

Taste, Appreciation and the ‘Extramural Effect’ on the Study of Literature

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In a famous 1970s American television advertisement for Starkist canned tuna a nattily-tailored tuna fish named Charlie, complete with beret, black tie, and cane, presents himself for approval to his friend Joey as a walking epitome of “Good Taste”, and therefore a certainty to be selected for canning by the Starkist people. “But Charlie”, explains Joey, “Starkist don’t want toona with good taste. Starkist want toona that taste good!” “Sorry, Charlie!”, says a sympathetic but patronising voice-over.

The persistence of good taste as a synonym for social and cultural distinction some two hundred years after Wordsworth supposedly ‘skewered’ it in his Prefaces to the early editions of the *Lyrical Ballads* may be an illustration of the conservatism of popular culture. But Charlie’s embarrassing gaffe also indicates a persistent popular sense of the slipperiness of the term, and in particular of its shifting and uncertain relationship, as a cultural concept, to the physiological sense from which it derives.

The argument I advance in this article is that certain significant shifts occurred in the uses and meanings of two related concepts, “taste” and “appreciation”, in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and that these shifts both reflected, and also in a sense facilitated, the emergence of literary study as a formal academic discipline. The salient context for these shifts is the rise of popular literary education in Britain, but especially (I argue) of those extramural forms of education – most notably the University Extension movement – that came to fruition in the second half of the nineteenth century, bringing with them a distinctive rationale and a new pedagogy for the study of literature.

Aspects of what might be termed the pre-history of extramural literary education have been traced by Franklin Court in the lectures delivered by Adam Smith and Hugh Blair at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow in the second half of the eighteenth century (Court 17-38). Neither man was lecturing to extramural audiences as such, but their respective preoccupations – Smith’s with the biographical perspective as the key to activating the ethical and political benefits to be gained from studying classic authors, and Blair’s with using appreciative judgement as a means of inculcating a ‘correct’ standard of literary taste or sensibility – both reflect the same strong sense of their students’ need to acquire and appropriate new skills and dispositions as well as new knowledge that informed the discourse surrounding British extramural education a century later.¹ It was no accident, clearly, that such an awareness should have arisen in eighteenth-century Scotland where, as Court – and before him Stephen Potter – note, many ambitious young men were eager to overcome their ‘outsider’ status in relation to English political and cultural elites, and where the self-transforming, socially-reforming doctrines of Scottish intellectuals like Lord Kames, Adam Ferguson, and Smith himself, encouraged them to believe it was possible to do so (Court 17-18 ; Potter 104-6).

Given these auspicious northern initiatives, it may be that the ideas about taste that Wordsworth articulated so memorably in the 1815 *Preface* were formulations, on a more general plane, of ideas that were already in circulation. Nonetheless, because of Wordsworth's pervasive presence and authority in English teaching contexts throughout the nineteenth century, it is his formulations, more than Smith's or Blair's, that carried weight with English educators later in the century.² Raymond Williams suggested in *Keywords* (1976) that much of the force of Wordsworth's ideas on taste consisted in reactivating its metaphorical connections in order to re-examine its relevance to lived experience (Williams 265). Williams's observations need to be qualified somewhat by a recognition that, as Denise Gigante has recently shown, a complex and dynamic interplay between taste as critical judgement and taste as gustatory experience had kept those connections alive through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at least in the work of some major poets and philosophers from Milton to Burke (Gigante 1-67). It remains true, nonetheless, that for neoclassical critical orthodoxy during this period, the connection did become increasingly attenuated, and that Wordsworth probably was breaking new, or at least forgotten, ground when he "remind[ed] the reader", in the "Essay Supplementary" to the 1815 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, that "TASTE ... is a metaphor, taken from a *passive* sense of the human body, and transferred to things which are in their essence *not* passive, – to intellectual *acts* and *operations*" (Wordsworth 67; original emphasis).

Wordsworth's more radical idea, however (which he graciously credits to Coleridge), is expressed a little earlier in the same Essay, after a brief review of the history of English poetry designed to demonstrate "that every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed: so has it been, so will it continue to be" (66; original emphasis). In effect, Wordsworth rejects taste in one sense (as denoting an absolute standard of critical judgement), while embracing it in another (as denoting a capacity to enjoy something.)

