Article

Victorian Artists' Letters: Rhetoric, Networks, and Social Capital

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Abstract: Victorian artists were remarkably literate; they wrote autobiographies, diaries, and essays and befriended writers and journalists. Writing had become a way to present themselves on the open market and to generate a public image as individuals and collectively within the new professionalism emerging in the century. Letter writing was purposed to solidify and improve artists' social capital, and their comments were always embedded in social relationships and practices. Thus, artists' letters reveal much about the artworld structure; its players; and its overlapping spheres of social, economic, and professional identities. Their letters combined frankness with rhetorical pleading and contained their own press releases, studio invitations, and responses to criticism and were often intended for public consumption if used in critics' reviews. Through letters, artists and critics revealed their reciprocal authority and agency and did not simply reflect the artworld but shaped that world. In their letters, economic gains were sublimated by artists' desire for fame, Royal Academy acceptance, and a place in art history, then an emerging university discipline, seeking symbolic investments in their reputations and demonstrating that the market is cultural, not just economic. In their letters artists made clear that commodification does not destroy or pollute subjectivity.

Keywords: social capital; agency; reciprocity; artworld; critics; patrons; networks; rhetoric

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1. Introduction

Recognizing the rhetorical nature of artists' statements and defining them as performative speech acts, Natalie Adamson and Linda Goddard question 'the expectations of authenticity and authority that have surrounded the artist's statement from early manifestations . . . to the present day. As a declarative, "signed" source of artistic intentions, the artist's statement is the most essential, if problematic, of art historical documents. Not only is it an unmatched and irreplaceable companion to the artwork, but in many cases, it becomes a proxy for, or even generative of, the artwork's very substance' (Adamson and Goddard 2016, p. 363). Adamson and Goddard suggest examining the 'linguistic and intentional features of artists' statements: their deep involvement with any historical inquiry into the construction, context and reception of artworks, and artists' biographies' (ibid., p. 365). As problematic, if not more so, are artists' letters which engage a complex artworld network and the conflicts between economic and social demands in their letters.

However, knowing that letters are rhetorical is not enough to understand how letters work. Letters reveal artworld networks, the complex intertwined social and professional ties among all artworld players, as artists attempted to be successful in both the canon and the market, sites often incompatible with one another and thus requiring different rhetorical tactics. Unlike artists' statements, most letters were intentionally private rather than public and thus subtly reveal much about the hierarchic networks. Artists' letters, then, contribute to the growing area of social and economic analyses of art production and the role in the nineteenth-century art market of interventions by artists, critics, and the periodical press. The Victorian art press included a variety of information ranging from engravings and criticism to records of exhibitions and sales in a seamless way that indicated a continuum between the market and art production.¹ Many of the letters I cite here also

reveal that while some artists had networks of patrons and critics supporting them, many Victorian artists, especially those who are now obscure, struggled to gain a foothold in the artworld and art market. In this way, the letters I cite fit Margaretta Jolly's and Liz Stanley's suggestion that letters are proto-genres whose distinctive yet infinitely malleable features can be best understood through the social and cultural codes of relationships and whose meanings are in the relationship between writer and reader, rather than in the subject (Jolly and Stanley 2005, p. 93). She points out that letters offer content about 'representativity; the relation of individuals to social context; the assessment of individual agency; whether and how narrative is essential to identity; the relationship between individual and collective time and memory and, perhaps most prominently, the peculiar reflexivity and relativity of research in the field' (Jolly and Stanley 2005, p. 92).

I will explore artists' letters primarily for their representativity, collective relationships, overlapping social and cultural contexts, agency, and uses of narrative and rhetoric. As John House (2012, pp. 335–39) points out, 'reading a letter must crucially involve consideration of the addressee as well as the writer, and of the relationship between writer and addressee. This artist–addressee relationship significantly affected the ways in which artists presented and explained their work' (p. 336). The addressee's and the writer's relationship was reaffirmed or reshaped with every letter. Beyond their relationship, these two were in a network in which they had roles, identities, and investments for the future based on their past and present ties in complicated, intertwined personal, social, and professional relationships that letters managed and shaped. Letters had agency in relationships and demonstrated connections between social and professional spheres at a time when art criticism was still in its infancy and when a handful of artists enjoyed an unprecedented success that inspired many others to study high art, especially painting, hoping, too, to share successful artists' newly elevated cultural status.

