these as much as the personality of the artist. The idea appears at the
beginning of the Romantic movement in André Chénier’s “L’Invention” (1787):

Les coutumes d’alors, les sciences, les moeurs  
Respirent dans les vers des antiques auteurs.  
Leur siècle est en dépôt dans leurs nobles volumes.

By the middle of the next century, the notion of art revealing the age from which it sprang had become something of a critical truism. In his *History of English Literature* (trans. 1873), Hippolyte Taine writes that during the last hundred years in Germany and the last sixty in France this idea had transformed the study of history because people had come to realize that “a literary work is not a mere individual play of imagination, the isolated caprice of an excited brain, but a transcript of contemporary manners.” Architectural critics as well as literary ones applied the principle. In the last decade of the century, John Sedding wrote, “English architecture quite as much as English literature, expresses the imaginative thought of the English people during a long series of successive generations, and in a true sense has concentrated and imaged the dominant qualities of our race.” Ruskin and others believed that architecture is a truer index than literature since a building, unlike a poem, is the work of many hands and therefore more accurately represents the society at large.

Once the principle of art reflecting society became established, the next step was to determine more precisely what aspects of society should be embodied in works of art. Voltaire had written in *Essay on the Manners and Spirit of the Nations* (1756) that the three main factors in a society’s character are climate, government, and religion; and most nineteenth-century writers agreed, with slight variations, that these three qualities therefore should be expressed in art. Since climate figures in architecture more as a functional determinant, it will be considered later on. The other two generally fell under the headings of nationality and religion, and were used by the Revivalists in their arguments against revived classical architecture, which they considered foreign and pagan. Pugin, in fact,
ordinarily spoke of classical architecture as pagan and of Gothic as Christian. He did not object to the antique classical, because it properly expressed the religion of a pagan age, but he was intransigent in his opposition to the revival of ancient architecture during the Renaissance since it was inconsistent with the religious beliefs of a Christian people. Classical architecture, having developed naturally as the religious expression of pagans, could not express the very different religious concepts of Christians, and so was entirely wrong for modern churches. Only Gothic, which evolved from the Catholic faith, was proper for worship in churches where, as Pugin thought, that faith survived. This, for him, was the strongest argument in its favor: "Pointed or Christian architecture has far higher claims on our admiration than mere beauty or antiquity; the former may be regarded as a matter of opinion,—the latter, in the abstract, is no proof of excellence, but in it alone we find the faith of Christianity embodied, and its practices illustrated."8

As long as cosmopolitanism prevailed in the eighteenth century, an Englishman could consider himself a "citizen of the world" and regard his Palladian home as perfectly appropriate. Until Strawberry Hill he would no more have thought of building a house in the "national" Gothic style than he would have learned Old English instead of Latin. But when England was carried along in the general movement toward nationalism, which gained added impetus during the long war with France, the Revivalists were able to appeal to patriotic sentiments in arguing that Gothic was national but classical was foreign and could no more express the English character than it could the Christian religion. Pugin, who championed Catholic architecture with the unremitting zeal of a convert, made the nationalistic appeal with the patriotic fervor of a first-generation Englishman: "How painful is it to behold, in the centre of a fine old English park and vast domain, a square unsightly mass of bastard Italian, without one expression of the faith, family, or country of the owner."9 Ruskin would have none of this. Generally credited with the popularity of Italian architecture in Victorian England, he accused the English of
confusing vanity and patriotism in their failure to acknowledge that the French originated the Gothic and brought it to its highest perfection. Palmerston also refused to accept Gothic as a national architecture. In the debate over which style to choose for the Foreign Office, he denied the main argument of Scott and his defenders that Gothic was the English style: “Now, I take leave to say that it is anything but the national style: it is a foreign style, which at a particular period was imported into this country...” The Revivalists were on weaker ground here than with the religious approach, and this may be one reason they were more successful with ecclesiastical buildings than with public, secular ones.

The logical extension of individual expressionism to collective expressionism involved aesthetics in the conflict between two contradictory elements of Romanticism—heroic individualism and populism—both of which gained impetus as the century matured. On the one hand, the hero as artist, more or less comparable to the “great man” of historical theory, stands apart from society by virtue of his superiority to it and frequently expresses in his art ideas inimical to the commonly held values of his time. If such an artist reflects society at all, he does so only inversely, and we must hold the image up to a mirror to set it aright. On the other hand, art as the collective expression of the people denies the individuality of the artist, who acts as little more than spokesman for the prevailing sentiments of his age. For example, though admitting that to some extent the architecture reveals himself in his buildings, G. E. Street goes on to add, “The man is dominated to a great extent by the age; so that the spirit of the age is seen more or less in the architectural works of all times.”

Collective expressionism was strengthened by two related developments in the latter half of the century. The first of these was social Darwinism, which explained that art reflected society because art was environmentally determined by society at large, and the artist, himself a product of the milieu, exerted no more control over art than the least organism exerted over the evolution of its species. The second development was political
socialism, which was applied to art by such people as William Morris and William Richard Lethaby. It follows from Morris's ideal of "art made by the people and for the people" that "architecture cannot flourish unless it is the spontaneous expression of the pleasure and the will of the whole people" ("The Beauty of Life" and "The English Pre-Raphaelites"). Lethaby agreed with Webb that "building is a folk art." "No art," writes Lethaby at another time, "that is only one man deep is worth much; it should be a thousand men deep." 14

Of the two types of expressionism, the Revivalists overwhelmingly preferred the collective over the individual. For one thing, a building is less an individual achievement than any other work of art since its design is often determined in varying degrees by those who are paying for it and since its execution is in the hands of many. For another, the Revivalists were quick to realize that collective expressionism was an effective argument in the debate over styles. Gothic, as the spontaneous expression of the people, was more national, more universal, and more natural than the classical style, which had been imposed upon England by an aristocratic minority who had acquired a taste for it at the universities and on Grand Tours, and which, therefore, was foreign, elitist, and artificial. There is a distinct egalitarian strain, all of it by no means as calculating as perhaps I have implied, running throughout Gothic Revival polemics.