Clearly taste was becoming a formidably slippery notion at this point in its history, and Wordsworth was not alone in helping to make it so. As a way of getting a handle on its changing character and significance through to the end of the nineteenth century, it may be useful to try to map the range of relevant meanings of artistic and literary taste which appear to have been current by mid-century. For this purpose, the historical etymologies preserved in the *O.E.D.* are as good a guide as any.

The first relevant sense of the word is "a capacity for correct judgment and discrimination" in literary and artistic matters. This might reasonably be called the "neoclassic" definition, since it is certainly what people like Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson meant by taste (and, less frequently, 'good taste'). It is also (with some ambiguity) what Hugh Blair meant by it in the 1780s; and it was taste in this sense that Wordsworth, in his 1815 *Preface*, attacked as having led in practice to the artificial rules of poetic diction that he opposed. But it needs also to be taken as a genuinely trans-historical usage since (as we hardly need Charlie's confusion to attest!) it has retained its popular currency up to the present time.

The second relevant sense – presumably the closest of the three to the word's gustatory origins – is "a propensity to enjoy, a liking for" works of art and literature – as in "She has a taste for poetry," or more specifically "He has a taste for Jane

Austen.” The third relevant sense of the word is taste as “style, or manner,” as in “The room was decorated according to the taste of the last century.” These three relatively distinct cultural meanings of taste – let us call them ‘The Judgement Meaning,’ ‘The Enjoyment Meaning’ and ‘The Style Meaning’ – can all be found in nineteenth century writing.

Can the *O.E.D.* tell us more? Perhaps it can. There is some indication in the illustrative quotations of a shift of critical usage away from the Judgement Meaning towards the Enjoyment Meaning in the course of the nineteenth century. The Style Meaning (which comes into its own in the second half of the twentieth century, as an index of the diversity and relativity of world-cultures) appears to lose ground in the nineteenth century except in particular contexts, those in which it is used to articulate a recurring theme of the later decades: not so much that diversity of taste so pleasing to late twentieth century cultural pluralists, as a historical instability of taste that worried and bemused their great grandparents. This was perhaps one of the hares started up by Wordsworth when, in the 1815 Preface, he rejected the taste of the eighteenth century, and ridiculed the choice of authors in Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets*; and again later, in his (or Coleridge’s) observation that great and original authors have to create the taste by which they are to be enjoyed. By the closing decades of the century, numerous lectures and articles, most of them with titles like George Birkbeck Hill’s “Revolutions in Literary Taste” (1891), were revelling in the ironies of fallen idols and risen nobodies (Hill, Lectures I-IV). Sometimes the spectacle was used as a warning against hasty praise or blame, sometimes as a reason for placing one’s faith in the ultimate verdict of history, and sometimes as an argument for a truly ‘scientific’ method of criticism that might provide ‘objective’ grounds for evaluation.³

This is the taste (or these the tastes) about which, in the aphorism, there can be no disputing.⁴ In literature, as at the dinner table, people have their likes and dislikes, and that, the aphorist seems to say, is that. But this was emphatically not the view taken by most Victorian teachers and critics. For them, taste *in* literature, as well as a taste *for* literature (which is to say, respectively, Judgement and Enjoyment) were not given and immutable, but were themselves quite properly subject to appraisal on the one hand, and to formative development, through reading, study and training on the other. I have already referred to Blair’s Edinburgh lectures as an early manifestation of this latter project. Arnold Bennett’s little book, *Literary Taste and How to Form It* (1909) – the second half of the title is revealing – provides a much later testimony to the continuing strength, in certain quarters, of the belief in the educability of literary taste. Not content with describing the process, Bennett enacts it with great vigour, first stripping his hapless aspirants to Culture of their face-saving self-deceptions, then seducing and bullying them into a personal commitment to reading and enjoying the classics:

You are not content with yourself. ... You feel that there is something wrong in you, but you cannot put your finger on the spot. Further, you feel that you are a bit of a sham. Something within you continually forces you to exhibit for the classics an enthusiasm which you do not sincerely feel. You even try to persuade yourself that you *are* enjoying a book, when the next moment you drop it in the middle and forget to resume it. You occasionally buy classical works, and do not read them at all; you practically decide that it is enough to possess

them, and that the mere possession of them gives you a cachet. The truth is, you *are* a sham. And your soul is a sea of uneasy remorse. You reflect: ‘According to what Matthew Arnold says, I ought to be perfectly mad about Wordsworth’s *Prelude*. And I am not. Why am I not?’ (Bennett 27-28; original emphasis)

