Textus

ENGLISH STUDIES IN ITALY

XVIII (2005)

1

Volume XVIII (2005) • No. 1 (January-June)

TILGHERGENOVA

TEXTUS
English Studies in Italy
Rivista dell'Associazione Italiana di Anglistica

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Piazza S. Sabina 2
16124 Genova (Italy)

Casa Editrice
Publisher
Tilgher-Genova s.a.s.
Via Assarotti 31/15
16122 Genova (Italy)
Tel. + 39.010.839.11.40 – Fax + 39.010.87.06.53
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EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE: THE LANGUAGES OF AESTHETICS

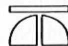
edited by
Mirella Billi and Kenneth W. Graham

CONTENTS

Mirella Billi and Kenneth W. Graham *Introduction* 3

Maurizio Ascari *The Role of Addison's Dream Visions and Oriental Tales in the Nascent Poetics of Short Fiction* 11
Michele Stanco *Hutcheson's "Idea" of Beauty and the Formation of Taste in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain* 25
Francesca Orestano *Picturesque, a Transformation: William Gilpin's Aesthetics and Ann Radcliffe's Visual Imagination* 39
Adriano Elia *Sublime and Word-Painting in Ann Radcliffe's* The Mysteries of Udolpho 61
Roberta Ferrari *In Search of a New Aesthetics: Addison, Fielding and the "Challenge" of Travel Writing* 77
Lia Guerra *Unexpected Symmetries: Samuel Johnson and Mary Wollstonecraft on the Northern Road* 93
Lidia De Michelis *Daniel Defoe and the Aesthetics of Discovery* 107
Marialuisa Bignami *What the Writers Said: Self-reflexive Statements in Early British Fiction* 121
Francesca Saggini *The Art of Fine Drama: Inchbald's* Remarks for The British Theatre *and the Aesthetic Experience of the Late Eighteenth-Century Theatre-Goer* 133
Luigi Cazzato *Laurence Sterne and His Paradoxical Aesthetics of the New* 153
Kenneth W. Graham *"Painting the Eyes of the Circassians". Samuel Henley's Mistranslations in Vathek* 173
Gilberta Golinelli *The Concept of Genius and Its Metamorphoses in Eighteenth-Century English Criticism* 189

(*continua nella pagina seguente →*)



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Diego Saglia *The Aesthetics of the Present: Commerce, Empire and Technology in Late Eighteenth-Century Women's Poetry* 205

Contributors 221

(*Instructions*: p. 226)

TEXTUS

Registrazione presso il Tribunale di Genova
n. 36 del 16.6.1988

Direttore responsabile: Renato Venturelli
Proprietario: Associazione Italiana di Anglistica
Editore: Tilgher-Genova s.a.s.
Stampato presso la Microart's S.p.A. in Recco (Genova)
per conto della Casa Editrice Tilgher-Genova s.a.s.

ISSN 1824-3967

© Casa Editrice Tilgher-Genova s.a.s.
Via Assarotti 31 - 16122 Genova (Italy)
www.tilgher.it

Poste Italiane S.p.A. Spedizione in A.P. - D.L. 353/2003
(conv. in L. 27/02/2004 No. 46) - art. 1 comma 1
DCB Genova - No. 1/2005

INTRODUCTION

This volume of *Textus* consists of a series of studies on eighteenth-century literature and its relationships with the intense debate concerning aesthetic concepts and principles which takes place in the course of the century and results in the creation of a system for the understanding, the interpretation and the evaluation of art works.

It is well known that aesthetics, as a recognized subject within the practice of philosophy, and as a philosophical discipline, received its name only in 1735, when a book in Latin, *Meditationes Philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus (Philosophical Considerations of Some Matters Pertaining to the Poem)* by the young German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten introduced the term. This was later, in 1739, expanded in *Metaphisica* by the same author with the inclusion of the concept of "logic of the lower cognitive faculty, the philosophy of the graces and the muses." Ten years later, in 1749, Baumgarten published the long fragment *Aesthetica,* the first treatise to bear the title of the new discipline, defined "the theory of the liberal arts, lower gnoseology, the art of thinking beautifully, the art of the analog of reason, and the science of sensitive cognition."

Although Baumgarten was the first to name the new subject, he by no means invented the subject itself. Since antiquity, philosophers, writers and artists had argued about the nature of beauty and the value of what we now group together as the fine arts, such as literature, visual arts and music. It is, however, around the begin-

Textus XVIII (2005), pp. 3-10.

ning of the eighteenth century that writing about the character and value of beauty and other properties both in art and nature was intensified to a tremendous extent. In England, the second and third decades of the eighteenth century have a claim to being the time of the origin of modern aesthetics, with the appearance of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* (1711), Addison's seminal essays "On the Pleasures of the Imagination" in the *Spectator* (June and July 1712), followed in the third decade of the century by Hutcheson's *Enquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725).

