

**'EQUIVOCAL POSITIONS':
THE INFLUENCE OF WILLIAM ROTHENSTEIN, c.1890-1910**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the influence of the artist Sir William Rothenstein (1872-1945) between the years 1890 and 1910. A talented draughtsman and painter, Rothenstein was also an energetic social networker, a keen critic, an influential force in the foundation of several societies and – in the case of the Carfax – a commercial gallery. This study employs a wide range of sources to trace these achievements, and explains why Rothenstein's life and work have tended to resist critical interpretation.

This study argues that Rothenstein grappled constantly with the notion of being influential. To draw out these tensions, Rothenstein's relationships with several artists (Charles Ricketts, Max Beerbohm, Charles Conder, Augustus John and Mark Gertler) are explored in depth. Significant aspects of his identity – his status as a middle-class Anglo-German Jew, for instance, or resident of Hampstead – are also considered. It is argued throughout that the complexity and ambiguity of Rothenstein's identity and close relationships were fuelled by a desire to carefully control his instinct to influence.

The Carfax Gallery, co-founded by Rothenstein in 1898, went on to hold important exhibitions of contemporary British art. This thesis offers the first detailed account of the gallery's origins and subsequent position within the rapidly-changing London art market of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Rothenstein claimed that the gallery was founded to support 'work of a certain character'; through a close examination of Rothenstein's writings (including his 1900 study *Goya*) and art works, significant attributes of this elusive character are revealed. I explore, amongst others, the turn-of-the-century popularity of artists such as Rembrandt, Puvis de Chavannes, Honoré Daumier, Jean-François Millet and Rodin. If a hint of the equivocal remains, this is seen to be justified: Rothenstein sought a critical position that could not, ultimately, be pinned down.

This study not only represents the first major attempt to engage with the early career of William Rothenstein, but confirms the artist's importance to a range of wider issues, through which we may develop new ways of thinking about a much neglected period of British art.

ABBREVIATIONS

In the text:

N.E.A.C. – New English Art Club

In the footnotes:

HGTN – Houghton Library, Harvard

TA – Tate Archives, London

BL – British Library

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INTRODUCTION

Vattetot, 1899

A walking intelligence of a distinctly uncommon sort – He’s a sort of sizer-up of all the art work being done everywhere. He never flatters, is quite sincere, and so has (consciously or unconsciously) acquired a great influence.
[Muirhead Bone on William Rothenstein, c.1902].¹

These awful doubts that come on one after action!
[William Rothenstein to Robert Ross, 1899].²

In the summer of 1899, the artist William Rothenstein holidayed at Vattetot-sur-mer, on the Normandy Coast.³ He and his new wife, Alice, had enjoyed their honeymoon there earlier in the year; now they were returning with friends and family in tow.⁴ Alice’s younger sister Grace Knewstub joined William’s younger brother Albert, who brought along two friends from the Slade School of Art, William Orpen and Augustus John. An old friend of William’s, Charles Conder, completed the artistic side of the party, later supplemented by guests including gallery manager Arthur Clifton and Charles Rowley, who had come to discuss a portraiture project with William.⁵

It was clearly an inspiring summer – a ‘golden moment’ as Rothenstein’s

¹ Bone (2009) 45.

² William Rothenstein to Robert Ross [from Vattetot] 1899, BL 81717.

³ William and Alice married in a registry office on June 11th 1899, with Charles Conder and Max Beerbohm acting as witnesses. The first night of their honeymoon was spent in Dieppe, in a bridal chamber booked by Sickert, whose divorce Rothenstein had recently helped organise. The holiday at Vattetot lasted from about mid-June to late September. William, Alice and Augustus John made at least one Paris visit during this time. Grace Knewstub and William Orpen left the party in early September. Conder was not present the whole time. Chris Knewstub, a friend of Grace Knewstub’s, and a man called John Everett (the son of Augustus John’s landlady) were also part of the party at one point. Charles Rothenstein planned to visit, as did Walter Sickert – it is unknown whether or not they did.

⁴ It is sometimes described as one long honeymoon; letters from Albert Rutherston to his parents suggest, however, that William did return to England in-between the two Vattetot trips: TA TGA 51-2

⁵ This was the Manchester Portraits Project, a companion to Rothenstein’s *Oxford Characters* (1896). Charles Rowley stayed for ‘four or five days; not long enough, it seems, to get Rothenstein excited about his commission: Speaight (1962) 131. ‘Manchester is not an alluring city,’ Rothenstein wrote to Robert Ross from Vattetot, ‘but one has to eat so much dirt in life, a little Manchester “muck” won’t be more unpalatable probably than St. James’s grime’: William Rothenstein to Robert Ross, September 14th 1899;; Ross (1952) 56-7. St. James’s was the home of the Carfax Gallery.

biographer puts it – which lived long in the memories of all those involved.⁶ Both Rothenstein and Augustus John left full accounts of it later on, which correspond with contemporary reports.⁷ In one letter to his parents – who had initially disapproved of the trip – Albert Rutherston describes a typical day: ‘up at 7-30 – Chocolate – Work – bathe at 11 – dejeuner at 12 – work till dinner, after dinner we walk + sit in the café and smoke’.⁸ The emphasis on work may be exaggerated for his parents’ if not his brother’s sake; though it was not an unproductive holiday, the experiences of bathing naked in the sea, reading Balzac, invading local confectioners and cavorting about in blue canvas clothes seem to have been rather more memorable.⁹

Bruce Arnold, Orpen’s biographer, ponders the implications of the trip, describing the five artists (the two Rothensteins, John, Orpen and Conder) as ‘moving much together, as a group, with a common purpose and common aims’; with William himself filling the role of ‘moving spirit’.¹⁰ There is something to be said for this, though Arnold struggles to make much more of this group. The statement to which he directs the reader – Rothenstein’s claim that the Carfax was founded to support ‘work of a certain character’ – confounds rather than clarifies (indeed, as my third chapter will reveal, the ‘character’ which Rothenstein invokes is one in which certainty plays a relatively small role). Ultimately, this holiday isn’t quite the moment Arnold – or, indeed, I – would like it to be. By using it as a starting point for this study I follow a common academic trope: here is a moment of involving drama, one might say, from which everything will neatly unfold. And yet what interests me about this moment is its essential *resistance* to such a narrative. ‘Moving much together, as a group, with a

⁶ Speaight (1962) 133.

⁷ Albert Rutherston wrote to his parents frequently during the trip; Augustus John, William and Alice Rothenstein also mentioned their experiences in letters. For first-hand published accounts see: W Rothenstein (1937b) 347-9 and John (1975) 59-61. Biographers of all the artists involved have described the holiday in some detail: Speaight (1962) 130-4; Holroyd (1996a) 75-8; Arnold (1981) 57-70; Galbally (2002) 202-8.

⁸ Albert Rutherston to Moritz and Bertha Rothenstein, undated from Vattetot, TA TAM 51-2. Albert and Charles Rothenstein changed their names to Rutherston in 1914. For the sake of clarity I will be using the changed names throughout the thesis.

⁹ Both Albert and William Orpen were working on paintings illustrating Hamlet for the Slade School Competition. Augustus John was mostly drawing; Charles Conder working on silk, and on his lithographs illustrating Balzac. Albert describes William as having ‘started several paintings’ during the trip, probably *Le Grand-I-Vert* and *The Butcher’s Shop Under the Trees*. John wrote of the holiday that ‘industry was the order of the day, industry and, in the evenings, calvados’: John (1950) 5-6.

¹⁰ Arnold (1981) 58.

common purpose and common aims': Arnold's statement both invites and denies our interest – who are these artists who are *almost*, but not quite a group; who seem to be going in the same direction, 'much' but not absolutely 'together'? Groups are loose things at best: history is strewn with groups whose togetherness bares very little scrutiny. And yet, for all their 'common purpose and common aims', these five artists have stood firm against our tendency to over-categorise – to push everyone, where possible, into a clearly labelled box.

Such is clearly the case with the artist at the centre of the Vattetot holiday; the so-called 'moving spirit' who somehow failed to move his followers in any obvious direction: the leader, if you will, of this non-group. He is the man to blame, we might say, for the fact that, for all the sun-tinted memories, nothing tangible seems to have come out of this glorious summer in France. He is, in many senses, the architect of this anti-moment; setting up a series of opportunities which he seemingly refuses to seize. Rothenstein has always been seen as 'influential', but what sort of influence is it, we may ask, that fails to materialise into a clearly definable shape or form?¹¹ The uncertain spirit of Vattetot is, to some extent, the spirit that pervades Rothenstein's career: that of simultaneous movement towards, but ultimate resistance to a position of clarity and/or centrality.

All talk of tranquillity aside, a series of small tensions can be seen to be running through the Vattetot trip. Rothenstein, already established as an influential personality by the late '90s, had an opportunity in 1899 to oversee the early careers of several young artists, amongst them the talented William Orpen and Augustus John. Rothenstein's interests lay more in John than in Orpen (who, after a successful summer's courting was to become his brother-in-law); nevertheless, he approached his charge with unexpected caution. No wonder: Conder, one of his previous dependents, was also present, offering an alternative form of influence and reminding Rothenstein that helping your fellow

¹¹ The most recent academic essay on Rothenstein starts thus: 'In the autumn of 1910, the influential artist William Rothenstein...' Though the writer goes on to chart his influence within the sphere of Anglo-Indian artistic relations, the general perception of Rothenstein as influential is not interrogated: Arrowsmith (2010) 228.

artists is a delicate business, something into which one shouldn't rush.¹² Though his close friend Max Beerbohm was later to describe the young Rothenstein as a 'meteorite', the fact is that his behaviour in the summer of 1899, and at various other points, *lacked* obvious force.¹³ He was the moving spirit, maybe, but his spirit moved in strange ways. He was, in one sense, a born leader with an innate distrust of leadership. Uncommon vitality kept pace with 'awful doubts' throughout Rothenstein's career: neither would ever seize absolute control.

Vattetot in 1899 offers a temptation I know I must resist. Most of what is going on during this holiday defies a simple interpretation; the tendency is to group things together; the reality is that, in doing so, we lose sight of what it is that makes this moment special. The fact that Rothenstein and his fellow artists were 'moving much together, *as* a group' is much more interesting than their *being* a self-defined group. Perceiving this lack of cohesiveness as a weakness – an excuse for ignorance – is a mistake. To try and pin together the disparate strands would be equally foolish: we will never grasp Rothenstein's significance by aiming, simply, to inflate his importance; only by concentrating on his so-called *failure* to meet our pre-conceived notions of the 'influential artist' can we hope to fully understand the fascinating role he did play.

But if mental freedom is dear to me, I can never be patient with the current opinions of the moment by the élite. Whistlerites, Ruskinites, Cézannites bore me equally. [William Rothenstein].¹⁴

William Rothenstein [fig.1.] was, as Wyndham Lewis once wrote, an artist whose energies were 'parcelled out over a wide field'; a career in clear contradiction of his own

¹² For Conder's influence see Arnold (1981) 59-61.

¹³ Rothenstein appears in Beerbohm's story *Enoch Soames*, written in 1912. Beerbohm's written portrait is a memorable – and oft repeated – one. It is, nonetheless, worth treating with caution: Beerbohm (1966) 4.

¹⁴ W Rothenstein (1937b) 286. Augustus John, in a similar mode, was to claim with pride that: 'I have never been particularly interested in Art politics and have managed to remain unidentified with any camp': A John (1975) 84.

admission that ‘an artist is well occupied only when at his easel’.¹⁵ Mary Lago, one of the few writers to have directly tackled Rothenstein since his death in 1945, described him as ‘patron, organiser, introducer, errand-runner, and fund-raiser’, adding: ‘a complete record of Rothenstein’s services would not be easy to compile’.¹⁶ To this range of activities, we could add an equally bewildering group of identities. Rothenstein was an Anglo-German Jew, born in Bradford and educated in London (The Slade) and Paris (The Académie Julian). He made his appearance in the 1890s: a friend of Toulouse-Lautrec, Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde. Friends of the 1900s included Joseph Conrad, Auguste Rodin, W H Hudson and Eric Gill. In 1910 – the year his friend Max Beerbohm began his self-imposed exile in Italy – we find Rothenstein introducing the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore to London, and himself to India.¹⁷ Still later, in the 1920s, we find him teaching the young Henry Moore at the Royal College of Arts, fashioning his own artistic responses to both the First and, shortly before his death in 1945, the Second World War.¹⁸ Artistically, he has been classed as a Symbolist, an Impressionist and a Post-Impressionist; a realist and an idealist; a portraitist and landscapist; a painter, draughtsman and lithographer; an essentially conservative artist who nonetheless lent early support to progressive figures such as Wyndham Lewis and Paul Nash. The list could go on. Rothenstein, it soon transpires, is the sort of man who pops up in no end of places, creating a sort of distracting omnipresence: an identity so multifarious that it dilutes the general picture, leaving us with a hazy, washed-out image of a man: someone who belongs everywhere and yet nowhere.¹⁹

The outcome of these wholesale departures from the comfort of the easel,

¹⁵ W Rothenstein (1937b) 93; Lewis (1970) 218.

¹⁶ Lago (1978) 18. The main sources on Rothenstein published during his lifetime (aside from his own works) are Manson (1910) Wellington (1923) J Rothenstein (1929) and Rutter (1931). John Rothenstein revisited his father’s work in the first volume of *Modern English Painters*: J Rothenstein (1952). Max Beerbohm, Augustus John and Wyndham Lewis wrote important memorials after Rothenstein’s death in 1945: Beckson and Lago (1978) 175-6; John (1950); Michel and Fox (1971) 415-6.

¹⁷ Rothenstein’s trip to India famously coincided with Fry’s Post-Impressionist Exhibition: see Lago (1972).

¹⁸ In 1972 Moore wrote that ‘more and more I appreciate that Will Rothenstein was a great idealist and a unique man’. Moore’s memories of Rothenstein are collected in Wilkinson (2002) 47, 92.

¹⁹ Augustus John once described Rothenstein’s accent as owing ‘nothing to the racy felicities of his native Yorkshire; carefully purified of all such rusticity, it only admitted, when appropriate, the intrusion of some apt and untranslatable Gallicism. Interchange between two such opposites could only result in mutual discomfort’. This last sentence goes some way to summing up the wider problems critics have had with Rothenstein: John (1950) 4.

predicted by Rothenstein – and encapsulated in Oscar Wilde’s proverb ‘he who lives more lives than one, more deaths than one must die’ – is confirmed by Lago’s relatively lonely position in Rothenstein scholarship (and even she, it must be noted, mostly saw him in relation to more famous names).²⁰ The length of his career; the breadth and depth of his memoirs; his trans-cultural and trans-social connections and contacts: these alone these will ensure that Sir William Rothenstein is not a name that will be easily forgotten.²¹ He can usually be guaranteed a passing reference in most studies of the age; one of his many portraits will just as often lurk amidst the illustrations.²² Less certain, however, is whether his is a name that will ever be taken seriously. Who dares confront his career and treat it as if it wasn’t the career of a distinctly ‘minor’ artist; someone whose energy and enthusiasm were built on a small foundation of talent; someone who, ultimately, bit off more than he could ever chew?²³ There are, it might seem, too many parts to Rothenstein, but never enough in each part.

Despite its many qualities, Robert Speaight’s 1962 biography does little justice to his subject; he has a story of a life to tell, and finds little time to stop and take care of the richness of the artist’s career any one point.²⁴ Appearances in other biographies, as we shall see, are even more damaging; here Rothenstein is boiled down to his ‘most essential’ – or most comic – qualities.²⁵ The many services he provided are seen as a cause for suspicion rather than celebration. Once again, writers run up against Arnold’s

²⁰ Lago, an English professor (who died in 2001) contributed three major works to Rothenstein studies: Beckson and Lago (1975); Lago (1972) and Lago (1978) The title of the second – ‘Imperfect Encounter’ – is echoed in my own ‘equivocal positions’. The third work, an abridged and annotated version of Rothenstein’s memoirs, was published to make Rothenstein accessible to a ‘new generation of readers’.

²¹ I employ ‘sir’ here and here only; the knighthood was conferred in 1931, beyond the remit of this study.

²² His habit of drawing famous writers ensured he had a steady stream of requests to use his works as frontispieces.

²³ In regard to Rothenstein’s perceived weakness as a creative artist, I direct the reader to Ysanne Holt’s remarks on the art of Philip Wilson Steer: ‘It is only when prejudice and value judgements to do with preconceived notions of artistic progress are set aside; when deviation from certain standards is no longer viewed as weakness, but as symptoms of belonging to time and place; and when the implications of the artist’s own history and character are given equal importance, that fuller interpretations can begin to emerge’: Holt (1992) 140.

²⁴ Rothenstein’s memoirs were relatively quiet on the subject of Rothenstein himself; a gap which Speaight’s biography aimed to fill. Though it has had little popularity as a biography, Speaight’s work seems to me a convincing and – at times – sensitive portrayal of the subject, if a little dull in tone. It appears, however, to have had little effect on Rothenstein scholarship, or the wider popularity of the artist – the situation he describes in his foreword, for instance, has barely changed in fifty years, if not worsened: as I write, Cartwright Hall has only one painting by Rothenstein permanently on show: Speaight (1962) xii-xiii.

²⁵ Examples include Holroyd (1996a), Olson (1989), Arnold (1981), Bone (2009), Delaney (1990) and MacDougall (2002).

quandary: Rothenstein is clearly a ‘moving spirit’, but where exactly is he moving? Movement without a clear destination is, to many, a pathetic attribute. And so Rothenstein is discarded: considered unworthy of further study.

The truth is that this supposed meteorite of a man requires a softer, keener touch; the benefits of which, I believe, extend far beyond the simple desire to better understand the artist himself. As a handful of recent texts have shown, an investigation of Rothenstein’s practices (his art, writings and other activities) *can* shed interesting light on wider debates, from Anglo-Indian artistic exchanges around 1910 and the British avant-garde in the interwar years, to Anglo-German relations before the First World War, mural painting in the 1920s and the role of the applied arts in British art schools in the 1930s.²⁶

His art, meanwhile, has helped illuminate the themes of major exhibitions, even if it does, once again, provide a purely supportive function; adding depth to the histories of better known artists, such as (to use the most recent example) Degas, Sickert and Toulouse-Lautrec.²⁷ In each of these cases a close examination of Rothenstein’s career has provoked a clearer understanding of a range of interesting issues relevant to the British and French art worlds in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. Rothenstein is beginning to prove a useful subject of study: he might yet prove more so.

It is in this spirit that this thesis has been written. Though I find Rothenstein a fascinating subject in his own right, my reasons for writing about him spring from a different source. His was not an ordinary personality, granted, but the pattern of his life, the range of his activities, the broadness of his social contacts: all these make him a highly useful figure through which to study the period in general. Throughout this thesis, therefore, I will be employing aspects of Rothenstein’s life and work to explore concepts with wider implications, from the art of influence to the rise of commercial galleries and art criticism at the turn of the century: a series of subjects that are, I

²⁶ See Arrowsmith (2010); Turner (2008); Saler (1999); Brockington (2009); Willsdon (2000) and Powers (1996).

²⁷ Robins and Thomson (2006). The co-author of the same study, Anna Gruetzner Robins, was also responsible for Rothenstein’s inclusion in the 1979 Royal Academy exhibition, *Post-Impressionism: Cross-currents in European Painting*: House and Stevens (1979) 179-217. Rothenstein also featured in the 2004 exhibition, *The Edwardians: Secrets and Desires* held at the National Gallery of Australia and in the 2003 Charles Conder retrospective: Gray (2004) and Galbally and Pearce (2003). The last major exhibition devoted solely to Rothenstein was the 1972 centenary exhibition held at the Cartwright Hall, Bradford.

contend, very much alive at during the Vattetot holiday in 1899. This I will explain shortly; firstly, however, a further note on the scope and aim of this study.

The issue of ‘influence’, as my title suggests, forms a major part of my work. Influence, however, can be examined in a variety of ways. One of the more popular methods – an aspect of ‘artistic influence’ – is to examine the movement or progression of a particular ‘style’ from one artist to another. This is, perhaps, the sort of argument a reader might expect from a study of Rothenstein’s ‘influence’. It is not, in this case, what they will get. In the foreword to his 1950 memorial exhibition at the Tate it is noted that ‘the multiplicity of Sir William’s Rothenstein’s activities has tended to obscure at times the fact that he was first and foremost a painter and draughtsman’.²⁸ This remains hard to deny. Whilst I have no intention of further obscuring this fact (I have spared no effort in viewing as many of Rothenstein’s works as possible during the course of my research) it must be stated that this is not an artistic monograph – and his paintings and drawings will, for the most part, take a backseat. One cannot, at least for now, ignore a ‘multiplicity’ of activities quite so easily.

Allow me to follow this admission, however, by turning to one of the very paintings I threaten to neglect. Amongst the images Rothenstein worked on during the Vattetot holiday was a painting that has come to be celebrated as one of his best works.²⁹ The tone of the painting, hinted at by its Ibsen-inspired title – *A Doll’s House* [fig.2.] – is curiously dark; the atmosphere undeniably claustrophobic. Robert Speaight is surely right to call this ‘a strange picture to have come out of a honeymoon summer’; a painting that ‘suggests an anecdote and conceals a mystery’.³⁰ This mystery, however, becomes the circumstances of its conception. Glorious moments there were undoubtedly many, but these were probably all the more glorious for coming in the midst of a complicated period in Rothenstein’s life. Aside from the tensions surrounding his relationships with his young artist friends, and the alcoholic Conder – not to mention his recent marriage – Rothenstein’s mind was occupied by a good many

²⁸ *William Rothenstein Memorial Exhibition* (London 1950) 3.

²⁹ The painting, inspired by a staircase at the house in Vattetot, was completed after Rothenstein’s return to England.

³⁰ Speaight (1962) 134.

things. As it happens, many of the themes that came to dominate his career (and themes, as noted, almost always came hand in hand with doubts) are represented during this holiday. Once one sees beyond the implications of what *isn't* happening – i.e. the triumphant emergence of a tightly-knit group of like-minded artists – Vattetot 1899 provides us not only with a helpful starting point, but a microcosm of the whole study.

Influence, unsurprisingly, proves the enduring theme, albeit influence in its less obvious forms, as seen through a personality often called ‘influential’, but rarely credited with having influenced any one thing in particular. To say this is a quality particular to Rothenstein would be misleading. Rothenstein is, I believe, a valuable figure through which to chart the patterns of this kind of influence. I never mean to suggest that his behaviour is not, in its way, symptomatic of a more general spirit (as I hope will become clear over the course of this thesis).

The sources and implications of being influential form the basis of my first chapter, which covers Rothenstein’s experiences leading up to the Vattetot holiday, closing with an exploration of his relationship with Conder. Why might Conder’s presence have lent the Vattetot trip an air of uneasiness? What were the implications of his friendship with Rothenstein, and what bearing might they have had on Rothenstein as he moved through the early stages of friendship with younger artists such as Augustus John and William Orpen? What lessons he had learned regarding ‘influence’ from other artists and friends over the course of the decade?

From the ebbs and flows of a clutch of complex relationships I move, in my second chapter, onto a more concrete example of influence at work. Here the presence of Arthur Clifton at Vattetot provides the relevant clue.³¹ Clifton was manager of the Carfax Gallery, a small commercial gallery in St. James’ London, co-founded by Rothenstein with his friend John Fothergill in 1898.³² Rothenstein’s role was not, officially, a business one; nonetheless, he was deeply involved in the venture, especially

³¹ The gallery was behind the holiday in many other ways also. Augustus John could only afford the trip after gathering the profits from his 1899 Carfax exhibition, whilst Charles Conder was working on art that would, on their return, appear there (and earn him great success).

³² Robert Ross, later involved in the Carfax Gallery, attended Rothenstein’s wedding. Rothenstein corresponded frequently with him during the Vattetot holiday.

in its early days.

The Carfax presents us with some of the same problems as the group (or non-group) assembled at Vattetot: it resists immediate classification. It is also part of a history that has often been ignored: that of commercial galleries operating in London around the turn of the century. Rothenstein worked during a period of great institutional change – few would disagree with this fact. And yet there is a general reluctance to see artists of the time in relation to these changes. Galleries are cast simply as spaces where art works happened to have been exhibited; if they are granted any influence at all, it is secondary. I believe, yet, that they have a history as rich and significant as those of the artists they supported: they shaped the period in so many ways – and any account that lacks serious consideration of these forces does so at its peril.³³ I therefore offer a close reading of Rothenstein's relationship with exhibiting spaces, as a contribution both to this neglected history and as proof of the obvious benefits that its integration with the history of a specific artist can have.

A second project also loomed large during the Vattetot holiday. In early 1899 Rothenstein was asked contribute to a series of books edited by his friend and the poet Laurence Binyon. His subject was to be Goya. This commission provided Rothenstein with a great opportunity to put his artistic ideals into a solid form for the immediate benefit of young artists who were coming under his influence. In my third chapter I closely examine both the results of this particular project and relation of this work to Rothenstein's other critical writings. These I explore in close relationship with the Carfax Gallery, with a view to understanding the clash between artistic ideals, as expressed in writings, and the practical reality of exhibiting.

My final chapter returns to social networks and one-to-one relationships, re-interrogating questions brought up in the first chapter in relation to the period 1900-1910. I closely examine particular aspects of Rothenstein's identity, from his status as a married man to his Jewishness – which I explore at some length. How did these aspects of his identity feed into his experiences as an influential artist? How did he relate to the new generation of artists emerging after the turn of the century? Lastly, where does

³³ The institutional history of British art is, fortunately, a rapidly growing field, as I note in Chapter Two.

Rothenstein belong in our understanding of the British art world c.1910?

I have employed the word ‘period’ throughout this introduction. And yet this study deals, quite deliberately, with a passage of time that could be seen to cross the boundary of two periods; the 1890s on the one hand and the 1900s on the other (or, to put it another way, the Late Victorian and Edwardian periods). I go on to close in 1910, where many studies of twentieth century British art like to begin.³⁴

Rothenstein’s ‘fortune’ (or ‘fate’) was, as Hubert Wellington pointed out in 1923, to be a major figure in the London art world from 1890 through to the 1920s. Alongside his consistent resistance to discernible groups, recognisable ‘styles’ and/or aesthetics, this makes him somewhat hard to manage; to ‘fit’ into history as we like to know it. This is not to say that all such boundaries are necessarily false. What is interesting about 1900 is that, roughly speaking, there *is* a palpable sense of closure. Queen Victoria’s death in 1901 merely confirmed that a new age had, in some senses, begun. Rothenstein’s life is often seen to follow this shift. ‘In 1899 he settled down, married, and determined, like Queen Victoria, “to be good”’, writes D.S.MacColl, echoing W B Yeats’ famous 1936 statement that ‘in 1900 everybody got down off his stilts; henceforth nobody drank absinthe with his black coffee; nobody went mad; nobody committed suicide; nobody joined the Catholic Church; or if they did I have forgotten’.³⁵ Although there is little evidence that Rothenstein was ever ‘not good’, there were clearly some personal changes made around 1900, which may have been allied to wider cultural shifts. There is, however, little to be gained by exaggerating these – and much more to be learned, I believe, by positing 1900 at the centre, rather than the start (or end) of a critical study.³⁶ Again: only by embracing the difficulties in studying

³⁴ For example, Charles Harrison’s popular study of English Modernism purports to start in 1900, but grants no more than forty pages to the first ten years of the century: Harrison (1994). The continuing popularity of ‘Bloomsbury’ and more recent interest in Vorticism has led to a similar tendency to overlook, or dismiss, the early Edwardian period.

³⁵ MacColl (1945) 68; W B Yeats (1936) xi.

³⁶ For more on this issue see D Peters Corbett (2006) 346. Corbett writes: ‘The challenge is to write history that follows the unfolding of change, which does not strive to hurry the account towards the next “period”...The study of British art in the years on either side of 1900 is at a stage when it needs this type of close attention to the historical texture rather than works that are concerned to prove once again that everything changed in 1910 or that *Blast* was entirely sincere in its iconoclastic assertion of the redundancy of ‘1836-1900’.

such artists as Rothenstein, by resisting the tendency towards narrow-minded periodization, can we hope to generate a deeper, richer history of British art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Despite the lack of serious critical attention Rothenstein has received since his death, the sources for the present study are manifold. The amount of contemporary material published – at the centre of which lie Rothenstein’s three-volume memoirs – is considerable. Rothenstein was also, like many of the time, a prolific letter writer. I have drawn heavily on this archival material in constructing my history, which not only represents the closest reading of Rothenstein’s early career to date, but the first major account of such significant ventures such as the Carfax Gallery and The Artist’s Library.

CHAPTER ONE

‘Laying Down the Law’:

Managing the instinct to influence, c.1890-1899

Reflecting on the early stages of his friendship with William Rothenstein, Augustus John recalled Rothenstein’s suggestion ‘that he would like to play the part of Vautrin to my Lucien de Rubempré!’³⁷ As far as John was concerned, this Balzacian analogy did neither of them any favours, on which grounds he promptly dismissed it, using the quote as a springboard to a discussion of Oscar Wilde, who had famously written in *Intentions* (through the voice of Vivian) that the death of de Rubempré was ‘one of the greatest tragedies of my life... a grief from which I have never been able completely to rid myself.’³⁸

We shouldn’t dismiss Rothenstein’s comment so lightly. However playful and ironic the spirit in which it was made, it nevertheless reveals a tension integral to our understanding of his character and role/s in the British art world. The suitability and implications of the Vautrin/Rubempré characterisation will be examined in due course. So far as the general reference point goes, however, the comment is very appropriate. Balzac was, as we have seen, a feature of their Vattetot holiday. Indeed, within a wider social circle he was, in last three decades of the nineteenth century, alluded to more so than most writers (though Omar Khayyam, Browning and Ibsen may have run him close). Whilst opposing political factions in France tried in vain to claim him as their own, artists and writers in Britain were drawn to Balzac for more personal reasons.³⁹

³⁷ John (1975) 63.

³⁸ Wilde (1945) 20. Max Beerbohm makes an ironic reference to this passage in a letter to Robert Ross in 1898, in which the famously fastidious writer discusses the horror of finding ‘a misplaced comma’ in his recently published *Works*. He concludes: ‘It and the death of Lucien de Rubempré are the only things I have never been quite able to dismiss’: Cecil (1964) 198; see also John Hall (2002) 133.

³⁹ For a more comprehensive history of Balzac’s reception in Britain and France see Decker (1932), Adamson (1992) and Bellos (1976).

Swinburne admired the scatological content of his tales.⁴⁰ George Moore thought him the equivalent of a great city: ‘enormously, incomprehensibly in advance of his time’; superior to Shakespeare – and even to Moore himself.⁴¹ The constant need for ‘Balzac and Gautier’, meanwhile, caused Wilde to travel through America – where Henry James had been preaching Balzac’s genius from 1875 onwards – with a ‘Cyclopean’ trunk.⁴² The ‘mouth-watering descriptions of Lucien de Rubempré’ of which he was so fond were later echoed in the character of Dorian Gray.⁴³ Elsewhere Wilde wrote that that ‘a steady course of Balzac reduces our living friends to shadows and our acquaintances to the shadows of shades’ – a comment worth keeping in mind as we move into an arena in which semi-fictional and unreliable characterisations of historical figures attempt to distract us from a critical goal in which tracing ‘the shadows of shades’, as difficult a task it may be, is an integral part.⁴⁴

The beauty of Lucien may have had less attraction for others as it did for Wilde, but the cautionary tale of his attempts to conquer the Parisian literary world – or those of the similarly idealistic Rastignac – certainly struck a chord with many a young artistically-minded man in Paris around the turn of the century. It comes as no surprise that Charles Conder ‘nourished a longstanding identification with Balzacian heroes’; an identification which manifested itself in his behaviour, dress and finally, in 1896, in his art, when he provided illustrations for Ernest Dowson’s translation of *La fille aux yeux d’or*, published by Leonard Smithers [fig.3]⁴⁵ Balzac’s reputation in Britain had by this stage developed beyond the careless conclusion that he was a crude and brutish moral degenerate; nonetheless, the choice of story was in this case deliberately provocative. Though it starts with the author writing well within his meticulous ‘secretary of society’

⁴⁰ Robb (1994) 188.

⁴¹ Moore liked to rate himself highly, but never above Balzac: Frazier (2000) xiv, 192. For the comparison to Shakespeare see Moore (1929) 79-84; see also Moore (1889) 491.

⁴² Hart-Davies (1962) 122; James (1987)

⁴³ Robb (1994) 115; see also Ellman (1977) 4-6.

⁴⁴ Wilde (1945) 20.

⁴⁵ Galbally and Pearce (2003) 188, 191, 196; Galbally (2002) 142-3. The frontispiece to *La Fille aux yeux d’or* was reproduced in the fourth volume of *The Savoy*. Conder’s later illustrations of Balzac (known as ‘The Balzac Set’) were sold at the Carfax. Richard Thomson describes Conder’s dress in Rothenstein’s 1893 portrait as ‘a throwback to the Romantic generation of the 1830s’: Robins and Thomson (2005) 148. The 1830s were particularly in vogue at this time; Rothenstein himself sought out models with an 1830s air: see Hart-Davies (1964) 71; also Robins (1992).

mode, *La fille aux yeux d'or* ends in a blaze of dramatic glory, managing to fit a bloody suicide, lesbianism and incest within its closing pages. Such theatrical, ambiguous morbidity also attracted such figures as Aubrey Beardsley – a voracious reader of Balzac, who designed the backlet for Smithers' eleven volume edition of *Scènes de la vie Parisienne* – and Walter Sickert, who from 1892 onwards was keen on throwing Balzacian quotes and allusions into his newspaper articles, if not his paintings also (*La Hollandaise* from c.1906 is generally thought to be a reference to the prostitute Sara Gobseck from Balzac's *Gobseck*).⁴⁶

All of these people (Wilde, Moore, Conder, Beardsley and Sickert) were close to Rothenstein, as were many of Balzac's countless French admirers, not least Rodin, with whom he had first stayed in 1897, when the sculptor was working on his controversial memorial to the writer.⁴⁷ In October 1899, days after leaving Vattetot, the Rothensteins visited Rodin once more and, in the words of Alice, 'saw the Balzac for the first time – it is a wonderful thing'.⁴⁸ Earlier that summer, both Rothenstein and Conder found themselves in the position to pass their love of Balzac onto the young members of their immediate social circle, with Rothenstein revealing his interests, not only in reading habits and casual remarks, but in a painting also: *Le Grand-I-Vert* [see fig.4], shown at the New English Art Club (hereafter the N.E.A.C) the following year.⁴⁹

Le Grand-I-Vert is the name of the ramshackle tavern in *Les Paysans*, Balzac's far-from-charming ramble through rural Burgundy; a typically detailed exploration of the relationship between peasants and their creditors that at least three influential writers

⁴⁶ Maas, Duncan and Good (1970) 249. Rothenstein noted that Beardsley 'knew his Balzac from cover to cover': W Rothenstein (1937b) 135-6. The connection between Sickert's *L'Hollandaise* and Balzac was first made by Richard Shone: Upstone (2008) 121.

⁴⁷ Criticised in France, the Balzac memorial was nevertheless popular amongst the English intelligentsia. Oscar Wilde wrote to Robert Ross from Paris in 1898 to say that 'Rodin's statue of Balzac is superb. The leonine head of a fallen angel, with a dressing gown... People howl with rage over it.': Hart-Davies (1962) 732. See also Caso (1964) 284.

⁴⁸ Speaight (1962) 135.

⁴⁹ Augustus John was to later write of Rothenstein: 'Professing no systematic philosophy, and subscribing to no dogma, his point of view in maturity was that of a curious, penetrating and essentially moral intelligence, upon which Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* had left indelible traces': John (1950) 5. *Le Grand I Vert* was exhibited at the N.E.A.C in the summer of 1900, alongside another Vattetot work, *The Butcher's Shop Under the Trees*. See Laperriere (2002) for a full list of Rothenstein's N.E.A.C exhibits.

thought prophetic.⁵⁰ ‘Every revolt, open or concealed, has its banner’ writes Balzac, and ‘the banner of the marauders, the drunkards, the idlers, the sluggards of the valley des Aigues was the terrible tavern of the Grand-I-Vert’.⁵¹ From this base – a veritable ‘nest of vipers’ – the restless peasantry plotted against the inhabitants of Les Aigues, the country house in whose grounds they camped.⁵² How the tavern came by this curious name (which seems to have led to some confusion when cataloguing the painting) is thus explained:

Above the door of the house a roving artist had painted, probably in return for his breakfast, a huge capital ‘I’ in green on a white ground two feet square; and for the benefit of those who could read, this witty joke in twelve letters: “Au Grand-I-Vert”.⁵³

The punning signpost is just one of many carefully described features that doesn’t make it into a painting that is strangely rough in texture and technique; like a gloomier, more melodramatic Whistler, or a rural James Pryde.⁵⁴ Still, Rothenstein *had* been doing his bit as a roving artist in France that summer, offering a ‘Goyaesque’ drawing for a ‘charming little inn’ on the way to Le Havre, where Degas, Monet, Whistler and Forain had previously dined.⁵⁵ Perhaps this experience endeared him to the subject of the rather less amiable ‘Grand-I-Vert’, or else, just as he had impressed the proprietors of the inn with the fact that he knew Degas and Whistler, the title of the painting may serve as proof that the artist is well up on his Balzac. Augustus John struggled in retrospect to imagine how the painting might have come about: ‘As far as I know there was no such place in the neighbourhood’ he wrote, ‘but W.R., in choosing his subject has certainly

⁵⁰ Karl Marx thought the social dynamics worthy of discussion in *Das Kapital*, Aldous Huxley wrote in the 1920s of the novel’s attractively inverted message (in the struggle between landowners and the peasantry, Balzac appears to side with the former) whilst the ubiquitous George Moore thought the novel to have prefigured the events of the Irish Land War: Bellos (1976) 172; Baker and Sexton (2002) 21; Fleming (2004) 356-364

⁵¹ Balzac (1890) 60.

⁵² Balzac (1890) 58.

⁵³ Balzac (1890) 45. The allusion is to ‘Grand Hiver’, the Great Winter of 1794-5, during which the French army fought a campaign in the Low Countries. See fn.56 for cataloguing confusion.

⁵⁴ See Hudson (1949) for a review of James Pryde’s art and life. Pryde also succumbed to the Balzacian craze: his 1909 *The Doctor* (Tate Gallery) was one of a series of paintings collectively named ‘The Human Comedy’

⁵⁵ Speaight (1962) 132. Rothenstein had already painted a mural decoration of a hanged man at an inn at Giverny: W Rothenstein (1937b) 49.

imbued it with a sense of fatality: even the tall elm tree seems to hide a fatal secret and we are left to guess what goes on in the obscure habitation it overshadows'.⁵⁶ Were we to take the painting as a straight illustration, we could have a very good idea of what was going on, provided we turn to the text.⁵⁷ However, as with many of Rothenstein's paintings, the relationship between the title and the subject is ambiguous.

Literary allusions were not new for him. Another painting started on this holiday, *A Doll's House* [fig.2] took its title from Ibsen's play, whilst Browning was invoked in his 1891 *Parting at Morning*, his 1894 *Porphyria* (or *Porphyria's Lover*) and once more in the title of the 1900 work *The Browning Readers* [fig.5].⁵⁸ In 1895 we find him working on a set of twenty etchings illustrating Voltaire.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, in a drawing from 1899 – *La Belle Heaulemière aux filles de joie* – Rothenstein channels the imaginative, Watteau-esque style of Conder, along with his enthusiasm for Goya, topped off with a title taken from a ballade by the fifteenth century Parisian poet, François Villon.⁶⁰ A later interior, *Flower, Fruit and Thorn Piece* (exhibited at the N.E.A.C in 1902) alludes to the German writer Jean-Paul Richter, whose work Rothenstein was reading in Hampstead.⁶¹ Balzac re-appeared in the work of Charles Conder, as did Browning, in

⁵⁶ John (1950) 6. Unconsciously extending the allusion, Manchester City Art Gallery catalogued the painting under the title of 'Le Grand If Vert' (The Great Green Yew), despite its being exhibited under the title 'Le Grand I Vert' at the N.E.A.C. Augustus John seems confident in relating the painting to Balzac, and identifying the tree as an elm – not a yew.

⁵⁷ The critic at the *Saturday Review* seems to have done just this, referring the figures in the painting to 'some relentless plot gathering in incomprehensible peasant brains': *The Saturday Review*, vol 89, 1900, 28th April 525-6

⁵⁸ The figure in *Porphyria's Lover* is thought to be another portrait of Conder: Speaight, (1962) 70. Rothenstein reports being given the Complete Works of Browning on his birthday in 1896: William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, 30th January 1896, HTGN. For more on *Parting at Morning* see Robins and Thomson (2005) 111-113. Thomson argues that 'Rothenstein used Browning's lines not to a literary, Pre-Raphaelite end, but for something more emphatically modern' invoking 'the proletarian poor of Paris' and 'the aesthetic of the Symbolist avant-garde'.

⁵⁹ The etchings were made for Leonard Smithers, with whom he later quarrelled. *A Scene from Voltaire's "La Pucelle"* nonetheless appeared in the first volume of *The Savoy* in 1896: W Rothenstein (1937b) 244-5. Rothenstein wrote to his father c.1895 requesting a loan: 'for I shall need many models & costumes (it is a poem of Voltaires I am doing)': William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, undated from Chelsea, HTGN.

⁶⁰ This drawing was bought by his brother Charles and now forms part of the Rutherston Collection at the Manchester Art Gallery. In March 1899 Conder sent Rothenstein a fan illustrating 'verses of Villon': Charles Conder to William Rothenstein, 1st March 1899, HTGN.

⁶¹ The reference is to Richter's 1796 work *Flower, Fruit and Thorn Pieces: or, the Married Life, Death and Wedding of Siebenkäs* [*Blumen-Frucht und Dornenstücke, oder Ehestand, Tod und Hochzeit des Armenadvokaten Siebenkäs*]. In a letter to his father, c.1900, Rothenstein writes 'I am reading Goethe's Faust, with the help of a very good translation, & think it magnificent: Goethe and Jean Paul are my sole food just now'; William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, undated from Kensington, HTGN. See also Speaight (1962) 161

Conder's *Toccata of Galuppi*, exhibited with *The Balzac Set* at the Carfax gallery.⁶² Albert Rutherston, meanwhile, was busy with his own literary allusions, evoking Zola in his *Confessions of Claude* (1902) and Thomas Hood in *Song of the Shirt* (also 1902), whilst Orpen looked to Shakespeare in *The Play Scene from Hamlet* (1899), Thackeray in *A mere fracture* (1901), and The Arabian Nights in *The Thief and the Three Blind Men* (1901).⁶³

Each of these paintings has a complex relationship with the text from which its title is taken. *Song of the Shirt* and, perhaps, *Porphyria* come closest to being purely illustrative, whilst *The Play Scene from Hamlet* plays (appropriately enough) with several narratives, combining elements of Hamlet with more personal narratives – as well as allusions to other artists, including Watteau, Hogarth and Rembrandt.⁶⁴ Ann Galbally refers to Conder's references to Browning's poem as being 'elliptical rather than direct'; a description which could be easily carried across to Rothenstein's own works in this mode.⁶⁵ In-between elliptical references to the text in question, there is a certain amount of role-playing and, indeed, role-casting going on.⁶⁶ Some of this may be down to youthful exuberance: a desire to communicate to an audience the artist's confidence within the field of literature and/or the desire to conceal oneself (or one's friends) in a dramatic cloak of mystery. In reference to the latter, it is hard not to be reminded of William Orpen's strange pre-war self portraits, where he appears to himself in a variety of (sometimes unlikely) guises, from a jockey to the painter Chardin, creating what David Fraser Jenkins has described as an 'imaginary personality'; not necessarily the one

⁶² Galbally (2002) 213. Galbally writes of Balzac and Browning: 'Both authors were very topical. In the decade since his death, Browning societies had sprung up all over Britain. Even Will, not especially prone to making literary references in his work, called the enigmatic study he was making of Alice and her sister in the sitting-room at Pembroke cottages *The Browning Readers?*. I have proved on the contrary that Rothenstein was, at this stage in his career, very susceptible to literary references.'

⁶³ The first of Orpen's paintings was made for the Slade School painting competition, for which students were recommended subjects. The previous year Augustus John had painted on the subject of *Moses and the Brazen Serpent*. On *A mere fracture*, see McConkey (2004) 92-3. The Arabian Nights was later invoked by Rothenstein in his 1908 painting *The Princess Badroulbador* (Tate). The Slade School Competition clearly offered one inspiration for these literary paintings; the new opportunities offered by cheaper book production another.

⁶⁴ Upstone, Foster and Jenkins (2005) 53-61; Arnold (1981) 65-70.

⁶⁵ Galbally (2002) 209. John Rothenstein makes a similar point in reference to Conder's 'Balzac Set': 'These six prints are not so much illustrations...as equivalent expressions in line and tone of various phases of the Balzacian spirit': J Rothenstein (1938) 167.

⁶⁶ I don't mean to rule out practical considerations here. Artists tend to paint themselves and their friends at certain stages in their lives simply because these people are there – and may be the most willing models.

artist wants to have – which is what we might expect a self-portrait to reveal – but ironic and playful reflections on type, designed to subvert the viewer's expectations.⁶⁷ The roles he plays differ to the extent that the personality which emerges is deliberately unresolved, as if the paintings are adding up to a statement on the equivocal nature of personality itself.⁶⁸ This is, I think, an issue with which artists of this generation were preoccupied: a serious fear of being pinned down, not to be confused with a merely playful interest in different roles (or inability to hold any of them down). It differs in some senses from the play-acting of the next generation (Wyndham Lewis comes to mind) which packed a more deliberate and, perhaps, effective punch.

If Rothenstein's spoken identification with Vautrin clearly plays this first game, his Balzacian painting does so with a little less certainty. *Le Grand-I-Vert* as a title is, I believe, a play, in which Rothenstein takes the part of the Englishman who knows his French culture. However, it is unclear to us (and, I might suggest, to the man himself) the extent to which he wished to sustain this particular role. The fact that this same painting was later exhibited under the title *Night* hints at a change of mind; a loss of faith, perhaps, in the role-playing approach, or in the self-consciously bohemian stances of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century art world.⁶⁹ As Beerbohm suggests in *Enoch Soames*, Rothenstein developed an unnecessary fear of showing off his literary knowledge; a reservation, claims Beerbohm, that was 'very characteristic of the period'.⁷⁰ Perhaps so – though it is noticeable that it is *before* 1900 that Rothenstein is relatively happy to make literary allusions. It is only after 1900 that they dry up in favour of more prosaic titles.

The fact remains that few of his poses were delicately constructed: he never approached the style of practised posers such as Whistler, Sickert or the young Wyndham Lewis. The former's desire that the 'limelight should be focused on himself' and that his disciples – an 'artistic bodyguard' – were there to be 'made use of' for his and not their own benefit, was part of an attitude that Rothenstein constantly fought

⁶⁷ Upstone, Foster and Jenkins (2005) 53.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Of course this only really works when the paintings are seen as a series.

⁶⁹ The same seems to apply to *Flower, Fruit and Thorn Piece* (c.1902), later known simply as *Interior*.

⁷⁰ 'No one is better judge of literature than Rothenstein,' Beerbohm went on, 'but it wouldn't have done to tell him so': Beerbohm (1966) 9.

against.⁷¹ The latter, meanwhile, famously wrote that he approached the pre-war art world as a kind of fabulous game, in which he was happy to play a part (even if that part was played with his tongue firmly in his cheek).⁷² Rothenstein seems to me to have understood the nature or presence of this game, but been less keen to play it; preferring to stay true to what Beerbohm called his sense of the ‘eternal verities’.⁷³ He was, as Mary Lago has written, ‘an interesting combination of practical organizer and mystic’.⁷⁴ Interesting, yes: but also confusing.

Rothenstein’s evident knowledge of Balzac says a lot about the social circles he had been a part of for the previous ten years and the experience he had gained in Paris; the influence of which he sometimes underplayed, but which – with or against his will – supplied him with an aura guaranteed to excite the interest of younger artists. ‘I know everyone in Paris’ proclaims Vautrin shortly after meeting Lucien.⁷⁵ Max Beerbohm repeats the statement in reference to Rothenstein: ‘He knew every one in Paris. He knew them all by heart. He was Paris in Oxford’.⁷⁶ Indeed, there was so much of Paris about Rothenstein that the man who introduced him to Beerbohm felt a need to assure the latter that he ‘speaks English perfectly’⁷⁷.

It seems unlikely that Rothenstein would have actually passed for a Frenchman; nevertheless, it is easy to see how an uninitiated acquaintance could be confused as to the exact nationality of this Bradford-born son of a German Jew, freshly returned from four years in Paris. Scanning the list of Rothenstein’s N.E.A.C entries, especially between 1893 and 1905, it is impossible to ignore the continental flavour, with five French titles and further French, Spanish and German subjects.⁷⁸ If anything, it is the 1893 *Souvenir of Scarborough* – a subject from the county in which he was brought up – that seems unusual.

⁷¹ W Rothenstein (1937b) 168-9.

⁷² Lewis (1937) 8, 32.

⁷³ Beerbohm in J Rothenstein (1926) xii.

⁷⁴ Lago (1996) 200.

⁷⁵ Balzac (1971) 364.

⁷⁶ Beerbohm (1966) 4. Anticipating that critics would downplay this statement, Beerbohm wrote in 1926 that he ‘did not exaggerate what was felt. It was awe’: Beerbohm in J Rothenstein (1926) xi.

⁷⁷ ‘But for that assurance,’ added Beerbohm, ‘I might not have accepted the invitation’: Beerbohm in J Rothenstein (1926) xi.

⁷⁸ Laperriere (2002) 51-55.

To Grant Richards, who met him in Paris, ‘unusual’ was very much the word that came to mind when he considered Rothenstein, along with ‘an effect rather Japanese’ (based, no doubt, on preconceptions of his height).⁷⁹ This is repeated elsewhere. In unpublished notes by Beerbohm, Rothenstein is described as a ‘Japanese jew [sic] with a Franco-German accent’.⁸⁰ Froitzheim, Rothenstein’s double from Gilbert Cannan’s *Mendel*, is thought to be ‘so Oriental that he looked out of place in Western clothes’ (the Asian effect exaggerated at that stage by Rothenstein’s associations with Indian culture).⁸¹

Bearing in mind the tendency to exaggerate – and the fact that, in Oxford, Rothenstein had found almost the perfect arena to flaunt or temper his curious identity – we can nevertheless understand the effect he might have had. A ‘meteorite’ he may not have been, but it doesn’t seem unreasonable that a man in his early twenties was already at a point in which he seemed, to Edward Gordon Craig at least, ‘unapproachable in experience’ and ‘old in wisdom’.⁸²

He knew Paris and had more than a passing acquaintance with many of its most fascinating inhabitants. He had been drawn by Toulouse-Lautrec, met (and in most cases sketched) such figures as Degas, Verlaine, Rodin, Huysmans and Puvis de Chavannes. He liked to read Stendhal, Barbey d’Aurevilly, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam and Balzac. He knew his Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky equally well and had travelled through Germany, Spain and North Africa, accompanied on the latter two journeys by Robert Cunninghame-Graham, another seemingly larger-than-life figure whose career stretched in many directions.⁸³

On top of this came Oxford. In Beerbohm’s enduring analysis, Rothenstein arrives in Oxford and the city immediately bows down to this apparent ambassador of

⁷⁹ Richards (1933) 183.

⁸⁰ Lago (1978) 21.

⁸¹ Cannan (1916) 75. In a letter to his sister from Paris, Rothenstein noted how several French artists thought him Japanese: William Rothenstein to Louise Rothenstein, undated (c.1890), HG’TN.

⁸² Speaight (1962) 183.

⁸³ For Cunninghame-Graham see Watts and Davies (2008). Rothenstein had German ancestors and a close German friend in the artist Ludwig von Hofmann (1861-1945). For more on Rothenstein and his German identity see Brockington (2009) 297-319

bohemia.⁸⁴ For all that he may have given it, however, Rothenstein must also have taken something back: a veneer of respectability to take the edge off that unusualness. ‘After the hectic life of Paris,’ he wrote, ‘the sense of order, of a settled social system, was good for my undisciplined spirit.’⁸⁵ Oxford presented a new world of social contacts; with it a sense of mobility, countering the fear of becoming too closely aligned with one particular mode of production or social grouping. From the Paris perspective, this was may have been seen as selling out (the artist Emile Friant had little doubt of this).⁸⁶ From Rothenstein’s perspective it was one of many such moves, designed to keep him away from cliquish factions, wedded instead to his eternal ideals.

Rothenstein was, Beerbohm recalled, ‘constantly dynamic, radiating ideas in all directions, all the time’.⁸⁷ To most people his position in the late 1890s would seem to be one of remarkable strength: a wholly positive position. And yet, if John’s word is to be believed, of all the figures he chose to compare himself to at the turn of the century, Rothenstein settled on the sinister Vautrin: the fictional criminal mastermind whose dangerous influence destroys the beautiful young Lucien de Rubempré. Recently married, and still below thirty, we find him musing over his suitability to play a middle-aged two-faced homosexual villain, with a penchant for elaborate and deceptive disguises. Why?

John, as we have seen, thought the identification practically worthless. Aside from its reminding us of Rothenstein’s interest in Balzac – and the inclination to sometimes ironic role-play that extends into images of the period – is there any reason why we shouldn’t come to the same conclusion? It would be easy to think of it as no more than a casual remark; perhaps even a case of mistaken identity.

I think there is more to it than this. Even if the source turned out to be unreliable, mapping aspects of Rothenstein’s character onto those of Vautrin would still

⁸⁴ Beerbohm (1966) 4.

⁸⁵ W Rothenstein (1937b) 151. He was never beyond the escapism offered by the society of Oxford and Cambridge. In 1903 he wrote home from Cambridge: ‘for making anyone forget the difficulties of life, [I] commend one to a university town, with a reasonable acquaintance among the Dons. It is only when one is on the way back again one has time to remember that life is not all claret & skittles’: William Rothenstein to Bertha Rothenstein, May 1903, HGTN.

⁸⁶ Speaight (1962) 51.

⁸⁷ Beckson and Lago (1975) 175.

yield intriguing results. Indeed, it is interesting to note how often other commentators have come close to characterising a man described by his son as ‘a man of radiant goodness’ as being somewhat more sinister.⁸⁸ There is something in his personality that, rightly or wrongly, excites the imagination, demanding evermore inflated comparisons.

His deliberate and often subtle evasion of a specific or central role in this period means that his appearances in historical texts tend to be cameos (you could even argue that he is a bit-part player in his own memoirs). This suits the writer: Rothenstein in small doses, caught in dramatic moments, is an attractive and amusing subject. So he proves in Michael Holroyd’s celebrated biography of Augustus John. Holroyd labels him an ‘inverted Iago’: half-way to being an evil genius, lacking only the wickedness – which, paradoxically, made him equally if not more unnerving (for what *other* reason could anyone be so generous?)⁸⁹ Elsewhere, the same writer extends the curiously (albeit comically) menacing characterisation, referring to Rothenstein as a ‘nightmare figure’ desperate to fix his ‘personal ambitions on the performances of his protégés’.⁹⁰ As Vautrin remarks to Lucien near the end of *Lost Illusions*: ‘You will shine and show off while I, bending low in the mud of the foundations, shall be propping up the brilliant edifice of your fortune. I myself love power for power’s sake! I shall always be happy to see you enjoying the things which are forbidden to me. In short, I shall live in you!’⁹¹ The ghost of Vautrin clearly haunts Holroyd’s portrayal – as it did the artist himself.⁹²

Though it seems unlikely that Rothenstein was ever so blatantly sycophantic or self-consciously patriarchal as Holroyd is wont to describe him, it is clear that his generous spirit was complex, capable of beguiling, confusing and irritating its benefactors. Faced with such complexity, even his contemporaries were inclined to throw up their hands and settle for the simplistic answer. In 1910 D.S. MacColl wrote to Rothenstein a letter that for the most part deals in compliments, only to end with the

⁸⁸ J Rothenstein (1965) 115. This is not mere family fondness: references to William Rothenstein’s overwhelming ‘aura of goodness’ (as Mary Berenson once put it) are frequent; see Speaight (1962) 198.

⁸⁹ Holroyd (1996a) 173.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 170-1.

⁹¹ Balzac (1971) 650.

⁹² Rothenstein makes similarly pathetic and/or sinister appearances in other biographies; a good example being Stanley Olson, who argues in his biography of John Singer Sargent that ‘[Rothenstein] used his not too considerable talent (though it must be said some of his paintings are really very good) to propel himself to the more interesting pools where history would be certain to shine a light’: Olson (1989) 196. See also fn.97

admission that, for all his good intentions, he cannot shake off his ‘suspicion’ of him – as if, though the facts may deny it, intuition suggested that a man simply could not have such pure motives as he.⁹³ Epstein thought his friendship a ‘pretence’ – and a comic one at that.⁹⁴ As Robert Speaight points out, ‘The difficulty with William was that his intransigence was suddenly liable to turn into decision, with the result that he got the credit neither for being supple nor for being stubborn. People who admired stubbornness thought he was too supple, and vice versa. This ambivalence was due not to any weakness of character, but to a temperamental sensitivity which made him sometimes overplay, and sometimes underplay, his hand’.⁹⁵ Indecision, prompted not so much by shaky ideals, but by a shaky concept of how to deal with concrete ideals, cast Rothenstein in the self-confessed role of an ‘absurd wobbler’ with whom friendship was, for some, ‘a minor peril’.⁹⁶ It is, however, worth looking at this statement from a different angle, and asking how absurd *was* this behaviour – and what extent was it reaction to the sort of absurd situations in which an artist such as Rothenstein found himself; situations in which the options were never clear enough to make any reaction appear logical?

Rothenstein’s identification with a villain suggests that he was canny enough to realise how he might fall foul of historical categorisation – as he often has. The idea of him as predatory, relentlessly seeking out social contacts, turns out to be a common one; an image repudiated by his son:

David Cecil has written of [Rothenstein] having ‘contrived to make friends with Degas’ and other illustrious painters, whereas in fact Degas visited his first exhibition and invited him to call. Although he cared passionately for the arts and delighted in the company of artists he admired, he was incapable of seeking the friendship of anyone because they were illustrious or because they could be of service to him; he was likewise incapable of withholding an opinion however unpalatable; indeed the grim rectitude of his opinions often caused offence.⁹⁷

⁹³ Speaight (1962) 215.

⁹⁴ Holroyd (1996a) 171.

⁹⁵ Speaight, (1962) 167-8.

⁹⁶ W Rothenstein (1937c) 192; Speaight (1962) 168.

⁹⁷ J Rothenstein (1966) 159. See also Stanley Olson, who seems to agree with David Cecil, writing that: ‘Rothenstein’s love of art was, however, absolutely sincere, but his love of names seems to have been greater... his personal orbit was very closely defined, via names of the great’: Olson (1989) 196.

As we will see, Rothenstein's awareness of his instinct to influence may have made him especially cautious when it came to forging contacts; reluctant to seem overly pushy. In the early years of his career, however, we must remember that he had achieved some small fame of his own and did not necessarily need to force the issue: many people – Oscar Wilde, to name another – came to seek *him* out.⁹⁸

Augustus John (who noted to his credit that the attraction to Rothenstein was always 'mutual') was close enough to appreciate the complexity of Rothenstein's personality, if not deal with it. 'How I wish someone would record the diverting history of Rothenstein's career' he wrote to Ottoline Morrell: 'it would be the most ludicrous, abject and scurrilous psychological document ever penned'⁹⁹. The question remains – would the document be ludicrous because of its ludicrous subject, or because no document could deal with Rothenstein without seeming in some way ludicrous? I am inclined – in the midst of such a diverting history – to go with the latter. Instability in Rothenstein's character can be seen at many junctures as the failure of our critical structures to accommodate such a personality, rather than a series of purely personal flaws. This, in a wider context, is a reoccurring problem in the analysis of late nineteenth and early twentieth century British Art, where narrow critical frameworks have a tendency of obscuring the reality of a rich and complex art world.

In light of this comment, one wonders that John was unhappy with Rothenstein's association with Vautrin; surely there was enough of 'ludicrous, abject and scurrilous' in Balzac's work of fiction (or, better still, in Rothenstein's identification with it) to suit the job? The tone of John's autobiography is, however, altogether kinder to Rothenstein; a spirit of forgiveness having overtaken the wide range of feelings once excited by his late friend. Indeed, when he later experiments with a little role-playing of his own, John allows Rothenstein to assume a Christ-like character, with John as the once 'beloved disciple' who in an act of tragic treachery dropped his teacher's torch.¹⁰⁰

The identification with Vautrin, nevertheless, remains the more powerful image

⁹⁸ Speaight (1962) 42.

⁹⁹ John (1975) 315; Holroyd (1996a) 171.

¹⁰⁰ John (1975) 317.

(fittingly perhaps, for when Lucien first met Vautrin he was disguised as a Spanish priest) and I believe it had more meaning for Rothenstein than John may have guessed.¹⁰¹ This is not to say that it isn't also a knowingly witty identification, for undoubtedly it is. With all the talk of his 'severity' and overwhelming 'goodness' – and the sometimes dour nature of his memoirs – it is sometimes easy to lose sight of the fact that Rothenstein is documented as being entertaining and energetic company, well capable of holding his own amongst more famously witty characters such as Wilde, Whistler and Beerbohm.¹⁰² Charles Holmes notes that the early Rothenstein had about him 'something of the lively, irresponsible schoolboy'; a 'light-hearted' personality which only occasionally (but increasingly as he got older) gave way to his 'self-critical spirit'.¹⁰³

Like many of this generation, Rothenstein does seem at times to be remarkably self-aware. Indeed, this very identification springs from his self-awareness: it is a light-hearted joke against himself, concealing not so much a latent personality trait as the fear of a position into which he could easily slip, were he not to take care of those aspects of his personality which led him, on occasion, into tricky situations. Vautrin was for Rothenstein a warning: a model of how *not* to exercise influence. There may also be traces of psychological paranoia. Rothenstein was very aware of John's physical beauty compared with his own (relative) ugliness; reflected, as Mary Lago has explored, in the relationship between him and his wife – and intensified, no doubt, by an awareness of his foreign identity.¹⁰⁴ The first part of Balzac's description of Vautrin – 'stout and short, with broad hands' – does, in fact, come peculiarly close to describing Beerbohm's

¹⁰¹ Rothenstein had recently travelled through Spain and was a keen advocate of Spanish art. For ecclesiastical references see fn.114.

¹⁰² References to Rothenstein in Charles Ricketts's diaries invariably note his good humour: 'Rothenstein + his wife to dinner, full of amusing + malicious gossip about Sargent etc'; 'Holmes to dinner in the evening. Rothenstein turned up and amused me vastly!': *The Diaries of Charles Ricketts*, 6th March 1902; 24th October 1902, BL 58100. Rothenstein describes jesting with Whistler in his memoirs: *W Rothenstein* (1937b) 84.

¹⁰³ Holmes (1936) 170. We don't need to look far for other examples of Rothenstein's reputation as a '90s wit: 'In spite of a certain sedateness which, I understand, the growing years, his professorship and his knighthood have conferred upon him, Will Rothenstein is in essence the same winning personality, the same delightful *raconteur* that he was when I listened to his discourse in those far-away Nineties': May (1936) 61.

¹⁰⁴ Lago (1978) 27: 'Certainly Alice herself was a pleasure to behold, but William plainly felt that her beauty heightened the contrast between them. Deprecation of this appearance is a recurring motif in his letters, to her and to others'.

caricatures of Rothenstein [see for instance fig.8] just as the latter's written description of John – 'never, I thought, had I seen so faun-like a figure as when John ran naked along the beach' – spills into near homoerotic hyperbole.¹⁰⁵ It is hard to say how seriously he took this perceived shortcoming: at the very least it may have stopped him from ever casting himself, however playfully, in the role of the romantic lead; as Rastignac or Lucien.

There were other models beyond Vautrin; less extreme, perhaps (though in the case of Beerbohm's caricatures, this may be questioned) but equally important. When Rothenstein met John in 1898 he was by no means a novice in the art of building artistic relationships. He had seen and experienced a lot in the ten years since he had emerged from the Slade and had already started to give free rein to that side of his personality for which he was soon to be well known. He must have felt that he was a long way, as the Balzacian reference may have intended to reveal, from the naivety of the young Lucien de Rubempré or Rastignac in the early days of their Parisian adventures. He had, surely, lost some illusions of his own.¹⁰⁶ By his own admission, Paris had given him 'a new dynamic sense of the fullness of life'.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, he could not be said to have emerged from the experience as the warped, cynical beast that is Vautrin (or, to a lesser extent, Emile Lousteau). He eluded such types (if types they are – Balzacian scholars will continue to fight this one out), fitting into no easy fictional niche. This is hardly exceptional: people are rarely the types we think them to be. Rothenstein, nevertheless, is an intriguing example of someone who can be seen playing with – not in the sense of toying with, but working through – many roles, each of which shifted constantly under his inward gaze. His awareness of the historical process, in which the majority of humans are forced to fit a particular mould, and his deliberate evasion of the obvious roles, can seem simultaneously valiant and foolish. In either case, it is illuminating.

Some of Rothenstein's unofficial reflections of his Paris days were recorded by

¹⁰⁵ Balzac (1971) 651. Unlike Vautrin, Rothenstein did not possess 'herculean strength', though his later squabble with Conder would suggest that, when riled, he was capable of punching above his weight. W Rothenstein (1937b) 347.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Speaight describes Rothenstein in 1889 as setting out 'like Lucien de Rubempré, to conquer the fabulous city' but goes straight on, as does Rothenstein, to puncture any lingering romanticism with a comic anecdote: Speaight (1962) 23; W Rothenstein (1937b) 36.

¹⁰⁷ W Rothenstein (1937b) 49.

Michael Field.¹⁰⁸ If they thrill, it is not because they fulfil a universal concept of a young man recalling his heady student days, but because they subvert them brilliantly:

Billy assures us with the seriousness of a voice from the hold of a vessel where it is believed there is no survivor, that he never lived the life he was credited with. ...as he himself put it, in an epigram on Arthur Symons: "He got up every morning with bad intentions and broke them every night." Hundreds of young men are in this state, enchanted by the vicious estimate and yet deep in the ultimate recesses of their wills, guarding a good they are ashamed of and love inveterately, as is proved by the fact that they cannot sin deeply, though they are near all the bravery of Satan. Billy was tragic and amusing on this phase of a man's life.¹⁰⁹

Having a hold on the nuances of life may not always be the best aid when it comes to living it, which might explain Rothenstein's tendency to wobble in the face of big decisions. Undoubtedly he had the experience, the social skills and the personality to make waves in the British art world at the turn of the century. Mary Lago suggests also that he had an 'instinct for the most effective way of setting careers in motion'.¹¹⁰ This may be going too far. I would argue that though he certainly had the instinct to *want* to do this, he couldn't always be sure of 'most effective way'. In a rapidly shifting art world, handicapped by a desire to remain true to personal ideals, Rothenstein could hardly rely on instinct when it came to helping those around him. It was far too delicate a task for that. The art of being an influential force, even when driven by a deep sense of natural generosity, needed to be practised with care. A failure to manage these instincts with tact could lead one into entirely the wrong sort of role and – since a position of influence is a position of strength – could potentially affect the very form and structure of the British art world. The way that Rothenstein wielded his influence is, thus, more than an interesting psychological question: it has implications far beyond his person.

¹⁰⁸ 'Michael Field' was the pseudonym of the poets and journal writers Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley.

¹⁰⁹ Moore (1933) 283. Another 'tragic and amusing' example of a writer puncturing the facade of 1890s bohemianism (aside from Beerbohm's *Enoch Soames*) is Osbert Sitwell's first short story, *The Machine Breaks Down*, a fictional rendering of real life encounter with a well known conversationalist, whose spontaneous witticisms turn out to be exceedingly well rehearsed: Sitwell (1974).

¹¹⁰ Lago (1978) 17.

In the remainder of this chapter – which has already dealt, in various ways, with important aspects of Rothenstein’s personality (and how it has been perceived) – I intend to narrow in on the issue of Rothenstein’s instinct to influence, focussing mostly on the years 1890-1899, with a view to establishing Rothenstein’s position on this issue at the time of the Vattetot holiday.

I will do this by concentrating on Rothenstein’s relationship with three artists during the 1890s: Charles Ricketts, Max Beerbohm and Charles Conder.¹¹¹ There is, of course, always a danger when dealing with a two-way friendship that one will exaggerate the differences to strengthen the comparison, conveniently losing sight of the essential subtleties. The relationships between Rothenstein and Beerbohm (and to an extent, between Rothenstein and Conder) bring this danger to light, as the friends play off each other, sometimes assuming overstated roles (like Orpen in his portraits) either to undercut the ultimate sufficiency of such roles, or to sidestep the complexities of their actual personalities. My awareness of these dangers cannot absolve me from any such accusations; I can only hope that the following analysis will not resort to the kind of simplistic characterisation with which the early parts of this chapter have been wrestling.

Showered with Vautrin’s promises, Lucien de Rubempré sensibly ponders ‘the motives of this conductor of royal intrigues’.¹¹² Though I am not overly interested in uncovering the precise psychological explanations for Rothenstein’s basic (and blatant) desire to exert influence, a few points might be made. Unlike many artists, Rothenstein had a relatively trouble-free upbringing and, though his family were not especially religious, he retained a strong sense of moral duty throughout his career.¹¹³ In some senses, William was as religious as you could get without subscribing to any particular religion; an

¹¹¹ I have chosen these three on the understanding that they provide the best examples both in themselves and in relation to each other.

¹¹² Balzac (1971) 652.

¹¹³ Rothenstein’s relationship to his Jewishness will be explored in the third chapter.

attribute which irked Eric Gill.¹¹⁴ As Robert Speaight has written: ‘not far below the surface of the *boulevardier*, and the man who dressed for dinner, was the boy from Bradford; and deep down below the boy from Bradford were the Law and the Prophets and the Ten Commandments’.¹¹⁵ Though a mixture of mere curiosity and a desire to take up a new artistic challenge may have been the main motives for the series of Jewish paintings he started in 1903, they surely confirmed the suspicions of those who thought him a little holier-than-thou. There was, as Mary Lago has put it, a ‘prophetic fervour’ in his beliefs and practises; a sense of austere conviction that confuses many of those quick to associate him with the perceived frivolity of the 1890s.¹¹⁶

Still, in his early years at least, Rothenstein clearly had a knack for combining the seemingly incompatible attitudes of piousness and playfulness. Though he confessed to being ‘sensible at bottom’ he later wrote (referring in particular to his Paris days) that ‘half my friends disapproved of me because I sat with wine bibbers, and the other half because I did not drink’.¹¹⁷ Every party needs a designated driver and, of course, ‘sitting with wine bibbers’ could be an attractive stance for someone who was, as Michael Holroyd has suggested, ‘enraptured with the father-figure’.¹¹⁸ It was, after all, in such company that you found those artists most in need of a father figure (though probably unwilling to admit it). Without losing sight of the fact that keeping such company may have also been, on a basic level, a pleasurable experience, there was a definite role for him here – albeit a role that needed to be played with subtlety. Rothenstein, however, was not always subtle. Whatever elements of his past contributed to this aspect of his personality, there was a peculiar force behind it, which cannot always be explained – and is, I think, best dealt with as a fact. His son John highlighted the importance of his father’s upbringing – ‘I have never known anyone whose own childhood so manifestly and so decisively shaped his character’ – and his brothers shared enough of his traits to

¹¹⁴ Whistler employed a range of ecclesiastical nicknames for Rothenstein, referring to him variously as ‘parson’, ‘reverend’ and ‘vicar’. The original identification came from his resemblance to Phil May’s illustrations in the serial ‘The Parson and the Painter’: Lago, (1978) 46; Speaight (1962) 40, 62, 57. On Gill, see fn.524

¹¹⁵ Speaight (1962) 77.

¹¹⁶ Lago (1978) 23.

¹¹⁷ W Rothenstein (1937b) 74.

¹¹⁸ Holroyd (1996a) 174.

confirm the family links.¹¹⁹ And yet William, with his ‘tireless ebullience’, his ‘unflagging vitality’ and dynamic energy, was always on another level.¹²⁰

How to mould these natural, forceful instincts into an appropriate form? With a personality like this it was easy to make friends, but harder to keep them, as Rothenstein was to be reminded throughout his career. Whatever form it took, influence was a dangerous tool to wield – and if he wasn’t well aware of this, friends like Max Beerbohm were there to remind him. Though fond of lampooning him, as we shall see, Beerbohm nevertheless remained aware of the positives in Rothenstein’s exertions. If it was safer to remain indifferent (Max’s trademark) there were yet moments in which Beerbohm regretted his lack of flair in this department. In the mid-twenties he mused: ‘I do wish I had the Rothenstein faculty of deterring people from culs-de-sac and setting them on the broad and shining highway. I can only offer light hints...and my hints are never taken’.¹²¹ At Rothenstein’s Memorial Service in 1945, Beerbohm recalled his friend’s convenient adage that ‘strenuous’ men fell into two categories: ‘givers’ and ‘takers’, losing no time in pointing out that Rothenstein was ‘assuredly a giver, a giver with both hands, in the grand manner’.¹²² This was praise indeed – and meant as such. And yet, in an earlier essay on a much similar theme (‘Hosts and Guests’ from 1918), Beerbohm had written of how the ‘hospitable instinct’ invited suspicion. ‘It is not wholly altruistic,’ he notes: ‘There is pride and egoism mixed up with it’.¹²³ ‘Hospitality,’ he goes on, ‘is not one of the most deep-rooted instincts in man, whereas the sense of possession certainly is’.¹²⁴ To make a virtue of being hospitable, much care had to be taken. It was, and is, a balancing act: ‘far to the left of the good host stands he who doesn’t want to see anything of anyone; far to the right, he who wants a horde of people to be always seeing something of *him*’.¹²⁵

Safe it wasn’t, tempting it certainly was. Near the beginning of Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Lord Henry offers a somewhat negative interpretation of

¹¹⁹ J Rothenstein (1952) 100. Considered as a whole, the influence of the three Rothenstein brothers across this period of British art history is both highly impressive and, I think, unique.

¹²⁰ John (1975) 316; Beckson and Lago (1975) 93.

¹²¹ Cecil (1964) 370.

¹²² Beckson and Lago (1975) 175.

¹²³ Beerbohm (1920) 131.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 142.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 143.

the instinct to influence. ‘All influence is immoral,’ he states: ‘To influence a person is to give him one’s own soul.’¹²⁶ Later on, however, we find the same character dwelling on the same subject with much less caution:

There was something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence. No other activity was like it. To project one’s soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment; to hear one’s own intellectual views echoed back to one with all the added music of passion and youth; to convey one’s temperament into another as though it were a subtle fluid or perfume; there was real joy in that...¹²⁷

This argument, with the suggestion of an older man trying to control or spiritually seduce a younger man was probably written with Vautrin and Lucien in mind, or with the attempts of Huysman’s des Esseintes to corrupt Auguste Langlois in *A Rebours*.¹²⁸ The passage finds a fainter but nevertheless significant echo in a passage from Rothenstein’s memoirs. Here, in one of the few obviously critical passages of a book usually described as lacking ‘venom’, he describes the personality of his friend Charles Ricketts:¹²⁹

Ricketts had a passion for influencing others. There is no word to describe this fatal desire, this *Einflusslust*. I believe all consciously exerted influence to be a bad thing. Certain people, certain books and pictures, fertilise a man’s spirit; but this can only be at a given moment, when the mind is *à point*, prepared to receive the seed. At such a time, when we are putting out feelers in certain directions, the conviction we need may come from others. Such influence is natural and healthy; but that which is forced on us cannot be properly assimilated. Twice-cooked food is notoriously indigestible; equally so are twice-chewed ideas. Indeed, good examples imitated may be as fruitless as bad ones. The tendency to study works of art too enthusiastically, to reflect the appearance of mastery rather than enter, like the spirit of the Chinese artist in the legend, the heart of nature herself, is perhaps a weakness of English painters. I felt that Conder, in his own dreamy way, did respond to the visual harmonies and the pulsating vitality of nature; while Ricketts and Shannon depended over much on

¹²⁶ Wilde (1994) 24-5. Rothenstein showed his bohemian credentials by dismissing Wilde’s novel as too derivative of Huysmans: W Rothenstein (1937b) 124.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ellman (1977) 4-6; Huysmans (1959); Richard Ellman compares the relationship between Wotton and Gray to that of Wilde and Andre Gide: Ellman (1987) 334.