Bennett goes on to offer much helpful advice to his readers about how to reorganise their life, what books to buy, where to start their reading, and how to continue with it. His instructions on the question of where to start are worth quoting: “You must begin,” he insists, “with acknowledged classics; you must eschew modern works”(48). This is emphatically not because there are no great modern works, an assumption he deplors, but because nobody can be sure what they are, least of all somebody with an unformed taste.

To sift the wheat from the chaff is a process that takes an exceedingly long time. Modern works have to pass before the bar of the taste of successive generations. Whereas, with classics, which have been through the ordeal, almost the reverse is the case. *Your taste has to pass before the bar of the classics*. That is the point. If you differ with a classic, it is you who are wrong, and not the book. (50)

Probably [Bennett concludes], you will not especially care for a particular classic at first. ... How are you to arrive at the stage of caring for it? Chiefly, of course, by examining it and honestly trying to understand it. But this process is materially helped by an act of faith, by the frame of mind which says: “I know on the highest authority that this thing is fine, that it is capable of giving me pleasure. Hence I am determined to find pleasure in it.” (51)

What Bennett did, more frankly and explicitly than most, was to acknowledge that even for most of the population, the prior necessity, as far as forming their literary taste is concerned, was learning to enjoy literature, not learning how to judge it. Some of his better-known predecessors – notably Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater – did not make that separation clearly or consistently. Certain other Victorian intellectuals, however – and especially those who had devoted themselves to reforming the taste of ordinary people – did insist on the absolute primacy of mediating Literature for maximum enjoyment and pleasure.

To this end, for example, the Rev. Frederic Denison Maurice – leader of the Christian Socialist movement, first Principal of the London Working Men’s College, and Chair of English Literature and History at King’s College, London (1840-1846) – lectured tirelessly to audiences of workers for many years, trying to shape the relationship of the un-learned reader to books as a type of “friendship.” “The Friendship of Books” is the title of one of his best-known lectures, first delivered in 1856, and also of the volume of lectures that appeared soon after his death in 1872. In all of them he stresses the need for the reader to find the distinct human individual within or behind the “great work,” be it *Hamlet*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Faerie Queene*, or Burke’s *Reflections*, and to form a relationship of sympathetic understanding with them. Maurice shared with close colleagues like Charles Kingsley and Frederick Furnivall an evangelical belief in the humanising power of great literature, and was impatient of anything that seemed likely to interfere with the sympathetic spark that should pass between the common humanity of writer and reader.⁵ Such interferences

included pedantic philological commentary, intimidating stylistic abstractions, historical trivia, and destructive criticism. The best kind of criticism, he said in his lecture “On Critics” (1856), is that which “delights to draw forth the sense and beauty of a book, and is able to do so because the heart of the critic is in sympathy with the heart of the writer” (383). Such criticism will be “historical,” not in such a way as to insulate the author from the reader by giving undue attention to the “accidental” features of his age, but rather by enlarging on those aspects of the author’s life-experience that ordinary readers need to understand so that they too can sympathise with him and appreciate his literary response to it.

The word “appreciate” is one that Maurice uses occasionally to designate what the best kind of critic does with a work, and enables a reader to do. He speaks, for example, of the “genial cordial appreciation” with which a colleague evoked for his audience “the sorrows, the conflicts and the hopes of the poet” (383).⁶ Certainly the fault-finding that typified the journal criticism of his own time troubled him, and the term “appreciation” begins to emerge, in the work of several later writers, as the least technical of several alternative words used to denote the sympathetic, facilitative kind of commentary that Maurice favoured. What comes to the fore in Maurice’s use of the word is a sense of appreciation as an expressive verbal practice, performed by somebody who is acting not only as a reader of the work in question, or a judge of its value, but as an interpreter or commentator. Somewhat ironically, Maurice’s own lack of enthusiasm, in the King’s College post, for teaching composition *in addition to* literature (Court 88) may well have strengthened the status of appreciation as a distinct and legitimate form of student writing – an opportunity that R.G. Moulton was later to seize with both hands.