The issues raised by these early thinkers and authors – together with the impact of deeply influential foreign works, such as, for instance, Jean-Baptiste Du Bos's *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Paintings and Music* (1719), widely circulating in Britain long before its translation into English in 1748 – prepared the way for more professional and critical work and also influenced, both directly and indirectly, the literature and the arts of the rest of the century – and beyond.

In this fundamental beginning of modern aesthetics a variety of theories were produced and developed about the epistemology of art work itself, which resulted in some sort of system for the evaluation and interpretation of all forms of art, more precisely for what was at the time defined "the fine arts". Through the complexities and even the contradictions of this system the original and traditional idea of beauty was transformed, significantly according to emerging concepts of subjectivity and individuality: all the theories were in fact interwoven with the great revolutions of the Enlightenment period, in which the subject re-conceptualized him/herself, his/her relations to others and to the world outside and around him/her, by articulating the complexities of his/her emotional and affective experience, and were interconnected with different branches of knowledge, positioning themselves at the centre of a complex discursive network.

A new idea of the Imagination emerged and, most significantly, that of its freedom: this idea, though notoriously ambiguous and vague, particularly in the early thinkers, torn between competing conceptions of freedom, came to mean the absence of determination or control of some kind on any form of imagination. Shaftesbury

introduced the idea of "disinterestedness" into aesthetic discourse; in Addison, the Imagination is seen as enjoying freedom from constraint whether by nature or other interests, and is finally considered a positive power enabling the subject to enjoy and create images of liberty.

Addison anticipates Kant's synthesis of the positive and negative conceptions of the freedom of the Imagination in the experience of beauty and art. Kant's complex interpretation of the freedom of the imagination is in fact a synthesis of ideas expressed in the first decades of the eighteenth century, as he transformed the idea of the autonomy of aesthetic response that Hutcheson derived from Shaftesbury's "disinterestedness", and developed Baumgarten's conception of the complexity of the aesthetic representation into an elaboration of the contents of art. The symbolic significance of aesthetic response reconciled, in Kant, both Du Bos's conception of the engagement of the emotions through the imagination and Addison's idea of the free play of imagination.

In the course of the eighteenth century, the aesthetic ideas expressed and elaborated by these early thinkers and authors were developed and transformed by philosophers, writers and artists, from Burke to Hume, from Gilpin to Reynolds, from Johnson to Akenside, from Gerard to Kames, from Hogarth to Gray, just to name some of the major contributors to the formulation of the new aesthetics in its complex interweaving of issues and discourses.

Addison's account of the "Pleasures of the Imagination" as those "arising originally from sight" and his distinction between Primary Pleasures ("which entirely proceed from such objects as are before our eyes") and Secondary Pleasures ("which flow from the ideas of visible objects, when the objects are not actually before the eyes, but are called up into our memories and formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious"), stresses the importance of the visual arts (such as painting, sculpture, architecture, landscape gardening), but particularly all forms of literature, which employ verbal means – and also a special language – to call up visual imagery and in so doing afford pleasure to the subject. Moreover, Addison's division of the Primary Pleasures into three fundamental

kinds – *grandeur, novelty and beauty* – is equally anticipatory of further developments in aesthetics. His recognition of the Pleasure in *grandeur* or *greatness* will become one of the pillars of almost all later eighteenth-century theories under the name of the Sublime. The words Addison uses in his account of such Pleasure as "afforded by prospects of an open campaign country, a vast uncultivated desert, huge heaps of mountains, high rocks and precipices, unbounded views, or a wide expanse of water [by which] we are flung into a pleasing astonishment" cannot but remind the reader of Burke's similar and even identical words in his *Enquiry* published in 1757, a ground-breaking intervention within the proliferating discussion of aesthetics in Britain.

The crucial question of Taste was closely related with the issues of evaluating, interpreting and even creating literary and art works. This question, widely discussed throughout the century by a great number of scholars and artists such as Addison, Hutcheson, Shaftesbury, Gerard, Burke, Hume and Hogarth, found a definition in Hume's writings, "On the Delicacy of Taste" (1741), and "On the Standard of Taste" (1757), in which Taste was thought to be based on the workings of the individual critical mind and on human skill together with public agreement. At the end of the century, Taste came to mean the human faculty that sums up the ability to understand, value, criticize and appreciate the fine arts and, in general, the aesthetic dimension of human life. Not a mere instinct, and not even a separate faculty of the mind, it depended on the harmonious workings of sensibility, judgment and imagination. An objective standard of Taste was provided also by an artistic "language", a vocabulary and a usage determined by reference to well-known works of art, celebrated masters, and a generally accepted idea of art history.

The progress and development of aesthetic theories marked the transition by which the domination of classical rules was gradually transformed, contradicted and finally dismissed and a new language of art and criticism was created, connecting the evaluation and practice of the various arts.