In promoting the idea that art reflects society, the Revivalists also took advantage of the growing interest in history, particularly medieval history, by pointing out that no records of the past were so accurate as architecture. Before Ruskin said in "The Lamp of Memory" that architecture surpasses both poetry and historical writing as a conquerer of forgetfulness, Pugin had written in An Apology that "the history of architecture is the history of the world: as we inspect the edifices of antiquity, its nations, its dynasties, its religions, are all brought before us. . . . By architecture and ornament alone, learned men of the present time are enabled to make the most important discoveries, relative to the history of nations. . . ." 15

This archaeological approach to architecture, whereby an-
cient buildings become evidence of past civilizations to be analyzed by the historian, is parallel to the paleontological approach, in which buildings are regarded as fossils of extinct creatures to be reconstructed by the anatomist. Both are natural developments of the expressive theory, and both explain why the Victorians were concerned with what their architecture would reveal about themselves to the New Zealander of the future. But both approaches were leading in a dangerous direction, which was that architecture was becoming a means to an end, important less in its own right than in its use to the historian. We see something of this tendency in a remark made by the historian Edward Augustus Freeman: “We look upon an ancient church or castle not merely as a work of art, but as the relic and witness of a former age, of creeds, sentiments, institutions, and states of society which have passed away.” It is to be expected that a historian should consider a building “not merely as a work of art,” but it is fair to say that the public as a whole, many architects included, shared the opinion. Geoffrey Scott recognized this tendency some time ago in *The Architecture of Humanism* when he identified the habit of regarding architecture as symbolic to be a Romantic fallacy whereby architecture “ceases to be an immediate and direct source of enjoyment, and becomes a mediate and indirect one.” Had his subject been broader, Scott might well have included literature in this statement; for a natural consequence of expressionism in any art form is to emphasize the artist against the work, or, collectively, to elevate the society over the work. Hippolyte Taine, for example, argued for a historical approach to literature by comparing a fossil shell to a literary work: “Why do you study the shell, except to bring before you the animal? So you study the document only to know the man. The shell and the document are lifeless wrecks, valuable only as a clue to the entire and living existence. We must get hold of this existence, endeavor to recreate it. It is a mistake to study the document, as if it were isolated” (*History of English Literature*).

This attitude toward literature generated a school of historical and biographical criticism that led ultimately to a reaction
against itself by the New Critics, who attempted to refocus attention on the work of art by regarding it in isolation and ignoring the contexts of history and biography. Both they and Geoffrey Scott were part of a general cultural reaction, begun by the Aesthetic movement and continuing into the first decades of this century, against Romantic and Victorian values. Although the reaction did not succeed with either literature or architecture in eliminating the historical bias from criticism (and perhaps it was never meant to do so entirely), it did restore a more evenly balanced study by emphasizing the importance of the work of art in its own right. The task of those involved in the reaction was a particularly difficult one, for they were opposing not only the expressive function of art but the didactic function as well. We shall see in chapter 6 that the Victorians looked upon architecture and the other arts as a means for improving the moral climate of the age. This didactic approach, by which art becomes an educational tool for the amelioration of society, subordinates the work of art to an ulterior function as much as the historical aspect of expressionism. One reason that didacticism became so firmly entrenched in Victorian aesthetics was that only by means of it could the Gothic Revival be saved. As we shall now see, the expressive doctrine had led the Revivalists into a trap from which they could escape by no other means than using their art to reform society.

III. THE PROBLEM WITH COLLECTIVE EXPRESSIONISM

A style of architecture is simply that characteristic and collective material expression in which all the artists concerned in its production, working among a given people or in a given age, coincide. To be true, it must indicate the people’s or age’s collective type of character. This is an indispensable requisite. . . . (E. L. T., “Style in Architecture”)  

Men in those days had convictions. We moderns have opinions. It requires something more than an opinion to build a Gothic Cathedral. (Heinrich Heine, Confidential Letters to August Lewald on the French Stage)

In his famous statement of subjective expressionism, Wordsworth defined poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of
powerful feelings,” and this basic tenet found its architectural application in Morris’s comment that “architecture cannot flourish unless it is the spontaneous expression of the pleasure and will of the whole people.” The universality of architecture was important to the Revivalists not only because it bespoke the diversity of Gothic as a style appropriate for all types of buildings but also because it meant that architecture was an accurate record of the entire society. Spontaneity was important to them in establishing the historical accuracy of architecture as well, for an unpremeditated impulse was natural and therefore true instead of artificial and false. Pugin wrote that it was impossible for people “to have built consistently otherwise than they did”; and T. G. Jackson maintained that “all styles that have ever lived, lived because they came naturally of themselves, not by conscious choice; and . . . they fell into styles under the influence of the habits and needs and the predilections of contemporary society. . . .”

Spontaneity and universality became, therefore, mainstays in the argument that architecture is a true image of society.

