IV. MIMESIS

I. THE IMITATION OF NATURAL PRINCIPLE

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame
By her just standard, which is still the same:
Unerring Nature! still divinely bright,
One clear, unchang'd, and universal light,
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
At once the source, and end, and test of art.

Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*

[Architecture] applies itself, like Musick (and I believe we may add Poetry),
directly to the imagination, without the intervention of any kind of imita­
tion. (Sir Joshua Reynolds, “Discourse XIII”)

[Architecture] does not consist, like the others, in the imitation of natural
forms, but only of natural principles. (Edward Lacy Garbett, *Rudimentary
Treatise*)

Just as Wordsworth’s definition of poetry as “the spontaneous
overflow of powerful feelings” is the classical statement of the
expressive theory of art, so is Hamlet’s instruction to the travel­
ing players that the end of drama is “to hold the mirror up to
nature” the corresponding summary of the mimetic approach.
M. H. Abrams has said that art as imitation—as a mirror, in
Shakespeare’s words—is the oldest and most prevalent aes­
thetic doctrine in Western culture, extending back to Plato and
dominating classical and neoclassical art. One might add that
long before any formal criticism of art, imitation was the aim of
primitive art, guiding, for example, the hand of some prehis­
toric Iberian in the caves of Altamira. With so many centuries
of tradition behind it, mimesis was firmly enough established as
an aesthetic doctrine to maintain a powerful influence in the
nineteenth century, even though it was radically altered to
accommodate the new concepts of expressionism and organi­
cism, and not until the end of the century did it cease to figure
importantly in artistic theory.

But can mimetic principles apply to architecture? Sir Joshua
Reynolds had said in “Discourse XIII” that architecture was not
an imitative art, and almost a hundred years later, T. G. Jack­
sen admitted in *Modern Gothic Architecture* that nature was rarely
used as a principle in judging architecture since there is no obvious connection between the forms of nature and of building. Painting and sculpture are preeminently mimetic, writing can be vividly descriptive, and even music, as with Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, is able to represent nature, but architecture seems to lie beyond the reach of this particular aesthetic doctrine.

Despite the apparent incompatibility of this art form and this aesthetic doctrine, there were persistent attempts to make architecture conform with mimesis and to show that buildings could follow nature as readily as poems and paintings. In June of 1860 the twenty-first annual meeting of the Ecclesiological Society had as its topic for discussion "The Tendencies of Praeraffaelitism, and its connection with the Gothic movement." The president, A. J. B. Beresford-Hope, argued that the minute realism of the Pre-Raphaelites was at odds with the Gothic Revival, which was essentially imaginative and spiritual. It was commendable that the members of the Brotherhood were interested in Arthurian legends, but they should not paint Guinevere "with a face which they might see on the first passerby in Conduit Street." William Burges, on the other hand, said that the two movements were parallel because both went back to first elements, the Pre-Raphaelites to nature and the Camdens to old churches. George Edmund Street agreed with Burges and expanded on his remarks by saying the Pre-Raphaelite school developed precisely as the Gothic Revival: "Such a man as Pugin (though he might not be admired in all things) taught them to think of nothing but truth in their art, and that they should do in architecture what was true and natural; and that was what seemed to be the object of the Praeraffaelites."¹ Years later Lethaby made the same point in comparing Philip Webb to Browning: "Webb was one of the typical (and I believe great) Victorians; he did, or tried to do, for building what Browning attempted for poetry: to revitalize it by returning to contact with reality."²

Truth to nature, then, was as much a cardinal rule for architecture as it was for painting and literature. Garbett wrote that "it is the highest possible aim of architecture, as of all the other
fine arts, to imitate nature”; and T. G. Jackson said that architecture is “based upon the recognition of certain forms or qualities in animate or inanimate nature.” There were several explanations of just how architecture imitated nature, one of the earliest and most popular being that the Gothic style was originally inspired by, and modeled on, the forests of northern Europe. R. C. Dallas mentions the explanation in *The Morlands* (1805) when he remarks that linden branches “it has been said, gave the first idea of those Gothic structures that are the pride of former days, and the admiration of the present”; and later in the century Richard Monckton Milnes described olive groves as “Sylvan cathedrals, such as in old times/Gave the first life to Gothic art, and led/Imagination so sublime a way” (“Corfu”).