All the essays in this volume point out, in the study of a series of

authors and texts, the close relationship between literature and the aesthetic ideas and principles circulating in Britain and developing into an increasingly coherent system throughout the eighteenth century. References to or echoes from the works of the above-mentioned theorists and scholars can be found or retraced, certainly always implied, in all the contributions, which also, in the variety of their subjects and points of view, offer interesting insights into the complex texture of the literary-aesthetic discourse, and suggest new perspectives for further study and research.

Maurizio Ascari, with the support of a number of contemporary works on the origins of prose fiction, analyzes, in his article on "The role of Addison's dream visions and Oriental Tales in the nascent poetics of short fiction", the direct relationships between the aesthetic premises expressed in Addison's and in his periodicals and fictional writings. In **Michele Stanco**'s extensive essay on Hutcheson's early work a connection is convincingly established between the emerging new concept of beauty and the poetry of Pope, Gay and Swift.

Francesca Orestano focuses her analysis on the aesthetics of natural landscape as theorized in Gilpin's writings on the Picturesque, and points out the influences of such writings and particularly the principles governing representation expressed in them on the novels of Ann Radcliffe, and on the creation of a visual-verbal language which characterizes not only the gothic novelist's visual imagination in her romances but a great deal of travel literature. This genre is a favourite with women, whose aesthetic ideas are not laid out as argument or theory, but rather emerge from the application of the language of aesthetics, mainly in the form of landscape descriptions and often in subtly unconventional ways, which express a conscious search both for an alternative way of looking and a new mode of travel. Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* ia also the subject of **Adriano Elia**'s essay, focused on the close relationship to be found in the novel between the idea of the Sublime and what the author of the essay defines *word-painting technique*, that is, a sort of verbal transposition of pictorial scenes (admired in such painters as Salvator Rosa and Lorrain and found in travel literature) used by the novelist

in her descriptive passages of natural views and landscapes. Elia stresses the anticipatory cinematic strategy of Radcliffe's descriptions, particularly in some passages of *Udolpho,* and connects it with contemporary techniques of representation. Two other essays focus on travel literature, confirming the relevance of this genre in eighteenth-century narrative and its importance for the connection of aesthetics with literature: **Roberta Ferrari** points out how in the early eighteenth century, as is obvious in Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* and in Fielding's *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, the aesthetic debate was still in search of a clear codification. **Lia Guerra**, in her analysis of two texts, Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) and Wollstonecraft's *Letters from Sweden* (1796), comes to the conclusion that significant similarities exist between them. Both are in fact characterized by an attitude of discovery and by the interest in natural landscapes, the fascination for which is nevertheless expressed in different ways: in Johnson through realistic descriptions and comments, in Wollstonecraft under the influence of Burke's Sublime and Gilpin's theorization of the Picturesque.

Defoe's *A General History of Discoveries and Improvements* (1724) is another very special example of travel literature, here analyzed by **Lidia De Michelis**: through a mixture of references to the Bible, Bacon and Sir Walter Raleigh's historiography, and according to the Horatian ideal of "utility and dulce", it highlights, in the variety and pleasing narrative of the many episodes, and in a highly imaginative language, navigation and travel as the source of discovery and improvement and as the ways by which Britain can be reinstated as the most glorious nation in the world.

Specifically connected with eighteenth-century criticism based on the new aesthetics are the essays by **Marialuisa Bignami** and **Francesca Saggini**. Bignami's "What the writers said: self-reflexive statements in early British fiction" points out how the prefaces and the authorial interventions of Aphra Behn, Daniel Defoe and William Congreve to some of their works not only reveal the elaboration of new principles for the writing of narrative and dramatic works, but, by reflecting on their own writings, and by communicating their

intentions to the readers, the authors, through them, convey a complex aesthetic message and anticipate the tendency towards the writing of metafictional and self-reflexive texts. Saggini's detailed analysis of Inchbald's *Remarks for the British Theatre* demonstrates how this work is invaluable in reconstructing the theories of drama and acting in the last decades of the century, and in revealing the implicit aesthetic criteria and principles – often, though only apparently, contradictory – which influence and determine the practice of eighteenth-century theatre.

Starting from a sentence in Laurence Sterne's masterpiece, "In writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to Horace's rules, nor to any man's rules the ever lived", **Luigi Cazzato** focuses his essay on the "cult of the new" in the eighteenth century, exemplified in *Tristram Shandy*, and on the increasingly accepted idea that works that conformed to the classical rules were not to be valued better than the ones that defied them.

Henley's translation and adaptation of *Vathek*, the famous Oriental tale written originally in French by William Beckford, is closely analyzed by **Kenneth Graham**, who retraces the main influences on this work, those of Dryden, Pope and Johnson, "the three founders of translation theory in English" and the most eminent representatives of neo-classicism. The rules of translation classified by Dryden are actually overstepped by Henley, who departs from his source text both by adding words and phrases, making suggestions about the text, expanding passages and writing extensive notes, the contents of which are drawn from a wide variety of texts. The translation, never authorized by Beckford, in its extraordinary mixture of neo-classical knowledge, proudly and excessively exhibited by Henley, of Oriental references, of quotations from a variety of authors such as William Jones, Shakespeare, Anacreon, Homer, Hesiod, mentioned together with Winckelmann, Chaucer, Tasso, Lucian, Richardson, Lady Mary and Cervantes, is revealing not only of Henley's personal ostentation of knowledge, but of the interweaving of elements and references and of the extremely complex intertextual web underlying eighteenth-century culture and taste.