¹²⁹ Speaight (1962) 353-4. Rothenstein reappraises Ricketts in his third volume of memoirs, where he repeats many of his earlier observations, looking upon them much more kindly: W Rothenstein (1939)160-164.

conscious artistry. Art does not generate art. Lilies and columbines and golden grain grow from the rough earth; indeed, so do weeds; but who fears to sow through charlock springs up in the sprouting corn? Nor may an artist neglect to keep the soil clean – the soil from which his seed draws its life, lest the weeds of mannerism spring up. These weeds, too, wear brave colours – scarlet, yellow and blue, and the critic will often prefer the weed to the priceless ear'.¹³⁰

It is not hard to feel the spirit of Lord Henry or Vautrin lurking in some of these sentences, as if the writer has the former's 'subtle fluids' directly in mind when he considers the delicate process of 'fertilising the spirit'.¹³¹ Negative or forced influence is clearly seen as a corruptive, poisonous force and, unlike Wilde's hero, Rothenstein is far too 'sensible' (or firmly heterosexual) to see the attraction.¹³² Instead, he sets himself against Vautrin's philosophy, as communicated to Rastignac in *Pere Goriot*: 'You must either rend a way for yourself through the crowd like a cannon-ball, or you must creep through it silently like a pestilence. Honestly and uprightness won't help'.¹³³ Rothenstein aims for the impossible: to be the honest cannonball – a healthy infection. He returns to this healthy/unhealthy distinction in his third volume of memoirs, when he writes of Roger Fry's 'infectious enthusiasm', a comment that flickers on the edge of a compliment and a warning – to be confirmed as the latter by the words that follow, which accuse Fry (whose influence was considered, by this time, to have been much more dangerous than that of Ricketts) of being 'disingenuous' and 'too closely aligned with a group of artists whose work he was eager to advance'.¹³⁴ Positive or 'healthy' influence involves tact and timing: a sensitivity to conditions and circumstances. It's a relationship between consenting adults, conceived in an orderly fashion. And there is a real sense here that the author – whose tone, at times, is that of the preacher (albeit a

¹³⁰ W Rothenstein (1937b) 174-5.

¹³¹ Beerbohm picks up on the language of fertilising, writing to Rothenstein in 1913: 'your belief in me has always been a great incentive to me to believe in myself; and your creative, suggestive, fertilising mind has enormously helped me from time to time': Speaight (1962) 56.

¹³² It could be suggested that this passage reveals a slight fear of homosexuality – or (more likely) a fear of wanting to seem too closely aligned with homosexually-tainted texts (and/or texts associated specifically with the 1890s). Having said this, Rothenstein seems to have been happy to move in social circles in which homosexuality was an obvious issue, remaining friends with Wilde beyond his trial – and with Robert Ross also. Ricketts' homosexuality and its relation to his perceived *Einflusslust* is more problematic; in so far as his sexuality was accepted (if tactfully ignored) by his close friends, Ricketts didn't fit the predatory stereotype: see Corbett (2007)

¹³³ Balzac (1899) 134.

¹³⁴ W Rothenstein (1939) 73-4, 160.

widely-read one, with a fair knowledge of Chinese legends) feels very sure of these facts, couched as they are in faintly archaic terms, not easily transferable to the reality of experience.

This leads us to the main problem with this passage. It is, excepting the comparison between the art of Conder and Ricketts and Shannon, frustratingly free of tangible examples – both in the context of Ricketts’s career and in reference to the writer’s own experience. Who exactly suffered from Ricketts’s ‘consciously exerted influence’ – and what were the consequences? By what means did the author come to his conclusions regarding influence of the ‘natural and healthy’ sort? If we need proof that Rothenstein could have easily accused himself of the very same attributes, we need only consider the following comments by his son:

[Rothenstein] was a man of preternatural dynamism who had been intimate with many of the masters active in his time... So much experience, such passionate and continuous didacticism, combined to make it difficult for me to enjoy the visual arts, for it left me with so little scope for personal enjoyment... I felt myself in a maze that Kafka might have described from which there was no exit to any personal experience and so to any personal conclusion.¹³⁵

In this case, it seems that John’s mind was neither ‘prepared to receive the seed’, nor had his father (handicapped, in this case, by the complex psychology of familial ties) come to an adequate understanding of a situation in which his subject’s mind was clearly not ‘à point’. This is not to say that Rothenstein’s efforts to manage his instinct to influence must have been in vain; but that, however sensitive he was to the needs of the situation, and however many successes he had, an issue such as this was to remain a pertinent one throughout his career.

Of course, this passage from *Men and Memories* really deals with two forms of influence: the influence that Ricketts wielded on his contemporaries and the influence that Ricketts and Shannon took from other artists (mostly the Old Masters) which was, in turn, wielded on their contemporaries. Rothenstein clearly has strong views on both – and it is interesting that Conder should appear in the midst of this argument, since he

¹³⁵ J Rothenstein (1965) 90.

was an artist with whom Rothenstein was in the perfect position to exert influence during this period. Otherwise the passage could be said to serve, like the reference to Vautrin, as another warning to himself: these are issues, it would seem, that the writer has fought with – and here are his conclusions.

The main subject of the discussion from now on will be the first of these two issues; the process of exerting influence rather than the specific content of the influence exerted; beginning with an examination of how Ricketts may have managed his own instinct to influence – as strong in him, it seems, as it was in Rothenstein.

There is no need to talk when Ricketts & Rothenstein are on the go. You could not find such wonderful talkers in London I think' [Laurence Binyon].¹³⁶

Rothenstein was introduced to Ricketts and Shannon by Oscar Wilde in 1893, just as he was settling back into the London art world after his four years in Paris. Until 1898, when he shifted over to Kensington – and later, more boldly, to Hampstead – Chelsea was Rothenstein's London base. It was a natural transition after Paris. Wilde and Whistler were already there, along with the largely francophile stalwarts of the N.E.A.C: Philip Wilson Steer, Henry Tonks, and the critic D.S.MacColl. Sickert was also, at this time, a Chelsea resident – and appeared, along with Steer, Beerbohm, MacColl and Charles Furse in Rothenstein's group portrait of 1894 [see fig.15].¹³⁷

Despite Turner's presence there in the last years of his life, Chelsea's artistic reputation only began to grow in earnest after Rossetti's arrival in 1862, boosted beyond this by the increasing fame of Whistler and steady influx of young artists in the '70s and '80s. All but one of the artists in John Rothenstein's study of art in the 1890s were based in Chelsea – and by the turn of the century the Chelsea Arts Club (founded in

¹³⁶ Hatcher (1995) 55.

¹³⁷ Of Chelsea in the 1890s Rothenstein wrote: 'The men who counted most for me lived there': W Rothenstein (1937b) 167.

1891) was attracting over a hundred members.¹³⁸

There was, in short, much to attract Rothenstein, from Sickert's amazingly dreary rooms and deliberately 'forbidding' workplace, to the perennially over-coated Wilson Steer, with his 'constant dread of colds'.¹³⁹ On top of all this, there was The Vale – the 'symbol' of 'that gracious period' – amidst which wild gardens lived Ricketts and Shannon: 'apart from all the world'.¹⁴⁰ Though he was already well acquainted with a huge range of artists – and many other figures beside – he noted something new here. Ricketts especially impressed him. Just as his own experience had bowled over the young Beerbohm, Rothenstein was thrilled in turn by Ricketts. 'He was fascinating talker,' he recalled, who 'had been nowhere except to the Louvre, yet he seemed to know everything, to have been everywhere'.¹⁴¹ The difference between this and Beerbohm's description is that Ricketts's aura comes mostly from knowing *things*; Rothenstein's from knowing people. Indeed, Ricketts never came close to being the social 'meteorite' that Rothenstein was.¹⁴² He was outgoing within a constricted circle – centred, on the whole, around the comfort of his own home – whereas Rothenstein operated within much wider social groupings. Though in time he too would direct young artists towards the art of Old Masters such as Rembrandt and Goya, Rothenstein seems to have been much more cautious about giving artistic advice, preferring (where possible) to set up artistic opportunities. At the heart of his aesthetic philosophy was Nature; taking directions from the Old Masters was fine, but refusing to see beyond them – as we will see later – was rather more dangerous.

If there was a quality in Ricketts's personality which drew people in (and certainly there was) it could just as easily drive them away. Ricketts was well aware of this: 'Mostly I wither up' he admitted, extending Rothenstein's biological and biblical metaphors: 'People can't stand it'.¹⁴³ J G P Delaney summed up the situation as follows: 'Too much desire for influence can bedevil a friendship; too much help from a powerful

¹³⁸ The *Westminster Gazette* suggested in 1901 that there were over 2,000 artists in Chelsea: T Cross (1992) 21.

¹³⁹ W Rothenstein (1937b) 167.

¹⁴⁰ Speaight (1962) 408; William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, January 3rd 1891, HGTN.

¹⁴¹ W Rothenstein (1937b) 173.

¹⁴² Beerbohm (1966) 4.

¹⁴³ Delaney (1990) 67.

personality like Ricketts's can be stifling and even destructive. Both Shannon and Sturge Moore suffered from this, and other – less loyal, or flexible – friends felt that they had to break with Ricketts in order to follow their own road.¹⁴⁴ Sturge Moore himself provided a more imaginative description: 'Like a motor-launch hampered in a crowd of tubs, [Ricketts] was always producing collisions and soreness; but his extreme generosity forgot both that you had crossed him and that he had hurt your pride'.¹⁴⁵ An even more positive assessment of Ricketts's influence came from Charles Holmes: 'Before I knew him my judgments had been rough and ready, as well as strongly biased by commonplace handbooks. His refinement of eye and taste, his complete independence, did much to correct my native crudities, compelling much closer attention to small things, a weighing of spiritual and technical qualities in a nicer balance than any I had previously used'.¹⁴⁶ To feed this through Rothenstein's passage, we could say that Ricketts seems to have seized the 'given moment' with Holmes, arriving on the scene at the time when the younger artist's mind *was* 'prepared to receive the seed' (this is certainly how Holmes sets up the meeting in his own memoirs). Whether or not Ricketts was aware of the delicate task he was undergoing is not known; most likely he struck lucky, finding in Holmes a personality suited to receiving the influence of a more experienced man. To have the support – 'encouragement' is the word Holmes uses, significantly – of an older artist was, in this period, of great help to many of the younger generation; perhaps even an essential part of their artistic growth.¹⁴⁷ For many people, however, the process wasn't so smooth – nor were they as willing as Holmes to record it.

People like to be helped, but don't always like other people to know how much help they have received. One of the secrets of the successful artist has always been to arrive on the art scene 'fully formed'; patriarchal figures, however necessary, need to be shaken off as soon as possible. Concealing your influences could be an art form of its

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. Elsewhere Delaney writes 'Ricketts was always prepared to accept disciples, but [Gordon] Bottomley's devotion both touched and puzzled him. After one of their early meetings Ricketts asked Shannon why Bottomley had such a high regard for him. "He does not see you often", Shannon replied': Delaney (1990) 193.

¹⁴⁵ Lewis (1939) 15.

¹⁴⁶ Holmes (1936) 178.

¹⁴⁷ Holmes (1936) 142.

own; an approach perfected by figures such as Beardsley and, later, Lewis.¹⁴⁸ Eric Gill concluded with typical candour that offending patrons and influences was an unavoidable part of being involved in the art world: ‘You’re sure to cause misunderstanding somewhere and some people have absolute genius for being offended.... I don’t see why I should go so goofy with gratitude as to be blind to the rottenness of the whole business’.¹⁴⁹ Few artists wanted to *be* disciples and if you wanted to have them, the trick was not to look as though you did. Tracing the various streams of influence in the art world is, then, an especially difficult task – not least because influence takes many forms; some less dangerous than others. Exerting influence, as Rothenstein explained, was a highly delicate procedure. Barnett Freedman wrote after the death of William’s younger brother Albert that he was a man who ‘did good by stealth’.¹⁵⁰ This was, perhaps, the only way to get away with it. Acting like a ‘motor launch’ was always liable to land you in trouble. The down side was that the subtler, more ‘natural’ forms of influence, rarely received their due, as Frances Cornford explained to William in 1917:

I have seen a lot of people un-grateful to you. And I see why it is, because you just by your encouragement and wisdom have shoved them into the way in which they ought to be going, and once in that way it seemed so natural, they thought they had got into it themselves.¹⁵¹

It was a bind. Exerting a form of ‘natural’ influence was the goal; but success in that field was rarely noticed, let alone praised. The lack of recognition was, in turn, hurtful – though it may have served as proof that the person in the position of influence had not been tempted into ‘this fatal desire, this *Einflusslust*’.

If Charles Ricketts had a habit of taking it too far, he just as often succeeded, as some of these recollections prove. Certainly there was more to him than a domineering egoist; he could be sympathetic in his thinking, catholic in his tastes and, aside from the kind of

¹⁴⁸ Delaney 84 (1990); Corbett (1997b).

¹⁴⁹ Gill (1944) 273-275.

¹⁵⁰ Rutherston (1988) 15.

¹⁵¹ Speaight (1962) 200.

direct artistic advice (or instruction) most likely to irk his contemporaries, he appears to have done well to have channelled his energy and influence into more amenable forms. As influential hosts at their house in the Vale – and later in Beaufort Street and at their house in Richmond – Ricketts and Shannon created an environment in which a large range of artists and writers could meet, with regulars including Thomas Sturge Moore, John Gray, Reginald Savage, Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, Max Beerbohm, Charles Conder, Charles Holmes, Roger Fry, Walter Sickert, Lucien Pissarro, Laurence Housman, Laurence Binyon and William Rothenstein. The recollections of artists and writers prove that such gatherings – also found at the Hacon's in Chelsea, Mackmurdo's in Fitzroy Street, Edmund Gosse's in Delamere Terrace, The Pennell's at Buckingham Street, The Vienna Café, The Café Royal, The Chelsea Art Club, Roches and The British Museum Print Room (to name but a few) – were an integral part of the art world at this time, providing forums for the free exchange of ideas amongst a range of artists. It is very hard for historians to know exactly how each of these spaces operated; clearly the degree of formality and intimacy differed, as did the balance between social discourse and business-related matter. Likewise, there were inner and outer circles of artists; regulars and occasional visitors, whose movements are not easy to trace. Rothenstein, for instance, seems to have been mentioned in reference to so many of these places that we must doubt his ability to have taken a central position in all of them: it would not be practically possible.

Though later art/social centres (The Friday Club, for instance) featured female artists, this was, essentially, a man's (if not a bachelor's) world – and a demanding one at that. Oscar Wilde held The Vale in high esteem as a place where one would not be bored. Animated banter, or 'verbal combat' over a wide field of topics was expected, with every member contributing to what Holmes (whose initial efforts were scorned by Wilde) called the 'flood of lively comment on art and letters'.¹⁵² Being able to express an opinion was, perhaps, more important than agreeing with fellow guests: the best conversation, after all, is driven by slight differences of opinion – which is why it is best

¹⁵² Holmes (1936) 168, 41.

to think of many of these collections of people as ‘groupings’ rather than ‘groups’.¹⁵³ A base of shared sympathies kept them together, but small differences stopped them from becoming dangerously – one might say ‘unhealthily’ – close. The word so often used, perhaps unfairly, in reference to Roger Fry – ‘doctrinaire’ – was feared enough to demand a certain looseness, which could be seen as an inability to seize the initiative, or else a brave stance against the compromises and illiberality of the modernist movement.¹⁵⁴ The former view may be blamed for much of the misunderstanding surrounding figures such as Ricketts, Binyon and, I believe, Rothenstein.¹⁵⁵

Artists interacted not only amongst themselves at The Vale, but also with the objects around them. Ricketts and Shannon were keen art collectors. Their house was, as Rothenstein noted, full of treasures, from Hokusai prints to Whistler fans and, later, a much-prized drawing by Puvis de Chavannes.¹⁵⁶ In Rothenstein’s famous lithograph from 1897 (included in *English Portraits*, published in 1898: see fig. 6) the friends are caught in a truly connoisseurial pose, with Ricketts the more active of the two, casting his critical eye (and hands) over a small unidentified art object, whilst Shannon looks knowingly on. The catholicity of Ricketts’s interests – and his whole-hearted engagement with artistic issues – must have impressed the young Rothenstein, even if the style of his criticism was, at times, a little too dogmatic. Rothenstein’s experiences at The Vale certainly informed the regular ‘at homes’ which he and his wife were to hold in Hampstead after 1900, where Augustus John first met figures such as W B Yeats and Rabindranath Tagore.

On top of this, Ricketts was deeply involved in various enterprises which, far from simply boosting his own interests or artistic philosophies, offered great practical

¹⁵³ Elizabeth Pennell, discussing her and her husband’s Thursday evening ‘at homes’ in Buckingham Street, writes of their rooms ‘echoing with the agreeable roar of battle’: Pennell (1916).

¹⁵⁴ Think of Pound’s response to Laurence Binyon in *BLAST*, who, though ‘far from being one of the outer world,’ is yet accused of a ‘disgusting attitude of respect toward predecessors’: Lewis (1915) 86. Of Ricketts, Rothenstein once wrote: ‘he was no doctrinaire; his ringing laugh and quick sympathy with character and talent, his attentive charm as a host allowed of no pedantry, in himself or others’: W Rothenstein (1939) 160.

¹⁵⁵ This has been argued, in relation to Ricketts, in Corbett (2006) 338-348 and Corbett (2004) 255-7. Ricketts, ironically, associated the anti-doctrinaire way of thinking with the French, admiring the artist Jacques Émile Blanche for his ability to ‘agree or disagree without a hopeless sense of things being wrong’: Delaney (1990) 57-8.

¹⁵⁶ W Rothenstein (1937b) 167.

help to many young artists. Two annuals, *The Dial* and *The Pageant*, were valuable additions to the array of magazines that emerged during the 1890s, with *The Pageant* including work by Conder, Beerbohm and Rothenstein, whose valuable Parisian connections were utilised – not for the first time – in order to secure an article by Verlaine.¹⁵⁷

Ricketts also attempted in this period to help artists reach a public through the foundation of an exhibiting society which, unlike the N.E.A.C, would dispense with a jury of selection and allow a highly heterogeneous group of artists to exhibit together – and to be allowed take an active part in the arrangement of their own work. Unfortunately, despite the approval of Camille Pissarro, ‘The Panel Society’ never got off the ground, though it set a precedent for later artist-led initiatives, including The Society of Twelve, in which both Ricketts and Rothenstein were involved.¹⁵⁸ Taken out of his personal kingdom and seen in larger groups of artists (many of them with equally strong personalities) Ricketts does seem to have been a little more defensive than usual, if not sceptical. In a diary description of one Society of Twelve meeting, for instance, he notes how he ‘held myself in carefully throughout the evening’.¹⁵⁹ He may have been, as his biographer points out, very much ‘a committee man’ at this stage of his life; he no doubt found it difficult to turn down the opportunity of changing things for the better.¹⁶⁰ Once on a committee, however, Ricketts does not seem to have figured as largely as we might imagine. Artistic politics clearly frustrated him and, unlike Rothenstein, he appears to have lacked the energy or willpower to battle his way through them.

Rothenstein may not have been as close to Ricketts as Sturge Moore or Holmes; nevertheless he was influential in helping to set up what was to be Ricketts’s most successful venture: The Vale Press. It is in situations such as these that we see Rothenstein using his talent (or address-book) in the least dramatic but most effective

¹⁵⁷ Rothenstein also encouraged Robert Bridges to contribute: W Rothenstein (1937b) 226.

¹⁵⁸ Delaney (1990) 65-66, 193. Pissarro (whose son Lucien was a Vale regular and friend of Rothenstein’s) hoped to get Mary Cassatt involved in The Panel Society. After her lack of success exhibiting at Dowdeswells she was, however, downbeat about the London art market, despite the elder Pissarro’s assurances that Panel Society had the benefit of being organised by ‘the artistic milieu which is to London what the impressionists were [to Paris] in their time’: Rewald (1943) 170, 178.

¹⁵⁹ The Diaries of Charles Ricketts, October 18th 1905: BL 58103.

¹⁶⁰ Delaney (1990) 192.

of ways; by acting as a go-between or match-maker between two parties: an arguably safe and non-obstructive form of exerting influence.

As it is, Rothenstein was responsible for two of the most important contacts in Ricketts's life during this period. One was to have arranged a meeting between Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley (i.e. 'Michael Field') and Ricketts (they were to become firm friends); the other was to convince a new patron of his – the barrister William Llewellyn Hacon (to whom he had already introduced the woman he was to later marry) to put money offered as a salary to the young painter into Ricketts's printing press instead. The latter, selfless proposal was instrumental; without the £1000 put forward by Hacon, it is doubtful whether Ricketts and Shannon would have been able to get their enterprise off the ground.¹⁶¹

As it was The Vale Press enjoyed relatively positive financial security and popular success from 1895 until its closure in 1903. Not only did it produce a range of beautifully designed books during this period but its Warwick Street shop in central London (known as 'At the Sign of the Dial') served as yet another significant meeting-place for artists, as well as small exhibiting space for artists such as Lucien Pissarro, Sturge Moore, Legros and Rothenstein.¹⁶² Rothenstein later credited it as a major inspiration for the Carfax Gallery (a relationship that will be explored in the next chapter). He also praised it in an anonymous review for *The Saturday Review*, in which he argued that Ricketts 'is too great a scholar, too fine a craftsman, to appeal to any considerable audience', going on to compare him, favourably, to William Morris, and praising his 'catholicity of taste as a designer and a book-maker'.¹⁶³

Ricketts's influence took further forms over the years to come, from his study of The Prado, the organisation of the 1911 'Century of Art' exhibition and the constant

¹⁶¹ Had Ricketts had not been supported by Charles Holmes his ambition and enthusiasm might also have been wasted. Despite entrepreneurial enthusiasm, Ricketts was not equipped with the shrewdest business mind.

¹⁶² For a detailed account of The Vale Press and Ricketts as a book designer see Watry (2004).

¹⁶³ 'We would not for one moment undervalue the noble and accomplished work of Mr. William Morris, one of the greatest Englishmen of the century; but we are at the same time sensible of the greater modernity of Mr. Ricketts': 'The Vale Press', *The Saturday Review*, 4th July 1896, vol 82, p.17-18. The review is not signed, but Rothenstein claims authorship in contemporary letters. One to his father, dated 21st July 1896, directly mentions 'my review of Ricketts's books in *The Saturday Review*': William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein 21st July 1896, HGTVN.

championing of artists such as Puvis de Chavannes and Moreau.¹⁶⁴ No doubt Rothenstein kept a close eye on all these developments. Ricketts was clearly an influence on him, not least because he offered a model of a naturally influential person, with traits Rothenstein would surely have recognised in himself, but saw the need to manage with care. After all, for all the advantages that a man of ‘strained and restless brilliance’ could bring to an increasingly fragmented art world littered with impressionable young artists, there were always going to be no end of people who, like Laurence Housman, were irritated by the habit that men like Ricketts had for ‘ever laying down the law’.¹⁶⁵

If Rothenstein’s comments on Ricketts sometimes come close to other people’s comments on his own personality – and vice-versa – Housman’s complaint finds a perfect echo.¹⁶⁶ ‘Will Rothenstein Laying Down the Law’ [fig.7] is the name of a caricature by Beerbohm from 1895, in which the young Rothenstein is shown preaching to no less than eleven people on eleven different subjects. The need for self-awareness was inescapable when Beerbohm was around, for ‘nothing escaped the clear pitiless grey eye of Max the caricaturist’ – not even his best friends, of which Rothenstein was undoubtedly one.¹⁶⁷ In fact, Rothenstein suffered more than most. Beerbohm seems to have regretted this later in life, admitting that: ‘my caricatures of him were cruel... He knew they were, and yet took it manfully’.¹⁶⁸ Walter Sickert was amazed that he managed to do so, wondering why Rothenstein didn’t simply hate them (as Oscar Wilde

¹⁶⁴ See Ricketts (1907); Delaney (1990) 262-4.

¹⁶⁵ Housman (1936) 115.

¹⁶⁶ Ricketts seems to have viewed Rothenstein with admiration mostly, praising his ability to ‘face a serious subject’ and noting his ‘pushing, pulling, and intreating egoism [sic]’ – a comment which could just as well apply to himself: Delaney (1990) 49-50. In 1900 Charles Holmes wrote to congratulate Rothenstein on his Carfax exhibition, noting that ‘Ricketts went twice yesterday...an attention usually reserved for a few extremely dead men’: W Rothenstein (1937b) 366.

¹⁶⁷ W Rothenstein (1937b) 146. In a letter to his brother from the 1920s Rothenstein noted: ‘What an actor Max is, as well as a talker... Nothing good or bad escapes him – he is the most appreciative & the most pitiless of creatures’ William Rothenstein to Albert Rutherston, undated from Rapallo (c.1920), HTGN.

¹⁶⁸ Behrman (1960) 66. Rothenstein’s comments on Beerbohm’s caricatures suggest that he not only took them manfully, but very seriously also: W Rothenstein (1937b) 369.

had done), leading Beerbohm to presume that they probably frightened him more than anything.¹⁶⁹ It is just as likely that Rothenstein saw them as useful pointers for his rigorous programme of self-improvement.

As it stands, the 1895 caricature is amongst his most inventive, with aspects of Rothenstein's personality and physical appearance proving a godsend for the young caricaturist. To his credit, the drawing shows off the range of Rothenstein's social contacts, garnered both by a natural ability to make friends and from the work he had been doing as a portraitist, which ensured contact with many major figures of his time. The Prince of Wales was not one of these: in this instance, Beerbohm's fancy gets the better of him. It is also highly unlikely that Rothenstein ever lectured the then prime-minister Lord Rosebery on the subject of politics, or Lord Coleridge on law. Beardsley, however – as well as presenting Beerbohm with the opportunity to present a sly parody of his style – certainly *did* come under Rothenstein's influence. In this same year, Beardsley shared Rothenstein's studio at Glebe Place in Chelsea; an arrangement that mostly suited the latter's desire for company, though Rothenstein remembered that they also worked together on a 'dialogue', since lost.¹⁷⁰ He also took credit for having an artistic influence on the young Beardsley, denied by other critics.¹⁷¹ There can be no denying, however, the influence that a particular gift of Rothenstein's had on his friend. After picking up a book of Utamaro prints in Paris, Rothenstein was shocked to discover 'pictures so outrageous that its possession was an embarrassment'.¹⁷² He promptly passed the book onto Beardsley, who by the time they next met, 'had taken out the most indecent prints... and hung them around his bedroom'.¹⁷³ According to the Michael Fields, Rothenstein was rarely able to exert his influence much more directly than this, for apparently Beardsley was 'the only man who sits on Rothenstein with success'.¹⁷⁴

The same commentators noted when seeing Rothenstein at his 1894 exhibition

¹⁶⁹ Behrman (1960) 66.

¹⁷⁰ W Rothenstein (1937b) 185.

¹⁷¹ 'Ross told me that in his introduction to *Volpone*, after Beardsley's death, he had written of Beardsley's debt to Conder and myself, but Smithers obliged him to take it out': W Rothenstein (1937b) 184.

¹⁷² W Rothenstein (1937b) 134.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Treby (2006) 130.

at the Dutch Gallery (which he shared with Shannon) that ‘Rothenstein looks as sure as himself as a bantam cock’.¹⁷⁵ And yet, they thought, ‘there is something pathetic in his eyes that have seen so much of life’.¹⁷⁶ It might also be said that there is something pathetic about Beerbohm’s image of Rothenstein in this 1895 caricature. Here he is – a ‘Lilliputian among Gullivers’ as S.N.Behrman puts it – boring or irritating every one with his opinions: his face perpetually tilted upwards, inviting the idea that he is overreaching, guilty of trying too hard to compete in a world in which he doesn’t appear to belong.¹⁷⁷ And if this assessment seems unfair, later caricatures only turn up the volume, focussing very much on the second half of Beerbohm’s written description of Rothenstein as ‘full of gaiety and self-importance’.¹⁷⁸ His 1906 caricature of the N.E.A.C [fig.8] though centred on the strangely phallic figure of Philip Wilson Steer, is nonetheless dominated by Rothenstein’s hand which, almost as big as the rest of his body, is stuck in the pose of pointing: a visual embodiment of instruction or influence.¹⁷⁹ As D.S.MacColl put it, Beerbohm makes Rothenstein’s ‘diminutive form swell with missionary ardour’.¹⁸⁰ In either case, the image seems to contradict Rothenstein’s ideal that ‘certain people, certain books and pictures, fertilise a man’s spirit; but this can only be at a given moment, when the mind is *à point*, prepared to receive the seed’.¹⁸¹ He may have avoided the menace of the predatory Vautrin, but these images (exaggerated as they are) show him cast in a no less attractive role: as a manic little busybody, the Jiminy Cricket of the art world – the moral conscience nobody wants to hear.

Beerbohm was not alone in creating a visual image of this aspect of his friend’s personality. Rothenstein appears in a similar guise in a painting mentioned earlier: William Orpen’s 1899 *Play Scene from Hamlet* [fig.9]. This painting has, as noted, a complicated relationship with its text. Indeed, art historians find it easier to point out Orpen’s friends in the painting than they do Hamlet. Rothenstein, for his part, seems to

¹⁷⁵ Moore (1933) 187.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Behrman (1960) 42.

¹⁷⁸ Cecil (1964) 67.

¹⁷⁹ W Rothenstein (1937b) 174-5; In his 1925 caricature, *Some Persons of “The Nineties”*, Beerbohm softens Rothenstein’s caricature a little, transferring the large pointing hand to John Davidson.

¹⁸⁰ MacColl (145) 69. Steer was known to have a more laid back approach.

¹⁸¹ W Rothenstein (1937b) 174-5.

have posed, or been appropriated as a model, for the figure at the centre of the painting. If this *is* him (arguably, it could also be his brother Albert) then it can hardly have been an unconscious decision on Orpen's part to place him there – and in this particular pose.¹⁸² Here, again, is the instructive stance: the stance of someone who, if not exactly laying down the law, is at the very least taking control of whatever situation he is in. David Fraser Jenkins has noted how the figures in the painting seem part of a procession; one that fades (almost to grisaille) as they approach the stage.¹⁸³ It's interesting how Rothenstein, at the foot of the stage, is playing the part that others have cast him in: striking his personal pantomime pose. Orpen's image does, however, seem a little more respectful than Beerbohm's. Considering the relationship between Orpen and Rothenstein at the time, this is hardly surprising. If Orpen was at all irreverent in this painting, argues Bruce Arnold, it was to Augustus John, who has his back to the viewer, locked in a lascivious embrace with Ida Nettleship.¹⁸⁴

It is also worth noting Rothenstein's appearance in a later painting of Orpen. In his 1909 painted sketch of the N.E.A.C, Rothenstein (or his visual representative) takes a central position once again [fig.10]. The jury are gathered around to select paintings for the show. Many of them aren't even looking at the current work being offered. Some, including Orpen himself, Sickert, and Steer, are a little keener. Rothenstein, however, is ahead of them all: his face flung in front of the concealed work, reading it as if it were a book.¹⁸⁵

This painting has a clear photographic precedent. Five years previously the jury of the New English were photographed at the Dudley Gallery [see fig.11]. Orpen wasn't there, it seems, but Rothenstein was. True to perceived form, he is the closest figure to the painting on display, sitting on the table besides Roger Fry (it is tempting to see them as trying to outdo each other's enthusiasm), almost as if he is taking a class. Rothenstein's closeness to the work takes us back, interestingly, to his lithograph of

¹⁸² Robert Upstone thinks it is William, as does Bruce Arnold who thinks that Albert may be the 'figure with outstretched arm' (mimicking his brother) in the right foreground, above Orpen: Upstone, Foster and Jenkins (2005) 10; Arnold (1981) 68-9.

¹⁸³ See Upstone, Foster and Jenkins (2005) 54-5

¹⁸⁴ Arnold (1981) 69-70.

¹⁸⁵ It is worth comparing this image with John Singer Sargent's 1897 sketch of Rothenstein (National Portrait Gallery) in which the artist is shown with his face extremely close to the image he is working on. Though this pays tribute, once again, to his enthusiasm, the artist's short sightedness is also a factor.

Shannon and Ricketts, in which the latter is seen to be really engaging with the art work, as well as to Ricketts's comment on Rothenstein: 'he can face a serious subject'.¹⁸⁶ Here is a man who wants to be seen really grappling with things; unafraid to possess a strong opinion. Of course, this second image of Orpen's differs from Beerbohm's caricatures in the sense that Rothenstein is seen in a slightly kinder context. Though he may seem amusingly over-enthusiastic, in this case it is a fault that charms. It is easier to forgive him for expending energy on looking at paintings than it is for telling people *how* to look at paintings.¹⁸⁷

Following the ferocity of his caricatures, Beerbohm's written portrait of Rothenstein in *Enoch Soames* encompasses the subtler forms of his friend's influence. Noticing that the hapless Soames is in desperate need of some recognition, Beerbohm directs him Rothenstein's way. Rothenstein demurs, as if attempting to play against type, only to quietly relent in the meantime. The help he duly offers is to exhibit a pastel portrait of Soames at the New English Art Club of 1896.¹⁸⁸

This detail, surely, had personal resonances. Rothenstein's inclusion of Beerbohm in his collection of *Oxford Characters* (started in 1893, but published in 1896) had helped the undergraduate make his name. Elsewhere Beerbohm puts the debt owed to Rothenstein in the simplest form possible: 'He started me', he writes.¹⁸⁹ To Reggie Turner in 1893, he explains: 'Dear Will Rothenstein has been "puffing" me to all sorts of people: I hope you will do likewise'.¹⁹⁰ The results of such 'puffing up' – and of further portraits – provoked in Max Soames-like visions of fashionable celebrity, as expressed in another letter to Turner, this time from 1894:

¹⁸⁶ Delaney (1990) 49-50.

¹⁸⁷ He may have taken it manfully, but Rothenstein was definitely aware of the cruelty contained in Beerbohm's caricatures of him, remembering with indignation Beerbohm's mother's reaction to a caricature he had done of her son. She did not take kindly, it seems, to his own 'very harmless' image; ignoring the fact that Max, for his part, had presented him in a 'particularly brutal' light: W Rothenstein (1937b) 275.

¹⁸⁸ Beerbohm (1966) 19. Rothenstein did exhibit a 'Study for a Portrait' at the 1896 N.E.A.C. winter show, but (at the risk of offending the Enoch Soames Society) we can be confident that Soames was not its subject.

¹⁸⁹ Lago (1978) 21.

¹⁹⁰ Hart-Davies (1964) 63.

Will R. is going tomorrow to do a heavenly and elaborate pastel of me, sitting straddle-legged over a chair, my hat tilted back, a white carnation and trousers of a very pale grey. It will be in his exhibition. Cannot you imagine the public pausing before it and exclaiming “Is that Max Beerbohm?” and thinking of the paper on Cosmetics?¹⁹¹

Rothenstein’s encouragement of Beerbohm’s artistic skills was also critical; he not only gave him the confidence to work at his caricatures, but directed him towards new possibilities, such as the watercolour washes he was to introduce into his work later on. In 1896, he invited him to contribute to a special supplement of *The Saturday Review* which he had been invited to edit [fig.12] and after the turn of the century continued to support him in various ways, such as encouraging his brother-in-law Edgar Hesslein to purchase some of Beerbohm’s drawings, a significant service which he extended to other artists besides.¹⁹² Beerbohm’s first one-man show, unsurprisingly, was held at the Carfax Gallery, in November 1901.¹⁹³

At Rothenstein’s memorial service, Beerbohm recalled that ‘he was ever a laughter as well as a teacher, and I have known no man who so dearly loved a joke against himself.’¹⁹⁴ ‘Dearly loved’ is a strong way of putting it; ‘appreciated’, however, may well be true, for Rothenstein was ever desperate to improve himself and would have accepted Beerbohm’s sometimes brutal jokes as valuable warnings against a character he was continuously battling against.¹⁹⁵

If he had not a sense of humour, it is unlikely he and Beerbohm would ever have been such close friends, for when both artists are boiled down (like a Beerbohm caricature) to their most ‘essential’ qualities they would seem to have little in common.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 93. The paper on Cosmetics was published in the very first *Yellow Book*.

¹⁹² Max responded to this arrangement as follows: ‘It is most charming of you to have secured these drawings – to have purged, in some degree, the Augean stable which is my sitting room. Of course, you may object that it isn’t charming of you at all. But your “deal” with Sickert the other day could be brought up in evidence against you’: Beckson and Lago (1975) 51

¹⁹³ Rothenstein had just left the Carfax at this point, and Beerbohm’s exhibition was organised by its new owner, Robert Ross.

¹⁹⁴ Beckson and Lago (1975) 175.

¹⁹⁵ Wyndham Lewis made a similar point in reference to Rothenstein: ‘as a painter he is at times witty, at times didactic and never devoid of self-criticism. Among his pupils is *himself* – and he is the Cinderella of his class: he reserves for Master William, one feels, the harshest treatment of all’: Lewis (1970) 218.

Compared to the energetic Rothenstein, always at the centre of things, Beerbohm was thought aloof, ever desperate – as David Cecil has written – to protect his personality ‘from any disturbing invasion by the grow-up world of action and responsibility’; a world that he enjoyed, but ‘did not want to risk being involved in’.¹⁹⁶ ‘I edge away to ground on which I feel safer,’ he wrote when considering Rothenstein’s habit of tackling everything, from a barn to a hedgerow, with severe intellectual force.¹⁹⁷ The comparison is, as ever, swollen for comic effect, whatever basis it may have had in reality. Still, the facts remain. On one of the few occasions that Beerbohm was able to use his influence to help Rothenstein (by putting him forward as a possible costume designer for the 1898 production of *The Happy Hypocrite*) his resolve deserted him. ‘Please forgive my weakness of purpose’ he wrote, humbly admitting that when it came to laying down the law himself, he was ‘a mild and embarrassed neophyte’.¹⁹⁸

Undoubtedly they played up to their differences, as Rothenstein realised after their one and only row in 1909 (where, interestingly, it was Beerbohm and not Rothenstein who had taken first offence). ‘You have for so long been in the habit of chaffing me about my pedantry & bourgeoisism’ he wrote, ‘that I have got into the habit of assuming the part when I meet you’.¹⁹⁹ It’s the old problem: playing roles is a dangerous business; you play one long enough and there is every possibility you will become it. Just as Beerbohm’s caricatures play up Rothenstein’s restless and unnerving energy, so Rothenstein’s portraits of Beerbohm [fig.13] linger on his cool, almost dispassionate grace.

If in some sense they complemented each other through differences – if Rothenstein seemed over-enthusiastic, Beerbohm could well afford to be over-cynical, to address the balance – they could also compete on a level playing field. Their early letters to one another are crammed with airy humour, irony and frequent teases, concealing sometimes fiercely honest comments. When Beerbohm dines with Bosie

¹⁹⁶ Cecil (1964) 62.

¹⁹⁷ Beerbohm in J Rothenstein (1926) xii.

¹⁹⁸ Beckson and Lago (1975) 39-40. This production was cancelled and the play was first produced in 1900. Rothenstein dabbled in theatrical ventures throughout his career and remained deeply informed as to the state of British theatre through his friendship with Edward Gordon-Craig. He was, however, never as involved in costume design as his brother Albert, or Charles Ricketts.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. 58.

Douglas in October 1893, he taunts his friend: ‘aren’t you, dear straight-laced timid wonderful Will, very shocked?’²⁰⁰ But it is hard to be shocked by the behaviour of someone whose *raison d’être* is to be lightly subversive of almost everything. And for his part, ‘timid’ Will is well capable of a return volley. In December of that year, he asks Max (whom he jokingly patronises, as if he were writing to a naughty little child) whether he has ‘been doing any of those horrid caricatures, or silly verses & absurd writing, which things no respectable idler ever does’ – demeaning the art of which he was, in fact, the number one supporter.²⁰¹ In some senses Rothenstein and Beerbohm’s friendship took place in their own fantasy land in which they took on roles which were exaggerated versions of themselves. There is nothing especially unique in this habit; however, the continuing reliance of historians on letters of this sort demands continued caution in dealing with such sources. We are dealing with a particular language here; a language devised as a source of entertainment between friends; not – even for those who, like Soames, dreamed of great fame following their death – for the pure edification of historians.

Though Rothenstein was surely of more assistance to Beerbohm’s career than vice versa, the latter’s sometimes ‘brutal’ observations must have served as a timely reminder that such assistance was best offered delicately. And if Beerbohm’s visual images of Rothenstein suggest that his friend too often failed in this regard, a kinder image seeps through his prose, such as the appearance in *Enoch Soames*, or in their correspondence. Beerbohm’s description in 1913 of Rothenstein ‘creative, suggestive, fertilising mind’ comes very close to Rothenstein’s ideal of a model of influence.²⁰²

Besides Beerbohm (who, though helped in many ways, was relatively self-sufficient) the artist with whom Rothenstein was most closely related with during the 1890s was Charles Conder. Indeed, for all the lessons provided by Ricketts and Beerbohm, it was

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 24.

²⁰¹ Ibid. 25.

²⁰² Ibid. 93.

probably this relationship that had the greatest influence upon Rothenstein's approach to Augustus John and his friends at the turn of the century (even though the most dramatic chapter in their friendship was to occur in 1900, *after* the summer at Vattetot).

Relationships with Rothenstein were never simple, and it comes as no surprise that Ann Galbally should describe the one that developed between him and Conder as 'deep and complex on both sides'.²⁰³ They first met around 1890 in Paris and, at the start at least, Conder was very much the senior partner. Four years older and much more at home in bohemian Paris than Rothenstein (then only eighteen), Conder gave the young artist the impression that 'he knew so much more of the world than I did, or, I thought, than did any of my friends'.²⁰⁴ On the literary front, Conder introduced him to Omar Khayyam and Ibsen, and matched his enthusiasm for Browning, as well as for artists such as Whistler and Puvis de Chavannes.²⁰⁵ It didn't take long for one of Rothenstein's other friends, Arthur Studd, to grow suspicious of Conder's influence and attempt to forestall the growing friendship. To no avail: Rothenstein had 'blind faith in my star'.²⁰⁶ Studd, perhaps, had thoughts of Balzac's Lucien de Rubempré abandoning the earnest Cenacle for the pleasure-driven society of the journalists. The move was not, of course, quite so dramatic – though one does wonder what drove the young Rothenstein to ignore his friend's advice. Perhaps he was already anxious over becoming too closely associated with a particular group of artists.

He and Conder were soon sharing a studio, a move which initially backfired (Rothenstein finding himself unequal to certain aspects of Conder's lifestyle) though, ever patient with those in whom he believed, William held firm.²⁰⁷ Conder, meanwhile, tried to convince Rothenstein to draw in his manner – one which Rothenstein

²⁰³ Galbally (2002) 69. For more on the Conder/Rothenstein relationship see Robins and Thomson (2005) 100-116.

²⁰⁴ W Rothenstein (1937b) 55.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 57.

²⁰⁷ Although Rothenstein's patience seems to have reached superhuman levels at times, he marvelled at Conder's endurance with artists he thought unworthy of interest. 'Paris was then as full of pseudo-geniuses as is London today; men angling for notice with sorry, pretentious bait. No kinship with these! Heaven forbid! With men who, fighting, fail – yes, but not with charlatans or self-deceivers': W Rothenstein (1937b) 81. The label 'self-deceiver' was later used by Gilbert Cannan to describe Edgar Froitzheim, a semi-fictional portrait of Rothenstein: Cannan (1916) 80.

ultimately found ‘foreign’ to his temperament²⁰⁸. This becomes a theme in their friendship. Notwithstanding their mutual respect, they remained quite different artists. As far as Rothenstein was concerned ‘lovely colour meant less to me than good drawing, and strength and shrewd observation more than charm’.²⁰⁹ Conder’s art, though owing a little to ‘the visual harmonies and the pulsating vitality of nature’, nonetheless ran on charm.²¹⁰ ‘He never aimed at precision of form, and had little natural power of constructive drawing’ – a quality that Rothenstein grew to admire, without ever trying to imitate.²¹¹ Conder, in turn, admired Rothenstein’s drawings – and was himself the subject of more than one painting from this era [fig.14].

In 1892 Rothenstein shared his first exhibition with Conder at Père Thomas’s, a small gallery in Paris. Here their differences might have been advantageous; with such different goals, they would not be in obvious competition with one another, but provide a welcome contrast instead.²¹² It may also have helped Rothenstein that Conder’s talent was so ‘foreign’ to him: he would have been reluctant to interfere with something he couldn’t exactly fathom. Ultimately, small differences in their style should not have mattered, so long as they believed in the foundations of each others’ approach. As it was, the most significant piece of artistic advice Rothenstein ever gave Conder was to suggest to (and teach) him a new medium – Conder’s lithographs (chief among them *The Balzac Set*) were directly inspired (which is to say influenced, but not stylistically so) by Rothenstein’s skills in that medium.²¹³

The wistful dreaminess – not without the merest hint of menace – that was such a major part of Conder’s art (of which *The Balzac Set* is a good example) was also present in his personality, leading to a gradual shift in the relationship between him and Rothenstein. He could offer artistic influence to his friend, perhaps, but in practical matters he became increasingly dependent on the younger man. One of Rothenstein’s more dramatic experiences in Paris – and perhaps the closest he ever got to acting out a scene from Balzac – was to accompany Conder to a duel; a situation which was easily

²⁰⁸ W Rothenstein (1937b) 75.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. 55.

²¹⁰ Ibid. 74-5. I return to Rothenstein’s reaction to Conder’s art at the close of the third chapter.

²¹¹ Ibid. 75.

²¹² Galbally (2002) 83.

²¹³ Galbally (2002) 208; Galbally and Pearce (2003) 169-178; J Rothenstein (1938) 243-8.

diffused (such was the nature of most of their bohemian exploits) but must nevertheless have brought home the perilous nature of Conder's personality.²¹⁴ Left alone, Conder seemed bound to self-destruct sooner or later.

Rothenstein had become such an important friend to Conder that the latter was disappointed when he heard that his friend was not pursuing a career in Paris. Aside from the opportunities open to him there, Conder had begun to need Rothenstein as a steadying influence in his often chaotic life. It was less a fatherly role, perhaps, than that of an older brother, though Conder's tone often makes it seem as if he were an elderly parent – and Rothenstein his son: 'write me soon like a good boy,' he implores in one letter.²¹⁵ At other times, they could be said to have inhabited the clichés of the sexes. According to Rothenstein, Conder had 'a strong feminine strain in his nature, soft and feline'.²¹⁶ Rothenstein, for his part, was somewhat graceless, but practically minded – the active member of the partnership, taking charge of both of their affairs. Oscar Wilde once described Conder as being 'very vague and mist-like': reminiscent of Beerbohm's attempted *bon mot* in *Enoch Soames*, in which he describes the poet as 'dim': the perfect (albeit slightly engineered) juxtaposition to the meteoric, exceedingly un-mist-like Rothenstein.²¹⁷ The comparison is, as ever, alluring. As both Ann Galbally and Max Rutherford have proved recently, Conder and Rothenstein are easily cast as opposites.²¹⁸ We must take care, however, not to accept such a view so readily; a view that essentially contradicts the former's analysis of their relationship as 'complex'.

Throughout the mid 1890s, Rothenstein – with help from D.S. MacColl and Norwegian artist Fritz Thaulow – was of ever greater practical assistance to Conder, whose reputation was to grow steadily in England until his death in 1909.²¹⁹ In an 1893 report on the Parisian art scene written for *The Studio* magazine, Rothenstein clearly singles out

²¹⁴ Galbally (2002) 102-3.

²¹⁵ J Rothenstein (1938) 76.

²¹⁶ W Rothenstein (1937b) 75.

²¹⁷ Beerbohm (1966) 6; Galbally (2002) 184-5.

²¹⁸ Rutherford (1990); Galbally (2002) 69.

²¹⁹ Rothenstein and MacColl, like a pair of puppeteers, took turns in engineering Conder's life. When Conder fell in love with Louise Kinsella, her sisters 'looked to Rothenstein to warn Conder off, which he did. They agreed to join the summer party to Vétheuil only on the understanding that MacColl would be there to keep an eye on things': Galbally (2002) 119.

Conder's work.²²⁰ Indeed, one of the distinct advantages of being in London at this time was the slew of new publications, from sporadically produced journals such as *The Yellow Book*, *The Savoy*, *The Dial* and *The Pageant*, to the weekly *The Saturday Review* and monthly *The Studio*, all of which offered direct opportunities and/or support for young artists. Rothenstein was involved in many of these, as well as producing for the publisher John Lane collections of his lithographic portraits.²²¹ Conder 'was to badger Rothenstein to find work for him' in this field also.²²² Henry Harland, literary editor of *The Yellow Book*, duly took a shine to him, though a misunderstanding typical of Conder thwarted his early involvement with his magazine.²²³ As Rothenstein was perfectly aware of his instinct to influence, so too was Conder aware of his reputation for being dreamy and spontaneous. Though happily careless in the majority of his financial arrangements, every now and again he saw fit to make some effort to sidestep the stereotype.²²⁴ Though his rift with Harland, founded on 'unjust suspicions', was soon healed, a similar scenario was to be repeated some years later with Rothenstein. Clearly Conder liked to break through the mist every now and again in an attempt to ensure that the role in which he was often cast could not be set in stone. Moves such as these highlight the need for historians to be sensitive when reconstructing personalities – as much as we may like to see Conder as 'the last bohemian', not every aspect of his behaviour can be expected to correspond to this convenient tag.²²⁵

Writing of the relationship between Rothenstein and Augustus John, Michael Holroyd notes how the former's advice was 'a formidable commodity' to which the latter 'was not susceptible', concluding that John 'preferred to use Rothenstein for money'.²²⁶ As we have seen, Rothenstein was well aware that giving advice was a delicate

²²⁰ 'Amongst the most refined works in the exhibition were the landscapes of Mr. Charles Conder. Curiously beautiful in conception, the execution is in dreamy harmony with it. Omar [Khayyam] himself might have lazed away a day in those gardens': 'Paris Letter', *The Studio*, Vol I (1893) 160

²²¹ *Oxford Characters* (1896) was published by Lane; following sets were taken up by Grant Richards. Rothenstein appeared in *The Pageant*, *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy*. He wrote for *The Studio* and *The Saturday Review*.

²²² Galbally (2002) 113.

²²³ Mix (1960) 75.

²²⁴ Oscar Wilde on Conder's commercial ineptness: 'With what exquisite subtlety he goes about persuading someone to give him a hundred francs for a fan, for which he was fully prepared to pay two hundred': Galbally (2002) 184.

²²⁵ 'Charles Conder: The Last Bohemian' is the full title of Galbally's biography: Galbally (2002).

²²⁶ Holroyd (1996a) 172.

business and, as his relationship with Conder and others show, the concept of being ‘used for money’ would not have been new to him. Rothenstein understood the problems inherent in exerting influence, and whilst he must have preferred other methods of assistance, he was nonetheless resigned to the fact that many artists valued financial support above spiritual encouragement. If that was one of the most effective ways of supporting talent, so be it. Rothenstein did not shirk from this side of his self-enforced responsibilities, though he was rarely in any real position to provide it. As his son was to write later: ‘My father used to borrow money to lend to writers and painters in need at times when he himself had nothing in the bank’.²²⁷

A less precarious way of providing financial support was to act as agent to his fellow artists, using his skills as a social networker – and family connections – to set up patrons. Almost all of Conder’s major patrons were introduced to his work by Rothenstein, MacColl, Fritz Thaulow or Charles Ricketts. In 1893 William’s brother Charles Rutherston (whom he may have met as early as 1890) bought one of Conder’s first fans. Charles continued to support him over the coming years, as he did many of his younger brother’s friends.²²⁸ William Hacon, the Vale Press financier, was also an important patron of Conder, to whom he was introduced by Rothenstein.²²⁹ In 1894 he bought William’s most famous portrait of Conder, *L’Homme Qui Sort* [fig. 14] which Conder is said to have found too realistic (he would have preferred, it seems, to have been depicted as an *homme fatal*).²³⁰ D.S. MacColl, as art critic for the *Spectator* and later *The Saturday Review* (in which Rothenstein and Beerbohm were also involved) not only supported Conder through his writing, but used his Oxford connections to ‘ensure that Conder’s beautiful painted fans and pictures were sold to rich patrons’.²³¹ Fritz Thaulow’s influence, meanwhile, peaked in 1895, when he created the opportunity for

²²⁷ J Rothenstein (1938) 13.

²²⁸ That the Charles Rutherston art collection (presented to Manchester City Art Gallery in 1925) owed much to William Rothenstein’s advocacy is a certainty. He also helped amass the collection created by his brother-in-law Edgar Hesslein (with whom relations were much more strained). Speaight (1962) 180-1; On Charles Rutherston’s patronage of Conder see Galbally (2002) 11, 130, 163.

²²⁹ Ann Galbally suggests that Hacon provided ‘perhaps Conder’s most successful artist-patron relationship’; Galbally (2002) 164-6.

²³⁰ Speaight (162) 49, 71; Robins and Thomson (2005) 148. For further discussion of this painting see Stephenson (2007).

²³¹ Borland (1990) 91; Galbally (2002) 107, 114. These patrons included Logan Pearsall Smith, Eugene Sellars and Miss Lowndes.

Conder to exhibit at Samuel Bing's largely unsuccessful Art Nouveau Exhibition in Paris.²³² It was most likely Charles Ricketts, finally, who introduced Conder to his most significant patrons, Sir Edmund Davis and his wife, for whom Ricketts acted as 'friend and artistic advisor' from the 1890s onwards.²³³ Conder aside, the majority of these patrons supported many of the other artists who might be said, in the mid 1890s, to have been closely associated with Ricketts or Rothenstein and/or, from 1898 onwards, the Carfax Gallery.

It was of course here, at the Carfax, that Rothenstein's loose role as art agent found, for a brief period, an official outlet. As artistic advisor, he was in charge of selecting artists for exhibition. Top of his list, to no one's great surprise, was Charles Conder.²³⁴ It has been claimed, indeed, that the gallery 'would show primarily the work of Charles Conder, as the Art Establishment and academic circles were disinclined to exhibit or recognise his work.'²³⁵ Though the gallery may have helped his career more than anyone else's, it seems unlikely that Conder was the single motive for its foundation. There can be no denying, on the other hand, that he was a major reason behind Rothenstein's break from his official role there in 1900.

It could be said that, after various struggles to manage his instinct with influence with artists who were not altogether keen to be influenced, the Carfax represented the answer to Rothenstein's problems. However, as the next chapter will reveal, acting as agent to his friends was far from a viable solution. Once again, Rothenstein found himself in an 'equivocal position'.²³⁶ One of the advantages that other, influential figures of the time had over him was that they were not trying to balance an artistic career as well. MacColl was a painter, admittedly, but primarily a critic. Robert Ross and Laurence Binyon were both primarily writers, with more specific roles within the art world.²³⁷ Ricketts was, of course, an artist – but then, as Rothenstein was to keen to point out, he was far from the perfect model. Was there any way for these two artists to expend that

²³² Galbally (2002) 154.

²³³ Ibid. 257.

²³⁴ Matthew Sturgis has written that 'at the top of his list was Sickert': Sturgis (2005) 266. However, in its early year the Carfax was much more closely associated with Conder than Sickert, then living in Dieppe.

²³⁵ Borland (1995) 69.

²³⁶ W Rothenstein (1937b) 343.

²³⁷ Robert Ross took over the running of the Carfax in 1901 until 1909. Binyon worked at the British Museum from 1893 onwards and took over D S MacColl's post at *The Saturday Review* in 1906.

terrific energy of theirs without causing misunderstandings with their contemporaries; without being accused of meddling in other people's affairs? Rothenstein's experiences from 1890-1899 must have led to mixed conclusions. What is so interesting about his fallout with Conder in early 1901 is that he recognised in Conder's accusations, false though they were, the seed of something he had joked about himself: yet another echo, I think, of Vautrin.²³⁸ As Balzac wrote of Esther in *A Harlot High and Low*, faced with Vautrin (then assuming the character of Carlos Herrera): she 'felt herself to be less an object of solicitude than the victim of a plan'.²³⁹ This was Conder's irrational fear when faced with Rothenstein – prompted perhaps by his own less knowing response to Balzac's writing; the fear that he was too kind to be anything but a schemer. Strangely, Conder's allegation that Rothenstein had forced him to sign a contract after plying him with drink evokes a diabolical act straight out of Vautrin's book: this is exactly how Balzac's villain destroys the threat of Pere Goriot and Rastignac at the close of *Pere Goriot*. Unlike Lucien de Rubempré, Rastignac resists Vautrin's diabolical influence in the long run; perhaps this is why Conder chose to identify himself with the latter rather than the former. His attempts to keep the influence of Rothenstein at bay were, however, less heroic than paranoid.

The claims were outlandish, as even Conder must have known. However, they had their roots in a common emotion: a wariness of Rothenstein's motives. As we have seen, Rothenstein excited suspicion throughout his career, ever struggling to manage that rather extreme instinct to influence that was, for one reason or another, such a major part of his character. What I hope to have shown is that he was neither unaware of the dangers inherent in this desire of his, nor – despite frequent misunderstandings and the odd evidence to the contrary – were these struggles in vain. There *was* room for someone of Rothenstein's nature and, in their own eccentric way, people like him helped shaped the art world, both by encouraging artists around them and making the best use of the new and old structures through which art was created and exhibited – all of which will be explored in more detail throughout this thesis.

Rothenstein's relationship with Conder was both a success story (with the help

²³⁸ I discuss this incident more fully in Chapter Two.

²³⁹ Balzac (1970) 44.

of Rothenstein and others, Conder's career was extremely successful after 1900) and a story of failure (though they made up after their 1900 argument, the friendship never quite returned to its former state). Of course, with both artists married by 1901, some change was inevitable. It could be argued that the manner in which their differing personalities balanced each other was rendered needless by wives who took similar, steadying roles.²⁴⁰ Conder's health, also, was steadily declining. However, when Rothenstein *was* able to turn his attentions to his old friend once more, his exertions were more often than not appreciated. As Conder's wife Stella told Rothenstein towards the end of her husband's life: 'you can't imagine the pleasure you gave poor dear Conder by spending so many hours with him and fussing'.²⁴¹ It seems that the same element of Rothenstein's personality that had caused problems in their friendship nevertheless kept it going to the end.

²⁴⁰ John Rothenstein explores the personalities of his parents at length: J Rothenstein (1965).

²⁴¹ Galbally (2002) 278.

CHAPTER TWO

‘The ideal shop’?:

Exhibiting Spaces, c.1890-1911

I strayed on through the jungles of painting that are bounded northwards by Oxford Street and to the south by Pall Mall. Spring has hung all those groves with monster blossoms. [D.S.MacColl].²⁴²

Throughout his career, but especially after 1910, Rothenstein privately and publicly revealed his frustrations with the structure of the British art world. As a young man he had railed against the Royal Academy; enjoying the sense of solidarity felt by those for whom an institution once central to the contemporary art market had come to be seen as increasingly backward. A regular exhibitor with the New English Art Club and an outspoken opponent of the Academy’s handling of the Chantrey Bequest (which had come to symbolise the flaws of the institution), he was also – as this chapter explores – actively involved in the foundation of an influential gallery and at least one society: direct results of what D.S.MacColl was to call ‘the crumbling down of big institutions into small’.²⁴³

As his career progressed, however, he found himself struggling to come to terms with the implications of these alternatives, ultimately wondering whether anything had improved at all. The independent spirit that had inspired many turn of the century societies and small galleries was beginning to seem a little hollow, and by 1909 he was dallying with what his friend John Masefield had called ‘the gang of lying jobbers at Burlington House’; not because he suddenly felt in tune with Academy ideals or art

²⁴² MacColl (1902a) 662.

²⁴³ MacColl (1904) 607. MacColl was the most vocal critic of the Chantrey Bequest and the Royal Academy. A satirical drawing by Tonks (British Museum Collection) reflects on the attack of the administration of the Chantrey Bequest by picturing MacColl as Don Quixote, with Rothenstein as his Sancho Panza. The subject may also reflect the popularity of Daumier, a version of whose ‘Don Quixote and Sancho Panza’ was shown at the Dutch Gallery in 1904. For more on the Chantrey Bequest see Chapter Seven of Fyfe (2000).

forms, but because there seemed just as much chance of getting them on his side as anyone else.²⁴⁴ Some of his friends had already gone this way: Charles Furse, who had appeared in his *Chelsea Group* [fig.15] joined the Academy in 1904, whilst George Clausen, a founder member of the N.E.A.C and later of The Society of Twelve, joined as far back as 1895, proving that accepting Academy membership did not necessarily shut the door on other, more progressive ventures; that one *could* be ‘a reformer within, instead of without, the Academy’.²⁴⁵ William Strang was yet another to defect, to the regret of his friends. ‘One reason people go into the Academy,’ he told Rothenstein in his defence, ‘is, not that they agree wholly with it, but that they are not satisfied with the conditions outside. If we were agreed & harmonious, there would be fewer desertions, for the number of Societies who won’t speak to one another constitutes the strength of the Academy’.²⁴⁶

It was a compelling case: Rothenstein, as we will see, had as much difficulty as anyone with ‘the conditions outside’, and probably had the strength of personality to force changes if elected. And yet he continued to resist all attempts to get him on board, ever conscious that his loyalties lay elsewhere, even if elsewhere was becoming an increasingly indistinct place, no longer represented by the N.E.A.C, barely embodied by the Carfax Gallery and hardly fulfilled by the Society of Twelve, to name just three major ventures with which he had once been closely associated and had, in time, come to blows.²⁴⁷

In 1907, during the first stage of his long-running disagreements with the Society of Twelve, Muirhead Bone (acting as secretary) wrote to console the disgruntled Rothenstein with the idea that ‘after all, our work and not the Clubs we happen to

²⁴⁴ John Masfield to William Rothenstein, 2nd Dec 1906, HGTN. Masfield’s comment represents just one of a whole host of jibes against the Academy, from artists and writers alike. Rothenstein himself tended to be of a more generous spirit. In 1907 he instructed a reporter from *The Jewish Chronicle*: ‘I would be glad... if you would remove a strange misconception. I, and others, who do not exhibit at the Academy, have no quarrel with that institution. We simply prefer to be independent. But we are quite good friends’: ‘Mr. Will Rothenstein’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, June 15th 1906, 34.

²⁴⁵ W Rothenstein (1937c) 94.

²⁴⁶ William Strang to William Rothenstein, 13th Jan 1906, HGTN.

²⁴⁷ William’s parents, who had clearly fancied the idea of an Academician in the family, nonetheless reacted to his decision to reject the Academy by stating that they were ‘satisfied you acted to the best of your judgement and principles’. Moritz to William, Feb 7th 1909, HGTN. See also W Rothenstein (1937c) 191-2.

belong to, is the most important thing as you say'.²⁴⁸ Though both parties may have been temporarily warmed by this idea, neither would have gained any long-term consolation. Clubs, groups and societies provided constant grounds for suspicion; but they were an increasingly unavoidable – and highly significant – part of the landscape. Independence was fine in theory: group co-operation and, to a lesser extent, group identities proved more powerful in reality.²⁴⁹ Some sort of structure – a modicum of compromise – was required; might even be essential. 'Too much liberty is not good for an artist,' wrote Rothenstein later: '...if he has no tasks set him, upon which he can concentrate his powers, he is likely to find his freedom stand in the way of a full productivity'.²⁵⁰

The question was: who should be setting these tasks? This quotation was taken from a lecture Rothenstein gave after taking up the position of Professor of Civic Art at Sheffield University in 1916.²⁵¹ During the course of this lecture (later published as a pamphlet) Rothenstein looked back fondly to the days of State and Church sponsored art, complaining that contemporary patronage of the arts was 'almost entirely in the hands of the individual patron', with pictures designed primarily to 'complete the interior he has made for himself, pictures that he can hang pleasantly with others'.²⁵² The use of 'pleasantly' is set up in clear contrast to the 'nobler realities of the human soul', the 'austerer form of human life' and the 'epic of the life of man' mentioned elsewhere, all of which are typical, if not typically vague, descriptions of Rothenstein's artistic ideals (to which I will return in the following chapter). The patron in question is, he admits, 'perfectly justified' to do as he will; allowing him to do so, however, leads to an art world shaped by the tastes of a handful of influential collectors. When the State *does* make rare forays into picture-buying, it makes the mistake of bowing to these same tastes, lacking the foresight – and no doubt the will – to see beyond them; or to build the relevant structures within which a greater range of locally-flavoured work may be

²⁴⁸ Muirhead Bone to William Rothenstein, December 30th 1907, HGTN.

²⁴⁹ It has nevertheless been argued, in the context of the Parisian art market, that the Impressionists attracted no more commercial interest when exhibited as a group than they did in solo shows (in fact, quite the opposite). In general it remains unclear whether groups represented good models for long-term financial success. White & White (1965) 99, 111.

²⁵⁰ W Rothenstein (1916) 13.

²⁵¹ W Rothenstein (1937c) 346-7.

²⁵² W Rothenstein (1916) 9-10.

created and shown.

Throughout the lecture lurks the idea that the current conditions of the marketplace significantly affect the nature of the work produced – and that the results of this are not, in Rothenstein’s opinion, beneficial. Further: ‘the extremer attitudes, such as cubism and the like, which puzzle so many people and call forth the admiration of others, are largely the result of the non-employment of gifted men who, masters of their own time and fancy, become mere interesting experimenters’.²⁵³ The so-called ‘open-market’, ‘free-enterprise’ or ‘dealer-critic’ system has become, to his mind, *too* open and *too* free.²⁵⁴ Those who haven’t yet found their niche find themselves in the position of having to either ape the successful, in order to attract the attention of the power-wielding patrons, or stay the noble course, with the entailing financial risks. The opportunities to succeed are thereby limited – and controlled by the tastes of a few: conditions which were hardly conducive, in Rothenstein’s view, to the production of great art. Thus:

The twentieth century was to see the disappearance of that probity which was the glory of nineteenth-century French painters; while a limited objective, with a certain success, which enables painters to supply picture-dealers with canvases in such quantities, was to take the place of the far-reaching achievement of the older painters.²⁵⁵

Rothenstein was certainly not the only artist going through a phase of serious disenchantment with the structure of the art world during this period – Roger Fry pondered the buying power of the plutocrats in ‘Art and Socialism’ (and other essays besides) whilst Wyndham Lewis argued for the re-engagement of art and life (unmediated by the ‘pretty’ tastes of ‘dowagers, dreamers, and dealers’) in *The Caliph’s Design*.²⁵⁶ Rothenstein’s 1916 lecture also draws heavily on its immediate context, conscious of the possibility that the end of the war, whenever it came, would provide

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ ‘open market’: Wright (2004) 27; ‘free-enterprise’: Mainardi (1993) 127; ‘dealer-critic’: White & White (1965).

²⁵⁵ W Rothenstein (1937b) 69.

²⁵⁶ Fry (1923); Lewis (1919) 66. Fry was less confident than Rothenstein regarding the benefits of national patronage.

the perfect opportunity for a series of state-sponsored memorial art projects. To this we might add both the continuing influence of the Arts and Crafts movement – which had informed more recent projects such as Fry’s Omega Workshops – and the consistent yearning amongst Rothenstein and his friends to see British artists working on the scale of Puvis de Chavannes, painters of the Italian Renaissance and George Watts (whose ‘epic spirit’ Rothenstein had always admired).²⁵⁷

It is, however, just as important – as I hope this chapter will demonstrate – to see these words in light of Rothenstein’s twenty or so years of exhibiting experience in the London art world: a context which is easily forgotten. After all, Rothenstein’s memoirs, written in the early 1930s, make very little of his role in the foundation of the Carfax Gallery or The Society of Twelve, with scant mention of the influence that these two projects were to have on other commercial galleries and societies. This is partly humility, but it serves also as a further example of the mentality that we see emerging in the 1916 *Plea*; an attitude that was to run somewhat contrary to the aims of these earlier schemes. The Carfax represented a successful attempt to exhibit and sell the work of artists whose work was traditionally shunned by the Academy. All the same it was bound by certain laws: for those who wanted to see beyond the Academy, it offered an attractive alternative, but for the increasing amount of artists and critics who wanted to see ‘beyond the gallery’ altogether, or beyond the drawing-room (the ultimate home of so many Carfax paintings/drawings) it had a much limited appeal.²⁵⁸

We find instead the growing suspicion that the growth of small independent galleries, lauded at first, was affecting the very nature of the art itself. Post-Impressionism may seem to some to have exploded upon the scene, but to what extent could it be considered a natural consequence of problems that had been lurking in the pre-war art market for some time? Could the spontaneous, unstructured nature of much modern work be linked (as Rothenstein believes of Cubism) with the speed of modern

²⁵⁷ It is clearly the Italian courts he has in mind when he muses, somewhat idealistically, on a ‘healthy intercivic rivalry’, imagining Sheffield county council as the court of Mantua in waiting. Although Rothenstein was later to make moves in this direction, attempts to kick-start a noble mural-painting tradition met either with lack of council support (Leeds in 1923) or relative critical indifference (St. Stephen’s Hall): W Rothenstein (1937c) 348-50; Willson (2000) 196-204. Rothenstein visited Italy in 1905 and 1907. On Watts see W Rothenstein (1937b) 32-4.

²⁵⁸ See Cork (1985).

commerce? Had the ‘crumbling down of big institutions’ brought with it the very ‘disappearance of that probity’ which Rothenstein was to spend much of his career mourning?

Walter Sickert’s disparaging reference to the ‘incessant lollipops’ of modern art comes to mind; an ironic reference point, perhaps, since Sickert is one of the artists whom Rothenstein takes to task in his memoirs for allowing late fame and relative financial stability to undermine the quality of his work.²⁵⁹ Corot provides another example. The early work of Corot, he argues, passed almost un-noticed, whilst his later ‘slight feathery landscapes’ provided a tonic to his neglect: not because they were better, but because they were infinitely more sellable.²⁶⁰ They met the needs of the dealer and the patron not so much in style as in speed. It is almost as if Rothenstein, once a follower of Whistler, is echoing Ruskin’s fear of a ‘lack of finish’; fearing that the needs of the market are overtaking the need to bring a work of art to a point of significant ‘completion’. It is not necessary a case of surface texture, per se, or even of the precise time taken over a work, but of the artist’s vision being compromised by a lack of concentration on the subject in hand; perhaps even by the knowledge that their art doesn’t *need* to stand the much-loved, though ultimately undefinable, test of time:

If painters formerly worked for the Church and the State, they knew at least their work would have a permanent place in chapel or palace, and must stand the scrutiny of more than a generation. Most paintings to-day are seen but once at one or other current exhibitions, and generally return to the artists’ studios, to be stacked against the walls; while books can be read and re-read at pleasure.²⁶¹

Though they lack the power of Walter Benjamin’s analyses of modern art and commodity culture – or later surveys of modernism and the marketplace, including influential studies by Robert Jensen and Malcolm Gee – Rothenstein’s thoughts on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century art market nevertheless anticipate some of

²⁵⁹ ‘In these days of incessant lollipops, strong meat does not find quick or universal favour’. This comment was made in May 1910 in favourable reference to William Strang’s *Adam and Eve* (though the language Sickert employs is remarkably similar to that often used in reference to Rothenstein’s painting): Robins (2000) 239; W Rothenstein (1939) 276-7.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ W Rothenstein (1939) 176.

the problems that critics have with the usual modernist narrative, offering corrections that widen our understanding of the actual conditions, even if they err, occasionally, on the side of self-preservation.²⁶²

The fact is, despite consistent critical respect and a fairly positive public profile (not to mention direct involvement in the set-up of various exhibiting spaces) Rothenstein made very little money from his exhibitions, especially between 1900 and 1915, when he relied heavily on the patronage of his brother. Throughout the first half of his career, therefore, he was well used to the dispiriting experience of stacking paintings in the studio post-exhibition, left to dream – as in a letter to Herbert Fisher – of a ‘university of the fine arts, where men will learn to respect only that which is worth the dignity of noble expression, where the past shall be used to make present ideals possible, to illumine and guide contemporary thought and all triviality will be relegated to the lumber room of picture dealers’.²⁶³

Picture dealers seem to be cast in a gloomy light in this case; their role reduced to vendors of thoughtless, commercial tat. As recent studies have shown – and as contemporary sources consistently prove – this was a typical representation of dealers.²⁶⁴ The stock of the art dealer had risen over the course of the nineteenth century, admittedly, and their reputation was much improved from earlier stereotypes: nevertheless it may have stopped short of radical reassessment. However enlightened a dealer might be, and however much they were able to distance themselves from accusations of commercialism, they were to remain in a compromising position.

Again, it may still seem a little odd that Rothenstein, of all artists, should be expressing himself in this way. After all – as this chapter will prove – he was not a passive pawn caught up a system that didn’t support his particular aesthetics or commercial ideals; nor was he a commercially inept artist left at the mercy of money-grabbing dealers. In fact, he worked with some of the most respected dealers of his time: men who managed, for the most part, to sidestep the stereotypes. He made a conscious effort to exhibit in galleries – and with societies that were run (at least

²⁶² Mainardi (1993) 4; Benjamin (1992); Jensen (1994); Gee (1981). See also Bättschmann (1997).

²⁶³ This letter was written in 1910; Lago (1978) 158.

²⁶⁴ Helmreich (2005); Fletcher (2007); Fyfe (2000) 64.

initially) by likeminded individuals. Not the type of person to be carried along by conditions set by other people, the art world against which he rails in the 1916 lecture was not only one in which Rothenstein had been thoroughly involved, but one which he had personally helped forge, for better or worse.

Though Rothenstein tackled the role with more energy than most, it is not necessarily rare to find an artist taking an active role in how his works are exhibited and sold. In fact, most artists of this period were forced into ‘entrepreneurial roles’ whether they liked it or not.²⁶⁵ They were afforded a certain freedom, but it was a dangerous and elusive one, which constantly threatened to throw artists into openly commercial waters, controlled by market forces rather than the state.²⁶⁶ The trick was to find a way in which to play those forces to one’s advantage without appearing to compromise a personal artistic vision; to work within the system whilst tweaking it to suit your own needs.²⁶⁷

Societies and small commercial galleries provided one source of immediate relief. Reflecting an increasingly specialised market, in line with general economic trends, societies were being founded by artists left, right and centre.²⁶⁸ Few artists founded their own *galleries*, but many were closely associated with extant spaces; afforded certain freedoms never before granted to artists (solo exhibitions, better control of exhibiting conditions, closer contact with patrons, etc.). Whistler, for instance, was one artist always on the lookout for new ways to control the exhibiting spaces, with an eye to both aesthetic ideals and potential buyers.²⁶⁹ Alive to the potentialities of a larger, looser market he – in the words of Anna Gruetzner Robins – ‘inadvertently provided a model for a modernist art practice which involved forming cliques, developing strategies for picture-making, taking over exhibition spaces and art-

²⁶⁵ Wright (2004) 27.

²⁶⁶ Mainardi (1993) 127-8.

²⁶⁷ For a detailed study of the relationship between a successful modern artist and the marketplace, see Michael Fitzgerald’s work on Picasso: Fitzgerald (1995).

²⁶⁸ For a detailed analysis of the growth of societies during this period see Codell (1995).

²⁶⁹ On Whistler’s influential role in the history of the commercial gallery and the one-man show see Jensen (1994) 42-48.

politicking'.²⁷⁰ Though exhibitions such as Whistler's 1874 Flemish Gallery show did not exactly usher in an exciting new era of like-minded projects, they nonetheless suggested new possibilities.

Whistler is, of course, a highly important figure in this context. Though Rothenstein was greatly influenced by his art (thinking him a 'legendary' figure, no less) and valued his encouragement above all others, he was suspicious of his tactical approach.²⁷¹ For many British artists (and certainly for the British public) Whistler was too much of an attention-seeker, too entertaining for his own good, too keen to influence; to collect followers who would call him 'The Master'.²⁷² 'Whistler could not afford the luxury of popular indifference', Linda Merrill has written – though it is interesting to note how many of his fans who could not, in their own way, afford indifference, nevertheless eschewed his tactical approach.²⁷³ 'Belief in publicity was this painter's tragedy' wrote Ricketts, a comment that says as much about Ricketts's approach to the art world as it does about Whistler's.²⁷⁴

It seems fair to say, in light of this, that Whistler's behaviour was a major factor in forcing certain members of the following generation into rather more low-key ventures; taking care to keep the combativeness firmly out of the newspapers, almost as if they feared the concept of being seen to be 'fashionable'. Whatever their ideals, they weren't to be fulfilled by employing Whistlerian tactics – or by imitating the manner of exhibiting spaces such as the highly fashionable Grosvenor: the self-consciously distinct 'temple' of art.²⁷⁵ It was, arguably, a peculiarly English approach to art, marked by the

²⁷⁰ Robins (2007) 5.