The word “appreciation” is a more recent addition to the critical vocabulary than “taste,” about 150 years more recent: it does not appear in Johnson’s *Dictionary* at all (nor, unfortunately, in Raymond Williams’s *Keywords*, nor even in the magisterial *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*);⁷ but the *O.E.D.* cites several older non-aesthetic meanings (relating to economics and military strategy, for example), all of which are roughly synonymous with ‘estimation’ and ‘evaluation’, reflecting its Latin etymology (“ad” + “pretium” – putting a price to something). These give rise to an analogous aesthetic meaning of appreciation, first recorded after 1800, at which point it seems to be more or less synonymous with taste in its judgemental sense, namely the capacity for correct aesthetic judgement.

However, the aesthetic meanings of appreciation that predominate after 1800 do seem, on the evidence of the *O.E.D.* examples, to have more to do with the cultivation and refinement of pleasure than with the exercise of critical judgement, discrimination or evaluation. They include, for example, “the perception of delicate impressions or distinctions,” and “the sympathetic recognition of excellence.” In these senses, appreciation corresponds rather to taste as enjoyment rather than judgement, and seems to mean, specifically, the capacity for aesthetic enjoyment.

What we see, then, in the admittedly sketchy evidence of usage recorded in the *O.E.D.*, is a shift in the aesthetic meaning of appreciation through the nineteenth century which parallels the shift we noticed earlier in the aesthetic meaning of taste: in both cases, there is a movement away from “judgement” and “discrimination” and towards “enjoyment” and “pleasure.” What this combination of verbal stability and

semantic instability points to, I suggest, is a process of enabling necessary change by masking it. That is, the culturally and educationally necessary shift from judgement to enjoyment as the primary goal of literary study could be “finessed” – as perhaps it needed to be – by hiding a real discontinuity of method and purpose behind the veil of an apparent continuity in the terms that were used to name that goal all through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, namely *taste* and *appreciation*. Of the two terms, the second is the one that contains within itself a capacity for change. This is partly because it was the newer term, less encrusted than *taste* was (and still is) with the older normative assumptions and connotations, and therefore more capable, eventually, of taking on a new non-normative meaning – as indeed *appreciation* has since done.⁸ There may be a second reason, though, namely that “*appreciation*,” as we saw with F.D. Maurice’s writing, can be used to refer to an *active practice* of understanding and enjoyment, an act of verbal articulation rather than a state of mind; and this is a meaning – obviously a crucial one for pedagogical purposes – to which the word “*taste*” could not so easily extend.

The name that surely springs to mind in connection with Victorian literary appreciation is Walter Pater, if only because, in 1889, he published a volume of critical essays actually called *Appreciations*. Pater, however, illustrates precisely the difficulty of inferring the nature of a practice from the name attached to it by the practitioner. It is true that Pater’s “*appreciations*” are all, in varying degrees, introspective and speculative meditations triggered by particular authors or works, and they may well have been aimed, in part, at calling forth an answering refinement of ethical reflection and aesthetic discrimination in the reader; but such responses – Pater’s own and the putative reader’s – are both at some considerable distance, finally, from the initiating work itself. This distance can vary considerably in Pater’s critical writings: the *locus classicus* of Paterian criticism is perhaps the *bravura* free-wheeling meditation on Leonardo’s ‘Mona Lisa’ in his book *The Renaissance* (98-99). The essays in *Appreciations*, however – on Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Sir Thomas Browne, Shakespeare and D.G. Rossetti – generally remain closer to the text than this later example of Pater’s criticism, but are also more Arnoldian – and for that matter, more Johnsonian – in their concern with arriving at a definitive estimation of each writer’s worth. In this latter respect, its evaluative dynamic, Pater’s version of appreciation differs from another practice, also calling itself appreciation, which developed alongside the criticism of Arnold and Pater, in a somewhat different institutional setting.⁹