When, in turn, the Revivalists rejected Renaissance and neoclassic architecture as shams, they did so largely on the basis of these two criteria. Instead of rising naturally and spontaneously from the requirements of society, the classical style of the Renaissance was imposed by men who, in Cram’s words, “self-confidently set to work to invent and popularize a new and perfectly artificial style.” Instead of being the expression of the entire people, the new style brought to England from Italy was, according to Lethaby, “a ‘taste’ imposed on the top as part of a subtle scheme for dividing off gentility from servility. In England, Italian art (so-called) became a badge of the superiority claimed by travelled people, especially those on the grand tour, over people at home. It was an Architecture of Aristocracy. . . .” If one filters out the socialism by dismissing the motive, the statement represents typically enough the Gothicist charge of exclusivity against neoclassic architecture. Neither spontaneous nor universal, the revived classical was a sham that defied one of the true principles of architecture.
The Gothic style, on the other hand, abided by the principle since it arose naturally and since it was popular in the sense of being an expression of all levels of society. This line of thought worked well enough in establishing the superiority of Gothic architecture over revived classical, but could it be used to justify neo-Gothic? Here was the problem, for what was the difference between the Gothic Revival and the Classical Revival three hundred years before? The very weapon the Revivalists used against the architecture of the preceding era could be as lethally turned against them since it could be argued that no revival is spontaneous. T. G. Jackson recalled having doubts about the Revival early in his career when he wondered whether "modern Goths were not after all pseudo-Goths [who] . . . had got the old dead style on its legs and propped it up, but they could not make it walk." Once dead, no style can be made to live again because all living styles must develop naturally and unconsciously. Furthermore, not only was modern Gothic imposed, but it was imposed by a small group every bit as elite as the aristocrats who introduced the classic into Renaissance England. Eastlake concluded his survey of the Gothic Revival by saying that the movement would not be complete until it ceases to be pedantic and becomes popular. That was in 1872. Sixteen years later Morris believed that it had failed to achieve this goal: "The architectural revival, though not a mere piece of artificial nonsense, is too limited in its scope, too much confined to an educated group, to be a vital growth capable of true development" ("The Revival of Architecture").

If spontaneity and universality are essential to the success of a style, then the absence of these prerequisites may account for the failure of the Gothic Revival. If these same two conditions are necessary for a style to reflect accurately a time in history, then the absence of them may suggest that modern Gothic architecture does not present a true picture of the Victorian age. Pugin believed, to the contrary, that the "Babel of confusion" in architecture falsely represented modern values and that only Gothic could correctly express the soul of a Christian and English nation. "Will the architecture of our times," he
writes in An Apology, "hand down to posterity any certain clue or guide to the system under which it was erected? Surely not; it is not the expression of existing opinions and circumstances, but a confused jumble of styles and symbols borrowed from all nations and periods." Pugin's failure to recognize that the confusion of architectural styles faithfully reflected the uncertainty of modern life according to his own inviolable law was, I think, the great mistake of his life. I prefer to believe that he would not see it, but why he did not matters less than that he achieved what he did only through an unshakable conviction in the truth of his perception. Had he lived beyond mid-century, he may have come to realize that England was no longer the insular and devout nation once so consistently expressed in its Gothic architecture. Perhaps he would not have, but from the perspective of the twentieth century, Cram saw it and found reason for hope in the immutability of expressive law: "Chaos then confronts us, in that there is no single architectural following but legion; and in that fact lies the honour of our art, for neither is society one, or even at one with itself. Architecture is nothing unless it is intimately expressive, and if utterly different things clamour for voicing, different also must be their architectural manifestation." Pugin's mistake, then, lay not in holding to an incorrect law but in thinking that the law had been suspended. The law was in effect, only it operated under different conditions since spontaneity and universality would no longer be possible for any style in a civilized and complex modern nation.

Cram's insight came, as I say, from the advantage of looking back after the Revival had run its course and at a time when Gothic architects were content to work with churches and colleges alone. Pugin, Scott, and others, however, were more ambitious in their belief that if Gothic were to become a living and dominant style, it must be universally applicable to all types of buildings. But here they became entrapped, for they believed that architecture reflected the age, and it was manifestly clear to all that nineteenth-century England was very different from the nation that had produced pointed architecture. How
could they revive Gothic and reconcile the aesthetic principle with the historical change? The answer lay in compromise: on the one hand, as we saw in chapter 1, they adapted the style to suit the times by relying on principles rather than exact precedents and by allowing for modern developments; on the other hand, as we shall see in chapter 6, they meant to reform society by restoring certain medieval values and bringing it more in line with the age that had created Gothic originally. The means by which this reformation would be effected was art, and so they came to set up a reciprocal relationship between art and society. Art is the product and reflection of society at the same time that art determines the values of society. In this way expressionism and didacticism merge, and in this way the Revivalists hoped to extract themselves from a pitfall of their own unintentional making.

IV. SUBJECTIVE EXPRESSIONISM AND SINCERITY

The greatest art represents everything with absolute sincerity, as far as it is able. (John Ruskin, *The Laws of Fésolé*)

Sincerity is of the essence of good art, and the detection of insincerity is certain. (G. E. Street, *Memoir*)

"It's gude to be honest and true." This line from an old Scottish song appears on the title page of Anthony Trollope’s *The New Zealander*, a jeremiad warning that unless society becomes honest and true the New Zealander will arrive to view the ruins of English civilization rather sooner than expected. Critics entertained the same fears for art that Trollope did for society and proclaimed truthfulness with such urgency that it may be fairly said to represent perhaps the most important aesthetic value of the age. In the arts there are several kinds of truth, depending on the different aesthetic theories. For example, the mimetic theory values truthfulness as the accurate correspondence between a work of art and the object it imitates. This is the kind of truth Johnson had in mind when he told Boswell, "The value of every story depends on its being true. A story is a picture of either an individual or of human
nature in general: if it be false, it is a picture of nothing" (Life, 16 March 1776). The expressive theory, on the other hand, demands a truthful correspondence between the work of art and the soul of the artist. John Stuart Mill describes this variety of truth when he writes that "the truth of poetry is to paint the human soul truly . . ." ("Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties"). Critics were careful to distinguish between the two types of truthfulness, and Mill separated them in this way: "Poetry, when it is really such, is truth; and fiction also, if it is good for anything, is truth: but they are different truths. The truth of poetry is to paint the human soul truly: the truth of fiction is to give a true picture of life" ("Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties"). Mill apparently makes this distinction on the basis that poetry is expressive and that fiction is mimetic. Pater makes a similar distinction, but at the same time affirms the supremacy of expression over mimesis: "In the highest as in the lowest literature, then, the one indispensible beauty is, after all, truth:—truth to bare fact in the latter, as to some personal sense of fact, diverted somewhat from men's ordinary sense of it, in the former; truth there as accuracy, truth here as expression, that finest and most intimate form of truth, the vrai vérité" ("Style," Appreciations, 1889). In Literature and Sincerity Henri Peyre differentiates between the two types by designating expressive truth as sincerity, and, although the Victorians seem to have used truth and sincerity synonymously, I shall employ Peyre's helpful distinction in the present discussion of expressionism.