²⁷¹ 'Logan Pearsall Smith has just come back from Paris & told me that Whistler thinks more of me than any other of the younger men in England, and if you know how much I think of him, you would understand what pleasure it gives me...': William Rothenstein to Bertha Rothenstein, undated from Chelsea [c.1895], HG1N; W Rothenstein (1937b) 82-3. Ricketts and Holmes significantly dissuaded Whistler from using the Vale Press, a partnership that the former thought would probably 'end in murder': Holmes (1936) 172-3.

²⁷² See Robins (2007). As Rothenstein was to find out, Whistler was a man who 'never forgot and never forgave'; whose 'judgments on his contemporaries were as much dictated by his personal relations with artists as by aesthetic standards'; W Rothenstein (1937b) 114. A note in *The Observer*, preceding the publication of Rothenstein's first volume of memoirs suggested that 'the book will be as memorable as Whistler's "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies"'. But Sir William's book is more likely to demonstrate the gentle art of making and keeping friends': *The Observer*, 15th Feb 1931, TA: TAG 933/1.

²⁷³ Merrill (1998) 56.

²⁷⁴ Ricketts (1931).

²⁷⁵ The Grosvenor is one of the few major galleries to have received significant art historical attention: see Casteras and Denney (1996), Denney (2000) and Newall (1995).

conservatism represented by artists like Philip Wilson Steer, who, despite acceptance of forward-thinking Impressionist values, held onto the general view (according to Rothenstein) that ‘change only means bother’; failing to comprehend ‘why, if a man could paint like Whistler, he should want to write letters and make things uncomfortable’.²⁷⁶

Keen to avoid controversy – or any sort of palpable publicity – such artists would have to rely on sensitive critics to reach their audience.²⁷⁷ The patrons were not, after all, a complete law unto themselves. Their tastes were often informed by outside sources, by newspapers and journals, upon which some artists and dealers were able to exercise their influence. Here they were fortunate. There is no doubt that places like the Carfax, The N.E.A.C and The Society of Twelve benefited greatly from the support of critics such as D.S.MacColl (*The Spectator* and *The Saturday Review*), Frank Rutter, (*The Sunday Times*) Frederick Wedmore (*The Studio* and *The Art Journal*), George Moore (*The Speaker*) and Laurence Binyon (*The Saturday Review*).²⁷⁸ *The Saturday Review*, in particular, was closely associated with Carfax-based artists. Rothenstein contributed several articles during the 1890s and Beerbohm took over as theatre critic from Bernard Shaw (who owned shares in the Carfax) in 1898, whilst other friends of Rothenstein’s – such as Robert Cunninghame-Graham and Arthur Symons – were regular contributors.²⁷⁹ MacColl, already an N.E.A.C member, was invited to hold his first exhibition at the Carfax in 1902.²⁸⁰ Though MacColl did not continually cite the Carfax as an example of the perfect gallery, he nonetheless gave its exhibitions consistent attention and, by sharing many of the same concerns as its founders (an obvious admiration for Rodin, for example) gave his readers the impression that this was where the future lay.

²⁷⁶ W Rothenstein (1937b) 170.

²⁷⁷ A critic wrote in 1910 that ‘the galleries of Messrs. Carfax have the unique distinction of never being known to have had an uninteresting exhibition... their doors are always open to artists who are not bidding for the sensational sorts of reputation’: ‘Studio-Talk’, *The Studio*, vol. LI (1910) 229.

²⁷⁸ Wedmore mentioned Rothenstein in articles for *The Studio*, *The Art Journal* and in his 1905 study *Fine Prints*, though their correspondence remained tense (Rothenstein wrote later that Wedmore ‘wearing’ him) Wedmore (1905); W Rothenstein (1937b) 208. For Rothenstein on George Moore, see W Rothenstein (1937b) 240-3.

²⁷⁹ See Beckson (1987); Watts and Davies (2008); Holroyd (1992) 171. Rothenstein contributed two articles on Goya, and edited their Christmas supplement in December 1897: W Rothenstein (1896a-b). The close associations between newspapers, journals and the Carfax Gallery were brought to my attention by Anne Helmreich, to whom I am grateful.

²⁸⁰ The exhibition was delayed and eventually held in 1906: Borland (1990) 118.

Rothenstein's wealth of contacts and experience were always going to prove useful in any role he took. However, for all his networking skills, he could be cautious in his approach, proudly employing that 'reticence which was far removed from narrow-mindedness' (a feature of British society of which he was especially fond).²⁸¹ It should therefore come as no surprise that this chapter will reveal Rothenstein's interaction with exhibiting spaces to be complex; subject to constant changes of mind as he continually lost and regained his faith in the possibility of a satisfactory system. He had spent twenty years or so hacking his way through MacColl's 'jungles of painting' – and if his later remarks that the results were wholly negative, this may be relative only to his ideals.

Despite its reputation as an important centre for young artists at the turn of the century, and continuing references to its 'progressive' nature, the Carfax Gallery has thus far received little direct attention, excepting its role in the careers of specific artists and its role in staging a handful of 'important' exhibitions, principally those of the Camden Town Group, whose place within the standard history of modern art in Britain remains relatively secure.²⁸²

However, if we accept the fact that the Carfax – itself inspired by the Vale Press and the Dutch Gallery – went on to be a major influence on the Chenil Gallery and The Leicester Galleries, we might understand why the gallery ought to have attracted more attention in histories of modernism in Britain. In her study of important exhibitions held between 1910-1914, Anna Greutzner Robins selects Augustus John's 1910 show at the Chenil and an exhibition of work by Matisse and Maillol from the Leicester Galleries; revealing both spaces operating in what seems, in retrospect, to have been the

²⁸¹ W Rothenstein (1937c) 206.

²⁸² Charles Holmes's 1903 guide, *Picture Collecting*, draws attention to the Carfax as a gallery that makes 'a special study of the work of the best of our younger artists': Holmes (1903) 46-7. For the Carfax cited as 'progressive' see Stansky (1996) 90. Borland (1995) deals with the Carfax during the Robert Ross years. The gallery receives passing references in such works as Sturgis (2005), Holroyd (1996a), Arnold (1981) and Speaight (1962). The most recent study of the Camden Town Group is Upstone (2008). The relationship between the Carfax and the Camden Town Group is due to receive closer attention in the forthcoming Camden Town Group Online Research Project (Tate).

vanguard of British culture.²⁸³ The Chenil is regularly mentioned in other texts also, mostly in relation to David Bomberg's solo show in 1914 – though the precise relationship between the young artist and the exhibiting space has only recently been explored in detail.²⁸⁴ It is almost as if art historians think this exhibition, and others, could have been held anywhere; that the context pales into insignificance alongside the work itself: forgetting that it is the space that made the work visible, if not possible.²⁸⁵

Bomberg's debut at the Chenil was, of course, a memorable one: a major modernist moment, if you will, such as we struggle to find in the history of the Carfax (aside from the shows of the Camden Town Group, which, excepting Wyndham Lewis's almost universally deplored contributions, were probably less dramatic than commonly thought).²⁸⁶ Half-moments abound: Augustus John was never far away from controversy, Beerbohm's caricatures (*The Second Childhood of John Bull*, for instance) were far from polite; even artists such as Steer, Tonks and Rothenstein were not, in many people's eyes, respectable fare.²⁸⁷ That major figure of modern art in Britain, Roger Fry, also made a home for his art at the Carfax, albeit at a stage in his career rendered complex by subsequent events – an issue which could even have hurt the gallery by association, undermining its 'progressive' credentials.²⁸⁸

That there has been no real attempt to forge a 'Carfax group' – despite Rothenstein's claim that the gallery was founded to support 'work of a certain character' – might, however, be seen as a positive. Though an ability to eschew easy classification can do little for an artist's reputation, I think it is clear that those associated with the Carfax are best dealt with in texts which resist the urge to force the issue of shared characteristics; that are content to explore aspects of their work without employing the oppositional frameworks that have often blighted British art history. The best examples

²⁸³ Robins (1997).

²⁸⁴ Helmreich and Holt (2010).

²⁸⁵ As Helmreich and Holt have written: 'a particular physical venue generates specific values and associations, maintained through certain modes of display, selection of artistic goods and related activities, and patterns of critical reception and consumption, all relying on an extensive social network involving artists, critics, dealers, and patrons': Helmreich and Holt (2010) 45.

²⁸⁶ Lewis showed *The Architect* at the first show and *Port de Mer* at the second.

²⁸⁷ Paul Stansky describes a 1906 show at Agnews where a 'respectable' clientele might have been shocked by a show of 'independent' art by artists such as Steer, Tonks, Rothenstein and Sickert: Stansky (1996) 90-1; see also W Rothenstein (1937c) 93.

²⁸⁸ Fry's Carfax exhibitions occurred at a stage in his career during which the influence of Richard Wilson, rather than Paul Cézanne, was prevalent: Spalding (1999) 73-4, 113.

of such work have, nevertheless, tended to pursue their ends without direct reference to the gallery itself.²⁸⁹

The Carfax remains, then, in a strange position. This seems appropriate: the Carfax was problematic from the beginning, perhaps even deliberately so. From the very start, it seems to have lacked a clear – or, to put it another way, a constrictive – identity. As the Daily Telegraph put it in 1902 (a quote the gallery used for their advertisements) the Carfax was, in its early stages, associated ‘with the finer and less obvious phases of both modern and ancient art’.²⁹⁰ ‘Less obvious’ seems to be an important phrase in reference to Rothenstein and his friends (with Whistler, again, an obvious reference point). Holbrook Jackson, whose famous survey of 1890s culture was first published in 1913, frequently employed the word ‘obvious’ to describe a contemporary tendency. ‘At no period in English history had the obvious and the commonplace been in such dispute,’ he writes, adding: ‘so fearful were writers of being convicted of obviousness that they often convicted themselves of obscurity’.²⁹¹ What this means in terms of their art (and art criticism) is a subject for the next chapter – our immediate concern is how it relates to the gallery as a business. Does this obscurity extend *beyond* late Victorian/Edwardian writing, into institutional practices? To what extent could a gallery function in a ‘less obvious’ manner?

Rothenstein’s official role at the Carfax may have been short-lived (he spent little over two years as its artistic advisor). Why he was involved in founding it in the first place; on what grounds it was established; and why he left it so soon are, nevertheless, interesting questions. In order to understand his motives in founding such a gallery, however, it will also be necessary to examine the history of his relationship with other exhibiting spaces; at galleries which set the precedent for what was to come, and those which followed in its wake.

From this point onward, I intend to work in a roughly chronological manner, contextualising the ventures I refer to within the market as a whole.

²⁸⁹ For example McConkey (2000); Upstone, Foster and Jenkins (2005); Tickner (2005); Jenkins (1989).

²⁹⁰ Daily Telegraph, June 4th 1902: quoted in *Year’s Art* advert, 1903.

²⁹¹ Jackson (1913) 128-9.

Rothenstein's first proper exhibiting experiences were in Paris. During his short period at the Slade (1888-9) however, he was able to come to some understanding of exhibiting spaces in London. In the first volume of his memoirs he describes the dizzying range of options facing the young artist for viewing and exhibiting works of art. There were, firstly, the 'old curiosity shops', evocative of the earlier nineteenth century and 'choked with articles of every kind' – or the print shops where 'one might find precious studies by old masters among the heaps of miscellaneous drawings in portfolios'.²⁹² More reliable contact with 'great' artists could be managed at the National Gallery, the South Kensington Museum (later the Victorian & Albert Museum), the private house of a patron such as Stopford Brooke (a collector of paintings by artists such as Rothenstein's Slade professor Alphonse Legros) and, on occasion, the houses and studios of artists themselves.²⁹³

Meanwhile there were the larger commercial galleries, such the recently founded New Gallery, created in response to the growing commercialism of the Grosvenor which – though never a viable business model – had in its heyday presented the most attractive alternative to the ailing Academy.²⁹⁴ Though the New Gallery lacked the imposing facade of its predecessor, or of the Dudley Gallery at the Egyptian Hall (where the N.E.A.C exhibited before the building was knocked down in 1905), it boasted a 'cavernous space' within, putting it firmly in a class of exhibiting spaces that galleries like the Carfax could never threaten.²⁹⁵ For this reason it tended towards large group shows, accommodating various societies, from the Arts and Crafts and the Portrait Painters to the ambitious International, whose first president was Whistler (to be followed by Rodin).

²⁹² It was at one such shop in the Brompton Road, that Rothenstein was later to buy two drawings by Rembrandt, at only 'five shillings each, and right under Sir Charles Robinson's nose!': W Rothenstein (1937b) 29.

²⁹³ Ibid 31-2.

²⁹⁴ The New Gallery was founded by Hallé and Carr, managers of the Grosvenor, after Sir Lindsay Coultts fell into financial difficulties in the late 1880s: see Waterfield (1991)

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

Solo shows, an ever-increasing feature of the London art market, were more likely to be found at the smaller galleries – or in strange, unlikely places, such as the class rooms of a girl’s school where the young Rothenstein went to seek out Whistler’s work.²⁹⁶ When Rothenstein told William Strang of his ‘intense love for J.F. Millet’s art’, he was directed to Dowdeswell’s Gallery in New Bond Street, where ‘besides paintings by Millet, I first saw canvases by Ingres, Delacroix, Corot, Daubigny, Diaz, and James and Mathew Maris’²⁹⁷. Whistler and Sickert also showed here; with Millet and the Maris brothers providing a link with the gallery where Rothenstein, Sickert, Ricketts, Shannon and others were to exhibit throughout the 1890s: Van Wisselingh’s Dutch Gallery in Brook Street.

The lack of relevant material makes it hard to assess the relative merits of these smaller galleries, though it must be remembered that there was quite a range in size, style and approach.²⁹⁸ Places like Agnews (which moved to Old Bond Street in 1876) were clearly ‘less flamboyant’ than the Grosvenor or the Grafton (made famous in 1910 when it staged Roger Fry’s Post-Impressionist exhibition).²⁹⁹ Nonetheless, for all its similarities to a private house – the probable destination of its wares – it was still a purpose-built building on a major street. Obachs (where the Society of Twelve exhibited) moved to the same street in 1901 in the hope of holding their own ‘for refined and dignified decoration, and above all, in respect of practical fitness for showing fine things adequately’.³⁰⁰ This is a revealing mission statement, with ‘fine’ things and ‘dignified decoration’ seen within a thoroughly ‘practical’ and ‘adequate’ framework. It is the usual balancing act: the desire to be ‘above’ commerce (as a servant of the arts) and the practical need to survive as a business on a commercial level. The smaller (or the smaller the level of financial backing behind) the gallery, the harder this balance became.

The complexity of the art during this period was, ironically, a result of the need

²⁹⁶ W Rothenstein (1937b) 31. The reference is probably to Whistler’s exhibition of May 1889 held at the London College for Men and Women at 29 Queen’s Square, Bloomsbury.

²⁹⁷ W Rothenstein (1937b) 34. The exhibition was probably the ‘Loan collection of pictures by the great French and Dutch romanticists of this century’ May 1889.

²⁹⁸ Waterfield (1991) 164.

²⁹⁹ Waterfield (1991) 163-4.

³⁰⁰ H. W. B., ‘Messrs. Obach and Co.’s New Galleries in London’, *Art Journal*, October 1901, p. 317.

to simplify the ever-growing chaos of the centralised system. Dissatisfied with the inability of the Academy (or in Paris, Salon) to accommodate the needs of an ever-increasing number of artists, a range of smaller spaces appeared, each dealing with parts of an art world which, though theoretically easier to navigate when split into chunks, remained similarly difficult to comprehend in its entirety. In her work on the French art market, Patricia Mainardi considers this situation in light of economic theories, seeing the development of the modern art market in a capitalist context:

...The factors important to the proper distribution of any product, including art, are visibility, knowledge of the market, and homogeneity of the product, but the annual Salon could no longer offer artists any of these conditions. The precondition for any kind of marketing – that different kinds of people know where to look for certain kinds of goods – had broken down in the democratic Salon. Other efforts were needed to bring these goods to their proper audiences, and the new concern for aesthetic purity as the guiding principle in the organization of exhibitions was the result.³⁰¹

It is worth questioning the extent to which the Carfax fulfilled its role within this modern market. The gallery was founded, seemingly, in order to help a certain group of artists locate a compliant audience – but it refused to be blatant in its approach, as if doing so would reveal its economic intentions, or limit a certain kind of art to a specific audience, thus crippling their claims to universal and/or eternal ideals. It is as if it desired to be visible and invisible simultaneously; to reap the benefits of capitalism, without bearing its mark.³⁰² This is not an uncommon avant-garde tactic, albeit one the Carfax employed with relatively little modernist bluster, for though it saw itself as a space for modern art, it reserved the right to be associated with more traditional art forms – and tended to eschew antagonistic strategies (or the kinds of artists who might employ such strategies).

Before Rothenstein was able to make his subtle mark on the rapidly developing London art market, however, he was flung into the similarly complex surroundings of

³⁰¹ Mainardi (1993) 118.

³⁰² Many of these issues are also relevant to the Chenil Gallery, duly described by Helmreich and Holt as ‘a commercial art gallery where modernism and the market confronted each other in a necessary but paradoxical relationship’, developing an identity that ‘depended crucially on the concept of commerce enacted without ostentation’. Holt and Helmreich, 46-7.

the Parisian market.

It might seem ironic that the young artist was sent to Paris (to study at the Académie Julian) on the advice of Solomon J Solomon, a Jewish painter who Rothenstein later described as ‘an exceptionally capable painter of the big Salon “machine”’.³⁰³ After all, the more famous of his Parisian friends – Toulouse-Lautrec or Degas, for instance – fall into a camp we might associate as anti-Salon. And yet, true to form, Rothenstein refuses in retrospect to play up to this black-and-white image of the Parisian art world. Indeed, I think we may find in his description of Solomon an equal quantity of derision and respect. It was, he considers, perfectly ‘sound’ of young artists to ‘distrust the pretentious and showy Salon picture’.³⁰⁴ But to condemn traditions out of hand, or follow the alternatives blindly, was a similarly foolish path to take. The official Salon was still, for all its faults, ‘the focus of popular interest’ and retained the power to impress young artists.³⁰⁵ Unsurprisingly, it was an artist such as Paul-Albert Besnard (1849-1934), who ‘stood *between* the more skilful of the Salon painters and independent artists’ [my italics] who rose up to become an early hero.³⁰⁶

When Rothenstein sent to the Salon himself, however, it was the reactionary Salon du Champs de Mars, where Whistler had shown his *Rose Corder*.³⁰⁷ Success was all the sweeter for having come to him alone: ‘am really very pleased with my Salon success,’ he wrote home, ‘as so many of my ‘comarades’ [sic] have been refused, poor Conder amongst them’.³⁰⁸

By early 1891 Rothenstein had managed his competitive instincts enough to share an exhibiting opportunity with the luckless Conder, outside of the Salon this time, in the uncertain but exciting world of the small commercial gallery:

³⁰³ W Rothenstein (1937b) 35. For Solomon see Pery (1990)

³⁰⁴ W Rothenstein (1937b) 72.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. 71.

³⁰⁶ Ibid. 44.

³⁰⁷ Ibid. 111.

³⁰⁸ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, undated postcard from Paris [early 1891?], HTGN. The work in question seems to have been the portrait of Conder, *L’Homme Qui Sort*: Speaight (1962) 49.

This show of Conder and mine was held at the little gallery of le père Thomas on the Boulevard Malesherbes. Thomas was a courageous but reckless dealer, one of the few who, at this time, risked their small capital on men in whom they believed. It was Lautrec who made our work known to him. Both Conder and I were very young and obscure; Conder was 23, and I was 19; yet with no chance of getting back his money the good Thomas placed his gallery at our disposal. Conder showed paintings of orchards, and drawings inspired by Omar Khayyam; I showed pastels, chiefly portraits, including the one of Oscar Wilde. The little show was favourably noticed in *Le Figaro*.³⁰⁹

Though Pere Thomas cannot be counted amongst the most well-known dealers of that time, the Boulevard Malesherbes was a major thoroughfare, well within one of a few Parisian districts known for artistic activity – and if Rothenstein’s accounts are to be trusted, the show went down remarkably well. In one letter, accompanying a bright pink invitation to the opening, he writes: ‘Just a few lines in great haste. We are having a small exhibition in chez Thomas of which all Paris (more or less) is talking. On Monday we receive in person, & we expect a great number of people. You can imagine it is a very good thing for my reputation’.³¹⁰ A few days later he reports back, breathlessly: ‘My dearest ones, a splendid success! From 1 o’clock until 6 a continual crowd pouring in. Of course it was perfectly splendid... all the most fashionable people & the most bohemian painters... We shall have several articles written on us which I shall send you & I shall have two of my things reproduced in one of the best art papers.’³¹¹

Amongst the painters who visited were Pissarro and Degas – quite a coup for the young artists and well worth all the excitement. The power of the Salon, so keenly felt at first, was already beginning to drain away. ‘People make a great fuss over my work here’, he writes, in his best offhand manner in July of that year.³¹² Aside from the ‘reckless’ Pere Thomas, one of the most famous dealers of the age, Durand-Ruel, was also interested. Indeed, he had gone so far as to take all of his work and promise to show it, presenting the opportunity both to cement the artist’s steadily-growing

³⁰⁹ W Rothenstein (1937b) 100-1. For more on this show see Galbally (2002) 95.

³¹⁰ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, March 1891, HGTN.

³¹¹ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, March 22nd 1891, HGTN.

³¹² William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, July 2nd 1891, HGTN.

reputation and earn him a little more money also (the latter, at this early stage, still seeming to be somewhat of a bonus – a situation that was soon to change).³¹³

If we look at Rothenstein's career through the Paris-centric, archetypal modernist narrative, he was at this early point in a position of remarkable strength. Befriended by Degas, courted by Durand-Ruel, praised in *Le Figaro*; judged by the sometimes narrow standards of popular art history, he may as well have floated into a dream.³¹⁴ To have given all this up (in 1893) to return to England – portrait commission or no portrait commission – seems, in retrospect, like a foolish move.³¹⁵ Conder certainly thought it was – and that Rothenstein was making a great mistake. He had 'dug' himself into Paris life: why move? Had not Wilde and Whistler 'extolled life in Paris, to the disadvantage of London?'³¹⁶

Putting aside the exalted company he was keeping, we still have the market to consider. Here too Paris is usually seen to have held all the right cards. The main problem was, as Rothenstein wrote, that 'English dealers sold only on commission; so that until something was bought the artist got nothing', a system which provoked artists such as Sickert, when 'unusually hard up' to take their canvases over to Paris, where the pay was not necessarily more generous, but could nonetheless be received immediately.³¹⁷ The prevailing feeling was that the Parisian dealers put more confidence in the artist, and in their own ability to create a market for the work, reinforcing the concept that Paris offered not only the best education for young artists, but a superior infrastructure through which they could reach an audience. Compared to the Parisian giants – Durand-Ruel at the end of the nineteenth century, and in the early years of the

³¹³ 'I have most brilliant news to tell you. Durand Ruel, the largest picture dealer in Paris, has taken all my work & will show it in his gallery, so I have every chance of not only getting well known in Paris but of making money': William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, undated letter from Paris [c.1891/2?], HG7N. This letter is the only evidence that Rothenstein worked with Durand-Ruel, suggesting that, if they did forge a business relationship, it was short-lived. The deal is not mentioned in his memoirs, though Durand-Ruel's gallery is duly described as 'to me a kind of second Louvre': W Rothenstein (1937b) 71. Very little of Rothenstein's Paris work, save a few paintings and sketchbooks, still exists.

³¹⁴ Rothenstein's experiences in Paris were certainly not typical; as Richard Thomson has noted: 'For a young British art to be connected with such luminaries in the Parisian avant-garde as Lautrec and Anquetin was exceptional in 1890': Robins and Thomson (2005) 100. Compare for instance the Paris experiences of Roger Fry and Philip Wilson Steer.

³¹⁵ The commission in question was for *Oxford Characters*, a series of lithographs depicting famous Oxford men (eventually published by John Lane in 1896).

³¹⁶ W Rothenstein (1937b) 126, 153.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.* 212.

twentieth figures such as Guillaume and Rosenberg – even the best London dealers tend to get a rough ride.³¹⁸

‘A few dealers with the flair and sagacity of Durand-Ruel would surely not be amiss among the five millions of Londoners’, confessed D.S.MacColl in 1899.³¹⁹ It would, however, be wrong to suggest that the forward-thinking London-based dealers simply did not exist. As recent work by Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich has shown, men such as Ernest Gambart and David Croal Thomson (working, in the main, at the French and Goupil galleries) did work hard to force a change – though not, one senses, a radical transformation – in the role and perception of the London art dealer.³²⁰ Both dragged the role away from accusations of the ‘middle-man’ or the ‘broker’; making of it something much more professional – and much less distinctly commercial. Gambart, in Fletcher’s words, ‘worked to establish a role for the dealer distinct from that of the speculator, positioning himself as a disinterested promoter of the arts, not merely as a buyer and seller of objects’.³²¹ Thomson, for his part, was stung when accused of keeping ‘a paint shop’; he clearly aspired to more than this, seeking ‘scholarly validation’ as a writer and editor, ever keen to reveal that there was more to his interests in art than a desire to make money.³²² The ‘best’ dealers, you could say, were those who managed to conceal the commercial aims of their trade: those who didn’t seem like dealers at all; who had, like Pere Thomas, a slightly ‘courageous and reckless’ nature.

The efforts of Gambart and Thomson were, undoubtedly, influential – and I believe that we may see the effects of their endeavours in the careers of dealers such as Van Wisselingh, Robert Ross and Arthur Clifton; all of whom, in their way, worked hard to overturn deep-rooted suspicions concerning the attitude of London-based dealers. Indeed, though there were notable differences, I would suggest that there were fewer disparities between the Paris and London art markets than we might think. Certainly there was a fair degree of cross-pollination.³²³ Goupils, where Thomson

³¹⁸ For a good and rare example of an artist writing openly about London art dealers and galleries see Roberts (1990) 99-121.

³¹⁹ D S MacColl in *The Saturday Review*, 11th Feb 1899, 171.

³²⁰ Fletcher (2007) and Helmreich (2005). For more on Gambart see Maas (1975).

³²¹ Fletcher (2007) 16.

³²² Helmreich (2005) 32.

³²³ For more on the interchanges between the London and Paris art world in the late nineteenth century

worked, was the London base of a French firm (though it later achieved independent status under William Marchant) in whose Paris base Elbert van Wisselingh (a Dutchman) was to work before founding the Dutch Gallery in London. Durand-Ruel himself was not averse to taking advantages of London conditions when needs must. During the Franco-Prussian war, a handful of French artists, Pissarro and Monet included, had taken their wares to London. Durand-Ruel (who had joined them) remained a constant visitor. One such visit, in 1905, may have had implications for the Carfax, to whose administration he may have offered advice.³²⁴

Walter Sickert, meanwhile, continued to make use of both markets; especially during his time at Dieppe, during which he frequently sent canvases back to Rothenstein to sell at the Carfax, farming others off to Parisian dealers. The canvases came, more often than not, with advice: 'I am so anxious you should avoid every possible small mistake by which custom is at all alienated,' he instructed Rothenstein at one point: 'Business is a science. The London dealers have not mastered it'.³²⁵ The Carfax, he clearly hoped, could.

Despite the misgivings of fellow artists, Rothenstein's return to London after three successful years in Paris was not initially disappointing. The young artist's popularity travelled well. Before leaving Paris in April 1893 he had two paintings hung on the line at the spring exhibition of the N.E.A.C – and on arriving in Chelsea later that month found that he was to be elected a member.³²⁶ By May he was writing articles for *The*

see Robins and Thomson (2005).

³²⁴ Durand-Ruel visited Ricketts and Shannon in 1905, brought by 'Aide' – possibly a reference to More Adey, a close friend of Robert Ross, then managing the Carfax: *The Diaries of Charles Ricketts*, Nov 14th 1905: BL 58103.

³²⁵ Walter Sickert to William Rothenstein, undated from Dieppe [c.1899] HTGN. Rothenstein, for his part, continued to visit Paris regularly – making good use of his connections throughout Europe (particularly Germany) to further his career. Rothenstein exhibited in Berlin in 1902 and helped arrange an exhibition of German work in London in 1906. The German background of his family undoubtedly endeared Rothenstein to Germany, though his success there also owed much to a contact from Paris, Ludwig von Hofman: see Brockington (2009) 297-319

³²⁶ 'I have had absolutely nothing refused in all the three exhibitions this year' he wrote to his father on 6th April, adding on the 22nd, 'My pictures are excellently hung, and I have received many compliments from the painters here... Every one here has been most kind to me'; William Rothenstein to Moritz

Studio (with promise of a series to come) and starting work on his *Oxford Characters*: the first of a series of lithographic portrait collections (published first by John Lane, later by Grant Richards) – and one of many publishing-based opportunities with which Rothenstein was engaged over the decade.³²⁷ These last ventures proved a mixed blessing. Though Rothenstein was more fortunate than most in having the great and the good (rather than the merely rich) to sit for him – a habit that Frank Rutter was to compare to G.F.Watts – portraiture remained for him an uneasy way to make a living.³²⁸

With this in mind, the work he made for exhibiting spaces was to become increasingly important, particularly as his hopes of financial independence dwindled. From Oxford – where ‘it will be most interesting doing all the distinguished people’ – he wrote home: ‘in future, dear pa, I shall not bother you for much money. I am absolutely confident that in a year’s time I shall not only be quite independent, but tolerably comfortable’.³²⁹ This comment rings hollow in retrospect, since almost five years later he is meditating on ‘what horrid drains children are in a thousand ways, on their parents purse, and heart strings... a painter’s life for the first years is much harder than people can realise’: thoughts which would be repeated many times over in the coming years.³³⁰

Though the *Oxford Characters* project dominated much of Rothenstein’s time during this period, he continued to make a name for himself in London; mostly within the ranks of the N.E.A.C, where he garnered a fair amount of critical attention – and a few sales also. It was a good starting point, but should the sales dry up (which they duly did) showing twice-yearly at the N.E.A.C would not prove financially sustainable.³³¹

Rothenstein, 6th April 1893, HGTN; William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, 22nd April 1893, HGTN.

³²⁷ Rothenstein wrote two – somewhat high-spirited – articles on the Paris art world in 1893, but turned down the opportunity to do any more, following a pay-related argument with Charles Holme (*The Studio* editor, not to be confused with Charles Holme, manager of the Vale Press): William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, May 2nd 1898; W Rothenstein (1937b) 134. *Oxford Characters* (1896) was followed by *English Portraits* (1898) *Liber Juniorum* (1898) and *Three Portraits of Verlaine* (1898, printed by the Vale Press).

³²⁸ F Rutter (1931) 236. For Rothenstein’s reflections on his career as a portraitist see Rothenstein (1937). For further contemporary critical analyses see Jackson (1911) and Tatlock (1926).

³²⁹ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, undated from Oxford [c.1893], HGTN.

³³⁰ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, September 20th 1898, HGTN. Rothenstein relied heavily on family money until the 1920s at least.

³³¹ In a letter to D S MacColl in 1922 Rothenstein claimed that he had only ever sold three paintings at

It may have been the main port of call for most of his Chelsea friends, but not everyone Rothenstein knew was associated with the N.E.A.C. Ricketts and Shannon were two artists who, for various reasons, kept away. Shannon had exhibited there in the late 1880s, but didn't appear again until 1897, when he made his carefully planned 'reappearance' as a painter.³³² Ricketts never exhibited there, probably because the majority of his work was unsuited to the N.E.A.C's output (in terms of medium), though it is also possible that his increasing suspicion of Impressionist trends, coupled with a controlling personality, made him reluctant to associate himself with the Club.³³³

Ultimately, both artists had projects of their own to worry about: the magazines, *The Dial* and *The Pageant*, and, later, The Vale Press in Warwick Street, which provided an exhibition space of its own. As Rothenstein noted in an 1896 letter:

Ricketts & Hacon are getting into their new place next week – the new Dial bears the name of the new firm on the cover – a particularly strong number... I am going to have a small exhibition of portraits later on in Ricketts's new place – they have a charming little shop in which they will have small shows from time to time.³³⁴

The significance of this 'charming little shop' is confirmed in Rothenstein's description of the Carfax as an enterprise that was 'fired by the example of Hacon and Ricketts's'.³³⁵ Though we have little evidence of how (and how often) the Vale Press Shop operated as an exhibiting space, or whether it had any real success in this mode, it clearly provided some kind of proof that an artist-led venture could succeed in the modern marketplace (though it should be noted that things ran much more smoothly when Ricketts was kept away from the accounts).³³⁶ The books brought the majority of the money in, but the shop also served as a focus point for a range of artists, chief among

the N.E.A.C, all of them before 1902: William Rothenstein to D S MacColl, Feb 6th 1922, HGTN.

³³² At the end of the 1880s Ricketts and Shannon devised a ten-year plan whereby Shannon would withdraw from the art world in order to become a painting master and Ricketts would generate income for the two of them through illustrations and book design: Delaney (1990) 36

³³³ Ricketts was happy, however, to exhibit in shows dominated by N.E.A.C, as he did at Wolverhampton in 1902. 'I think we might work left-handed for 5 years and still top our contemporaries' was his modest verdict on the experience: Delaney (1990) 147-8.

³³⁴ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, Feb 29th 1896, HGTN. William Hacon was the financial backer of the Vale Press. For more on the Vale Press and its foundation see Watry (2004).

³³⁵ W Rothenstein (1937b) 343.

³³⁶ Holmes (1936) 171-8.

them Rothenstein, Shannon, Sturge Moore, Legros and Lucien Pissarro, for whom it also acted as an art agent (a favour not bestowed upon Whistler).³³⁷ Reflecting both Ricketts' preoccupations and the size of the space, the shop dealt with small-scale work: woodcuts, etchings and lithographs – mediums which had traditionally received little attention in larger exhibitions.

This was not the only space, however, where Ricketts wielded power. Even before the birth of the Vale Press shop in 1896 he seems to have succeeded in gaining a degree of influence over an established, albeit small commercial gallery. This was the Dutch Gallery in Brook Street, run by the Dutch art dealer Elbert van Wisselingh. Though run by an experienced art dealer, it is this gallery that seems the most obvious predecessor for – and subsequent partner to – the Carfax. A typical entry from Ricketts's diary of 1903 – 'called at Wisselingh and Carfax' – sums up the relationship neatly; though he visited a range of London galleries regularly, these two took precedence.³³⁸

Before and after the Carfax's founding in 1898, the Dutch gallery held shows of all the major figures closely associated with the Carfax, including Rothenstein, Ricketts, Shannon, Sickert, Conder, Strang and Bussy.³³⁹ It was also the home of the Society of Medallists, of which Ricketts, Shannon and Rothenstein were members (the latter acting as honorary secretary) and in 1898 hosted an exhibition of wood-engraving, arranged by Ricketts, featuring the work of Shannon, Sturge Moore, Savage, Nicholson and Lucien Pissarro.³⁴⁰ This same exhibition also featured the work of Millet: a major reference point for Rothenstein, as were many of the other, older artists associated with the Dutch Gallery. This was, no doubt, another reason for Ricketts' close association with Van Wisselingh: his gallery was to provide constant opportunities for him as a collector.

³³⁷ Delaney (1990) 101. For Whistler comment see fn.271

³³⁸ The Diaries of Charles Ricketts, June 24th 1903, BL 58101. Other spaces that feature highly are Obachs – where the Society of Twelve exhibited – and Agnews, to which David Croal Thomson had moved. When Van Wisselingh finally gave up trying to sell the work of R.F. Wells, a young sculptor, Ricketts (acting as an agent, to his evident amusement) immediately tried to win Wells favour with Carfax: 'Wells called in low spirits, trouble with Wisselingh'; 14th June 1904: 'Called on Wisselingh, rather painful interview, he can't go on helping Wells. Called on Ross!!!!': 11th June 1904: The Diaries of Charles Ricketts, BL 58102. See also Delaney (1990) 152-3.

³³⁹ The Dutch Gallery exhibitions have been listed, amongst others, by the University of Glasgow online project 'Exhibition Culture, 1878-1908': <http://www.exhibitionculture.arts.gla.ac.uk/about.php> [last accessed: 27/07/10].

³⁴⁰ Delaney (1990) 123-4.

Indeed, throughout the late 1890s and early 1900s Van Wisselingh was to help him and his friends buy, sell and see work.³⁴¹ In return he was open to advice (for instance, Ricketts's suggestion to show Camille Pissarro's lithographs), with which he turned a gallery that had tended to specialize in Dutch masters into a space where a mixture of Dutch and French masters mingled with the work of contemporary Dutch, French and British artists.³⁴²

Despite a perceived lack of business sense and natural timidity, Van Wisselingh [fig 16] had an impressive background as a dealer.³⁴³ His father, Hendrik, had set up an art dealing business in Amsterdam in 1838, showing in the following decades a preference for the French Barbizon and Dutch Hague Schools. By 1875 he had moved the business to The Hague. Upon his death in 1884 he passed on his business to his son Elbert, who had been gaining experience at both Goupil's Hague and Paris branches, and with two Scottish dealers, David Cottier and William Craibe Angus (whose daughter he married in 1887). These two dealers drew him to London, where he set up the Dutch Gallery in 1892 – though he continued to have ties with Amsterdam, which Ricketts and Shannon were able to take advantage of.³⁴⁴

Amongst the Dutch artists with whom Van Wisselingh was associated were the Maris brothers, in particular Mathew (or Matthijs), who met Elbert in Paris and followed him and David Cottier to London, where he was to live as a virtual hermit until 1917.³⁴⁵ Following a falling-out with Cottier – whom he considered a 'personification of all he despised in a corrupt, materialistic society' – Mathew Maris relied on the financial support of Van Wisselingh, who represented an 'honourable

³⁴¹ Ibid. 116. On Feb 26th 1900 Charles Ricketts writes: 'Van Wisselingh did not turn up at Christies in time for our drawings'; July 17th 1900: 'Forbes refuses his portrait by Shannon with all the pomp of a grocer returning his photo to a photographer. Wisseleing [sic] has most charmingly come forward to purchase it'; March 27th 1901: 'C.J.H [Charles Holmes] has bought a Delacroix drawing from Van Wisselingh': The Diaries of Charles Ricketts, BL 58098, 58099.

³⁴² Delaney (1990) 92.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ricketts and Shannon exhibited at Van Wisselingh's Amsterdam gallery in 1895. Rothenstein contributed his double portrait of the artists. For a history of the Van Wisselinghs see Heijbroek and Wouthuysen (1999). This study (in Dutch) was reviewed by M.Hopkinsons, *The Burlington Magazine*, Nov 2000, 712-3. E.J. Wisselingh & Co continue to trade in The Netherlands today.

³⁴⁵ Bionda and Blotkamp (1991) 182.

exception to the rule'.³⁴⁶ Here Van Wisselingh's possible poor business sense is cast in a positive light: it is through being an inefficient art dealer in the material sense that he becomes, in other senses, the most attractive dealer of them all. This idea is echoed in later descriptions, throughout which Van Wisselingh appears almost as an art admirer who happens to run a gallery, rather than a dealer.³⁴⁷ 'In appearance the most distinguished dealer I ever saw', recalled Grant Richards; feelings shared by *The Morning Leader* in 1894, who thought him similarly 'distinguished', adding that 'he has done a great deal for art and artists in this country and in Holland'.³⁴⁸ His tastes, suggested the latter, might not have been obvious (that word again) and would probably never appeal to the wider public, but there was much to interest the 'artist and art connoisseur'.³⁴⁹

Oliver Brown, later of the Leicester Galleries, was equally impressed by this 'solemn and melancholy Dutchman of great judgment' with his sombre artistic tastes and decidedly low-key approach to selling, describing him as 'one of the most silent men I have ever known, he would point to a picture, look at me and stroke his beard without saying a word'.³⁵⁰ Amongst the work Brown recalled seeing at the Dutch Gallery were paintings by Daumier.³⁵¹ Rothenstein shared this experience:

I had not been long in Chelsea when I made friends with a cultured picture-dealer named van Wisselingh. At his gallery in Brook Street I found paintings and drawings by Daumier, then little known in London, by Delacroix, Courbet, Millet and Mathew Maris. He generously offered me the use of his gallery; I talked the matter over at the Vale, and Shannon agreed to join me in a small exhibition of prints and drawings.³⁵²

This exhibition – Rothenstein's first major London show – took place in 1894.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ One thinks of Thomas Davies, the eighteenth century bookseller, of whom Samuel Johnson said (and Oscar Wilde reminded us) 'that he was not a bookseller, but "a gentleman who dealt in books"'; Wilde (1945) 51.

³⁴⁸ Richards (1933) 189-190; *Morning Leader*, June 11th 1894.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Brown (1968) 27.

³⁵¹ One of these paintings was, quite possibly, the *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza* now owned by the National Gallery, London, which was bought from Van Wisselingh by Hugh Lane in 1904, passed on to the Tate in 1917 as part of the Lane bequest and later transferred to the National Gallery. At least a dozen paintings by Daumier can be traced back to Van Wisselingh.

³⁵² W Rothenstein (1937b) 198.

Rothenstein showed thirty one works, mostly lithographs, accompanied by some drawings and pastels; whilst Shannon offered lithographs and drawings.³⁵³ Portraits naturally dominated Rothenstein's selection, though the varied and interesting subjects of those works (Verlaine, Lord Alfred Douglas, Max Beerbohm) qualified his claims to modernity. To many reviewers, indeed, Rothenstein was still the young man from Paris, the 'French *decadent*' who was 'rapidly becoming as *rèpandu* in London' with work of a 'quite wonderfully clever', 'striking' and 'complex' nature.³⁵⁴ However, despite the Michael Fields' impression of him at this exhibition strutting about like a 'bantam cock', he was not seen as a poser; rather someone who combined the faintly vulgar with 'beauty in design' and 'a subtle feeling for colour'.³⁵⁵ Though some shirked at comparing the work of the two artists – Shannon was rarely perceived as being all that modern – both artists found themselves (no doubt to their delight) compared to Puvis de Chavannes, with most commentators convinced that this was, altogether, work of a clever, yet subtle nature.³⁵⁶ One critic described it as a 'pleasant little show, free from staring colour or tiresome laboriousness': a comment which hints at some of the artists' aims – the desire to eschew fashionable effects, for instance – whilst revealing the dangers inherent in their approach.³⁵⁷ There was, it seems, a fine line between dignified beauty and mere prettiness. Needless to say, the phrase 'pleasant little show' probably wasn't what Rothenstein had in mind when he wrote to his older brother shortly before the preview, noting that 'Shannon has some simply magnificent work, & I believe it will be in a certain way a distinctly important exhibition'.³⁵⁸

The exhibiting space itself clearly had some bearing on the reception of the work. Most reviewers struggled to deal with the Dutch gallery – and later the Carfax – without referring to its smallness; sometimes revelling in the idea of a tiny haven within

³⁵³ One of Rothenstein's pastels – a portrait of a girl called 'Ryllis' – impressed William Llewellyn Hacon so much that he both bought the art work and married the model: Holmes (1936) 95; W Rothenstein (1937b) 198-200

³⁵⁴ *The Gentlewoman*, May 26th 1894; *Sunday Times*, May 27th 1894. He was still using French titles for many works, such as *Toque de velours*, a drawing he sold in the first week.

³⁵⁵ Moore (1933) 187; *Sunday Times*, May 27th 1894.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*; *Daily Telegraph*, June 1894.

³⁵⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 24th 1894.

³⁵⁸ William Rothenstein to Charles Rutherston, May 17th 1894, HGTN. Rothenstein wrote to his father after the opening noting: 'I have sold one drawing... the weekly papers will probably have notices tomorrow... Van Wisselingh is very pleased with our show. Most people are very keen about it' – William to Moritz Rothenstein, undated [May 1894?], HGTN.

the big bustling art world; just as often struggling with the dark and cramped conditions.³⁵⁹ No one ever seemed sure whether or not a ‘distinctly important exhibition’ could be staged in such a space or not. Smallness in the gallery context seemed to act as both a selling point and, if necessary, an excuse. D.S.MacColl brings out the ‘pleasant’ word himself in reference to the Dutch Gallery in 1899: this time with wholly positive associations. ‘At Mr Van Wisselingh’s,’ he writes, ‘is a landscape by Mr. Mark Fisher that is even better, if I may trust my recollection, and discount its advantage of being hung in a small pleasant gallery, than his excellent work at the Academy and International exhibitions’.³⁶⁰

Putting such tensions aside, it seems fair to say that Rothenstein’s Dutch Gallery exhibition was successful. Though he never held such a large exhibition of his work there again he was to return four years later as a member and honorary secretary of the Society of Medallists.³⁶¹ By this time, however, he had begun develop exhibiting ideas of his own. These were to blossom in the shape of the Carfax: another ‘small pleasant gallery’: if not the ‘ideal shop’ itself.

If we were to take Rothenstein’s word, the single driving force behind the Carfax would be John Fothergill. It is Fothergill who has the ‘extremely generous’ and ‘adventurous spirit’, Fothergill who is ‘fired by the example of Hacon and Ricketts’ and Fothergill who proposes both to start the gallery *and* raise the finances.³⁶² Rothenstein’s own role is simply described: ‘I was to be responsible for the choice of artists’ he writes, suggesting a primarily advisory position: significant, but not central. The ‘business side’, he is keen to remind us, was never his concern, but that of Arthur Clifton. The general

³⁵⁹ Ricketts’ last show at Van Wisselingh’s (which ran for a disappointing single month in June 1906) was beset by problems which Ricketts blamed on the far-from-pleasant conditions of the gallery. He wrote: ‘Hanging pictures for my show at Wisselinghs, the room is so dark, the light so bad, the pictures looked so brown, I became more & more depressed as they were put up and evidently depressed poor Wisselingh’: The Diaries of Charles Ricketts May 22nd 1906: BL 58104. His next exhibition was held at the Carfax in 1907. Mark Fisher was a landscapist and regular N.E.A.C exhibitor.

³⁶⁰ D S MacColl, *Saturday Review*, 17th June 1899, p.749.

³⁶¹ First exhibition of Society of Medallists was held at the Dutch Gallery in February 1898; the second in 1901.

³⁶² W Rothenstein (1937b) 343.

impression is of Rothenstein assisting someone else's venture; rather than, as other sources suggest, a deeper and much less clear-cut involvement. Before exploring these sources – and their implications – it is worth establishing a few facts concerning one of the central players.

John Fothergill was born in the Lake District in 1876. After studying at Bath College he went on to St. John's College Oxford, where he lasted a term, moving on to study under Sir Arthur Blomfield at the London School of architecture; ostensibly killing time before receiving his 21st birthday inheritance.³⁶³ Over the next decade or so, before gaining fame as a sartorial innkeeper in the 1920s, his life was to revolve around the often overlapping social circles of three men: Robert Ross, Edward Warren and William Rothenstein.³⁶⁴

Ross was the oldest of these friends and, along with Reggie Turner (a close friend of Max Beerbohm's) helped introduce Fothergill to figures such as Oscar Wilde.³⁶⁵ Warren, meanwhile, came from a rich Boston family (in the paper manufacturing line) and had studied first at Harvard and then at Oxford, where he was much influenced by the work of Walter Pater. Inspired in part by his mother, who owned paintings by Corot and Millet, Warren began collecting in earnest in the early 1890s, taking on a young assistant (John Marshall) and buying a house in Sussex, where he gathered a team of studious young archaeologists, of which Fothergill was soon to form a part.³⁶⁶ Lewes House was, in Rothenstein's words: 'a monkish establishment,

³⁶³ The main source of information regarding Fothergill's background is Sox (1991) a study of Edward Warren, which draws on Fothergill's unpublished memoirs and provides a good general account of his early life. Fothergill's later life is described in Fothergill (1938). Fothergill is mentioned in various memoirs, such as Christopher Nevinson's, who describes a meeting c.1910: 'Mr Fothergill was an exquisite in dark blue velvet suiting, pale-yellow silk shirt and stock, with a silver pin as large as an egg, and patent court shoes with silver buckles... In order to attract attention Fothergill developed a fit of temperament and tore up his drawing, then struck several matches which he threw in the air, and departed... Presently he returned in changed clothes – a black coat, chef trousers and sandals, with a whippet at his heels': Nevinson (1938) 34.

³⁶⁴ Fothergill (1938) 15.

³⁶⁵ Fothergill remained friendly with Wilde until snubbing him in Rome in 1898, fearing that any connection with Wilde might put Edward Warren under suspicion with the Italian police, who were apparently looking for an excuse to quash Warren's collecting: Sox (1991) 140-2.

³⁶⁶ See Sox (1991). Warren was also a writer, though most commentators have sided with Oscar Wilde's perception of his prose (after reading portions of his three-volume philosophical work *The Defence of Uranian Love*, Wilde noted: 'humorous and fantastic and vulgar: your work has none of these qualities'; Ibid. 83-84).

where women were not welcomed'.³⁶⁷ Warren and his fellow scholars lived nobly, like ancient Greeks (or so they thought); maintaining an air of secrecy that 'seemed to permeate the rooms and corridors, to exhaust the air of the house. The social relations, too, were often strained'.³⁶⁸ Much of this was probably due to Warren's complex and frustrated homosexual leanings, although his habits as a collector were also couched in mystery.³⁶⁹ Rothenstein, however, was happy to assist him in some of his less spurious purchases, most notably a version of *The Kiss* he commissioned from Rodin.³⁷⁰ In return Warren (though he was, Rodin aside, a man of mostly ancient tastes) seems to have done his bit for contemporary British art by supplying Fothergill with some, though perhaps not all, of the funds required to found the Carfax.³⁷¹

During this period Rothenstein provided for Fothergill a much-needed contact outside of the increasingly claustrophobic world that Warren had created; a world which, ultimately, led to the departure of all his assistants (for Rothenstein, yet another cautionary tale regarding the desirability of disciples). Rothenstein provided a window into another art world; that, as Fothergill put it, of 'Tonks and Steer and so forth'.³⁷² Ross joked to Rothenstein in 1899 that all art for Fothergill had to 'thoroughly battered with certain amount of secrecy as to where it comes from'.³⁷³ By the end of the following decade, however, Fothergill would find himself teaching at the Slade, closely involved with contemporary artists such as James Dickson Innes and Augustus John: a brotherhood of altogether different kind to Warren and Lewes House. Rothenstein and

³⁶⁷ W Rothenstein (1937b) 343.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Fothergill thought Warren 'more a misogynist than a homosexual' – if not asexual. There seems to be little doubt that Fothergill himself had homosexual encounters as a young man, though he went on to have a short fling with the American artist Romaine Brooks and to marry, twice: Sox (1991) 146-7, 154-55. A few of the pieces Warren collected were later exposed as fakes. Letters from Fothergill to Rothenstein give a sense of the type of dealers from which some of these works were bought.

³⁷⁰ Sox (1991) 93-4. Warren paid Rodin £1,000 for the work (now owned by the Tate Gallery) in 1900, on the conditions that it should be finished within a year and that the genitalia of the man should be seen in their entirety. It took four years and the finished genitals were 'hardly distinct'. Warren nevertheless continued to buy other work from Rodin. For Rothenstein's description of a meeting between Rodin and Warren see W Rothenstein (1937c) 45.

³⁷¹ There remains some doubt on this point. Sox and Borland claim that Warren provided all the money; Fothergill, however, never mentions this fact in letters of the time, nor does Rothenstein. John Rothenstein wrote in his biography of Conder, without any mention of Warren, that 'the firm's whole capital was £500 put up by Fothergill'. Fothergill was not only receiving his allowance by this point, but was also making some money in speculative ventures, so it is not impossible that he could have funded the gallery on his own: Borland (1995) 69; J Rothenstein (1938) 156; Sox (1991) 138.

³⁷² Fothergill (1938) 15.

³⁷³ Robert Ross to William Rothenstein, September 11th 1899, BL 81717.

the Carfax helped make such a transformation possible.

But whose idea was it, ultimately, to create the Carfax? In a letter to Rothenstein from around 1900 – composed during one of many uneasy moments in the first year or so of the gallery's existence – Fothergill described the set-up as follows:

Remember that once you told me of the difficulties in getting money for your enterprise, and I, upon the second day of knowing you, had confidence enough in you to promise you all you should want. Also remember that when we were well on the way to agreement in spite of Hannay's cutting out at the last moment (who is richer than I am, and presumably a prudent man) and in spite of warning, and advice that I had received from common friends of ours, remember that I wrote to you again & offered my money & confidence... I am still conscious that it is I who have given life to the company, and I don't intend giving it up.³⁷⁴

Here it is quite clearly Rothenstein's 'enterprise', given 'life' by Fothergill's money. Another letter, written before the opening of the gallery, confirms this, with Fothergill offering 'once again to be the moneyed, and obedient partner in the new ideal shop'.³⁷⁵ Here, as elsewhere, the Carfax is seen as the result of a partnership between the two men: 'our Carfax', as Fothergill referred to it in correspondence with Rothenstein.³⁷⁶

Fothergill's sense that it was he, ultimately, who gave 'life' to the company was nonetheless confounded by the complexity of his actual involvement. As to the former, he was obviously aware that, in comparison to Rothenstein, he could not pretend to know his way around the contemporary art world; nor did he have the personal qualities conducive to such an undertaking. As already noted, he had a reputation as a drifter; someone who approached tasks with enthusiasm one day, only to abandon them the next. He was also, as he later joked, 'the best-looking and worst-mannered gentleman in London'.³⁷⁷ On top of this, his experience with buying and selling art had been, up till

³⁷⁴ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [c.1900?], HGTN. The vast majority of Fothergill's letters to Rothenstein during this period were not dated. 'Hannay' was, it seems, a potential share-holder; possibly a relation of the Mrs Hannay associated with the Camden Town Group (there is a work attributed to her at the Leeds University Art Collection).

³⁷⁵ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [c.1898?], HGTN.

³⁷⁶ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [c.1901?], HGTN.

³⁷⁷ A comment to which Robbie Ross added, 'Why, he's the worst-mannered man in London, but when you know him well, he's far worse': Fothergill (1938) 134. Ricketts noted after a meeting with Fothergill at Lewes in 1904 that he was 'too young and lacking in temper and manners; he hurt me once or twice, but I

now, dominated by Warren's tastes in ancient art. This last issue could, of course, work in the gallery's favour, though Fothergill could understand why Rothenstein might be having doubts. 'You think my interest will flag,' he wrote, 'and that ultimately if I don't become a burden to the firm, I will leave you all the work... Against this I can bring no material arguments, of course, but your knowing me and all my best friends ought to dispel your belief in me as an incontinent youngster, or an incompetent poseur'.³⁷⁸

Fothergill's belief in the Carfax never wavered. Yet any doubts that Rothenstein had were probably well-founded: circumstances *did* lead to his having to do the vast majority of the work. Though the original discussion that led to the founding of the Carfax probably took place in London, most of the planning took place in a series of letters sent across Europe, where commitments to Warren and, in the main, a run of bad health, kept Fothergill for long periods of time.³⁷⁹ In fact, Fothergill had barely any direct contact with the gallery until it was already well-established, a fact that lends his consistent use of 'our' gallery (or 'our' Carfax) a mournfully ironic air as time goes by. 'I hope our picture show is going well,' he writes one day, in exile at Rome: 'I feel very wrong in doing nothing towards its prosperity myself, but were I in England, I don't suppose I wd. be of much use. The shop will be "Rothenstein"... as long as your proper calling is not too much neglected, it is better that you should go to work single-handed'.³⁸⁰ The more this went on, the less confidence Fothergill was to have in his own input; likewise Rothenstein, who may not have been overly keen on the shop *being* 'Rothenstein' in the first place.

As far as the two men were concerned, the situation was far from perfect. Fothergill's letters from abroad, nevertheless, do provide us with an intriguing insight into the way the Carfax grew, somewhat clumsily, beyond Fothergill's decision to give 'life' to Rothenstein's 'enterprise'.

was there to see beautiful things': The Diaries of Charles Ricketts, April 21st 1904: BL 58102.

³⁷⁸ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [c.1898?], HGTN.

³⁷⁹ Fothergill spent long periods of time in Germany, Italy and Greece; sometimes with Warren, sometimes alone.

³⁸⁰ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated from Rome [1899?], HGTN.

As Fothergill was quick to realise, there were always two things to keep in mind: the commercial and the artistic perspectives. Regarding the former, he seems relatively confident throughout. ‘There is no doubt,’ he states early on, ‘that our project, if floated in a businesslike way, with a capital neither too small or too great, will make us both less poor & perhaps rich’.³⁸¹ Such caution was, one senses, not only a response to the economic uncertainties of setting up a small business, but a mark also of the gallery’s desired identity as a place where artistic ambition would not be cut back by financial considerations. It was, as usual, a balancing act, although, clearly unsure of what these ambitions were, Fothergill never seems to have known quite where the balance lay. Though he had wished to be the ‘obedient partner’, he couldn’t get away from the fact that it was, in the main, *his* money that was being played with. To what extent was he willing to risk losing it for the cause of art and artists with which he was not yet greatly familiar? Many letters reveal his inner conflict over this matter. ‘I see you have a show of Strang I hope you succeed,’ he writes at one point, adding fearfully, ‘though he is not a very popular worker now is he’, before brightening up with ‘however if you are indefatigable enough – it is always good to keep the shows going’.³⁸² Being obedient was less easy than it sounded, especially when many miles away from the scene, relying chiefly on piecemeal accounts of how things were going. ‘We seem to be doing really well,’ he writes on one occasion, adding: ‘I long to see the gallery’ – perhaps Rothenstein could get someone to take some photographs of it?³⁸³ ‘I feel very, very sorry to give up hopes of being on the spot with the show,’ he writes elsewhere: ‘not that I could do anything, but where ones money is there wd one like to hover about’.³⁸⁴

Unable to provide any hands-on help (or, at the very least, ‘hover about’) Fothergill attempted to compensate by using the collecting skills he had developed as Warren’s assistant to buy stock for the gallery. Though it was, essentially, founded in order to support the work of Rothenstein and his contemporaries, the partners seem to have agreed that, as at the Dutch Gallery and elsewhere, their work would be

³⁸¹ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [c.1898], HTGN.

³⁸² John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [c.1899], HGTN.

³⁸³ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [c.1899], HGTN.

³⁸⁴ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated from Liepzig [1899]. Fothergill was, it appears, paying rent not only for the exhibition space itself, but also for a room above.

supplemented and supported by various deceased masters. This not only improved their chances of making a profit – by tapping into an already thriving market – but probably appealed to the artists involved, who might have warmed to the possibility of their work being shown in a space previously occupied by a Rembrandt or a Delacroix.

Fothergill pursued this aspect of the enterprise with mixed results; his letters to Rothenstein full of possible purchases, from some ‘jolly China things in and about this Town’, to ‘an old woman in Rome who has three pictures which are strangely good’ and, later, from a slightly less spurious source, ‘eleven old Master drawings’ which he snapped up with his ‘usual ardour to buy’ and which he rather hoped ‘will be genuine’.³⁸⁵ Rothenstein’s opinion of all this activity, discernible through Fothergill’s replies, seems to be to advise caution, resulting in another Rome letter in which Fothergill confesses: ‘I have already given up the attempt of buying for the shop – as my experience is necessarily nothing, both as to the value as well as to the price of an article’.³⁸⁶ He nevertheless receives assurance from Rothenstein that he is ‘still with the intention of keeping up the Old Masters’, which comes as some relief to Fothergill, whose opinion on the younger artists seems to have progressed to the point at which he can say that ‘if they are not kept in the dark...they will do us no harm – may, perhaps, much good ultimately’ – hardly an assertive statement.³⁸⁷ This he realises, adding: ‘this remark is certainly beyond my rights’ – though this and other letters continue to reveal the fact that he isn’t sure quite what his rights are.

Essentially Rothenstein was calling the shots, all the while complaining (not without due cause) that he should have found himself in such a position in the first place. Fothergill points out: ‘In your letter you complain of the great responsibility & great difficulty, “with no artist to consult with” and in the same letter you complain that anyone should be let into our affairs’.³⁸⁸ This was typical of Rothenstein: it was in his nature but often against his will to control every situation of which he was part. From the start I believe that the Carfax represented for him both the perfect opportunity to exercise his ideals and, simultaneously, an arena fraught with dangerous temptations. In

³⁸⁵ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, various undated letters [1898-99], HGTN.

³⁸⁶ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated from Rome [c.1899], HGTN.

³⁸⁷ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [c. 1899], HGTN.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

addition to these tensions, the opportunity to run the gallery had coincided with various other ventures: the book on *Goya* he was writing for Laurence Binyon, a set of *Manchester Portraits* – not to mention his own marriage.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that there was an element of chaos surrounding the early days at the Carfax. Not that anyone had intended for it to burst onto the art world in a blaze of publicity: what was to make the shop ‘ideal’, after all, was the fact that it might not seem to be a shop at all; rather a small and informal space where art and artists gathered and sometimes, when no-one was looking, a bit of money changed hands. ‘Shop’, as we have already seen, was a contentious word for many people working in galleries and it is relevant, one feels, that whilst Fothergill uses the word freely in letters, Rothenstein tends to favour ‘Carfax’. Exactly how the latter name came about is, however, never mentioned. The word has obvious Oxford associations and may be linked to the fact that both Fothergill and Rothenstein held that particular city close to their hearts. Or perhaps there was a deeper meaning: in 1896 a historian of the Church of St. Martin’s Oxford (known as Carfax) noted the word’s origin in ‘Quadrifurcus’: a ‘place where four roads meet’.³⁸⁹ Could this be the spirit in which the Carfax Gallery was founded; that of a space open to influences from all sides: a spot where several artistic paths could comfortably converge?

Should the name seem vague, it is probably intentionally so. It may be better to think of what the word ‘Carfax’ *doesn’t* refer to than what it does. Unlike the Dutch, French or Flemish galleries, it has no specific national identity. Nor does it proclaim a particular artistic one. It was founded for work of a ‘certain character’, yet there is no attempt to make this character explicit; to find a word or phrase by which participating artists might be conveniently ordered. ‘Carfax’ is, you might say, an identity created to deny an identity; not a unique tactic by any means, but nonetheless a telling one.³⁹⁰

In his obituary of Arthur Clifton, Charles Holmes writes of when ‘the firm of Carfax and Co., picture dealers, made its humble appearance in Ryder Street’: another telling use of words, confirming the approach which with the gallery wanted to be

³⁸⁹ Since 1896 the church has consisted simply of a tower, widely known as Carfax Tower: Fletcher (1896).

³⁹⁰ A similar tactic, as we shall see, was employed in 1904 by The Society of Twelve.

associated.³⁹¹ It could be mistaken for amateurism; what it really was, I believe, was the only option left to those who didn't want to seem to be trying too hard: who didn't like the idea of forcing the issue in any way; of being seduced by the speed and power of the public opinion and the media; of having to shape themselves as mini-masters in the Whistler mould.

Humility aside, there was no harm in being a bit better organized. Beyond the success of securing a site, few things appear to have gone to plan (if, indeed, there ever was anything quite as definite as a plan). The gallery started out at 17 Ryder Street, St. James: not a major thoroughfare, but securely within the 'jungle' of paintings that lay between Oxford Street to the north and Pall Mall to the south.³⁹² These premises were taken up, it seems, during the end of 1898 and remained the home of the firm until March 1905, whereupon they moved into 'more spacious and convivial premises' at 24 Bury Street.³⁹³ Neither street was grand and neither space was particularly large (henceforth newspaper reviews would rarely refer to the Carfax without employing the tags 'small' or 'very small') but this was the least of the founders' worries.

Initially, the biggest problems surrounded the manager: the man who, if well selected, should have been able to take over some if not most of Rothenstein's responsibilities. What would have become of the Vale Press without the practical know-how of Charles Holmes? Rather than find someone of equal ability for his own venture, Rothenstein continued to pull strings in the Sickert family; offering his habitually helping hand to Walter's feckless and dreamy brother Robert, who had failed to make much of a career as a merchant's clerk and was ready now to give gallery management the best of his uncertain abilities.³⁹⁴ As far as his brother Walter was concerned, this was a kindly step too far. 'I always thought your engaging Robert showed your unfitness as

³⁹¹ C Holmes, 'Mr A. B. Clifton: A Benefactor of Young Artists', *The Times*, October 1932: TA TGA 8721.

³⁹² It was also situated close to many clubs, amongst whose moneyed clientele the gallery might have hoped to make an impression.

³⁹³ John Rothenstein claims that the firm was founded at the end of 1897, though this seems unlikely, as there is no evidence of any exhibitions taking place in 1898: J Rothenstein (1938) 157; Borland (1995) 101.

³⁹⁴ Sturgis (2005) 85-6.

a manager!’ he wrote to Rothenstein later.³⁹⁵ What the gallery needed in this position, Sickert thought, was ‘a gentleman & a University man, & very clean & tidy’: a category into which his brother clearly didn’t fall.³⁹⁶ Fothergill’s letters are peppered with references to the clueless manager, who seems to have made no effort to keep the absent partner informed. From Liepzig he writes: ‘I am greatly looking forward to seeing the accounts for the half year. Don’t let me be forgotten when they are out, as Sickert never lets me know how things are doing’.³⁹⁷ Elsewhere: ‘Please tell Sickert that I am always glad for any news, artistic or financial, about the firm’s doings’.³⁹⁸ Finally Sickert obliges: ‘I have received a very pleasant letter from Sickert for which please thank him... I think you are to be congratulated for having made such a successful hit in digging up [Alfred] Stevens. I hope we will be able to elicit other flashes from your happy commercial & artistic genius before the year is out’.³⁹⁹ Another letter from Sickert, however, reveals Fothergill’s enduring anxieties – and possible doubts over his partner’s talents. ‘When I understood from Sickert that we were putting on a “Tonks Drawing’s” show I naturally became pessimistic’ he writes – a comment that must have irked Rothenstein.⁴⁰⁰ Choosing the artists was the only part of the job Rothenstein had really wanted in the first place; to have his power restricted or undermined in this field must have been frustrating.

Despite the general air of chaos, the first year or so at the Carfax was by no means a disaster. In 1899 they showed work by Alfred Stevens, Charles Conder, Augustus John, various small works by Delacroix, Gericault and Ingres, and a range of artists in a mixed summer show.⁴⁰¹ Rothenstein wrote home in November to complain that ‘business is dull’ (the fault of the war, he thought) and that the running of the gallery continued to eat into his time.⁴⁰² The Conder show, however, had been, in his

³⁹⁵ Walter Sickert to William Rothenstein, undated from Dieppe [c.1900], HG TN.

³⁹⁶ Walter Sickert to William Rothenstein, undated from Dieppe [c.1900], HG TN.

³⁹⁷ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, from Liepzig, 1899, HG TN.

³⁹⁸ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated, [c.1899-1900], HG TN.

³⁹⁹ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated from Rome [c.1899], HG TN. The reference is to the Alfred Stevens exhibition, possibly the first Carfax show, held in March 1899.

⁴⁰⁰ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [c.1900], HG TN.

⁴⁰¹ There remains some uncertainty as to which other exhibitions were held in the first year; possibly the Tonks and Strang shows took place then. The work of artists such as Walter Sickert could usually be found at the gallery, though it was some time before he held a solo show there.

⁴⁰² William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, November 1899, HG TN.

brother's words, 'a great success'.⁴⁰³ Indeed, boosted by D.S.MacColl's description of 'the most lovely fans ever painted in Europe', it didn't take long for Conder to emerge as the Carfax's prime draw, enjoying a solo show in each of the first four years of the gallery's existence and securing what seemed at first to be a generous contract, in which the Carfax would pay him, upfront, 150 francs a fan – a steady income, not reliant on how much he sold each show.⁴⁰⁴ This was, as we have seen, the kind of contract favoured by Parisian dealers (Durand-Ruel in particular); much less, if ever, a feature of the London art world, where the vast majority of artists gathered income based on what the galleries sold, minus commission. It remains unclear whether the Carfax made a habit of drawing up such contracts, or whether this was a privilege bestowed upon Conder, based on Rothenstein's continued faith in his talent (and, no doubt, understanding of his precarious financial position). We can be certain, however, that for the first year or so this was a deal that suited Conder, around whom a set of influential patrons – amongst them Llewellyn Hacon, Edmund Davis and Charles Rothenstein – were beginning to gather.⁴⁰⁵

Beyond Conder's successes, Rothenstein had also managed to secure for the beginning of 1900 what was, for the Carfax, a bit of a coup: an exhibition of drawings by Rodin. According to Sickert, trying his best to publicise the gallery on the other side of The Channel, Rodin (who Rothenstein later as described as 'warm in support') had formed the positive impression that the Carfax was 'unlike the usual dealers'.⁴⁰⁶ Though this comment may have come back to haunt Rothenstein later (when the sculptor raised objections to the way in which the financial side of the exhibition was handled) it was for now a gesture worth celebrating: a warming confirmation of the Rothenstein/Rodin friendship.

Though buyers would, ultimately, dictate the success of the Rodin show, it was also a good opportunity for artists themselves to engage with his work at close

⁴⁰³ Albert Rutherston to Moritz and Bertha Rothenstein, May 1899, TA TAM 51-2.

⁴⁰⁴ D S MacColl, *The Saturday Review*, 5th May 1900, Vol 89, p.555; Galbally (2002) 195; W Rothenstein (1937b) 343.

⁴⁰⁵ These collectors were probably regular visitors to the Carfax, a group to which we might tentatively add the names of Michael Sadler, Augustus Daniel and William Evans: Upstone (2008) 49. For Conder's early success at Carfax see J Rothenstein (1938) 156-162.

⁴⁰⁶ W Rothenstein (1937b) 343. 'I think I have bit by bit sent useful people to Carfax': Walter Sickert to William Rothenstein, undated from Auteuil [c.1900], HGTN.

contact.⁴⁰⁷ Ricketts – who thought Rodin the ‘world’s greatest living artist’ – made his appearance in his dual role as artist and collector on the 29th January 1900: ‘Went to Carfax + Co and bought a Rodin drawing,’ he wrote in his diary, and ‘was charmed by the place hung with tastefully mounted drawings by Rodin, most of them too slight, others worthy of Michael Angelo’.⁴⁰⁸ As previously noted, the Carfax was to become for him part of a London routine: an essential port of call for the educated artist about town. It was for him a mixture of shop, exhibiting venue and social meeting place. ‘I often go to “Carfax & Co.” to see the drawings,’ wrote a similarly enthusiastic Albert Rutherston to his parents a few months after the opening, before anticipating Rodin’s comment: ‘so far they are doing pretty well, it is a charming shop and quite unlike any other dealers shop in London’.⁴⁰⁹

Clearly the Carfax represented a departure from the norm – and there were plenty who saw the advantages of this. Rothenstein’s friend Stanley Mackower (a probable share-holder in the gallery, along with George Bernard Shaw) gave the following description of the Carfax in August of 1899:⁴¹⁰

I cherish my first impression of Ryder Street which, thank Heaven, is to remain undisturbed. I see Robert [Sickert] flitting between the desk and the door, a kind of agitated Christ, confusing his soul with the pictures on the wall and afraid to sell, lest he might imperil a reputation of nineteen centuries; I see pretty Mrs Clifton brewing tea in the first floor front drawing-room and smiling at the shareholders who drop in to see ‘how Carfax is going’; I see Albert Rothenstein, Esq. leap from his Tilbury, throw his reins to the groom and sweep the gallery with his critical eye in three minutes. He pauses, murmurs “Giotto could have done no better”, pauses on his way out at a master at the Slade, [Tonks, Steer or Brown] mutters ‘vile *pastiche*’ at the innocent canvas, and then jumps on the box of his Tilbury and drives to see Nellie Farren...⁴¹¹

Though Mackower’s fulsome and poetic account may have convinced Rothenstein to

⁴⁰⁷ Again, Fothergill and Rothenstein seem to have differed in their definition of success. ‘I am sorry not many Rodin’s sold,’ wrote the former, ‘how was the show then a success – or am I too dull not to see that an unbuying crowd is better than a buying one?’: John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [c.1900], HG TN.

⁴⁰⁸ Delaney (1990) 186; The Diaries of Charles Ricketts, 29th January 1900, BL 58098.

⁴⁰⁹ Albert Rutherston to Moritz and Bertha Rothenstein, 18th March 1899, TA TAM 51-2.

⁴¹⁰ Speaight (1962) 144; Holroyd (1992) 171.

⁴¹¹ Speaight (1962) 144.

keep faith in the enterprise for now, at least one element required disturbance. The obvious weak point was the agitated Christ. ‘I know that with you the only danger has been that you would strain points in his favour,’ joked Walter Sickert, commiserating rather more with the Carfax for having put up with his brother than with Robert for losing a job.⁴¹² ‘We can none of us afford Robert,’ Sickert wrote elsewhere: ‘that is the truth of the matter’.⁴¹³ Luckily, as Mackower’s letter notes, a more capable figure was already on the scene. This was Arthur Clifton who, along with his wife, had been present at the Rothenstein marriage in June and popped up again at Vattetot-sur-mer later on that summer as part of Rothenstein’s impressive artistic entourage, by which time he was already working as business manager for the gallery.⁴¹⁴ It is not known for certain exactly when or how he found himself working for the Carfax; though eventually his association with it, however small at first, was to last longer than that of anyone.

The son of Robert Bellamy Clifton, Oxford Professor of Experimental Philosophy, Arthur Clifton trained and practised as a solicitor before joining the Carfax, happily dumping the law in favour of the London art world.⁴¹⁵ Whatever experience he had gained there no doubt stood him in good stead: the first few years at the Carfax contained a fair share of controversies, many of which had their source in complicated financial negotiations. Perhaps it isn’t wholly surprising that Clifton was the only figure from the gallery’s first year still standing by its last. Though he was later praised by Charles Holmes for a ‘languid indifference to his commercial interest’ (in the true Carfax fashion) he appears at this early stage to have kept a firm hold on financial necessities, sometimes to Rothenstein’s annoyance.⁴¹⁶ ‘You must see yourself why I dislike Clifton,’ wrote Rothenstein to Robert Ross, ‘He writes to tell me that he has the

⁴¹² Walter Sickert to William Rothenstein, undated [c.1900], HGTN.

⁴¹³ Walter Sickert to William Rothenstein, undated from Dieppe [c.1900], HGTN.

⁴¹⁴ Clifton’s wife, who made some impact on Augustus John (he was to sketch her at least three times during the trip) turned out to have a less than happy marriage to Clifton, though she refused him the divorce he desired on account of her Roman Catholicism. Clifton, increasingly drawn into Walter Sickert’s world, had fallen for one of his pupils, Madeleine Knox, with whom he eloped, much to Sickert’s distress: Sturgis (2005) 502-3

⁴¹⁵ Sturgis (2005) 266 and Holmes, ‘Mr A. B. Clifton: A Benefactor of Young Artists’, *The Times*, October 1932: TA TGA 8721. As a solicitor Clifton seems to have been involved in Oscar Wilde’s bankruptcy case. Certainly he knew Wilde – and was a friend of Robert Ross’s before the latter took on the management of the Carfax in 1901: see Ellman (1987) 461, 496

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

money to send me, then tries to make terms before giving it to me... I don't believe in a solicitor being able to do what we ordinary mortals would consider conduct unworthy of a decent man'.⁴¹⁷ 'Nobody will ever be able to make me admire Clifton's methods,' he concluded: 'except Clifton, by changing them entirely'.⁴¹⁸

Such issues were to find their resolution in early 1901. 1900, meanwhile, was another steady year. Conder and John, already established as the gallery's biggest attractions, shared an exhibition in April. Conder returned at the end of the year, accompanied this time by Rothenstein, who showed lithographs and drawings – some of them portraits, others landscapes from a summer spent in Auvergne and Burgundy. Though providing a convenient exhibiting space the gallery was, again, taking up too much of his time, as he readily admitted to his family. 'It is quite impossible, I regret to say, for me to come home this week,' he writes in April of that year: 'Conder & John are having a show at Carfax on Saturday, which has kept me daily from 5-7 at work. My Goya book, now quite finished, has also necessitated my staying in town to superintend the printing of the plates etc.'⁴¹⁹ On top of this there was his own artistic production: 'I have several paintings now under way & two landscapes at the N.E.A.C, which opens next Saturday', he added, revealing a continued reliance on the N.E.A.C, on whose jury he now sat.⁴²⁰

Rothenstein's old Slade master Alphonse Legros was scheduled to exhibit at the Carfax in 1901, along with yet another Conder show. Max Beerbohm's turn was also imminent. Rothenstein's *Goya* had finally been published and he had gained the honour of a silver medal for *A Doll's House* at the World's Fair in Paris.⁴²¹ After a difficult – or self-consciously humble – start (depending on which way you look at it) the Carfax was growing in confidence. A letter from Fothergill to Rothenstein in January 1901 confirms this: 'you say that the business is doing very well – surely the wrong time to give up?', whilst indicating that thoughts of quitting still occupied Rothenstein's mind.⁴²²

There had been frustrations throughout, but this time an added factor provided

⁴¹⁷ William Rothenstein to Robert Ross, British Library, undated: BL 81717.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. See Nash (1988) for a description of Clifton and the Carfax Gallery c.1910.