Other writers, less interested in architectural origins, observed simple visual parallels between Gothic churches and trees. Goethe compared Strassburg Cathedral to a “lofty, far-spreading tree of God” (*Von deutscher Baukunst*, 1773), Friedrich Schlegel likened the interior pillars of Cologne Cathedral to an avenue of trees and the exterior to a forest (*Grundzüge der gothischen Baukunst*, 1805), and Chateaubriand saw similarities between the spires of a Gothic church and the tops of trees, between the music emanating from those towers and “the very winds and thunders that roar in the recesses of the woods” (*The Genius of Christianity*, 1802). Adelaide A. Procter, the eldest daughter of Barry Cornwall, provides an English and Victorian example of the comparison in “A Tomb in Ghent”:

Dim with dark shadows of the ages past,
St. Bavon stands, solemn and rich and vast;
The slender pillars, in long vistas spread,
Like forest arches meet and close o’erhead.

The perception of Gothic architecture as being like northern forests, although persistent and popular in literary works, did not seem to gain much acceptance by architectural writers, who perhaps regarded it as too fanciful. Architectural writers did, however, believe that imitation of natural forms was possible by means of the mimetic sister arts of painting and sculpture; and by considering these arts to be of such integral importance to architecture, they were able to apply, indirectly at any rate,
imitative standards to architecture. In some cases these writers agreed with the budding realistic tendencies of poets and painters to abandon artistic conventions and be true to nature. Ruskin wrote that “the greatest decorative art is wholly unconventional,” and George Gilbert Scott recalled that at the outset of his career he copied the conventional foliage of early English work but that he later came to believe “it was inconsistent to revive bygone conventionalism in matters originally derived from nature; and that while we might imitate the architecture of another period, we must always go to nature direct . . . for objects of which nature was the professed origin . . . .”

Both Ruskin and Scott stressed the importance of botanical knowledge for the architect, but there were far more who believed that such knowledge was as useless to an architect as to a Moslem artist, whose religion forbade direct representations of nature, and that nature should be conventionally treated in art. Christopher Dresser wrote in *Principles of Decorative Design* that “if plants are employed as ornaments they must not be treated imitatively, but must be conventionally treated, or rendered into ornaments,” and his attitude is in accord with what both Owen Jones in *The Grammar of Ornament* and Ralph Nicholson Wornum in “The Exhibition as a Lesson in Taste” had to say earlier on the same subject. Architects as well as ornamentalists advocated conventional treatment of nature. Butterfield did, and so did Street, who gave several reasons for his choice. First, after pointing out that stained glass does not allow for accurate copying of nature, he goes on to say, in what amounts to the eighteenth-century concept of general nature, that “conventional representations of natural forms are usually the absolute forms which Nature has produced. . . .” Second, Street believes that the conventional is superior to the literal in beauty, for no “representation in oak or brass of a real eagle for a book-desk ever approached in real grandeur” conventional eagles. Finally, the conventional has been sanctified by time and custom, so that a conventional representation of Christ, though historically inaccurate, is more reverent than an attempt at realism. Consequently, “the religious conventions of many ages of
often very devout artists are worth more than the latest conceit of the nineteenth century. ..."7