In order to understand the novelty of sincerity as an aesthetic value, the origin of which Peyre traces to Rousseau, we must remember that, ever since the revival of learning in Europe, writers had adopted the classical concept of literature as rhetoric. The significance of this attitude Herbert Read has explained in The True Voice of Feeling: "Rhetoric is literature conceived as a game, and to conform to the rules of the game a writer must use and elaborate certain fixed forms, with the object of exhibiting his skill. There was never any question of sincerity. Poetry was treated as a literary game. . . ." To a large degree,
rhetoric is didactic; for the skill exhibited by the orator or writer is designed to persuade the listener or reader, and the audience, therefore, becomes the focal point of art. When, however, Romantic expressionism shifts the focus to the artist, the importance of the audience diminishes in consequence. Mill says that the difference between eloquence and poetry is, "Eloquence is heard, poetry is overheard. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciuosity of a listener" ("Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties"). The importance of this shift in artistic focus from the audience to the artist in terms of sincerity is obvious: when one stands before people to persuade them, one neither can nor cares to be sincere; but when one writes for oneself alone with no thought of others, one can sincerely express one's feelings. The orator creates an effect by calculation and design; the Romantic artist spontaneously expresses emotions. The thoughts Hamlet sincerely reveals in soliloquies are quite different from the remarks he makes to Ophelia for the benefit of Claudius and Polonius behind the screen, and, as Mill says, "All poetry is of the nature of soliloquy."

Sincerity worked both for and against the Victorian artist. It was detrimental because it led him to ignore his audience and so to isolate himself further from it. But it could be beneficial, too, for the audience had come to value sincerity in art and to esteem it above all else. Thackeray appealed to the readers of *Pendennis* to excuse the flaws in his artistry as less important than his sincerity. He may have committed mistakes in writing, but he has been honest with his readers, who will find that he meets such proper expectations as these: "Is he [the author] honest? Does he tell the truth in the main? Does he seem actuated by a desire to find out and speak it? Is he a quack, who shams sentiment, or mouths for effect? Does he seek popularity by claptrap or other arts?" ("Preface," 1850). Henry James wrote later in the century that sincerity was "the only condition that I can think of attaching to the composition of the novel" ("The Art of Fiction"), but the most remarkable statement about sincerity in literature was made by the architectural critic
James Fergusson. It is an extraordinary statement because it in
effect denies insincerity by taking as a fundamental rule “that
sordid minds cannot express elevation, the impure cannot ex­
press purity, or the vulgar mind elegance...” This extreme
form of expressionism, which asserts that an artist has no
choice but to reveal his character in his work, is augmented by
the notion that sincerity is more important than morality and
that an audience will respond to truthfulness even when it is
offensive. Here is what he says:

Lord Brougham somewhere remarks, that it is a strange, but melancholy
fact, that the three best works of three of the greatest poets of modern
times—Voltaire, Burns, and Byron—should be their most impure and
licentious productions, the “Pucelle,” “The Jolly Beggar,” and “Don Juan.”
Had he looked a little below the surface, he would have known, that it was
because the men were themselves impure that they could only truthfully
express the impurity in which they revelled. And truth will always find an
echo in every human heart, while falsehood can only please a passing
fashion, but can strike no truly responsive chord...

It is questionable that Victorians preferred sincerity to moral­
ity, but that Fergusson could even conceive of such an explana­
tion testifies to the forcefulness of sincerity as an aesthetic value
when he wrote this.

Since architecture was thought to be no less expressive than
the other arts, sincerity was as much a criterion for the architect
as for the writer or painter. Thomas Graham Jackson used the
synonym “frank” in saying that architecture must be “the frank
expression of the mind of the artist and of his age...” Ordin­
narily, when writers spoke of sincerity in architecture they
meant one of two things. First, just as collectively a Christian
society was required to produce a Christian architecture, that is
to say Gothic, so individually a church architect must be a
Christian if he is to express sincerely his faith in his work. John
Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb would not go so far as to say
that “none but monks ought to design churches,” but they did
think that “a religious ethos... is essential to a church
architect.” Pugin had said much the same thing, and Street
affirmed that “the church architect must thoroughly believe the doctrines of the church for which he builds. . . .”

Second, the architect must not only be sincerely committed to the religion for which he builds but also to the style in which he builds. For the Revivalists this meant that the architect must be dedicated to the Gothic and that this dedication precluded his working in other styles. This demand was peculiar to architects, for painters and poets were free to choose classical or medieval subjects and could work in whatever genres they pleased, all of which suggests that the restriction to one style proceeded less as a natural development of sincerity than as a capitalization of sincerity by Goths who were eager to promote their cause. The demand was also peculiar to the age in that architects had formerly moved freely from one style to another. The mainly classical architects Adam and Flaxman worked in Gothic, and William Wilkins worked equally in both styles, using the classic for Downing College, Cambridge, and the portico of University College, London, and the Gothic for New Court at Trinity College, Cambridge, and for new buildings at King's College, Cambridge. Sir Charles Barry had made his reputation as a classicist with the Travellers' Club and the Reform Club before he won the competition for the New Houses of Parliament with a Perpendicular design; and even there his son tells us that had it not been for the Gothic remains of Westminster Hall, Sir Charles would have preferred Italian. A good illustration of the stylistic versatility of architects early in the century is an advertisement following the title page of James Malton's *A Collection of Designs for Rural Retreats, as Villas, Principally in the Gothic and Castle Styles of Architecture* (London, 1802): “From his acquaintance with the various styles of architecture, Mr. Malton will alter any sound old building, to any particular style desired, that it may be capable of being converted to; or he will extend any structure, strictly keeping, if desired, to the original style of construction.” There is no dedication to a single style and no respect for the historical integrity of buildings in this, which is the sort of indifferent restoration practiced by “Wyatt the De-
structive" that would enrage Ruskin and Morris. It is also the sort of thing satirized by Pugin in *Contrasts*, where he attacks modern architectural practice with an illustration of advertisements, one of which reads, "Buildings of Every Description Altered Into GOTHIC or GRECIAN on Moderate Terms, Terrace Fronts Designed."