⁴¹⁹ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, April 4th 1900, HGTN.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Speiaght (1962) 145.

⁴²² John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, 17th Jan 1901, HGTN.

a tipping point (or a more compelling excuse). After a decade of assistance from Rothenstein, it seems Charles Conder had decided his friend's behaviour had finally crossed the line between offering help and taking advantage. His commercial successes and increasing reputation amongst the younger generation gave him a new found confidence – and even to someone as commercially inept as Conder came the realisation that the original contract made with the Carfax, great as it was at the time, was now working to their rather than his benefit. His paintings on silk were beginning to make a lot of money – and the artist felt as if he wasn't getting his fair share. After years of humble and affectionate letters asking Rothenstein for financial assistance, he switched into attack mode:

At a café frequented by their circle Conder broke suddenly into wild, self-pitiful invective against Carfax. The firm bought silks from his cheap and sold them at an indefensible profit, he alleged, and quoted figures to show how easily he could sell his silks elsewhere for more than Carfax paid. One of his listeners asked him why he continued to deal with the firm any longer. "Because Rothenstein got me to make an agreement when I was drunk".⁴²³

An attempt to renegotiate the contract seemed strangely beyond him and the ability of two good friends to sort through a relatively simple problem crumbled under a flurry of mutual misunderstandings.⁴²⁴ To say this, however, may be to underestimate the pressure Rothenstein was under – and his sensitivity to Conder's particular line of attack. The relative violence of his response, if anything, confirms this. John Rothenstein, again, provides the fullest account:

Rothenstein was wild with anger; and he had not sat at the Great Quarreler's feet for nothing – Whistler had taught his young disciples never to suffer an affront. That evening, 'small and devilish earnest,' as Sickert described him, he went to 4 Limerston Street and, meeting Conder, threw him violently onto the floor and bitterly reproached him. Inconsequently Conder ignored the issue, but remaining on the floor complained that it was abominable to beat up a man in his own house. 'You could scarcely expect me to invite you to mine to do it,

⁴²³ J Rothenstein (1938) 182. It seems fair to presume that John Rothenstein derived this account from conversations with his father.

⁴²⁴ Galbally (2002) 219-20.

could you?’ inquired his guest, and went.⁴²⁵

The reference to Whistler is misleading – as I have already noted, Rothenstein tried throughout his career to work through problems in a manner that, though by no means soft, rejected the self-consciously confrontational approach of ‘The Master’.⁴²⁶ Indeed, this single act of violence (exaggerated, no doubt, for effect) represents the height of Rothenstein’s quarrelling experience – and was a response, it seems, to specific conditions. Seen in the light of Walter Sickert’s accusation that Rothenstein’s problem when it came to resolving issues was his inability to shed his natural kindness, the Conder fight was perhaps symbolically dramatic: a self-conscious indication that he could, under certain circumstances, break through the role so often assigned to him.

The immediate upshot of the argument, in any case, was that Rothenstein resigned from his Carfax role; not without opposition from Fothergill who, back at Warren’s house in Lewes, got to work drafting a stern letter to Conder. ‘Had you found the firm wanting in fulfilment of its promise to you,’ he wrote, ‘you wd have levelled your accusations against the firm itself, in open & business like form. Not having had any official notice of your having done so – I rest assured that what grievances you have are fantastic & moreover have been given utterance by you in a manner irregular & unreasonable’.⁴²⁷ Despite Fothergill’s support Rothenstein was, however, determined to call it a day.

The relative financial success of the Carfax, gratifying though it was, didn’t much matter: being accused of being a scurrilous dealer certainly did. It was this detail that reminded him, he wrote later, that there had been ‘something equivocal in my position’.⁴²⁸ What could be worse for an artist than being thought of as a dealer?⁴²⁹ Fothergill seemed unsure as to the seriousness of the insult, increasingly of the opinion

⁴²⁵ J Rothenstein (1938) 183.

⁴²⁶ His memoirs make it quite clear that this element of Whistler’s personality, though amusing in its way, was essentially misguided.

⁴²⁷ Draft of a letter to Conder, sent by John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, Jan 1901, HTGN. It is not clear whether this letter was ever sent to Conder.

⁴²⁸ W Rothenstein (1937b) 345.

⁴²⁹ Conder’s accusation may have had anti-semitic overtones; perhaps he was thinking of Balzac’s money-grabbing Jewish art-dealer in *Pierre Grassou* (1839).

that, teething problems aside, the gallery was proving itself a veritable profit machine.⁴³⁰ But Rothenstein was inconsolable. Conder's claims may have been 'fantastic', but was it worth the risk? How long would it take before other artist friends started to question his motives?

Meanwhile, Fothergill was beginning to feel the strain himself. Efforts to placate Conder appear to have been fruitless. 'Conder has a pleasant smile & a contorted idea of life – but he is the last man to make agreements with', Fothergill admitted, adding 'my health & happiness is all shattered owing to a cold & to the unfortunate state of Carfax'.⁴³¹ Though the financial side of things continued to look rosy, it was obviously a tough task keeping everyone happy. Even Clifton was pondering an exit. 'I do hope Clifton remains with us' Fothergill writes to Rothenstein at one point, wondering at another whether he might be prepared to buy the business from them.⁴³² Throughout it all he remains concerned that their friendship won't go the way of the Rothenstein/Conder alliance; against which eventuality he decides, finally, to throw in his own lot, take whatever profits have been accrued so far, and follow Rothenstein through the door.⁴³³

Arthur Clifton, to everyone's relief, was persuaded to stay on as financial manager, to be joined by the new, though essentially familiar face of Robert Ross [fig.17] who took control of the gallery in the spring of 1901.⁴³⁴ Ross had been a close friend of Fothergill

⁴³⁰ Fothergill highlighted one problem: 'My sister went last Wednesday to Carfax arriving there at 11.15 & found the place shut. She was staying at the De Pas' and De Pass told me that "the place would never pay if it was never open" – Now this is not nice coming from a wealthy Jew': John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated from Lewes [1900/1901?], HTGN.

⁴³¹ John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [1901?], HTGN.

⁴³² John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, 17th Jan 1901; undated letter [1901?], HGTN.

⁴³³ 'As our business matters are very closely mixed up with our friendship's affairs – I cannot help fearing that the rigor of my unschooled business talk may have approached rather dangerously the region of friendship. I therefore want to again assure you that what has lately passed in the post between us (and perhaps especially that from me to you) must be looked upon in cold blood': John Fothergill to William Rothenstein, undated [1901], HGTN. The exit from Carfax clearly came as a relief to Rothenstein. In July of that year he wrote to his parents: 'Did I tell you Robbie Ross and another friend [i.e. More Adey, see below] have taken over Carfax and Fothergill, & I am free again, a great relief to me' William to Moritz and Bertha, July 18th 1901, HGTN.

⁴³⁴ He was helped throughout by his close friend More Adey, though references to him in relation to the

and Rothenstein for some time and regularly visited the Carfax in its early days.⁴³⁵ Ross, wrote Rothenstein, ‘was a general favourite’ with ‘a genius for friendship’ and a social circle as wide (if not wider) than Rothenstein’s, which he was happy to utilise to help the artists he knew.⁴³⁶ ‘When I was only a beginner he bought & made other people buy my work,’ Rothenstein remembered elsewhere, joking that ‘now that I have become a classic, his loyalty is still stronger; & all he can do to make people see that my works belong to the future & not the present he does... Ross has done so much to bring about, is that my studio at Hampstead contains possibly the noblest collection of my works that can be seen anywhere in the world.’⁴³⁷ Though they shared many qualities, Ross had clear advantage over Rothenstein in the fact that, literary criticism aside, he was not himself a creative person – and could concentrate on helping artists without jeopardising his own career.

He was also, in 1901, feeling the loss of the man who had, during the 1890s, commanded the majority of his attention. Ross’s devotion to Oscar Wilde is very well known; for many, indeed, it is the one trait for which Ross will always be remembered.⁴³⁸ Direct responsibility for Oscar ended, however, with his death in late 1900 and, though Ross was appointed his literary executor, there was also space in his life for a new concern – a space which the Carfax appeared, in good time, to fill.⁴³⁹

Ross’s decision to take over the gallery must have thrilled Rothenstein and Fothergill. Here was someone who was likely to take the gallery in a similar direction to their own. Indeed, few if any of the exhibitions put on during Ross’s reign would seem to contradict Rothenstein’s original vision. This is not surprising: they moved in a similar social circle and it is reasonable to suppose that Rothenstein still frequented the gallery. He exhibited there twice, in November 1902, and again in March 1907, before

Carfax remain relatively rare. Adey was, like Ross, a writer on art – and later worked as joint editor for *The Burlington Magazine*.

⁴³⁵ Ross visited Fothergill and Warren in Rome at the end of 1899, taking with him news of the Carfax. The closeness of the three men is represented by the fact that Ross and Fothergill were chosen as godfathers for William’s first child, John, born in July of that year: Speaight (1962) 151.

⁴³⁶ W Rothenstein (1937b) 187.

⁴³⁷ W Rothenstein: ‘On Ross’, notes for a dinner speech, HGTV 1148.2.

⁴³⁸ *Wilde’s Devoted Friend* is the title of Borland’s biography of Ross: Borland (1995). Ross summed up the situation to Rothenstein thus: ‘I had grown to feel, rather foolishly, a sort of responsibility for Oscar, for everything connected with him except his genius, & he had become for me a sort of adopted prodigal baby’: W Rothenstein (1937b) 363-4.

⁴³⁹ Ross’s time at the Carfax is dealt with in detail by Borland (1995) 81-143.

Ross's departure at the end of 1908.⁴⁴⁰ Mutual friends such as Beerbohm achieved their greatest successes at the Carfax under Ross's management, whilst the practice of holding regular exhibitions of Old Master works continued with growing success. There were exhibitions of English masters such as Edward Calvert and, a particular favourite of Ross's, William Blake.⁴⁴¹ The last of these exhibitions coincided with an article on Blake Ross wrote for the *Burlington Magazine*, one of many indications of Ross's adoption of the dealer/connoisseur role, played to good effect by Gambart and Croal Thomson before him.⁴⁴² Oscar Wilde may have famously said a dealer was 'a person who knew the price of everything and the value of nothing', but Ross worked hard to prove that he was better than this – that, like Van Wisselingh, he could be considered as much an art admirer as a dealer.⁴⁴³

Supported by his friend More Adey, and by Arthur Clifton, Ross ensured that the Carfax not only continued the good work of its first two years, but improved upon it, turning it into what Rothenstein called, almost sheepishly, a 'serious business'.⁴⁴⁴ Though the initial handover was both a friendly and convenient one, Ross was not greatly impressed by the manner in which the Carfax had been run up to then. At the end of August he wrote to Rothenstein regarding 'several matters at Carfax which you alone can throw light on', mostly revolving around items in the stock book which had gone missing. Some of these mysterious works belonged to Strang, others to Rothenstein himself. More worrying, however, were those belonging to Rodin, from whom Ross had received a 'cold at least unenthusiastic letter'.⁴⁴⁵ 'Do we owe him any money?' he asked, anxiously.⁴⁴⁶

He might also have wondered at the lack of publicity Carfax had been generating – and set to work ensuring that things would improve on this front, making best use of his contacts in the newspaper world. Though friends in high places helped,

⁴⁴⁰ At Ross's departure, Arthur Clifton took sole charge until the Carfax closed in the 1920s.

⁴⁴¹ *Exhibition of Works by William Blake* (January 1904), *Paintings and sketches by Edward Calvert* (April 1904), *Frescoes, prints, and drawings by William Blake* (June 1906).

⁴⁴² Ross (1906). When Ross left the Carfax in 1908 it was to take up a place as art critic for *The Morning Post*.

⁴⁴³ Robert Ross to William Rothenstein, December 11th 1902, HTGN.

⁴⁴⁴ W Rothenstein (1937b) 345.

⁴⁴⁵ Robert Ross to William Rothenstein, 28th August 1901, HGTN; See also Borland (1995) 81-2.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

it clearly wasn't easy getting the Carfax into the newspapers. The art critic of *The Times* was not untypical in considering "one-man" exhibitions (the very idea was still, even at this date, treated with suspicion) 'too apt to contain an indiscriminate gathering of whatever sketches or finished drawings the artist may have produced in a summer's outing or during a few months in his studio' and, as such, 'commonly call for little notice'.⁴⁴⁷ Fortunately the same critic accepted that there could be exceptions to this rule, providing Wilson Steer's 1902 Carfax show as one example: evidence that the Carfax was gaining a reputation for work above the average. Ross, indeed, was proud to report to Rothenstein that the gallery had been receiving 'wonderful' notices, though 'sales have been fearfully slack & money has had to be borrowed'.⁴⁴⁸ Conder, he thought, had been the victim of overkill, whilst new men such as Muirhead Bone suffered from their relative obscurity. 'I am sorry to say until the end of this quarter we don't want to make any more engagements for exhibiting new men,' he noted, 'but prefer to stick to the old programme via Rothenstein, MacColl, Fry, Conder etc...'.⁴⁴⁹ The most interesting thing about this last letter is the way that Ross seems to be seeking Rothenstein's blessing a year after taking over his responsibilities: for all the mistakes Rothenstein had made, Ross appears to have understood that he had a duty to keep his friend in the loop and to make every effort to run the gallery in a manner of which he would approve.

Despite his claims in the summer of 1902 that 'Carfax is just keeping its head under water at present' there is little doubt that Ross managed to raise the profile of the gallery considerably during his first few years in charge.⁴⁵⁰ Before 1903, the Carfax had yet to register its appearance in *The Year's Art*, the annual guidebook to the British art world. This was an oversight which Ross promptly corrected, inserting a full-page advert into the 1903 issue. This contained five press quotes, taken from reviews printed the previous year, starting with the previously noted comment from *The Daily Telegraph*,

⁴⁴⁷ *The Times*, July 8th 1902. The description of the archetypal one-man show compares well to many Carfax shows, not least Rothenstein's 1900 exhibition, which consisted entirely of drawings from his summer in Auvergne and Burgundy.

⁴⁴⁸ Robert Ross to William Rothenstein, June 9th, 1902, HGTN.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

which drew attention to the gallery's association with 'the finer and less obvious phases of both modern and ancient art'. Significantly, four of the five quotations exploited used either 'small' or 'little' in describing the Carfax, albeit with positive implications.⁴⁵¹ Below these cuttings came a list of the art and artists associated with the gallery, starting with 'drawings and paintings by Old Masters, Italian, French, Dutch and English', moving onto 'drawings by William Blake, Aubrey Beardsley, Simeon Solomon, Fuseli, etc', before alighting on 'modern works by Rothenstein, D.S.MacColl, Wilson Steer, Tonks, Housman, Roger Fry, Strang, John Orpen [sic], Legros, Charles Ricketts and C H Shannon' and finishing with 'bronzes by Tweed, Furse, and Rodin'.⁴⁵²

The following year a similar advert appeared, containing three of the original press cuttings, to which were added three more, including the following statement from the *Guardian*: 'The little gallery of Messrs Carfax in Ryder Street has recently acquired considerable importance by the excellence of the exhibitions which are held within its rooms. Some of these are devoted to rare pictures and old Italian masters; others to the display of works by living artists, who are for the most part members of the new English Art Club [sic]'.⁴⁵³ The other two cuttings both name-checked John Sargent, who held a loan exhibition of sketches and studies in the summer of 1903, probably designed to introduce a wider audience to the gallery.⁴⁵⁴

These adverts were to change little over the years, though Rothenstein was singularly unimpressed by a modification in the 1905 edition: the absence of his own name (in place of his brother Albert's). He made clear these frustrations in a letter to Ross:

I am sure you mean well by putting Albert's name in the advertisement of Carfax instead of mine. But I myself believe you are doing him no good by doing so. He has not done enough to merit his being put among the present painters of the day included in your list & I disapprove strongly of his having an exhibition of his very unequal work... as for leaving out my name, you have

⁴⁵¹ The *Star* critic commented that 'when a gallery is so pleasantly small as the Carfax, it cannot easily hold more than you can see', whereas the *Daily Mail* drew attention to the 'small but peculiarly interesting' displays: *The Star*, January 28th 1902; *Daily Mail*, February 3rd, 1902, quoted in *The Year's Art*, 1903, advertisements.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ *Guardian*, June 3rd 1903, quoted in *The Year's Art*, 1904, advertisements.

⁴⁵⁴ For more on Sargent's exhibition see Kilmurray and Ormond (2009) 51-5.

chosen to do it, so it is as you please. As it has always been included in your N.E.A.C list, its absence is remarkable; I take it that my exhibition at the Leicester Galleries is the cause of it. You will remember that I approached you first & you did not care to entertain the idea... Perhaps now that our business connection is thus broken we may resume our private one without reference to any other.⁴⁵⁵

Blame it on the Leicester Galleries he might, but there was more to Rothenstein's Carfax-related tensions than this. The sad fact was that his own exhibitions at the Carfax had never gained much success at all: critical or material. Ross had been forced to postpone his 1902 exhibition from May to December, only for it to pale in comparison to the surprise success of Roger Fry's show in early 1903.⁴⁵⁶ Ironically, for all the help Rothenstein was able to give his fellow artists through the foundation of the Carfax, he was unable to help himself. Of all the major patrons for whom the Carfax was a significant source – Edward Marsh, for example, or Michael Sadler – few if any collected work by Rothenstein. 'All the important collections have been made without an example of my work,' he later explained to D.S.MacColl, adding, 'I have to except Butler, who bought one small canvas, & of course my brother Charles. But Blackwood, Daniel, Sadler, Evans have not...'⁴⁵⁷

The break-up of Rothenstein and Ross business connection that the letter announced lacked finality. Rothenstein returned to the Carfax in 1907 and, in light of his poor sales, it is doubtful whether Ross would have been all that disappointed by his temporary defection to the Leicester Galleries. Dealers were capable of 'touchy feelings', as Ross would be the first to admit, but they weren't ever likely to be hurt too deeply by the defection of an artist who had made them little money in the first place.⁴⁵⁸

The two artists with whom Rothenstein shared his Leicester Galleries exhibition, Shannon and Conder, were in a much similar position. Though Shannon was associated with the Carfax (his name appears on the adverts) he continued to show

⁴⁵⁵ William Rothenstein to Robert Ross, November 12th 1904, HGTN.

⁴⁵⁶ Ross's letter to Fry notes that his exhibition was 'numerically' the best exhibition ever held, aside from Beerbohm's. He adds: 'Under the former management nothing modern except Conder ever paid expenses. Steer, Max and yourself have been our *three* triumphs in new fields'; Robert Ross to Roger Fry, 13th April 1903: Borland (1995) 87-90;

⁴⁵⁷ William Rothenstein to D S MacColl, 6th Feb 1922, HGTN.

⁴⁵⁸ Robert Ross to William Rothenstein, 18th April 1911, HGTN.

regularly at Van Wisselingh's Dutch Gallery and, later, at the Leicester Galleries.⁴⁵⁹ Conder – who turns out, probably unknowingly, to have been Shannon and Rothenstein's third choice as co-exhibitor – rode through the Rothenstein/Carfax controversy only to make further demands of Ross and Adey, who promptly dropped him.⁴⁶⁰ He turned, typically, to the Dutch Gallery, where he exhibited in 1903, before receiving the invitation to exhibit with Shannon and Rothenstein (with whom he had since managed a partial reconciliation).⁴⁶¹

The move to the Leicester Galleries was a natural one in the circumstances – and one that was later repeated by other artists, including Max Beerbohm.⁴⁶² Founded in the summer of 1902 by Ernest Brown and the brothers Wilfred and Cecil Phillips, the Leicester Galleries was to exhibit the work of many young British artists up until the 1970s – entering art-historical texts with more frequency than most, thanks to its major role in the careers of Nevinson and Epstein and of seemingly pioneering exhibitions of continental artists such as Maillol and Matisse.⁴⁶³ In those early days, however, it saw itself in distinct relation to the Carfax and the Dutch. As Ernest's son Oliver (who became a partner in 1914) was to write: 'In the West End the private galleries were mostly very different from ours, but there were two very small galleries that always interested me'.⁴⁶⁴ He goes on to describe the Dutch and the Carfax.

The influence of the Carfax on the next generation of small commercial galleries may be underrated; not least because many of these galleries, the Leicester in particular, went on to have much greater success than their predecessor. Nonetheless, Jacob

⁴⁵⁹ Shannon and Ricketts exhibited at the Dutch in 1903, alongside works by Mathew Maris, Fantin-Latour and Rodin: see *The Times*, July 8th 1902.

⁴⁶⁰ William Strang was lined up to exhibit, but dropped out, having already made arrangements with Van Wisselingh for a show at the Dutch Gallery. William Nicholson was also asked, but declined. For Conder's argument with Ross, see Galbally (2002) 238-9

⁴⁶¹ Conder – who had married in 1901, much to everyone's surprise – wrote a humble letter to Rothenstein in 1902, apologising for his behaviour: Galbally (2002) 234.

⁴⁶² Beerbohm's last exhibition at the Carfax was in 1908, from which point he was closely associated with the Leicester Galleries. He worried in late 1910 that the Carfax might take insult at his having defected to the Leicester, noting in a letter to Reggie Turner: 'I am not sure that I behaved quite well in not giving Arthur Clifton the refusal of the exhibition; and I would like A.C. [Clifton] to know first through *me* that I have deserted him. However, I daresay A.C. knows already. And after all it will be a different sort of exhibition from what they could have at Carfax: a *retrospective* and rummage-sale affair': Hart-Davies (1964) 192.

⁴⁶³ See for instance Robins (1997).

⁴⁶⁴ Brown (1968) 27.

Epstein – who came to be closely associated with the Leicester – thought on his arrival in London that it was the Carfax that was ‘the centre of real art in London’: a reputation which, though later bolstered by Sickert’s successes, was probably diminished by the accomplishments of its imitators.⁴⁶⁵

Though still, essentially, a small commercial gallery, the Leicester had advantages over the Carfax in its size and location. Leicester Square was not the most obvious place for an art gallery, sitting on the edge of the Bond Street-centred art ‘jungle’, but the premises turned out in time, in the words of William Roberts, to be ‘ideally placed... looking on to the trees and flower beds of Leicester Square’, a few steps from the National Gallery and ‘the aristocratic clubs round about; while across the Square the restaurants of Soho,’ provided ‘the right environment in which to persuade a hesitant client, or to celebrate a sale’.⁴⁶⁶ With such a location, steady management, and a consistently strong line-up of artists (yet another winning mix of Old Masters and unknown youngsters) it did not take the Leicester Galleries long to establish itself within the London art world.

Rothenstein, nevertheless, still struggled to gain the reputation of a painter on whom galleries could rely for good publicity and/or sales. He gathered enough respect to secure an exhibition every now and again, but he was never to be as closely associated with any gallery as he had been with the Carfax. After the Leicester Gallery show in 1904 he was, essentially, a free agent, scrambling around for whatever opportunity he could find, in and outside of London.⁴⁶⁷ Chief among the latter were his experiences exhibiting at the 1902 Wolverhampton and 1904 Bradford Exhibitions, in the second of which he also took an organisational role. Both exhibitions – ostensibly reviews of British art from Hogarth to the present day – were dominated by the N.E.A.C; indeed, the Bradford exhibition was, to Rothenstein, ‘probably the best exhibition of contemporary art that had ever been held in Yorkshire’.⁴⁶⁸ Despite this,

⁴⁶⁵ ‘Epstein has come to London with amazing drawings of human creatures like withered trees embracing. He wants to exhibit them at Carfax, which is to him the centre of real art in London... There may be something in him’: George Bernard Shaw to Robert Ross, 13th March 1905; Ross (1952) 111-2.

⁴⁶⁶ Roberts (1990) 113.

⁴⁶⁷ Conder returned to the Leicester before the end of the next year; Shannon in 1907. Rothenstein didn’t appear again at the Leicester until 1916.

⁴⁶⁸ W Rothenstein (1937c) 57.

the profits from the show (the first to be held in the newly built Cartwright Hall) went towards the purchase of paintings by Royal Academicians.⁴⁶⁹

‘What is wanted in Bradford,’ Rothenstein explained to his father at the time, ‘is someone like Fry, Binyon, MacColl, who would bring some kind of order & found some proper institution for reference & study of the broad relations of art to life’.⁴⁷⁰ This was a noble, but somewhat unrealistic hope; throughout his career, Rothenstein’s dreams of a ‘decentralized culture’ (such as that set out in his 1916 *Plea*) were consistently undercut by his experiences outside the capital – and even he, a Yorkshireman by birth, seemed reluctant to be the one to bring order to the ‘impoverished’ provinces.⁴⁷¹

London remained, therefore, the centre of things. Here new galleries continued to be founded, many following the Carfax’s lead, now seen by some as the undoubted ‘future’ of the art exhibition. Of the three prevailing types of exhibition (the large, all-encompassing ‘monsters’, the one-man shows and small group show) an anonymous critic from the newly founded *Burlington Magazine* fell, in 1904, firmly in favour of the third:

That example has now been followed by some of the most enterprising modern dealers, and in the recent show of works by Messrs. C.H. Shannon, Conder, and Rothenstein, or in the admirable show of the Society of Twelve, we seem to have the prototype of the good art exhibitions of the future.... it seems likely that they will be the means by which pictures will be brought before the intelligent man of the future, just as the large exhibitions will continue to pursue the shillings of the many.⁴⁷²

This stands as a wholly positive assessment of a generation’s attempts to shape exhibiting spaces according to their own ideals; welcoming the advances Rothenstein and his friends had fought to secure – and of which they were, in some cases, reaping

⁴⁶⁹ Speaight (1962) 212.

⁴⁷⁰ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, Feb 20th 1904, HG TN.

⁴⁷¹ Speaight (1982) 212; see also W Rothenstein (1939) 19-20.

⁴⁷² *The Burlington Magazine*, December 1904, vol 6, no 21, 176. The critic might have been either Charles Holmes or Roger Fry, both working for the Burlington at this time. For more on Fry and the Burlington see Elam (2003).

the rewards. Though we may search in vain for echoes of this statement in Rothenstein's later writings, commercial galleries and small group shows did continue to play a part in his life over the following years. His return to the Carfax in 1907 and first appearance at the Chenil in 1911 were, admittedly, one-man shows, while in 1910 he shared the Goupil galleries with a display of jewellery by Mrs Koehler.⁴⁷³ He continued to feature, nevertheless, in exhibitions of the N.E.A.C, just one of many societies and clubs with which he had exhibited since the 1890s. Before we consider the relative silence he chose to keep over all these ventures, it is worth considering his involvement with these societies in a little more depth.

Formerly it used to be an obligation upon artists to belong to no more than one society; but now they belong to half a dozen. [*The Times*, 1909]⁴⁷⁴

Rothenstein exhibited with the N.E.A.C from 1893, showing work every year of the next thirty with the exception of 1897. 1904, meanwhile, saw him exhibit a portrait of Alice Kingsley (later his wife) at the Society of Portrait Painters (founded 1891) who held an annual show at the Grafton Gallery.⁴⁷⁵ According to D.S.MacColl, this was 'the most successfully eclectic of all the exhibiting associations', showing the work of a large range of artists, brought together by the obvious narrowness of the subject matter.⁴⁷⁶ As Julie Codell has pointed out, the 'plethora of artists' professional societies' that started emerging from the 1880s onwards were, like many galleries, characterised by their

⁴⁷³ Goupil's, under William Marchant, had a noticeably more plush interior than either Chenil or Carfax. Eric Gill wrote to Rothenstein of the latter's exhibition there: 'I want to write as soon as possible to tell you how a mere carpet-beater like myself was simply forced to disregard the unutterable beastliness of Messrs William Marchant & Company's Mid-Victorian, Bourgeois, stuffy decorations which on first entering the Gallery gave me a so severe fit of the blues that I thought nothing could possibly live in such an atmosphere. I am sure it does say something for the real strength and sincerity of certain pictures I saw on the walls that after twenty minutes or so Messrs Marchant & Co were forgotten and are only now with amusement recollected': Eric Gill to William Rothenstein, 24th May 1910, HGTN. For more on the decoration of the Goupil see MacColl (1945) 113-4

⁴⁷⁴ *The Times*, January 7th, 1909, 9.

⁴⁷⁵ He exhibited the portrait of his parents in the 1900 exhibition, reviewed by MacColl in *The Saturday Review*, 1st December 1900, vol 90, 678.

⁴⁷⁶ D S MacColl, *The Saturday Review*, Vol 84, 1897, 511.

specialisation, seizing on mediums that had been traditionally shunned by the Royal Academy, from whom they sought to distinguish themselves.⁴⁷⁷ The Pastel Society (founded in 1899) was in these respects typical; D.S.MacColl describing it as ‘a new illustration of a distinct phase,’ adding, ‘the old type of official, all-including exhibition, Academy or Salon, is moribund. Its vulgar art, its vulgar intrigues, begin to smell too bad for self-respecting artists to approach it’.⁴⁷⁸

Upon Rothenstein’s exit from the Carfax, Augustus John had noted ‘I hear you no longer drag Carfaxian fetters’ with all the approval of a man for whom commercial alliances were a dirty sort of business (despite his own, similarly underplayed, connections with the Chenil).⁴⁷⁹ Rothenstein might have agreed, in theory, though he was as ever strangely attracted to the fetters of artistic politics. Societies proved no exception.

Invited on to their executive committee in late 1898, Rothenstein exhibited at the first exhibition of the Pastel Society in 1899, where he showed, amongst other things, a portrait of Charles Ricketts.⁴⁸⁰ He was also invited onto the committee for the ambitious International Society, only to walk away in protestation of demands made by its president Whistler.⁴⁸¹ On top of this he was appointed secretary of the Society of Medallists, also founded in 1898.⁴⁸² This last society represented specialisation gone wild, with the focus on a medium that was not merely ignored, but widely unknown. Perhaps Rothenstein was dreaming, again, of the Italian courts. If so, he was not the only one. In 1905 the Carfax was to host the exhibition of the Society of Painters in

⁴⁷⁷ Codell (1995) 169-171.

⁴⁷⁸ D S MacColl, *The Saturday Review*, 11th Feb 1899, Vol 87, 170. MacColl was, however, cautious to embrace the alternatives in their entirety, noting that ‘because A, B and C practise drawing in pastel, there is no reason for their exhibiting together’: Ibid. 171.

⁴⁷⁹ W Rothenstein (1937b) 9.

⁴⁸⁰ The exhibition was held at the Royal Institute in Piccadilly.

⁴⁸¹ Whistler tried to bring Pennell and Ludovici on the committee, which led to the departure of Rothenstein, Ricketts and Shannon (brought on, probably, by their dislike of Pennell). Rothenstein nevertheless went on to exhibit at the International exhibition – and Ricketts and Shannon later returned to the committee. After Whistler’s death, Rodin assumed the presidency: W Rothenstein (1937b) 335-6.

⁴⁸² A letter to his brother Charles makes clear the extent of his responsibilities: ‘you must forgive me for having neglected to write, but you have no conception of all that has been happening. To begin with, the soc. of Medallists, which I have had, as usual, to run’: William Rothenstein to Charles Rutherston, 30th January 1898, HGTN. The Society of Medallists held the first of their two exhibitions at the Dutch Gallery in February 1898 (the second followed in 1901). Ricketts and Shannon were involved; Rothenstein showed two medals, containing portraits of Rodin and Verlaine.

Tempera, organised by Rothenstein's friend Christiana Herringham.⁴⁸³

Such societies held few secrets: the name gave away the contents. The Society of Twelve, for all its specialisations, presented itself differently.⁴⁸⁴ The foundation of the society (in 1904) was spurred, in the first instance, by the failure of The Royal Painter-Etchers and Engravers Society to accommodate the habits and ideals of two artists, William Strang and David Young Cameron.⁴⁸⁵ However, it could also be said to have united the long-held society-forming dreams of Ricketts and Shannon with the seemingly insatiable ambitions of William Rothenstein. Though it did not restrict itself to twelve members, the title (suggested, it seems, by Ricketts) nonetheless hinted at exclusiveness.⁴⁸⁶

In retrospect Rothenstein, once again, played down his role. 'Muirhead Bone was the leading spirit', he writes.⁴⁸⁷ This is not exactly false: as secretary of the Society, Bone was the driving force, responsible for organising meetings and exhibitions – and for clearing up various controversies. Some letters from Bone to Rothenstein do, nevertheless, throw new light on the influence that Rothenstein had. Upon hearing of the first of Rothenstein's resignations, Bone wrote: 'I wish you would do us the great favour of re-considering your decision. I don't know who founded the XII but I suspect that it was yourself... certainly it was you who invited me to become a member'.⁴⁸⁸

The leading protagonists were made up of familiar faces, many of whom had already exhibited at the Carfax and were close friends of Bone, Rothenstein and

⁴⁸³ See Lago (1996).

⁴⁸⁴ The Society of Twelve was dedicated to woodcuts, etchings, lithographs and drawings. For full details see Bone (2003).

⁴⁸⁵ Strang and Cameron left after losing a fight to 'deny membership to reproductive engravers': Bone (2003) 66.

⁴⁸⁶ 'Meyer favours a suggestion of Ricketts to call the Society "The Society of Twelve" he points out that it looks 'very select' & we can always add to the numbers': Charles Shannon to William Rothenstein, July 23rd 1904, HGTN. The original twelve members were: Muirhead Bone, George Clausen, Charles Conder, Augustus John, David Cameron, Edward Gordon Craig, Thomas Sturge Moore, William Nicholson, William Strang, William Rothenstein, Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts. The name may have alluded to The Société des Trois, founded by Whistler, Fantin-Latour and Legros (who was asked to be an honorary member of the Society).

⁴⁸⁷ W Rothenstein (1937c) 69.

⁴⁸⁸ Muirhead Bone to William Rothenstein, December 21st 1907, HGTN. There were definitely similarities between the personalities of Bone and Rothenstein. Sylvester Bone writes of how their correspondence 'although full of compliments, gives the impression of two tom-cats circling each other': Bone (2003) 68; see also Bone (2009)

Ricketts. Amongst the less reliable members could be counted Edward Gordon Craig (a close friend of Rothenstein's) who recalled his invitation thus: 'At this moment I was elected to be a member of the "Society of Twelve." Very surprised and delighted in 1903, I am still puzzled (in 1955).'⁴⁸⁹ In one letter to Rothenstein he refers to it as the 'Council of Twelve', in another the 'Society of XIIIIIIIIIII' (a light-hearted reference to its growth beyond the original number), admitting elsewhere that 'I am entirely ignorant of what the Society is doing & I wish to know from you whether it is doing what you intended when you touched the rock with the wand' – a further hint of Rothenstein's central role in the society's foundation.⁴⁹⁰

The first exhibitions were held at Obachs (founded by Charles Obach, though the Society seem to have done business with a man called Meyer), a gallery which had moved from Pall Mall to Bond Street in 1901.⁴⁹¹ Obachs had shown etchings by Whistler the previous year and, in the summer of 1904, his notorious Peacock Room decorations. Nineteenth century French and Dutch artists were, however, the primary draw, making it similar to the Dutch Gallery and, as such, an appropriate stage for the Society of Twelve.

Meetings were held at Shannon's studio; though they were dominated throughout by Bone.⁴⁹² Having retreated to the sidelines, Rothenstein re-emerged in 1907 to exercise his will in what he considered to be, in retrospect, 'a small matter'.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁹ Craig was probably invited as a close friend of Nicholson and Rothenstein. Letters from Shannon to Rothenstein and various comments from Ricketts suggest that they were never in favour of his inclusion. Craig was living abroad for most of the decade, which made sending in work difficult. See Craig (1957) 245.

⁴⁹⁰ Gordon Craig to Rothenstein, undated from Florence HGTVN. Another man surprised to have been invited was George Clausen who, despite early involvement with the N.E.A.C, felt far from in tune with more recent developments. As he later confessed to Rothenstein: 'admitting [Augustus] John's talent fully, I think the tendency of his work is deplorable. But I suppose I'm old-fashioned'. He was nonetheless flattered to be a member of the Society, so long as it didn't tie 'itslef up with rules & machinery' (which, of course, it did): George Clausen to William Rothenstein, Dec 22nd 1907; Ibid. May 25th 1904, HGTVN. Ricketts describes Clausen as 'slightly perplexed by the strenuousness of the atmosphere' at a 1905 Society of Twelve meeting; The Diaries of Charles Ricketts, October 18th 1905, BL 58103.

⁴⁹¹ According to Bone this was 'the best place we could appear at': Muirhead Bone to William Rothenstein, July 15th 1904, HGTVN.

⁴⁹² In a description of an early meeting, Ricketts was to write of Bone: 'whose work not one of us likes...He, that is Bone, with a strong Scotch accent & unbounded Vanity, the Vanity of the small recent success in London almost ruled the roost with suggestions of a sentimental & selfish nature': The Diaries of Charles Ricketts, May 27th 1904: BL 58102. This view softened later on, as Ricketts came to respect Bone's work.

⁴⁹³ W Rothenstein (1937c) 69.

The problem was, in itself, simple: Rothenstein was tremendously keen for Lucien Pissarro to join the Society of Twelve, but whenever he was put up for the vote, others (William Orpen, Francis Dodd and Harvard Thomas in the first instance) were chosen instead.⁴⁹⁴ Rules were rules – but Rothenstein suspected foul play. Bone constantly assured him that it was a mere lack of familiarity with Pissarro’s art that worked against him. This wasn’t exactly untrue: Clausen, for instance, ‘didn’t know anything about Pissarro’s work beyond two or three books’, whilst Bone was ‘too ignorant of his black & white work to judge’.⁴⁹⁵ Rothenstein, however, seems to have suspected that the main reason for his failure to secure votes lay elsewhere, most notably in the lack of support offered by Ricketts and Shannon – neither of whom could claim any ignorance of Pissarro’s work.⁴⁹⁶

Though it didn’t emerge fully until 1907, the Pissarro problem was there from the start, as an entry from Ricketts’s 1904 diary proves: ‘Pissarro in the evening with greivance [sic] at his not belonging to society of twelve!!! He offered to get naturalized English if it would make a difference!!! He stayed from 8 to half past 11 !!!’⁴⁹⁷ The excessive exclamation marks reveal the extent of Ricketts’s amusement; fuelled, maybe, by his current aversion to his old friend’s charms; for Pissarro, once a regular at the Vale, had since the turn of the century found himself firmly on the wrong side of Ricketts’s controlling personality.⁴⁹⁸

This issue seems to have troubled Rothenstein (who would probably have admitted to following the same artistic creed as Pissarro) to an increasingly large degree, provoking him to stake his membership within the Society of Twelve on this issue not once, but twice. After Pissarro’s failure to receive enough votes in 1907 he promptly announced his resignation, only to be persuaded back by a bemused but humble Bone.

⁴⁹⁴ The voting system was roughly based on that of the N.E.A.C. Augustus John proposed Henry Lamb at the same time – but he was work was judged too unknown to go to a vote. See Bone (2003).

⁴⁹⁵ George Clausen to William Rothenstein, December 22nd 1907, HGTN; Muirhead Bone to William Rothenstein, December 17th 1907, HGTN.

⁴⁹⁶ Pissarro had been a close friend of theirs in the early 1890s.

⁴⁹⁷ The Diaries of Charles Ricketts, 11th November 1904: BL 58102.

⁴⁹⁸ In the late ‘90s Pissarro began to think that Ricketts – having once given him such a helping hand – was now standing in the way of his career. There were political motives for this: Pissarro’s Eragny Press was, essentially, a rival to Ricketts’s Vale Press (whatever ideals they may have shared). There may also have been an artistic clash; Delaney suggests that Ricketts criticised Pissarro because ‘his art was inspired by nature rather than art’: Delaney (1990) 107

‘I only hope you’ll stay with us because even if you think we do make mistakes still the XII and its aims have I’m sure a good deal of your sympathy’ he wrote initially, following this up about a week later with a cheery New Year’s message: ‘I can only express on behalf of the XII our sincere regret that you have resigned your membership, and to wish you good luck and real success in your own work and along your own road.’⁴⁹⁹

The thought of being flung out onto his ‘own road’ prompted Rothenstein’s almost immediate return to the society, no less intent on getting Pissarro elected than before. At the end of 1908 he was, again, put up for an election and, again, failed. The pattern repeated itself in 1909, followed by yet another resignation from Rothenstein. Bone seems to have remained unaware of the underlying tensions, mistakenly bringing the focus, second time around, to the question of Pissarro’s nationality – a detail that was not easily resolved.⁵⁰⁰

As to whether Rothenstein ever directly challenged Ricketts on the issue we have no evidence.⁵⁰¹ It seems somewhat ironic if he didn’t, since his main problem with his fellow Society members seems to have been that they were refusing to bring out into the open their dislike of Pissarro, as man or artist.⁵⁰² Maybe he was sensing a return of Whisterian combativeness; a forming of tight cliques, or lack of liberality within the group. The problem was finding the best way to counteract this. Quietly putting forward Pissarro for election year after year, resigning and then rejoining was, needless to say, a solution that simply made him look ridiculous.⁵⁰³

The Society of Twelve was a more catholic society than most, but it hadn’t been able to free itself entirely from accusations of narrow-mindedness and, for all its successes, continued to fall short of Rothenstein’s expectations. To argue that this was in spite of his best efforts would be incorrect: in fact, though he was initially supportive,

⁴⁹⁹ Muirhead Bone to William Rothenstein December 21st 1907; December 30th 1907, HGTVN.

⁵⁰⁰ Pissarro, as Ricketts’s diary entry proves, was not officially a naturalized Englishman, though he had been living in the country for seventeen years.

⁵⁰¹ There *is* some evidence, however, of tension between Rothenstein and Ricketts at this time; see Beckson and Lago (1975) 61, fn.1

⁵⁰² Rothenstein’s full-hearted defence of Pissarro (not to mention the antagonism of others) may have had something to do with their mutual Jewish heritage.

⁵⁰³ To put it in Rothenstein’s own words: ‘I was tenacious... until Pissarro was admitted’: a wonderfully mild summing up of a long and complex argument: W Rothenstein (1937c) 70

the Society was essentially run by Bone, with help with Shannon. Nevertheless, the society had, at one point, represented his ideals: now it was just another missed chance – another compromise.

Rothenstein's position around 1910 was, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, a difficult one. His involvement with various galleries and societies was influential, but it left him largely unsatisfied. He had helped provide regular exhibiting space for artists ignored or poorly served by larger institutions, only to remain unconvinced of the results and/or implications.

One thing is certain: if the exhibiting spaces in which he was involved were designed to support the right sort of work, this didn't turn out to be his own. This was the sad fact he was left contemplating after his return to the Carfax in 1907. Though he continued to enjoy a reasonably high public profile, he never witnessed the success enjoyed by Conder and Augustus John at the turn of the century. Beerbohm's caricatures consistently sold better than his paintings: a fact which seemed to irk him.⁵⁰⁴ As Bone had predicted, he was very much left on his 'own road' by the end of the decade – though not for want of trying. In a letter to D.S.MacColl in the early 1920s Rothenstein smarts at the idea that he was guilty of 'steering off' from the art world, arguing that, in the absence of any other options, he was *forced* into 'ploughing a lonely furrow'.⁵⁰⁵

In 1910 Rothenstein took his turn, as many of his friends had done before him, at Goupil's, William Marchant's Regent Street gallery, which he followed with a large retrospective show at Bradford in the summer. In the following year, after his trip to India (which had coincided with Roger Fry's first Post-Impressionist exhibition) he accepted the offer of a show at Chenil's, after receiving interest from both the Carfax

⁵⁰⁴ Lack of success was very much on Rothenstein's mind at this time: 'what is all this about your work being "dull and unpopular," and about yourself being "not very successful"? I daresay you haven't all the success you deserve. But what good artist *has*, in his lifetime?' wrote Max Beerbohm in March 1909: Beckson and Lago (1975) 61

⁵⁰⁵ William Rothenstein to D S MacColl, Feb 6th 1922, HGTN.

and, through Fry, the Grafton.

His appearance at the Chenil seems apt. Though it was, geographically at least, far removed from so many of the major commercial art galleries in London, the Chenil owed its foundation largely to the Carfax; created as it was by two artists who had debuted there – Augustus John and William Orpen – and by Jack Knewstub, Rothenstein's brother-in-law, whose less-is-more approach owed something to the Carfax dealers (if not to Van Wisselingh also).⁵⁰⁶ Discarding the Carfax's interest in Old Masters, the Chenil continued its tradition of putting faith in young artists, especially those from the Slade. Indeed, the majority of the young artists in whom Rothenstein was interested during this period – Eric Gill, Mark Gertler, the Nash brothers – exhibited at the Chenil.⁵⁰⁷

Though he never rejected the opportunity to stage one-man shows at commercial galleries during the remainder of his career, it is nevertheless fair to say that Rothenstein had lost confidence in their worth by the end, if not the beginning, of the First World War. This is not surprising – he had put a lot of energy into improving the relationship between the artist and the art market and, though he helped a lot of artists along the way (Conder, John, Beerbohm, to name but a few), he was left with the suspicion that certain forms of art – principally his own, it must be said – could not survive within this setup. Worse still, the setup was, it seems, directly responsible for a decline in standards. For someone so full of life and so committed to a range of causes, Rothenstein's conclusions on twentieth century art always lacked positivity. It was for him a period of decline, of deterioration: language which reminds us, inevitably, of MacColl's talk of the 'crumbling of the large institutions', once a positive, even triumphant statement – now something more ambiguous, more dangerous. Even MacColl's critical aid was, in retrospect, something to be suspicious of; too closely aligned to the 'pleasant' and 'pretty' side of the art shown by the Carfax, seduced by 'a happy quality of paint, and by charm of colour': the other, slightly insipid, side of 'less obvious' art, increasingly associated with the work of Steer and Tonks.⁵⁰⁸ Rothenstein

⁵⁰⁶ For more on the Chenil see Helmreich and Holt (2010)

⁵⁰⁷ Nash's very first exhibition was, in fact, at the Carfax in 1912. See Nash (1988).

⁵⁰⁸ W Rothenstein (1937c) 97.

expected more from art than this – and that the gallery he founded might achieved its greatest successes in what was, essentially, a watered-down version of his ideals, could not have pleased him.

This leaves us with the question: which aspects of the Carfax or the Society of Twelve *would* have pleased him? Firstly, we need to credit the quiet but significant part both ventures played in the resurgence of an interest in artistic mediums that had been poorly served by the Academy. The Slade's insistence on skilled draughtsmanship was, for instance, well supported by the Carfax's drawing-dominated exhibitions. These were not simply leftover shows featuring sketches for paintings shown at larger exhibitions (such as the N.E.A.C) but exhibitions containing original drawings by some of the most talented draughtsman of the age, from Augustus John to William Orpen (if not Rothenstein himself). Indeed, for artists who worked solely in what some might consider smaller mediums (such as the etcher Muirhead Bone) the Carfax and the Society of Twelve offered vital exposure.

The same applies to young artists. Rothenstein's faith in John and Orpen – both fresh from the Slade, with little or no reputation – was, from a business perspective, dangerous, but it set a promising precedent, albeit one which might have had mixed results, as an obsession with youthfulness later led galleries to offer shows to artists before they had gained enough experience. This was a typical dilemma, echoed in the fate of a much older artist, in whose fame the Carfax – and Rothenstein – had also played a significant part.⁵⁰⁹ 'I would wish my friends success, but not too much success', wrote Rothenstein, recalling Rodin's last flush of celebrity.⁵¹⁰ This may not be a particularly unique observation, but it is nonetheless an important issue in relation to Rothenstein and many of the artists with whom he was associated. To say that they shunned material, social or critical success would be wrong (Rothenstein was forever frustrated by his lack of it) but it is certainly fair to say that they pursued it with caution.

⁵⁰⁹ See Newton (1994) for Rodin's reputation in Britain.

⁵¹⁰ W Rothenstein (1937c) 46.

CHAPTER THREE

‘Work of a certain character’:

Rothenstein’s critical position, c.1900-1910

The situation in which Rothenstein found himself at the beginning of 1910 was a disillusioning one. The conspicuous lack of interest in his 1910 exhibition at the Goupil only reinforced his suspicion that, despite various attempts to shape conditions in his favour, the small commercial galleries and societies with which he was associated had not provided ideal conditions for his art.⁵¹¹ Rothenstein’s growing interest in alternative exhibiting strategies confirms this; by 1910 he was surely considering the possibility that the ‘certain character’ of work he had in mind had always been incompatible with the structure of the art world – and that the Carfax’s valiant attempt to address this issue had always been doomed to failure.

Despite this lack of wider critical and public interest, Rothenstein received in 1910 three of the more sensitive reviews of his career; reviews that managed both to celebrate his qualities, whilst hinting how his talents might have fallen foul of contemporary tastes.⁵¹² ‘They [Rothenstein’s pictures] do not accommodate themselves easily to the exigencies of domestic life’, wrote Roger Fry in an article for *The Nation*, in which Rothenstein’s lack of charm and ‘limited appeal’ are seen as valuable weapons in the fight against the ‘pleasant’ and ‘commonplace’.⁵¹³ Laurence Binyon took a similar line in the *Saturday Review*, casting Rothenstein as an isolated individual, distrustful of passing trends, obedient only to the ‘wonder and glory’ of Nature itself.⁵¹⁴ During a period in which

⁵¹¹ Speaight (1962) 224.

⁵¹² Binyon (1910), Manson (1910) and R Fry, *The Nation*, 11th June 1910. Much of the latter is quoted in Speaight (1962) 225-8.

⁵¹³ R Fry, *The Nation*, 11th June 1910.

⁵¹⁴ Binyon (1910) 752-3.

Binyon was deeply involved with the attributes of Asian art (*The Flight of the Dragon* was one of several books on Asian art he published between 1908 and 1911) Rothenstein appears to uphold his concerns.⁵¹⁵ ‘Always sensitive and alert to catch the moving spirit and significance of men and things’: there is certainly something of the Eastern artist in Binyon’s summary of Rothenstein’s work.⁵¹⁶ Material concerns and passing fashions are secondary to the spiritual. Rothenstein has become, like Binyon’s Chinese landscape painter (or Goya, his erstwhile subject) a man who paints primarily to ‘please himself’.⁵¹⁷

James Bolivar Manson’s Rothenstein (from *The Studio*) is a similarly serious and self-contained creature, with his ‘spirit of self-abnegation’ and ability to become ‘for the time being, the thing he is painting’.⁵¹⁸ His aims are high, his outlook sane; a much-needed alternative to the ‘by-ways of decadence’ with which he was associated, briefly, in the 1890s.⁵¹⁹ In short the character of his work, as described by these three critics, seems fundamentally at odds with our concept of a commercial gallery in fashionable Ryder Street, maybe even of the wares to be found there: Charles Conder’s whimsical fans, Philip Wilson Steer’s impressionistic landscapes – even Beerbohm’s satirical caricatures.

Which leads us to the question: what was this character anyway? Rothenstein’s Carfax comment is an ambiguous one, and it seems fitting that it should swing on the word ‘certain’, for there is at first glance very little certainty regarding the aesthetics of Rothenstein and his fellow Carfax contributors. Indeed, it is this lack of certainty that has made them so resistant to clean art-historical narratives. We know what they weren’t, but what they were remains unclear. One might re-imagine the comment as relating to the work of ‘certain character.’; finding in this a more comfortable way of

⁵¹⁵ Binyon (1908a; 1908b; 1909; 1911). Responding to an exhibition of Japanese art in London in 1910, Binyon was to write: ‘This year will be remembered for its revelation of the arts of the Orient to Europe’. Roger Fry’s Post-Impressionist shows were to undermine this prophecy: *The Saturday Review*, 28th May 1910, Vol 109 687-8. See Hatcher (1995) for a wider discussion of Binyon and the arts of Asia. Rothenstein contributed to the growth of interest in Asian art by publishing a short essay on Hokusai, founding the India Society and travelling to India: see W Rothenstein (1910); Lago (1972); Turner (2008); Arrowsmith (2010).

⁵¹⁶ Binyon (1910) 752-3.

⁵¹⁷ W Rothenstein (1900) 7. This is a typical assessment of Rothenstein’s attitude; Hubert Wellington writes in 1923 that ‘it would be difficult to find an artist of his time more definitely self-controlled and purposeful in development, less swayed by either praise or criticism’: Wellington (1923) 7-8.

⁵¹⁸ Manson (1910) 37.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

dealing with a set of artists whose connections to each other are more obviously social than artistic. Rothenstein's *Chelsea Group* (1894: fig.14) provides a potential symbol: five artists, all but one closely associated with the gallery, standing in close proximity to one another, each asserting his own particular personality (represented, most obviously, in the range of headgear). This shift from character to characters is a telling – and convenient – one, but it is also dangerous. Ultimately, some attempt must be made to delve a little deeper into this character; to tease out the various ideas that hide behind this misleadingly strident 'certain'.

As already highlighted, there was among Rothenstein and many of his friends a strong desire to be seen as 'catholic' in taste, to be suspicious of anything that *did* have a 'certain' (in the sense of immediately definable) character. Part of a generation often described as 'heterogeneous' in outlook, Rothenstein was as keen as anyone to foreground his belief in 'mental freedom' and his distaste for '-isms'.⁵²⁰ Though he held a wide range of other artists in very high regard and directed friends towards the work of others, he railed against imitative art; both in the sense of attempting to mirror nature and, most significantly, the conscious imitation of another artist's style. Artistic influences were there to offer pointers, not models; individuality something to be valued; distinct groups and theories to be treated with caution. In unpublished notes he complained of how critics such as Fry and MacColl (both of whom were, at times, keen supporters) liked to 'act the part of cardinals of an aesthetical Vatican, & wd like, if they could, to make permanent saints, & control a permanent index'.⁵²¹ Art criticism was 'refined gossip', whilst 'a doctrinaire theory of art will never capture the dynamic quality of life'.⁵²² Narrow-mindedness in artistic matters was the worst crime of all; typified by oppositional strategies, employed with semi-comic effect by Lewis in 1914, but quietly condemned by Rothenstein in his eminently sensible phrase: 'It is not a question of

⁵²⁰ Delaney (1989) 40; W Rothenstein (1937b) 286.

⁵²¹ Undated Notebook (marked S.O.), HGTN 1148.3.

Binyon used similar language, referring in *Botticelli* to the 'theological bitterness' of certain artistic factions: Hatcher (1995) 189. Henry Tonks once referred to Roger Fry as St. Roger: Hone (1939) 193.

⁵²² W Rothenstein (1937c) 226; unpublished criticism, HGTN 1148.2.

preferring one to the other but of response to the challenge of each'.⁵²³

Of course, openness melts into vagueness without much persuasion – and there is a fair amount of that in Rothenstein's critical writing, particularly when it veers into more spiritual territories, where his constant leaning towards, yet ultimate ambivalence to religion lends his prose an obvious tension.⁵²⁴ It is easy to lose patience with his constant talk of 'hidden realities' and 'cosmic rhythms', or his habit of ascribing 'dignity' and 'sincerity' to works of art based on feelings which are never adequately explored.

Some of these phrases – 'cosmic rhythms' for instance – have obvious precedents, in this case Laurence Binyon, who, though sharing much the same territory as Rothenstein when it came to aesthetic matters, nonetheless developed his theories with much more consideration, rarely employing an uncertain term without due explanation.⁵²⁵ Perhaps it would be unfair to castigate Rothenstein for failing to do the same: he was an artist, essentially, not a literary intelligence. And yet his opinions, unlike many artists', had a wide audience, not only amongst his ever-expanding social circle, but into the public domain. In this sense, his critical position can't be ignored. And yet it remains quite easy to do so. Widely dispersed as they were, his words have rarely caught the imagination of the historian. Excepting a recent study by Michael T Saler,

⁵²³ W Rothenstein (1939) 30. Comparisons may be made with Ricketts and Binyon: 'Every work must be judged on its own merit, wholesale opinions imply that he who makes them "sees through his ears because his eyes are no use" – as Ricketts loved to say': Lewis (1939). 'To sweep the mind clear of prejudice and preoccupation is an essential condition of apprehending beauty as it really is. As an old Chinese artist complained, "People look at pictures with their ears rather than with their eyes."': Binyon (1911) 10. For Lewis see BLAST (1914) where Lewis exaggerates oppositional strategies, either 'blasting' or 'blessing' a range of cultural figures and ideas. Though many of the underlying ideals were keenly felt, the approach is a deliberately facetious one, almost self-defeating in its faintly comic violence. Lewis later turned out to be an especially sensitive critic of Rothenstein's work; though his earlier style continues to attract the most attention for those keen to see early twentieth-century British art as a battleground between distinct artistic tribes: Bloomsbury, Vorticism, British Impressionism, The Camden Town Group, etc.

⁵²⁴ John Rothenstein (a Catholic convert) writes with obvious frustration of his father's impatience with religious dogma, part of his wider suspicion for 'any precisely formulated principles'. He notes: 'when I contended that the doctrines of the Catholic Church were either (as I believed) true or else they were false, but that in either event they treated of realities, he [Rothenstein] insisted that "the Church needs dogma as a garden needs walls to enclose it"': J Rothenstein (1952) 123. Eric Gill's friendship with Rothenstein was also rocked by the former's frustration with the latter's refusal to pin himself down religiously. 'Our whole trouble today', concluded Gill, 'is our contentment with a vague godliness – the result being a complete ungodliness': Eric Gill to William Rothenstein, 6th August 1917, HGTN.

⁵²⁵ W Rothenstein (1937b) 325; Binyon (1911). Hatcher notes that "'Rhythm" was Binyon's favourite word': Hatcher (1995) 179. Ysanne Holt has written elsewhere that 'the term rhythm was used constantly by younger artists and critics in discussions on modern French art and culminated in the publication of a magazine of that name from 1911, directly related to the latest developments in painting seen in Paris': Holt (1992) 109. The quasi-spiritual foundations of Rothenstein's thought probably have their roots in Ruskin.

few contemporary writers feel the urge to credit Rothenstein as a leading critical thinker of the times.⁵²⁶ This isn't too surprising. Rothenstein's admirable tendency to give the artist the benefit of the doubt; to consider everything on its own merits, seemingly blind to the boundaries we are so used to imposing on periods of art, does not lend itself well to the historical process, making the artist, as his biographer once pondered, a likely 'victim to his own integrity, uttering no *dernier cri* and following no contemporary mode'.⁵²⁷

Indeed, we don't need to look far for proof that Rothenstein's propensity for uncertainty was an open issue at the time. Lytton Strachey encountered him for the first time in 1907 and, though his description of his fellow diner as 'small and monkey-like' might seem a little cruel, his impatience with Rothenstein's 'style of vagueness' was probably no exaggeration.⁵²⁸ 'He was nice, and extraordinarily meek,' explained Strachey in a letter to Duncan Grant: 'but oh! the rot he talked... I should never be able to agree that Nature was the only one aspect of Art, that Beauty was the expression of True Emotions'.⁵²⁹ Robert Speaight seems to have agreed, concluding: 'in dealing with ideas, as in dealing with people, [Rothenstein's] sympathies suffered from their imprecision'.⁵³⁰

As Strachey's account reveals, Rothenstein could clearly come across as self-important at times, although the constant criticism of friends and acquaintances may have made it hard for him to deceive himself for long. Certainly he was aware, I believe, of the problems inherent in his critical approach – and though he probably lacked the incentive to change it entirely, it would be wrong to suppose that he never thought it

⁵²⁶ Saler (1999) Saler's study is, essentially, a reaction against Bloomsbury and a celebration of artists from the north of England. He focuses, like other writers, on the clash between Rothenstein and Fry, putting the former at the forefront of a group of what he calls 'medieval modernists'. Although the study focuses on the interwar period, he has valuable things to say on the development of Rothenstein's aesthetics.

⁵²⁷ Speaight (1962) 345.

⁵²⁸ Holroyd (1967) 356-7. He had met Rothenstein's brother Albert shortly before (whom he described as 'rather podgy and hubristic') – mistaking him for William [*the* Rothenstein]. Both brothers were, he thought, rather vague.

⁵²⁹ Virginia Woolf later remarked, a little archly, upon Rothenstein's 'fine simple emotions' and 'robust and uncompromising' style. The language is very close to that which the artist himself might have used: Nicholson (1976) 257. In his memoirs Rothenstein describes the dinner with Strachey from his own viewpoint: 'I thought that here was the cultured University man, who lies in wait, hoping one may say something foolish, or inaccurate, and then springs out to crush one, in high falsetto tones'. He adds, with typical humility, 'But I was mistaken': W Rothenstein (1937c) 179.

⁵³⁰ He goes on to say, less convincingly, that his subject was 'the least sophisticated of men; and the sincerity that informed his comment on modern movements in art would sometimes raise a smile from those who were more closely at grips with them': Speaight (1962) 318.

through. Instead, he sought a position that allowed for breathing space, that wasn't overly dogmatic, whilst seeking to prove that his *was* an essentially serious approach to art; that his appreciation of various forms of art was driven by a distinct set of beliefs; even a sense of moral purpose.

In order to understand this position we need to navigate between two popular conceptions of Rothenstein's approach. The first of them may be summed up by John Drinkwater's full-hearted dedication to Rothenstein in his 1917 *Prose Papers*: 'Nothing in the public affairs of art has been more inspiring in my time than the tributes that you have paid to your contemporaries, and your eager recognition of the painters of a new generation, some of them in revolt against the methods of your own art'.⁵³¹ The second we have already witnessed in Beerbohm's caricatures; the darker (or more pathetic) side of the eager and inspiring friend: the suffocating busybody – a man who, in Wilson Steer's words, aspired to create art from 'higher motives' than everyone else.⁵³² In short, the didactic Rothenstein.

The abiding perception of Rothenstein is that, despite his famous scuffle with Conder, his was not a fiery temperament; or at least, any fires that started up were very soon put out, and the ground raked swiftly over. As Arnold Bennett and others were to complain of his memoirs, his writing sometimes lacked 'salt' or 'venom'; self-conscious attempts to qualify every judgment merely muddying the waters.⁵³³ It would be foolish, nevertheless, to go too far in this direction and imagine that Rothenstein was incapable of strong opinions: that his was, ultimately, an aesthetic riddled with uncertainty. Augustus John, who suffered more from Rothenstein's kindness than most, gave much-needed credit to the other side of his personality: 'Though Rothenstein's intellectual tempo was so much faster than mine,' he recalled, 'his conversation, in which serious subject matter contended with irrepressible gaiety, was both enlivening and educative. His judgments as regards my work might be severe; they were never unjust'.⁵³⁴ He was not the only artist to uphold the idea of Rothenstein as an inspired and stern critic. Fred

⁵³¹ Drinkwater (1917) dedication page.

⁵³² Speaight (1962) 105.

⁵³³ Speaight (1962) 353-4.

⁵³⁴ John (1950) 4.

Brown wrote to William in 1906 noting that ‘it is a great encouragement to have work appreciated by one whose critical judgment I have the greatest respect & from one whose praise I know is not lightly given’.⁵³⁵ The fact that such letters are relatively commonplace hint at the possibility that his praise was not as lightly given as people thought it was; that the severity was a shield brought out irregularly to save him from an overwhelming desire to please everyone all of the time. There is still plenty of profit to be had, yet, in pursuing these judgments.

Ironically, Rothenstein’s obsession with mental freedom was, in its own way, a facet of a latent moralizing temperament. Throughout his career, he was caught between desire and reluctance to preach to the public (and fellow artists). Though he claimed to dislike giving lectures, he did so more frequently than most, enjoying a ‘long and crowded career as a public speaker’, beginning in earnest around 1908, the year in which he provided the annual address at the Birmingham Municipal School of Art – one of a few published speeches.⁵³⁶ Similarly, though he published little before 1920, the subsequent length of his memoirs reveals an inability to keep his opinions on art entirely to himself. On the one hand a tentative teacher, highly suspicious of dogmas and trends, Rothenstein was nonetheless naturally inclined to lecture his fellow men, even if his subject was the dangers of lecturing.⁵³⁷ His critical influence never approached that of Roger Fry, whose wide experience, scientific mind and ability to seize the moment created a unique impact. Nonetheless, Rothenstein’s words did reach a large audience. Not only the public, but a large portion of artists – many of whom went on to become just as, if not more influential – were exposed at an early stage to Rothenstein aesthetics.⁵³⁸

Though his primary consideration was the structure of the art world, this was never unrelated to the nature of the art created: the two depended on each other.

⁵³⁵ Fred Brown to William Rothenstein, June 21st 1906, HGTN.

⁵³⁶ Speaight (1962) 206-12; W Rothenstein (1916; 1932; 1942). Rothenstein’s 1905 prize-giving speech at Winchester School of Art was also published. In 1908 Rothenstein lectured in Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Brighton and Bolt Court, where Paul Nash saw him speak (see fn.538). 1909 was a similarly busy year.

⁵³⁷ We may recall Beerbohm’s caricature, *Will Rothenstein Laying Down the Law* [fig 7] in which Rothenstein is seen lecturing to himself in a mirror on the subject of modesty.

⁵³⁸ Paul Nash describes attending a lecture by Rothenstein at Bolt Court. ‘Will Rothenstein talked on and on,’ he recalled: ‘I was amazed at his fluency; from the moment that wide, judicial mouth opened a stream of easy, persuasive and ingenious talk flowed out, full of shrewdness and wit’: Nash (1988) 82-3.

Engineering the right environment for a ‘certain character’ of work to flourish may have been a key consideration, but we cannot hope to understand the Carfax, and likeminded projects, without also arriving at a fuller understanding of its founder’s critical ideals; of the art that would, or should, inhabit this environment.

Though Rothenstein’s memoirs will inevitably remain a major source for this discussion of his aesthetics – this exploration of the often mysterious ‘certain character’ – I intend to concentrate, where possible, on earlier texts. I am especially interested in dealing with the development of Rothenstein’s critical position around the turn of the century, when the Carfax was founded. Though I don’t believe that there is a great gulf between his thoughts during this period and those expressed in the early ‘30s (the consistency of many of his beliefs is in fact remarkable), the latter are nonetheless informed by changes in the art world occurring between the two; revolving, most obviously, around the writer’s need to shape his opinions in light of the very public debate that had followed events at the close of 1910 – and of subsequent developments in the post-war art world. Later writings, as I have already noted, also pick up on the work of other critics, such as Laurence Binyon – though he, in turn, may have been influenced by Rothenstein: part of a circle of influence that is difficult to trace in retrospect.⁵³⁹

Rather than rely on his memoirs, a more accurate picture of Rothenstein’s critical position around the turn of the century can be picked up from contemporary letters, lectures and art criticism. Of the latter, Rothenstein produced several pieces in the 1890s, including a couple of columns on the Parisian art scene for *The Studio* (in 1893) and two articles on Goya for *The Saturday Review* (in 1896).⁵⁴⁰ In 1899 he was invited by Binyon, in a typical gesture, to expand his work on Goya into a short book, by far the most important early source.

Rothenstein’s *Goya* is interesting for many reasons. Though a short work, and one which occasionally digresses from the central subject, it remains the only piece from this

⁵³⁹ Though Rothenstein writes about Binyon in his memoirs, he doesn’t openly engage with his critical writing. Indeed, Rothenstein’s writing rarely refers to specific books, and rarely if ever quotes passages from other critical thinkers.

⁵⁴⁰ *The Studio*, vol I (1893) p.80, 160; W Rothenstein (1896a; 1896b).

period dedicated to a single artist. It also appears at a critical time. As we have seen, 1899 was an especially busy year for the artist. He was closely involved in the foundation of the Carfax and working on his *Manchester Portraits*; meanwhile in Vattetot, that summer, he was trying to position himself amongst a group of younger artists. On this account, or independently of it, his work was undergoing changes, resulting in some of his most celebrated paintings: *The Doll's House* (1900: fig.2) *The Browning Readers* (1901: fig.5) *The Quarry* (1904: fig.21) and, after 1903, his series of Jewish paintings. It would be wrong to see this as a precise turning point – in fact, many of the qualities associated with these paintings can be seen in much earlier works, such as *Parting at Morning* (1891) and *Vézelay Cathedral* (1894: fig.18) – nevertheless, *Goya* presented the artist with his first major opportunity to set down some of the ideas he had been working around for the past decade or so.⁵⁴¹ Here was a chance to make a statement for the new decade; to prove to that this artist of the 1890s – of what Beerbohm, as early as 1895, jokily referred to as the ‘Beardsley period’ – had much more to say, a lot of which was not necessarily in keeping with the character of that decade (as it was already popularly perceived).⁵⁴² Unlike Beerbohm, Rothenstein wasn’t all that keen to be ‘outmoded’; he wanted to cast off the potentially profitable 1890s aura – to adapt, not by following fashions, but by pursuing a new, self-shaped, set of ideals.

The paintings produced around this period reflect the increasing lucidity of these ideals – though not always as directly as we might hope, since there was often a gap between what he wanted to do and what he was able to. As Augustus John was to write, ‘[Rothenstein’s] standards were high and difficult enough, God knows, and if he fell short of them at times (and who does not?) even his failures were heroic’.⁵⁴³ Others, in a less valedictory mood, might argue that he rarely approached his ideals. Despite this, reviews of Rothenstein’s work across this period – from as early as late 1900 – do suggest that, regardless of whether they appreciated it or not, critics *were* able to gauge

⁵⁴¹ John Rothenstein describes *Vézelay* as ‘one painting which anticipated the later attitude’. *Parting at Morning*, perhaps on account of the gold background, has rarely been put forward as an example of Rothenstein’s austere approach, though it is essentially a sober work: J Rothenstein (1952) 131.

⁵⁴² The idea of 1900 as a turning point is most obviously set out by John Rothenstein: J Rothenstein (1928) 197-203 and J Rothenstein (1952) 121-136; Beerbohm (1930) 123-4.

⁵⁴³ John (150) 5; Rothenstein admitted as much himself, writing of his ‘desire to wring all I could out of my subject, to aim at what was beyond me, rather than to achieve an easier and more attractive result’: W Rothenstein (1937c) 39.

from his work his wider artistic vision.

As far as he was concerned, however, his own work was only *an* answer to his ideals: not necessarily *the* answer. ‘Work of a certain character’ was always meant to refer well beyond his own canvases; we need, therefore, to question the extent to which his critical ideals relate to those artists with whom he was associated at this time. Whilst the Carfax would seem to have failed Rothenstein’s own art, artists such as Charles Conder and Walter Sickert benefited greatly from it.⁵⁴⁴ But to what extent did their work exhibit this ‘certain character’?

Rothenstein was not a self-absorbed artist. Though his critical position centred on the belief that Nature – and not other artists – ought to serve as the main inspiration for an artist, Rothenstein knew, critically engaged with, wrote about, collected and financially supported the work of a large range of artists. His relationship with all of them – past masters and contemporary – add something to our understanding of his critical position. I intend to focus on those which are either mentioned most frequently, or which present the most interesting problems for him as a critic and artist.

We start with Goya. In some senses, the 1900 book on Goya represented the *end* of Rothenstein’s five-year affair with the Spanish artist. Though he didn’t lose interest in Goya altogether – he considered *The Disasters of War* to be among the greatest etchings ever produced, alongside those of Rembrandt – he learnt through writing about him that he wasn’t, perhaps, the best model of his artistic ideals.⁵⁴⁵ This suggests that the book was a very personal reading, which in a way it was; though not, perhaps, as personal as some had hoped. Indeed, a large portion of Rothenstein’s essay sees the artist trying to prove that he can do art-historical biography just as well as anyone else –

⁵⁴⁴ Although letters prove that Sickert, probably with Rothenstein’s encouragement, sent work to the Carfax soon after it opened, his main association with the gallery was under Arthur Clifton’s management, especially after 1910. Conder exhibited regularly at the Carfax until falling out with its second manager Robert Ross.

⁵⁴⁵ W Rothenstein (1937b) 224.

thinking, probably, that the first English monograph on Goya deserved its fair share of facts. Luckily for us, however, he does cut loose at times, using Goya to help outline and give historical backing to his own developing beliefs.

Why this particular artist? Though the French had been much quicker to appreciate Goya's work, the impulse to study him didn't originate in Rothenstein's Paris years.⁵⁴⁶ It was instead a Scotsman, Robert Cunninghame Graham, who pushed him in this direction, writing to Rothenstein in 1894 that 'Goya is I think the painter you would find yourself in most harmony with to your ideas' and that it was 'absolutely necessary' for him to go to Madrid.⁵⁴⁷ This he did, with Graham, the following year, confirming his friend's judgement in a letter home: 'nothing could have been more lucky, than my having come to Spain, for nothing has ever so completely influenced my whole attitude in painting'.⁵⁴⁸ There is, of course, an important difference between these two comments; in the second Rothenstein suggests that he is being influenced to move in a new direction, though in the first it seems as though Goya's advantages lie in his exhibiting qualities already evident in Rothenstein. The reality was probably a mixture of the two: Goya's art did not necessarily present the young artist with an altogether original attitude, but directed, expanded and strengthened a set of beliefs he had held for some time. The influence of a dead artist had a distinct advantage; it could be managed to suit his own needs, to qualify his own approach.

There was, no doubt, an added incentive. Though the tides of appreciation were clearly turning, Goya was not yet fashionable in the same way as his Spanish counterpart Velazquez was; there was still a cachet in the appreciation of his work: a sense of being a pioneer.⁵⁴⁹ Rothenstein owned work by Goya shortly before the National Gallery acquired their first paintings; his 1900 book was the first English monograph: Goya scholarship was still a field in which a young man could acquire a

⁵⁴⁶ For comparison of English and French responses to Goya, see Glendinning (1964).

⁵⁴⁷ Cunningham Graham to William Rothenstein, August 7th 1894, HGTN. Rothenstein's adventures in Morocco and Spain are recounted in his memoirs: W Rothenstein (1937b) 215-226.

⁵⁴⁸ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, March 1st 1895, HGTN.

⁵⁴⁹ Interest in Velazquez at the turn of the century has attracted a lot of attention, much of it centred on R A M Stevenson's influential 1895 study. See in particular McConkey (2005; 2006). Ricketts was quietly critical of Stevenson's approach in *Art of the Prado*: Ricketts (1907)

reputation relatively easily.⁵⁵⁰ So far as bohemian identities went (to which he still relatively open in the mid 1890s) Goya was a godsend; there was something slightly dangerous about his work – a measure of eroticism and violence that must have attracted an artist already open about his love of Balzac (to whom, indeed, Rothenstein was fond of comparing Goya). As he wrote later, ‘Goya’s art was of the kind to dazzle a young painter’; a comment which hints at a subsequent change in attitude – anticipated in the opening paragraphs of the 1900 study – and of a new-found maturity; one that sees beyond mere dazzling attributes.⁵⁵¹ By 1900 he was certainly playing down the more dramatic qualities of Goya’s art, or his faith in them at any rate; reluctant to sustain the role of the archetypal 1890s artist-connoisseur, typified (rightly or wrongly) by Beardsley’s fondness for the grotesque. Characteristically, by what Nigel Glendinning has called the ‘climax to the nineteenth-century rise of English interest in Goya’ (represented by a major exhibition of Spanish painting at the Guildhall in London in 1901) Rothenstein was moving on, towards a set of aesthetic standards which reserved a little less space for Goya’s ‘savage grace’.⁵⁵²

We sense these changes in the 1900 study. This was preceded, however, by two articles published in *The Saturday Review* in September 1896, in which admiration had yet to be tempered by reflection.⁵⁵³ Glimpses of Rothenstein’s later writing style are evident, though his approach is a little more breathless than we might expect; the author taking much more delight in the ‘insolent cynicism’ and ‘luxuriant fancy’ of his subject than he might have done later on.⁵⁵⁴ There is also, as William Wilde was to point out, a little too much showing off on the art-historical front: ‘We who like your work with colour, pencil or needle’, wrote Wilde, ‘don’t really care a solitary monosyllabic anathema for your over-erudite theories as regards the influence of Guardi and Longhi and the elder Tiepolo (confound the elder T!) on your Goya. These ideas are on the dangerous verge

⁵⁵⁰ He bought a copy of *The Disasters of War* at the Academy of San Fernando during his visit to Madrid. Later he acquired two paintings, *Two Majas* and *Monk and Witch*, both of which were reproduced in the 1900 study. The first is now considered a false attribution: Glendinning (1964) 12.