This alternative tradition of appreciation (of which Bennett’s book on literary taste is clearly an inheritor) is of great interest because while it seems to have been quite robust and visible in its day, it is now largely neglected by cultural historians. Its driving force, I believe, was not a single individual so much as a whole institution, namely the University Extension Movement, that quintessentially Victorian project for, as Stefan Collini puts it, bringing the benefits of education to the uneducated classes (309). University Extension proper began in 1867 when James Stuart, a Scottish science graduate from Cambridge with ideas about establishing “a sort of peripatetic arm of the University,” was approached by the North of England Council for the Higher Education of Women to offer a series of lectures in four large northern towns. Over the next few years, Stuart recruited a hardworking team of Cambridge academics who carried the higher learning (largely the humanities, political economy and natural science) to many parts of Britain. Before long the Universities of Oxford

and London, at the urging of Benjamin Jowett and John Churton Collins respectively, also instituted extension schemes to work beside Cambridge's, and by the end of the century several of the new provincial universities were doing likewise (Palmer 41-103).¹⁰

The Extension movement had its extramural precursors: F.D. Maurice's Working Men's College, already mentioned, was obviously an important one. But the distinctive Extension pedagogy initially developed by Stuart, and retained, in essence, for the rest of the century, is itself of some importance for what I want to suggest about appreciation. It comprised four weekly lectures, either followed or preceded by group question-and-answer sessions known as "classes," weekly written exercises (marked and returned the following week), and an examination at the end of a twelve week course (Moulton, *Memoir* 131-5).

What kind of literary "appreciation" would these highly structured but interactive methods and conditions be likely to engender, and what would the socially mixed, unevenly prepared, but large, highly motivated and mature Extension audiences be likely to demand? We can be fairly sure, I think, that it would not look very Pater-esque – or even very Arnoldian, if the un glossed European analogues and impressionistic pronouncements to be found in Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* are any guide. It might look a little like Ruskin's careful analysis of Milton's attack on the English Church in *Lycidas* (in *Sesame and Lilies*, 1864-69). It would probably look quite a lot like the methodical exposition, structural and verbal analysis and comparison of literary works exemplified by John Churton Collins. Collins was a fierce (but in his own time unsuccessful) advocate for the introduction of serious, systematic and scholarly studies in modern English literature at Cambridge University, in a "School of English" separate from Classics on the one hand and from Philology on the other, and clearly distinct from the dilettantism of literary journalism (embodied and epitomised, as he saw it, in his *bête noire*, Edmund Gosse) (Palmer 78-103).

One of the most prominent and influential late-Victorian exponents of appreciation as a basis for the advanced study and teaching of literature, was a man whose name is surprisingly unfamiliar even to Victorianists, Richard Green Moulton. Born in Preston in 1849, Moulton was the youngest son of a prominent Wesleyan Methodist minister. Immediately after graduating in Classics from Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1874, he became enthusiastically involved in the new Cambridge University Extension Program and delivered many hundreds of lectures on literature – English, European, Classical and Biblical – in many parts of Britain over the next quarter of a century. In 1890 he visited the United States and Canada, where he played a central role in planning and organising the American Society for the Extension of University Teaching. He based himself first at the University of Pennsylvania (where he was awarded a doctorate), and then, from 1892, at the newly-established University of Chicago, where he was appointed Lawrence Head of the School of General Literature – thereby achieving something very close to Churton Collins's failed dream of an autonomous School of English, but in another place. He returned to England upon his retirement in 1919, and died five years later, at Tunbridge Wells.¹¹

Moulton published about a dozen substantial book-length studies of literature – on Shakespeare, ancient Greek drama, the Bible, “World Literature” (especially Italian and German classic literature), and on the theory and practice of literary interpretation. For all its apparent diversity, however, his work rests upon a very firm and consistent foundation, namely the distinction he insists upon, from his first published book to his last, between what he calls “inductive criticism” and “judicial criticism.” By judicial criticism, Moulton means that kind of commentary on works of art and literature that seeks to judge their relative merits, sometimes with reference to certain fixed standards, and sometimes impressionistically or intuitively. By inductive criticism he means interpretation, that is, the systematic investigation of the structure and meaning of works. In its earliest and simplest formulation, in his 1885 book *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, he expresses it as follows:

Judicial criticism compares a new production with those already existing in order to determine whether it is inferior to them or surpasses them; criticism of investigation [i.e. inductive criticism] makes the same comparison for the purpose of identifying the new product with some type in the past, or differentiating it and registering a new type. ... Judicial criticism ... analyses literary works for grounds of preference or evidence on which to found judgments; inductive criticism analyses them to get a closer acquaintance with their phenomena. (2)

As Moulton saw it, the history of criticism to date had been very largely a history of judicial criticism. It had also been a history of the triumph of authors over critics, as the great classics had asserted their authority, slowly but inexorably, over the misguided fault-finding and rule-mongering of their contemporaries, in a steady evolution of taste that he regarded in broadly Darwinian terms. Inductive criticism, like inductive science, was a serious and sustained exploration of Nature – that part of nature called literature – which it *investigated* in its historical and formal aspects. Later in his career, Moulton accepted the practical utility of judicial criticism as a means of culling the overwhelming volume of contemporary writing; and he also enthusiastically embraced the work of the great judicial critics of the past – Dryden, Johnson, Hazlitt, Lamb, and the like – as great literature in its own right. But he held firm, throughout his career, to the view that judicial criticism, *qua* criticism, was of no value to the study or teaching of canonical literature, because it erected what he called “a barrier to appreciation, as being opposed to that delicacy of receptiveness which is a first condition of sensibility to impressions of literature and art” (6). He went on:

It is a foundation principle in art-culture, as well as in human intercourse, that sympathy is the grand interpreter: secrets of beauty will unfold themselves to the sunshine of sympathy, while they wrap themselves all the closer against the tempest of sceptical questionings. (6-7)

Moulton uses the terms “taste” and “appreciation” deliberately, frequently, and at times almost interchangeably. In some places he defines taste as “the faculty of appreciation.” But he is also well aware that taste had, and continues to have, a foot in two critical paradigms: the judicial and the inductive. In the former paradigm, it functions in a static mode, applying fixed standards or theories to literature; in the latter paradigm it functions (he argued) in an *evolutionary* mode, continually being re-created by the ongoing process of literary production, in accordance with that

Wordsworthian principle whereby each new kind of literature *creates its own taste*. “Appreciation” is less complicated: it seems to function exclusively in Moulton’s discourse as the practice of enlightened enjoyment, and his own inductive criticism of particular classic authors and works is always designed to promote the reader’s appreciation in that sense, and thus to widen and enrich their taste, not correct it.

Moulton is an intelligent, lucid and engaging writer, and it is surprising that he has received so little recent attention. John Dixon has devoted some valuable, if slightly ambivalent, pages to an overview of his work and indeed he refers, though without elaboration, to the probable role of Extension teaching in forming his ideas on literary education (29); but beyond this there has been silence. Yet many of Moulton’s lifelong preoccupations – for example, evolution and literary history, the idea of world literature, and the theory of interpretation – are also prominent on contemporary critical and theoretical agendas.¹²

Of those three topics, the most interesting is perhaps World Literature. In his book of that name, and elsewhere, Moulton attempted to give coherence and substance to Goethe’s notion of “Weltliteratur.” Constructing a working definition of the concept, Moulton distinguishes it from Universal Literature, which he takes to mean “the sum total of all literatures;” World Literature he defines as “Universal Literature seen in perspective from a given point of view, presumably the national standpoint of the observer” (*World Literature* 6). This is probably not a definition that would much appeal to recent proponents of the idea – and in Moulton’s case it subtends a conventionally ‘classical’ array of European literary interests – but his book is nonetheless a significant precursor to the current resurgence of interest in this idea.¹³

In the late-Victorian British context, however, it has a somewhat different significance, that of a genuinely *alternative* formation of university literary studies. The dominant formation in this period, as determined and represented by Professors of English such as David Masson, John Nichol, Henry Morley and Edward Dowden, had largely abandoned comparative philology as the core of the discipline, and embraced national(ist) English history in its stead. The university study of English, in other words, had become centrally the study of ‘English-ness’ as it manifested itself – in qualities of language, character and ideology – in literary history and tradition. In this respect, the institution of English had diverged markedly from the vision of Matthew Arnold, who always advocated a cosmopolitan scope for literary study, and regarded the study of English literature in isolation as undesirably provincial (Court 108-118).