As I have suggested, the Revivalists may have insisted upon an architect's commitment to a single style as a practical means of opposing the stylistic indifference of men who were producing such an incongruous mixture of buildings and as a means of promoting their own cause; but they urged this on the ultimate basis of expressionism and sincerity, without which values they could not have done so. We see the expressive rationale in Arthur Edmund Street's comment that for his father the true architect could work in only one style because "an artist must show himself in his work, and it would be impossible to do this in antagonistic things." The value of sincerity appears in another statement from Street's *Memoir*: "To have designed in any other style would have been impossible to him, feeling, as he did, that no architect could conscientiously be a man of many styles..." This rather narrow attitude was probably never very popular outside the most zealous members of the Revival and of Ecclesiological circles, and certainly it was expressly opposed by the Eclectics, who advocated an appreciation of different styles. Oscar Wilde identified sincerity with prejudice that blinds one to the beauties of all art forms. In "The Critic as Artist" (1891), Wilde's spokesman, Gilbert, says a "a little sincerity is a dangerous thing, and a great deal of it is absolutely fatal." He goes on to explain by saying that the true critic should be unbiased, seeking "beauty in every age and in each school..." The Gothic Revival had gained a foothold in the eighteenth century only by establishing eclectic aesthetic values to allow for the appreciation of styles other than the overwhelmingly dominant classical one. Ironically, the Revivalists now discovered that the zeal of some was tending toward the same exclusivity against which they once rebelled and was,
consequently, incurring the same eclectic argument they had
themselves once used so effectively.

V. SUBJECTIVE EXPRESSIONISM AND MORALITY

The revival of Gothic Art was, in short, an assertion of moral principle.
(E. I. B., "On the Ethical Value of the Gothic Revival")

The introduction of morality into art criticism, what Geoffrey Scott has
called the ethical fallacy, came partly from expressionism and sincerity. It came from expressionism in that if
a work of art reflects the character of the artist, then its value
depends upon the quality of the artist, which came to mean,
given the Victorian emphasis on morality, that the value of a
work of art depends on the moral rectitude of the artist. In
Ruskin's words, "A foolish person builds foolishly, and a wise
one, sensibly; a virtuous one, beautifully; and a vicious one,
basely." Collectively, the principle operates by establishing a
correspondence between the art of any age and the morality of
the society that produces it. Ruskin extended the principle in
this way by organizing The Stones of Venice around the theme
that the architecture of Venice flourished and waned in accord­
ance with the morality and immorality of the state. But the
relationship between morality and art was well established be­
fore the publication of the first volume of the book in 1851, for
Pugin had shown in Contrasts how a morally upright and Chris­
tian Middle Ages had created the glories of Gothic art and how
the immorality and corruption of the Renaissance were
accountable for the decayed art of paganism. Also, in 1850
Frederick George Stephens wrote in the Germ, "The Arts have
always been most important moral guides. Their flourishing
has always been coincident with the most wholesome period of
a nation's..." ("The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian
Art").

Morality entered art criticism through sincerity, on the other
hand, because truthfulness is, after all, a moral virtue; and once
sincerity became an aesthetic value, it was naturally attended by
Fig. 8. An illustration showing the connection between morality and architecture. From A. W. N. Pugin's *Contrasts*, 2d ed. (1841; rpt. New York: Humanities Press, 1973), n.p.
moral implications. Christopher Dresser drew truth, morality, and art together in 1873 when he wrote, "There can be morality or immorality in art, the utterance of truth or of falsehood. . . ." If I am right in seeing these connections between aesthetics and morality, then Kenneth Clark's explanation for the nineteenth century's tendency to evaluate art according to the moral worth of the artist is misleading. In *The Gothic Revival* he writes, "Whenever esthetic standards are lost, ethical standards rush in to fill the vacuum; for the interest in esthetics dwindles and vanishes, but the interest in ethics is eternal." I do not doubt that Victorian morality arose quite independently of aesthetics, but I do deny that ethical standards replaced absent aesthetic ones, for my point is that morality combined with art because of, not for lack of, the aesthetic values of expressionism, sincerity, and, as we shall see later, functionalism. Had these values not existed, there may have been morality and art but not morality in art.

In 1886 Henry Van Brunt described the Gothic Revival as "the only instance in history of a moral revolution in art." Perhaps so, but Savanorola created a minor upheaval in the fifteenth century, and the association between morality and art extends as far back as the Platonic equation of the Beautiful and the Good. Christianity later affirmed the equation of the two through its teaching that goodness is beautiful and evil is ugly. When, therefore, the Victorians united ethics and aesthetics, they were calling upon the same Greek and Christian traditions as did Kant, who wrote in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790) that "the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good." And when they evaluated art according to the character of the artist, they were criticizing from the same point of view as Shelley, who had written in "A Defence of Poetry" that "the greatest poets have been men of the most spotless virtue. . . ." Finally, lest we believe that Robert Buchanan's notorious attack on Rossetti in "The Fleshly School of Poetry" was the simple consequence of Victorian morality, we should recall that Thomas Bowdler expurgated Shakespeare, Robert Southey accused
Byron of leading the "Satanic School of Poetry," and Lord Chancellor Eldon refused Shelley custody of his children because of "Queen Mab" long before the Victorian period ever began. The Gothic Revival, then, if it was "a moral revolution in art," was, like all revolutions, as much an evolution from certain elements in established authority as a rebellion against them.