⁵⁵¹ W Rothenstein (1937b) 224. He appears to suggest in the opening to *Goya* that the Goya was an artist he had put behind him, an ‘idol... [from] an early period of our development’: W Rothenstein (1900) 5.

⁵⁵² Glendinning (1964) 13; W Rothenstein (1896a) 253.

⁵⁵³ See K McConkey (2006). McConkey notes that *The Saturday Review* was rare in supporting the Spanish interest in the Spanish-American conflict, making it the obvious place for a revival of interest in Spanish art.

⁵⁵⁴ W Rothenstein (1896a) 253.

of pedantry, and encyclopaedic lore'.⁵⁵⁵ What he wanted instead was to know 'how Goya's work approximates, inspires, guides or influences your *own* work?'; a process that probably required a little more thought than Rothenstein had been able to fit in between his trip to Spain and the appearance of these two articles.

If he was personally reluctant to come to any certain conclusions as to how Goya was influencing his outlook at this point, others weren't averse to the challenge. 'Mr Rothenstein is very young,' wrote Frederick Wedmore in the *Studio* in 1896, an inauspicious remark (if not an excuse), followed by 'of his etched work, so far as I have seen it, some is suggested visibly by Goya's spirit, and much is a result of a familiarity with Goya's themes and processes. Goya – who hesitates at nothing – does not commend himself to the ordinary Briton; nor will Mr. Rothenstein.'⁵⁵⁶ This rather dramatic and daring image of the young artist was confirmed, much later, by Augustus John, who remembered Rothenstein's early work as owing much to the example of 'Whistler, but more, in their dramatic quality, to the irradiation of Goya's genius'.⁵⁵⁷ He was probably referring, unlike Wedmore, to paintings from the mid 1890s, such as *Coster Girls* (1894), *Two Women* (1895), the Cunninghame-Graham portrait (exhibited as *The Swordsman*, 1895) and, most blatantly, *Ignacio Zuloaga as a Torrero* (1894-5) and *Hablant Espagnol* (1894-5: fig 18). Unfortunately Rothenstein, ever reluctant to admit the direct influence of a single artist, wrote little on this short yet distinct phase in his art, confessing to a technical point only; that his study of Goya had led him to experiment with dark red grounds.⁵⁵⁸ The 'certain character' was never one to be bound to a single source – and Goya, it appears, was never an influence he was keen to exaggerate.

Though later work was much less obviously inspired by Goya, or Velazquez, language commonly employed to describe Spanish painting *was* to follow Rothenstein throughout his career; most obviously the word 'austere' – which appears in almost all of the major reviews of this work – and throughout his own writing also. In reference to Spanish art,

⁵⁵⁵ Speaight (1962) 105. By the time Rothenstein worked up these articles into his book, William Wilde was dead.

⁵⁵⁶ F Wedmore, 'Some Younger Etchers', *The Studio*, vol VI, 1896, p.84.

⁵⁵⁷ John (1950) 5.

⁵⁵⁸ W Rothenstein (1937b) 178.

‘austere’ is liberally employed by Charles Ricketts in his 1904 study of the Prado; though here the more negative associations of the word emerge, the author having little patience for the Spanish School (excepting Velasquez, saved by his Italianate influences). Though it had little in common with Murillo and his ilk, the perceived austerity of William’s style was often the point on which his reputation swung; if the critic in question didn’t welcome austerity in art, there was little chance of his being impressed by Rothenstein’s oeuvre. Not everyone was as inclined as Wyndham Lewis to admire and even embrace the ‘uncompromising severity’ of his style.⁵⁵⁹

Words such as ‘drama’ and ‘brutality’, more closely associated with Goya than Spanish art as a whole, did not follow him so closely. A boldness of design and vaguely brutal honesty may be associated with his portraits, but the conception of Rothenstein as a daring artist who ‘hesitates at nothing’ was never to become a common one. Were it so, I doubt whether Rothenstein’s work would have been as neglected as it has been. As it is, the ‘fresh, emphatic, and spontaneous’ side of Goya, which Ricketts recognised in Manet, was only carried so far by Rothenstein, whose adoption of self-consciously Impressionist techniques was, typically, tempered (though never entirely subdued) by his suspicion of passing effects; of immediate charm or showiness.⁵⁶⁰

Four years passed between the appearance of his *Saturday Review* articles and the 1900 book, commissioned in early 1899 by Rothenstein’s friend Laurence Binyon, as part of his Artist’s Library series.⁵⁶¹ Already a published poet, and a regular at the Vale, Binyon [fig. 19] had joined the staff of the British Museum in 1893, later securing an influential job in the Prints and Drawings Room, which was to become an important meeting place for contemporary artists.⁵⁶² Though his was a quieter personality than that of Rothenstein or Ricketts, his influence proved equally great. The wideness of his interests was ultimately to lead him, nevertheless, into conflict with the succeeding generation (Lewis included) who – whilst praising aspects of his vision – were to blast

⁵⁵⁹ Michel and Fox (1971) 415-6.

⁵⁶⁰ Ricketts (1907) 130.

⁵⁶¹ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, Jan 7th 1902, HGTV.

⁵⁶² See Hatcher (1995).

his ‘disgusting attitude of respect toward predecessors’.⁵⁶³ Rothenstein’s description of Binyon in his memoirs, meanwhile, approaches the ideal he sought for himself: ‘quick to perceive and welcome unusual talent in others’, he was clearly, as Binyon’s biographer has put it, a ‘talented enabler’.⁵⁶⁴ The two men were sympathetic to each other’s ideas, as proved by Binyon’s perceptive review of his 1910 exhibition.⁵⁶⁵ They shared plenty of likes (the work of Augustus John and Puvis de Chavannes) and dislikes (the doctrine of art for art’s sake, or the ‘bluff and bunkum’ surrounding contemporary art movements).⁵⁶⁶ Both made a remarkable contribution, also, in the sphere of Asian art, various forms of which they promoted with a sensitivity and understanding lacking in previous decades.⁵⁶⁷ Just as Carfax exhibitors were among the most frequent visitors to the Prints and Drawings Room, letters reveal that Binyon, in turn, was a regular visitor to the Carfax, often using his artistic knowledge to help them with questionable attributions.⁵⁶⁸ Binyon bridged the gap, argued Rothenstein, between the scholar and the artist, revealing a ‘rare modesty... seldom met with in the expert’.⁵⁶⁹

Binyon’s Artist’s Library started out as an ambitious project, one which stands out, even amongst the art-publishing boom of the late nineteenth century, as an intriguing attempt to draw public attention to lesser-known artists, with the help of contemporary artists and writers, many of whom had little or no experience writing about art. Backed by Ernest Oldmeadow, founder of *The Dome* (a cultural journal which ran from 1897 to 1900) and owner of the Unicorn Press, the roots of the project did not lie in fertile financial soil – but there were advantages to this. In one sense it took the pressure off; introductory essays to each book, which would contain as many illustrations as the budget allowed, were to be supplied by friends on the basis that they would write short, accessible and personal pieces – ‘for students and not for

⁵⁶³ Ezra Pound, ‘Laurence Binyon’, in Lewis (1916) 86; see also Corbett (1997).

⁵⁶⁴ W Rothenstein (1937b) 200; Hatcher (1995) 186.

⁵⁶⁵ Binyon also wrote the preface to the catalogue for Rothenstein’s 1904 Leicester Gallery exhibition

⁵⁶⁶ Hatcher (1955) 147, 141-3. Binyon’s interest in de Chavannes and John was linked to his belief in civic art projects, another sphere in which Rothenstein’s influence was prominent. See Corbett (2005) for a wider discussion of Binyon’s aesthetics.

⁵⁶⁷ See fn.515.

⁵⁶⁸ ‘I was looking through the portfolio of drawings at Carfax the other day. The drawing you call Reynolds is, I think, much more likely to be by Rubens. I can show you one here which has similar characterisations’: Laurence Binyon to William Rothenstein, undated letter, [c.1899], HGTN.

⁵⁶⁹ W Rothenstein (1937b) 200.

collectors'.⁵⁷⁰ Binyon looked to draw together the writing skills and diverse artistic knowledge of his friends, encouraging innovation and a broad, universal approach. The choice of writers and subjects makes the series the perfect representation of the 'unashamed eclecticism' of the social circles revolving around centres such as The Prints and Drawings Room, The Vale, The Carfax and Murkmurdo's at Fitzroy Street; of journals such as *The Pageant*, and newspapers like *The Saturday Review*.⁵⁷¹ Indeed, early outlines of the series make it seem, in retrospect, one of the most exciting art-publishing projects of the period. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the titles were to remain unwritten. Amongst these we find Max Beerbohm on Daumier, W B Yeats on Calvert, Bernard Berenson on Giorgione, Sturge Moore on Rodin, Charles Dodgson on Cranach, D.S.MacColl on Alfred Stevens, Herbert Horne on Piero della Francesca, Selwyn Image on Rowlandson and Roger Fry on Piero di Cosimo.⁵⁷² The five that did make it through, nonetheless, present an interesting – and distinctly international – set. Charles Holmes offered *Hokusai* in 1899 and *Constable* in 1901, Roger Fry *Giovanni Bellini* in 1899, Sturge Moore *Aldorfer* in 1900 and, in the same year, Rothenstein presented his *Goya*.

The fact that so few of the titles made it into print may have had as much to do with the relatively small financial incentive as for this very quality of eclecticism. The freedom offered by Binyon had benefits, clearly, but it also made it hard for the writers. How to pitch a reply to such a commission? In the five that exist, we find a range of responses, most of them marked by this slight confusion of identity. Holmes recalled taking the books a little too seriously. He started learning Japanese for the book on *Hokusai* and compiled enough notes for *Constable* to write a much larger study.⁵⁷³ Rothenstein's progress, meanwhile, was arrested by several complications: a personal feud with Oldmeadow (the publisher), his involvement with the Carfax and the *Manchester Portraits* commission – and a debilitating attack of jaundice. I don't think it

⁵⁷⁰ Hatcher (1995) 58. The commission was £25 – not a great amount, certainly not for the time Rothenstein put into it.

⁵⁷¹ Hatcher (1995) 46.

⁵⁷² Binyon appears to have asked Beerbohm through Rothenstein in early 1900, noting 'I'm afraid he wouldn't find it worth his while, as I suppose he gets paid very highly' (referring to his position as theatre critic of *The Saturday Review*): Laurence Binyon to Alice Rothenstein, 3rd Jan 1900, HG TN.

⁵⁷³ Holmes (1936) 190. Binyon, who had been commissioned to write a longer book on Constable, duly passed the task onto Holmes, who followed his Artist's Library essay with a much more comprehensive study.

would be unfair to see some of these as excuses: although the illness was serious, it hit him several months after he'd promised to submit the book (in March 1899), whilst the argument with Oldmeadow was, as with many of Rothenstein's disagreements, not only blown out of proportion, but unrelated to the project in hand.⁵⁷⁴ In fact, his copious notes on the book, and correspondence with Binyon, suggest that the real reason lay in multiple changes of mind regarding the manuscript. This came to symbolise for Binyon the fate of the entire series. In September 1899 he wrote to 'beg for a final effort' as 'my poor series pines & withers'.⁵⁷⁵ He had every right to be frustrated: Rothenstein spent well over a year on what turned out to be a thirty-six page essay.

Still, there were good reasons to be anxious over the book. Rothenstein had never pretended to be an art historian – and though his articles for *The Saturday Review* proved that he was a perfectly capable writer, he was surrounded by people who wrote more regularly (famous stylists such as Beerbohm, or a burgeoning critic such as Fry) all of which may have given him a sense of inferiority, despite Binyon's constant encouragement. Balancing this was his belief that an artist's opinion had just as much, if not more, value than that of a critics – along with William Wilde's assertion that readers *were* interested in what he, as a painter, had to say about Goya, and would receive this with just as much, if not more enthusiasm, than a text by a more experienced art historian. On top of this, it was a good time to be making statements; the decade was at an end, a new generation of artists were emerging and looking to Rothenstein for help: this was a timely opportunity to put into words thoughts that he had been working with for almost a decade. There was every incentive to follow Wilde's advice and make it a personal text: a statement of intent.

He nonetheless tried, at the same time, to present a professional front. It was, after all, the first English book on Goya – and though he might be a lowly painter, his interest in Goya ran deeper than most. He was, after all, a collector as well as an admirer; he had studied a large majority of the works at first hand, and knew his

⁵⁷⁴ Binyon explained that Rothenstein had promised him that he would write the book – and any argument with Oldmeadow was beside the point. Rothenstein eventually agreed with him. Laurence Binyon to William Rothenstein 30th Jan 1899, HGTN.

⁵⁷⁵ Laurence Binyon to William Rothenstein 26th September 1899, HGTN.

secondary material well.⁵⁷⁶ He was not about to present himself as a merely enthusiastic amateur. Here he may have anticipated the views of Berenson, who used Rothenstein's involvement as proof that the series was not scholarly enough.⁵⁷⁷ There was also the example of Roger Fry's *Bellini*; a detailed, Morellian analysis, clearly setting out his art-historical credentials. The resulting book is, then, a curious mixture of racy anecdote, dry professional analysis and personal statements concerning Goya's relation to the author's own artistic vision.

Rothenstein's interest in securing his growing identity as an artist of seniority is clearly evident in the opening paragraphs, as he reflects upon 'idols which opened out before us, at an early period of our development, a new vista of art'.⁵⁷⁸ It is easy to forget that this is a twenty-eight year old writing – no doubt he wants us to forget this. This is the voice of experience; or wants to be at any cost: a man who has stopped testing the waters and is at last sure of himself. Words which are to dominate Rothenstein's writing in subsequent years also appear early on: 'however many reasons men may give for their admiration of masterpieces,' he writes in a passage described by John Rothenstein as emblematic of his career as a whole, 'it is in reality the probity and intensity with which the master has carried out his work, by which they are dominated': a strong early statement, which nonetheless keeps some of its meanings to itself.⁵⁷⁹ In an otherwise complimentary review, D.S.MacColl – perhaps smarting from various derogatory remarks towards British art – also picked up on this sentence, questioning exactly what Rothenstein meant by 'probity'. Was a stylistic comment, or was he making assumptions regarding Goya's honesty – in which case what gave him the right to claim that Goya was more honest in his approach to art than Gainsborough?⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁶ Rothenstein tends to play down his own scholarly ambitions, but we mustn't underestimate the sincerity or depth of his artistic enthusiasms. Like many artists of his generation, he took an active interest in art of the past and, in regards to Goya, was right to see to himself near the forefront of contemporary art historical research. Letters from Berlin in 1902 show him fraternising with the director of a major gallery, collecting reproductions of their Rembrandt etchings and discussing Goya: 'One of the people is writing an elaborate book on Goya,' he writes to his father, '...of course he knew all about my booklet': William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, Jan 7th 1902, HGTN.

⁵⁷⁷ Hatcher (1995) 62. Berenson was to change his opinion on Rothenstein later, and the two became good friends.

⁵⁷⁸ W Rothenstein (1900) 5.

⁵⁷⁹ J Rothenstein (1928). Hubert Wellington draws attention to the same comment: Wellington (1923) 10.

⁵⁸⁰ See Speaight (1962) 139-140. It is not known how Rothenstein responded to these queries: it doesn't appear to have affected his use of similarly ambiguous language in later criticism.

We find a little more clarity in the fourth and fifth paragraphs, which form some of the most interesting passages of the book. Here, in what seems at first a strange digression (Goya isn't mentioned until well into the second page) Rothenstein turns his attention to a 'general tendency among English painters... with few notable exceptions' to 'seek inspiration from pictures rather than Nature'.⁵⁸¹ This is obviously an early appearance of the argument that reappears in relation to Ricketts in his memoirs: 'the tendency to study works of art too enthusiastically, to reflect the appearance of mastery rather than enter, like the spirit of the Chinese artist in the legend, the heart of nature herself, is perhaps a weakness of English painters'.⁵⁸² If the latter is a little toned down, the former has also been through a softening process. His notes for the book reveal Rothenstein working through these ideas again and again, as if this were the main point of the essay. Indeed, for a while, he clearly intended to open with these statements. One draft began:

The general tendency of ~~most~~ English painters has been to seek inspiration from pictures rather than from life. Their ~~curiosity for~~ interest in form has been small; ~~provided they are able, brilliancy~~ brilliant brush work & beautiful colour is their ~~aim~~ technical aim & ~~prov~~ When they have once ~~known~~ learned enough to be able to produce upon canvas a beautiful woman, a dignified man, a poetic landscape, they have but little curiosity for those subtleties ~~of line or form & character which so many artists of other countries have been so surprisingly gifted other~~ artists of other countries have so lovingly and elegantly searched for.⁵⁸³

Elsewhere he mused:

In England ~~but few artists are allowed~~ no artist will ever allow himself to feel, as did Rembrandt in Holland & Balzac in France, perfectly above suspicion. The only beauty traditionally allowed is obvious & intrinsic beauty, just as the only ~~pity~~ feelings of pity an Englishman is never ashamed of is pity in dumb animals.⁵⁸⁴

Though aspects of both these passages find their way into the final draft, we have little

⁵⁸¹ W Rothenstein (1900) 5-6.

⁵⁸² W Rothenstein (1937b) 174-5.

⁵⁸³ Drafts for *Goya*, HGTN.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

idea of the fervour with which the writer had originally pursued the idea. What remains is a much paler series of statements, although the author's equivocal relationship with English art and artists continues to come through. Though he was, and would no doubt consider himself English, he was equally aware that, at the time of Reynolds, his ancestors were not. Indeed, his pose throughout the text seems to that of a more International being; an outsider to these general English tendencies.⁵⁸⁵ Either that or this is a call to arms – an attempt to rile his fellow artists into action: to put aside their typical English ways and do what most of their countrymen could never do: appreciate Goya.

Once again, the drafts put it most bluntly: 'And so, of all temperaments, that of Goya seems to the writer... to be the most opposed to the English taste'.⁵⁸⁶ Though this statement does not appear in the final version it is nonetheless implicit in all that follows. The qualities most lacking in English art – a strong sense of form and character, but above all a 'profound interpretation of nature' – are to be found in Goya.⁵⁸⁷ Whether or not he is the best source for those seeking such qualities remains to be seen: even in the introduction there is some doubt. It seems for a while as if Rothenstein would rather be writing about Rembrandt and when at last he turns his full attention upon Goya there is, despite the sometimes florid praise, a hint of uncertainty.

If he wasn't, ultimately, the *best* model, he remained a very good one, allowing the writer various opportunities to expand upon his vision. More than anything he highlights the 'seriousness' of Goya's art; 'the frankness of his attitude' and the 'immense vitality' of his work.⁵⁸⁸ Too new, perhaps, to be an Old Master (Goya was, to many, the first modern artist, or in Rothenstein's words 'the connecting link between traditional art and the violently awakening spirit of the nineteenth century') his spirit is undoubtedly that of the greatest artists. He creates images which lend 'certain new

⁵⁸⁵ One of Laurence Binyon's suggestions for corrections to the manuscript was 'Should you mind getting rid of some of the French phrases? it seems to me there are more than needful?': Laurence Binyon to William Rothenstein, undated letter [early 1900] HGTN. Of course, it could be argued that Rothenstein's ultimate reluctance to focus on the 'occasional diabolical tendency' of Goya's work – and to temper the drama of his work with an insistence on the 'architectural sense' of his form – revealed him to be more of the measured Englishmen than he thought he was: W Rothenstein (1900) 14, 27.

⁵⁸⁶ Drafts for *Goya*, HGTN.

⁵⁸⁷ W Rothenstein (1900) 6.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 7.

qualities... to our view of men and women ever after' – an idea echoed by Ricketts in *Art of the Prado*: 'Without Rembrandt, for instance, a whole range of emotion would have partly failed us, or would at least have been seen and known less readily... we might have been indifferent to the tidemarks of passion upon a human face... Without Titian other experiences might have failed us, and that deep sense of crisis we each carry in us at time in our life might not have found its visible expression.'⁵⁸⁹ This was what great art should do: make people see life. It punctured the surface, laying bare the essential qualities of things.

Of course, to see things frankly was not necessarily to see them crisply: Rothenstein's realism allowed, even encouraged, formal invention – so long as it was used in the service of content, and not for its own sake. Early on in *Goya*, he writes that Goya's 'passion for this mysterious quality of life made him willing to sacrifice precisely those qualities which are looked for and admired in most painters, for a peculiar grip and vivacity of presentment'.⁵⁹⁰ Goya was a realist, but it was his 'imagination for reality' which set him above other artists.⁵⁹¹ He brought 'fancy into the realms of reality'; employing fantastical devices for the benefit of the cold, dry truth.⁵⁹²

This is, perhaps, where the writer begins to struggle a little, unsure of how to square the fancies of Goya's imagination – and the undeniable aggressiveness of his approach – with the underlying seriousness of his (and, it seems, Rothenstein's) vision. These comments, after all, find Rothenstein working with an idea that younger artists would, over the course of the next decade, be pursuing with much more determination. At this time, however, he still sees the need to tone down the significance of Goya's stylistic sacrifices, as if in fear of what they might inspire. He is at pains to note that, for all his fearlessness, Goya's sense of form was based on traditional compositional modes. We learn, for instance, that 'he brought back to painting the old architectural sense, and squareness of proportion and design, which the artists of the last century had allowed to

⁵⁸⁹ Ricketts (1907) 321.

⁵⁹⁰ W Rothenstein (1900) 7.

⁵⁹¹ This phrase brings to mind Oscar Wilde, who once wrote that 'the difference between such a book as M. Zola's *L'Assommoir* and Balzac's *Illusions Perdues* is the difference between unimaginative realism and imaginative reality': Wilde (1945) 19-20. Rothenstein compared Goya and Balzac earlier in his text.

⁵⁹² W Rothenstein (1900) 28.

dwindle into the vignette'.⁵⁹³ Regardless of its relevance to Goya, this is a neat summary of Rothenstein's stance on formal issues and one which is, again, echoed throughout his writing. It is as if he fears that an overemphasis on 'vivacity', 'creativity' and 'imagination' suggests a lack of discipline and feels the need to weigh these words down with copious references to 'balance' and 'structure', highlighting his belief in works of art that show what he later refers to as 'firmness and dignity in their forms'.⁵⁹⁴ He asks for realism *and* imagination, fearlessness *and* nobility: a sense of movement *and* a sense of eternity. Insolent he may have been at times, but Rothenstein's Goya is, ultimately, an insightful and serious-minded artist, whose interest in the grotesque is balanced by a convincing and solid sense of form. As proof that this balancing act is not an easy one, Rothenstein cites William Blake (to Binyon's distress) as an example of an artist who failed to overcome the same difficulties, claiming that 'the spirits calculated to terrify us in the drawings of Blake, for instance, leave one unmoved, for the reason that no representation of form is ever convincing in his work'.⁵⁹⁵ Fittingly, it is another Englishman who fails to make the grade; the writer finishing where he had intended to start – with an attack on the national characteristics of his homeland.

The timing of *Goya* lends a lot of significance to aspects of its approach. Though it is too easy to fall back into generic descriptions of late-nineteenth century British art – to reduce a decade or so into one short sentence – it is equally foolish to overlook the fact that artists were perfectly aware of the historical process, and quick to react to it. Rothenstein's obsession with a particular type of language in this book, especially in regards to form, not only anticipates criticism of the following decades – but reveals his sense of the path art may be taking. William Gaunt's succinct evaluation of the period in his study *The Aesthetic Adventure* comes to mind. 'Weight', Gaunt writes, 'is the element

⁵⁹³ Ibid. 27.

⁵⁹⁴ W Rothenstein (1939) 279.

⁵⁹⁵ W Rothenstein (1900) 28. Binyon wrote to Rothenstein to say 'thanks for the new stuff. It seems to me admirable (I don't agree quite with your sentence about Blake, but that's a matter of opinion)': Laurence Binyon to William Rothenstein March 26th 1900, HGTN. In 1910 we nevertheless find Binyon wondering whether Blake's linear approach to art suits his spiritual interests; *The Saturday Review*, 5th February 1910, 169.

lacking in the period'.⁵⁹⁶ Weight, after all, is the one quality that Rothenstein seems especially keen to have at the forefront of his approach to art – a quality that is almost always lacking in art he professes to dislike.⁵⁹⁷ Perhaps he equates intellectual weight too closely with compositional weight; in any case he has a distinct leaning towards 'solid' forms; objects that literally carry a lot of weight. Though painter and draughtsman, he constantly turns to sculptural and architectural analogies. Lecturing in 1908 he drove home the idea that 'sculpturesqueness is an important basis for strong design. The bas-relief principle and the processional idea; repetition of general form without monotony of detail; figures arranged as on a cathedral wall, without attention to the relatively unimportant feature of perspective – such a scheme was at the base of the best design in the greatest periods of art, and no better scheme could be found as a basis for the design of today'.⁵⁹⁸

Natural metaphors are also very common; though the natural ideal is, essentially, a controlled one. Nature, at bottom, corresponds to an underlying structure – it is, in itself, architectural, and art should reflect this. Poor art is uncomprehended, thus unstructured nature: 'something wavering, sagging and over-ripe...restless and unstable...constantly uprooting' – a perverse anomaly.⁵⁹⁹ Over-ripeness leads, inevitably, to decay – which is, as far as the future of art goes – a dead end. 'Gesture' and 'flourish' are things to be suspicious of: Rothenstein demands a 'precise grasp of the emotion to be conveyed'; 'that swiftness and decisiveness which you will find in all forms of nature – an understanding not of surface beauty, but of an inner nobility'.⁶⁰⁰ This is one of many obvious side swipes at widespread Impressionist principles, revealing once again Rothenstein's concerns with form; concerns which refused, nevertheless, to lead him down the path of many so-called Post-Impressionist painters. Balance, again, was the key: 'I regret that cubism', he later wrote, 'in reality an austere and logical attitude to form ...should have become an end in itself, and finally, a mere

⁵⁹⁶ Gaunt (1945) 216.

⁵⁹⁷ He regularly uses the word to describe his own art, as do others.

⁵⁹⁸ see Speaight (1962) 207.

⁵⁹⁹ W Rothenstein (1939) 279.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid. 415; W Rothenstein (1942) 201. John Rothenstein refers to a comment made by Whistler on Rothenstein: 'Whistler showed an almost prophetic insight into the underlying weight and intensity of [Rothenstein's] nature when he used to say of him that he carried out right to the end what with others was mere gesture'; J Rothenstein (1952) 124.

mannerism, a matter of entertaining shapes and colours, of more concern to stage, fashion and advertisement designers'.⁶⁰¹

After 1900, Rothenstein was to settle on a range of subjects well suited to the noble pursuit of 'weight' and 'sculpturesqueness'. Though nature's underlying structure should, in theory, shine through any subject, he took care to choose those in which it had the best chance of revealing itself. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find large, solid buildings featuring prominently.⁶⁰² The imposing Romanesque cathedral at Vézelay [fig. 20] provided an early model; the church at St. Seine L'Abbaye in Burgundy a later, equally accommodating subject.⁶⁰³ These were overtaken by small, plainer buildings: by Burgundian barns, or (after 1910) the outhouses at Iles Farm in Gloucestershire, many of which were, in the words of Wyndham Lewis, 'bare, yellow and dry enough to satisfy a Saharan nomad'.⁶⁰⁴

Even his interiors (a series of which he was beginning as he wrote *Goya*) were curiously dry; 'as puritanically free of the extraneous as a hospital and as clinically clean'.⁶⁰⁵ The contemporary comparison Lewis goes on to make, that of Vuillard's warmer, cluttered interiors, is a fitting one: Vuillard and Bonnard (also known for his interiors) were artists who Rothenstein thought represented the decline of French art in the early twentieth century; artists who had let slip out of their hands the 'probity which was the glory of nineteenth-century French painters'.⁶⁰⁶ Another artist with whom earlier comparisons were made (most notably by Max Beerbohm, in a rare review of the New English Art Club) was Sargent, an artist for whom Rothenstein reserved a little more respect – though his ultimate stance was clearly critical.⁶⁰⁷ Unable to dismiss his

⁶⁰¹ W Rothenstein (1937c) 378.

⁶⁰² John Rothenstein linked his father's fondness for austere buildings and landscapes with his Yorkshire upbringing. Certainly he writes fondly of 'the austerity of the farms and houses, the stark lines of the moorsides, the grim churches...' and, elsewhere, of the 'dignity and style' of 'solidly built' buildings in Bradford: J Rothenstein (152) 122; W Rothenstein (137b) 281; W Rothenstein (1937c) 176.

⁶⁰³ *Vézelay* (1896, private collection); *The Church of St. Seine L'Abbaye by Moonlight* (1906, private collection).

⁶⁰⁴ Michel and Fox (1971) 415-6. Reflecting on the move to Gloucestershire, Rothenstein wrote that 'stone buildings always move me – austere in grey weather, pale, livid even, against a stormy sky, they are warm and sparkling in the sunlight': W Rothenstein (1937c) 274.

⁶⁰⁵ Michel and Fox (1971) 416.

⁶⁰⁶ W Rothenstein (1937b) 69; W Rothenstein (1939) 279. The cluttered interior was often connected to a late Victorian mentality. Describing a visit to Walter Crane's house, Rothenstein wrote: 'His mind, perhaps like his house, was too full to be kept dusted and tidy'; W Rothenstein (1937b) 292. A range of turn-of-the-century interiors can be found in Rosenblum, Stevens and Dumas (2000).

⁶⁰⁷ *The Saturday Review*, Vol 95, 18th April 1903, 483-5.

technical brilliance, equal at moments to Velazquez and Hals, he notes that Sargent ‘too often failed to reveal the solidity and radiance of form’; the ‘rhythmical construction’ of Titian, Rubens and Rembrandt.⁶⁰⁸ His paintings missed ‘something of the mystery of life’; his portraits, in particular, having little relation to ‘the drama of life and death’.⁶⁰⁹ A victim of the vicious circle to which Rothenstein was also bound, Sargent’s move from portraiture to the Boston murals was self-defeating: his lack of experience in the medium nullifying his noble intentions.⁶¹⁰

When Rothenstein turned to purely natural landscape, he favoured large forms of nature. In his 1908 lecture at Birmingham, he encouraged artists to explore the ‘abstract sense of the weight and dignity of rocks and trees’ – something he was doing himself at this time.⁶¹¹ His clear fascination with rock formations, first explored in *The Quarry* (1904:fig.21) led him to a series of cliff paintings later in the decade.⁶¹² Whilst seaside landscapes are a common feature of the period, Rothenstein seems to have spent most, if not all of his time at the sea looking inland. Though Conder had painted cliffs in the mid 1890s [see *Yport*, fig.22], Rothenstein’s interpretation in works such as *Nature’s Ramparts* [fig.23] turn his friend’s rocks into a blossomy sponge.⁶¹³ Like many of Rothenstein’s paintings, *Nature’s Ramparts* is an essay in the fine-line between drama, sentimentality and restraint. The sun is permitted to creep over the cliff, only so long as it promises to behave itself. The cliff is imposing; but the lighting strangely muted. If we compare Conder’s more contemporary beach scene, *Newquay (Towan Beach)* (1906:fig.24)

⁶⁰⁸ W Rothenstein (1937b) 193.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. 195.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. 196. Rothenstein and Augustus John’s attempts to master murals were similarly criticised. In 1916 Gill wrote to Rothenstein, in response to a frieze exhibited at the Arts & Crafts Exhibition: ‘Your theory that the painter shd. be a decorator is sound enough, but if he isn’t one it can’t be helped... I regret your excursions into decorating’: Eric Gill to William Rothenstein, November 14th 1916, HGTN. Of John, Michael Holroyd has written: ‘There are one or two good examples of John’s large-scale composition... but for the most part these big decorations were disappointing and sometimes disastrous’. see Holroyd (1996) 11.

⁶¹¹ W Rothenstein (1942) 206.

⁶¹² *Nature’s Ramparts* (also known as *Cliffs near Vaucottes*) c.1908 (Manchester City Art Gallery); *The South-West Wind* 1909 (Ashmolean); *White Cliffs* 1908 (Tate); *Round the Cliffs on a Sudden Came the Sea* c.1908 (whereabouts unknown).

⁶¹³ Other Conder cliff paintings include *Cliffs at Yport*, 1891, and *Figures on a rocky promontory, Dieppe* 1894. Cliffs, possibly at Vattetot or Etretat (where he holidayed with Rothenstein) appear in his 1899 lithograph *Beatrix et Cahyste*. In 1906 Conder painted several images of the beaches at Newport: see Galbally and Pearce (2003).

with any of Rothenstein's cliff scenes from this period the difference is similarly remarkable. Rothenstein's landscapes are sparsely populated (large groups of people are rare in Rothenstein's work) and largely dominated by their geological features, often cast in deep shadow. In Conder's *Newquay* the cliffs are simply a backdrop to a flood of fashionably dressed holidaymakers, the vast majority of which are female. Like a lot of Conder's works, this is certainly not a weighty picture.

Seeking a precedent for Rothenstein's fascination with austere, rocky landscapes (seen most clearly in *The Quarry*) we might turn instead to Courbet, who often took on such subjects in paintings of the 1860s, or to Cézanne, whose *Hillside in Provence* (1890-2) offers a more contemporary approach to a quarry.⁶¹⁴ The Cézanne comparison is less strange than it may seem. Frances Spalding's summation of what she thinks was to Fry, 'the crux of Cézanne's originality: the reconciliation of the data of Impressionism with an underlying structure indicative of some hidden reality' could just as well sum up Rothenstein's approach just prior to 1910.⁶¹⁵ John Rothenstein confirms this, admitting that 'in so far as he attempted to unite hard structure with brilliant colour he may properly be regarded as something of a Post-Impressionist' – something of which Fry, it seems, was well aware and happy to acknowledge, at least while their friendship lasted.⁶¹⁶ It may even go back, argues Michael T Saler, as far as Rothenstein's *Goya*, in which we find statements that match 'Fry's more formalist statements of the interwar period' – where the two men differ seems to be in their wider interpretation of, and ultimate confidence in these statements.⁶¹⁷

Trees also proved useful allies in the search for Nature's hidden realities.⁶¹⁸ A

⁶¹⁴ Rothenstein visited Courbet's birthplace, after 1900, with Alice and his brother Charles: 'Everywhere at Ornans we were reminded of Courbet's landscapes; here were the rocks he loved to paint and near by were the forests': W Rothenstein (1937c) 82.

⁶¹⁵ Spalding (1999) 241. Fry wrote in 1911: 'Few British artists have aimed so consistently at this creative plastic idea of drawing as Mr. Will Rothenstein, and at last he seems to be reaping the fruits of his labours. His two pictures of Indian life at the New English are, I think, the most impressive things in the whole exhibition, and their impressiveness comes from the fact that he has surrendered himself so entirely to the essential plastic relations of things': Fry (1996) 140.

⁶¹⁶ J Rothenstein (1952) 131. Rothenstein's own attitude to Cézanne is much more complicated; he praises his unique approach to form, though he suggests he got there by mistake – and seems to begrudge his influence, ultimately preferring the methods of Daumier and Millet: W Rothenstein (1937c) 31, 123-4, 217-8; W Rothenstein (1939) 73-4.

⁶¹⁷ Saler (1999) 55-8.

⁶¹⁸ 'A living body, a tree, each is a universe containing a complexity of life beyond our perceptions. To represent something of the exquisite detail and the large nobility of form apparent to our limited senses

winter tree [fig.25] had the perfect quality of starkness he sought; an innate austerity and eternal value.⁶¹⁹ Again, though the subject is far from extraordinary, and could well be accused of romanticism, Rothenstein tackles it with a curious, though quite deliberate restraint.⁶²⁰ The life of the paintings lies in their simple structures; a few large forms delicately placed in relation to one another.⁶²¹

Then there were the people; the portraits that were a constant in his career. But they, too, could be treated like architecture. Aldous Huxley complained in the 1920s of the pain of sitting for Rothenstein, ‘who insists on treating his victims rather as tho’ they were pieces of architecture – demanding a stone-like rigidity’.⁶²² There is, perhaps, more to this than the mere dislike of sitting still; indeed, the ‘stone-like rigidity’ transfers itself to the drawing itself, creating a sense of solidity that is present in the majority of Rothenstein’s portrait drawings from the turn of the century onwards. John Rothenstein writes of how his father’s change of approach in this period led to a ‘vast increase of power at the expense of grace’; arguing that ‘nothing he did after the change approached in noble elegance of style his lithographed drawings of *Henry James*, of 1898, of *Fantin-Latour* or of the big double portrait of *Ricketts and Shannon*’, the latter a far from rigid interpretation of Rothenstein’s friends [see fig.6].⁶²³ Two full-length, interacting figures, drawn in loose strokes, are certainly not a feature of his later work; nevertheless, for all the severity and economy of line on display, there *is* discernible vitality in so many of Rothenstein’s post-1900 portraits: a subtle sort of spirit, best evidenced in post-war works such as the simple yet vibrant *Dame Margery Perham* (1919:

seems to me no unworthy aim’: W Rothenstein (1939) 326. To D.S.MacColl he once posed the question: ‘Has any one ever painted a tree, with its strange primaeval shapes & shadowed mystery? I still think Millet’s apple tree the most satisfying rendering of the moment of blossoming. But a lime or a chestnut – I can think of no one’: William Rothenstein to D S MacColl, 4th June 1937, HGTN.

⁶¹⁹ This tree reappears in several works, including *St. Martin’s Summer* (1915, Manchester City Art Gallery).

⁶²⁰ The faint melodrama of earlier works, such as *Le Grand-I-Vert* and, to a lesser extent, *Vézelay*, rarely reappears, except in works like *Moonlight* (c.1900, Ashmolean).

⁶²¹ What gives Rothenstein’s First World War paintings their strange power is the way that he re-presents these forms in a similarly matter-of-fact style, drawing quiet but significant attention to their disintegration and collapse. He doesn’t overemphasize the destruction, or seek a more dramatic subject, but sticks with the buildings and the trees, as if trying to restore dignity to them, safe in the knowledge that it is gone; that in their new unseemly forms they speak for themselves – and for the war.

⁶²² Smith (1969) 232. Rothenstein writes in his memoirs: ‘My eye for proportion was untrustworthy, hence my frequent recourse to measuring. I found this useful for portraiture; for to establish the place of the eye in the head, and the relation between height and width gives a sense of confidence, and without a plumb-line it is difficult to make a figure stand well on its feet’: W Rothenstein (1937c) 49.

⁶²³ J Rothenstein (1952) 128-9. The vast majority of his later portraits (post 1900) focus on the head alone.

fig.26).⁶²⁴ This portrait, indeed, has the quality of Lewis's late drawings, a good example of which, the 1938 *Self-Portrait with Pipe* [fig.27], may have been made to accompany Lewis's review of Rothenstein's memorial exhibition.⁶²⁵ As Hubert Wellington wrote of these later portrait drawings: ' [Rothenstein] searches for the long, sweeping lines of a face, the essential angles of its construction, the continuity and flow of bone, muscle, and hair, and endeavours to set them down simply and directly, yet keeping the rhythmic line of a designer'.⁶²⁶

Many of these qualities were noted by Wyndham Lewis in a couple of perceptive reviews.⁶²⁷ The respect was clearly mutual. In *Men and Memories* Rothenstein praised Lewis's 'austere and impressive' War paintings, his 'vivid quality of design' and 'forceful' experimentation – as well as his writing.⁶²⁸ *Tarr* was, he thought, 'one of the powerful books of our time'.⁶²⁹ Indeed, it is in *Tarr* that we might find the root of Lewis's interest in Rothenstein, in a passage towards the end of the book where Lewis introduces, through the voice of his protagonist, the idea of art's essential 'deadness':

This is the essential point to grasp: *Death* is the thing that differentiates art and life. Art is identical with the idea of permanence. Art is a continuity and not an individual spasm: but life is the idea of the person... A statue is art. It is a dead thing, a lump of stone or wood. Its lines and proportions are its soul... Soft, quivering and quick flesh is as far from art as it is possible for an object to be... deadness is the first condition: the second is absence of soul, in the human and sentimental sense.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁴ Virginia Woolf turned down an opportunity to sit for Rothenstein in the late 1920s, despite T S Eliot's assurance that 'he makes one look so noble': Nicholson (1981) 53-4.

⁶²⁵ Edwards and Humphreys (2008) 30.

⁶²⁶ Wellington (1923) 35.

⁶²⁷ The first review, written in 1938, was not published until after Lewis's death. The second review was a response to Rothenstein's memorial exhibition in 1950: Lewis (1970); Michel and Fox (1971a) 415-6. See also Edwards (2008) 30.

⁶²⁸ W Rothenstein (1937c) 350, 378-9. In his third volume of memoirs, Rothenstein wrote of Lewis that he had 'always been markedly sane in his outlook on the arts, and in conversation and discussion he is considerate of an opinion he respects; if one praises a work in which he has not been interested, he is ready to review his opinions': W Rothenstein (1939) 303.

⁶²⁹ Ibid. 379. Robert Speaight goes so far as to suggest that we might see in Rothenstein an 'embryonic Vorticist': Speaight (1962) 345.

⁶³⁰ Lewis (1928) 312. For discussion of this passage and the wider implications of Lewis's 'Aesthetics of Deadness' see Chapter 2 of Schenker (1992). Elsewhere, Paul Edwards reads this passage in relation to Roger Fry's aesthetics: 'According to artist and art critic Roger Fry (1866-1934), a man's head is no more and no less interesting than a pumpkin when represented in a painting. And Lewis's own fictional surrogate, Tarr... explains that works of art have no 'inside', no 'restless ego'... Tarr simplifies his author's views, for in reality Lewis, while a modernist artist, scorned Fry's statement as simplistic and

Lewis returns to, and significantly develops this theme at other points in his career, not least in his work *The Dithyrambic Spectator*, where he praises Egyptian art for its inherent deadness: ‘in dynastic Egypt, *art* comes nearer to being life than at any recorded period: and apparently for the reason that it was *death*’.⁶³¹ He recalls Cézanne’s fondness for still life and ponders, in reference to portraiture, ‘the more you reflect upon this information, the more you are convinced how very much to be preferred a dead magnate is to live one. “There’s a great deal to be said for being dead” (or for the incessant contemplation of death) on the part of a person sitting for his or her portrait’.⁶³² Huxley’s complaint seems very apt now – and Lewis’s fondness for Rothenstein’s work all the more understandable.

There is another issue here; Rothenstein and Lewis, though never exactly close allies, were united by a common enemy – represented, however vaguely, by Bloomsbury and its beliefs (note that Lewis can’t help mentioning Fry in his 1938 review).⁶³³ If they didn’t share a common style, they did at least share an artistic language; the word ‘austere’ is just as much a part of Lewis’s writing as it is Rothenstein’s, whilst both men seem to take a certain pleasure in a kind of severe charmlessness, with a suspicion of anything too pretty, or of obvious commercial value. Writing to Rothenstein in 1938, as he was planning a show at the Leicester Galleries, Lewis implored the senior artist to ‘stress what is sober, weighty and uncompromisingly plain and unadorned: no concessions; in the form of scarlet women, or whorish little landscapes – if you have any!’⁶³⁴ Responding later that year to a letter from an editor, angry that Lewis should

unrealistic... despite Tarr’s dogmatism and Lewis’s own desire to throw over the tradition of naturalism, Lewis was capable of allowing quite contradictory objectives in his aesthetic’: Edwards and Humphreys (2008) 14.

⁶³¹ Lewis (1971) 179-80.

⁶³² Ibid. 81, 183-44.

⁶³³ Lewis writes of the influence of Whistler on Rothenstein, noting in passing that ‘Mr. Roger Fry was of course responsible for the slump in the Whistler stocks; and that gentleman’s influence is still very great in the critical and the aesthetic and amateurish world if not in any other’: Lewis (1970) 220.

⁶³⁴ Wyndham Lewis to William Rothenstein, July 25th 1938: Rose (1963) 258-9. In this letter, and in later reviews, Lewis seems keen to outline the fact that Rothenstein was assisted in his career by ‘fortunate economic circumstances’, possibly referring to his professorship at the Royal College of Arts, or a presumption that he was supported by wealthy family members. ‘It was most fortunate that he was rich,’ he reflected in 1950: a somewhat unsubstantiated claim. Early on his career, Rothenstein was far from

have written a review ‘all about’ Rothenstein, Lewis reiterated this point, noting that, although Rothenstein’s work was hardly ‘akin to my own’, he deserved credit for being a ‘very honest painter’.⁶³⁵ He is, he goes on, ‘if anything *too* plain and unvarnished, too uncompromisingly “unattractive”’.⁶³⁶

This idea of excess, which lends a tension to Lewis’ obvious respect, comes out more clearly in the 1950 which casts Rothenstein as a hero of aridity, with puritanical instincts that lean towards the comic. If this is to misread the tone, it is a significant misreading; one that leads us to the problem most viewers might have with Rothenstein’s art and ideals. To what extent can the pursuit of dignified plainness, or of a noble simplicity, hold a viewer’s interest? To what extent could his interests be seen as excuses for a general lack of artistic imagination? Why should we be interested in Rothenstein’s desire to draw out the inner nobility of a barn? What form does nobility take anyway? Such questions clearly vexed Max Beerbohm, though he would refuse (typically) to provide a direct answer:

Even if he be painting a barn or a tree, a cart or a hedgerow, [Rothenstein] seems to be saying, “What *is* this object? Just what part does it play among the eternal verities? And just how can I best pluck the heart out of it?” I cannot pretend to answer such questions. I edge away to ground on which I feel safer, though far from secure.⁶³⁷

As it was, Rothenstein’s desire to reveal the eternal verities throughout the first decade of the century led him to a point at which he was almost sculpting in paint. This trend is evident from 1905 onwards, in the images of St Seine and in some of his Jewish paintings, such as *Reading the Book of Esther* (1907: fig.28), where the heavily modelled

rich.

⁶³⁵ The editor, R.A.Scott-Thomas, appears to have dismissed Rothenstein as a painter of ‘potboilers’ – a charge against which Lewis was quick to defend him, concluding that he ‘has been far less of a “potboiler” than many with more pretensions to originality’. The review was, nonetheless, suppressed – and only published in 1970. Lewis to R.A Scott-James, Nov 17th 1938; W K Rose letters, 259-61; Lewis (1970).

⁶³⁶ Ibid. Rothenstein was frequently criticising other artists for the opposite. For example: ‘I admired much of Epstein’s work, most of all when it was not too forceful. He has a tendency, common among contemporary artists, to give more power to his forms than they can comfortably carry – as though one pumped more air into a tyre than it needed’: W Rothenstein (1937c) 129.

⁶³⁷ Beerbohm in J Rothenstein (1926) xii.

faces of the three men is at odds with their surroundings: left as evidence of an artistic struggle.⁶³⁸

Similarly thick surfaces are found in later paintings by fellow Carfax exhibitors, especially Harold Gilman and Charles Ginner, members of Walter Sickert's Camden Town Group.⁶³⁹ Indeed, the former's 1917 painting, *Mrs Mounter at the Breakfast Table*, forms an interesting companion to Rothenstein's *Eli the Thatcher*, from 1913 [see figs 29-30].⁶⁴⁰ Gilman's work was praised by the critic Frank Rutter for having 'the reverent psychology of a Rembrandt with the colour of a Vermeer'; the first part of which Rothenstein would have surely welcomed as a response to his own study of an elderly acquaintance.⁶⁴¹ Though he uses paint in an almost sculptural manner, the surface of Gilman's canvas is, however, relatively consistent; an approach taken to its extreme by Ginner, who used paint liberally to create a decorative, mosaic-like effect, but eschewed by Rothenstein, who rarely covered the entire canvas with the same level of paint.⁶⁴² In *Eli the Thatcher*, paint gathers up around the heavily worked face and beard, whilst the jacket is treated with relative looseness – like a Rembrandt head grafted onto a Van Gogh body.

One might argue that, in this example, the emotional intensity of the portrait blinds the viewer to this stylistic mannerism. But this was not always the case. Charles Holmes later complained to Rothenstein that 'you aim to put too much into each canvas'; a criticism that he accepted, without any obvious intention of changing his methods.⁶⁴³ 'Above all', he confessed towards the end of his memoirs: 'I want to live with and in my subject... A sketch is a flirtation; I prefer a serious love affair with each adventure in paint, to give myself to it to the point of exhaustion. A hint of weight and

⁶³⁸ Wellington notes the same problem in the painting *Aliens at Prayer* (Melbourne): Wellington (1923) 29

⁶³⁹ Thickness of paint was, indeed, a big issue within the group. In an article for *The New Age* from June 1914 (entitled 'The Thickest Painters in London') Sickert wrote that 'I am inclined to think that, just at present, Mr. Ginner and Mr. Gilman attach a somewhat doctrinaire importance to the virtue of impasto in itself'; see Robins (2000) 378-81. Rothenstein defends his own use of thick paint in W Rothenstein (1937b) 178.

⁶⁴⁰ Sickert's *The Old Model* from 1906 would provide an equally interesting comparison.

⁶⁴¹ See Upstone (2008) 117. Mrs Mounter was Gilman's London housekeeper: Eli a local Gloucestershire thatcher (one of many local workmen Rothenstein employed whilst living at Iles Farm).

⁶⁴² Frank Rutter first made the comparison to mosaics: see R Upstone (2008) 58.

⁶⁴³ W Rothenstein (1939) 326.

dignity does sometimes, I hoped, get embodied in my handiwork'.⁶⁴⁴ Hubert Wellington, an early commentator, excused the subsequent 'clumsiness of touch' as an appropriate response to the 'human significance' of the subject; a natural reaction to the 'pleasant' and 'easy' surfaces of Rothenstein's predecessors, in particular Whistler.⁶⁴⁵ If Rothenstein's work after 1900 was a return to pictures with a subject, or an emotional significance beyond the pursuit of beauty, it was, argued Wellington, 'a return – with a difference'.⁶⁴⁶ With the possible exception of *The Doll's House* [fig.2] and a handful of others from this period, these were not literary paintings, mere illustrations, but pictorial representations of deep, weighty human emotions. Specific and self-consciously modern subjects were cast aside in favour of more eternal themes; three of which, 'Death, Love and the Charm of Children', Rothenstein put forward to art students in 1908 as especially worthy 'essential facts' on which to base a work of art.⁶⁴⁷

This critical statement clearly reflects his own artistic concerns, recalling the paintings of his wife and children, many of which occupy the delicate middle ground between admirable honesty and mawkish sentimentality, whilst exploring the interesting spatial relationships that exist between small groups of figures [see figs. 39, 41, 42 and 45].⁶⁴⁸ Though many of these paintings are personal responses to events in his own life (his marriage in 1899, his first child in 1901), a belief in the worthiness of his theme was well maintained by his contemporaries. 'Nothing can be more central, more humanely significant, more full of deep yet contained emotion', wrote Binyon of the Mother and Child theme, to which painters such as Augustus John and, later, sculptors such as Eric Gill, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Jacob Epstein were bringing a fresh interpretation – to

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid. 326-7.

⁶⁴⁵ Wellington (1923) 28; see 20-29 for discussion of Rothenstein in relation to Whistler.

⁶⁴⁶ Wellington (1923) 26.

⁶⁴⁷ Speaight (1962) 208-9. We might compare Rothenstein's 'essential facts' to Walter Sickert's 'gross material facts', a phrase used in May 1910 to describe the aims of the modern artist. John Rothenstein was to later criticise the latter approach, noting that 'Sickert wrote as though the drawing-room were the only conceivable alternative to the kitchen, but this is no more than a dialectical device, and a transparent one at that: Robins (2000) 217; J Rothenstein (1952) 50-1.

⁶⁴⁸ For example: *Mother and Child* (1903, Tate); *In the Morning Room* (1905, Manchester City Art Gallery); *Mother and Child, Candlelight* (1909, Cheltenham Art Gallery); *Morning Room: Mother and Child* (c.1910, Southampton Art Gallery). As Wellington pointed out: 'It required a certain courage for a young artist to paint scenes of normal domestic experience which had been made ridiculous and nauseating so often by mawkish sentimentality, in pictures of the Christmas almanac type... Mr. Rothenstein was stimulated by the interesting arrangements, the harmonious grouping, and expressive movements which such subjects offered': Wellington (1923) 26-7.

find its most memorable manifestation, eventually, in the work of one of Rothenstein's ex-Royal College of Art pupils, Henry Moore.⁶⁴⁹

Many of the ideas that dominate Rothenstein's critical writing, and directed the nature of his work, can be found in *Goya* – and yet his interest in Goya appears to have waned over the years. Why? Was it the fear that Goya's perceived brutality – his satirical, political bent – was not one the young artist wished to be too closely associated with? Throughout the text he seems to want to associate himself most closely with the less 'tumultuous, and wayward' side of Goya. The 'frankness' and the 'humanity' of Goya were his real concerns. It would be naïve to expect Rothenstein to be painting bull-fighters for the next few years, especially after his tirade against artists whose work was overly based on other works of art. Nevertheless, we might be equally surprised, after reading *Goya*, to find him working on *The Browning Readers* [fig.5]. Here is grace, but of a slow, not savage variety. After all, it is the attitude that ought to inspire, not the painting itself, and perhaps it should come as no surprise that Rothenstein, at this point the victim of a relatively stable life, was to turn his own frank and uncompromising eye upon less dramatic subjects than Goya.

One reviewer thought that Rothenstein's love of Goya could be seen to diminish before the reader's eyes; that he started out with much more admiration than he finished with.⁶⁵⁰ This could have been close to the truth. At any rate, Rothenstein's confidence in Goya as a model clearly underwent changes, revealing a tension that is hard to ignore. A similar sort of anxiety reappears when Charles Ricketts tackles Goya four years later. Amidst various compliments, he writes of 'an intellect guided more by experiment and curiosity than by that sense of control and construction which is the spirit of art itself'.⁶⁵¹ Rothenstein was reaching a point in 1900 at which youthful experiment and curiosity, he thought, ought to be giving way to something more controlled, more considered. Most of his paintings and drawings from here on are

⁶⁴⁹ Binyon (1927) 223-6. See for instance, J Epstein *Maternity, from Strand sculptures (1908)*; E Gill, *Madonna and Child* (1910); H Gaudier-Brzeska, *Maternity* (1913) and the work of Maxwell Gordon Lightfoot, who exhibited with the Camden Town Group.

⁶⁵⁰ Speaight (1962) 140.

⁶⁵¹ Ricketts (1907) 37.

essays in control: he was an artist who indulged in restraint, a quality that could either save him from the charge of sentimentality, or mark him out as charmless, unimaginative and uninspired.⁶⁵²

We may question whether or not these artistic ambitions were directed, primarily, by a deep belief in their importance, or whether they were motivated by the artist's sense of his own limitations. The answer, inevitably, would probably be a mixture of the two. Rothenstein hinted at several times that the latter was true – that he was suspicious of 'charm' in art because he felt he personally lacked it.⁶⁵³ Despite this he made a choice to avoid certain styles; it is not a case of the art informing the aesthetic, or vice versa: the two inform each other. Rothenstein was too self-aware to be so self-serving. Though primarily an artist, and not a critic, his ability to look beyond himself, to encourage other artists in a manner that was not self-aggrandising, is amongst the most remarkable features of his personality.

Any fear of his close association with Goya had as much to do, therefore, with the anxiety over how Goya's influence might be interpreted by artists around him. In his memoirs Rothenstein writes of how French painter Louis Anquetin, an old Parisian contact, 'foresaw the menace of alien influences'.⁶⁵⁴ This, I believe, was something he tried to do himself, whilst avoiding Anquetin's subsequent 'arrogant' reluctance 'to measure himself besides contemporaries'.⁶⁵⁵ It seems we sometimes forget that artists are able to anticipate the progression of aesthetic ideas; to respond, in some senses, to problems *before* they occur. Too often we imagine that events of 1910 came as a shock of artists of the previous generation. We presume that the formalism propagated by Fry and Bell took everyone by surprise. And yet, looking at earlier texts, we often get a sense that they had a good idea that things might go this way; the only surprise is that, for all their efforts to the contrary, they actually did. Thus the transitional nature of

⁶⁵² In one of the fiercer reflections on his father's work, John Rothenstein writes of how 'the grace and ease that distinguished the work of his boyhood and youth gave way to a dourness, an almost aggressive 'probity' (to use one of his own highest terms of approbation), even on occasions when his subjects, young women, children, sunlit orchards or fields of ripe corn, would seem to call for lighter handling'. J Rothenstein (1952) 129-130.

⁶⁵³ This issue is especially relevant in relation to the art of Conder and John: see W Rothenstein (1937c) 98, 177-8.

⁶⁵⁴ W Rothenstein (1937b) 63-4; see also W Rothenstein (1937c) 30-31; W Rothenstein (1939) 183.

⁶⁵⁵ W Rothenstein (1937b) 63-4.

much of their criticism is not necessarily an inability to reach a destination towards which they may seem to be moving, but an understanding that this destination, already considered before its actual appearance, is not worth meeting at all. The point of transition is in itself a destination. We look for responses to Post-Impressionism/modernism after they appear: we might do just as well to look for them before.

If MacColl's review of The Society of Portrait Painters in November 1900 is anything to go by, the claims made in *Goya* were, in the hands of a sensitive critic, perfectly consistent with Rothenstein's art. Comparing Rothenstein to Shannon, MacColl writes: 'He has none of the other's learned elegance, or certain charm. But he stands up to the challenge of nature in the sphere of paint. I see that the critics, when they have not described Mr. Rothenstein's painting as a slavish imitation of the Old Masters ...have dismissed it as "clever work in the latest manner of the Parisian studios". As a matter of fact it is at present anything but clever, on the contrary clumsy and ugly in many respects, but with an evident application and anxiety to wring an honest rendering out of the facts'.⁶⁵⁶

Putting aside, for now, the comparison with Shannon – with whom Rothenstein had shared his Dutch Gallery exhibition in 1894 – MacColl's response to Rothenstein is almost too perfect; as if the two friends had discussed it beforehand. The review takes especial care to note the change in Rothenstein's approach; his new-found maturity, or at least serious progress in that direction. Some of MacColl's word could even stand in for the 'certain character', particularly the last line: 'anything but clever, on the contrary clumsy...'. MacColl (later associated by Rothenstein with an art criticism over-inclined towards 'learned elegance' and 'certain charm') was at this point reading from the same page as the artist.⁶⁵⁷ Other critics, the same review suggests, were not.

⁶⁵⁶ D.S. MacColl, *The Saturday Review*, 1st December 1900, Vol 90. Rothenstein exhibited a portrait of his parents, Moritz and Bertha.

⁶⁵⁷ W Rothenstein (1937c) 97.

The reference to ‘slavish imitation of the Old Masters’ is significant. Though it could refer to Rothenstein’s fascination for Goya and Velasquez in the mid 1890s – to which *Goya* was bound to draw unwanted attention, despite its protestations against imitative art – it probably hints at a more recent enthusiasm for Rembrandt: an enthusiasm shared by almost all the artists with whom Rothenstein and the Carfax were associated at this time. Indeed, though slavishly imitating the Old Masters was clearly never intended to be a feature of Rothenstein’s ‘certain character’, it is hard to argue against its being an unavoidable issue when we come to consider the work of Carfax-based artists.

This is hardly surprising. The Carfax stocked and exhibited the work of Old Masters from the beginning; indeed, Rothenstein seems proud to note in his memoirs that Rembrandt’s *Polish Rider* was eventually shown there, though he would have realised that this double game was a dangerous one.⁶⁵⁸ The attitude of respect shown to past masters by contemporary artists was always liable to haunt them at times when their work seemed a little too reliant on tradition. The Carfax, born in what David Fraser Jenkins has called ‘a time of booming art appreciation’, was often to be a centre of such debate.⁶⁵⁹ Various artists, Botticelli and El Greco among them, now established Old Masters, were being re-evaluated after a long period of neglect. The prices of more established names were beginning to reach new heights. The burgeoning art-publishing market, of which Binyon’s Artist’s Library was a part, was one explanation, supported by a range of large exhibitions on major artists. Art schools such as the Slade, meanwhile, though progressive in many ways, fostered in their students an especial interest in Old Masters, as proved by the results of its famous summer competition, which produced works such as Augustus John’s unashamedly Rubenesque *Moses and the Brazen Serpent* (1898).⁶⁶⁰

Though the Slade had since come under the leadership of Fred Brown, assisted by Tonks and Steer (both Carfax exhibitors), this approach was spearheaded by its previous director, Alphonse Legros (also a Carfax exhibitor) under whom Rothenstein

⁶⁵⁸ W Rothenstein (1937b) 345.

⁶⁵⁹ Upstone, Foster and Jenkins (2005) 53-4; see also Jenkins (1989).

⁶⁶⁰ See M Evans (1996).

had studied in the late 1880s.⁶⁶¹ Legros was, Rothenstein recalled, ‘a disciple of Mantegna, Raphael and Rembrandt, of Ingres and Delacroix, of Poussin and Claude’; a man who actively encouraged his students to copy works from the National Gallery and the Prints and Drawings Room.⁶⁶² Keen to follow this advice, the young Rothenstein ‘filled more than one book with drawings after Michael Angelo, Raphael, Durer, Leonardo, Holbein, Signorelli and others’.⁶⁶³ One of those others was Rembrandt, whose etchings he copied back at the Slade, and whose ‘head of an old man with a turban’ he drew at the National Gallery, provoking an early desire to ‘paint old men’ – a dream he was to fulfil later on in his career.⁶⁶⁴

If Spanish art was to preoccupy Rothenstein in the mid-nineties, he returned with a will to Rembrandt and Dutch art at the turn of the century, as evidenced in *Goya*. ‘I believe at the time I was perhaps more under the influence of Rembrandt than of Goya,’ he admitted to Roger Fry in 1909: ‘you remember there was a great exhibition of his work at Amsterdam a little time before’.⁶⁶⁵ This had been followed by a similarly important exhibition of his work at the Royal Academy, the success of which was noted on the other side of the Atlantic: ‘From its walls glowed in warm amber tints the entire comédie humaine. It showed at his best the great master, who through studying the play of light and shadow on the rude features of his kinsfolk gave the world the most profound and penetrating version of life yet given. Deep-rooted in actuality, he had little care for conventional prettiness; he sought beauty in what was homely and common’.⁶⁶⁶ This echoes MacColl’s response to Rothenstein’s work – and Rothenstein’s own writing (especially in the allusion to Balzac and in the phrase ‘profound and penetrating version of life’), hinting at how Rembrandt was, in some senses, a more natural model of his ideals than Goya. In Rembrandt Rothenstein found that delicate balance of vitality and austerity he was looking for; an ‘imagination for reality’ that had a ‘biblical’ dimension,

⁶⁶¹ Legros, Tonks and Steer all exhibited at the Carfax in its early years.

⁶⁶² W Rothenstein (1937b) 22-4.

⁶⁶³ Ibid. 25.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid. 25, 20. The National Gallery work was probably the painting now classified as *An Elderly Man as Saint Paul*.

⁶⁶⁵ See Beckson and Lago (1975) 9.

⁶⁶⁶ C. Brinton, ‘Four Great Art Shows’, *New York Times*, January 27th 1900. The other shows mentioned were Velasquez’s tercentenary exhibition in Madrid, Cranach in Dresden and Van Dyck in Antwerp. There was also a large exhibition of Dutch art at the Guildhall, London, in 1903.

deriving from what he perceived (in *Goya*) as Rembrandt's 'serene and serious outlook on life, that profound interpretation of nature and Christ-like sympathy for men and women'.⁶⁶⁷ Here was someone who combined 'the clear, satisfying rendering of features visible only when close to the model' with an all-important 'appearance of unity'; someone who, with Rubens and Titian (but not, significantly, Velasquez and Hals) was a master of that Binyonian ideal: 'rhythmical construction'.⁶⁶⁸

Initial impressions of Rothenstein's paintings around 1900 make the link to Dutch art, in general, difficult to ignore. Small, uncluttered domestic interiors, muted portraits, self-portraits and the odd, moody landscape don't exactly hide his interests.⁶⁶⁹ Though this dark, predominantly brown palette seems to have been part of a wider fashion (it is often remarked upon in reviews of the N.E.A.C.) it is quite possible that the artist felt that a strong use of shadow lent further weight to his exploration of 'serious' themes. It is almost as if he had decided that a self-consciously bright palette, as seen in some Impressionist paintings, was essentially undignified. His gradual move away from the pronounced chiaroscuro of these early works hints, nonetheless, at the realisation that it wasn't, or shouldn't, be as simple as this.

Despite the self-conscious debt to contemporary Scandinavian drama, it is hard not to see a relation between *The Doll's House* and Rembrandt's *Philosopher in Meditation* [fig.31] a painting Rothenstein would have known from the Louvre. A work from the same summer, *The Butcher's Shop under the Trees* [fig.32] whilst nodding to images of butcher's shops by Whistler and Sickert, might also have been painted with Rembrandt in mind. 'Rembrandt's *Butcher's Shop* seemed to me the last word in realistic painting' he wrote later on; his son remembering how he 'spoke often of Rembrandt's making so noble a work of art out of the split-open carcass of an ox'.⁶⁷⁰ Early self-portraits owe some debt also; his 1900 effort (in the words of Hubert Wellington) 'vaguely' recalling

⁶⁶⁷ W Rothenstein (1900) 6; W Rothenstein (1937b) 42. Rothenstein's own Messianic aspirations were often noted by friends.

⁶⁶⁸ W Rothenstein (1937b) 193.

⁶⁶⁹ With reference to the former quality, there is a largely ignored link between Rothenstein's interiors and those of the Danish painter Wilhelm Hammershoi. Though Hammershoi was working in London at the turn of the century, there is no reference to the two artists ever meeting. The similarities of Rothenstein's *Interior* and Hammershoi's *Interior, Strandgade 30* (1901) are, nevertheless, hard to dismiss. Interestingly Hammershoi was to exhibit, in 1907, at Van Wisselingh's Dutch Gallery.

⁶⁷⁰ W Rothenstein (1937b) 42; J Rothenstein (1952) 132.

the Dutch master with ‘its rich, deep tonality, its lack of definite contours, its rough textures, and also by its strong feeling for personality’.⁶⁷¹ The use of ‘vaguely’ is significant: Wellington, in line with the artist himself, wants to push the idea that Rothenstein’s paintings don’t reflect ‘direct influence’, but suggest instead ‘a parallelism of feeling and interest’.⁶⁷²

The most obvious result of Rothenstein’s Rembrandt obsession (or ‘parallelism of feeling and interest’) remains his series of Jewish paintings [figs 26, 46-7] Though these benefitted from a slightly lighter palette – and exhibit a wide compositional variety – the main excitement seems to have lain in the fact that he was working on ‘subjects Rembrandt would have painted’.⁶⁷³ It was a contemporary subject that nevertheless offered a window on the past; the sort of eternal subject Rothenstein had always yearned for, offering him – as Manson was to note in 1910 – ‘ample scope for the expression of the poetry of human life and human endeavour’.⁶⁷⁴ It also gave him an opportunity, as we will see in the next chapter, of reconnecting, in some form, with his spiritual past.

Works from this period were shown at Rothenstein’s 1907 Carfax exhibition, ensuring the gallery kept some of the ‘austere and sympathetic’ character that its founder may have intended – with a hint of the Old Master worship that typified its early days.⁶⁷⁵ Indeed, for all his efforts to assimilate influences in his own work, and preach against imitative art, Rothenstein was no less keen than Legros to send young artists off to copy at the National Gallery. His brother Albert had no sooner settled in London than he found himself in front of a Rembrandt portrait, sketchbook in hand.⁶⁷⁶ He was duly converted. ‘I went to the Rembrandt show,’ he wrote home a year later, ‘which almost takes ones breath away it is so marvellous. Of course I shall go again’.⁶⁷⁷ John and Orpen were similarly effusive – and their work shows it, perhaps a little too clearly. Orpen’s *The English Nude* (1900: fig.33) and John’s *Merikli* (1902: fig.34) reveal

⁶⁷¹ Wellington (1923) 24. The reference is to *Portrait of the Artist* (1900, Metropolitan Museum, New York).

⁶⁷² Ibid. 25.

⁶⁷³ W Rothenstein (1937b) 35.

⁶⁷⁴ Manson (1910) 42.

⁶⁷⁵ *The Studio*, vol XL (1907) 224.

⁶⁷⁶ Albert Rutherston to Moritz and Bertha Rothenstein, April 19th 1898, TA TAM 51-2.

⁶⁷⁷ Albert Rutherston to Moritz and Bertha Rothenstein, Jan 13th 1899, TA TAM 51-2.

their struggles to assimilate Rembrandt's influence, as do John's etchings of the period, which remind us of Rembrandt's relevance to the etching revival (in which the Carfax was to play an important part).⁶⁷⁸ 'The aspiring student who thinks he may best find himself by pursuing the Old Masters,' confessed John later, 'is in grave dangers of losing sight of his guides as well as his goal. He must take his directions, as did his distinguished predecessors, from life itself': a statement that wouldn't look out of place in any of Rothenstein's writings.⁶⁷⁹

One of the strengths of the Carfax, like the Chenil after it, was that it was willing to take risks with young artists. One of the unfortunate results of this approach was that featured many artists at an early stage in their artistic development; a stage in which their influences had yet to be tempered by a personal style. This raises the distinct possibility that the gallery was associated, by some, with the very crime Rothenstein seemed so keen to avoid; the tendency to 'seek inspiration from pictures rather than Nature'.⁶⁸⁰ John and Orpen weren't the only perpetrators; more experienced artists were prey to the same dangerous instinct. Ricketts and Shannon, as we have already seen, were often criticised by Rothenstein for a tendency to create art from art. Turn of the century works by Wilson Steer – the Rubenesque *Toilet of Venus* (1898) for example – fall into the same category: so too the early work of Roger Fry.⁶⁸¹ This was, as Rothenstein explained in *Goya*, a problem at the heart of English art. It was, for him, a primary concern – and yet the gallery he founded at this period appears to have sheltered artists of this very persuasion.

The frightening possibility of having founded a space where this particularly

⁶⁷⁸ *The English Nude* was never exhibited during Orpen's lifetime: see Gray (2004) 202-3. Augustus John saw the 1898 Rembrandt exhibition in Amsterdam with Ambrose McEvoy, whose early work was described by John Rothenstein as 'not original' and highly indebted to Rembrandt and Rubens: J Rothenstein (1952) 206. Michael Holroyd describes John's *Merikli* as 'Rembrandt, with a helping hand from Velasquez', writing of his etchings that 'Augustus had made so close a study of Rembrandt's method, and assimilated it to such an extent, that many of his etchings look like imitations': Holroyd (1996) 55, 108, 124.

⁶⁷⁹ John (1975) 418.

⁶⁸⁰ W Rothenstein (1900) 5-6.

⁶⁸¹ 'If Fry's career had ended in 1903', Frances Spalding has written, 'he would be remembered as a critic whose tastes favoured the Old Masters and as a painter of mock seventeenth-century landscapes': Spalding (1999) 71. John Rothenstein later noted of Steer that 'he was tempted too readily to see nature in terms of other painters. I remember how easily visitors at the Memorial Exhibition of 1943 recognized which master he had had unconsciously in mind in representing given subjects': J Rothenstein (1952) 73. Fry himself wrote of Steer as being 'very sensitive to outside artistic influences': see MacColl (1945) 182. See also Holt (1992) 69-70.

English affectation might be allowed to flourish may have been further provoked by the fact that, for a brief period, Rothenstein ran the risk of being seen as the leader of a small movement. Art historians might be tempted to make more of the obsession with domestic interiors shared by a band of British artists around the turn of the century: Rothenstein, one of its leading adherents, was largely dismissive.⁶⁸²

The fashion is dealt with at length, intriguingly, by Max Beerbohm, in a rare art review for the *Saturday Review*.⁶⁸³ One of the conclusions he comes to is that, of all the paintings in this mode, Rothenstein's *The Doll's House* [fig.2] is the only one that seems to have comprehended the potential of the subject.⁶⁸⁴ Beerbohm's closeness to the artist is never hinted at – and letters suggest that Rothenstein may not have been entirely happy with the review – nonetheless, there is every possibility that the artist was equally uneasy about this sudden blossoming of works in *The Browning Readers* mode.⁶⁸⁵ It drew increased attention to the Dutch influences in his work, giving the overall impression that his paintings were not the product of an artist grappling with the eternal facts of life, but a premeditated response to a contemporary fashion. His personal vision (albeit one expressed in a very traditional, if not derivative mode) was being turned into a commodity: a mere craze. If Rothenstein was to value sincerity in art, he needed to beware of imitators, for sincerity cannot be reproduced.

Of course, Rothenstein brought much more to John and his generation than an enthusiasm for Rembrandt and the Old Masters, and I doubt that this grouping, or the

⁶⁸² For discussion of these works see K McConkey (2004); McConkey (2006) and Fletcher (2003). Rothenstein notes that Orpen was, at the turn of the century, 'an admirer of my work; and was perhaps rather a disciple of mine': W Rothenstein (1937b) 349.

⁶⁸³ *The Saturday Review*, 18th April 1903, Vol 95, 483-5. MacColl was on the committee of the N.E.A.C., which he why he declined to review the show himself.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid. Beerbohm claims that the idea of painting an 'interior' is an essentially foolish one, unless the painter deliberately creates a sense of dislocation. He argues that there are no modern interiors; the typical modern house 'is not lived in – merely slept in, gone in and out of... It might belong to anybody – to everybody. It is as impersonal as the open air. It is not "an interior". That is a thing to be found only if you go to call on people who are living years behind the time'. *The Doll's House* succeeds, he thinks, because it is an anti-interior: 'Here, we feel, is no home. That is what the painter meant us to feel. It is not, however, what the other painters meant us to feel'. 'These other painters' include (amongst others) Ambrose McEvoy and Henry Tonks.

⁶⁸⁵ A letter from William to Max in April 1903 reads: 'Alice appears to have told your people I liked your article in the Saturday. Can you, cher, be as innocent as they & believe it? And do I not know your Roman justice towards your friends, we scratch your back & you scratch our eyes. And would any one have you otherwise?': see Beckson and Lago (1973) 47. The editors – wrongly, I suspect – link the comment to a Beerbohm's review of Gordon Craig (another mutual friend whom Beerbohm happy to criticise).

character of their work, can be fully understood without reference to more contemporary artists.

All but one of the names I wish to consider at this point appeared, as did Rembrandt, in the text of *Goya* – a fact which clearly irked one critic. ‘Why drag Daumier and Millet into the comparison?’ he questioned.⁶⁸⁶ Why indeed? As far as Rothenstein was concerned, the answer was simple: these two artists were, in his opinion, the most important of the modern masters; those who most successfully taken up the challenge of the Old Masters.⁶⁸⁷ They were, perhaps, better models of influence than Goya himself.

The same names reappear in John’s description of Rothenstein around the time they first met: ‘The walls of his house and studio were adorned with original drawings by Rembrandt, Gainsborough, Daumier, Millet, Puvis de Chavannes and other masters, acquired by some mysterious process in which money played an almost negligible part, for he was far from rich’.⁶⁸⁸ Puvis de Chavannes, who constantly reappears in texts from this time, is a significant addition. When Rothenstein accompanied Augustus John to Paris after their Vattetot holiday in 1899, he was especially pleased to note that ‘Puvis de Chavannes’ paintings, too, impressed him deeply; so did Daumier’s’.⁶⁸⁹ In Beerbohm’s *Enoch Soames* we find Rothenstein sitting in the Cafe Royal (that ‘haunt of intellect and daring’) in the ‘thick of a disquisition on Puvis de Chavannes’.⁶⁹⁰ To these three we

⁶⁸⁶ The sentence in question appears in an early draft as ‘His [Goya’s] sense of truth was creative, as well as imitative, as in the case of ~~Rembrandt~~ Daumier & Millet’: *Goya* drafts, HGTN.