As David Barton and Nigel Hall point out, letter writing is an extremely flexible genre, always 'embedded in particular social situations', so that it 'gains its meaning and significance from being situated in cultural beliefs, values and practices'.² Victorian artists were remarkably literate; they wrote autobiographies, kept diaries, published articles in the press, gave lectures sometimes subsequently published, and befriended writers and journalists.³ Writing also became one of artists' professional demands to present themselves to the buying public on the open market and in the press and thus to participate in the creation of their own public image, both as individuals and collectively as a profession, lifted into the new professionalism emerging in the nineteenth century. Victorian artists wrote voluminous letters to critics, editors, dealers, and patrons and their letters are now housed in many archives and libraries.⁴

I focus here on two large archives of artists' letters to two prominent critics, F. G. Stephens, critic and later art editor for the periodical the *Athenaeum* from 1860 to 1901, and M. H. Spielmann, founder of the periodical *Black and White*, art critic for the *Graphic*, contributor to the *Illustrated London News* and other periodicals, and editor, from 1887 to 1904, of the *Magazine of Art*, one of two highly popular art periodicals. Both men were active in many ways in the Victorian artworld. Their prominence, as well as their kindness to artists, made them magnets for artists' letters compiled in their vast archives. These archives are highly representative of the artworld because artists at all career levels and media wrote to them, so that these letters convey the range of artists' concerns in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Britain, as well as the range of possible relationships between artists and critics and between artists and artworld institutions, such as exhibitions and critical reviews in the press, which artists addressed in their letters. Many of these artists are now obscure and did not have long careers, while others were highly successful, so the letters contain a range of artistic achievements and professional identities.

In their letters, artists actively promoted themselves while disguising this promotion, often through a criticism of Academy hanging practices and by inviting critics to see works up close in the studio to make a proper assessment, an invitation meant to encourage social bonds and a positive review that would, nonetheless, be presented as an "objective"

aesthetic judgment in the press.⁵ These letters were informed by a highly charged, though often friendly and amenable, discourse that could affect an artist's very livelihood and public image. Artists had to soften rhetorical language out of their own concern to maintain ties with critics who were conduits to the art market. Like writers in any genre, letter writers constructed imaginary readers, even when writing to those they knew well, making all letters socially fraught. Their letters to patrons were more explicitly rhetorical and even given to exaggeration or falsehoods through which artists assured patrons of their honesty, devotion and quality. Artists' relationships to patrons were often unstable, artists being not quite their patrons' social equals (although aspiring to be equals with shared interests) while being careful to express their subordinate status.

Barton and Hall distinguish sharply between personal and official subgenres of letters, but I would argue that artists' letters reveal, instead, overlapping spheres of personal and public, given the tight social network of the Victorian artworld and artists' attempts to control critics' comments in the press.⁶ Family publication of artists' letters in biographies also turned the private into the public and as a strategic use of letters to show artists' "human" side, emphasizing their devotion to family and work to assure the public that artists were not bohemian.⁷ Letters meant to be read privately could also be strategically collected in memorial books that might be handed down in families, crossing temporal, public, and private boundaries in these ways, as well as serving the Victorian mania for the publication of celebrities' letters.

Barton and Hall note that letters were meant to cover the distance. But many artists wrote letters to those in the same town (letters were delivered several times a day in Victorian London), indicating that letters had other functions and that meeting with their addressees was not a substitute for letter writing. In letters to critics, artists justified their works, explained their ideas, logged their long hours, and often suggested their own press releases to critics. They might complain about ill-treatment by critics and by the Royal Academy, or collude with patrons against casual buyers, or collaborate with other artists to raise the reputation of a recently deceased colleague in the hopes that all would be lifted up in the market. Most artists sought to get support for their economic needs, the most common reason for writing to critics and dealers, but they wrapped this motive in justifications of social practice, aesthetic valuation, and national cultural contribution.