If, furthermore, one chooses to regard the Revival in this way, one sees that it is like all revolutions in creating by reaction a counterrevolution. Referring to Ruskin, Charles Eastlake wrote in *A History of the Gothic Revival*, "To what extent morality and art were allied in the Middle Ages, or any other period of the world's history, may be doubtful. What we do know is, that in the nineteenth century a bad artist is not unfrequently a very good Christian, and that an indifferent Christian may be an excellent artist." For the most part, though, opposition to moralistic art criticism came from the Art-for-Art's-Sake group, whose objective approach to art denied expressionism. For example, Théophile Gautier refuted the identification of author and work by writing in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* that the novelist maintains an objective distance between himself and his characters. In his "Ten O'Clock" lecture, Whistler argued that morality has nothing to do with art. "In no way," he says, "do our virtues minister to its [art's] worth, in no way do our vices impede its triumph!" He then goes on to prove his point by the example of worthy yet utterly uncreative Switzerland, whose liberty and righteousness have produced nothing more artistic than "the clock that turns the mill, and the sudden cuckoo, with difficulty restrained in its box."

The opposition to moral judgments of art was founded on other grounds than the objectivist denial of expressionism. One of these was realism, which stipulated that the accurate and unselective depiction of life in all its conditions, moral or immoral, was more important to art than its ethical value. Another of these arose in reaction to didacticism, whose chief point was that art should elevate the morals of the people through an overt and calculated design. Perhaps this was the stronger of the two, for artists perceived in didacticism a threat
to the integrity of themselves and their art, and sought then more strenuously than they otherwise would have to wrest art from the dominance of morality by elevating art above all things. Instead of art serving religion, they made religion serve art, as when Rossetti uses Christian symbols for aesthetic effects rather than for the propagation of faith. The Aesthetes were to carry the tendency yet further by making a religion of their art.

VI. OBJECTIVE EXPRESSIONISM

Few monuments have a true character of their own and few architects appear to have concerned themselves with giving their architecture character; and yet this is the ideal, the Poetry of art, its most sublime aspect, and the one which makes it true art. (Etienne-Louis Boullée, Architecture, Essai sur l'art)

The style of a building should so correspond with its use that the spectator may at once perceive the purpose for which it was erected. (Welby Pugin, Contrasts)

Whereas subjective expressionism focuses upon the artist, whether individual or collective, by regarding art primarily as an expression of the artist’s character, objective expressionism focuses on the object to be portrayed by regarding art primarily as an expression of the object’s character; but in either case the presentation of this intangible quality is the key element in the creation of art, and without it the product, no matter how excellent technically, lacks life and therefore value. Objective expressionism requires, for example, that the portrait painter capture the personality of his model and somehow incarnate it in facial features on canvas. This, I take it, is where Fra Pandolf succeeds so well in painting the duke of Ferrara’s last duchess and why the “depth and passion of her earnest glance” invests the portrait with its lifelike quality. The landscape painter or descriptive poet is similarly committed to embodying in his art the spiritual character of the scene.

Now what soul is to the person and what spirit is to the place, purpose is to the building; for just as surely as soul and spirit compose the inner and special character of people and places, so purpose defines the individual character of a building. The
architect, then, for his part should try to express in his design the purpose for which the building is erected. Thus defined, his task was much easier than that of painter or poet since he needed little in the way of penetrative imagination to apprehend purpose; and once he grasped it, he had something rather more definite and substantial to work with than elusive abstractions like spirit and soul. Also, once he set about expressing purpose, although the materials with which he had to work were less tractable than paints and words, his task was easier than that of painting "earnest glances" since nothing could be simpler than designing for function by starting with the plan and allowing the elevation to develop more or less as it may. A building constructed on these principles must almost necessarily bespeak its purpose because its exterior is the natural outgrowth and visible manifestation of its functional purpose.  

The aesthetic principle of objective expressionism, then, lies behind Pugin's declaration in *Contrasts* that "the great test of Architectural beauty is the fitness of the design to the purpose for which it is intended, and . . . the style of a building should so correspond with its use that the spectator may at once perceive the purpose for which it was erected." But, in addition, there was also the functional approach of eighteenth-century French rationalism, and there was further support for the notion that a building should reveal its purpose in the picturesque theorists Humphrey Repton and Richard Payne Knight as well as in the architectural writers John Britton and John Loudon. There was, therefore, a considerable weight of opinion behind Pugin when he satirized in the dedicatory illustration of *Contrasts* such execrable shams of contemporary architecture as "a moorish fish market," "a castelated turnpike gate," and "a gin temple in the baronial style." The same principle applied to smaller objects, and Pugin similarly objected to the disguise involved in designing a clock as "a Roman warrior in a flying chariot, round one of the wheels of which, on close inspection, the hours may be descried. . . ."  

If objective expressionism in architecture involved nothing more than the revelation of purpose, then the architect's task
would have indeed been a simpler one than that of his fellow artists in poetry and painting, but the theory has a more complex aspect that draws architecture closer to the other arts both in the effect that it is supposed to create and in the difficulty with which the effect is achieved. To distinguish between these two kinds, we might borrow linguistic terms and call the simple variety denotative expressionism and the complex variety connotative expressionism. Denotative expressionism means, carrying through the linguistic analogy, calling a house a house and not a temple, castle, or whatever. Connotative expressionism means calling the house a home, thereby going beyond the bare designation of the thing to summon up an aura of thought and feeling associated with the thing. This aura, it will be at once perceived, is more nearly akin than purpose to the soul or spirit of painting and poetry, its mode of expression is similar to the techniques in the other arts, and its usual name, consequently, is "poetry"—"the poetry of architecture." The expression of a building's abstract character, its connotative values, came to be regarded as the essential element in architecture as an art. George Gilbert Scott stressed the importance of this kind of expression while at the same time indicating appropriate qualities for various types of buildings, when he made this comment as president of the Royal Institute of Architects:

That buildings should and may be noble, grand, beautiful,—should have an expression in accordance with their character and purpose... is what we properly understand by architecture, over and above the utilitarian purpose of building. Hence the solemn temple, the sumptuous palace, the severe court of justice, the gloomy prison, the frowning fortification, the meditative cloisters, the seclusion of the college, the inviting, joyous rest of home, are all expressions which have been sought and realised in building; and the true architect is he who perceives the possibilities of these vivid impressions of aesthetic pleasure, and is able to satisfy them. ...  