There was, then, some disagreement among the proponents of the Revival about the proper way for architectural ornament to imitate nature, Street and Butterfield arguing for the conventional approach but Ruskin and Scott advocating the newer, realistic approach. In the end, the dispute was of little more consequence to architectural theory than the belief that Gothic arose in imitation of towering trees, for architects had by this time found a far more satisfactory link with nature through the imitation of principles instead of forms, discovering, in the words of Edward Lacy Garbett, that their art form “does not consist, like the others, in the imitation of natural forms, but only of natural principles.”8 This recognition is comparable to the reiterated advice of imitating the principles of artistic precedents rather than copying their forms and undoubtedly owes something to it, but no doubt the Romantic emphasis upon the abstract, spiritual quality of nature as the most important element and the one most worthy of representation in art contributed to architecture’s reliance on principles. In “On Poesy or Art” (1808), Coleridge had written that the artist should imitate natura naturans rather than natura naturata; that is to say, he “must imitate that which is within the thing, that which is active through form and figure, and discourses to us by symbols—the Natur-geist, or spirit of nature....” This interpretation of the artist’s goal allowed for objective expressionism, but, more to the point, it also relieved the architect of the obligation to imitate outward forms and freed him to adapt abstract qualities, qualities that could, in turn, “discourse to us” in the special symbolical language of architecture.

II. THE PRINCIPLES TO BE IMITATED

The Old Naturalism is at one, then, with the New in proposing conformity to nature as its great law. Where the two differ is in the meaning they set upon the words “conformity to nature.” (W. S. Lilly, “The New Naturalism”)

Accompanying the aesthetic shift reflected by Coleridge—or, perhaps more correctly, responsible for the aesthetic shift—was
the replacement of the old mechanistic concept of the universe by the new organic concept of it. This new perception of the world meant that when the artist sought out the principles of nature, he would find not the inert, static, and regular properties of a world-machine that Newton had revealed to his predecessors but instead the vital, dynamic, and irregular elements of an organic universe. Furthermore, when that artist was an architect, he discovered that the principles inherent in the organic view of the world accorded far more readily with the Gothic than with the classic style. The time was ripe for a return to pointed architecture.

One analogy between architecture and nature that was based upon organic principles is rather general in its application and was used to account for the development of architectural styles. Sometimes this type of analogy was employed—by Samuel Huggins, for example—to explain the environmental influence on style: “As the geographical distribution of plants in the vegetable world is influenced by conditions of soil, heat, moisture, light, and many other causes, so the geographical arrangement of architectural styles is ordered by conditions of climate, scenery, &c. . . .” Revivalists were able to use this point in arguing for the fitness of Gothic for English buildings and for the unsuitability of classical, which had arisen in a totally different climate. At other times writers used the organic analogy to justify stylistic evolution, as when M. H. Baillie Scott wrote that “art, if it is alive, must always so change and develop; for in the continual flux of human affairs, to stand still is to fossilise and decay.” But most frequently, the organic analogy was applied to the development of architectural styles to suggest their spontaneous origin. Just as the individual work of art is the spontaneous expression of a single artist’s mind, so is art collectively the spontaneous and natural expression of the society out of which it organically grows. The “intertwined fibres” of old English architecture, wrote John Sedding, “had grown from one tree, from one root of national genius, in a leisurely, unconscious way from first to last.” The Gothic Revivalists were to turn this premise into an argument against both their
Greek enemies and those who were demanding a new style. To seek an entirely new style was absurd, Street said, because all styles must arise naturally and unconsciously: "Very cautiously must we use the word [invention], however, for no style has ever been invented; either it has come by growth or by decay, the process in either case being as gradual and as equal as it is in Nature itself." It was no less wrong to build after classical models because they were of a style that had been artificially imported into England during the Renaissance and had not developed naturally. Art cannot survive transplantation, so dependent is it on the cultural soil from which it springs. In Cram's words, "You cannot sever art from society; you cannot make it grow in unfavorable soil, however zealously you may labour and lecture and subsidize. It follows from certain spiritual and social conditions, and without these it is a dead twig thrust in sand, and only a divine miracle can make such bloom, as blossomed the staff of St. Joseph of Arimathea at Glastonbury." On the other hand, Gothic architecture, as Morris pointed out, "is the most completely organic form of the Art which the world has seen," in that it developed naturally and uninterruptedly in those countries where it is indigenous ("Gothic Architecture").