Victorian artists' letters, then, function within rhetorical and professional systems, which they also helped create. In these ways, artists' letters are part of larger interlocking discourses on artistic knowledge, professionalism, and national culture. New Journalism in the second half of the century focused the press on personal lives in an emerging celebrity culture, deploying the new method of interviews and photos of artists, writers and scientists in their lair—their studies and studios. Print shops displayed widely circulating cartes-de-visite of artists who were also popular subjects of books and periodicals. This public visibility must have imposed on letter writers a self-consciousness about the eventual readership of their letters. The many crossings out in archived Victorian letters, if we consider them as material objects as Barton and Hall suggest we do (Barton and Hall 2000, p. 8), indicate that artists or their heirs were aware of where these letters might end up and who might be reading them in the future. The awareness of them as potentially public documents was modeled by Victorian historians Thomas Macaulay and Thomas Carlyle, who emphasized the ordinary individual in historical events. Letters became, like drawings or sketches, revelations of the inner mind of the so-called genius and of the nature of creativity itself, making them worth saving for posterity or for the growing market value they were accruing.

2. Fame and Sublimation: Masterpieces and Potboilers, Commodity and Transcendence

Artists' letters reveal much about how artists created an economy of production, torn between potboilers and masterpieces, and the permeable borders between these categories of paintings. William Holman Hunt's letters to his patron Thomas Combe are filled with

descriptions of his economics—prices of paintings and his need to make potboilers, perhaps a subtle request for funds: ‘I could only get on with my big picture by leaving it off every month or two to do pot-boilers—and I could not afford a day’s rest either’.⁸ He listed his prices and his works’ market appreciation, perhaps to validate his labor-intensive methods and tantalize his patron: ‘I have sold the Cornwall drawing for 60 guineas Plint made good thing by his sale’, having gained £5000 selling some of Hunt’s work: ‘The Claudio and Isabella and the Valentine fetched respectively in my studio £7 and £38 and in the sale room £210 and £240’.⁹ Hunt referred in his letters to his potboilers: ‘I am getting on with my potboiler nearly made it into a hundred pounder already’, which he hoped to use to pay off some of his debts.¹⁰ In one letter, Hunt referred to his need to stop work on *The Light of the World* (a subject he replicated several times!) in order to ‘attend to something for immediate sale’¹¹ and again ‘the product of my three weeks [sic] hard labour is converted into cash’.¹² He distinguished between his potboiler in Italy and his serious painting about Columbus in Spain.¹³

Hunt, like most Victorian artists, recognized that art making was a form of speculative capitalism. He called Combe ‘the sleeping partner in the firm’¹⁴ and used ‘our’ and ‘we’: ‘We must never reduce one farthing from the first price of a picture—the firm must get a good name for dealing as well as for the articles sold . . . I want you to keep my subjects secret’.¹⁵ Together, they discussed how to affect other patrons’ purchases to increase the value of Combe’s collection of Hunt’s paintings: ‘[Charles] Maud’s commission I shall deal with in an antagonistic spirit as you advise so far as they interfere with our intention of an Oriental character’. Hunt’s negotiations with Maud, perhaps dramatized or exaggerated for Combe’s benefit, reveal something of the dealings between Victorian artists and patrons: Hunt assured Maud ‘of the impossibility of making any fair arrangement for the price of a subject picture until its completion determined its true value, and further saying that I had not resolved on what work I should next engage myself’.¹⁶ William Powell Frith, too, made this same point in his dealings with buyers who were not patrons; for them, he refused to name a price until the work was complete or to promise to carry out a requested commission for a pre-arranged price.¹⁷

As Viviana Zelizer (1994, p. 628) argues, the market is cultural, not just economic.¹⁸ In their letters, artists, too, make clear, as some anthropologists have asserted, that commodification does not destroy or pollute subjectivity and that consumption combines cultural and social motives. Consumption can generate new meanings, and artists in their letters reveal how economic concerns could be both promoted and sublimated strategically and rhetorically. They carefully constructed their pleading for public attention as an aesthetic matter in epistolary interventions that sought to address and stabilize their economic well-being, social status, public image, and future reputation. All of these concerns, despite the tensions among them, coalesce in their letters to patrons and critics.