Once the architect had perceived these possibilities, just how was he to satisfy them? Vitruvius had confronted a similar problem, although he conceived it in terms of propriety rather than of expression, and found an answer in the appropriate use of the orders. In building temples to the various deities, Doric should be used for the virile strength of Mars, Hercules,
Minerva; Corinthian for the delicacy of Venus, Flora, and Proserpine; and Ionic for the mediate divinities of Juno, Diana, and Bacchus. But the classic orders inadequately met the more complex demands of expressionism, besides being altogether useless for Gothic, and so new solutions had to be found. Boulée, who considered the poetry of architecture before anything else in beginning a design, relied chiefly on symbolical arrangements. For example, he placed a prison underneath the Palace of Justice to create "an impressive metaphorical image of Vice overwhelmed by the weight of Justice." In designing the Municipal Palace, he "placed guard-houses at the four angles of the foundation of the building to proclaim metaphorically that the forces of public order are the basis of society."

Boulée's method, although similar to the overt symbolism in Victorian narrative paintings, is nevertheless somewhat crude compared with later solutions. Samuel Huggins, for example, explained that the expression of an institution's moral or mental qualities by the building's material qualities depends upon analogies between the two kinds of qualities, by which he means that certain ideas are associated with various shapes, volumes, and textures in a way rather more vague and subtle than the way ideas are evoked by symbols. "Thus," he says, "rough-hewn and boldly rusticated masonry, harsh angular lines, lofty and unpierced walls, will give the ideas of a prison; prison-like strength, combined with palatial sumptuousness of decoration, will characterise a bank; severity of outline and form, a character grave and solemn, of patriarchal simplicity, in which nothing is hidden, intricate or but partially told, and the absence of all imaginativeness, will distinguish a justice court." Huggins does admit, however, that in some cases analogy alone is insufficient and that the architect must then resort to allegorical sculpture.

In addition to the allegorical use of sculpture, though, the degree to which ornament was used could be a means of expression and a fairly simple one, too. William Butterfield, for example, used ornament to express social and religious hierarchies at Baldersby village, where the laborers' cottages
Fig. 9. Allegorical sculpture—a moneky and a cat, representing litigants, carved over the judges’ entrance to the Royal Courts of Justice, London.
are very plain, the schoolmaster’s house is decorated Gothic, the vicarage is more ornate still, and the church is the most highly decorated of all. Richard Norman Shaw kept ornament to a minimum in his design for New Scotland Yard, aiming, in the words of an interviewer from *Murray’s Magazine*, “at solidity and sternness to give simplicity. . . . His view of the Metropolitan Police is that it is an essentially stern, and not at all frivolous body.”

VII. SUBSTANCE OVER FORM

Expression is the soul of Art, without which it is inanimate and dead. ("On Invention and Expression")

And in exactly measured and inevitable degree, as architecture is more ingenious, it is less passionate. (John Ruskin, "The Flamboyant Architecture of the Valley of the Somme")

What I have called subjective expressionism and objective expressionism, although at variance in some respects, are alike in exalting the poetry of art as the essential quality and in making it, consequently, the chief criterion in aesthetic judgments. Moreover, as feeling became the measure of all things, correctness, refinement, and technical expertise became devalued in a direct ratio, and Romantic primitivism drew support from yet another source.

This preference for feeling over skill was most frequently apparent in evaluations of painting, that art form which revealed the opposition of values most clearly. Ruskin, for example, criticized John Brett’s landscape of the Val d’Aosta for being “wholly emotionless. I cannot find from it that the painter loved, or feared, anything in all that wonderful piece of the world. There seems to me no awe of the mountains there—no real love of the chestnuts or the vines. Keenness of eye and fineness of hand as much as you choose; but of emotion, or of intention, nothing traceable.” More than Brett, however, Browning’s Andrea del Sarto is famous for making the mistake of gaining finish at the expense of substance. Andrea is the faultless painter who surpasses in technical expertise Raphael, Leonardo, and Michael Angelo, but in his faultlessness ironi-
cally lies his fault, for his paintings lack the soul and vital fire of his rivals' less perfect yet greater works.47

Although painting may be most suitable for illustrating this principle, other art forms, architecture among them, exemplify it as well. James Fergusson pointed out that although medieval churches lack technical perfection, they "must speak to the heart of man in all ages; whereas, in spite of all the perfection to which the mechanical processes of art have been carried in our days, there is an absence of mind in its productions that renders them vapid and powerless..."48 When applied to architecture, the principle was usually described with reference to the worker since it is he who actually executed the design, and surely the noblest statement is Ruskin's famous chapter in The Stones of Venice, "The Nature of Gothic." The theme of this chapter has been explained by its foremost exponent, William Morris, to be "that the art of any epoch must of necessity be the expression of its social life, and that the social life of the Middle Ages allowed the workman freedom of individual expression, which on the other hand our social life forbids him" ("The Revival of Architecture"). It is more important that the workman freely express himself than that his execution be perfect. Indeed, the two are incompatible, for, as Ruskin said, "the demand for perfection is always a sign of a misunderstanding of the ends of art." With architecture none "can be truly noble which is not imperfect."49 An indication of Ruskin's evolution from an art critic to a social critic is that he justifies these remarks by focusing on the welfare of the worker rather than the value of the artistic product. Of course, the emphasis on the artist over the work is part of subjective expressionism, but Ruskin carries the theory a step further by introducing religion and moral values with his concern for the happiness of the workman. Christian art accepts imperfection in workmanship since Christianity acknowledges the fallen condition of man. To demand perfection is immoral since it enslaves the worker by refusing him the free expression of ideas.