One of the most debated issues in eighteenth-century aesthetics is

discussed by **Gilberta Golinelli**, who writes extensively about the concept of genius, starting from the origin of the term and retracing its transformations in meaning in English criticism through the works of John Dennis (on Shakespeare), Joseph Addison, Edward Young, William Duff and Elizabeth Montague.

Focusing on the works of Anna L. Barbauld, Anna Seward, Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson, written in the 1780s and 1790s, **Diego Saglia**'s essay charts how late eighteenth-century women poets addressed political, social and economic issues in poems in which such thematic novelties were expressed in traditional forms, slowly but definitely replaced by a new language and new poetic patterns. Women's poetry, shifting in forms and modes from "Augustan" to "Romantic", appears as an important site of the elaboration of the new aesthetics, which, by the end of the century, is no longer a set of theories, but a recognized discipline within the practice of philosophy.

Mirella Billi and Kenneth W. Graham

Michele Stanco

Hutcheson's "Idea" of Beauty and the Formation of Taste in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain[*]

> Thus we see that strict regularity in laying out of gardens in parterres, vistas, parallel walks, is often neglected to obtain an imitation of nature even in some of its wildness. And we are more pleased with this imitation, especially when the scene is large and spacious, than with the more confined exactness of regular works.
>
> F. Hutcheson, *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*, Section IV, article v (1738)

This paper focuses on Francis Hutcheson's aesthetic theories and their relation to early eighteenth-century taste. The first part of it concerns the notion of beauty emerging from the *Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*, whereas the second part deals with the relationship between his theory of beauty and his theory of art.

The *Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*, along with the *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*, forms the *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, which was published in 1725. The subsequent editions of the major work, and thus of the two treatises it consists of, contain some considerable alterations. The fourth and final edition published during the author's lifetime (1694-1746) appeared in 1738, and may thus be con-

[*] I wish to heartily thank Dr Albert Coward for his precious linguistic suggestions.

sidered as his aesthetic testament.[1]

Unlike seventeenth-century critical discourses, which were mostly rooted in the contemporary court, early eighteenth-century enquiries into "taste" were much more in line with the values of civil society and the emergent urban middle classes (Jones 1998).

Hutcheson's *Inquiry* largely conforms to this rule. Indeed, although maintaining that the "property" of objects "is of little consequence to the enjoyment of their beauty, which is often enjoyed by others beside the proprietor", Hutcheson however specifies that "there are other objects [...] which require wealth or power to produce the use of them as frequently as we desire: as appears in architecture, music, gardening, painting, dress, equipage, furniture, of which we cannot have the full enjoyment without property". Thus, for him "the only use of a great fortune" is "to supply us with the pleasures of beauty, order, and harmony" (Section VIII, article i, p. 88). In other words, ownership is to be pursued in so far as it lets us fully enjoy beautiful objects.

As hinted throughout the work, taste, and its display in social practices, was an obvious social marker.[2] Taste, indeed, revealed the "subject" in all his/her components. Therefore, defining taste was also a powerful means of "fashioning" the subject.

Rooted as it was in the author's socio-historical context, Hutcheson's treatise also drew on the classical critical tradition; the very epigraph on the title page of his major work is a quotation from a "Platonic" passage in Cicero's *De Officiis* (p. 3). In fact, the Platonic elements in the *Inquiry* are quite pervasive. Most conspicuously – as we shall attempt to show – the very term "idea" in the title of the work conveys a Platonic echo, as does the author's notion of art as mimesis.

Hutcheson's association with Platonism (and the Platonic Ren-

[1] References to *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design* are to Kivy's edition (1973) of the 1738 text. In quotations from this as well as from other works emphases are mine only when indicated.

[2] It should be further noted that in the eighteenth century the notion of "beauty" did not only have social but also gender implications. "Beauty" was also used to indicate, and determine, acceptable behaviour for women (Jones 1998). See also Bermingham (1993), and Perry and Rossington eds (1994).

aissance) was possibly also fostered by the influence played upon him by Lord Shaftesbury, who was, in his turn, heavily indebted to the Cambridge Platonists.[3] Indeed, the title page of the *Inquiry* pays homage to Shaftesbury by maintaining that "The Principles of the Late Earl of SHAFTSBURY are explain'd and defended, against the Author of the *Fable of the Bees*" – that is, Bernard Mandeville (p. 3; Kivy 2003: 25-26).[4]

Needless to say, however, Hutcheson was above all a follower of Locke's "moderate" empiricism. Therefore, his notion of "ideas", and thus of the "idea" of beauty, is even more profoundly indebted to Locke's epistemology and his analysis of the origin of knowledge.