⁶⁸⁷ C J Holmes wrote in 1903 that ‘of more modern artists, Millet (with Mr Watts and Mr Whistler) would probably accord best with a collection of old masters’: Holmes (1903) 16.

⁶⁸⁸ John (1950) 4. Rothenstein owned two Rembrandt drawings, bought for two shillings each, later sold for two hundred pounds each. He mentions hanging Daumier lithographs in his Chelsea studio, ‘of which only Sickert and Steer took notice’: W Rothenstein (1937b) 177. Of Rothenstein’s house in Hampstead the Michael Fields noted: ‘The large room... hung with lovely Rodins, Rembrandt drawings, Puvis drawings and little things by Millet’: (1933) 283.

⁶⁸⁹ W Rothenstein (1937b) 348. John had already admitted that ‘J.F.Millet was a master I bowed before’: Holroyd (1996a) 54. John Rothenstein wrote of Daumier’s influence on John: ‘[Daumier] reinforced with immense authority the lesson he had begun to learn from Rembrandt, of seeing broadly and simply, and who taught him to interpret human personality boldly, without fearing to pass, if need be, the arbitrary line commonly held to divide objective representation from caricature’: J Rothenstein: (1952) 178-9.

⁶⁹⁰ Beerbohm (1966) 5-6.

might add Rodin [fig.35] who provides us with a direct link to the Carfax, as an early exhibitor.

Rothenstein's interest in most of these artists stemmed from his years in Paris; from contact with the work itself, with fellow enthusiasts (Toulouse-Lautrec and Degas, for example) and, the case of de Chavannes and Rodin, with the artists themselves.⁶⁹¹ None of these artists were as popular back in London (Rodin's fame in England was on the verge of erupting); though the works of Daumier and Millet, in particular, could be seen and studied in places such as Van Wisselingh's Dutch Gallery.⁶⁹²

Though rarely credited as a major influence on British artists in this period, allusions to Daumier appear in works such as Orpen's *The Valuers* (1903), John's *The Rustic Idyll* (c.1903) and several of Beerbohm's caricatures.⁶⁹³ Beerbohm had been approached to write about Daumier for Binyon's Artist's Library, whilst William Strang had written to Rothenstein a couple of years earlier with 'an idea that you could make an interesting little book on Daumier & his works & I know a man who has a lot of them. I wish you would, as he is too little known here'.⁶⁹⁴ That Strang sees Rothenstein in such a scholarly role, before the publication of *Goya*, is interesting.

Though this particular project never transpired, Rothenstein was clearly thinking about Daumier in a critical sense, as proved (once again) in his notes for *Goya*. In yet another abandoned passage he writes:

⁶⁹¹ 'Degas was buying as many drawings by Ingres as he could; he had also acquired half a dozen of his paintings, and many drawings by Daumier and Delacroix. Daumier he placed high among the nineteenth-century painters': W Rothenstein (1937b) 101. On Lautrec: 'not for a moment would he have claimed equality with men like Degas or Puvis de Chavannes, nor had he the puissant hand or great mind of a Daumier'; Ibid. 67.

⁶⁹² Many of Daumier's works passed through the hands of this dealer, examined in interim, no doubt, by artists associated with the Carfax. Van Wisselingh was also well known to be a fan of Millet and the Barbizon School. There was a large Daumier show in Paris in 1901, visited by Ricketts and Shannon, who reported back to Rothenstein: 'The Daumier show closes definitely this week... the drawings are very fine indeed & well worth seeing. Van Wisselingh's two "Don Quixotes" would compare very favourably with any of the paintings': Charles Shannon to William Rothenstein, 6th June 1901, HGTN. Ricketts was less positive about the show, noting in his diary that it was, 'very interesting & very disappointing... Like all good Mannerists – even Rembrandt included – he strikes one most in a mixed collection': The Diaries of Charles Ricketts, June 11th 1901, BL 58099.

⁶⁹³ A caricature entitled 'Messrs Carfax' (Paul Mellon Centre, Yale) showing what appears to be a three-faced Clifton, alludes to Daumier's *Le Passé, Le Présent, L'Avenir*, a caricature of Louis-Phillipe. John Rothenstein suggests *A Rustic Idyll* as a work 'made under the immediate inspiration of Daumier': J Rothenstein (1952) 179.

⁶⁹⁴ William Strang to William Rothenstein, Jan 1897, HGTN.

To those who, like myself, value certain thought & intelligence & comprehension of nature translated into line & colour, Daumier takes his place among the few great painters of the century. A man whose eye saw form largely, massively & clearly, who read deep into his own heart, who [unknown words] hid nothing from himself... whose sense of humanity was profound, ~~his humour~~ who hit so justly, that he hurts no one but the man he strikes, whose intelligence was as unflagging as his industry... without illusions but with the highest ideals, the greatest pictorial historian of his generation. The forerunner of Millet...⁶⁹⁵

This is not the last time these two artists are coupled, or put forward as prime examples of the kind of art Rothenstein values. In his third volume of memoirs we find him yearning, still, to produce ‘an art as rich and complete as that of Millet and Daumier’; bemoaning the attitude of those who see either artist as ambassadors of a transitional nineteenth-century tradition.⁶⁹⁶ Not for the first time he argues that an artist such as Millet cannot be seen merely as a stepping stone towards the art of Van Gogh, but as someone who fully realised ideas which his followers only perverted. Thus, ‘it was Millet, and not Van Gogh, who conceived those passionate, rhythmical strokes by which he built up his designs; Van Gogh exaggerated what Millet invented’.⁶⁹⁷ What we think of as modernism was often, for Rothenstein, mere mannerism: an overstatement of ideals attained by the greatest nineteenth century artists. ‘Daumier and Millet expressed the sense of volume more clearly and more completely perhaps than any artists before or since their time’, he wrote in his memoirs: ‘yet because their aesthetic sensibility was used to present a more epic picture of the life of man than their followers conceived, the importance of their formal qualities goes unrecognised’.⁶⁹⁸ Having held these views at the beginning of the century, he makes no attempt to change them in light of Fry’s wholehearted presentation of Cézanne as the modern master of form. On the contrary, he argues, Cézanne ‘never saw clearly, as did Millet and Daumier, that the sense of mass comes from our perception that parts of form are turned towards, and others away from the source of light’.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁵ *Goya* drafts, HGTN.

⁶⁹⁶ W Rothenstein (1939) 278.

⁶⁹⁷ W Rothenstein (1937c) 258.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 218.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Millet's greatest strength, he writes elsewhere, was his ability to achieve a balance between various artistic concerns: 'uniting perfect colour, design and draughtsmanship with exactitude of observation' and creating 'the perfect fusion between movement and form, between what was passing and what was permanent' – all driven by 'an underlying desire for something other than casual appearance'.⁷⁰⁰ He was helped in these respects by his choice of 'great subject matter'; subjects that lent themselves, evidently, to an exploration of life's 'hidden realities'. This suggests a bias in Rothenstein's approach towards rural and eternal human subjects, which is reflected in his paintings. This attitude sits uncomfortably with commonly received ideas of modern art which, despite their obvious basis in 'something other than casual appearance', tend to revolve around urban subject matter, finding in Millet's art too much of the sentimental; an excess, perhaps, of Rothenstein's precious 'austerity'.⁷⁰¹ This move towards permanence; the obsession with an 'eternal' image may, furthermore, seem overly engineered towards posterity – arrogantly unconcerned with contemporary life.

Not everyone shared Rothenstein's belief in Millet. Writing of George Moore, Rothenstein noted that 'Moore found in Steer and Tonks his most sympathetic listeners; in neither was there any intellectual nonsense; like Moore they laughed at my strange taste for Giotto and Millet'.⁷⁰² To Moore we will return – Steer and Tonks it is worth dealing with immediately, for they are artists who were clearly associated with the Carfax, who nonetheless appear throughout Rothenstein's writing to lack what we may perceive, however faintly, to be the 'certain character' for which the gallery was founded. James Bolivar Manson drew attention to this in 1910, noting that Rothenstein, rarely tempted by 'the charms of passing effects', was 'nevertheless' full of admiration for Steer.⁷⁰³ MacColl writes, meanwhile, of Rothenstein's 'unwavering' admiration for

⁷⁰⁰ W Rothenstein (1937b) 43, 243. In an article from 1892, Sickert compared Millet with Bastien-Lepage, to the latter's obvious detriment. Of the former he writes: 'he was a great artist... gifted with the comprehension in its entirety of the import of any scene in nature which he wished to render'. He also argued that 'the work of Jean François Millet was, with scarcely an exception, free from a preoccupation with the walls of an exhibition': Robins (2000) 85-8.

⁷⁰¹ W Rothenstein (1939) 314. Rothenstein's interest in Millet is especially evident in his 'Mother and Child' paintings and pastels.

⁷⁰² W Rothenstein (1937b) 243.

⁷⁰³ Manson (1910) 46. The word often used to describe Steer's work is 'instinctive' – probably not a word

Steer's work, well summed up by a full-hearted letter from 1909, in which Rothenstein tells Steer that 'I glory in what you do, and what you have become, and the work you are showing now will establish you once and for all as easily first among us all as a painter'.⁷⁰⁴ Seen from one perspective, it is a contradiction; seen from another, it stands as testament to the artist's openness – his refusal to shut his mind to alternative approaches; to accept, perhaps, that art had more than one 'certain character'. On the other hand, Rothenstein *may* have been straining, at times, to appreciate his friend's work. In 1913 he wrote his brother Charles claiming that 'the parting of the ways is near. The old N.E.A.C people like Tonks & Steer are content to go on painting models doing nothing but sitting pretty... at bottom it has been the actual realism of my work they have liked, not its structural severity'.⁷⁰⁵

He returns to this idea in his memoirs:

Bad psychology, shallow and insincere interpretation of life, invariably tend to make bad design. It was here I felt a separation between my 'New English' friends – between Steer and Tonks and myself especially; Conder was in his peculiar way, a subtle interpreter of life. In Tonks and Steer was a certain indifference to the profounder emotions, an indifference which was reflected, I thought, in their work – in Tonks especially.⁷⁰⁶

Some coldness had developed between Rothenstein, Tonks and Steer after the First World War, which could account for this tone, though the fact remain that Tonks and Steer, though close to the artist at the turn of the century and a feature of the Carfax were never mentioned in such glowing terms as other artists who exhibited there (most notably Conder, as seen above, and John). This gives us an idea, already, that 'work of a certain character' not only existed in some form, but that it might have referred only to a small portion of what could be seen at the Carfax.

The fact that Tonks and Steer sided with Moore over his love of Millet is significant –

that could ever be applied to Rothenstein: MacColl (1945) 48-9 and Holt (1992) 81.

⁷⁰⁴ MacColl (1945) 69, 52.

⁷⁰⁵ William Rothenstein to Charles Rutherston, August 14th 1913, HGTN.

⁷⁰⁶ W Rothenstein (1937c) 98.

and one wonders what they thought of his other major touchstones. When criticising Millet in *Modern Painting* (1893), primarily for his ‘deficient’ brushwork and drawing, Moore lumped him with a contemporary French painter, Puvis de Chavannes. The two objects of Moore’s wrath were re-united, fifteen years later, in Rothenstein’s Birmingham lecture, where they were brought forward as especially *worthy* candidates for any student’s attention. Clearly nervous over the effect of putting forward two French artists as models of study, he is keen to point out that ‘they can be studied in conjunction’ with the Pre-Raphaelites (of which there was a strong collection in Birmingham) tempering any sense of formal invention with the ultimate nobility of their vision.⁷⁰⁷ The same word (nobility) appears in an essay by Ricketts on Puvis from the same year, where the artist is cast as one who ‘strove for the noblest tasks, and who would have been equal to satisfying the cravings of some genial Tyrant or Pope desirous of seeing the history of the world painted in his palace’.⁷⁰⁸ This is not an artist at home in a small commercial gallery. What we have instead is ‘the most original designer of landscape since Rembrandt’, a painter with a ‘monumental’ vision and ‘range of emotions’; the ‘dignity and singleness’ of whose art ‘exasperated two generations of critics who missed the opportunity for self-important pronouncements or admonition’.⁷⁰⁹

Ricketts closed with the comment that Puvis de Chavannes was ‘still comparatively unknown in England’.⁷¹⁰ Excepting an extraordinary attempt by the burghers of Preston to commission a mural from Puvis in 1893, there was some truth in this statement.⁷¹¹ It would be hard, nevertheless, to overestimate the appeal of Puvis de Chavannes to this generation of British artists. Millet and Daumier had their fans, but Puvis attracted something close to worship, especially amongst artists associated with the Carfax. We need only think of Ricketts’s unforgettable description of buying a work by the artist (‘I burst into perspiration at the sight of it, so great was my lust of possession’), Augustus John’s murals for Hugh Lane, Conder’s Swanage paintings, or

⁷⁰⁷ W Rothenstein (1942) 201-2.

⁷⁰⁸ Ricketts (1908) 10. The same essay also examines Millet.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 11-18.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.* 18.

⁷¹¹ see R Upstone (2002). Upstone’s essay is the first to highlight these connections; with earlier texts tending to wilfully ignore British artists: see Wattenmaker (1976).

William Strang's *Adam and Eve* series, to come to some comprehension of his significance.⁷¹²

Rothenstein writes that 'Puvis de Chavannes and Monet were the prevalent influences among the more intelligent students' in Paris and though his meeting with the former was somewhat of an anticlimax ('Puvis was discreetly genial, and said little that was remarkable') the suggestion is always that he favoured him over Monet.⁷¹³ Yet again, Puvis de Chavannes is admired for his *balance*; his work contains the 'flavour of naivety' seized upon by Van Gogh and Gauguin, but does not insist, like these two, 'on a particular and partial aspect of painting'.⁷¹⁴ Puvis is able, instead, 'to relate to the whole [his] preoccupation with the parts' – to happily combine 'discipline and genius'.⁷¹⁵ Rothenstein's connection between Puvis and British art was not made merely to placate his audience. Indeed, Robert Upstone has suggested that 'for all the aesthetic francophobia in conservative British academic circles, Puvis's high seriousness and epic endeavour fitted exactly with prevailing beliefs about the desirable direction of the national school'.⁷¹⁶ The links between Watts and Burne-Jones – of whom Puvis was himself a fan – do not need to be stretched to fit, and Rothenstein (despite an early reluctance to embrace the Pre-Raphaelites) was always pleased to draw attention to them.⁷¹⁷ Beyond the Carfax (and as this chapter seeks to prove, Rothenstein's aesthetics

⁷¹² Ibid. Strang's *Adam and Eve*, a series of ten paintings, dated between 1899 and 1901 was commissioned by the collector Laurence Hodson. It was exhibited at Wolverhampton in 1902: see *William Strang RA, 1859-1921* (Sheffield 1980). For Augustus John and Puvis de Chavannes, see Holt (2003) 49-80. Ricketts bought the de Chavannes drawing in 1904: see Delaney 155-6. Rothenstein missed the chance to buy a Puvis de Chavannes himself: W Rothenstein (1937b) 100. Kenneth McConkey extends the link between Rothenstein and Puvis de Chavannes by suggesting that the figure in the left of *The Browning Readers* was modelled on de Chavannes: McConkey (2004). See Ishikawa (1968) for a general review of Puvis de Chavannes's popularity at the turn of the century.

⁷¹³ W Rothenstein (1937b) 45. The obvious exception is an interview from *Figaro* in which Rothenstein is quoted as replying to the question 'Which artists do you admire and which dislike?' with the assertion that 'I admire Ricketts and Shannon more than any one... As for my dislikes, there is nothing I dislike so much as the work of the modern French school – Puvis de Chevannes [sic] and all his crew. They are abominable': 'Private Views, No. 27', *Figaro*, March 18th 1897. This seems an unlikely answer, especially as Ricketts and Shannon were great fans of Puvis. Grant Richards draws attention to the contradiction in his memoirs, explaining it with the comment 'taste changes': Richards (1933) 187. In an early article for *The Studio* [Vol I (1893) 160] Rothenstein notes of the 1893 Salon du Champs de Mars that 'M. Puvis de Chavannes was represented by one of the poorest things he has ever painted'; all other references to the artist during this period are, nevertheless entirely positive, suggesting that the *Figaro* comment was either meant as a joke, or taken down incorrectly by the interviewer.

⁷¹⁴ W Rothenstein (1937b) 72-3.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Upstone (2002) 277.

⁷¹⁷ Rothenstein argues in the 1908 lecture that Millet and de Chavannes 'can be studied naturally in conjunction with those works of the pre-Raphaelites I have spoken of': W Rothenstein (1942) 202.

almost always cast him beyond the possibilities of this small commercial gallery) de Chavannes' skills as a muralist had a particular relevance, providing a model for a new kind of public art, such as that envisaged for the Leeds project in 1923.

Thinking of works like *L'Été* and *L'Hiver* (of which he recalled the unveiling at the Hotel de Ville) words from Rothenstein's 1908 lecture come back to mind: 'sculpturesqueness is an important basis for strong design. The bas-relief principle and the processional idea; repetition of general form without monotony of detail; figures arranged as on a cathedral wall.'⁷¹⁸ The sculptural aspect of de Chavannes paintings is often noted; indeed, in 1928 one critic went so far as to ask 'Is Puvis de Chavannes a painter?' – such was his relevance to modern sculptors such as Maillol and Bourdelle.⁷¹⁹ His influence was even greater, it has been argued, than that of his friend Rodin, seen by some to be leading modern sculpture in the direction of expressionism.⁷²⁰ Rodin was, however, no less of an important figure to those artists who exhibited at the Carfax, proved most clearly by the fact that Rothenstein invited him to hold a one-man show there in its first year.

Rodin's reception in London in May 1902 is often seen as the moment that symbolised his burgeoning fame in England. To coincide with the presentation of *John the Baptist* to the South Kensington museum, a dinner was given in his honour at the Café Royal, whereupon he was carried in a cab by students from the Slade to the Arts Club in Dover Street, with Sargent on the box.⁷²¹ Always one to miss the big moment, Rothenstein – who had done so much to boost Rodin's reputation in London – was in

Rothenstein's attitude to the Pre-Raphaelites – and English art in general – seems to have softened as the century progressed. This may have something to do with his sense of national identity; certainly his European connections were much harder to play up as tensions mounted in the run up to the First World War. It is also worth noting that he had married into a Pre-Raphaelite world: his wife Alice was the daughter of Walter Knewstubb, once an assistant of Rossetti, for whom her mother had modelled.

⁷¹⁸ W Rothenstein (1937b) 72-3; Speaight (1962) 207.

⁷¹⁹ See Chevillot (2002).

⁷²⁰ Ibid; see also Normand-Romain (2002). Rodin and Puvis de Chavannes were planning a joint-show in Brussels at the time of the latter's death in 1898: Sillevas (1995).

⁷²¹ For a general overview of Rodin's reception in England, see Newton (1994). Rothenstein quotes Adrian Stokes' description of the event: W Rothenstein (1937c) 17. The move to buy a work for the nation was initiated by John Tweed, and taken up by D.S. MacColl in *The Saturday Review*: see for instance D.S. MacColl, 'Rodin in London'; *Saturday Review* 17th May 1902; 628-9.

Germany.⁷²² When Rodin returned in 1903, however, William resumed his role as one of Rodin's prime contacts in the London art world, despite a growing frustration with the sculptor's burgeoning fame: 'his head was a little turned, he played up to worshippers and became something of a social lion and, worst of all, he spent overmuch time as his own showman... I wondered at his patience with fools, and with adoring, exotic ladies'.⁷²³ Rodin's friendship had once been 'a unique privilege' – now he seemed to belong to everyone.⁷²⁴

The presence of Rodin at the Carfax in 1900 is interesting. The exhibition consisted of some 'early drawings' and 'small bronzes'; mostly the former, which Rothenstein had seen at Meudon and praised, somewhat to Rodin's surprise.⁷²⁵ These works were, Rothenstein later wrote, 'very powerful, classical and romantic at the same time, evoking sculpture which no one, not even Rodin himself, had attempted. They were magnificent drawings'.⁷²⁶ It seems apt that Rothenstein, who yearned for sculptural and architectural forms in two dimensional artworks, should admire the drawings of a sculptor. Other aspects of Rodin's oeuvre seem equally relevant in light of his critical position, in particular the seemingly transitional nature of his work, forever caught between romantic and classical modes, between robust and sensual forms, between solidity and movement. 'It is Rodin's belief in an intense application to the form and movement of his models', wrote Rothenstein, in a 1902 review of MacColl's *Nineteenth Century Art*, 'resulting in the semi-conscious addition of the important feature of design, that has helped to make all that he has done so vital and imposing. An equally severe application bestowed on the conscious mastering of the elements of proportion, of form and of the principles of movement made Barye and Millet the incomparable artists they were'.⁷²⁷

⁷²² Rothenstein first met Rodin in the mid 90s, after an introduction from Legros. He visited Meudon several times, arranged Rodin's Carfax exhibition in 1899 and acted as agent between Rodin and Edward Warren. He later discovered that a letter written by Rilke to Rothenstein – then working as Rodin's assistant – had been the cause of Rodin and Rilke's falling out. W Rothenstein (1937b) 317-324, 344, 370; W Rothenstein (1937c) 47; W Rothenstein (1939) 314. Rothenstein drew Rodin at least three times – and owned a drawing by Rodin, given to him by the sculptor.

⁷²³ W Rothenstein (1937c) 46.

⁷²⁴ W Rothenstein (1937b) 322.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.* 321.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁷ *The Saturday Review*, December 1902, Vol 94, 768.

As with Goya, however, Rothenstein's faith in Rodin's vision was not without moments of doubt.⁷²⁸ Later in life he admitted that his interest in Rodin's *The Kiss* (a version of which he helped sell to Warren) had dwindled ('I can no longer accept it as completely as I then did'), whilst hinting that his youthful enthusiasm for the sculptor might have had something to do with 'a certain paganism, a sensuality, a preoccupation with unusual sexual subject matter'.⁷²⁹

How do we square this 'certain paganism' and 'sensuality' with 'a certain character', prime features of which, I have suggested, are 'austerity' – maybe even 'aridity'? Do we even need to square it? Rothenstein was keen to castigate narrow-minded approaches to art: can we really accuse him of critical inconsistency? And yet this tension remains; this desire, despite the obsession with open-mindedness, to carry on making claims for art. This is what makes some of his enthusiasms difficult to accept; for all the vagueness of the language, *Goya*, the lectures, letters and memoirs *do* contain critical concepts that seem to rub against some of the art and artists that Rothenstein publicly supported.

Conder remains the most obvious point of tension. He is undoubtedly the artist who benefited the most from the Carfax in its early years; a character in whom Rothenstein invested a great amount of energy. He ticks some of the boxes: he had an enthusiasm for Puvis de Chavannes, for instance, which comes out clearly – if not too clearly – in works such as *Women bathing, Swanage* (1900: fig.36).⁷³⁰ Elsewhere, however, his fondness for Watteau and a kind of rococo decadence dominates, particularly in the painted fans. The success of these no doubt helped the gallery through the financial insecurity of its early years, but to what extent could they be said to exhibited this 'certain character'? Hubert Wellington wrote of Rothenstein in 1923, that he 'has never looked upon the world as mere subject-matter for an engaging arabesque, nor as a

⁷²⁸ He compares the two briefly in *Goya*: '[Goya's] occasional diabolical tendency is shown in the cartoon of Saturn devouring his children ...a sinister and powerful composition, reminding one strangely of the designs of Auguste Rodin': W Rothenstein (1900) 14.

⁷²⁹ W Rothenstein (1939) 286-7; W Rothenstein (1937b) 322.

⁷³⁰ John Rothenstein writes of Conder's arcadia: 'It is instructive to compare it with the Golden Age portrayed by Puvis de Chavannes. In both worlds peace and beauty reign: in Puvis' mankind has returned, leaving luxury and sophistication behind, to primitive, simple life, in which there is happiness at last for the toiler also, but in Conder's, where luxury and sophistication are refined yet enhanced, dwell only privileged beings. Consider how a decoration by Puvis would reproach the habitués of a smart hotel; how one by Conder would mock the inmates of a workhouse': J Rothenstein (1938) xiii-xv.

collection of shapes and volumes to be aesthetically related to one another'.⁷³¹ In common with all critical writers on the subject he notes that Conder's 'delicate talent' was 'fundamentally different' from Rothenstein.⁷³² The artist himself admitted it, whilst claiming that his painting 'grew' on him, 'though lovely colour meant less to me than good drawing, and strength and shrewd observation more than charm'.⁷³³

If one can see beyond the charmingly buxom women in long ballooning dresses, there *is* a darker side to Conder's work; an atmosphere that differentiates him, perhaps, from his hero Watteau.⁷³⁴ It is worth noting that Conder's image of a dead prostitute (Esther from his 1899 *Balzac Set*) appeared at the Carfax a few years before Walter Sickert started to experiment with the same subject.⁷³⁵ We look in vain, however, for the formal heaviness; the weightiness favoured by Rothenstein; even (though these remain, of course, equivocal terms) the obsession with 'dignity', 'probity' and 'nobility' that we find in the work of other Carfax artists, such as Augustus John. If anything, Conder seems to represent what Rothenstein was trying so hard to put behind him in 1900. As late as 1906 Conder writes to Rothenstein of Courbet, an artist he claims to have been greatly attracted to, albeit 'after Fragonard & Watteau'.⁷³⁶ He goes on: 'the horrible obvious pomposity of the so called great masters is too much for me, I confess'.⁷³⁷ The letter coincides with the period of Rothenstein's Jewish paintings, a project inspired by Rembrandt, undertaken by an artist whose natural wit was often obscured by what many perceived as pomposity.

John Rothenstein quotes Wyndham Lewis in the Introduction to his Conder study (a book written, with William's obvious blessing, to raise consciousness of Conder, whose reputation had been on the wane since his death). According to Lewis's

⁷³¹ Wellington (1923) 11

⁷³² Ibid. 16. Christiana Herringham, close to Rothenstein after the turn of the century, failed to understand his faith in Conder, who she thought depicted 'woman as man has made her': Lago (1996) 146.

⁷³³ W Rothenstein (1937b) 56.

⁷³⁴ John Rothenstein plays down the sinister side of Conder's work, whereas Ricketts wrote that Conder brought to Watteau's tradition of the *Fêtes Galantes* 'something at once different, something at once more explicit yet more moody, more capricious and more complex': Ricketts (1909) 8. Conder's most recent biographer agrees: Galbally 171.

⁷³⁵ Conder's image is, nonetheless, a less immediately shocking image – and makes no allusion, unlike Sickert's, to contemporary events. Sickert's *The Camden Town Murder* (c.1907-8) and *What Shall We Do for the Rent?* (c.1907-9) appeared in the first Camden Town Group exhibition held at the Carfax in 1911.

⁷³⁶ Charles Conder to William Rothenstein, December 5th 1906, HGTN.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

criteria for ‘serious’ art, he notes that Conder falls flat. Likewise, according to Lewis’s perceptive descriptions of William’s art, with its ‘unflagging sincerity’ and ‘puritanical integrity’, John Rothenstein’s descriptions of Conder’s art (‘an Arcadia peopled by dreamy, capricious figures who lead lives of luxurious idleness’) reveal a striking contrast.⁷³⁸ It wasn’t one that passed Rothenstein by; in later descriptions we not only sense his awareness of the difference between his art and Conder’s, but of the challenge his friend’s art offers to his cautiously developed critical ideals. ‘[Conder’s] art was based partly on his sense of style, of gesture, of artificial comedy,’ writes Rothenstein in his memoirs: ‘he had a great feeling for form, but because of an incomplete equipment, he was never able to express it... Yet Conder has a place to himself in English art’.⁷³⁹

These sentences go some way to summing up Rothenstein’s critical position. Conder’s art clearly contradicts some of his core beliefs, but retains his place in Rothenstein’s affections. Not only is he reluctant to dismiss anything that attracts him, regardless of qualities incongruous with his own work, but he ultimately believes, like many artists of his generation, that ‘the territory of art is a wide one’.⁷⁴⁰ For this reason Rothenstein’s critical position is hard to resolve; though this is, in a sense, one of its goals. The lack of rigidity; of overweening obedience to a particular credo, remains an integral part of his approach.

Though it may be hard to boil his beliefs down to a ‘certain character’, I would maintain that, for all its vagueness, Rothenstein’s attitude is not uncertain to the point of chronic inconsistency: across this period he makes a range of statements and refers to a core group of artists in a way that does allow us to grasp a handful of pertinent ideas. His art, meanwhile, offers a lesson of his own, the relevance of which was not lost on contemporary thinkers. However, unlike two of these particular thinkers (Roger Fry and D.S.MacColl) Rothenstein was not inclined to making ‘permanent saints’⁷⁴¹ Herein lies the strength – and possible weakness – of his critical approach.

⁷³⁸ Lewis (1970); J Rothenstein (1938) xiii.

⁷³⁹ W Rothenstein (1937c) 177-8.

⁷⁴⁰ W Rothenstein (1932) 6.

⁷⁴¹ Undated Notebook (marked S.O.), HGTV 1148.3

CHAPTER FOUR

‘Still the important personage’:

Identity and influence, c.1900-1910

Everyone liked him, and wished to be helpful; but to help is not always an easy matter.⁷⁴²

The observation above, written by Rothenstein about the writer John Masefield, should, by now, seem a little too familiar. After all, as this thesis has sought to show, the difficulty of helping other artists was a recurring theme in Rothenstein’s career: a lesson he had already learned and attempted to accommodate, in various ways, into his behaviour many years before he met Masefield. We have already explored it in relation to his friendships with Ricketts, Beerbohm and Conder; in relation to his experiences with exhibiting spaces and societies; and in relation to his work as a critical thinker. In this final chapter I wish to pick up the thread of the first chapter and look again at Rothenstein’s associations with specific artists, between the later dates of 1902 and 1910. So often seen as a rather over-weening figure, someone who foisted himself upon fellow artists, I continue to argue that Rothenstein managed his instinct to influence in more subtle ways than this. I shall explore how the inherent complexities of his identity, especially his class and religious upbringing, both frustrated his approach at the time and obscured his significance for those looking back.

‘I suppose Will R. is still the important personage’, Charles Conder joked in a letter to Augustus John in 1903; a rhetorical question, surely, for after firsthand experience of his influential personality, Conder clearly doubted that his friend could ever fade into the

⁷⁴² W Rothenstein (1937b) 373.

background.⁷⁴³ Though Conder is making fun of Rothenstein, hinting at his self-importance, he is also grudgingly admitting Rothenstein's significance, whilst leaving his exact role unclear. Ultimately there is little doubt that, as Conder saw it, Rothenstein *was* 'still the important personage' – a fact that remains hard to deny.

It is significant that art historians often focus on the relationship between Roger Fry and Rothenstein when outlining the former's rise to power following the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition in 1910.⁷⁴⁴ To see them merely as rivals vying for a position of influence is highly misleading, but it is certainly true that Fry, like Conder, saw Rothenstein in 1910 as one of, if not *the* artist best placed to exert influence on the younger artists. Letters between the two around 1910 reveal Fry's desire to discuss his plans with Rothenstein; eager at every step to get the backing of his influential contemporary. 'I do wish we could meet at times,' he wrote in 1909: 'I want to know what you think of a hundred things'.⁷⁴⁵ For the next two years we find him constantly barking at Rothenstein's heels: 'I feel a new hope altogether about art & all those who care & who are not fossilised must get together & produce something'; 'I do want to talk over much with you'; 'I have a big idea... I want to talk it over with you'; 'Are you back yet? If so I must absolutely see you'.⁷⁴⁶ Throughout their correspondence it is clear that Fry respects Rothenstein's status as an 'important personage'. As he later recalled: 'I remember I used to be jealous of Prof. Rothenstein,' remembering his old friend's 'great reputation', whilst gloating on what he perceived as its ensuing demise.⁷⁴⁷

The seeming significance of what Fry and others went on to do and what Rothenstein, by implication, did not, goes some way to explaining the subsequent lack of respect he received. However we must not let this blind us to what Rothenstein *did* do. Admittedly, it wasn't anything on the scale of the Post-Impressionist exhibitions – though this is, in itself, a telling point. If Rothenstein was considered an influential figure *without* orchestrating an event of such obvious cultural significance, what *had* he done to deserve the reputation he clearly held? To answer this question, we need to get

⁷⁴³ Galbally (2002) 234

⁷⁴⁴ See Stansky (1996); Spalding (1999); Saler (1999)

⁷⁴⁵ Fry to Rothenstein, Jan 13th 1909, HGTV.

⁷⁴⁶ Fry to Rothenstein Jan 2nd 1910; Jan 30th 1910; undated 1910; March 17th 1911, HGTV.

⁷⁴⁷ Fry to Virginia Woolf, July 27th 1920: Sutton (1972) 486

beyond this general idea of Rothenstein as ‘an important personage’; to examine the role with the thoroughness it deserves. We need to stop judging Rothenstein and the period of British art between 1900-1910 purely by the standards of what came after – by the actions of Roger Fry and Wyndham Lewis – to understand how what has been perceived as Rothenstein’s ‘failure’ to compete with such men may, in fact, have been a planned retreat from or, more likely, a refusal to compromise a role he had been playing for some time. Events between 1910 and 1914 demanded a change of approach to anyone wishing to play the role of ‘important personage’; Rothenstein was not necessarily unable to play by the new rules: he was simply unwilling. This, I believe, was because these new rules necessitated a complete change of approach to that he had been taking the last decade or so – the period on which I shall now turn my focus.

The fact that Conder made this comment in a letter to Augustus John is especially interesting. Conder must have known that John, the man to whom Rothenstein largely transferred his energies after falling out with Conder, would appreciate the observation more than most. Conder, the older man, is recognising Rothenstein’s interest in the younger generation, starting with Augustus John, Rothenstein’s brightest hope – and perhaps the first young artist to feel the full force of his influence.

This study has already explored two distinct ways in which Rothenstein was able to directly assist young artists like Augustus John. The Carfax supplied an exhibiting space when other galleries may have been afraid to take the risk, whilst societies such as The Society of Twelve offered further, valuable support. The example of the former, furthermore, directly inspired the creation of the Chenil Gallery, a venture based on the Carfax, and closely associated with John.

The early artistic influences on John also owe a great deal to Rothenstein. Rothenstein eased the junior artist’s introductions to Goya, to Rembrandt, to Millet and to Puvis de Chavannes. John’s approach and subsequent writings on art reveal his debt to Rothenstein in this area; the same applies to other artists of this generation. Though Rothenstein was never to approach Fry’s fame as a critical thinker, he put down his thoughts in a popular form; one which may have had a wider influence than hitherto

acknowledged. The openness of his stance, frequently seen as a fault, may have attracted a generation who eschewed an obviously oppositional approach.

Charting Rothenstein's influence, as we have seen throughout, can be fraught with problems. Keen to avoid a reputation as a domineering, didactic force, he cultivated a deliberate ambiguity; developing something of a penchant for equivocal positions. William Orpen's caricature of the N.E.A.C in 1904 [fig.37] sums up this situation well; he captures Rothenstein bridging the gap between Augustus John and club stalwarts (also Slade School teachers) Brown, Steer and Tonks. The picture simultaneously makes fun of Rothenstein's hesitation – his inability to fully commit to any one cause or camp – whilst presenting him as a potentially pivotal figure; someone who might *unite* disparate strands. To understand Rothenstein fully we need to keep both of these roles in play.⁷⁴⁸

In this chapter I intend to focus on less tangible representations of Rothenstein's influence; to consider the implications of his growing power as well as the manifestations. I wish to explore also how this power was represented by his choice of lifestyle; most obviously by his choice of home. I will be using his residence in Hampstead (which roughly spanned the decade) as a context through which to examine the various social networks in which he operated. Much like the founding of the Carfax in 1899, and *Goya* in 1900, his move to Hampstead in 1902 coincided with a shift in the relationship between him and many fellow artists. He was no longer, as in Paris or Chelsea of the 1890s, the young pretender. As the Vattetot holiday had proved, he was now in a position to guide younger artists through their early careers. More critically than financially established, Rothenstein nevertheless had wide experience of the machinations of the London art world. Though he couldn't always provide money personally, the promise and/or possibility of financial help definitely formed a part of his reputation amongst his juniors.

I will be tackling these issues, as in previous chapters, via a variety of contemporary sources, from artist's memoirs and correspondence to more recent art historical accounts. At the heart of the chapter, however, will be four texts (four

⁷⁴⁸ William Orpen, *Crisis at the New English Art Club, 1930 for 1904*: Jenkins and Stephens (2004) 204.

gospels, I am tempted to call them) which shed direct light on the issue of Rothenstein's role as 'an important personage' in Hampstead. They each approach the subject in a different way. Three of them recount the experiences of young artists seeking Rothenstein's help, albeit in different circumstances. The first of these, and perhaps the most interesting, is a passage from Augustus John's autobiography – the source of the Vautrin/Lucien association explored in the first chapter. This model of their relationship was, as have seen, dismissed by John, though it remains, as I have argued, a comment ripe with meanings: a warning shot, reminding Rothenstein of what he might become, without due vigilance. As John explains in this later passage, the relationship actually progressed along different lines.

Mary Lago has noted how humility prevented Rothenstein from ever recording 'a detailed account of the time, money, and energy that he expended on Augustus John's behalf'; John, likewise, was little inclined to waste words on a relationship that was, perhaps, as tense as it was beneficial.⁷⁴⁹ This passage, nevertheless, represents a rare point in which he addresses the nature of their relationship with relative candour. Despite hiding himself, initially, behind a fictional character called George (who, he explains, 'is, was, or will be myself') the impression – supported, perhaps, by this peculiar approach – is of the writer working through issues of no small personal relevance.⁷⁵⁰

Of course, such texts need to be treated with caution, especially when dealing with the subject of influence – usually something artists will often be very sensitive, if not entirely silent, about. 'Artists are notoriously able to forget their patrons', noted Noel Carrington in the introduction to Gertler's letters.⁷⁵¹ Rothenstein recognised this, writing of Epstein (who treated him more 'scurvily' than most) that 'Epstein, too, had chosen to quarrel with me, in a way I resented at first, but not for long... [he] followed the tradition of the man of genius, a good tradition, which allows of an uncompromising attitude to the world, and freedom from social complications'.⁷⁵² Rothenstein's conspicuous absence from Epstein's writings may not have come as a

⁷⁴⁹ Lago (1978) 18.

⁷⁵⁰ John (1975) 314-5

⁷⁵¹ Carrington (1965) 28.

⁷⁵² Speaight (1962) 186; W Rothenstein (1937c) 128-9.

surprise; nor Eric Gill's casual admission of 'disgraceful ingratitude' to his own 'spiritual progenitors'.⁷⁵³ The lack of a 'detailed account' from John would hardly have shocked him either. John also held the ticket of 'genius', excusing him from various social faux pas, gratefulness included. John appears to recognise this – and makes a somewhat ramshackle attempt to address the issue. The result, as we will see, may be more intriguing than reliable. John is writing a long time after the events he describes, and has a tendency (seen throughout his autobiography, and exemplified in this instance by his use of an alter ego) to be drawn into elaborate flights of fancy.⁷⁵⁴

Though John was the first, and probably the most significant, of the young artists Rothenstein sought to help, it was those artists whose careers began at the close of the decade that benefited the most. Two of these artists, Paul Nash and Mark Gertler, left accounts of early meetings with Rothenstein – Nash in his autobiography and Gertler, by irregular proxy, through conversations with the novelist Gilbert Cannan. Nash's account is the more straightforward and though, like John's, it was written a long time afterwards, contemporary letters appear to confirm its reliability.⁷⁵⁵ The source on Gertler, though written much nearer the time, is far more problematic.

Cannan's novel *Mendel* (1917) is a fictionalised account of Gertler's early career featuring a chapter in which the young artist goes to meet Edgar Froitzheim, a clumsily unsubtle caricature of Rothenstein. Gertler's part in the construction of the book was complicated (and destined to remain unresolved), making it a curious and highly

⁷⁵³ Gill (1944) 273-4. Epstein didn't allow Rothenstein to publish any of his letters – many of which reveal the assistance he received from Rothenstein – in his memoirs. In 1931, he wrote 'I still think my letters to you were private & not for publication and that is why I do not care to publish them': Jacob Epstein to William Rothenstein, March 12th 1931, HGTV. Their friendship had reached the tipping point back in 1911, when Epstein had written to Rothenstein asking for 'no more of your damned insincere invitations. This pretence of friendship has gone far enough... It is the comic element in your attitude that has prevented me writing the above before this': Jacob Epstein to William Rothenstein, June 20th 1911, HGTV.

⁷⁵⁴ John started writing his autobiography (published in two volumes, *Chiaroscuro* and *Finishing Touches*) in the early 1920s, though it took him about thirty years to complete them. Michael Holroyd describes the work as 'a scrapbook, broken up into brief, haphazardly plotted incidents without reference to dates or chronological sequence'. He notes that John was not a careless writer, but a constant reviser: Holroyd, 'Introduction' in John (1975) 9-16.

⁷⁵⁵ Nash's autobiography, *Outline*, was written in the late thirties and early forties and first published, posthumously, in 1949. At the time of writing Nash visited Rothenstein, and is said to have been inspired by his own memoirs: see Andrew Causey's preface to Nash (1988). Causey writes: 'Nash's writing is sparse and direct, he recalls events vividly, his images are concrete and unequivocal... the language... economical and controlled'. See Bottomley (1990) for contemporary letters between Nash and the poet Gordon Bottomley.

dangerous text from which to launch a discussion of Rothenstein's Hampstead practices. Noel Carrington's description of the novel as 'grossly overpainted and distorted' seems a fair assessment; nonetheless, it contains too many interesting concepts to let go – relating, in particular, to Rothenstein's Jewish identity, which was to become especially open to debate during this period.⁷⁵⁶ Emboldened by the veil of fiction, Cannan confronts Rothenstein's identity in an unusually audacious manner. Though this is a character portrait based on a casual acquaintance, and presented as a piece of fiction, it nonetheless raises questions that need to be addressed. The crude, broad strokes with which the book tells its history could be easily dismissed were it not for the fact that texts of more ostensible reliability fall into many of the same traps. This is to say that, rightly or wrongly, Cannan's fictional portrait of Rothenstein – which casts him, amongst other things, as a 'Jew turned Englishman and prosperous gentleman' – has much in common with the received opinion of Rothenstein during this period.

To take a recent example from David Boyd Haycock's 2009 study *A Crisis of Brilliance: Five Young British Artists and the Great War*. After recounting Gertler's upbringing in the Jewish East End, Haycock introduces Rothenstein as a 'prominent Jewish artist... thirty-six years old and with a large house and family in the well-to-do London suburb of Highgate... the son of a wealthy German wool merchant'.⁷⁵⁷ Factually speaking, this is not inaccurate (the reference to Highgate aside) but the context does make it misleading.⁷⁵⁸ Rothenstein is seen in clear opposition to Gertler: the former established, comfortable and privileged – the latter poor, discontented and rootless.⁷⁵⁹ Gertler and his generation, as Boyd Haycock's book reminds us, have been granted an especially heroic glow – mainly on account of their war experiences (they are, after all,

⁷⁵⁶ Carrington (1965) 28. Carrington dedicates an appendix to the controversy, which contains Rothenstein's responses – and Gertler's replies: Ibid. 253-6. A precedent for Cannan's work – and interesting companion-piece – might be Issac Rosenberg's 1911 story *Rudolph*, an semi-autobiographical description of a meeting between a young Jewish artist and a wealthy patron: Rosenberg (1979) 276-282

⁷⁵⁷ Haycock (2009) 27.

⁷⁵⁸ Rothenstein's second Hampstead house was, strictly speaking, in Frognal, though Highgate was not far away – and had similar cultural connotations.

⁷⁵⁹ Such oppositions run throughout the book, which exemplifies the danger of following the careers of five artists from different backgrounds: one tends to over-exaggerate the differences. Nevinson, another of the artists selected, also lived in Hampstead – and is used to play off the poverty of Gertler's Whitechapel origins.

the ‘lost generation’) but also, as in Gertler’s case, due to their interesting social backgrounds.⁷⁶⁰ Though in itself this is no bad thing, the approach does appear to necessitate a misunderstanding of the preceding generation. We must be wary of praising Gertler’s class struggle at Rothenstein’s expense – something of which Cannan is especially guilty. The truth, as ever, is a little more complicated. Rothenstein’s life, as we shall see, was comfortable only in comparison to severe poverty. Boyd Haycock, like many other writers, is not deliberately perpetuating a myth, rather reinforcing a single, limited point of view; reducing the elements of his history to easy oppositions.

The perspective of Boyd-Haycock’s study is significant, as his story of British art centres on events occurring in the years directly before the First World War. This perspective is a popular one: 1910, the year of Roger Fry’s first Post-Impressionist exhibition, has proved the focus of many studies. It is Rothenstein’s fate that the part he plays in that particular narrative should symbolise a career that consisted of so many other, equally interesting, episodes. The questions raised in *Mendel* echo many of the questions surrounding Rothenstein’s reputation and behaviour in 1910; they are misleading questions, maybe, but we won’t correct the image by ignoring them.

My fourth and final text consists of a selection of journal entries from two female Chelsea friends, the Michael Fields – who sought Rothenstein’s encouragement, like so many, but see him from a different perspective to the young artists directly seeking help.⁷⁶¹ These sources have a more domestic approach, highlighting the role played by his wife and family; though it would be a mistake to think the Fields’ observations were in any way tame – their impressions of Rothenstein’s Hampstead life are carefully observed and, in their quiet way, hold no punches.

Though this chapter will focus on these specific texts and relationships, I hope also to give a sense of Rothenstein’s influence within a much wider circle of friends and acquaintances. One of the central points of John’s account is how Rothenstein’s

⁷⁶⁰ I refer to the generation who left the Slade in the five years prior to the First World War, including such major artists as Christopher Nevinson, Stanley Spencer, Paul Nash, David Bomberg, Dora Carrington, Isaac Rosenberg and Edward Wadsworth.

⁷⁶¹ Sturge Moore edited the journals of Michael Field, collecting several passages into a chapter he entitled ‘The Rothensteins at Hampstead’: Moore (1933) 279-284.

friendship stood for more than itself; facilitating as it did a whole sphere of social contacts. To visit Rothenstein in Hampstead might be to visit any number of people, from Conder to Conrad, W. H. Hudson to A. E. Housman. Rothenstein's Wednesday 'at homes' were, essentially, a lottery of literary and artistic talent: 'always such galaxies of intellect', as Housman was to write.⁷⁶² The idea was not new (as we have seen, Rothenstein had benefited from a range of similar social gatherings in the 1890s) but the role he was playing had changed. It was not unlike visiting Ricketts and Shannon at The Vale, albeit on Rothenstein's own terms – and not in Chelsea, this time, but Hampstead.

Hampstead is known throughout the world as representing just what is right and proper. [Christopher Nevinson].⁷⁶³

Why Hampstead? The house Rothenstein had taken in Kensington after his marriage to Alice in 1899 took him some distance away from the crowd of artists that gathered in Chelsea, but as gestures of independence go, it was a half-hearted one.⁷⁶⁴ Hampstead, though only seven miles away, seems to have represented something more.⁷⁶⁵

This was despite it sharing many of the same characteristics as Chelsea. Even in the early twentieth century, Hampstead retained the atmosphere of a village on the outskirts of London; a stepping stone between city and country, carrying some of the advantages of both. It had a history of attracting artists; some of whom were only visitors, making use of the picturesque qualities of the Heath; others who, starting with George Romney at the end of the eighteenth century, decided to stay for a while.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶² Burnett (2007) 246.

⁷⁶³ Nevinson (1938) 4. Nevinson tells of how, as a child, he invented two imaginary dogs. 'Herod' was the name of the wicked dog; 'Hampstead' his kindly counterpart.

⁷⁶⁴ The Rothensteins lived at 1 Pembroke Cottages, Edwardes Square from 1899 to 1902. This is where John Rothenstein was born.

⁷⁶⁵ In a letter to Robbie Ross in September 1899, following Ross's decision to winter in Rome, Rothenstein was to write: 'Kensington without Robbie – one might as well migrate to Hampstead!': Ross (1952) 56-7.

⁷⁶⁶ See Wedd, Peltz and Ross (2001) 53-65.

Romney was followed, most famously, by John Constable, who painted the Heath regularly, and had residences in the area, though he continued to hold onto central London bases.⁷⁶⁷ Hampstead at that time was not, it has been said, ‘a place for labour, but a place for leisure, refreshment and contact with nature.’⁷⁶⁸ As such it was yet to attract anything more than a stream of artists – and could hardly compete with Chelsea as a centre of artistic activity at the turn of the century.

The nature around Hampstead had been subject to some inevitable pruning by the time Rothenstein reached 26 Church Row [fig.38]; nevertheless it had got away more lightly than most. The Heath was an impressive stretch of parkland to find so close to one of the world’s biggest cities, and Hampstead still felt like part of the countryside. This aspect of the area certainly excited Rothenstein, as did the artistic history: ‘you have no idea how beautiful is,’ he wrote to Ludwig von Hofmann shortly after moving in: ‘just like landscapes by Turner and Constable’.⁷⁶⁹ Though Rothenstein never painted the Heath himself (most of his works from this period are interiors, or landscapes painted on holiday in France) it nonetheless formed a major part of his life.⁷⁷⁰ The opportunity afforded by the Heath to reconnect with nature was not lost on Rothenstein – and he enjoyed enjoining young artists to make the most of it (preferably with him at their side, slipping in advice). ‘Painting is done in the studio,’ he wrote to Gertler in May 1909, ‘but inspiration comes from outside, and you must get away into the fields whenever you get a chance spend as much time as you can in the open air. Come up to Hampstead some day soon. We will go for another walk on the Heath.’⁷⁷¹ Augustus John recalls similar invitations to ‘forced marches on the Heath, but only under the closest supervision’.⁷⁷² The Michael Fields, meanwhile, were made to ‘drive in

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid. Constable was buried at St. John’s, Hampstead Parish Church, at the end of Church Row, where Rothenstein lived.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid. 57.

⁷⁶⁹ See Speaight (1962) 160. He reiterates this in his memoirs: ‘There was the Heath, and immediately beyond it was open country. Golders Green was not yet, and the view from the White Stone Pond was not unlike that which Constable saw’: W Rothenstein (1937c) 32.

⁷⁷⁰ He writes in 1905 that ‘I have long meant to paint something of the crowd on the Heath... There is something in real commonness that is most alluring – the bad music of the vilely coloured roundabouts – the hoarse voices of the people, the crowd’s pushing and horseplay – what is it makes it all so attractive?’: William Rothenstein to Margaret Woods, June 18th 1905, HGfN. He showed a painting entitled *Preparing for the Tube, Hampstead* at the N.E.A.C. in winter 1903, but there are no known paintings of The Heath.

⁷⁷¹ Carrington (1965) 30.

⁷⁷² John (1975) 316.

keen damp about the Heath' on one of their visits, finding 'something spectacular about it – something strange, as if we were driving through the pages of a story book'.⁷⁷³

Indeed, in *Mendel*, Hampstead and the Heath take on an almost mythic quality, constantly drawn up in comparison to the cramped inner-city conditions of East End London.

"I shall hate to go back to London after this," [Mendel] said.

"I've never been there," she replied.

"Will you let me take you to Hampstead? It has lilies and water."

"Oh yes," she said eagerly.⁷⁷⁴

Rothenstein's impression of Hampstead probably never matched the ardent enthusiasm of the over-earnest Mendel; nevertheless he clearly appreciated the fact that Hampstead was still – in its 'top part' at least – 'a little country town', clearly removed from 'the crowd at Kensington'.⁷⁷⁵

His desire to be removed from the crowd may be surprising to those who consider Rothenstein's character to be an essentially cosmopolitan one: who think of him as the ultimate social networker and the tireless organiser, only at home amidst the hustle and bustle of inner city life. It fits well, however, with the image of him as someone who, at the turn of the century, sought a more serious, settled identity. Hampstead's ambiguous status – neither a country village, nor part of central London – seems to have suited Rothenstein perfectly. In 1911 he wrote that 'I hate my name to be on things; as a rule no one will do much in the way of work where these things turn up, and in my unfortunate way I usually have to do some of it'; a comment that cuts to the heart of his practices during this period.⁷⁷⁶ There is in him an initial resistance and subsequent submittal to involvement, a tension reflected in the choice of Hampstead as

⁷⁷³ Moore (1933) 280.

⁷⁷⁴ Cannan (1916) 202. Elsewhere he describes the Heath as 'a place of freedom and surpassing loveliness': *Ibid.* 72.

⁷⁷⁵ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, November 18th 1902, HGTN. John Rothenstein claims in his memoirs that they moved to Church Row, 'when I was about two years old': he was in fact fifteen months old. He also claims that 'we lived for some ten years in Church Row', though facts suggest they moved to Oak Hill Park Road as early as 1906: J Rothenstein (1965) 1.

⁷⁷⁶ Lago (1978) 28.

base; an area removed, but not too far removed, from the centre of things. Rothenstein was clearly striking out for independence, but it was a cautious sort of striking all the same; maybe even a misguided one. The desire to seem more serious could be mistaken for a desire to settle down completely; to surrender to a bourgeois vision of comfortable domesticity.

What did his friends and family feel? Throughout his life Rothenstein seems to have misunderstood the effect these physical removals would have on friends. When he returned to London in the early 1920s he was annoyed to find that previous contacts were not warm in their welcome; as if his moving to Gloucestershire hadn't, in its way, signalled a lack of interest in the London art scene.⁷⁷⁷ To be married was one thing, but to be married and living in Hampstead, with one child already, provided a clear hint that his Chelsea days were firmly behind him. Was it too much to expect his friends from those days not to be hurt? Might they not feel that Hampstead represented a degree of social elevation unsuited to an artist who had once thrilled his contemporaries with tales of 1890s Paris night-life?

Rothenstein's sister Blanche was glad to hear of the Hampstead move, having fond memories of the place herself: 'I saw a good deal of Hampstead... & always thought the air up there wonderfully invigorating & the scenery on the heath, fine'.⁷⁷⁸ Others, however, were less positive. The Michael Fields made their first visit on a 'malign' day in 'shimmering spring', finding Hampstead a 'mighty mole-hill, oppressive to our hearts, physically and aesthetically'.⁷⁷⁹ The hill is remarked upon by most; Augustus John recalls stopping for refreshment on the way up – partly because it was a long climb, partly because of the 'quality of the liquor' available at the King of Bohemia.⁷⁸⁰ The austere, high life that Rothenstein was living Hampstead clearly didn't allow for the low pleasures of alcohol. Indeed, the fact that Rothenstein was now literally 'above' many of his friends was not lost on them. Certainly, it adds a fitting symbolism to these accounts of young artists seeking out advice from someone who has

⁷⁷⁷ William Rothenstein to D.S.MacColl, May 2nd 1926, HGTN.

⁷⁷⁸ William Rothenstein to Blanche Schwabe, Jan 27th 1903, HGTN.

⁷⁷⁹ Moore (1933) 279. Elsewhere they wrote: 'We could not live in Hampstead – but we must cement this new friendship by visiting it for a day or two'. Ibid. 280.

⁷⁸⁰ John (1975) 315-6.

already 'risen' in the art world. By the time Nash and Gertler visited him he had moved still further up the hill, to a house which 'had a sweeping view... from the large windows in the back rooms'; 'a vast panorama of London – roofs, chimneys, steeples, domes – under a shifting pall of blue smoke'.⁷⁸¹ The impression is very much of the artist lording it over London; the city and its lowly denizens gathered at his feet. Hampstead stands, it seems, for Rothenstein's sense of his own progression.

The Michael Fields remark of how, passing The Spaniards (Spaniard's Inn Pub in Hampstead): 'the student of old, we remember fresh from the Latin Quarter, wakes yearningly in Rothenstein, as he looks into the little sheds and remembers how he envied his London model because she had an appointment, far out, at the Spaniards'.⁷⁸² Back in 1894 the Fields had visited Rothenstein in his studio at Tite Street in Chelsea and left the following remarks: 'two candles, a great luminous twilight, & the curly cub of an artist chattering incessantly as a bird sings. He is blessed in his poverty, lunching on an egg and some marmalade'.⁷⁸³ The fact that he has now made it out to The Spaniards himself, wife and son in tow, may blind us to the fact that the days of 'egg and some marmalade' had *not* necessarily been left at the bottom of the hill. Though he was clearly living in much better conditions than Gertler would have been used to in Whitechapel, the concept of him 'living the high life' in Hampstead needs to be carefully examined.

It is certainly a difficult image to shift. More so than ever, Hampstead lives in people's minds as a securely well-to-do area. John associates his visits to Rothenstein with a commission 'to do two drawings through the intermediation of a fashionable lady of Hampstead'.⁷⁸⁴ The word 'fashionable' stays in the mind when he goes on to write of how Rothenstein and his wife 'were in the habit of entertaining a small elite of writers and artists'.⁷⁸⁵ There is here a faint whiff of the modish Edwardian patron; an image somewhat out of kilter with the reality of the situation.

'We are terribly poor,' was Rothenstein's own take on his situation in 1902,

⁷⁸¹ Nash (1988) 86; Cannan (1916) 74.

⁷⁸² They add to the romance of the place by noting that 'a little air that haunts Watteau's *Fête Champêtre* is not quite away': Moore (1933) 280.

⁷⁸³ January 6th 1894; Treby (2006) 129.

⁷⁸⁴ John (1975) 315.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

writing to Von Hofmann that ‘moving house, doctors, nurses, have got us into debt, and I am suffering a little from this. I hope I shall earn some money in the spring, or I won’t be able to invite you. We live on rusks and bread and butter – very little meat’.⁷⁸⁶ As Robert Speaight has noted, Rothenstein might have been guilty of over-emphasising the desperate nature of his finances; nonetheless, it would be difficult to claim that this was a prosperous decade for the artist.⁷⁸⁷ Sales were consistently low – and his reliance on family money continued unabated. The growth of his family (five children were born between 1901-08) would not have helped.⁷⁸⁸ In fact, Rothenstein’s move to Hampstead only really gave the impression of settling; in reality he was still struggling. His kindness to others; and keen co-operation in arranging financial help for others may have given the impression that he was, himself, financially secure.⁷⁸⁹ This was not quite the case; Rothenstein frequently sought for other artists that which he did not necessarily have himself. Rothenstein could never be a prosperous patron, but he did have the connections through which money might be found, whether it be his collector brother Charles (who bought many of his friend’s work), or his roles at the N.E.A.C, the Carfax Gallery, the Society of Twelve and, as we shall see, the Jewish Education Art Society.

The mental shift which the move represented was less of a fantasy. Financially superior he may not have been, but he seems to have given some the impression of being morally so. A ‘terror of night chills’ put Steer and Tonks off visiting Rothenstein, but it may just as well have been the loftiness of his ambitions.⁷⁹⁰ Steer’s memorable comment – ‘William Rothenstein paints very much like the rest of us, only from higher motives’ – comes to mind once again; this time, the height contains a literal meaning also.⁷⁹¹ Church Row, high on Hampstead’s hill, was a strangely appropriate address for an artist who, in his Jewish and, later, Indian works, seemed to be throwing himself into spiritual concerns; a street by the Heath the right sort of place for someone preaching

⁷⁸⁶ Speaight (1962) 160-1. As was often the case, Rothenstein relied on financial aid from his family to secure the new Hampstead house: William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, August 20th 1902, HGTN.

⁷⁸⁷ Speaight (1962) 168-9. Rothenstein described the year of their move to Hampstead as a ‘desperate’ one.

⁷⁸⁸ John (1901), un-named child [died shortly after birth] (1902), Rachel (1903), Betty, (1905) and William (known as Michael) (1908).

⁷⁸⁹ The move to Gloucestershire in 1912 was partly financed by selling art work; it was not a reflection of any recent financial success.

⁷⁹⁰ Speaight (1962) 165.

⁷⁹¹ See Speaight (1962) 105.

of a return to Nature.⁷⁹² Beerbohm, unsurprisingly, was one of many to pick up on this aspect of Rothenstein's identity, casting him in the role of the Messiah.⁷⁹³ The Michael Fields, meanwhile, had christened William 'The Heavenly Dog' and wrote of how he described his friends as 'my Alps' ('with them we breathe purest air'); a hint, perhaps, of the exclusiveness of Hampstead: an escape from low-lying Chelsea, crammed with artistic acquaintances, into a place where his circle of friends might be pruned to include only the most worthy.⁷⁹⁴ With age, marriage and the force of his personality he had fully graduated from guest to host. Those who didn't care for the new role could stay at the bottom of the hill.

Augustus John writes of how Rothenstein's spirit would, on occasion, 'soar beyond the reach of an intractable brush and the maddening problems of light, into regions of pure speculation, whence he would look down on struggling humanity as from the top of a tower' adding, to temper the fancy of the thought, that he did so 'with the understanding, tolerance and humour of one who had himself, as the saying is "been through it"'.⁷⁹⁵ It is likely that Rothenstein played the role of prophet with more mischievousness than he is given credit for, but he couldn't have escaped the reality that the powers bestowed on him by way of his instinct to influence gave him a somewhat Olympian reputation. His fictional double in *Mendel*, for instance, is introduced as 'the famous Froitzheim, the arbiter of [Mendel's] immediate fortunes'.⁷⁹⁶ Rothenstein's fame may be over-exaggerated: his power is not. His role as advisor to Jewish Education Art Society made him directly responsible for the futures of young Jewish artists such as Gertler. Though he had no direct access to large sums of money, by taking on such roles he *did* put himself in a position to marshal the money of others. This gave him a degree of power unconnected to the state of his own finances, and helps us understand

⁷⁹² Rothenstein's call for a 'return to Nature' was generally embraced by his old friends; the interest in India less so. In Fred Brown's words his Indian work was 'regarded without much sympathy': Fred Brown to William Rothenstein, May 22nd 1914, HGTN. Rothenstein had written to Brown complaining that old friends, particularly N.E.A.C. members, had been cold about his work. The allusion is probably to Steer and Tonks.

⁷⁹³ See Beckson and Lago (1975) 51

⁷⁹⁴ Moore (1933) 281-282. Heavenly Dog was after Kalim, the Japanese dog of heaven (who turned out to be the lion of Chinese heaven). Rothenstein's (self-appointed, as it turns out) role was to 'bark...and keep Ricketts away from Heaven'. Alice was called 'Noli', from 'Noli Me Tangere': see also W Rothenstein (1937c) 113.

⁷⁹⁵ John (1975) 317.

⁷⁹⁶ Cannan (1916) 74.

why the gap between Rothenstein and Gertler was perceived by Cannan (if not by Gertler) to be as large as it appears to be in *Mendel*.

The way Cannan builds up the narrative only intensifies this opposition. Froitzheim is accessed via a walk across the Heath, a path taken to calm the young artist's thoughts, which stands in for a sense of pilgrimage, and the sense of distance between Mendel and Froitzheim – if not between Froitzheim and the forces of nature (represented by the Heath, with which the hero Mendel feels a unsurprising intimacy). The Heath in *Mendel* represents escape; though Froitzheim lives near the Heath, he is not *of* it. He is not fresh and unalloyed, like Mendel, but layered; perverted by the world of men: an unnatural 'self deceiver'.⁷⁹⁷ Froitzheim's experience is a chimera; only by hiding his origins has he been able to give the impression of progression.

Cannan's claim is a controversial one, as we shall see; nevertheless it should already be evident how Rothenstein's choice of Hampstead as a home might have led to such readings of his character. This was a problem of which Rothenstein was not, I believe, unaware. That to which he was drawn – the charm and beauty of Hampstead – also made him feel uneasy. After four years of living at No.26, Church Row (later described by Pevsner as 'the best street in Hampstead') he was again restless.⁷⁹⁸

This was despite initial enthusiasm. In August 1902 he had written to his father: 'one house we have found, suitable both as a living house & as a painting one – it would serve me nobly in the way of interiors, as the rooms are most exquisite'.⁷⁹⁹ A 1912 description of the street appears to confirm its suitability for a man of self-conscious austerity, noting a 'soberness of effect much to be admired'; a 'homely' place, 'quite lacking in "monumental" qualities'.⁸⁰⁰ Others remark on its 'restrained elegance', whilst noting the early eighteenth-century origin of the houses, intended at first for 'gentleman's families with a fair complement of servants' or as 'summer residences for families who also kept a London house'.⁸⁰¹ Restrained it may have been, but the

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid. 79.

⁷⁹⁸ Pevsner and Cherry (1998) 220.

⁷⁹⁹ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, August 20th 1902, HGTN.

⁸⁰⁰ Lloyd (1912) 124.

⁸⁰¹ Thompson (1964) 24.

impression of wealth seemed bound to bleed through eventually; if not through the impressions of those who visited, then through the paintings he completed there. After all, Rothenstein was during this period obsessed with interiors – aspects of his house were therefore quite literally open to visitors of the N.E.A.C, or his Carfax exhibitions.

Indeed, the living room of his previous house in Kensington had already gained small fame as the backdrop to one of his more popular paintings, *The Browning Readers* (1900: fig.5). According to his biographer Robert Speaight, ‘the brass plate, and blue and white vase, with branches of spring blossom, which were the only adornment of the mantelpiece, started a craze for simplicity’.⁸⁰² One lady wrote to the press, encouraging people to have ‘no more serried ranks of framed photographs, clocks, bronzes of poor design, and undistinguished china ornaments cluttering up their rooms’; a much-needed reform for which ‘some credit should go to Mr William Rothenstein’.⁸⁰³ Perhaps some credit ought also to have gone to Mr Whistler, from whom Rothenstein picked up many of the decorative skills on show, though the effect of the painting in question remains stamped by his own personality, incorporating elements that were to be a long-running feature of his work.

Though the emphasis is usually on the decoration, the part played by the house itself must not be discounted. Just as the strange staircase depicted in *The Doll's House* [fig.2] heightens the peculiar atmosphere of that work, so the small, neatly decorated room in Pembroke Cottages accentuates the homely atmosphere of the painting; creating a warmth lacking in slightly later interiors. As it happens, his early assertion that 26 Church Row ‘would serve me nobly in the way of interiors’ was to prove false; ‘I came to feel its very beauty to be a defect,’ he later reflected – ‘it was all *too* perfect, too stylish; for I was aiming at something more elemental than a Queen Anne interior. I was painting wife and child, and wished to suggest every-wife and every-child; and Queen Anne got in the way.’⁸⁰⁴ The white panelled rooms of Church Row – an elegant feature in the opinion of many – clearly disrupted his artistic ideals. The beauty and wealth of the house began to creep into and engulf his paintings. In *Mother and Child* (1903: fig 39)

⁸⁰² Speaight (1962) 149.

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁴ W Rothenstein (1937c) 32. The Queen Anne style had been a popular feature of late nineteenth aesthetic taste, from which Rothenstein appears to be distancing himself.

we find his wife Alice, and son John being swallowed up by the panelled walls. Though the room retains the simple arrangements of *The Browning Readers*, it no longer functions in the same way; above the ornate fire-place and below the bright expanse of painted wood, the objects on the mantelpiece look a little lost. The hard, straight chair (unlike the loose wicker armchair of *The Browning Readers*) appears to contradict the tenderness of the figures, whilst the empty fire exaggerates the general effect of coldness.

The same applies to another interior from this period – the simply named *An Interior* (c.1903: fig.40) – in which a female figure reads at a table, her hand on her forehead, as if struggling to concentrate. The white panelled wall behind her is empty of decoration; vaguely threatening in its clean, sparse brightness; the window left invitingly open, tempting escape.⁸⁰⁵ As he put it: ‘Queen Anne got in the way’; a curious intrusion, since the artist ought to have had control over what did and what didn’t make it onto his canvas. If he didn’t want the background to intrude, why didn’t he return to the earlier manner of *Parting at Morning* (1891) and *Femme Nue Assise* (1892), with their plain gold and blue backdrops, or the loose brown of the 1901 study for *Mother and Child* [fig.41]?

Queen Anne’s intrusion, nonetheless, is indicative of a wider problem. The surfeit of beauty he found in the house reminds us, once again, of his leaning towards the less obvious; his penchant for a sober and simple style. It also hints at his tension over the type of life he might be thought to be leading. He wrote later of how 26 Church Row was a ‘museum piece’; certainly Alice and John in *Mother and Child* both look like objects out of place, rented models in a rented room.⁸⁰⁶ But William too seems to have felt out of place: a visitor in his own home. It is as if the house was reflecting an aspect of his personality he didn’t want to see; his pretensions to beauty and gentility – his progression, real or perceived, towards the role of the wealthy, settled artist.

His thoughts on moving, but five minutes away, to 11 Oak Hill Park Road, sum up the situation well: ‘It was indeed a relief to be in an ordinary house’, he wrote,

⁸⁰⁵ Open windows were a feature of Rothenstein’s interiors. In two earlier works – both, it seems, from the Pembroke Cottage days – Alice is standing by an open window: see *At the Window* c.1900 (Manchester City Art Gallery) and *An Interior* c.1900 (private collection; not to be confused with another painting called *An Interior*, painted at a later date).

⁸⁰⁶ W Rothenstein (1937c) 95.

stressing the ‘large, plain Victorian rooms’ (‘plain’ being, I believe, the operative word) and ‘large garden’.⁸⁰⁷ What evidence of pretension there was – ‘portentous chandeliers and grates’ and ceilings ‘heavily ornamented with rosettes’ – was stripped out before the Rothensteins moved in.⁸⁰⁸ Needless to say, there was no panelling.

The interiors completed here once again reflect the artist’s relationship with his house. His 1910 work *Spring, the Morning Room* [fig.42] is, essentially, a re-working of the 1903 *Mother and Child*, albeit a much lighter, warmer affair, with the ‘large garden’ taking the place of the dreaded panelled walls; the window functioning as a means of showing off the way the house integrates interior and exterior, rather than suggesting an escape from the stuffiness of the interior.⁸⁰⁹ His 1910 portrait of *Eric Gill and Alice* [fig.43] meanwhile, reveals to us the third of Rothenstein’s living room fireplaces. Again, it is a simpler, and less disconcerting set-up to that found in the 1903 work – and one around which the figures seem well at home; Alice’s hand resting on the mantelpiece possessively; Rothenstein himself present in the form of his 1904 painting, *The Quarry* [fig.21] hanging on the wall behind. Eric Gill, in bright red robes, has a slightly awkward presence; though this seems to spring from his relation to Alice, if not from the evident irregularities of his own personality.

The effect of the Oak Hill Park interior was not lost on younger visitors, as our accounts by Nash and, through Gertler, Cannan suggest. The latter dwells, unsurprisingly, on the size of the house, whilst noting that it was ‘marvellously clean and light and airy’.⁸¹⁰ Nash is more than merely overwhelmed; picking up on the subtleties of the space – and the obvious relation to the personalities of its inhabitants. He writes, therefore, of the house’s ‘intelligently considered spaces, its colours in a low key, set off with perfect effect the many lovely pictures and objects, which had been selected with subtle discrimination to enhance the simple forms of the furniture, most of which was

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid. 90, 95. After a visit to the Rothensteins in Hampstead in 1906 Max Beerbohm commented on their ‘very plain living and very high thinking, and Will very happy therein; but Alice and I hankering after richer food and poorer cerebation’: Hart-Davies (1964) 162

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid. 90.

⁸⁰⁹ *Spring, Morning Room*, 1910 (Southampton Art Gallery; also known as *Mother and Child, Morning Room*)

⁸¹⁰ Cannan (1916) 74.

very plainly upholstered.⁸¹¹ Here we get closer to a more complex vision of Rothenstein; one which recognises the various strands of his personality – and the ways in which he attempted to reveal these to the world through the decoration of his house. Nash reflects less on the apparent richness of Rothenstein himself, than on the richness of his taste. The interior of the Oak Hill Park house physically replicates the breadth of the artist's mind, each object hinting at a further passion. 'I began to make the acquaintance of Indian drawings, Cotswold furniture and the dignified compositions of the New English Art Club', writes Nash, all of which were represented in one form or another; not jumbled together in some strange mix, but mingling subtly, as if their differences barely mattered. *The Browning Readers* (1900), *An Interior* (c.1900) and *Eric Gill and Alice* (1910), coupled with contemporary photographs, give us some sense of how this may have worked.⁸¹²

These paintings, like many of the period, all have something else in common: the presence of Alice Rothenstein [fig.44]. Of course, marriage was not a guarantee of a more stable life. 'Just recovering from the nervous breakdown following his recent marriage,' was how Augustus John was to describe himself in 1901: he, for one, wasn't going to be tied down.⁸¹³ William and Alice were, however, much more of a team; he saw her as asset to his career, rather than a distraction – and it is worth considering a few ways in which she fulfilled this role.

To start with the most obvious point – he painted her.⁸¹⁴ Because she was there, because he enjoyed it and because it corresponded with his ideals; with his desire to concentrate on the 'elemental' aspects of human life. His children were also to appear in paintings, including *In the Morning Room* (c.1905), *The Princess Badroulbador* (1908: fig.45) *Princess Betty* (c.1910) and *Rachel, Queen* (c.1910), the exhibition of which would have reinforced the artist's identity as a family man; perhaps also, in regards to the fabrics worn by the children in these paintings (and the clothes worn by Alice throughout), a

⁸¹¹ Nash (1988) 86.

⁸¹² For photographs see Lago (1972).

⁸¹³ John (1975) 316. He refers, later on in the same passage, to 'the insidious encroachments of domesticity' – seeming to suggest that he preferred Rothenstein's home to his own.

⁸¹⁴ Alice also modelled for Alphonse Legros, Philip Wilson Steer and Augustus John.

man of some wealth. We need not know whether these indicate that Rothenstein *was* more financially secure than he was inclined to reveal; rather that, to a younger artist, they would certainly *seem* to.

Upon hearing of his marriage in 1899, D.S. MacColl wrote to Rothenstein the following words: ‘marriage ought to help you in many ways by cutting down the social dispersion we are apt to suffer from when not anchored & allowing you to centre on your work’.⁸¹⁵ Certainly, it seems that Rothenstein’s habit of laying down the law was to some extent smoothed by his wife’s presence; she drew his friends back, if not to benefit from Rothenstein’s influence, than to enjoy her ‘radiant personality’.⁸¹⁶ As MacColl himself noted: ‘the balance of amusing levity against excess of gravity, however, was kept in the Rothenstein partnership not only by William’s own irrepressible wit but by a happy spirit of mischievous fun in his wife’.⁸¹⁷ She helped keep contacts like Augustus John from recoiling entirely from Rothenstein’s close attention. ‘There was always Alice Rothenstein’, John later mused, reflecting on his visits to Church Row: ‘Her comprehensive smile seemed to entoil everybody in a common enchantment. This was the nearest we got to intoxication, for our host’s rule of austerity prohibited any closer approach’.⁸¹⁸ Nash was part of this common enchantment – ‘I was kindly welcomed and introduced to my hostess who at once encompassed me with a gracious yet enigmatic smile’ – so too Cannan’s Mendel, who finds Edith Froitzheim to be a ‘woman with a friendly smile and an air of being only too amiable for a world that needed sadly little of the kindness with which she was bursting’; ‘terrifyingly beautiful,

⁸¹⁵ D.S. MacColl to William Rothenstein, June 3rd 1899, HGTV. Mr Tilney Tysoe, a character from Cannan’s *Mendel*, proffers the following advice: ‘Of course, I know, artists have their own view on that subject, but there is a great deal to be said for marriage’: Cannan (1916) 386.

⁸¹⁶ Speaight (1962) 148. A frustrated Robert Ross wrote to William during this period that ‘since your marriage, your wife understands me a great deal better than you do... When you have doubts about me and lack of sympathy, if you will consult Alice without reference to me I can leave my views and my character with her in trust. Being much simpler from an ethical standpoint she is able to understand complex people, including Will Rothenstein’: Ibid. 168.

⁸¹⁷ MacColl (1945) 69.

⁸¹⁸ John (1975) 315. Though many of Rothenstein’s clearly found his wife attractive, W H Hudson was the only one who confessed to being in love with her. ‘He was captivated by Alice Rothenstein,’ wrote Hudson’s biographer: ‘after one of the Wednesday tea-parties, when the atmosphere had been particularly strained, Hudson went to the door with Mrs Rothenstein, who burst into tears and exclaimed passionately, “Why do you stay here? Why don’t you find someone to love, and go away?” to be silenced by the quiet bitterness of his answer: “Oh, I’ve loved you for years. *For years*”’: Tomalin (1984) 215-6

the most lovely lady he had ever seen'.⁸¹⁹ Like the actress she had once been, Alice played the part of hostess with aplomb.