But Moulton’s most important contribution to the study and teaching of literature, in both the United States and Britain, had less to do with the world perspective he managed to maintain than with the appreciative critical methods he pioneered. He met with some resistance to his methods and assumptions. Though highly praised in general, Moulton’s first book on Shakespeare was subjected to a long, probing and highly critical review in *Macmillan’s* by William Archer, the influential drama critic, who concentrated his fire on Moulton’s polemical Introduction, a forty-page “Plea for an Inductive Criticism,” while acknowledging the originality and brilliance of his criticism of individual plays (Archer 46).¹⁴ Apart from a general rejection of the scientific pretensions of inductive criticism, the specific

point that Archer refused to accept was Moulton's insistence on the heuristically necessary imputation of autonomy and coherence to a work of literature as a precondition for a full and rigorous critical analysis. For Archer, a strategy of "presupposing faultlessness in order to prove perfection," even if it works well enough for Shakespeare, entails a principled obliviousness to good taste; and he ends his critique by making merry with its imagined application to "the works of the late Mr H.J. Byron," author of *Our Boys*, "the very idea [of which] is a nightmare from which the imagination shrinks appalled" (54).

But Archer's commonsensical assertion of the inescapability of taste (as judgement) in the practice of literary criticism is not finally as persuasive as he makes it seem. What Moulton was proposing was not a wholesale abandonment of critical judgement but – I believe for the first time in English criticism – the constructive *suspension* of judgment on works of assumed merit in the interests of revealing the widest possible field of affective meanings and cognitive structures in the work. In effect, he was advocating, against the 'writerly' application of taste-as-judgement, the 'readerly' application of taste-as-enjoyment as a way of constituting the literary work as an object of exhaustive and systematic aesthetic analysis. In this respect, it was Moulton rather than his anti-scientific critics, who laid the methodological foundation for the ascendancy of a rigorous critical formalism in both Britain and the United States in the decades following his death in 1924.

After his departure for America in 1892, however, Moulton's books and ideas seem to have been largely ignored in Britain, with two interesting exceptions: Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Cambridge Professor of English Literature, who recorded his admiration for Moulton's work on Shakespeare and on the Bible as literature; and W.H. Hudson (the literary historian, not the naturalist) who frequently quoted and discussed Moulton's work in his own books on the study of literature – and who, like Moulton, spent several years lecturing at an elite American university (Stanford), as well as in the University Extension system in Britain.¹⁵

In America Moulton's reputation was considerably higher: there are clearly quite direct 'Chicago' filiations connecting his work to that of the Chicago Neo-Aristotelians (see note 8), and also with the extramural "Great Books" program established at the University by its President Robert Hutchins and the philosopher Mortimer Adler some twenty years after Moulton's retirement. The latter debt is acknowledged by the University of Chicago in its "Centennial Catalogs" (and on its current homepage). Furthermore, Moulton does at least have an entry in the *Dictionary of American Biography* (see note 7), which, at the time of writing, he does not have in its British counterpart, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Moulton, I suggest, may well have been something of a pivotal figure in the history of English and American critical theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This may seem a quixotic claim in view of his current obscurity, but that invisibility is perhaps partly an effect of his success in ensuring that the ideas he was advocating quickly became identified as defining characteristics of the institutions in which they were implemented: University Extension in Britain and the University of Chicago in the United States.¹⁶

His importance in that history, in any case, is not so much that of a great original thinker as it is that of a creative and ingenious appropriator. What he appropriated was a way of approaching the study of literature not as an exercise of judgement, but as a practice of enjoyment and understanding – what came to be called literary appreciation. It first makes its presence felt in Hugh Blair’s (perhaps *belletristic*) lectures at the University of Edinburgh, first published in the 1780s, then reappears in more ‘democratic’ guise in Wordsworth’s critical prefaces (where the poet was explicitly engaged in exploring ways of making poetry – his own and others’ – accessible to the taste of a new class of “common” readers), and is then elaborated more fully in the lectures of F.D. Maurice for the London Workingmen’s College in the 1850s and 1860s. In the University Extension systems established in the 1870s the appreciative study methods earlier advocated by Maurice, Furnivall and others became pedagogically institutionalised – by R.G. Moulton himself, among others: lecturers who were keenly aware of the different preparation and abilities that their extramural students were bringing to the reading and study of literature. Moulton’s further insight was that appreciation, developed as a suitable pedagogy for less qualified students, could be re-framed as “inductive criticism,” and used to emancipate the study of literature from the vagaries of critical judgment and infuse it with the progressive energies of modern scientific thought, without at the same time surrendering the specificity of its object as literary art (rather than language or philosophy). It was an interesting and paradoxical achievement, both collective and individual, and its implications for understanding the relationship between late nineteenth and early twentieth-century criticism, and between British and American criticism in that period, have yet to be fully explored.