In sum, in Hucheson's *Inquiry* – and, more generally, "in the new British aesthetics" – we may find "a marriage of the new way of ideas and the most venerable of ancient philosophies, Platonism" (Kivy 2003: 11).

Given Locke's influence on Hutcheson, it has been debated whether Hutcheson's "idea" of beauty is a "complex" or a "simple" one. On this question, contrasting theses have been held by different critics.[5] I shall not try to solve this problem here, since such an attempt would exceed the limits of a short journal-article. What I wish to more simply recall is that Locke's theory of cognition is not a radically empiricist one: while denying the existence of "innate ideas", Locke allows for a cognitive process which is not reducible to sense perception. Experience provides the foundation of knowledge, but knowledge goes beyond experience and the "simple" ideas deriving therefrom.

Such a position is clearly far from Plato's idealism and his theory of the independent existence of ideas. As is well known, Platonic ideas cannot be grasped through our senses. They are, in fact, universal and unchangeable, and are thus ontologically different from

---

[3] On the Platonic Renaissance in England, see Cassirer (1953: 160).

[4] As to Shaftesbury, see the *Characteristiks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Robertson ed. (1963). On Shaftesbury's aesthetics, see Bernstein (1977).

[5] Townsend (1991) and Jones (1998: 46) have claimed that Hutcheson's idea of beauty is a complex one; Kivy, on the other hand, has argued that it is a simple one (2003: 260-265).

changeable representations. However, there are several dialogues and passages (particularly those concerning *eros*) where the visible world is credited with the capability of providing us with an at least temporary and imperfect insight into the ideas of the good and the beautiful. For instance, in *Phaedrus* Plato observes that "when [one] sees the beauty we have down here [he] is reminded of *true beauty*" (249d: my emphasis).[6] In other words, the sense perception (above all, the vision) of earthly beauty can help us recollect the transcendent notion of beauty we once possessed. Furthering this concept, we may conclude that our *empirical* vision of wordly beauty plays a role – however small it may be – in our *metaphysical* cognition of ideal beauty.[7]

Put simply, there are passages and elements in Plato's dialogues which are not wholly incompatible with a moderate kind of "empiricism". From this perspective, the "marriage" of Platonism and empiricism pointed out by Kivy, however difficult, was not a completely impossible mission. Indeed, the well-known Platonic – and Neoplatonic – thesis that our cognition of ideal beauty arises from our "desire to enjoy beauty" ("disìo di bellezza")[8] was fairly compatible with the role which eighteenth-century philosophers assigned to "feeling" in our capacity of perceiving the beautiful. In both cases, the aesthetic sense was evidently connected with affections.

In short, although Hutcheson's philosophical aesthetics is mainly set within a Lockean and an empiricist framework, it also retains some traces of Platonism and idealistic philosophies. These traces, which were manifestly present in seventeenth-century English aesthetics, would be minimized, but not completely erased by the rise of empiricism (Benson 1968). Indeed, the very title of Hutcheson's work, with its emphasis on the *idea of beauty*, cannot but evoke

[6] References are to *Plato. Complete Works*, Cooper ed. (1997).

[7] The main difference between idealistic and empiricist approaches is that the empiricists suggest that the possession of clear ideas does not necessarily imply the actual existence of such ideas (in other words, they maintain that it is impossible to make inferences from concepts to existence, or to shift from an epistemological to an ontological level).

[8] Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, Jayne ed. (1985), I.iii, p. 41.

similar titles in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian Neoplatonic (or half-Platonic, half-Aristotelian) treatises on beauty, such as Giovan Paolo Lomazzo's *Idea del Tempio della Pittura* (1591),[9] Federico Zuccari's *Idea de' pittori, scultori et architetti* (1607), or Giovanni Pietro Bellori's *Idea del pittore* (1672), which "is probably the century's best known treatment of ideas as an aesthetic concept" (Benson 1968: 93).[10]

The earliest, Platonic origins, as well as the subsequent developments (up to the seventeenth century), of the "idea of the beautiful" in philosophical aesthetics have been reconstructed by Panofsky ([1924], 1968). It would be impossible here to go into any detail as to such a vast topic. We shall thus limit ourselves to briefly recalling that, as Panofsky observes, although the term "idea" – as well as the phrase "idea of beauty" – continued to be used by different theorists at different times, its meaning underwent profound changes which altered the original Platonic associations between "idea", "beauty" and "art". As Panofsky further notes, an important change in the meaning of "idea" in Italian art theory may be observed as early as the second half of the sixteenth century: for instance, in Vasari's *Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori e scultori* (1550). Vasari's "idea" "not just presupposes but actually originates in experience"; not only can it be "readily combined with observation of reality, it *is* observation of reality". Thus, "an idea is no longer present *a priori* in the mind of the artist" but "is brought forth by him *a posteriori*"; in other words, it is no longer "innate" in the artist (or "dwells" in him), but "comes into his mind", "arises", or is "formed and sculpted" (Panofsky 1968: 62).