While artworld participants appear to disguise their economic interestedness, some of their interest is non-economic, as immediate monetary returns on their art ‘investments’ appear in artists’ letters as less important than the long-range investments in their reputations, which greatly concerned them in their adherence to an emerging notion of professionalism. Much of Victorian artists’ market behavior was calculated to serve long-range cultural goals—reputation, social bonds with patrons and other artists—rather than only immediate economic rewards and thus mark them as professionals, not laborers.

Hunt’s business acumen embraced long-term fame. Combe wanted Hunt to send off his paintings quickly and even to reduce the finish, to which Hunt replied: ‘my income would be increased as one of the immediate consequences’, but if he’d done this years ago, then his reputation ‘would never have been what is now—and now a very rapid fall in my income as well as in my reputation would be the result of my abandoning the patient system of polishing up each work of mine to the highest pitch’. Thus, he was not ‘wasting my labour’ but took pains like Titian, ‘the greatest painter of the world’.¹⁹ Hunt’s professional economics included a quality factor—a few big major pictures done well, he

reasoned, would gain him a reputation, and high-quality engravings of his work would increase sales in England and abroad.

Hunt's eye was on the economics of reputation, as well as of bread. Hunt expressed conflicts between art as commodity and as transcendental. He wrote to Combe that he would tell Thomas Fairbairn, another of Hunt's patrons, 'that I cannot reduce the price . . . I am well aware from your advice to stick to the price . . . for otherwise we shall only get bread and cheese, or we must take to sloshing'.²⁰ Hunt dangled information on his prices: 'The prices of the *Hireling Shepherd* sketch will be about 100 guineas—McCracken's sketch 50 or so: the Irishman has been buying so largely lately that I do not feel confident that he will resolve to keep mine. I shall easily be able to sell it however so these sums be added to *our* [italics mine] prospective total'.²¹

Despite making potboilers, Hunt described his works as sacred objects, not goods on an open market, reflecting artists' unstable status between artisan and professional. Dismayed that a work of his was sent to Buckingham Palace for royal examination without his permission, Hunt, instead of being pleased as most artists were, was upset over the painting's possible mishandling: 'After I had taken such pains to show what a sacred thing a picture is to find them carrying it about with their profane hands as if it were a tombstone'.²² Artists' letters reveal that their notion of success was not shortsighted but embraced a long view of fame and reputation, sublimating economic needs for the 'masterpieces' or works that would gain them entry into the Royal Academy (RA) or, more importantly, into art history, an increasingly central concern as art history became a discipline in Cambridge, Oxford, and University College London through three Slade Professorships in 1870. This sublimated economy included the political economy of critical reception or marginal utility in which value is based on reception, not on an economy of labor in which hours of work are the measure of skill and quality.

Hunt described his economic situation in letters to friends and colleagues in terms of exchanges that mixed forms of capital. To poet Coventry Patmore Hunt explained that he was glad Ruskin defended the PRB and was willing to reduce his asking price of £250 to £200, implying that Ruskin had inquired about a purchase, and admitting to reducing prices, a practice he denied in his letters to Combe.²³ In another letter to Patmore, Hunt complained that although he sold his paintings for £200, he spent £100 to paint them and that to finish *Light of the World* and another picture, he would not spend time completing salable sketches for the sake of an anticipated masterpiece.²⁴ Hunt's letters to art critic Frederic George Stephens (Figure 1), one of Hunt's closest friends until their falling out, are filled with investment advice: 'Two or three investments suggest themselves to me as worthy of consideration for your purpose—Gt. Eastern RY—Consolidated Bank-London and Westminster and Lond Joint Secy Bank—neither of these would require attention—the first would not only pay you about 3 3/4 of 4 percent even at the present prices 45 1/2 but they would improve and I should say in two or three years your capital would be greatly increased'.²⁵ Hunt even wanted to co-invest with Stephens.²⁶

Figure 1. John Everett Millais, *Frederic George Stephens*, 1853, pencil, 8 1/2 in. × 6 in. (216 mm × 152 mm). Image ID: 2363 © National Portrait Gallery, London.