Whilst she was not the only lure – the Michael Fields, for one, remind us that Rothenstein (for all his austerity) was still a talented conversationalist and host – Alice balanced the less attractive aspects of her husband's personality, and eased his passage to becoming a more effective host.⁸²⁰ Never scared of social networking, marriage nevertheless gave Rothenstein social confidence, allowing him to place himself, and his home, more at the centre of things.

Hampstead helped him form new circles, many of which were only passably connected to the art world. Old friends, like Conder, Tonks, Steer, Nicholson and Sickert were still to some extent present, but new names seem to have dominated, in particular those from the literary field. Joseph Conrad, W H Hudson, John Masefield, John Galsworthy, W B Yeats, A E Housmann, Edward Gordon Craig and H G Wells were among the fresher faces, with Robert Cunninghame-Graham, George Moore and, of course, the Michael Fields, representing older friends. Some of these, such as the Fields, came to Hampstead separately. Many, however, took advantage of the Rothenstein's Wednesday evening 'at homes'. These were not necessarily a new thing; Laurence Housmann's comment – 'If your Wednesdays have not died with your bachelorhood' – suggest that this day had been used before his marriage.⁸²¹ Nevertheless, they seem to have come into their own during this decade.

Of course, such events, by their very nature informal, resist easy examination. It is difficult to say exactly who came, how often, and for how long; what attracted them there in the first place, what kept them going back – what happened, even. If Rothenstein held them throughout the decade (as it seems he did) it is likely that the make-up of these events underwent many changes. It would be foolish to presume that half of the names listed above would be present at any one time; quite a few of them, perhaps, never met each other. Or maybe they met elsewhere. 'At homes' were a feature

⁸¹⁹ Nash (1988) 86, Cannan (1916) 77.

⁸²⁰ Of Alice the Michael Fields once wrote: 'A welcome so friendly – Noli's, as when a perverse bee hums'. Elsewhere they note 'a sort of blessing over that house, traceable in the end to Billy' [William]. Moore (1933) 282-3.

⁸²¹ W Rothenstein (1937b) 350.

of the period, after all (many of those who attended Rothenstein's held their own on different days of the week) – why, we might ask, are Rothenstein's any more deserving of our attention?

We forget, perhaps, his status as an 'important personage'; his well-established reputation as a figure of influence, a man with a wide circle of friends, crossing a range of ages, classes and disciplines. His address-book was a large one – and ever growing. A steady stream of famous names passed through his studio, waiting to be drawn. 'Heavens what a man of parts you are,' noted an impressed Gordon Craig in 1908: 'Bernard Shaw Monday. Henry Irving Tuesday. A W Pinero Wednesday. When's Hall Caine's turn?'⁸²² From the theatre to the Houses of Parliament, Rothenstein's studio was never short of big names. Others he met sitting on committees, organizing and attending exhibitions. In-between time he kept in touch via letters; the size of his correspondence a testament in itself to his wide influence. Indeed, for all the talk of Rothenstein as a socially active figure – the human 'meteorite' of Beerbohm's *Enoch Soames* – his influence may have spread most successfully through the quiet practice of letter-writing. There are plenty of suggestions that, for some, this may have been so.⁸²³ But perhaps this is merely a reflection of the material that remains; when all the brilliant talk is gone – the un-recorded interaction between unspecified groups – we *have* to fall back on the letters. In Rothenstein's case, fortunately, they have a lot to say; but what of this hard-to-quantify other? What can we make of that?

Their Wednesday 'at homes' were just one part of a large, albeit loose, agenda. What evidence there is suggests, nevertheless, that they were an influential part. Rothenstein himself had no doubt of it. 'Our Wednesday evenings continue to be the most brilliant entertainments of Hampstead,' he boasted to his father in 1910, noting 'the refinements of Mayfair being weekly married to the rougher eloquence of the new cut'.⁸²⁴ Here he turns the tensions of his Hampstead existence, with its illusions of

⁸²² Edward Gordon Craig to William Rothenstein, Feb 14th 1908, HG TN.

⁸²³ Conrad wrote to Rothenstein in 1908: 'Your letters have for me the great quality of comfort. You always do say something that puts heart into me. The words of a man who is so completely an artist, not only in temperament and genius but in the very soul, have a special significance, an absolute value apart from the preciousness of the friendship of which you have given me many proofs': Joseph Conrad to William Rothenstein, 19th August 1908, HG TN.

⁸²⁴ William to Albert Rutherston, March 5th 1910, HG TN.

prosperity, to his advantage: it becomes yet another equivocal space, where two classes meet, neither sure which is the more at home. This strange marriage of friends is clearly a point of pride to Rothenstein; much like his own, ostensibly irregular marriage.⁸²⁵ The fear of forming a clique becomes evident, again, with much satisfaction lying in the catholicity of his contacts. There were shared experiences and interests, of course – but no scent of a movement; nothing, for all Rothenstein’s seriousness, dauntingly didactic.

Augustus John, who left the most positive account of these evenings, clearly benefitted from what he calls the ‘fresh and easy-going character of these gatherings’, the like of which he had never before experienced.⁸²⁶ Under such conditions, Rothenstein could quietly, and less dangerously, indulge in his instinct to influence; backing up one-to-one advice with behind-the-scenes liaising; ultimately softening the force of his ‘tireless ebullience’ with the help of friends (and under the cover of ‘entertainment’). The art of influence was the same balancing act it had always been. The longer it went it went on, the more likely someone would, as Augustus John did, give ground and collapse. But this is not to say that, at some point, Rothenstein didn’t get the balance right. Indeed, John credits Rothenstein for having managed this early on in their relationship, noting how he, John (still masquerading as his alter-ego, George) ‘began to expand and blossom forth himself, in a style combining scholarship with an attractive diffidence and humour’.⁸²⁷ To this he adds, rather curiously: ‘This led to a close intimacy, but never, I believe, to any relationship exceeding the bounds of propriety. The liaison was of the spirit. Will, on his part always on the lookout for signs of intelligence, especially in his admirers, took George, so to speak, to his bosom...’⁸²⁸ Perhaps John is merely exhibiting said humour, alluding back to the Balzacian model of influence, that of the predatory Vautrin and his handsome young charge Lucien; or else reminding his readers, once again, of the complexities of such relationships, impropriety

⁸²⁵ As suggested, many friends – and indeed family – found Alice and William an unlikely couple, both physically (he small and dark, she tall and fair) and in terms of personality. Beerbohm did a caricature of William and Alice [c.1900] having dinner at Pembroke Cottages, highlighting these differences (Alice is self-composed and elegant, William somewhat uncouth and grim-faced). Though owned by the family, it is said that Alice refused to hang it on the wall. For John Rothenstein on his parents see J Rothenstein (1965) 12-4. See also fn.104.

⁸²⁶ John (1975) 316.

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

or no impropriety. The ‘I believe’, casually tucked into the middle of the sentence, is indicative of the tension created; tension which ensures that John, several decades later, still cannot quite get the grips with the nature of his relationship with Rothenstein. We leave, nonetheless, with no doubt that, at one point or another, the relationship *did* allow him to ‘expand and blossom’: a natural metaphor that Rothenstein would certainly have approved of; one that approaches his own model of influence, explored in the opening chapter, with its talk of planting seeds and fertilising spirits.⁸²⁹

Such lyrical evocations of the relationship between two friends remain, for all their charms, frustratingly vague. It can be a relief, therefore, to turn to tangible examples of Rothenstein’s assistance. Many of these are financial. More and more, this was the way in which he chose to support his friends, recognising that it was no good encouraging them to do something if it was beyond their means. Some sort of financial security was, then, the first priority. If he could not be patron himself, he could use his contacts to find others.⁸³⁰ The success of Augustus John’s early exhibitions owed a lot to Rothenstein’s advocacy.⁸³¹ When John was working in Liverpool he, like Conder and Sickert before him, used Rothenstein as a London agent, relying on either the Carfax or, quite simply, William’s social skills to shift his drawings. A letter from Rothenstein to his father suggests that this was a role he played gladly: ‘John has been sending me some very wonderful drawings from Liverpool, some of which I have been able to sell for him & and some people are coming in to tea today who may buy some more’; evidence of one of the less easily definable ways in which artists sold work.⁸³² Still, it was clearly a successful ploy; John wrote a week later, exclaiming ‘You have sold hundreds for me! It is all your philosopher’s stone has done it...’⁸³³ And again, four days later: ‘came Ricketts & Shannon’s cheques – Mon Cher! What wonders have you worked? What can I do for

⁸²⁹ See W Rothenstein (1937b) 174-5.

⁸³⁰ William’s art collection was much smaller than his brother Charles’ – and much of it was sold in 1912 to pay for the Gloucestershire house: nonetheless he bought a fair amount. Some of his purchases were made on behalf of Charles, or his brother-in-law, Edgar Hesslein, who lived in New York.

⁸³¹ Holroyd (1996) 88, 107.

⁸³² William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, February 28th 1902, HGTN.

⁸³³ Augustus John to William Rothenstein, March 5th 1902, HGTN.

you?⁸³⁴

Even when he was selling so little himself, Rothenstein helped maintain the flow of other artist's sales. No amount of kind words could, it seems, replace the act of actually buying a work, or encouraging another to do the same. Paul Nash describes with emotion the effect of Rothenstein buying a work at his 1912 Carfax show:

All at once Rothenstein said 'I should like to buy No. 5.' I had a wild impulse to clap him on the back and shake his hand, but he still looked very grave, on the point of tears almost. Suddenly I felt my eyes pricking. I thought we should both burst into tears and frighten Clifton. I told Rothenstein as well as I could how much I appreciated his gesture. Indeed, it was a charming thing to have done. For me at that point in my career it seemed, as if by magic, to change the aspect of my first real venture from something accorded a hesitating acceptance into a distinguished triumph and one that had been recognised by the highest award.⁸³⁵

Another young artist, Ambrose McEvoy, wrote one day to thank Rothenstein for buying one of his works.⁸³⁶ On another occasion there was nothing to buy – so help for McEvoy and his artist wife Mary had to be secured by setting up a fund: 'I have seen Steer today,' wrote Fred Brown to Rothenstein in 1904, 'and was informed of your idea of assisting the McEvoy's who I am sorry to hear again are in low water'.⁸³⁷ This was not the first time Brown had answered one of Rothenstein's appeals. In 1899 he agreed to help Sickert by buying a painting, a situation complicated by the fact that, as he wrote, 'I do not particularly want to possess the picture – I therefore make him the following proposition – I am prepared to pay 20£ for the picture and to leave it in your possession for 12 months with full permission to sell it for any amount greater than 20£... I will at the same time try to find a purchaser for it though I have not much influence of that kind – In the event of your succeeding I stipulate for the return of the 20£ but should the picture not sell within the 12 months it is to be returned to me'.⁸³⁸ It

⁸³⁴ Augustus John to William Rothenstein, March 9th 1902, HGTN.

⁸³⁵ Nash (1988) 128.

⁸³⁶ Ambrose McEvoy to William Rothenstein, undated [c.1902-4], HGTN.

⁸³⁷ Fred Brown to William Rothenstein, June 6th 1904, HGTN.

⁸³⁸ Fred Brown to William Rothenstein, June 3rd, 1899, HGTN. An undated letter from Sickert reveals his reaction to these events: 'But my dear Willhelm, enchanted! Not Fred Brown? It is really very good of him. Of you I don't speak...': Walter Sickert to William Rothenstein, undated from Dieppe [summer

was intricate stuff, organising underhanded financial help, and perhaps it is no surprise that the artists of this generation, Rothenstein included, fought hard for the creation of a Society that might take care of such business for them: hence the Contemporary Arts Society, founded in 1910.

Artists were not, however, the only beneficiaries of Rothenstein's generosity. Writers were also among the regular visitors at his Hampstead homes and, as my opening quote attests, were no less subject to assistance. In men such as John Masefield, William Hudson and Joseph Conrad, Rothenstein found qualities he was very keen to foster or support.⁸³⁹ We may wonder what that was exactly: was it simply that they were struggling more than others, or was there something in their work or personality that marked them out? Hudson and Conrad, like Rothenstein (to some extent), had exotic backgrounds; Hudson had grown up on the Argentine Pampas, whilst the Polish-born Conrad [fig.46] famously spent his early life at sea, in the French and British Merchant Navy. The young Masefield had also spent time as sailor, and a short period as a impoverished writer in New York, before returning in England in 1897, armed with 'about six pounds and a revolver'.⁸⁴⁰ Such backgrounds may have sparked the flame of romance in Rothenstein, or excited his desire to offer stability to those who had hitherto seen little of it. Or perhaps it lay in the writing itself. There does seem, at least, to have been much mutual admiration between the writers and the artist: a sense of working towards similar goals. Hudson, as a naturalist, may have reflected Rothenstein's increasing obsession with the open air and the natural world, exemplified by his 'Sunday tramps' during which Rothenstein and friends would breakfast together, then 'take tram and train to some place outside London and walk all day'.⁸⁴¹ Masefield's work had a similarly natural bent, especially towards the sea, though he was also keenly interested in art.⁸⁴² A few years before meeting Rothenstein he was already following the progress of

1899], HGTN.

⁸³⁹ The latter two were, of course, much older than Rothenstein. Hudson was born in 1841, Conrad in 1857. John Masefield was born in 1878.

⁸⁴⁰ Babington-Smith (1978) 49.

⁸⁴¹ The 'most constant tramps' were all writers; Rothenstein lists them as John Galsworthy, E.S.P. Haynes, Hugh Walpole, Hester and Maitland Radford – and H G Wells, who had recently moved into Church Row (and with whom Rothenstein used to play badminton): W Rothenstein (1937c) 100.

⁸⁴² Count Kessler, a mutual friend, made the inevitable comparison between Masefield and Conrad's work, to which the former replied: 'Kessler judges my work too kindly. I have my own little boat, stuck

modern art, with an early preference for the Barbizon School; indeed, he met Rothenstein through his friendship with another artist, William Strang.⁸⁴³ Conrad was less confident in the visual arts, but no less keen to learn, taking time to see Rothenstein's work, by which he was, on more than one occasion, 'very powerfully affected'.⁸⁴⁴ Rothenstein, in turn, 'excited me with his generous praise of the poor, clumsy book' (*Nostramo*, published in 1904).⁸⁴⁵ At one point Conrad even went so far as to compare their work, in terms of intention: 'I flatter myself that my *Typhoon* story is as *art* somewhere near – (if not *very* near) – your admirable picture – in *intention* I mean to say, for to your mastery of technique I can't pretend – even to myself'.⁸⁴⁶

Whatever it was attracted Rothenstein to these three writers, beyond an indistinct 'intellectual sympathy', was clearly accompanied by a serious desire to help them.⁸⁴⁷ 'You have evidently made up your mind to save me,' noted Conrad in 1904, adding 'thanks seem out of place'.⁸⁴⁸ And, later: 'I feel an extreme load of obligation to You – I don't say irksome, mind – but e[x]treme to that extent that it is only your personality that makes it so easily bearable'.⁸⁴⁹ He refers, alongside written encouragement, to a series of cash injections, culminating in a grant from the Royal

full of gimcracks and little gay flags, but I am not fit to be mentioned in the one breath with Conrad. I am not in the same sea with him': John Masefield to William Rothenstein, 12th December, 1905, HGTN. Masefield wrote to Rothenstein in 1910 that 'your work never fails to give me the re-assurance that art is the only form of moral discipline now among us, & the conviction that any lowering of the standards of art helps to let the barbarians into the fort': John Masefield to William Rothenstein, June 25th 1910, HGTN.

⁸⁴³ Babington-Smith (1978) 55, 67-8. Babington-Smith describes how Masefield's confidence as a young writer grew as a result of attending 'at homes'; starting with those given by W B Yeats, held on Monday evenings: Ibid. 62-3. see also W Rothenstein (1937b) 373.

⁸⁴⁴ Joseph Conrad to Alice Rothenstein, 18th April 1904, HGTN. Rothenstein writes elsewhere that 'Conrad had met few painters and was curious about the painter's outlook on life': W Rothenstein (1937c) 41. Conrad owned works by Ford Madox Brown.

⁸⁴⁵ Joseph Conrad to Alice Rothenstein, November 1904, HGTN.

⁸⁴⁶ Joseph Conrad to William Rothenstein, 11th March 1906, HGTN. The picture in question was probably one of his Jewish works. On their similarities of approach, Rothenstein noted: 'Through my painting, through my desire to wring all I could out of my subject, to aim at what was beyond me, rather than to achieve an easier and more attractive result, I could sympathise with Conrad's difficulties... I sympathised with him acutely in his desire to impress the passion of life on to his pages. This sympathy was, I think, the basis of our friendship; for Conrad seemed to understand what I too was aiming at in my painting': W Rothenstein (1937c) 43. There are moments in works such as Conrad's preface to *Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897) when one is reminded of Rothenstein's theoretical writing.

⁸⁴⁷ W Rothenstein (1937c) 41. What of political sympathies? Many of these Hampstead friends, such as Robert Cunninghame Graham, H G Wells and George Bernard Shaw, were connected with the socialist movement. Rothenstein notes that he 'leaned more towards radicalism than Conrad' (who 'couldn't abide Bernard Shaw') but stops typically short of explaining just how far he did lean. Ibid. 44.

⁸⁴⁸ Joseph Conrad to William Rothenstein, 27th June 1904, HGTN.

⁸⁴⁹ Joseph Conrad to William Rothenstein, 3rd July 1904, HGTN.

Bounty issued in 1906, instigated by Rothenstein with the help of Henry Newbolt and Edmund Gosse.⁸⁵⁰ Hudson's help had come five years earlier, in similar circumstances; a Civil List pension awarded in 1901, after much rallying by Sir Edward Grey, Edward Clodd and, it seems, William Rothenstein; providing financial security that allowed him, in the words of his biography, 'the greatest freedom and happiness he ever knew in England'.⁸⁵¹

Rothenstein was not alone in helping either of these writers; nor, it is likely, did he wish to be. It was not simply his inability to be a sole source of financial support, but the dangers inherent in being the sole source of any support. Working in teams, as part of a faceless body, even organising dinners; each provided yet another way of softening the strangely destructive blow of support; the quality of irksomeness he had managed to avoid in Conrad's case.⁸⁵² As such, the personal one-on-one approach he took to Charles Conder in the late nineties, and Augustus John at the beginning of the century, was rarely repeated; the instinct to influence channelled, instead, into less officious acts of generosity. Helping Masefield, he wrote, was not 'an easy matter'; the trick was to make it *look* easy; to manage the affair as quietly as possible, with the least possible damage to anyone's pride. In this case, it involved a temporary job: Masefield (probably recommended by Rothenstein and/or Laurence Binyon) was employed as secretary to the two major exhibitions of British Art held in Wolverhampton in 1902 and Bradford in 1904.⁸⁵³ Though the job proved stressful (the latter Masefield described as 'quite the most abominable week I have ever experienced') it was nonetheless useful: a practical solution to the problem of help.⁸⁵⁴ Indeed, it wasn't all about throwing money at artists to ensure their immediate creative independence. His unhesitant advice to Paul Nash, whose father could not afford the fees for his son to enter the Slade, was simply to make them for himself. This, accompanied by 'unexplained' belief in Nash's abilities,

⁸⁵⁰ W Rothenstein (1937c) 61-2; Newbolt (1932) 300-312. Rothenstein's political connections, forged from portrait sittings, were almost certainly helpful in these situations, though he remained ambivalent about his fraternising with statesman: W Rothenstein (1937c) 63.

⁸⁵¹ Tomalin (1984) 170. Rothenstein claims, conversely, that he didn't get to know Hudson well until 1903; see W Rothenstein (1937c) 39-41, 62-3.

⁸⁵² Rothenstein organised celebratory dinners for Philip Wilson Steer and Edward Gordon Craig. Craig's dinner was held in 1911 and represents Rothenstein's fulsome support for the younger man's theatrical vision.

⁸⁵³ W Rothenstein (1937c) 57.

⁸⁵⁴ John Masefield to William Rothenstein, 14th May 1904, HGTN.

provided the belief the young artist needed.⁸⁵⁵ ‘Doubt was no use,’ recalled Nash, ‘I left Frognal determined to make the fees for the Slade, bearing away, as I did, many encouraging and stimulating thoughts which the conversation of Will Rothenstein had aroused’.⁸⁵⁶

Aside from any changes in approach, Rothenstein’s relationship with Nash and his generation was, however, subject to new problems. Augustus John, Ambrose McEvoy and William Orpen were contemporaries of William’s brother Albert, and less than ten years younger than himself. Paul Nash, Mark Gertler, Stanley Spencer: these artists were distinctly younger. A man who had been friends with Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde; who had drawn Walter Pater; whose wife was the daughter of Rossetti’s assistant: such a man was always going to seem like a distant figure. In Gertler’s case, this distance seems to have been exaggerated, ironically, by the bond of their Jewish ancestry. It is this on which Cannan’s text turns; Froitzheim’s ambiguous relationship to his Jewish identity appearing to symbolise a flaw in his entire personality. Mendel, unlike Nash, bears away from Frognal something more than ‘encouraging and stimulating thoughts’; indeed, ‘the encounter [with Froitzheim] disturbed him greatly and depressed him not a little, so that he was rather overawed than elated by the prospect in front of him’.⁸⁵⁷

If Cannan’s remarks miss the mark, it is hard to blame the writer. There *is* something to be said for his confusion in the face of Rothenstein’s Jewish identity; ambiguities which are well worth exploring. Inherent attributes aside, this is the decade in which this aspect of Rothenstein’s identity undergoes the most changes, starting with his re-connection, so to speak, with Jewish issues around 1904 – and ending here, in 1916, with *Mendel*, a recreation of his dealings with Gertler, through the auspices of Rothenstein’s role at the Jewish Education Art Society.

These episodes have been given further relevance by the recent growth of art historical interest in art and Jewish identity at the beginning of the twentieth century: an interest in which Gertler has, again, played a major role. Gertler’s presence in Boyd

⁸⁵⁵ Nash (1988) 87.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid. 87-8. Nash went on to earn money designing bookplates. He also sought work as an illustrator, for which he appealed, again, to Rothenstein – who encouraged him to contact Yeats.

⁸⁵⁷ Cannan (1916) 79.

Haycock's 2009 study follows Sarah MacDougall's 2002 biography; the second of its kind, after John Woodeson's in 1972.⁸⁵⁸ Amongst more scholarly studies we must note the work of Juliet Steyn, Lisa Tickner and Janet Wolff, who have all explored key moments in the history of early twentieth century Jewish art, with fascinating results.⁸⁵⁹ These studies all focus, in the main, on the generation of Jewish artists emerging around 1910 – principally Mark Gertler, David Bomberg, Isaac Rosenberg, Bernard Meninsky, Jacob Epstein and Jacob Kramer – and on two exhibitions held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, the first in 1906, the second in 1914.⁸⁶⁰ Older Jewish artists, such as Alfred Wolmark, Solomon J Solomon and, of course, William Rothenstein are all mentioned, but clearly occupy a more complicated position in their relationship to the issues in question.⁸⁶¹ These relationships have been explored in detail only once, in Peter Gross's 2004 thesis, *Representations of Jews and Jewishness in English Painting, 1887-1914* – as yet the most comprehensive examination of Anglo-Jewish art during this period.⁸⁶² Though Gross goes some way to revealing the complexities of Rothenstein's Jewish identity, his study does not cover in any detail the effect this had on his relationship with younger Jewish artists. He notes Rothenstein's ambivalence, without exploring its wider significance.

Much of the interest in Gertler, Rosenberg and Bomberg lies in their East End origins – and the connection therewith to the wave of Jewish immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in which around one hundred and fifty thousand Jews fled

⁸⁵⁸ Haycock (2009); MacDougall (2002); Woodeson (1972). Noel Carrington edited a selection of Gertler's letters in 1965: Carrington (1965). Gertler's connection with Dora Carrington and other Bloomsbury figures has only added to the fascination in some quarters. 2008 saw a new biography of Isaac Rosenberg: Wilson (2008) and 2006 the first biography of Jacob Kramer: Manson (2006). The Ben Uri Gallery in London has long held exhibitions of Anglo-Jewish artists, with the exception of Rothenstein.

⁸⁵⁹ Steyn (1990; 1994); Tickner (2000); Wolff (2000; 2003). The most recent essay on the subject of Anglo-Jewish art in London before the First World War is MacDougall (2010)

⁸⁶⁰ 'Jewish Art and Antiquaries' (1906) and 'Twentieth century art (a review of modern movements)' (1914), the latter of which contained a 'Jewish section', curated by David Bomberg.

⁸⁶¹ Solomon J Solomon and Alfred Wolmark have both been the subject of exhibitions at the Ben Uri Gallery: see Pery (1990) and Dickson and McDougall (2004).

⁸⁶² Gross (2004). Gross's thesis contains chapters on Solomon J Solomon, Rothenstein and Alfred Wolmark, as well as the non-Jewish John Singer Sargent, who painted portraits of many famous Jews. It also explores the important exhibitions of Jewish arts and artefacts held in London in 1887, 1906 and 1914 and their role in promoting assimilation amongst the Anglo-Jewish population.

Eastern Europe to settle in Britain.⁸⁶³ Gertler's family were from Galacia (then Austro-Hungary, now Poland) and forced by sheer poverty of their situation to try their luck in London.⁸⁶⁴ Bomberg's parents fled Poland after the Russian pogroms of the 1880s; Rosenberg's Lithuania.⁸⁶⁵

Rothenstein's father, on the other hand, arrived in Bradford in 1859 from a village near Hanover in Germany. His family were 'fairly well-to-do' and his presence in England seems to have had as much to do with exciting business prospects as the desire for religious tolerance.⁸⁶⁶ This alone raises difficulties: *Mendel* presupposes a similarity of backgrounds between Froitzheim and Mendel; it allows the fact of their ultimate Jewish ancestry to overshadow more recent histories. It argues, essentially, that a Jew is a Jew; disallowing any sort of movement within this boundary; revealing ignorance of what Peter Gross has described as 'factions within the quasi-indigenous, host English Jewish community, whose sub-groups brought different nuances of Jewish practice, and within these, coalescing or splitting groups representing every shade of observance from devout to nominal'.⁸⁶⁷ Froitzheim appears to have leapt from the ghetto into the English middle class; in reality, Rothenstein graduated from what Robert Speaight calls the 'cultural *élite*' of Jewish Bradford to a corresponding position in bohemian London.⁸⁶⁸ If anything he *downgraded*: he would have had more security, certainly, had he chosen (like his older brother) to take up his father's trade. As an artist, he was never prosperous himself; although the prosperity of others kept him safe from serious

⁸⁶³ Two million Jews left between 1881 and 1914, but the majority went to America: see Tickner (2000) 147-9. The major studies on this subject are Lipman (1954), Gartner (1960) and Gainer (1972). Gross (2004) also explores in depth the effect that late nineteenth century immigration had on the already well established Anglo-Jewish population, arguing that 'The arrival, after 1880, of a very different kind of Jew (the Eastern European immigrant), who outnumbered the native Jewish population, threatened the ability of Anglo-Jewry to retain its position of "belonging" in English society. Their efforts to anglicise the immigrants were simultaneously coupled with a distancing from them... This "other" not only challenged Anglo-Jewry's comfortable perceptions of its own identity, but raised the very real possibility that the host community would come to equate all Jews with this new underclass rather than making any distinctions between the quasi indigenous Anglo-Jews and their newly arrived co-religionists': Gross (2004) 10-11; see also Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1998) 79-128

⁸⁶⁴ The family moved to London before Gertler's birth in 1891, before returning to Galacia for five years – and thence to London again in 1898.

⁸⁶⁵ See Lipke (1967) and Wilson (2008). Both families moved around the country before settling again in East End London. Bernard Meninsky and Jacob Kramer were born in Liverpool and Leeds respectively, whilst Epstein (whose parents were Polish refugees) grew up in New York.

⁸⁶⁶ Speaight (1962) 1-2. Lisa Tickner opts for the phrase 'solidly bourgeois' to describe Rothenstein's background: Tickner (2000) 150.

⁸⁶⁷ Gross (2004) 297.

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

poverty. The more we compare him with this younger generation of Jewish immigrants, the more these facts seem to matter; the more they seem to grate: to undercut Rothenstein's credentials as an empathetic defender of Gertler and his ilk.

Perhaps one of the more curious facts regarding Rothenstein's Jewish identity is that there are so few references to it early on in his career. Is it played down, ignored; unknown even? What Jewish teaching he had as a child seems to have been scant – what little there was came from his mother; his father, an enlightened Liberal, leaned towards Unitarianism.⁸⁶⁹ At his mother's insistence he was, notwithstanding a brief flirtation with Christianity, confirmed in the Jewish faith at thirteen.⁸⁷⁰ What he was left with, his biographer suggests, was no more than 'a general respect for the religious impulse and a general conviction that no one religious system was better than another'.⁸⁷¹ And yet he did retain an interest in Jewish issues, if not a sense of duty to those of the Jewish faith. This only becomes clear, however, after 1903, when he begins his Jewish paintings and becomes associated with the Jewish Education Aid Society. In the previous decade, Rothenstein's Jewishness doesn't seem to form a discernible part of his identity, with neither the artist, his friends, or reviews making any mention of it.⁸⁷² Recalling Degas' anti-semitic attitudes in his memoirs, for instance, he says nothing on the effect they had on their own friendship.⁸⁷³ On Degas' side very little, according to Sickert, who reported to Rothenstein from Paris around the turn of the century: 'I wish you could see what Degas is doing now. He asked affectionately after you, in spite of his *Judenhetze* monomania'.⁸⁷⁴ Considering the vehemence of Degas' behaviour in other respects, the suggestion is that Rothenstein's Jewishness had slipped under Degas' radar (though evidently not Sickert's).⁸⁷⁵ The same may have applied to Rodin, another anti-

⁸⁶⁹ Gross notes that Moritz Rothenstein, despite clear interest, was never baptised at the Bradford Unitarian Chapel. Ibid. 277-8.

⁸⁷⁰ Speaight (1962) 5-6. The Rothenstein children would attend the Synagogue on major feast days only. William's sister Blanche was later married in accordance with Jewish ritual: Gross (2004) 278-9.

⁸⁷¹ Speaight (1962) 6, 159.

⁸⁷² Despite his appearance in Roth (1961) Max Beerbohm, Rothenstein's closest friend during this period, was not Jewish. See Cecil (1964) 4.

⁸⁷³ W Rothenstein (1937b) 102.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid. 341. It seems that Sickert was himself anti-Dreyfusard; not because he was a Jew but because he thought e (Dreyfus) was guilty: see Robins in Brockington (2009) 27

⁸⁷⁵ See Nochlin (1987) and McMullen (1985) 421-446. Like many anti-semites, Degas did not immediately break up with all his Jewish friends, though most ties were broken by 1898.

Dreyfusard who was yet a close friend.⁸⁷⁶ Were they blind, or simply turning a blind eye? Perhaps this element of Rothenstein's self was obscured by the melting pot of identities the artist had at his disposal. Or else he never witnessed anti-semitism to a degree worth mentioning; a difficult claim to make, as Rothenstein's memoirs generally shy from any sort of self-interrogation.⁸⁷⁷ One is tempted to wonder whether any such discrimination, had it occurred, would have been mentioned.⁸⁷⁸

Perhaps he didn't wish to provoke the issue; or felt dislocated from the experience of his Jewish contemporaries, whose immediately stricken background he did not share. Despite all of this, he seems to have attempted, from the turn of the century onwards, to re-establish himself, albeit in typically equivocal form, as a Jewish painter. This may have coincided with his more serious approach to all matters post-1900; the interest in his ancestry stimulated, maybe, by the creation of his own family.⁸⁷⁹ He was also exploring his German heritage during this period, encouraging the idea that this was, simply, a time in which to re-connect with his identity.⁸⁸⁰ But there are other things going on as well. Firstly, he seems to have come into contact with more Jewish figures in the society in which he moved; increasingly realising, perhaps, that his Jewishness was no disability: it could help him further his career, by introducing him to new patrons and providing new exhibiting possibilities. Secondly, the introduction of Jewish subjects into his artistic repertoire seems to have provided a necessary expansion to his wider artistic vision, bringing in a note of spirituality that satisfied his desire to capture on canvas the most elemental human activities. Lastly, his involvement with the Jewish Education Aid Society offered yet another way to help young artists; a further

⁸⁷⁶ Some claim that Rodin was ambivalent, refusing to take sides; others describe him as anti-Dreyfus: Kleeblatt (1987) 19, 96.

⁸⁷⁷ Could Rothenstein's decision to leave Paris and return to England in the early 1890s have had something to do with anti-semitism? The Dreyfus Affair erupted *after* his departure, but anti-semitism was widespread in France before then: see Marrus (1987).

⁸⁷⁸ It does, however, offer a new perspective on Rothenstein's attempts to get Lucien Pissarro (also Jewish) into the Society of Twelve and subsequent resignations over his non-election.

⁸⁷⁹ Rothenstein occasionally equated his austere and moral approach to life with his religious background, writing to his mother (significantly) in the 1890s: 'I suppose, dearest mother, it is my Jewish blood which always sings injustice and I believe still that honesty is the finest quality in man & can see in fact no other line of conduct': William Rothenstein to Bertha Rothenstein, May 23rd, undated [1890s], HGTN. He didn't bring his own children up in the Jewish faith – his first son John later converted to Catholicism.

⁸⁸⁰ He made several trips to Berlin and often exhibited there. In 1906 he organised a banquet to support an exhibition of German art held at the Knightsbridge Galleries. This part of his identity was, unsurprisingly, downplayed as the prospect of war with Germany loomed: Speaight (1962) 193-5

way to fulfil this perplexing role of ‘the important personage’.

The writer Israel Zangwill [fig.47] was one of the earliest Jewish contacts Rothenstein was to make within London society. Zangwill grew up in Whitechapel in the 1860s and was educated at a Jewish school, before working as a journalist for the newly founded *Jewish Standard*. In the early 1890s he wrote popular stories with non-Jewish characters, before receiving a commission to write *Children of the Ghetto* (1892), a novel about life in the Jewish East End.⁸⁸¹ From here on he was increasingly involved in a variety of Jewish causes, principally the Zionist movement, for which he was a leading spokesman.

Rothenstein appears to have met Zangwill in early 1894. In February of that year Zangwill wrote to arrange a sitting, noting that he was currently having his portrait done by Solomon J Solomon – a Jewish painter (later Academician) whom Rothenstein had met in London some years before; and who had persuaded him to study in Paris.⁸⁸² In return for his pastel, which appeared alongside an interview with Zangwill in the *Pall Mall Budget*, Zangwill advertised Rothenstein’s work in other papers, *The Pall Mall Magazine* and *Cosmopolitan*.⁸⁸³ In another letter Zangwill invited him to dine with him and Solomon J Solomon; ‘they want me,’ explained Rothenstein to his father, ‘to join the “Maccabees”, but I shall not’.⁸⁸⁴ By rejecting this invitation to join a Jewish club Rothenstein appears to be resisting Zangwill’s attempts to get him more involved in Jewish society. Curiously, Zangwill reveals similar fears in the *Pall Mall Budget* interview. ‘I object to being labelled,’ he said, ‘The other day I was asked to write another Jewish story. I replied that I would not be shut up in the Ghetto. It seems to me that we in England specialise too much.’⁸⁸⁵ It was a battle the writer was not destined to win.

⁸⁸¹ See Leftwich (1957) and Zangwill (1977) On Zangwill and Anglo-Jewish fiction at the end of the nineteenth century see Cheyette (1990).

⁸⁸² Israel Zangwill to William Rothenstein, Fen 12th 1894, HG TN. Sickert also painted Zangwill, in 1896. Grant Richards mentions going to meet Zangwill in January 1894, and finding Rothenstein there: G Richards (1933) 298. Solomon J Solomon became the second Jewish Academician in 1906, after Solomon Alexander Hart in 1840.

⁸⁸³ Israel Zangwill to William Rothenstein, July 14th 1894; undated letter [c.1894], HG TN.

⁸⁸⁴ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, undated from Chelsea, HG TN.

⁸⁸⁵ *Pall Mall Budget*, July 12th 1894.

Rothenstein, increasingly an expert when it came to not being pinned down, was able to resist the Jewish label for a while yet.

By 1903 this had begun to change. In May 1903 he had, at last, succumbed to an invite from the Maccabeans. ‘Zangwill was in the chair,’ he told his father, ‘& I spent a pleasant evening – so pleasant, in fact, that I have been prevailed upon to join the club’.⁸⁸⁶ The rest of his letter reveals, however, what was to become a customary mixture of ignorance and celebration; of simultaneous resistance to and acceptance of Jewish culture. A man described by Solomon J Solomon (also in attendance) as ‘virtually the head of the Jewish community in England’ seems to be unknown to Rothenstein, and there is, from Solomon in particular, ‘a little too much mutual patting on the back’. And yet he appears to have enjoyed being in what he calls ‘such frankly friendly Kosher company,’ hearing ‘nothing but reasonable pride in Jewdom freely expressed instead of being suppressed, as it is often is among our friends who dive about in coaches... & call themselves MacGregor’.⁸⁸⁷ There are, of course, a lot of things going on here. Suppression versus assimilation; one type of Jewish upbringing against another. The language manages to be wholehearted and cautious simultaneously; the experience is ‘pleasant enough’; the pride shown is ‘reasonable’; there is a ‘little’ too much back-patting. Rothenstein’s anxieties over his Jewish identity seep through every line.

Over the next few years Rothenstein was to find himself drawn further and further into Jewish culture; as if he found it impossible to resist, though unsure of quite what it should mean to him. Solomon J Solomon’s brother, a solicitor who was also ‘very learned in things Hebraic’, soon volunteered to take Rothenstein to the Spitalfield’s Synagogue, in Brick Lane⁸⁸⁸. It was, promised his guide, ‘a curious sight... well worth seeing’.⁸⁸⁹ And so it proved. To Rothenstein, clearly, it was an eye-opener:

My surprise was great to find the place crowded with Jews draped in praying shawls; while in a dark panelled room sat old, bearded men with strange side-

⁸⁸⁶ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, May 14th 1903, HGTN. Peter Gross claims that Rothenstein never did join the club: Gross (2004) 293.

⁸⁸⁷ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, May 14th 1903, HGTN.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid. The Spitalfields Synagogue in Brick Lane was built in 1743 as a Catholic Chapel, before becoming a Jewish chapel, a Methodist chapel and, in 1897, a synagogue. Since 1976 it has been a mosque.

⁸⁸⁹ W Rothenstein (1937c) 35.

locks, bending over great books and rocking their bodies as they read; others stood, muttering Hebrew prayers, their faces to the wall, enveloped from head to foot in black bordered shawls. Here were subjects Rembrandt would have painted – had indeed, painted – the like of which I never thought to have seen in London. I was very much excited; why had no one told me of this wonderful place? Somehow I must arrange to work there.⁸⁹⁰

This he promptly did, taking a room in nearby Spital Square, where he encouraged men from the synagogue (it was against Jewish law to draw inside the synagogue) to come and pose for him. Over the space of about two years he completed eight major paintings, which went some way to positioning him as one of the leading Jewish painters in London, proudly feted by *The Jewish Chronicle*. Four of these paintings featured in the 1906 Whitechapel Exhibition of ‘Jewish Art and Antiquaries’. *Aliens at Prayer* (1905: fig.48) was recommended for purchase by the Chantrey Bequest in 1906; though rejected, another work, *Jews Mourning in the Synagogue* (1905: fig.49) was presented to the Tate in the same year.⁸⁹¹ Four years later Roger Fry praised this same painting fulsomely, noting how ‘it shames, by its gravity of design, its clear realization of form, the high plausibilities or clever sentimentalities with which it is surrounded’.⁸⁹² His comments were echoed by many who thought these paintings the highpoint of his career thus far. Agreement over their quality, however, has never been met by any consensus over their identity. What constitutes Jewish art is a question that has been long debated; one would think, however, that paintings of Jews by a Jewish painter would be the first to qualify.⁸⁹³ Rothenstein’s stance, however, remains equivocal.

From the very start, Rothenstein appears to have been approaching his visits to

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid. Peter Gross argues that Rothenstein must have been ‘familiar with the East End and its Jewish community well before his purported first encounter with the Machzike Hadass Synagogue in 1903’, noting a 1900 work entitled *Head of a Rabbi* and early mentions of the East End in his memoirs. He offers no real explanation as to why the artist might have chosen to play up his ignorance: Gross (2004) 272-5; see also W Rothenstein (1937b) 29-30.

⁸⁹¹ W Rothenstein (1937c) 92; Speaight (1962) 164. *Aliens at Prayer* was sent instead to Melbourne under the terms of the Fenton Bequest. Another work, *Kissing the Law*, entered the National Gallery in Johannesburg. *Carrying the Law* was given to Bradford. *The Book of Esther* was bought by Charles Rutherford and entered the Manchester City Art Gallery as part of his bequest. Of the remaining works, *In the Corner of the Talmud School*, is owned by Oldham Gallery, *The Talmud School* by the Sternberg Centre and *In the Spitalfields Synagogue* by the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin. For a detailed analysis of these paintings see Gross (2004) 261-318.

⁸⁹² See Speaight (1962) 163.

⁸⁹³ For further discussion of this issue see Kampf (1990) and Roth (1961).

the East End as a means to an end. ‘I now discovered a new subject matter,’ he recalled, seemingly keen to dampen the personal significance of this cultural encounter.⁸⁹⁴ ‘I have unformulated ideas of one or two pictures of Jewish life in & out of my head & am going to see as much as I can of the Ghetto’ he wrote to his father, as if setting out on a research project.⁸⁹⁵ It is hard to tell what excited him more: finding subjects that Rembrandt would have painted, or coming into close contact with people whose history he in some way shared. ‘I haunted the Jewish quarter’, he wrote – but did it haunt *him*, or was he merely an observer: a cultural tourist?⁸⁹⁶ To the ‘fanatically strict’ synagogue Jews, at least, he was a stranger, so much so that they suspected him of being ‘a missionary from a society for the conversion of the Jews’.⁸⁹⁷ For men and women fresh from Russia and Galacia, this urbane Bradford-born son of a German Jew, with little or no knowledge of orthodox ritual, bicycling daily from Hampstead to Whitechapel, was unlikely to inspire comradeship. The question is whether or not he felt entitled to it. In one letter to his brother Charles he reveals regret at his hopeless ignorance of ‘things Jewish’: ‘if anyone had told me a dozen years ago I should now regret having neglected semitic ritual, I would have laughed at the notion’.⁸⁹⁸ He goes on, less promisingly: ‘The Jews are servile, suspicious, secretive & tragically attracted by the clink of coin, but they have a noble element in them’.⁸⁹⁹ In his memoirs he notes that his ‘heart went out to these men of a despised race, from which I too had sprung’, whilst referring to them, at other moments, as ‘simple and narrow-minded’, ‘poor and feckless’ and ‘noble in mien if ignoble in dress’.⁹⁰⁰ It is as if his principal desire is to make a connection with the history, the traditions and the essential concept of the Jews; less so with the Jews themselves.

Max Beerbohm, as usual, was on hand to provide comic perspective. To Albert he wrote: ‘I haven’t seen Will since he went away. I hear he is just off on a flying visit to

⁸⁹⁴ W Rothenstein (1937c) 35.

⁸⁹⁵ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, May 14th 1903, HG TN.

⁸⁹⁶ W Rothenstein (1937c) 35.

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁸ William Rothenstein to Charles Rutherston, December 20th 1903, HG TN.

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰⁰ W Rothenstein (1937c) 35-6.

Palestine, to restore the tomb of Moses'.⁹⁰¹ To Alice: 'Will arrived on his bicycle but sternly refused to cross the threshold – probably because of some Jewish feat or fast: the threshold was unleavened, or there ought to have been blood on the lintel, or something of that kind'.⁹⁰² Typically, there also were caricatures featuring William as a Rabbi, including 'a large one of you as the "Messiah" surrounded by a crowd of Jews, you standing on a table in their midst'.⁹⁰³ Not for the first time Rothenstein was playing into Beerbohm's hands: the man accused of 'laying down the law' was spending his days painting *The Law*. Ironically, however, it was the larger-than-life Rothenstein who was depicting the subtle 'spiritual fineness' of Jewish life; Beerbohm, as seen in his caricature of Alfred de Rothschild, seemed content to stick with the stereotypes.⁹⁰⁴

Whilst it was clearly amusing for Beerbohm to see his friend exploring his Jewishness, others were more deeply impressed. 'There is no living painter of whom, as a community, we may be more proud than Will Rothenstein', wrote a reporter from the *Jewish Chronicle* in June 1906, introducing him very much as 'Jewish' artist and quick to note the his 'deep sincerity' of his paintings: 'those forceful yet restrained manifestations of the true Jewish spirit'.⁹⁰⁵ 'It is not the picturesque possibilities of Tallisim and phylacteries that appeal to me,' argued Rothenstein later on in the same article: 'I have even left them out where I should have painted them. What appeals to me is the devotion of the Jew. It is that, that I have endeavoured to put on to canvas – the spirit of Israel that animates the worshippers, not the outward trappings of the ritual'.⁹⁰⁶

This is essentially an early version of the point made in his memoirs regarding his early Hampstead interiors and his desire to capture the 'elemental' as opposed to the specific mother and child – though it must be noted that, once again, the trappings *are* allowed to encroach. Rothenstein writes and speaks sometimes like an artist ahead of his time (he might well be describing Jacob Kramer's 1919 painting, *The Day of Atonement*: see fig.50), but his brush doesn't always obey the tongue. We run the risk of

⁹⁰¹ See Beckson and Lago (1975) 51.

⁹⁰² Max Beerbohm to Alice Rothenstein, October 1905: Ibid.

⁹⁰³ Albert Rothenstein to William Rothenstein, undated letter [c.1904], HG1N.

⁹⁰⁴ See Beerbohm's 1907 caricature, *A Quiet Morning in the Tate Gallery*, in which D.S. MacColl attempts to explain the 'spiritual fineness' of Rothenstein's *Jews Mourning in the Synagogue* to the obviously Jewish Alfred de Rothschild (Tate Gallery).

⁹⁰⁵ 'Mr Will. Rothenstein: A Great Artist and His Work', *The Jewish Chronicle*, June 15th 1906, 34.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid.

expecting too much as critics, blessed as we are with the benefit of hindsight. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that, even if the ‘spirit’ did take precedence over the ‘trappings’, Rothenstein’s vision of East End Jewry remained securely (if not disappointingly) realist in nature. Despite admitting to missing some details out (or getting them wrong altogether) he took few discernible liberties with the forms he encountered.⁹⁰⁷ Titles as specific as *Carrying the Law*, *Kissing the Law* (1907) and *Reading the Book of Esther* (1907, also known as *Reading the Megillah*: fig.28) hardly suggest paintings of a generalised Jewish spirit – indeed, throughout the series of paintings the ‘trappings’ of Jewish ritual and dress are depicted with some patience. Simplify them he might, but Rothenstein was never one to ignore the details entirely: the spirit, for him, lay partly in the details. Indeed, his manipulation of the facts seems not to have extended beyond a little self-conscious posing of his models, such as that we might find in *Jews Mourning in the Synagogue* [fig.49] which, for all its murky realism, is yet a subtle essay in composition.⁹⁰⁸

The initial reaction of *The Jewish Chronicle*, again, betrayed neither the artistic nor personal conflicts surrounding Rothenstein’s project. When showed at the N.E.A.C. summer show of 1906, *Jews Mourning in the Synagogue* was immediately heralded as ‘far and away the most impressive and most important’ of Rothenstein’s Jewish paintings. Both the details (‘there are seven figures on the canvas, all of them in tallisim. Two of them are standing and appear to be saying Kaddish. Simple and natural is the pose of each; they are depicted just as they could be seen any day in the house of worship’) and the general atmosphere (‘There is a dignity and a solemnity about the work that commands silence... the pathos is not that of a sense of present pain, but of the consciousness of the great human tragedy... a more complete Jewish atmosphere and deep feeling in this picture than in any of Mr. Rothenstein’s previous work’) are praised

⁹⁰⁷ A later review, which concentrated on the work *Carrying the Law* (exhibited at Rothenstein’s 1910 Goupil show) was keen to note that ‘the manner of wearing the “praying shawls” adopted by Mr. Rothenstein’s sitters is not that which one sees in conservative synagogues’: ‘Mr W. Rothenstein’s Works’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, June 3rd 1910. Peter Gross has explored this further, arguing that, in all *but Carrying the Law*, ‘Rothenstein deliberately simplified or omitted almost all of the ritual and liturgical trappings which might have added an exotic dimension and picturesque appeal’. Gross (2004) 286-90.

⁹⁰⁸ Of this painting Gross writes: ‘the work reveals its studio execution more obviously than other images in the series – the brocade curtain and the edge of a picture on the background wall would have been out of place in the Machzide Synagogue’: Gross (2004) 267. We might question whether or not the Jewish clothes held an abstract interest for this son of a textile merchant.

at length.⁹⁰⁹ Rothenstein's role as the poster boy of Anglo-Jewish art, hinted at by these articles, was confirmed by his presence in a major exhibition, *Jewish Art and Antiquaries*, held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery later that year. Four paintings were shown, alongside Rothenstein's portrait of Israel Zangwill, in an exhibition that argued in favour of assimilation.⁹¹⁰ The timing of the exhibition was significant, coming just one year after the Aliens Act of 1905, a bill created principally to stem the flow of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. Rothenstein's reaction to this is unknown; though one wonders whether the title of one painting, *Aliens at Prayer* (1905: fig 48) serves as his response; a pictorial appeal on behalf of Jewish dignity.⁹¹¹

Whether this was the case or no, Rothenstein's seeming centrality to the future of Anglo-Jewish art was once more highlighted in a speech made by Canon Barnett (founder of Toynbee Hall) to the Maccabeans at a dinner celebrating the opening of the exhibition. Hearing of a 'proposition to buy one of Rothenstein's pictures and present it to the national collection', the Canon gave his full support. He was, noted the reporter, 'sure it would be very good for future generations to see in Mr. Rothenstein's pictures something of the earnestness and of the "other-worldliness" which characterised the Whitechapel Jew'. Rothenstein, he thought, 'had shown the ideal behind the real, the true behind the seeming'.⁹¹² The painting, *Jews Mourning in the Synagogue*, was duly purchased – and presented to the Tate.

With this triumph, Rothenstein's Jewish painting project had, it seems, reached its zenith. Though he continued to paint on the Jewish theme into 1907, it seems that he was beginning to exhaust the possibilities of his subject. 'I was tired of painting the greasy clothes and shawls of East-End Jews,' he later recalled, returning with what seems like relief to images of his wife and children.⁹¹³ In May 1907 he revealed to his mother his concerns that he was becoming associated with a particular sort of painting; and suggests his tactics when it came to avoiding this fate: 'I shall probably keep back

⁹⁰⁹ "Jews Mourning": Mr. Rothenstein's New Picture', *The Jewish Chronicle*, June 22nd 1906.

⁹¹⁰ The exhibition has been covered in depth by Steyn (1990) and Tickner (2000).

⁹¹¹ Peter Gross also discusses this title: 'Why was the work titled *Aliens* rather than *Jews at Prayer*? ...could Rothenstein's use of the word "Alien" have been a formulation of "Jew but different from me/us"?: Gross (2004) 296.

⁹¹² 'The Maccabeans: Dinner to the Jewish Exhibition Committee', *The Jewish Chronicle*, December 7th 1906.

⁹¹³ W Rothenstein (1937c) 97.

my other two & not show them at the same time – there would be too many Jews & I can show them later with other pictures'.⁹¹⁴ This fear – that of 'too many Jews' – may, aside from the tediousness of 'greasy clothes and shawls', have sprung from two other sources.

First, as I have explained, his relatively ambiguous relationship with his own Jewish identity. He may have submitted, at last, to the invitations of the Maccabeans, but he continued to keep other Jewish groups at arm's length. Zangwill, an ardent Zionist, had co-opted Rothenstein in October 1905 to the committee of the Jewish Territorial Organization. By January 1906 Rothenstein had resigned.⁹¹⁵ Though he appears to have given a lack of time as his excuse, I think it is fair to imagine that Rothenstein was not quite prepared to fight for the Zionist cause.

Second, we mustn't allow ourselves to ignore the issue of sales. Whether or not he wanted to go on exploring London Jewish life, he was certainly not the only one to have noticed that he could only expect his audience to follow him so far. In a review of an exhibition of 'independent' art held at Agnews in 1906, Bernhard Sickert wrote that: 'Mr. Will Rothenstein's *Aliens at Prayer*, fine as it is, does not quite reach the level of the picture dealing with the same subject at the Alpine Club last winter; or perhaps I am merely getting a little tired. I hope that Mr. Rothenstein will soon work another vein with equal success'.⁹¹⁶ The language of the closing sentence, with talk of working 'another vein', is suggestive – and takes us back to Rothenstein's description of how, a while before he began painting in the East End, John Singer Sargent had 'urged me to paint Jews, as being at once the most interesting models and the most reliable patrons'.⁹¹⁷ As if to temper the suggestion of money-making, Rothenstein swiftly adds that Sargent was, in time, disappointed by Rothenstein's 'abstract' approach, wanting him to 'paint scenes in Petticoat Lane, or the interiors of tailors' shops, as showing the more intimate side of Jewish life'.⁹¹⁸ The artist is keen to cover up the possibility that he should have been following Sargent's advice in tapping a potentially lucrative vein; in

⁹¹⁴ William Rothenstein to Bertha Rothenstein, May 4th 1907, HGTN.

⁹¹⁵ See Israel Zangwill to William Rothenstein, October 8th 1905; 7th November 1905; 30th November 1905; January 30th 1906 and May 2nd 1906, HGTN.

⁹¹⁶ B Sickert, 'Independent Art of To-Day', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 8, No. 36, (Mar., 1906) 384

⁹¹⁷ W Rothenstein (1937b) 195. On Sargent and Jews see Adler (1995).

⁹¹⁸ W Rothenstein (1937b) 195.

pursuing the Jewish theme for as long as it might suit him in a financial sense; possibly even in abusing his Jewish heritage to reach a much-needed market – whilst cleansing himself of any guilt, and strengthening family ties.⁹¹⁹ Once again, frequent references to ‘nobility’ and ‘dignity’ serve to obscure conscious or unconscious concessions to the market, such as those made by any artist, even someone as ‘anti-careerist’ as Rothenstein.⁹²⁰

Though three of the Jewish paintings were to enter national collections, there is in fact little evidence that this was an especially lucrative period in the artist’s life. Nevertheless, it seems that he was clearly aware of the potential. In the early days of their relationship, Gertler wrote to him : ‘I should like to come & see you on Thursday afternoon & we could arrange about getting a “jew”.’⁹²¹ The language is strange; both Gertler and Rothenstein were themselves Jewish – and yet there is a recognition here of a Jewish other; a source, most likely, of ready cash. This was, as it were, a third Jew: a long way from the poor Whitechapel Jews amongst whom Gertler had grown up, but some way also from the Jewish society Rothenstein was used to: an upper-middle or upper-class Jew – a straight patron, rather than a mere medium for money. Is it a coincidence that Gertler’s early paintings work the same vein as Rothenstein’s Jewish paintings? Gertler shared much of the older artist’s earnestness, and was just as likely to have been overexcited by the nobility of the subject; nonetheless, it appears that both artists were also quietly aware that such paintings would not harm them when it came to ‘getting a “jew”’. This is not to say that Jewish themes were pursued merely as a means of bagging Jewish patrons; nonetheless, we must consider this as one of various factors that prompted and/or affected projects such the one Rothenstein embarked on between the years 1903 and 1907.

Throughout this thesis I have explored how the complexities of Rothenstein’s character

⁹¹⁹ The Jewish paintings were particularly well received by Rothenstein’s parents, as letters attest.

⁹²⁰ J Rothenstein (1966) 159.

⁹²¹ Mark Gertler to William Rothenstein, undated letter [c.1909], HGTN.

have invited confused readings of his art and identity. This case is clearly no exception. Before dealing with the inaccuracies of Gilbert Cannan's attack on Rothenstein's Jewishness in *Mendel*, however, we must at first accept that there *were* foundations for such an attack. When Rothenstein read the book (or the relevant parts of it, at least) two years after its publication in 1916, his response was not to simply brand it false, but 'ungenerous' and 'ignoble'; 'untruthful' in its account of 'your own feelings and mine' – *not*, it seems, in the details of their meeting, many of which were, he thought, 'precise'.⁹²² A meeting between Mark Gertler and Rothenstein was always going to have involved a complex clash of class, culture and sensibilities; it is simply that Cannan's response to this clash is based on at least one major misconception. Not for the first time, Rothenstein is simplified to suit a narrative in which he was never destined to be the hero. Particular aspects of his personality and/or behaviour are taken to constitute the whole; the reality of his situation lost beneath the tides of the popular narratives that make up history.

Gertler and Rothenstein met in October 1908, after the young artist made an application to the Jewish Education Aid Society, a funding body set up in 1896 by the Maccabeans to allow 'gifted young Jews and Jewesses of humble means to obtain the education necessary to fit them for the career for which they are marked out by their natural talents'.⁹²³ Though he may have resisted the Jewish Territorial Organization, Rothenstein could not resist this; he was on both the General Committee and served as a referee for potential applicants. It was yet another way to serve as a medium through which young artists could further their careers – and it would have been a surprise had he not taken the position.

Gertler's application was received, initially, by Solomon J Solomon, the first referee, who treated it with some suspicion. He had the sense, however, to pass it on to Rothenstein, who invited Gertler to visit him in Hampstead; the trip that gave birth to Cannan's literary re-working. Before considering Cannan, however, let us turn to less fictional sources. Rothenstein's own account of the meeting is short and simple; he

⁹²² Carrington (1965) 254-5.

⁹²³ Tickner (2000) 149.

writes of how ‘a youth from Whitechapel’ who ‘longed to be a painter’ came to see him and of how, after noting his promise, he recommended him to the Society.⁹²⁴ He recalls returning the visit, to find that Gertler’s proud parents had framed one of his letters and hung it on the wall. Of the subsequent relationship between the two artists he writes: ‘[Gertler] professed an ardent admiration for my painting, and for long he consulted me about everything he did. Then he was taken up by most advanced circles, and I neither saw him, nor heard from him more’.⁹²⁵ This last point is, as it happens, an exaggeration; there *are* later letters (excluding those relating to the *Mendel* affair), in most of which Gertler attempts to prove that he has, in fact, not forgotten his early supporter. To no avail: Rothenstein remained convinced of his neglect.

Aside from his insistence on Gertler’s youth – a reminder that he was, now, securely amongst the older generation of British artists – Rothenstein’s account reveals little insight into their relationship. Here, as elsewhere, he seems unsure of how something as pure and simple as ‘the pleasure of helping a beginner’ should have become the ‘ugly legend’ of Cannan’s text.⁹²⁶ After more than a decade of struggling to help artists, he remains peculiarly baffled by increasingly typical results. How could it be that such a ‘charming happening’ as their meeting should have been ‘turned into a mean and ugly thing’?⁹²⁷

His son’s recollection of meeting Gertler offers one clue. John Rothenstein, about seven at the time, remembered outrunning the maid once to answer the door, only to find a ‘shortish handsome boy with apricot-coloured skin and a dense mop of dark brown hair so stiff that it stood on end’, looking so ‘nervous, sullen and somehow hectic’ that ‘I took him for a barrow-boy’.⁹²⁸ There is no hiding the rough exoticism of this teenage boy from the East End to the eyes of the child from Hampstead; the presumption that Gertler could not possibly be here to see his father reminding us once again of how Rothenstein’s class – or the illusion of it at least – formed a barrier between him and those he sought to help. John Rothenstein’s recollection shows that

⁹²⁴ W Rothenstein (1937c) 128.

⁹²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹²⁶ Carrington (1965) 255.

⁹²⁷ *Ibid.* 256.

⁹²⁸ J Rothenstein (1965) 16.

Cannan at least has a case when he describes Edgar Froitzheim as a ‘prosperous gentleman’; although both Cannan and John Rothenstein may be guilty of overstressing Gertler’s poverty.⁹²⁹ Any sense of affluence is, of course, relative and, as with almost everything in Cannan’s account, exaggerated for effect. However, as Paul Nash’s description of meeting Rothenstein at a similar juncture has proved, it cannot be overlooked so easily.

What Cannan does, which is new, is to relate the sense of prosperity to the issue of Jewishness. Froitzheim is not simply the ‘prosperous gentleman’, but ‘the Jew turned Englishman and prosperous gentleman’.⁹³⁰ This, suggests the text, is not the sort of thing that an artist like Paul Nash would have ever noticed, since it ‘takes a Jew to catch a Jew’: only Mendel, the open and honest hero of the story, can truly grasp the move that Froitzheim has made. The shared Jewish heritage makes Mendel something of a mind-reader, it seems, and it isn’t long before he has plunged further into Froitzheim’s soul and decided that this flight into Englishness and prosperity is the result of a torturous struggle with and ultimate submittal to gentile culture. Froitzheim’s failure to fully succeed in the art world has forced him to deny his Jewishness; to put aside the ‘audacious’ work of his youth and join the ranks of the ‘well-mannered Englishmen among whom he worked’. Froitzheim is, duly, ‘the first self-deceiver’ Mendel has come across; their meeting a disturbing and depressing lesson of the encounter between a Jewish artist and the British art world. ‘This help given to him [by Froitzheim] was not really help,’ he concludes: ‘He was still, as always, utterly alone’.⁹³¹

This rather shocking turn in Cannan’s text is all the more surprising for its being intermingled with a series of relatively sensible points. Froitzheim is, we learn, at ‘the awkward age in a pioneer’s life when he is forced to realize that there are people younger than himself... he deemed it his business to be an influence among the young people and to see that they were properly shepherded into the Detmold [i.e The Slade],

⁹²⁹ Peter Gross argues in his thesis that Gertler’s family was, in 1909, relatively well-to-do, describing their house in Spital Square as an ‘apparently comfortable middle class environment’ and noting Gertler’s desire to cultivate an ‘artist starving in his garret image’: Gross (2004) 36-9.

⁹³⁰ Cannan (1916) 78.

⁹³¹ Ibid.

there to learn the gospel according to S.Ingres'. This is a perceptive point; however, to see this as the source of an identity crisis in which the artist completely turns his back on one aspect of his personality in order to re-position himself is, I think, where Cannan (if not Gertler, his informant) goes wrong. *Mendel* takes Froitzheim to be a later, perverted version of Mendel himself, ignoring the fact that the character's real-life counterparts had much less in common than it seemed. Rothenstein's experiences as a Jew were very different to Gertler's. His relationship with his Jewish identity was – and had always been – complex. Ironically, it was his part in the Jewish Education Aid Society, a concession towards a cause in which he needn't have been directly concerned, that led to this accusation that he was not, in essence, doing his Jewish duty; that he had 'turned Englishman'. But was he not born an Englishman *and* a Jew? Was he not born into a relatively prosperous, securely middle-class family? There was no deception in appearing to be any of these things: they had in fact always been facets of Rothenstein's identity. *Mendel* seeks to prove that Froitzheim is running away from the foreignness of his identity ('he looked out of place in western clothes'), whereas the equivocal aspects of Rothenstein's character were with him from birth: he did not create them through any conscious cultural 'turns'.

It is hard to know how much Cannan is actively engaging with such issues; or whether his analysis of Froitzheim springs from a mixture of ignorance and scrambled thinking. In any case, by describing Englishness and Jewishness as separate entities, he does stumble upon a pertinent point – one raised by another exhibition held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery: the 1914 exhibition of 'Twentieth Century Art', a survey of English modernism that contained a Jewish section, curated by David Bomberg. This much-discussed exhibition reveals the struggle to make good the hopes of the 1906 exhibition, with its dream of assimilation, by separating Jewish and English artists, despite the fact that the vast majority of those who exhibited saw themselves part of mainstream English modernism: and were not working, as Rothenstein had been in 1906, on self-consciously Jewish themes.⁹³² It also seems to represent an important stage in Rothenstein's connections with Anglo-Jewish art.

⁹³² Steyn (1990) and Tickner (2000).

It is hard to say why Bomberg chose not to select any of Rothenstein's work for the exhibition. Most likely it was because he wished to favour younger Jewish artists – of which there were now a fair few rising up the ranks – and to select works of a more obviously modern flavour, which may explain why Alfred Wolmark – who worked in a similar mode to Rothenstein in the East End at the beginning of the century, but had since begun to paint in the Fauvist style – *was* included.⁹³³ Clearly the help extended by Rothenstein to these younger Jewish artists, through his role at the Education Aid Society, did not warrant his inclusion. Perhaps there also remained some doubt as to his true Jewish credentials; a suspicion of his ambiguous status within the Jewish community, fuelled by the difference in his origins and upbringing. Rothenstein was an outsider in this particular story – that of Anglo-Jewish artists from the London East-End – and as a result of the popularity of said story has, in some senses, remained a perennial outsider in the grander narrative of Jewish art in England.⁹³⁴ After all their initial fêting, references to Rothenstein in the *Jewish Chronicle* fizzle out after the First World War. His place in the literature on Jewish art is similarly small; whilst it is impossible to write him out (he was too heavily involved, at so many levels) there remains the sense that he doesn't really belong.⁹³⁵

⁹³³ For more on Wolmark see Dickson and MacDougall (2004).

⁹³⁴ Peter Gross's 2004 thesis is the obvious exception, though he comes to similar conclusions regarding Rothenstein's stance. He writes: 'The encounter with the Jews of the East End was, I would postulate, a defining moment of alterity for the young Rothenstein; one which posed a challenge he was ultimately to refuse... Rothenstein would appear to have simultaneously rejected and embraced his past': Gross (2004) 292.

⁹³⁵ The influential Ben Uri Art Gallery, or London Jewish Museum of Art, responsible for important exhibitions on Jewish artists such as Gertler, Epstein, Bomberg, Kramer and Wolmark, has never held an exhibition on Rothenstein.

CODA

‘A little of a revolutionary’:

Rothenstein on and after 1910

I'm one of the people that believe in your work, as I understand it, but I really don't see where you come in with the present day whirlpool. [Eric Gill to William Rothenstein, 1912].⁹³⁶

Struggling to make sense of Froitzheim, Cannan settles on a comfortable answer; that the character is struggling to make sense of himself; that he is a ‘self-deceiver’ who has compromised his true nature in a futile attempt to move with the times. He ignores the evidence of Froitzheim’s generosity to Mendel: such kindness becomes, as so often, a weapon wielded by the older artist; a sort of trap designed to lure Mendel away from his true purpose. The characterisation is crude, but the confusion is understandable. The ambiguity of his Jewish identity, and the constant anxiety over his position of influence ensured that Rothenstein’s personality was hard to grasp. Once again, his avoidance of the more obvious ways of exerting influence excited suspicion amongst his acquaintances. He had managed not to appear overly forceful; as a result, he had run the risk of looking witless, sinister or insincere. When no one knows where someone stands, they are apt to let their imagination fill the gap. Rothenstein allowed a lot of gaps, which people like Gilbert Cannan were more than happy to fill.

Herein laid the inevitable drawback of his role – and the way in which he chose to play it. A fear of clarity, or of didacticism, kept him open to criticism that he would find difficult to defend. Exerting influence subtly turned out to be an almost impossible task; hardly more congenial, in the end, than exerting it with commanding force. Artists who came under Rothenstein’s influence were, more often than not, bamboozled by his approach. What did he expect from them? He seemed to ask for nothing in return, only

⁹³⁶ Eric Gill to William Rothenstein, 17th December, 1912, HGTN.

to complain when he received nothing. He gave advice against those who gave too much advice, fighting hard for the right to be vague. Just as the period of art during which he worked has had a habit of frustrating art historians with its lack of an obvious identity, so Rothenstein frustrated this emerging generation of artists. He offered too much to be dismissed out of hand; but never enough to retain the role of *the* 'important personage'.

Roger Fry, working similarly hard to improve conditions for young artists, was as frustrated as anyone. As it happened, their failure to work together during these years was hindered by a range of issues, from difficult circumstances (Rothenstein was in India at the time of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition; later in the USA) to silly misunderstandings, fuelled by mixed messages and aggravated by mutual suspicion.⁹³⁷ Professional jealousy was probably part of the mix (Rothenstein admits in his memoirs that he 'did not feel inclined to work under Fry's dictatorship'), but it was well concealed.⁹³⁸ Rothenstein had, after all, pulled out of the application for Slade Professor in early 1910 to allow Fry the chance – and Fry did try, repeatedly, to get Rothenstein involved in the second Post-Impressionist exhibition. 'Do let us, however, get rid of misunderstandings', wrote a contrite Rothenstein in 1911: 'we are both of us working for the same thing and it seems absurd that there should be anything of the kind'.⁹³⁹ And yet the misunderstandings continued, to such an extent that one has to question whether they were, in fact, 'working for the same thing'. What becomes clear, at any rate, is that they had very different ideas as to how to go about things, with Rothenstein employing what should now strike us as typical language to express his own ideas. Noting his independence from the N.E.A.C. (and thus distancing himself from some of the more extreme reactions to the Post-Impressionist exhibition) Rothenstein writes to Fry of his hopes to 'form a small society... with certain aims and a certain duty'.⁹⁴⁰ 'There has always,' he goes on, 'remained in my mind the possibility of John, Gill, Epstein, McEvoy, myself, with a few of the more gifted young men, exhibiting together

⁹³⁷ Rothenstein was in the USA during the winter of 1911-12.

⁹³⁸ W Rothenstein (1937c) 212.

⁹³⁹ Rothenstein to Fry, April 4th 1911: Beckson and Lago (1975) 69.

⁹⁴⁰ Rothenstein appears to backtrack regarding his allegiances to the N.E.A.C. later, writing in his memoirs that, despite leaving the group, he still felt 'the New English Art Club to be the body with which I had most sympathy': W Rothenstein (1937c) 212.

as a vague group, and we have often spoken of it among ourselves'.⁹⁴¹ The language, once again, gives him away. 'Certain aims and a certain duty' take us back to the Carfax, founded to exhibit 'work of a certain character'; the 'vague group' confirming the fact that Rothenstein is as desperate as ever to *avoid* any sort of certainty.

Progress, for him, still lies in a spirit of strident vagueness; as opposed to the 'fireworks' represented by the first Post-Impressionist exhibition.⁹⁴² This he simply couldn't take seriously. It was, he thought at the time, 'an affair of social excitement... a brilliant and gallant charge of the light brigade'; a generator, ultimately, of ill-informed gossip – a throwback, perhaps, to the kind of Whistlerian tactics he had long since dismissed.⁹⁴³ The way forward lay in continued reliance on methods he had been employing for many years; in these 'vague' groups, rather than the 'spasmodic exhibition of an ill understood movement'.⁹⁴⁴ 'If we can manage to form a really independent group and appeal to unprejudiced people I am with you,' he confessed to Fry, as if this was nothing much to ask for.⁹⁴⁵ Fry knew, surely, that this was in fact too much; that Rothenstein had been making such appeals for many years, with little obvious effect. Now was the time, he seems to have perceived, to drop the equivocal positions: this approach had run its course – the 'unprejudiced' audience was no more than a pipe dream. And yet Rothenstein was as keen as ever to nail his colours to the mast of ambiguity. It was, in one sense, the only place where he had any chance of survival. Sensitive critics like Fry might be able to understand his relation to more modern movements, but his increasingly large group of supporters – as Rothenstein realised in 1911 – 'look upon me as dullard with an interesting past, who has done his best work 20 years ago'.⁹⁴⁶ We need only to take a look at *BLAST* to see how Rothenstein's tentative prods towards a new kind of art could have struck some of the younger generation; Wyndham Lewis's muscular prose and his 'volcanic' energy

⁹⁴¹ Rothenstein to Fry, March 30th 1911: Beckson and Lago (1975) 68.

⁹⁴² Rothenstein to Fry, March 19th 1911: Beckson and Lago (1975) 67-8.

⁹⁴³ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁴ Rothenstein to Fry, April 4th 1911: Beckson and Lago (1975) 70.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁶ Fry, though derided by many of his contemporaries as didactic, was far more open-minded than he has been given credit for: see Green (1999) 13-14, 28-30, 119; and Spalding (1999) 198, 232.

seeming to turn the words of this latter-day meteorite to dust.⁹⁴⁷

Was this the uncomfortable truth of the matter; that he was a ‘dullard with an interesting past?’ The almost non-existent art historical reception of Rothenstein’s post 1910 work would appear to suggest so. 1910 is the end of the road for Rothenstein, it would seem; the squabbles between him and Fry serving to represent, in the words of Michael Stansky, no less than ‘the differences in England between the previously advanced but still traditional forms of artistic developments, and those critics who were heralds of a new artistic movement, which we now know as modernism’.⁹⁴⁸ But is it really this simple? Neither Fry nor Rothenstein seem to have thought so at the time. Evidently his painting wasn’t ever likely to stand out besides the Matisse and the Picasso; but Rothenstein certainly saw himself in touch with some of the younger British artists – thus his frustration with the N.E.A.C. As he wrote to his family in 1913: ‘the old N.E.A.C people like Tonks & Steer are content to go on painting models doing nothing but sitting pretty. I don’t as you know like the fanatical and unbalanced side of post impressionism but I do feel there is a more intellectual attitude towards nature among some of the best of the young men, & I am more interested in them than in the old brigade. At bottom it has been the actual realism of my work they have liked, not its structural severity & I hope the imaginative quality present’.⁹⁴⁹ Here we see a genuine belief in his continued relevance; one that belies the idea that Rothenstein was left stranded, like Tonks & Steer, by the events of late 1910. But then he wasn’t quite in tune with the times either (or at least what we perceive to be ‘the times’); left, instead, on a small island of his own: slightly out of touch with both sides.⁹⁵⁰

The tendency to follow the progress of contemporary art according to the relative strengths and weaknesses of distinct groups has not done much for Rothenstein’s reputation. Adrift from the N.E.A.C., reluctant to be associated with Fry and

⁹⁴⁷ On the tendency to use events around 1910 to divide artists such as Rothenstein and Lewis into ‘historically opposing camps’ see Corbett (2006).

⁹⁴⁸ Stansky (1996) 187.

⁹⁴⁹ William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, August 14th 1913, HGTN.

⁹⁵⁰ In his memoirs Rothenstein declared Henry Tonks to be the ‘inquisitor’ of the Slade and the N.E.A.C., considering all outsiders as ‘heretics’, most obviously ‘the Dictators of the other independent group... Roger Fry and Clive Bell, who declared war on all who would not accept their ideology’: W Rothenstein (1939) 166.

Bloomsbury, or with Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism, there is no real place for him in the history of modern British art as we know it.

One of the few recent art historians to have argued otherwise is Michael Saler, who writes that '[Rothenstein's] tirades against Roger Fry and the aesthetic of significant form were so bitter, and his praise of representative content in painting so fulsome, he could be easily mistaken as an opponent of visual modernism.'⁹⁵¹ 'This,' he argues, 'is manifestly not the case', citing Rothenstein's support of 'controversial modernists like Jacob Epstein, Henry Moore, Wyndham Lewis, and Paul Nash' as just one example of his forward-looking stance.⁹⁵² He associates Rothenstein with what he calls 'the northern civic arts movement', noting his work in promoting art in the provinces, his 'invocations of Ruskin and Morris in speeches and essays' and his general openness, throughout this period, to modern art and artists. Rothenstein's tussle with Fry in 1910 led both to extreme positions that barely summed up their actual beliefs: 'on the whole,' Saler concludes, 'Rothenstein was a proponent of modern art, not an adversary'.⁹⁵³

Though Saler's approach probably suffers too much from a desire to score points against Fry – and feed his own concept of a Northern English 'medieval modernism' – many of these points are perfectly valid. There may be no need to push Rothenstein forward as one of *the* leading influences on modern art in Britain; but there *is* a need to understand his continuing relevance and importance up to and, indeed, beyond 1910. Allowing Rothenstein's disagreement with Fry, or his distance from the power of Vorticist art-politics to obscure his wide-ranging sympathy with aspects of the modern movement would be an unfortunate act indeed. Lewis put fierce rhetoric at the centre of *BLAST* to an extent that was almost self-defeating. Though he was obviously a serious thinker, he was also playing a game; putting the aggression that had, perhaps, always laid beneath matters of artistic debate very much on the surface. They were not empty words, but the approach was deliberately stylised. There was no talk of 'certain aims' or a 'certain duty': to be Vorticist was very much not to be 'vague'. And yet, for all this – and for all the immediate differences in their art – there was always between

⁹⁵¹ Saler (1999) 51-2.