We could thus conclude that, although a slight tendency towards empiricism may occasionally be observed even in some of the earliest formulations of the "idea of beauty" (so much so that, in some cases, the "a priori"/"a posteriori" distinction is hardly more than a useful

[9] Lomazzo's influence on British aesthetics is shown, above all, by the almost contemporary translation into English of his *Trattato dell'arte della pittura* (1584) (by Richard Hayduck, in 1598) and by the many references to his theories in Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* (1753).

[10] Bellori's work was partially translated and commented upon by John Dryden (in the "Parallel" prefaced to his translation of du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica*, 1695).

simplification), it was with the Italian High Renaissance and Mannerism, and the English Empiricism, that "ideas" started to be conceived of as deriving, *stricto sensu*, from sensation and experience.

Hutcheson's analysis of the "idea" of beauty shows what might be termed as rigorous flexibility, in that it manages to reconcile the empirical observation that single individuals have different perceptions of beauty with the ontological need for an objective definition of the beautiful. Indeed, in the *Inquiry* the analysis of the *psychological processes* which regulate our apprehension of beauty is matched by an attempt to define the *intrinsic qualities* characterizing beautiful objects.

In a brief and "deceptively simple"[11] definition, Hutcheson describes beauty as an "idea" which is "raised" (Section I, article ix, p. 34) or "excited" in us (Section II, article iii, p. 40):

> The word *beauty* is taken for *the idea raised in us*, and a *sense* of beauty for *our power of receiving this idea.* (Section I, article ix, p. 34)

"Beauty" may thus be considered as both a *subjective* notion, since one and the same object may cause different aesthetic responses, and as an *objective* one, in that its "idea" is occasioned in us by some "real quality" in the objects (*ibidem*).

Indeed, Hutcheson's theory of beauty also includes a theory of taste, which accounts for the subjective and social elements of aesthetic judgement – what Hutcheson terms "the diversity of fancy" (Section I, article vii, p. 33):

> Thus, if [...] the fancying of glaring colours be looked upon as an evidence of levity, or of any other evil quality of mind, or if any colour or fashion be commonly used by rustics, or by men of any disagreeable profession, employment, or temper, these additional ideas may recur constantly with that of the colour or fashion, and cause a constant dislike to them in those who join the additional ideas, although the colour or form be no way disagreeable of themselves. (*Ibidem*)

Here Hutcheson explains with the utmost clarity the coexistence of a universal idea of beauty with subjective (or social) standards of

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[11] Kivy (1973: 6).

taste.[12] The idea of beauty is a universal and objective one, since it is aroused by some given quality in the objects themselves. However, as a rule, "additional ideas" – such as social and historical influences – also contribute towards determining our aesthetic response. The intervention of these additional ideas, which have little to do with the objects themselves (and their intrinsic qualities), explains why different people have "different fancies about architecture, gardening, dress" (*ibidem*), or even why one and the same person's fancies may change in the course of his/her life (Section I, article vii, p. 32).

Interestingly enough, Hutcheson also uses the key-term "idea" in a further meaning, which accounts for his distinction between "absolute" and "relative" beauty – that is, between a general theory of *beauty* and a more specific theory of *art*. According to Hutcheson, the "original" which is imitated by an artist

> may be either some object in nature, or *some established idea*; for if there be any *known idea as a standard*, and rules to fix this image or idea by, we may make a beautiful imitation. Thus, a statuary, painter, or poet may please with an Hercules, if his piece retains that grandeur, and those marks of strength and courage which we imagine in that hero. (Section IV, article i, p. 54: my emphasis)

As is made clear by the passage, the "idea" which the artist reproduces has little or nothing to do with the above recalled "idea" of beauty "raised in us" by some figure (Section I, article ix, p. 34): it is not the result of a subject's aesthetic response to a pleasant experience or stimulus, but simply corresponds to what contemporary semiotics generally terms "a semantic unit", that is, a meaning conventionally accepted (in Hutcheson's words, "established") by a sociolinguistic community (Eco 1976) – as is, for instance, the idea of "Hercules".

This – as we shall see below – has some important implications: since the "idea" which the artist imitates can rather prosaically correspond to any socially "established" content-unit, it can even be an ugly or an unpleasant one. Therefore, the beauty of a work of art

[12] "In Hutcheson's scheme [...], a wide divergence of tastes is consistent with the universality of the aesthetic sense" (Kivy 1973: 11).

does not necessarily lie in the beauty of the idea or the object it imitates, but in the beauty (that is, the ability) of the reproduction, or in a fit relationship between "the original and the copy":

> what we call *relative* [beauty] is that which is apprehended in any object commonly considered as an *imitation* of some original. And this beauty is founded on a conformity, or a kind of unity between the original and the copy. (Section IV, article i, p. 54)

In sum, the distinction between "absolute" and "relative" beauty permits Hutcheson to propose two distinct yet complementary theories of the beautiful – or the beautiful *per se* and the beautiful *in art.*