A second natural principle that was applied to architecture, as well as to the other arts, is organic form. In On Dramatic Art and Literature, A. W. Schlegel had defined organic form by contrasting it with mechanical form, and a few years later Coleridge repeated Schlegel's distinction in his lectures on Shakespeare. "The form is mechanic," Coleridge said,

when on any given material we impress a predetermined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material, as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such is the life, such the form. Nature, the prime genial artist, inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms. Each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within, its true image reflected and thrown out from the concave mirror.
This belief in organic form is a part of other Romantic concepts and is of considerable use in explaining them. It clarifies, for example, the Romantic emphasis on particulars as means of access to the ideal; for if form is determined from within and is the true image of the internal, then the form of any object in nature, no matter how small or insignificant, reveals the life spirit inherent in it. When the life spirit is deified, nature becomes sacramental, revealing symbolically through form the divinity within. In other words, *natura naturata* reflects *natura naturans*.

Organic form also helps explain subjective expressionism, for the relationship between the artist and his work is similar to that between God and nature. Both artist and divinity create, both art and nature emanate from within, and, therefore, the artist reveals himself as completely in a work of art, whose form is an organic expression of the artist's soul, as God is revealed in nature. As we have seen, organic form in this sense was a popular architectural ideal; for the architect was supposed, either consciously or not, to express his character in a building just as society was to manifest its collective character in its buildings. One could, then, "read" the buildings and come to know the architect and his age. In addition, organic form helps explain objective expressionism in architecture since the idea that a building's exterior should reveal the building's purpose is so closely akin to Coleridge's explanation of organic form as that in which the "exterior is the physiognomy of the being within." These relationships explain in part why it was so important to Victorian architects, and Gothic Revival ones in particular, that a building accurately and honestly reflect its function and its social origins. Moreover, the analogy to organic form in architecture was a persuasive argument against neoclassic architects, who sometimes designed the elevation before the plan and who were, therefore, guilty of imposing a mechanical form from without rather than allowing the building to take an organic shape from within. In insisting that the plan should precede the elevation, that the interior requirements should determine the exterior form, and that the structure should not
be disguised, Gothic Revival architects were arguing for organic form, although they came to understand the term in a somewhat different way from Coleridge; for the concept was being modified, and thereby brought more in line with architecture, by evolutionary doctrine that substituted function for a divine life force as the inner essence determining form. That is, Darwin and others showed that the shapes, sizes, and colors of animals and plants were all the results of functional determinants. While, therefore, the overlapping theories of expressionism and organic form continued throughout the century to support belief in architecture as revelatory of more or less spiritual features of architect and society, the changing concept toward organic form led architecture in the direction of functional expressionism.

A very simple statement of this approach is Street's comment that "in good work the external form is always a translation of the internal structure, a building, if it is perfect, being as complete an organism as the human frame." A more complex version of the same attitude, incorporating the values of truth and beauty, is the following passage from M. H. Baillie Scott's "Ideals in Building, False and True":

If you look around you at the creations of nature, there is one striking fact in them which cannot be overlooked. It is that the forms of things are always the outcome of functions. The leaves and branches of the trees are all so shaped for certain definite practical purposes in the economy of the organism.... and if we apply this to art—to the building art in particular—we shall find that its products, if they are to be true like the creations of nature, must clothe themselves with forms which are the outcome of functions.... Let us try and remember, once for all, that the forms and features of building have no reason for existence at all apart from their uses. In the human frame the eye would be useless without sight, the arm useless without might. And so in a building, whenever the forms arrive naturally and obviously from the requirements of the structure, they achieve a kind of almost vital beauty.

If one chooses to emphasize the word vital in the last sentence of Scott's comments, one is not far from a third natural principle assumed by architecture, which is that buildings are sometimes animated with a kind of living presence. Warren Hunting Smith has remarked that "the advent of the personified house
in literature coincided with the Oxford movement in England" and surmises from this that Christian belief in the church building as God’s dwelling place had something to do with the literary phenomenon. But it is difficult to see how such a transference from church to house could occur, either in fiction or in fact, and a better explanation is probably to be found in the concept of organic form as applied to architecture. For example, it was usually a Gothic building, organically designed and constructed, rather than a classic one with its mechanical form, that was thought to be alive. In the following passage Street contrasts the passivity of a Greek column with the activity of a Gothic one:

The Greek column, standing passively under a direct weight, is naturally very different in form from the column which supports an arch. The fixity of the one is shown by the way in which it spreads to its base; the other is only a part of one continuous growth: it carries and spreads itself into that arched form which is truly said never to sleep. Sometimes the arch mouldings are gathered on to the cap and run down to the base in a different form; at other times they run down without, or almost without, a break.