⁹⁵² Ibid.

⁹⁵³ Ibid. 55.

Lewis and Rothenstein a good degree of mutual respect. The gap wasn't, to them, as wide as we like to think it was. Indeed, Lewis later praised Rothenstein for his 'invisible assets', describing him as a 'born teacher' and an 'eager mentor'; 'one of the last people in England able to distinguish what is authentic, and what is not, in the field of art'.⁹⁵⁴

Aside from the encouragement and occasional financial assistance he gave artists such as Lewis, Rothenstein did occasionally appear to be in tune with their ideals. In 1909 he lectured at the London Institute, where he was reported to have waxed lyrical over 'ships that come into the Thames, and of scaffolding and great buildings rising skyward, and of everything of an epic kind that was making their civilisation'.⁹⁵⁵ Speaking of a Manchester man who had told of his pleasure in being able to escape from the office and see J W Waterhouse's 1896 painting *Hylas and the Nymphs* at the Manchester Art Gallery, Rothenstein 'despairingly' provided the scoffing retort: 'You are content.... to go and see "Hylas and the Nymphs" while ships are coming into London and buildings rising to the sky!' ⁹⁵⁶ Put this alongside the artist's belief in the 'structural severity' of his work, or some of the earlier, semi-strident observations contained within his *Goya*, and there is little of the outmoded dullard here; rather a man rising to the challenge of modern life and imploring others to do the same.

Appropriately, many of those following a similar path were indirectly benefiting from Rothenstein's exertions. Walter Sickert's Camden Town Group held three exhibitions at the Carfax Gallery between 1911 and 1912, in the first of which Wyndham Lewis offered a work. Augustus John, another satellite member of the Camden Town Group, continued to hold important exhibitions at the Chenil – a gallery inspired by the Carfax (and the home, also, of Rothenstein's 1911 show of Indian works).⁹⁵⁷ India was, of course, the reason that Rothenstein had not been around to see the first Post-Impressionist exhibition; it stands, thus, as a symbol of bad luck – but also of the wideness and richness of Rothenstein's interests at this moment. At the point in which Britain appears to be tackling fresh ideas from the Continent, Rothenstein's

⁹⁵⁴ Michel and Fox (1971) 416.

⁹⁵⁵ 'Mr. Rothenstein's protest', *The Manchester Guardian*, Jan 15th 1909, 6.

⁹⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁷ John's 1910 Chenil exhibition – *Provençal Studies and Other Works* – was thought to be just as modern as any of the exhibits at the Grafton: see Robins (1997) 46-51.

obsession with all things Indian can seem a little off-putting: yet another flavour to add to an already potent mix. To ignore Rothenstein's Indian adventures would, however, be foolish: as research by Sarah Turner and Rupert Arrowsmith has shown, they are as much a part of the post-1910 British art world as, for instance, Roger Fry's essays on primitive art; forming a direct link to the modernist sculpture of Jacob Epstein and Eric Gill.⁹⁵⁸

Neither of these two sculptors would, in time, give much credit to Rothenstein as an influential force; Epstein thought his friendship 'comic'; whilst Gill seems to have felt betrayed by Rothenstein's refusal to follow him only so far in thought.⁹⁵⁹ Their experience was not untypical: many artists took a lead from Rothenstein, but few were willing to admit any sort of discipleship. As I have argued throughout, this shouldn't blind us to the importance of his role; nor should we assume that the ultimate effects of his efforts always ended in such negativity. The often peculiar course that his influence took was beneficial to many people – and in many ways. One of the ironies is that when it worked best, less was probably made of it: those who came under his influence found it easier to complain than to praise. Perhaps the manner in which he chose to operate was never going to be conducive to the historian.

All in all, Rothenstein's importance to art and artists of this period is not the chimera of an art historian desperate to see beyond the usual suspects: it is real, substantial and significant. And it was not lost on everyone. In 1915 Edward Gordon Craig still saw Rothenstein as the 'only possible leader' amongst British artists, bemoaning his lack of militancy.⁹⁶⁰ This was, in one sense, a misunderstanding, for Rothenstein's continued relevance lay partly in his refusal to take sides. Sir Michael Sadler's comment in 1921 contains a smarter assessment of the situation: 'no gathering of English pictures of the period in which you have been working and during which you have exerted a wise, moderating and conditioning influence is anything but a fragment without your work in it,' he told the artist. The language, I think, is apt. Rothenstein's behaviour may not

⁹⁵⁸ Turner (2008); Arrowsmith (2010)

⁹⁵⁹ See fns.524 and 753.

⁹⁶⁰ Edward Gordon Craig to William Rothenstein. July 29th 1915, HG TN.

always strike us as wise, but it would be fair to say that there was a little more method to the madness than we might expect.

Although Rothenstein's personality was a very particular one, aspects of his behaviour during this period are, furthermore, symptomatic of a general trend. He certainly wasn't the only influential figure chastised for not going far enough. The equally influential Laurence Binyon, as we have seen, was criticised by Ezra Pound in the second edition of *BLAST* for not 'sufficiently' rebelling; caught 'in a disgusting attitude of respect toward predecessors'.⁹⁶¹ Like Rothenstein, Binyon's response to the Post-Impressionists had been mixed; he too 'held aloof'; concerned, as John Hatcher has noted, 'that the base of native British art, fragile enough in 1910, might be further eroded by a fetishization of innovation which encouraged young artists to abandon the slow, painfully difficult task of developing their own unique vision in order to compete in mimicking the latest imported formulae, frittering away a potential spiritual renaissance in an endless succession of entrepreneurial, critically manipulated "isms"'.⁹⁶² Despite forming a group of his own (the moderately vague Camden Town Group) Walter Sickert held similar fears. 'Progress,' he wrote, 'lies in the slow unfolding of a profound and comprehending conservatism'; a rather Rothenstein-like observation, typifying this generation's mixture of enterprise and conformism; their sense that artistic developments were all the better for happening slowly.⁹⁶³ We see the same spirit, I would argue, in the life, art and writings of artists such Augustus John, Philip Wilson Steer and Charles Ricketts; even in Roger Fry himself; a belief that progress in the arts must be fought for, but not at the expense of tradition – and never for the mere sake of it. So long as artists did not lose sight of life and all its inner realities, it ought not to matter how they went about representing it.

More than anything, I would say, these artists opposed limits. This was what angered Rothenstein about the Post-Impressionist exhibitions – and modern art in general; that everything new idea had to be introduced at the expense of an old one. Continental influences brought in the 'structural severity' he sought for in his own art,

⁹⁶¹ Lewis (1915) 86; Corbett (1997b).

⁹⁶² W Rothenstein (1937c) 212; Hatcher (1995) 147-8.

⁹⁶³ Robins (2000) 405.

whilst fostering ‘contempt for technical knowledge and skill’.⁹⁶⁴ ‘The result of a limited objective, on a very moderate standard of execution, was not altogether fortunate’ he argued, conceding various successes (including work by the Nash brothers, Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, Edward Wadsworth and Wyndham Lewis), whilst bemoaning the way in which the popularity of one style determined either ignorance or the destruction of another.⁹⁶⁵ It was all so narrow-minded. ‘Fry is symbolic of his time,’ he later claimed: ‘a time when opinions seem of supreme importance. A thirst to know which periods are the best periods, which individual works of art are the best works of art, and which should be treated with contempt, is a curious characteristic of our age... Education has come to mean having the right opinions of things; doing rightly is a secondary consideration’.⁹⁶⁶ We might take issue with this – and argue that Rothenstein has not, in turn, done rightly by Fry in setting him up as a symbol of something that, on closer inspection, he made much effort to avoid.⁹⁶⁷ The comment, nevertheless – like many of those from his memoirs – is not so much about Fry as it is about Rothenstein himself; about how *his* desire to ‘do rightly’ consistently undermined, or rubbed up against his opinionated instincts.

Too forward-looking to be termed conservative, these artists consistently fall short of what we have like to think of as ‘modernist’. We take their reactions to the Post-Impressionist exhibition as an excuse to dismiss their credentials as modern artists, as if one event has the right to sum up a decade or so of artistic endeavour. Worse still, we allow it to function as a cut-off point; a juncture at which one generation splits from another. Events between the end of 1910 and the beginning of the First World War certainly threatened this spirit, but they by no means defeated it. Though this particular study ends here, Rothenstein’s approach to art shouldn’t be seen as dying along with the Edwardian era. Being no longer seen as *the* ‘important personage’ did not mean that Rothenstein had no relevance whatsoever. As with Binyon – who left his position as art critic of *The Saturday Review* shortly after the first Post-Impressionist exhibition – Rothenstein’s subsequent relocation to Gloucestershire gives the impression of a

⁹⁶⁴ Unpublished notes, Box 21, HGfN.

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁶ W Rothenstein (1937c) 213.

⁹⁶⁷ See fn.946

defeated warrior going into exile. Certainly some withdrawal was taking place – as it was when he moved to Hampstead in 1902 – but this does not mark the end of his influence by any means. Putting aside his work at the Royal College of Arts in the 1920s, or the influence of his approach on his son, writer and Tate director John Rothenstein, Rothenstein's influence can be seen most immediately in the work of such young artists as Paul Nash – who, after all, continued to seek his help well after the excitements of 1910 – and Stanley Spencer.⁹⁶⁸ I write here not of influence in its most popular form – discernible stylistic influence passing from one work of art to another – but of a subtler, less obvious, form. Or should I say *forms*, for – as I hope to have shown throughout this thesis – Rothenstein's influence, in all its equivocal manifestations, had undoubted range. It manifested itself in one-to-one relationships with artists; in the growth of small galleries and societies around the turn of the century; and in his writings and lectures. We might also find it operating behind the scenes; in his work with organisations such as the JEAS; in the advice he gave to collectors (such as his brother Charles Rutherston); and in the social networks in which he moved, which enabled him not only to meet people for his own benefit, but to form contacts between people who might otherwise have missed each other. His influence lay not simply, for all Beerbohm's teasing, in laying down the law, but – in the words of Paul Nash – in providing the necessary 'stimulant' for an artist in need; whether it be money, exhibiting space, direct advice or mere encouragement.⁹⁶⁹ In short: exerting influence in less obvious ways; in a manner which left space for the artist to be independent: untied to any specific group or movement. This approach may, on reflection, seem typically British; the examination of it, at any rate, seems to me to provide a much richer history of British art during this period than one that focuses only on those moments in which artists reveal a discernible debt or allegiance to Continental modernism.

In notes made for his memoirs in the early 1930s, Rothenstein scrawled the following, revealing line: 'I have always been a little of a revolutionary: not a conventional rebel instinctively taking part in every anarchical movement; but rebelling

⁹⁶⁸ Alan Powers writes of how a 'new generation of romantic painters' emerged in the 20s and 30s 'under the professorship of Sir William Rothenstein': Powers (1989); see also Powers (1996) for a fuller discussion of Rothenstein at the Royal College of Arts.

⁹⁶⁹ Paul Nash to William Rothenstein, November 12th 1912, HG TN.

against anything that, however revolutionary it appeared, had really become a convention⁹⁷⁰ This remark would, for some, be an admission of failure. How embarrassing, to only be a half-hearted revolutionary! But there is more to it than this. This is not so much a regretful reflection as a statement of intent; to be a 'little of a revolutionary' was, to Rothenstein, the best way to rebel. It suggested something other than a purely instinctive reaction against convention – it was instead a thoughtful position taken up between extremes; open to the criticism of each, but taken *not* from the fear of committing, but from the belief that doing so would only diminish the potential of British art. The future of Rothenstein and British art scholarship lies in paying closer attention to such distinctions – and treating them for what they are, not for what we'd like them to be.

⁹⁷⁰ Undated Notebook (marked S.O.), HGTV 1148.3

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(http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx)

- Bridgeman Art Library (<http://www.bridgemanart.com/>)



Fig.1. George Charles Beresford, *William Rothenstein*, c.1902, platinum print, 149 x 104 mm (National Portrait Gallery, London)



Fig.2. William Rothenstein, *A Doll's House*, 1899-1900, oil on canvas, 889 x 610 mm (Tate Gallery, London)

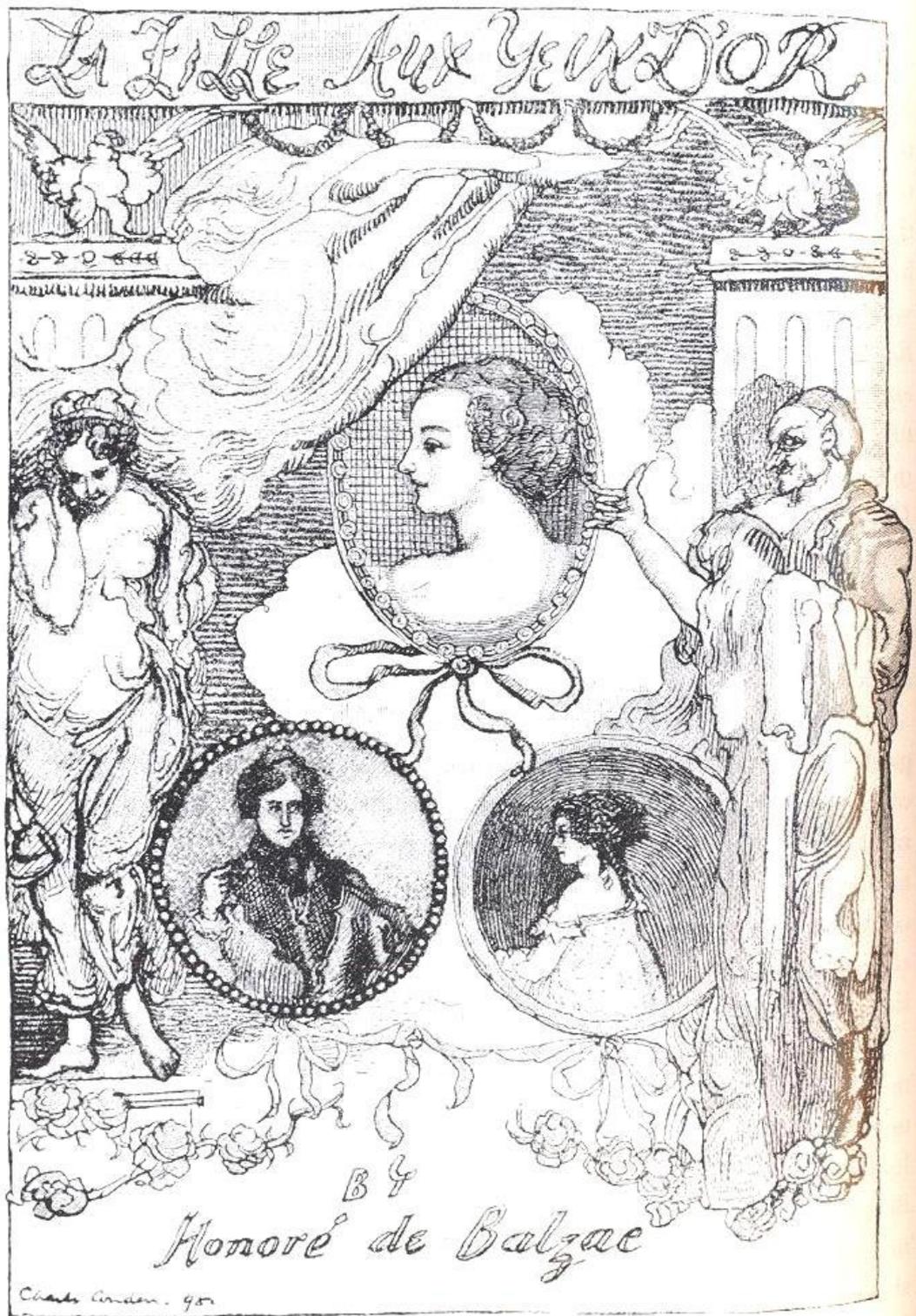


Fig. 3. Charles Conder, *Frontispiece to Balzac's 'La Fille aux yeux d'or'*, 1896, wood engraving (published in *The Savoy*, Vol 4, August 1896)



Fig. 4. William Rothenstein, *Le Grand-I-Vert (Night)*, 1899, oil on canvas, 840 x 610 mm
(Manchester City Art Gallery)



Fig.5. William Rothenstein, *The Browning Readers*, 1900, oil on canvas, 760 x 965mm (Cartwright Hall, Bradford)



Fig. 6. William Rothenstein, *Mr Charles Ricketts and Mr Charles Hazelwood Shannon* [Part IX, *English Portraits*], 1897, lithograph on paper, 377 x 250 mm



Fig.7. Max Beerbohm, *Will Rothenstein Laying Down the Law* (to Oscar Wilde on Department; to Arthur Pinero on Playwriting; to Lord Coleridge on Law; to the Prince of Wales on Dress; to Aubrey Beardsley on Decadence; to Mr Charles Furse on Folly; to Lord Rosebery on La Haute Politique; to George Moore on Caution; to Mr Eugene Stratton on Art; to Himself on Art; to Himself on Modesty), c.1895, pen on paper (Private Collection).

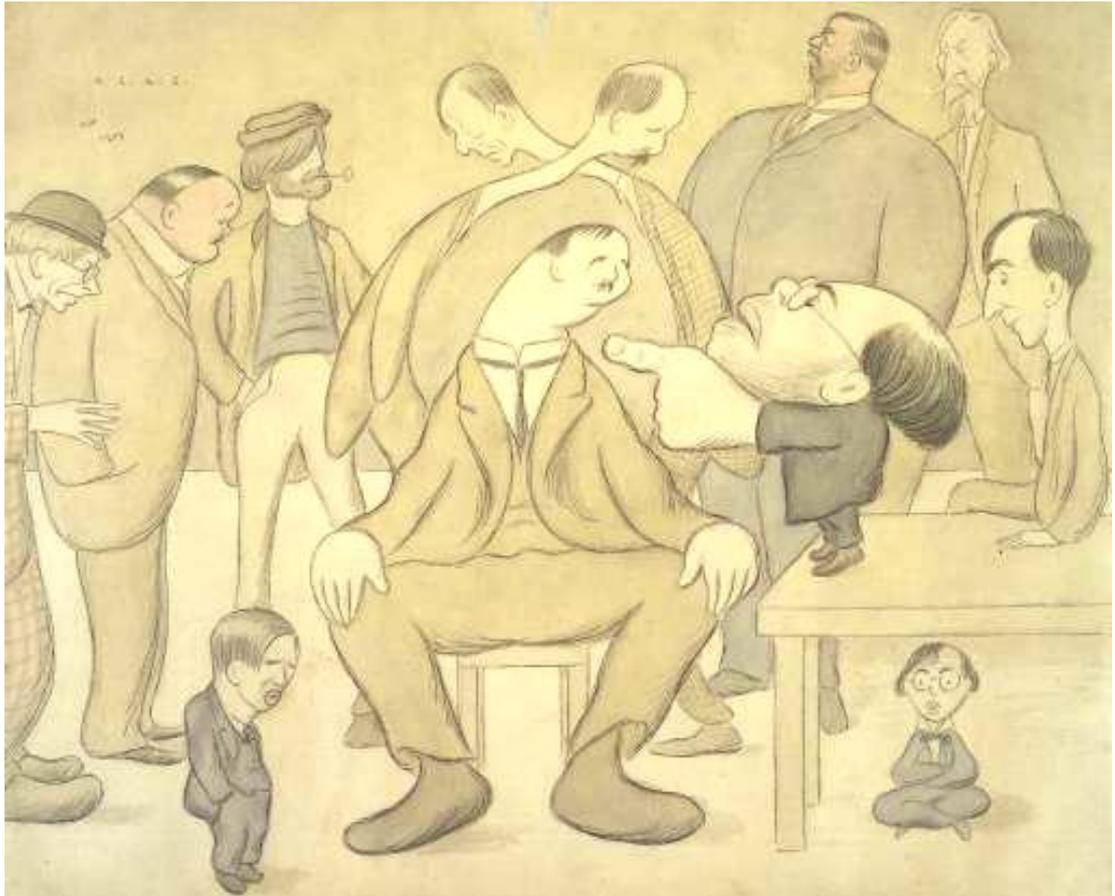


Fig.8. Max Beerbohm, *The New English Art Club*, 1906/7, pencil, pen, ink and watercolour on paper, 343 x 419 mm (Tate Gallery, London)
[From left to right: Walter Sickert, Charles Conder, William Orpen, Augustus John, D.S.MacColl, Philip Wilson Steer (seated), Henry Tonks, William Rothenstein, Roger Fry, L.A.Harrison, Albert Rutherston and Walter Russell]



Fig.9. William Orpen, *The Play Scene from 'Hamlet'*, 1899, oil on canvas, 1750 x 2220mm
(Private Collection)



Fig.10. William Orpen, *The Selecting Jury of the New English Art Club*, 1909, oil on canvas, 699 x 902 mm (National Portrait Gallery, London)

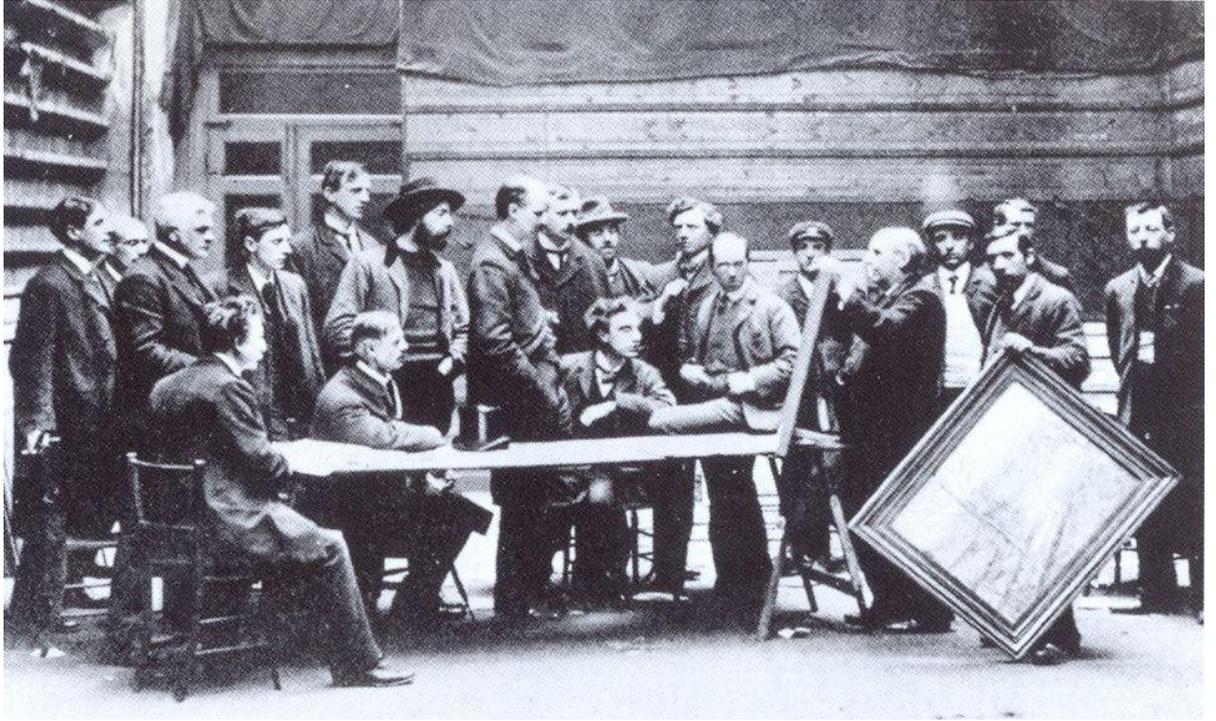


Fig.11. Anonymous, *Last Jury of the New English Art Club at the Dudley Gallery, 1904*, photograph, measurements unknown.

[Back row, from left to right: Walter Russell, David Muirhead, Alfred Rich, Ambrose McEvoy, Henry Tonks, Augustus John, D.S.MacColl, Philip Wilson Steer, Muirhead Bone, Francis Bate

Front row, seated: Fred Winter, Fred Brown, Roger Fry, William Rothenstein]



Fig.12. William Rothenstein, *The Saturday Review: Illustrated Supplement*, December 1896



Fig.13. William Rothenstein, *Max Beerbohm*, 1898, lithograph, 348 x 283 mm (National Portrait Gallery)



Fig.14. William Rothenstein, *L'Homme qui sort* (*The Painter Charles Conder*), 1892, oil on canvas, 1203 x 552mm (Toledo Museum of Art)

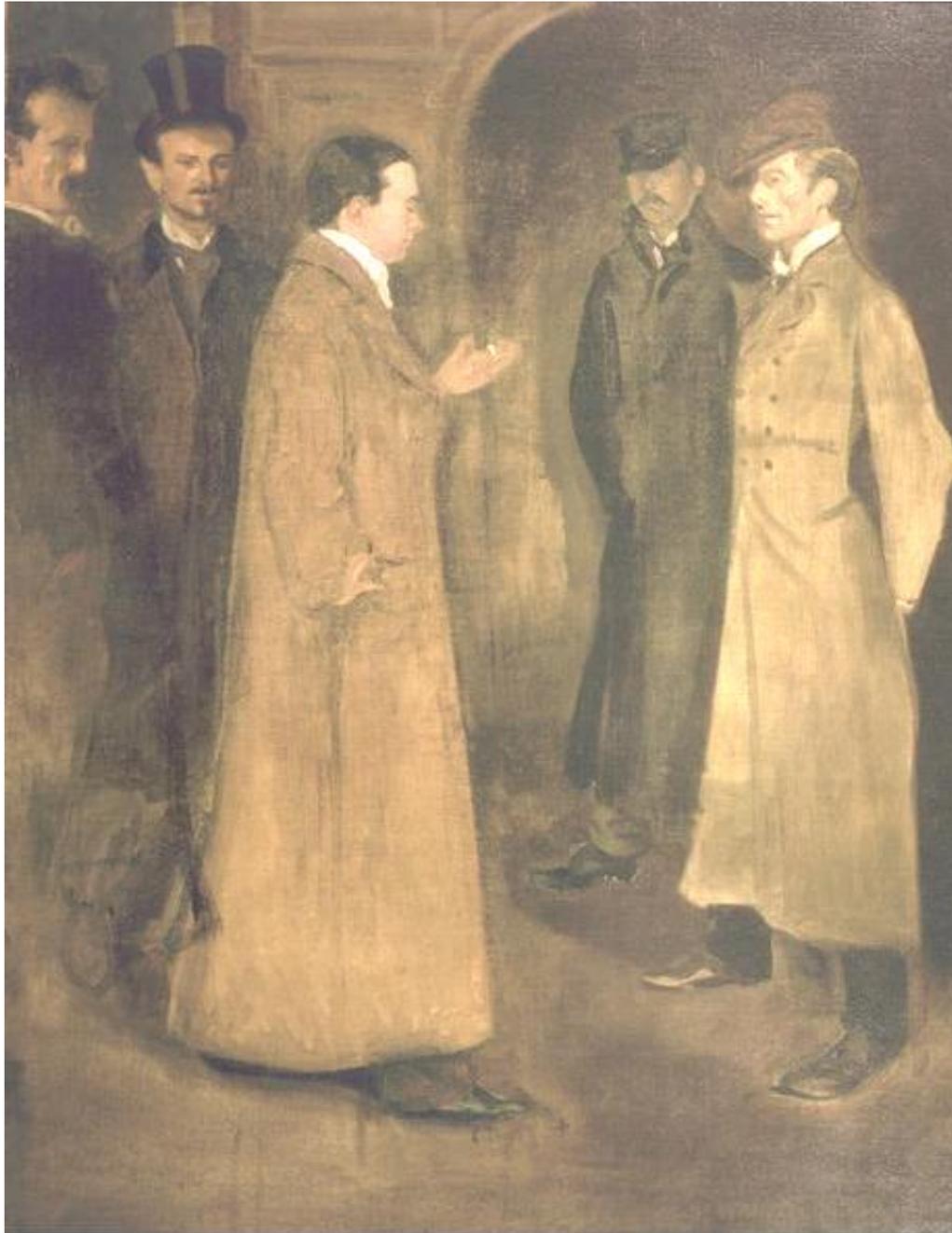


Fig.15. William Rothenstein, *Group Portrait*, 1894, oil on canvas, 1130 x 870mm
(Private Collection)

[Left to right: D.S.MacColl, Charles Furse, Max Beerbohm,
Philip Wilson Steer and Walter Sickert]

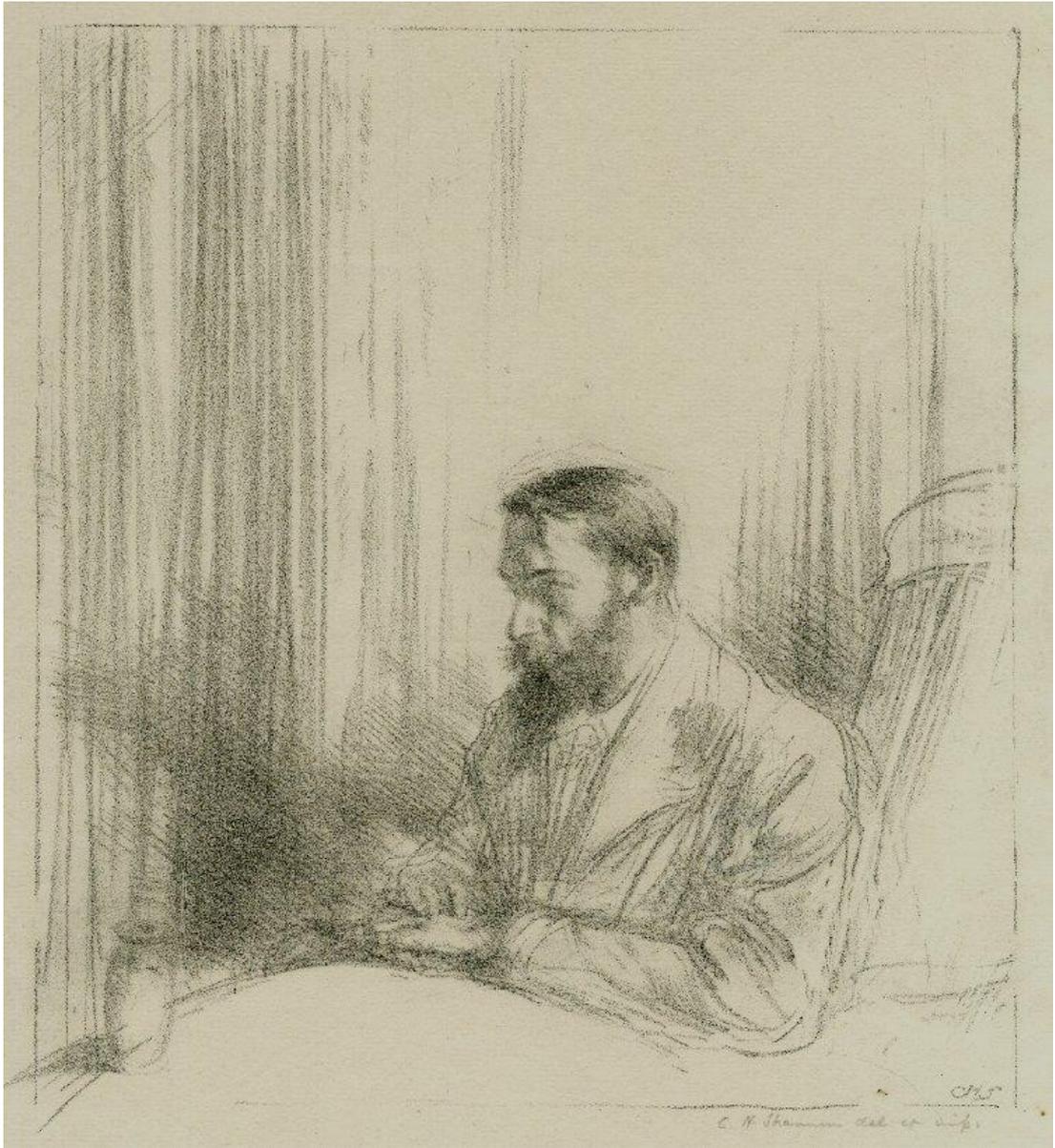


Fig.16. Charles Shannon, *E J Van Wisselingh: A Portrait Sketch*, 1895, lithograph, 237 x 224 mm (British Museum, London)



Fig. 17. William Rothenstein, *Robert Baldwin Ross*, c.1900, oil on canvas, 333 x 254 mm
(National Portrait Gallery, London)

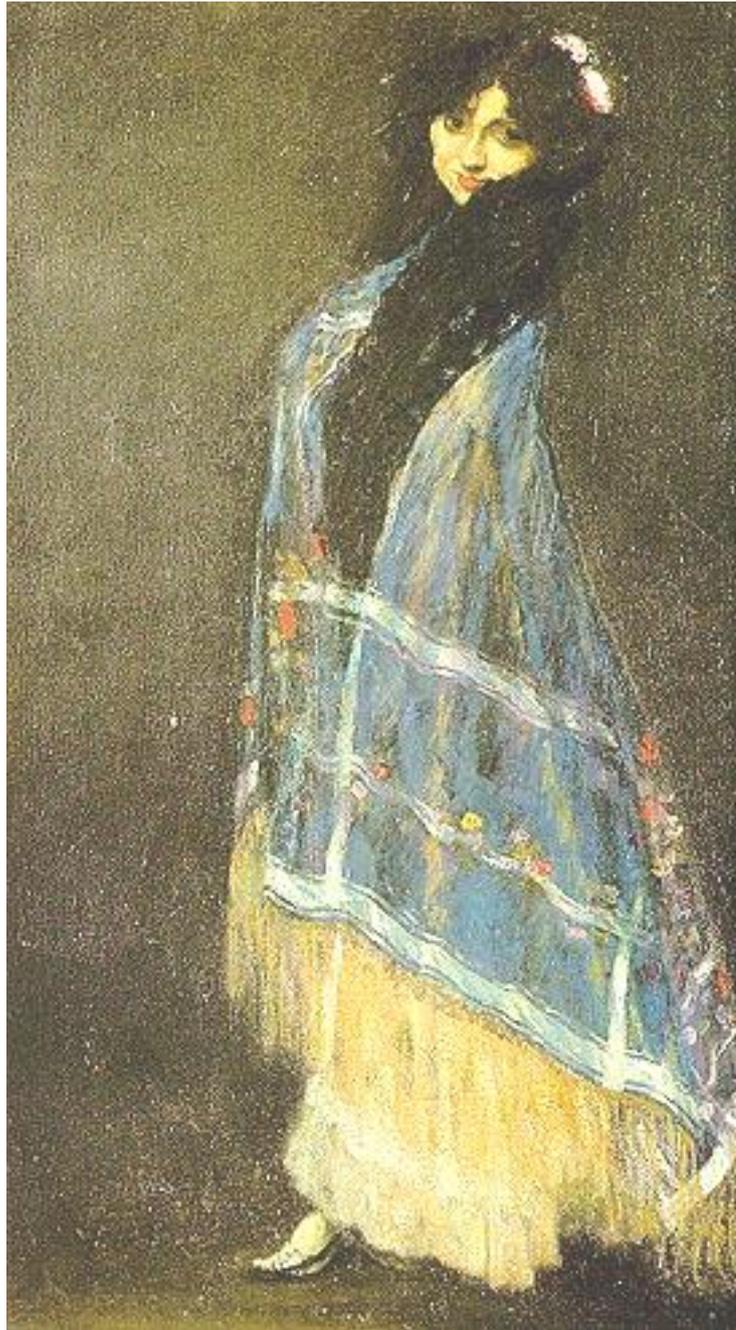


Fig.18.William Rothenstein, *Hablant Español*, 1895, oil on canvas, measurements unknown (Private Collection)



Fig.19. William Rothenstein, *Laurence Binyon*, 1898, lithograph, 306 x 288 mm
(National Portrait Gallery, London)



Fig.20. William Rothenstein, *Vézelay*, 1896, oil on canvas, measurements unknown
(Private Collection)



Fig.21. William Rothenstein, *The Quarry* (or *The Old Quarry, Hawksworth*), 1904, oil on canvas, 845 x 915mm (Cartwright Hall, Bradford)

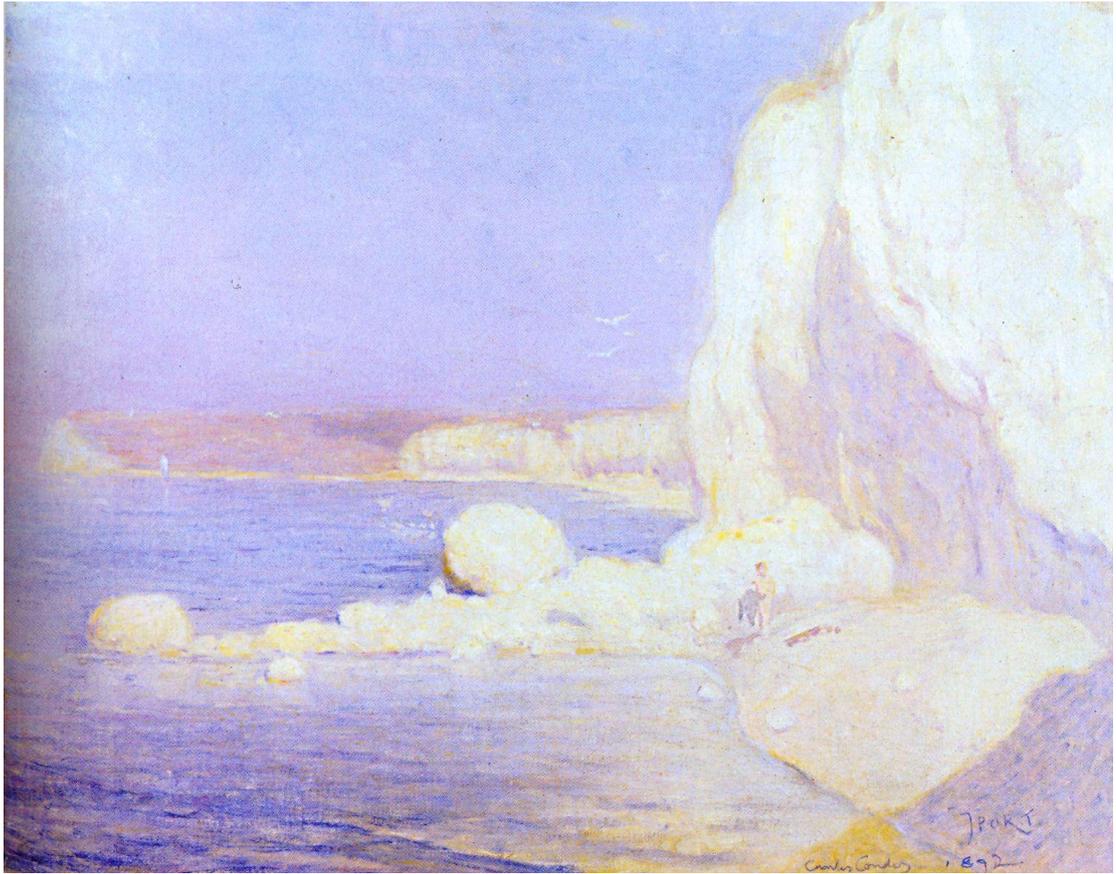


Fig.22. Charles Conder, *Yport*, 1892, oil on canvas, 489 x 597mm
(York City Art Gallery)

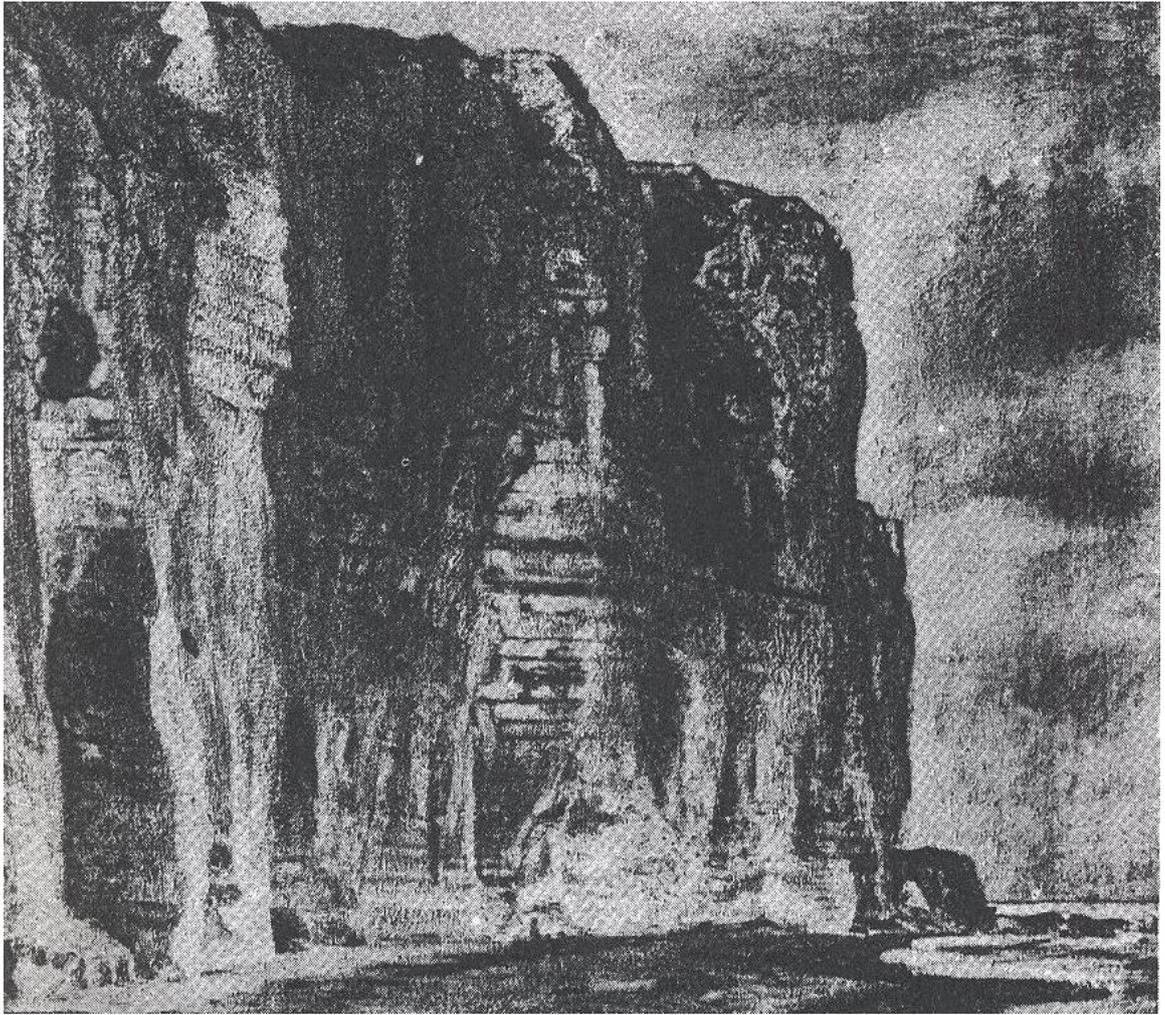


Fig.23. William Rothenstein, *Nature's Ramparts* (or *Cliffs at Vaucottes*), 1908, oil on canvas, 896 x 1014 mm (Manchester City Art Gallery)



Fig.24. Charles Conder, *Newquay (Towan Beach)*, 1906, oil on canvas, 642 x 772mm
(Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool)



Fig.25. William Rothenstein, *Tree in Winter, Iles Farm (or Winter)*, 1916, oil on canvas, 76 x 1017 mm (Manchester City Art Gallery)

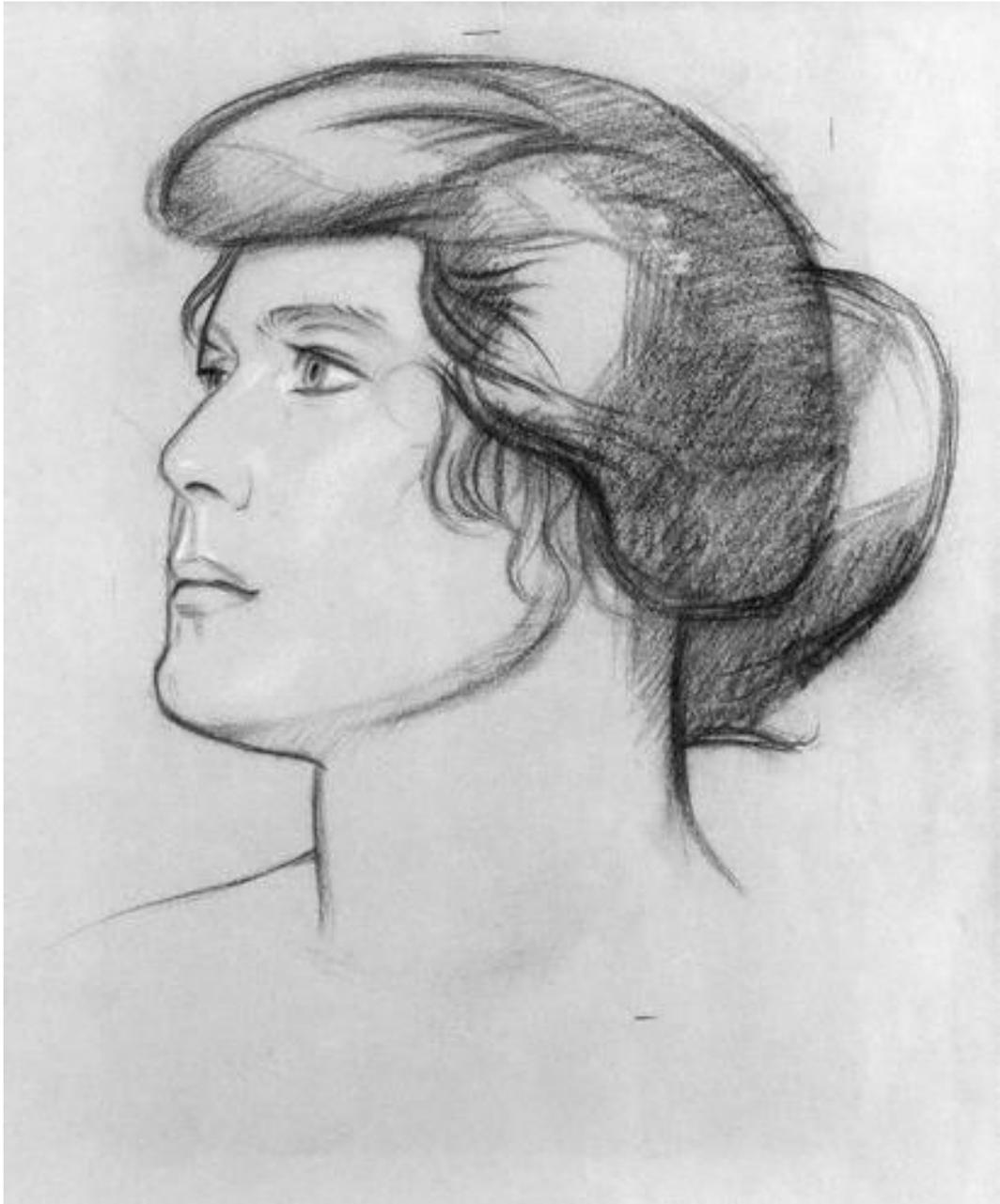


Fig.26. William Rothenstein, *Dame Margery Perham*, 1919, sanguine and black and white chalk, 378 x 279 mm (National Portrait Gallery, London)

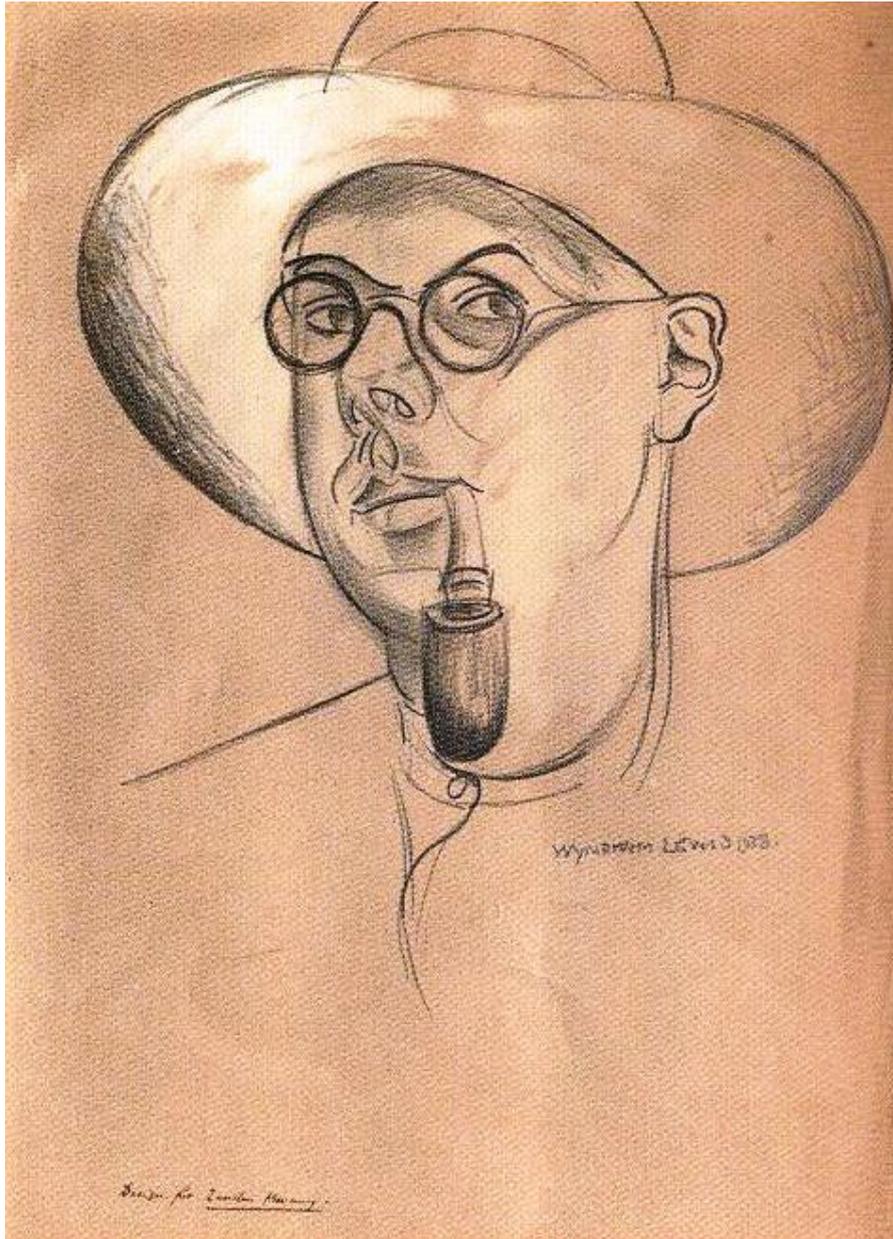


Fig.27. Wyndham Lewis, *Self Portrait with Pipe*, 1938, pencil on paper, 495 x 385 mm (State University of New York)



Fig.28. William Rothenstein, *Reading the Book of Esther*, 1907, oil on canvas, 87 x 1065 mm (Manchester City Art Gallery)

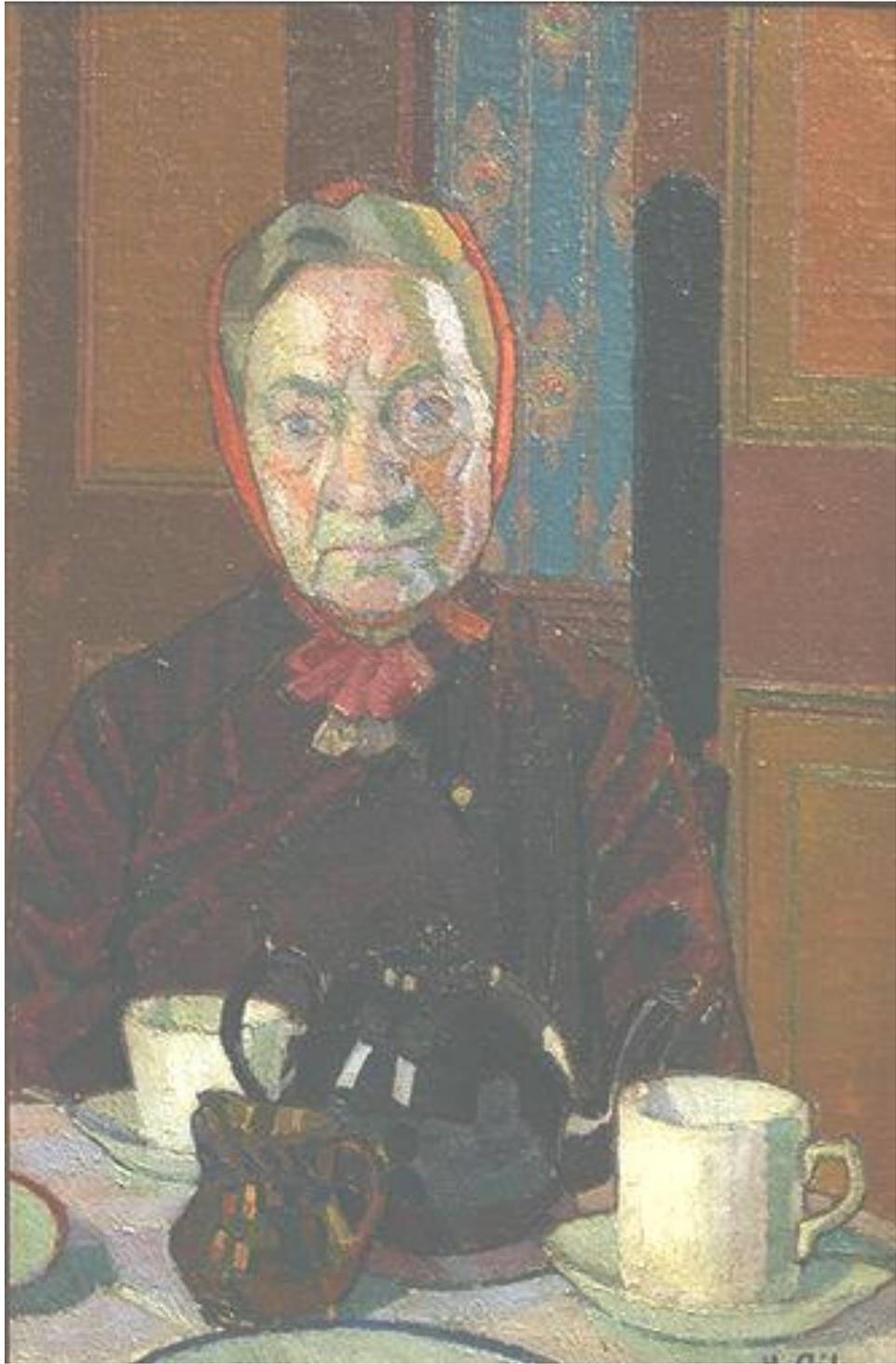


Fig.29. Harold Gilman, *Mrs Mounter at the Breakfast Table*, c.1917, oil on canvas, 808 x 605 mm (Tate Gallery, London)



Fig.30. William Rothenstein, *Eli the Thatcher*, 1913, oil on canvas, 765 x 633 mm
(Manchester City Art Gallery)



Fig.31. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Philosopher in Meditation*, 1632, oil on panel, 280 x 340 mm (The Louvre, Paris)

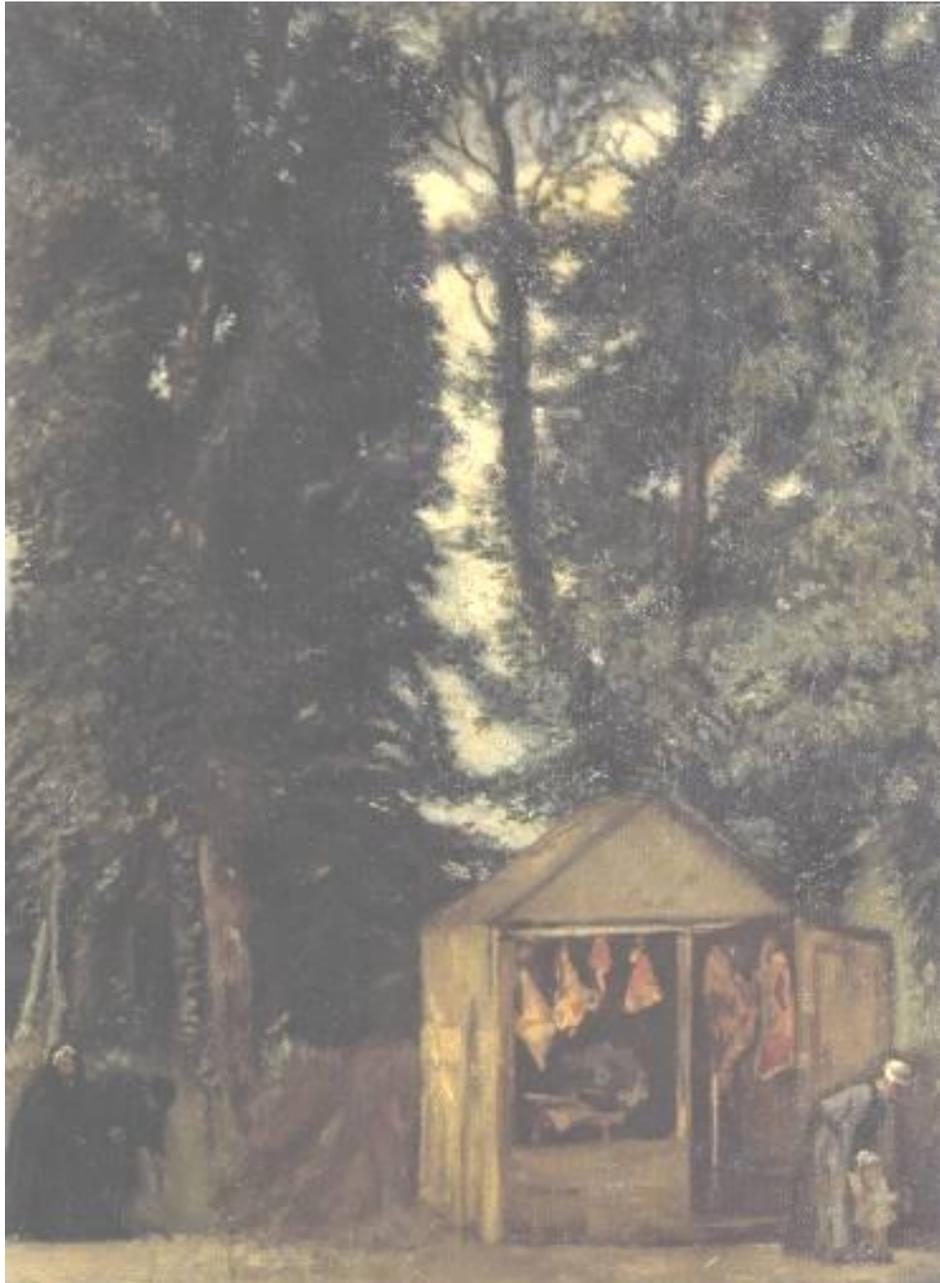


Fig.32. William Rothenstein, *The Butcher's Shop Under the Trees*, 1899, oil on canvas, 787 x 584 mm (Tate Gallery, London)



Fig.33. William Orpen, *The English Nude*, 1900, oil on panel, 920 x 720 mm (Mildura Arts Centre)



Fig.34. Augustus John, *Merikli*, 1902, oil on canvas, 762 x 637 mm
(Manchester City Art Gallery)



Fig.35. William Rothenstein, *Auguste Rodin*, 1906, chalk on paper, 368 x 311 mm
(Tate Gallery, London)

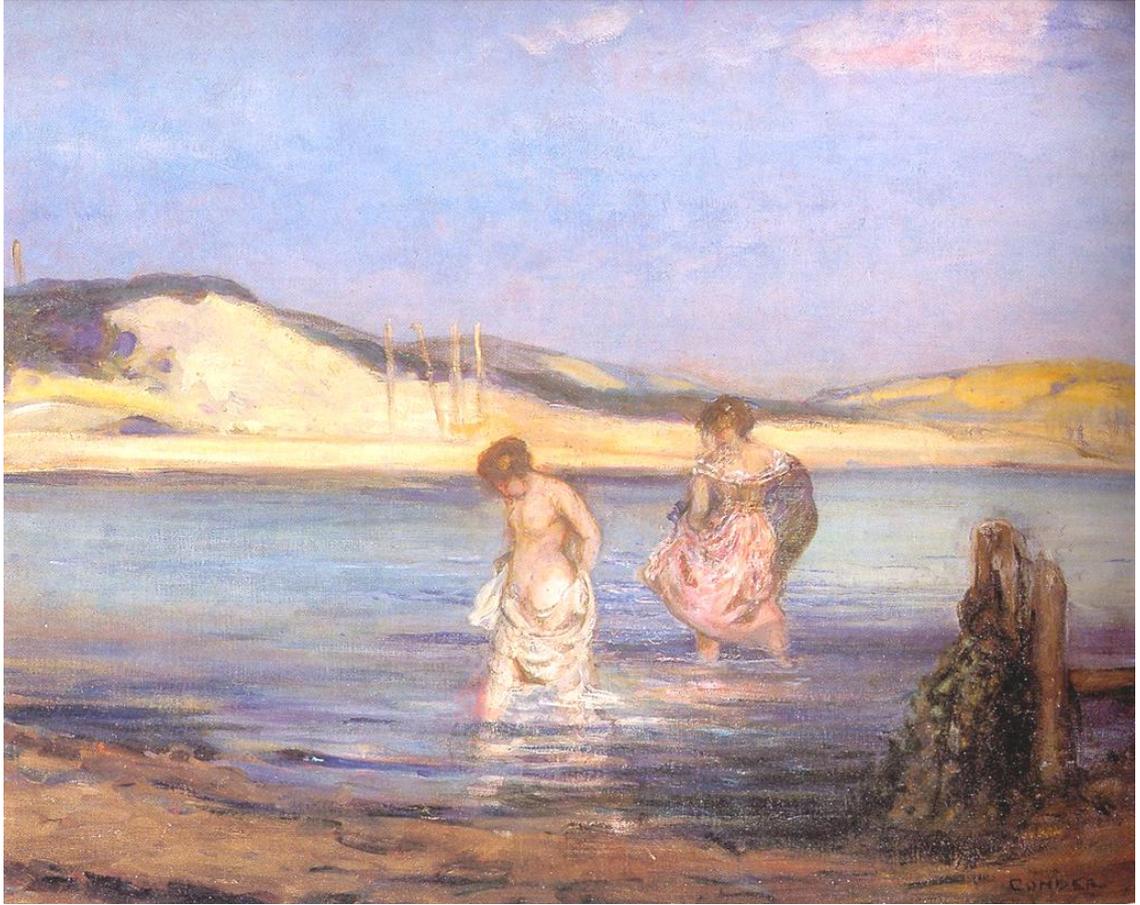


Fig.36. Charles Conder, *Women bathing, Swanage*, 1900, 508 x 600 mm (Private Collection)

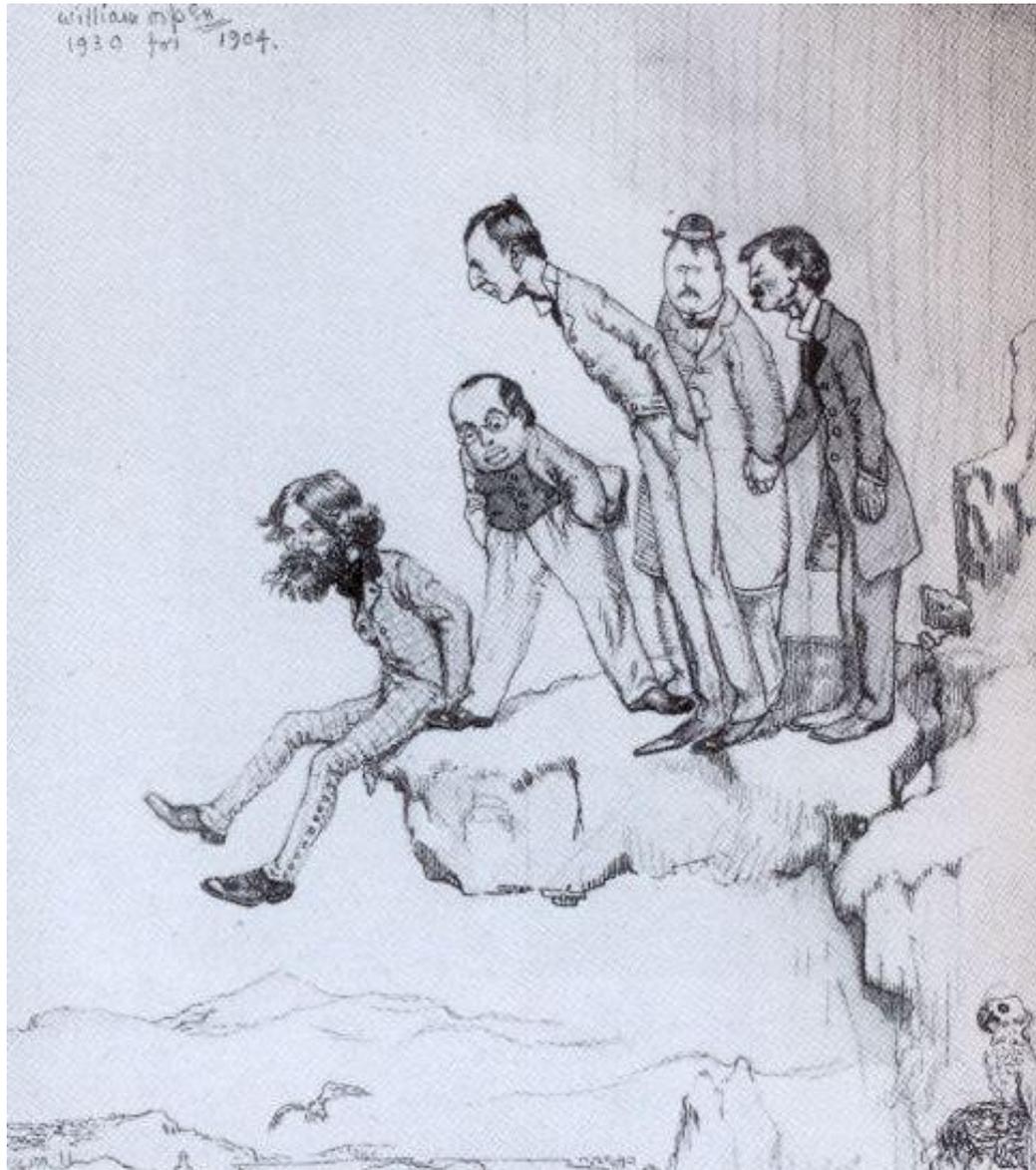


Fig.37. William Orpen, *Crisis at the New English Art Club, 1904*, 1930, 240 x 215 mm
(Private Collection)
[Left to right: Augustus John, William Rothenstein, Henry Tonks, Philip Wilson Steer
and Fred Brown]



Fig.38. 26 Church Row, Hampstead, 2009 (author's photograph)



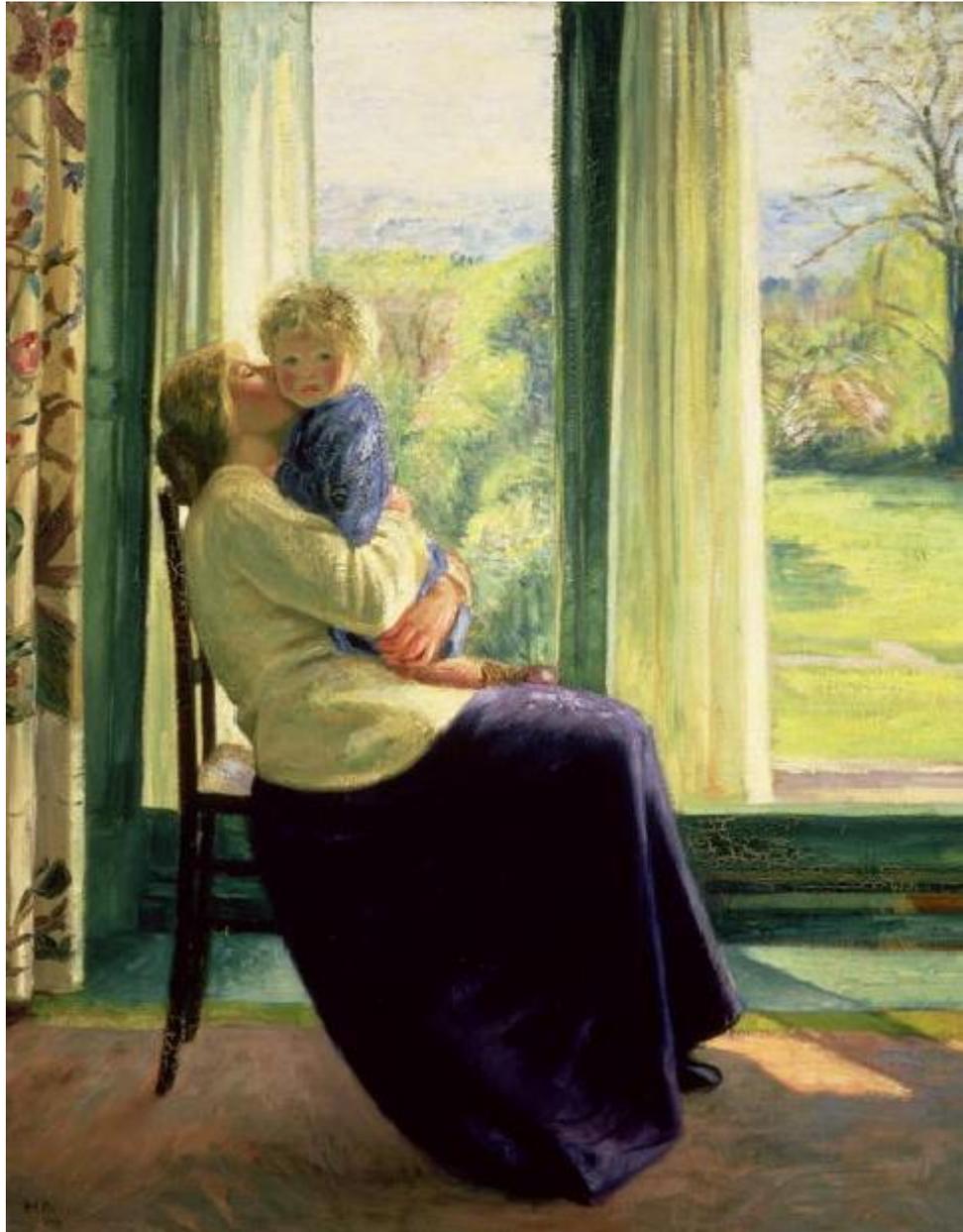
Fig.39. William Rothenstein, *Mother and Child*, 1903, oil on canvas, 969 x 765 mm (Tate Gallery, London)



Fig.40. William Rothenstein, *An Interior*, 1903, oil on canvas, measurements unknown (Private Collection)



Fig.41. William Rothenstein, *Mother and Child*, 1901, oil on canvas, 99 x 63.5 mm
(Private Collection)



42. William Rothenstein, *Spring – The Morning Room*, 1910, oil on canvas, 972 x 763mm (Southampton City Art Gallery)



Fig.43. William Rothenstein, *Eric Gill and Alice Rothenstein*, c.1914, oil on canvas, 1048 x 953 mm (National Portrait Gallery, London)



Fig.44. George Charles Beresford, *Alice Rothenstein*, c.1901, platinum print, 150 x 102 mm (National Portrait Gallery, London)



Fig.45. William Rothenstein, *The Princess Badroulbador*, 1908, oil on canvas, 1410 x 1194 mm (Tate Gallery, London)



Fig.46. William Rothenstein, *Joseph Conrad*, 1903, pastel on paper, 394 x 283 mm
(National Portrait Gallery, London)

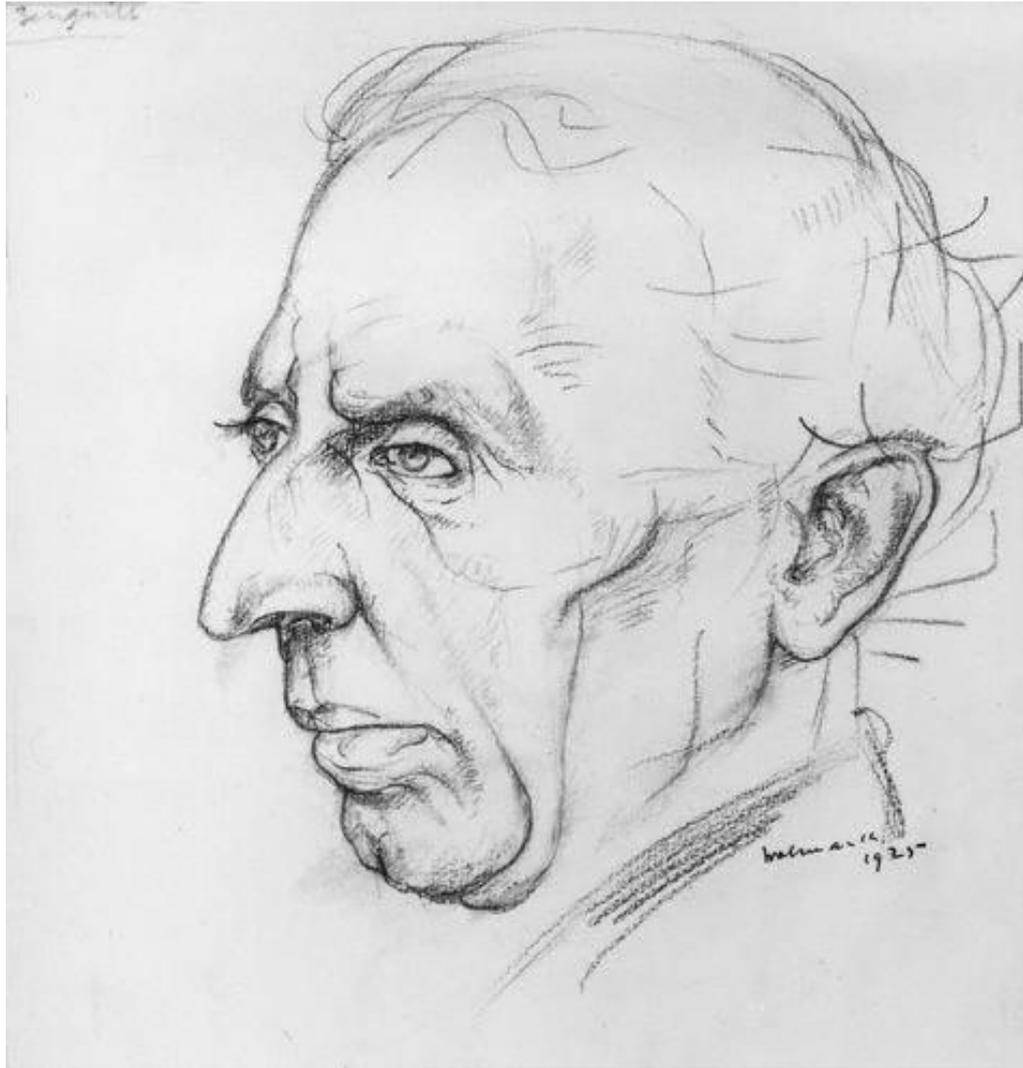


Fig.47. Alfred Wolmark, *Israel Zangwill*, 1925, 337 x 235 mm
(National Portrait Gallery, London)



Fig.48. William Rothenstein, *Aliens at Prayer*, 1905, oil on canvas, 1274 x 1015 mm
(National Gallery, Melbourne)



Fig.49. William Rothenstein, *Jews Mourning in a Synagogue*, 1906, oil on canvas, 1275 x 1155 mm (Tate Gallery, London)



Fig.50. Jacob Kramer, *The Day of Atonement*, 1919, oil on canvas, 99 x 1219 mm (Leeds Art Gallery)