The beautiful *per se* is characterized, above all, by a mixture of "uniformity " and "variety":

> The figures which excite in us the ideas of beauty seem to be those in which there is *uniformity amidst variety.* (Section II, article iii, p. 40)

Hutcheson's exaltation of unity, harmony and geometrical proportion is no novelty: its origins may be traced back to very ancient (Pythagorean or even earlier) notions of world harmony (Spitzer 1963), whereas its more recent developments have been subsumed into scientifico-mathematical enquiries into "nature's numbers", such as fractal geometry and chaos theories (Gleick 1988; Stewart 1996; 2001). Put simply, Hutcheson's theory of "absolute" beauty takes its start from the observation that more or less regular patterns occur in the natural world, that this is characterized by infinite diversity "of light and shade", that plants and animals likewise have endless yet somewhat regular forms (Section II). Hutcheson's remarks concern both the general beauty of a body as a whole and the microscopic beauty of the single parts it consists of – for instance, he notes both the beauty of the plumage of fowls and of each "feather separately" (Section II, article xi, p. 46).

Art may characteristically participate in both kinds of beauty, in that it may be *absolutely* beautiful, or beautiful *per se* (as far as it conforms to the general rules of unity and variety), but it may also be beautiful in *relative* terms (the artistic imitation of an ugly object, although it is not beautiful *per se,* may be beautiful in terms of its

relationship with the original).

As to the conformity of art to the standards of "absolute" beauty, even if Hutcheson is not very clear on this point, he seems to refer more especially to the beauty of artistic *form*. A work of art may be judged in the same terms as "absolute beauty" when its "artificial contrivances or structures" (that is, its *form*) obey the mathematical principles of unity and variety (Section III, article vii, p. 53). Thus, the geometrico-mathematical structure of a work of art may resemble the form or the structure of a beautiful natural object, and its virtually infinite diversity of proportions. In this case, its absolute beauty consists in its "uniformity or unity of proportion among the parts, and of each part to the whole" (*ibidem*) – a principle which is in line with Pope's emphasis on the need for cohesion between the single parts and the whole in the form of a poem ("Parts answ'ring parts shall slide into a whole": *Epistle to Burlington*, ll. 66).

For Hutcheson, artificial products are generally constructed – and thus may be judged – in terms of the same geometrico-mathematical principles which may be observed in the natural world; indeed, they follow them even more rigorously:

> There is a farther beauty in animals, arising from a certain proportion of the various parts to each other, which still pleases the sense of spectators, though they cannot calculate it with the accuracy of a statuary. The statuary knows what proportion of each part of the face to the whole is most agreeable, and can tell us the same of the proportion of the face to the body, or any parts of it, and between the diameters and lengths of each limb. (Section II, article x, p. 45)

Those principles were not peculiar to Hutcheson, but were widely accepted in the early eighteenth century. As is well known, art was thought of as a kind of idealized, ordered nature – in Alexander Pope's well-known definition, art was but "Nature methodiz'd".[13]

Since the natural world and the world of art were held to share more or less similar mathematical proportions and geometrical patterns, the beauty of a landscaped garden might be analogous to that

[13] *An Essay on Criticism*, l. 89. References to Pope are to *Poetical Works*, ed. Davis (1966), 1978.

of a well-proportioned building or a harmonious poetical line. Thus, it is no coincidence that Pope's own small landscape garden was based on the same principles as those governing his description of nature in the *Pastorals* (1709) or – on a more abstract level – that the variety and harmony in the arrangement of the garden was in a sense comparable to the semantic parallelism and double balance underlying his heroic couplets. From a phonological viewpoint, the occurrence of occasional rhythmical variations within the otherwise rigid form of the heroic couplet was in keeping with the contemporary ideal of harmonious variety.

An example of such coexistence of "uniformity amidst variety" may be found in the lines of Pope's second pastoral, *Summer* (1709) – which were borrowed by the librettist Hamilton and set to music by Händel in his oratorio *Semele* (1744) – where the insertion of trochaic and spondaic feet, the presence of more or less marked caesuras as well as deliberate asymmetries in the phonological sequence and in the word order,[14] give the binary structure of the couplet great flexibility:

> Where'er you walk, cool gales shall fan the glade,
> Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a shade:
> Where'er you tread, the blushing flow'rs shall rise,
> And all things flourish where you turn your eyes.
> (ll. 73-76)

Much the same might be observed about Pope's subsequent poetic works, particularly *The Rape of the Lock* (1712-14).

A similar taste for geometrical proportion also marks contemporary prose. As Billi points out, Henry Fielding's novels – and especially *Tom Jones* (1749) – exhibit something like a Palladian architecture.[15] This is true both of the parallelisms, the double balances

[14] See the imperfect echo (or the dissemination) resulting from the association of quasi-homophone expression-units, as in *ga*les – *gla*de (l. 73). As to the word order, cf. especially the alternate presence of *where'er* and *where* (and of the subordinate clauses containing them) both at the beginning and in the middle of the line.