The comment that the Gothic column and arch are united in “one continuous growth” suggests organic form, the active verbs “carries” and “run down” imply vitality, and the arch that never sleeps is outright personification. T. G. Jackson, too, approaches personification when he refers to “the intense struggling vitality that breathes in every stone of a Gothic minster.”

On the other hand, it was possible for some to discern vitality in Greek architecture. Charles Robert Cockerell, for instance, wrote his father that the marble of the Parthenon seems to breathe, just as Jackson said of the stones of a Gothic church:

I have now concluded that the vigorous, lifelike quality of Ld Elgin’s Marbles...is the prime Beauty of Gk Arch...as well, for contrary to all we have been told, the whole Temple, far from being a collection of inert masonry, is alive with movement...for the deviations which I have found in its construction provide an effect almost of breathing to the solid marble slabs.

For that matter, pictures could seem alive, as with Browning’s “My Last Duchess” or Rossetti’s “The Portrait”; but they did so
for other reasons than organic form, and I think it is fair to say that generally Gothic was more amenable to personification than was classic. It is somehow fitting that the House of Seven Gables, whose exterior was decorated with "the grotesqueness of a Gothic fancy," should be likened by Hawthorne to "a great human heart, with a life of its own. . . ."

A fourth principle that provided a common denominator in analogies between nature and architecture has been discussed by Arthur O. Lovejoy in "The First Gothic Revival and the Return to Nature," the most important article that has been written on the subject of this present chapter. Lovejoy's point is that architecture in the eighteenth century, like all the arts at that time, was judged according to its truth to nature, the dominant aesthetic criterion of the age, and that the change in taste from classical architecture to Gothic was brought about in part by a change in the concept of nature. That is, as long as nature was thought to be regular, symmetrical, and simple, classical architecture with its corresponding features met the criterion and maintained its popularity. When, however, nature came to be seen as irregular, asymmetrical, and various, Gothic architecture with its corresponding features met the criterion and gradually won acceptance. Lovejoy suggests, then, as a partial explanation for the growing popularity of Gothic architecture in the eighteenth century, that

this new appreciation of Gothic—not merely in England in the 1740s and 50s but in its later eighteenth-century manifestations also—was made possible by the supposed discovery that this style in architecture was really more "natural," more "in conformity with Nature," than the classical—in other words, by certain changes in ideas which enabled the "Goths" to steal the classicists' catchword. For the sacred though happily equivocal formula remained unchanged throughout; if it had not been possible plausibly to regard Gothic as a true "imitation of Nature" it could hardly have gained any wide acceptance in the eighteenth century.22

This change in the concept of nature is likewise partially responsible for the continued popularity of Gothic architecture in the nineteenth century. Pugin, for example, praised ancient mansions for "harmonizing in beautiful irregularity with the face of nature."23 One should recognize, however, that neither
Pugin nor his contemporaries regarded artistic imitation of irregular nature as the prime cause of irregularity in architecture, whether of the original Gothic or the neo-Gothic. They understood instead that medieval Gothic buildings were irregular because their designers were chiefly interested in function and because they had been added on to through the centuries and so did not conform to a master design. In adopting medieval principles, Victorian architects thought first of function and admitted irregularity as an inevitable and pleasing consequence. They did not, therefore, set out to design irregular buildings for the sake of irregularity; but because the irregularity of Gothic happened to be in accord with the new concept of nature, those buildings fortuitously fulfilled the aesthetic criterion of truth to nature and so were more widely approved than had they failed to do so.