Others, with perhaps more of an artistic and less of a social interest, were not as sanguine about the creative expressiveness
of workers as Ruskin and Morris. Butterfield, according to Swinfen Harris, "was opposed to the new cult of letting the workman think and act for himself"; and Pugin refused a request to support a school for laborers on the basis that "workmen are a singular class, and from my experience of them, which is rather extensive, are generally incapable of taking a high view on these subjects,—and ready at a moment to leave their instructors and benefactors for an extra sixpence a day for the first bidder that turns up. . . ." Street’s distrust extended even to his own draftsmen, whose work he directed and examined in every detail.

There is some evidence that these practicing architects were more accurate in their assessment of the workers’ abilities than the theorists, Ruskin and Morris. One danger of granting workmen free rein and of glorifying imperfection was shoddy workmanship. For art and architecture in general, Fergusson advocated expression over form; but when it came to modern Gothic, he faulted the poor execution of it: “The carpentry must be as rude and as unmechanically put together as possible; the glazing as clumsy and the glass as bad as can be found.” These remarks might be attributed to his antipathy to Gothic Revival architecture were they not lent credence by Ralph Adams Cram’s corroboration that architects are often dismayed to see their designs so imperfectly realized by poor craftsmanship.

Another danger in allowing artisans freedom of execution was that their work was frequently at variance with, and sometimes in outright contradiction to, the architect’s intent for the building, which could become a confused jumble of many minds rather than the unified product of a master design. Dr. Henry Acland’s tribulations with the willful Irish sculptors O’Shea and the Oxford Museum provide a good illustration of the problems that might arise when a workman was determined to have his own way. The sometimes scandalous designs on the undersides of misereres were as independently carved by artisans in the Middle Ages as the figures condemned by Acland, and the Ecclesiologists found them just as unpardonable. On
the other hand, the Ecclesiologists accepted the "disgusting forms" of gargoyles by justifying them as representative of demons driven from the church by the holy power of sanctification. But occasionally they are indefensible, as when some medieval O'Shea carved at St. Clement, Horsley, a wolf preaching in monk's attire.54

The Ecclesiologists' approval of gargoyles as symbolizing the power of Christianity over demons and Ruskin's justification of imperfect workmanship as a necessary feature of the thinking artist both proceed from the premise that expression in art, whether of a religious truth or of a craftsman's soul, overrides beauty of form. There are, of course, other reasons for what some consider ugliness in Victorian art. Robert Kerr, C. F. A. Voysey, and, more recently, Peter Collins attribute ugliness in the useful arts to functionalism. John Summerson and Kenneth Clark, on the other hand, blame a deliberate preference for ugliness, which Summerson ascribes, in turn, to bourgeois Puritanism.55 They are only partly right, for the ugliness to modern eyes of some Victorian art has multiple causes, and one of the most important is that expression as an aesthetic value came to have more weight than beauty of form.

In order to follow this change in taste, we must return to the starting point for Babbitt, Lessing's Laocoön. In explaining why the ancient sculptor portrayed Laocoön as sighing rather than screaming, Lessing said that for one thing Greek artists depicted only the beautiful and that a scream would distort the face into ugliness. In other words, for the ancient Greeks beauty of form was more important than expression of feeling. This is one reason, then, for the temperate sigh on Laocoön's face. The sculptor found that "the demands of beauty could not be reconciled with the pain in all its disfiguring violence, so it had to be reduced. The scream had to be softened to a sigh . . . because it distorts the features in a disgusting manner."56 Lessing's contemporary, Sir Joshua Reynolds, applied the theory to modern painting in "Discourse V." "If you mean to preserve the most perfect beauty in its most perfect state," Reynolds counseled, "you cannot express the passions, all of
which produce distortion and deformity, more or less, in the most beautiful faces.” What was true for art was true for life. The earl of Chesterfield advised his son to refrain from laughter, which is the ill-bred and vulgar way “the mob express their silly joy at silly things; and they call it being merry” (9 March 1748). A gentleman should repress his low passions and allow expression only to wit and sense by means of a restrained cheerfulness of countenance, hence the serene and tranquil “smile of reason” in most eighteenth-century portraits. However, in addition to revealing the unruly passions of the vulgar, laughter is unbecoming according to Chesterfield because of “the disagreeable noise that it makes, and the shocking distortion of the face that it occasions.” Laughter is as ugly to Chesterfield as the scream to the sculptor of Laocoön or the expression of any passion to Reynolds.

Charles Kingsley reaffirmed this idea in the next century when he spoke of the elevating influence of beauty on common workmen. A picture gallery, Kingsley wrote, is to the worker an oasis of beauty in a desert of ugliness, for “those noble faces on the wall are never disfigured by grief or passion” (“The National Gallery—No. 1,” 6 May 1848). But by the time he wrote this, most of his contemporaries had come to prefer expression over serene beauty. Much earlier, in fact, Blake had reacted to Reynolds’s comment about the incompatibility of beauty and the expression of passion with this note in his copy of the Discourses: “What Nonsense! Passion & Expression is Beauty Itself. The Face that is Incapable of Passion & Expression is deformity Itself. Let it be Painted & Patch’d & Praised & Advertised for Ever, it will only be admired by Fools.” Blake’s own pictures support this change in attitude as do those, for example, of Fuseli and Goya. In poetry one might select the startling first line of the “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister”—“Gr-r-r—there go, my heart’s abhorrence!”—as a further illustration of the change. Even keeping in mind Lessing’s contention that writing is better able to describe violent feelings than sculpture or painting, we may take this line as indicating that Browning considered the expression of his speaker’s malice to be more
important than mellifluous verse. Whether a Victorian architect believed along with Blake that the expression of feeling is beautiful or with Browning that it is more important than beauty, in either case he would have chosen the irregular, even grotesque, forms of the Gothic over the placidly regular, but less expressive, forms of the classic.