[15] As Billi further observes (1974: 90), the permanence of Palladian principles is shown, among other things, by the several editions which Giacomo Leoni's translation

and the antitheses characterizing his sentences, and of the vaster numerological correspondences concerning the text and its chapter partitions (Billi 1974: 69-91). The very ending of the novel is but the outcome of the slow but extremely coherent progression of the narrative towards its ultimate goal (in other words, of the inner coherence of the single micronarrative units and of their subordination to the macronarrative whole).[16]

If art may participate in the numerological proportion of absolute beauty, it is its share in "relative" beauty which makes up its aesthetic specificity.

The very creation of two different aesthetic parameters – one for beauty in general, the other for the specific beauty of art – marked a decisive step forward, both in general aesthetic theory and in the formation of taste. Before Hutcheson, it had almost been inconceivable to dissociate the beauty of art from beauty in general.[17]

According to Hutcheson, if a work of art is not beautiful in absolute terms, it may still be beautiful in relative or comparative terms. Thus, if one makes a splendid reproduction of an ugly object, one can still create a splendid work of art:

> to obtain comparative beauty alone, it is not necessary that there be any beauty in the original. The imitation of absolute beauty may indeed in the whole make a more lovely piece, and yet an exact imitation shall still be beautiful, though the original were entirely void of it. (Section IV, article i, pp. 54-55)

Therefore, Hutcheson may boldly claim that

> the deformities of old age in a picture, the rudest rocks or mountains in a landscape, if well represented, shall have abundant beauty, though perhaps not so great as if the original were absolutely beauti-

of *The Architecture of Andrea Palladio* underwent in the early eighteenth century. See also Wittkower (1949), (1998).

[16] "C'è il piacere dell'*armonia*, nella *varietà* del romanzo, in cui tutto ha una sua collocazione e un suo ruolo preciso, ma soprattutto, a tutti i livelli, c'è la convinzione di un simile modello nell'architettura cosmica della natura" (Billi 1974: 91; my emphasis).

[17] Hutcheson thus went beyond all those – classical and Renaissance – aesthetic theories which had judged the beauty of a work of art exclusively by its nearness to a beautiful original.

ful, and as well represented. [Nay, perhaps, the novelty may make us prefer the representation of irregularity.] (Section IV, article i, p. 55)[18]

In celebrating the "artistic" beauty of otherwise ugly objects (such as the deformity of the human body or the desolation of a barren landscape), Hutcheson considerably widens the range of what may be represented in art. Hutcheson's explicit exaltation of "the representation of irregularity" (Section IV, article i, p. 55) gives his analysis of art a much more modern outlook than it is generally credited with. Thus, to juxtapose Hutcheson's love of "uniformity" and mathematical proportions with Hogarth's love of "variety" and discovery (as Paulson does in his Introduction to Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* [1997: XXVIII]) is no doubt an oversimplification, which takes almost no account of the different parameters by which Hutcheson judges beauty and art. In fact, as Hutcheson himself observes, since Homer poets have successfully described characters that are neither morally good nor physically beautiful (Section IV, article ii, p. 55). Yet, Hutcheson is perhaps the first to give a theoretical foundation to something which had oft been thought, but had never been so well expressed.

In so doing, he to a certain extent justifies the contemporary taste for prosaic realism and "low" or even trivial contents, as can be observed in Gay's underworld (*Trivia* [1716] or *The Beggar's Opera* [1728]) or in Swift's grotesque (*Gulliver's Travels* [1726]) or, again, in Pope's mock-heroic trifles (*The Rape of the Lock*) or in Fielding's obscene humour (*Tom Jones*) – and, in part, anticipates certain aspects of Hogarth's aesthetic theory and practice.[19]

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In conclusion, the *dualism* of Hutcheson's aesthetic theory (with its coexistence of "absolute" and "relative" beauty) may be said to provide, at least indirectly, a critical framework for what is perhaps

[18] The last passage, in brackets, was added in the third edition (1729). However, it may be regarded as an obvious corollary of the author's former analyses.
[19] On Hogarth, srr Loretelli (1985, 1998), Di Michele (1999).

the most pervasive, as well as the most accomplished, eighteenth-century literary genre: parody. While the theory of "absolute beauty" accounts for the elegance and the numerological harmony of *form*, the theory of "relative beauty" legitimizes the prosaicism of characters and events – that is, of *contents*. Thus, the typically Augustan combination of a "high" form with a "low" content – as can be found in what are generally considered the two contemporary masterpieces, namely *The Rape of the Lock* and *Tom Jones* – finds its theoretical counterpart in Hutcheson's parallel celebration of "regularity" and "irregularity", or of the perfection of numbers and the imperfection of "wildness".

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XVIII (2005)

Textus

ENGLISH STUDIES IN ITALY

ISSN 1824-3967

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EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE
THE LANGUAGES OF AESTHETICS

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