Not unexpectedly there were some who neither approved of Gothic nor accepted the Romantic version of nature. For example, Edward Lacy Garbett, no admirer of Gothic architecture, found symmetry to be the dominant principle in nature: “We need hardly observe that it [the uniformity of halves] is the most universal quality in nature, pervading all ranks of organic life, from the leaf and the flower, up to man; and all separate and distinct creatures, even when inorganic, from a crystal to a world.”

But this attitude is a vestige of an earlier time and more in line with John Dennis's belief that “the universe is regular in all its parts” (“The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,” 1704) than with prevailing nineteenth-century opinion.

The Romantic concept of nature is epitomized in the ruggedness of mountain scenery, and a person’s fondness for either the highlands or the lowlands is an almost infaillable index of his preference for Gothic or classical architecture. On the one hand, as his son tells us, Barry cared little for the mountains through which he passed during his European tour in 1817–20: "His admiration of it [mountain scenery] was blended with the notion of something strange and almost grotesque in it. He speaks of it as exhibiting ‘the freaks and outrageous effects of Nature’ in its wilder features. . . . He delighted more in the
Apennines, rising in mountains of equal height. . . ."25 One sees very clearly in this passage the importance of irregularity and regularity in determining Barry's preferences. On the other hand, Viollet-le-Duc was a mountain climber who once fell into a crevasse, Street was so fond of mountain scenery that it was "almost a doubtful point whether or not he preferred it to the handiwork of men as exemplified in Gothic buildings," and Robert Louis Stevenson regarded great churches as "my favorite kind of mountain scenery."26

Closely akin to the values of regularity and irregularity, and similarly involved in the changing ideas about nature, are those of uniformity and variety.27 Here the shift is one of relationship and emphasis, as it is with the other pair; for both ages believed that a combination of uniformity and variety was consonant with nature and essential to aesthetic pleasure, uniformity alone being monotonous and variety alone being frenetic. The difference between them, as Heinrich Wölfflin has pointed out, lies in "the relation of the part to the whole—namely, that classic art achieves its unity by making the parts independent as free members, and that the baroque abolishes the uniform independence of the parts in favour of a more unified total motive."28 These different relationships in art correspond to the shifting relationship between objects in nature as the mechanistic universe gave way to the organic universe, and what Wölfflin is describing in baroque art is an early tendency toward the organic unity of nineteenth-century art. "Gothic architecture," Francis Palgrave wrote, "is an organic whole, bearing within it a living vegetating germ. Its parts and lines are linked and united, they spring and grow out of each other."29 In very nearly the exact words, Owen Jones made the same point about ornament: "Beauty of form is produced by lines growing out one from the other in gradual undulations: there are no excrescences; nothing could be removed and leave the design equally good or better."30

These statements are artistic versions of Coleridge’s principle of the One Life as illustrated, for example, in the Ancient Mariner's lesson that all parts of nature, from albatross to sea
snakes, are organically related through a universal participation in One Life. But for Coleridge and others, there is not only a new organic relationship between the parts and the whole but a new emphasis as well; for despite what Wölfflin says about baroque art, there is a new importance placed on variety over unity corresponding to the Romantic emphasis placed on particulars over the general. To illustrate this change, let us compare two statements, one by Lord Kames and the other by Coleridge. In *Elements of Criticism* (1762) Lord Kames writes, “Nothing can be more happily accommodated to the inward constitution of man, than that mixture of uniformity with variety, which the eye discovers in natural objects.” In “On the Principles of Genial Criticism” (1814), Coleridge says, “The BEAUTIFUL, contemplated in its essentials . . . is that in which the many, still seen as many, becomes one. . . . The most general definition of beauty, therefore, is . . . Multēity in Unity.” These statements are remarkably alike, but I should say that Lord Kames emphasizes uniformity by placing it before variety, whereas Coleridge emphasizes the many by placing it before the one and by italicizing it, as well as emphasizing Multēity by putting it before Unity. I do not wish to make too much of this contrast, for I quite realize that the evidence is too slight to bear the full weight of my argument and that Coleridge shares with other Romantics a philosophical commitment to the overwhelming importance of the Ideal One. But I do believe that the differences in the two passages indicate a shift of emphasis, however slight, from unity to variety. When we later examine this change in another context, we shall find more proof; but for the moment I should like to quote a passage that comes later in the century, after the change developed more fully and is therefore more discernible. In *Our Old Home: A Series of English Sketches*, Nathaniel Hawthorne recalled his impressions of the cathedral at Lichfield:

The traces remaining in my memory represent it as airy rather than massive. A multitude of beautiful shapes appeared to be comprehended within its single outline; it was a kind of kaleidoscopic mystery, so rich a variety of aspects did it assume from each altered point of view, through the presen-
tation of a different face, and the re-arrangement of its peaks and pinna­
cles and the three battlemented towers, with the spires that shot heaven­
ward from all three, but one loftier than its fellows. . . . A Gothic Cathedral
is surely the most wonderful work which mortal man has yet achieved, so
vast, so intricate, and so profoundly simple, with such strange, delightful
recesses in its grand figure, so difficult to comprehend within one idea,
and yet all so consonant that it ultimately draws the beholder and his
universe into its harmony. It is the only thing in the world that is vast
enough and rich enough.

Although for Hawthorne the cathedral combines unity and
variety, surely here the emphasis is on variety, the subject of the
entire description except for a prepositional phrase in the
second sentence and dependent clause in the penultimate one.

A third aspect of the shift in taste that accompanied the
change in the concept of nature is the growing preference for
ornateness. Linked to variety and manifested in the baroque
and the rococo, the artistic quality of ornateness paralleled, and
owed something to, the recognition of nature’s profuseness. In
his lectures on Shakespeare, Coleridge said that nature is “in­
exhaustible in forms.” A few years earlier Friedrich Schlegel
had made the comparison to architecture when he wrote of
Cologne Cathedral that “the inconceivable abundance of its
decorations vie with the inexhaustible profusion of nature”
(Grundzüge der gothischen Baukunst, 1805). It is possible, then,
that as people came to view nature as profuse rather than as
simple, they grew to have a new appreciation for the ornateness
of Gothic architecture on the basis of its truth to nature and to
develop a horror vacui in all artistic matters.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP OF ARCHITECTURE TO NATURE

Ye might think
That it had sprung self-raised from earth, or grown
Out of the living rock, to be adorned
By nature only. . . .

William Wordsworth, The Excursion

As the Romantic view of nature helped change taste in archi­
tecture, there arose a new and associated development in the
relationship between architecture and nature. The Renaissance
attitude toward the relationship, which continued into the
eighteenth century, was that a building and the surrounding countryside were essentially distinct—the one artificial, the other natural—but were linked by the garden, whose precise geometrical forms allied it with the building’s design and whose substance was that of the countryside. The popular writer on the picturesque, William Gilpin, expresses the idea in this way:

A house is an artificial object; and the scenery around it, must, in some degree, partake of art. Propriety requires it: convenience demands it. But if it partake of art, as allied to the mansion; it should also partake of nature, as allied to the country. It has therefore two characters to support; and may be considered as the connecting thread between the regularity of the house, and the freedom of the natural scene.\(^{31}\)

By the time Gilpin wrote this in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the change in taste from a formal garden to a natural one was well under way, and the impact of the change was to eliminate the separate though linking element of the garden by fashioning it more on the wildness of the natural scene and so, in effect, to bring nature up to the very doorstep of the house.