NOTES

¹ Court (1992) is, I believe, unfairly disparaging of what he regards as Blair’s ‘belletrism.’ On Court’s own showing (p. 32), Blair’s stated objectives in teaching literature go well beyond the achievement of ‘elegant taste’ for its own sake. Whether his lectures ever ‘completely measured up’ to the objectives would seem to be a difficult call at this date! For a more balanced assessment of Blair, see Potter, *Muse in Chains* (1938) and Schmitz, *Hugh Blair* (1948).

² Ian Reid has recently demonstrated the paramount influence of Wordsworth’s ideas and views, and of his own poetry, on the study of English literature in schools and universities in the late 19th and early 20th century (Reid, 2004).

³ Some other examples are R. A. Willmott, *Pleasures of Literature* (1860), 29-33; R. G. Moulton, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (1885), 1-22; T. G. Tucker, *Things Worth Thinking About* (Melbourne: Lothian, 1909).

⁴ The aphorism is usually quoted in Latin: ‘De gustibus non disputandum est,’ i.e. (strictly) ‘There *should* be no disputing ...;’ but the less prescriptive, more pluralistic rendering ‘There *can* be no disputing ...’ is understandably more common.

⁵ For a succinct account of Maurice’s political and educational radicalism, see Court, pp. 85-96.

⁶ Maurice was referring to a lecture delivered in Brighton, ca.1852 by the Rev. Frederick Robertson.

⁷ A new entry on Appreciation will, however, be included in the Fourth Edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman, now in preparation.

⁸ This somewhat sweeping pronouncement could be supported, if space permitted, by the plethora of ‘guides’ to literary appreciation that appeared in Britain and the United States in the period 1910-1970. For a sampling of the books used in Australian schools and universities during this period, see Buckridge (2006).

⁹ This way of mapping the field corresponds with Franklin Court’s persuasive demonstration of the discontinuity between Arnold’s practice as a literary critic and the methods of analysis and commentary adopted in school and university classrooms in the late 19th century (Court, 108-119).

¹⁰ For a recent and comprehensive history of the Oxford system, see Goldman, *Dons and Workers* (1995).

¹¹ Biographical details on Moulton can be found in the brief biography by his nephew W.F. Moulton, and in the entry in the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

¹² A notable contemporary exception to the general neglect is Brian Vickers, the eminent Shakespearean scholar, who believes that Moulton’s chapter on *Macbeth* in *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* is still one of the best structural analyses of that play (personal communication, 2005). Moulton’s method is undoubtedly a precursor to the analyses of dramatic structure practised some sixty years later by the ‘Chicago Neo-Aristotelians’ Ronald Crane and Elder Olson.

¹³ The theory of World Literature is developed in several of his books, not only the one bearing that title. For the modern interest in World Literature, see for example David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (2003) and *Debating World Literature*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (2004). In neither of these large books (the latter with fifteen contributors) is Moulton’s name mentioned.

¹⁴ Other short, similarly ambivalent reviews had already appeared, notably Edward Dowden’s in *The Academy*.

¹⁵ Hudson (1862-1918) engaged with Moulton at length on a variety of topics in his much-reprinted *Introduction to the Study of Literature*. London: Harrap, 1910 (e.g. 268-271, 278-280).

¹⁶ There is a chapter on “English at the University of Chicago” by Department Chair Albert H. Tolman in *English in American Universities*, an edited collection of self-descriptions of the state of English-teaching at twenty American universities and colleges in 1895. Tolman not only praises Moulton effusively, but makes it clear that the Department is now thoroughly committed to principles that must have gladdened Moulton’s heart – for example: “The masterpieces of our literature are studied at the University of Chicago primarily as works of literary art” (Payne 89).

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