For other types of buildings than country mansions, the assimilation of architecture into nature was more readily and completely achieved. Ruins, overgrown with weeds and ivy, were for Gilpin more natural than artificial: “A ruin is a sacred thing. Rooted for ages in the soil; assimilated to it; and become, as it were, a part of it; we consider it as a work of nature, rather than of art. Art cannot reach it.”\(^{32}\) Cottages, too, could easily be wrapped in the enfolding arms of nature, as Wordsworth declares in his Guide to the Lakes: “These humble dwellings remind the contemplative spectator of a production of Nature, and may (using a strong expression) rather be said to have grown than to have been erected;—to have risen, by an instinct of their own, out of the native rock—so little is there in them of formality, such is their wildness and beauty.”\(^{33}\)

The Victorians, not content with ivy creeping up the walls, enticed nature yet farther into their homes through their obsessive love for natural ornamentation of all kinds. Modern practice seems to have completed the process by introducing plants into the house and by designing arboreta in public build-
ings. Also, as Nikolaus Pevsner has pointed out, modern construction, which requires of walls no weight-bearing function, allows for an extensive use of glass, and thereby breaks down the separation of exterior and interior, resulting in what Frank Lloyd Wright termed the etherealization of architecture. In a way, then, houses have come full circle from those first rude shelters of primitive man, natural in fact and undeserving the name of architecture, to sophisticated dwellings assimilated by nature.

IV. THE BREAK BETWEEN NATURE AND ART

A really well-made buttonhole is the only link between Art and Nature. (Oscar Wilde, "Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young")

Through the mimetic capabilities of ornament and even more through the adaptation of certain natural principles, architecture remained as closely associated with nature as did, in a somewhat different manner, the novels of realism and naturalism. On the other hand, the art forms of painting, sculpture, and poetry had begun by the end of the century to repudiate not only realism but imitative theories of any kind, and in England the leaders of the revolt were the Aesthetes. The artists and critics of this group rejected the principle of art as imitation partially because the perspective of nature had changed, and to represent nature faithfully was to represent ugliness. A hundred years before, Cowper had written in The Task that nature surpassed art in beauty: "Lovely indeed the mimic work of art; /But Nature's work far lovelier." Now, however, Whistler turned this truism upside down by asserting that art is more beautiful than nature, which does nothing more than furnish raw materials, the piano keys on which the artist plays:

That Nature is always right, is an assertion, artistically, as untrue, as it is one whose truth is universally taken for granted. Nature is very rarely right, to such an extent even, that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong: that is to say, the condition of things that shall bring about the perfection of harmony worthy a picture is rare, and not common at all. ("The Ten O'Clock")
Another of the Aesthetes' aims was to establish the supremacy of art, not only by declaring its superiority to nature and all else but also by averring the independence of art from nature, instruction, audience, morality, and so forth. For them art was sufficient unto itself, a sort of self-contained religion. Wilde, in his extravagant and categorical fashion, flouted the age-old theory of artistic mimesis by dissociating art from nature altogether. In "The Decay of Lying," Vivian disagrees with those who "call upon Shakespeare—they always do—and will quote that hackneyed passage forgetting that this unfortunate aphorism about Art holding the mirror up to Nature, is deliberately said by Hamlet in order to convince the bystanders of his absolute insanity in all art-matters." But Wilde is not content simply to dissociate art and nature—he must reverse the imitative principle by declaring that nature follows art. Startling at first, this reversal amounts to little more than a notion to which we have now grown accustomed, which is that we transfer fiction into fact by basing certain behavioral patterns on artistic models. Nowadays it is television that influences the outlook and behavior of the masses, but for Vivian it is art—Turner, for example:

Yesterday evening Mrs. Arundel insisted on my going to the window and looking at the glorious sky, as she called it. Of course I had to look at it. She is one of those absurdly pretty Philistines to whom one can deny nothing. And what was it? It was simply a very second-rate Turner, a Turner of a bad period, with all the painter's worst faults exaggerated and overemphasized. ("The Decay of Lying")

In *Modern Painters* Ruskin had praised Turner's paintings for being true to nature, and so had used the traditional method of judging art according to natural standards. When, however, Vivian looks from Mrs. Arundel's window and sees a second-rate Turner, he is using artistic standards to judge nature and is looking at nature through art rather than at art through nature. In the brief span of half a century separating *Modern Painters* and "The Decay of Lying," the mimetic tradition of ancient authority was overturned, and art was headed toward the nonrepresentational forms of modern times.