3. Networks and Social Capital

Hunt's comments to patrons and colleagues on his economic concerns reflect their close relationships, professional interests, and economic ties with patrons that defined patronage despite its frequent appearance as a social relationship. Artists constantly overlapped categories of capital in their letters. As Mary Douglas argues (Douglas 1982, p. 129), forms of capital (cultural, social honorific, symbolic) generally do overlap: 'It is convenient to think of holdings in these four kinds of capital as spiritual resources; combined with economic resources they form a personal patrimony'.²⁷

The capital at work in their letters to critics, however, outline the artworld's social capital, defined by Pierre Bourdieu as capital tied to networks and relationships:

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition ... to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may ... be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name (the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc.) and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them ... enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges ... partially irreducible to objective relations of proximity in physical (geographical) space or even in economic and social space.

The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he [sic] can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right

by each of those to whom he is connected. . . . the exchanges instituting mutual acknowledgment.²⁸

For Bourdieu, social capital resides in hierarchic relationships of power. The artworld was a hierarchic one, with the Royal Academy members at the top, but from mid-century, this hierarchy was breaking up as new societies and exhibition venues, dealers' galleries, and artist-run exhibitions dented the control of the Academy and the privileges of its members.

Adler and Kwon (2002, p. 18) note three kinds of relations: '(1) market relations in which products and services are exchanged for money or bartered, (2) hierarchical relations, in which obedience to authority is exchanged for material and spiritual security, and (3) social relations, in which favors and gifts are exchanged It is this third type of relationship that constitutes the dimension of social structure underlying social capital'. Artists' letters reflect a social capital that, in fact, combines features of these three relations: critics' comments had a profound effect on artists' incomes; both critics and artists purported to have authority in assessing artworks and in the exchange of special artworld information; and critics sometimes favored their friends with positive reviews, and artists sometimes sent critics gifts for positive reviews.

Some scholars have redefined the notion of social capital to bring out nuances in its possible meanings. T. Claridge (2004) summarizes a network approach to social capital defined as patterns of relationships with which people have access and associations. This defines the larger network of the artworld whose patterns are clear in letters' rhetoric between those who have close relations to the critic and speak frankly (e.g., Ford Madox Brown to Stephens) and those socially more distant and given to pleading with the critic. The network approach emphasizes bonding and bridging in social capital. In the theory of network closure, Burt (2000, p. 351) identifies network closure as what facilitates sanctions that make it less risky for people in the network to trust one another in the case of a tightly connected network, as was the case with the Victorian artworld and which permitted artists to write to critics in the first place.²⁹

Furthermore, for artists, social capital meant more than current relationships, which they sought to solidify or improve through their letters to critics. While seeking economic and social success (some artists were granted a baronetcy, some became very wealthy), unique to the artworld was their concern with the network of the future, a place in art history's canon and fame. Artists often sublimated immediate economics for future fame. Writing to Combe, Hunt claimed that he charged dealer Ernest Gambart a low price for the copyright to *The Light of the World*, in order to get the dealer to pay more for a quality engraving: 'I reduced it that he might afford to pay the engraver better . . . if he makes a really novel engraving the sale will extend to the continent, and will continue for years.'³⁰ Value for artists meant creating an aura of professional authority as both cultural and social capital, and such rhetoric stressed the accrual of social capital: Hunt explained to Combe that he was holding out on another patron's request 'till they begged me to contribute, and they had apologized on the part of a clerk who once wrote an impudent note to me when I was calling their attention to some mistake in the catalogue'. Hunt hoped to prove to them 'that politeness and attention was much (or perhaps more) required in dealing with the younger and poorer artists as with those whose pictures they only get by favor'.³¹

4. The Culture of Economics: Pleading the Case of Labor

However, despite the meaning of professional as having expertise and being paid for that expertise, artists noted in their letters their hours of work, amount of travel for sketching, and hardships in the studio, hoping critics would mention these in the press while articulating an economy of professionalism by claiming their art as a special contribution to 'national greatness' and 'national pride', phrases advocated by Frederic Leighton in his Presidential Address of 1888.³² Labor appears to have remained a measure of value, as it was in classical economics, and the critic's mention of an artist's labor could still assure buyers of worth, indicating that the measure of aesthetic quality was unstable.

The labor vs. professional context was the focus of the 1878 Ruskin–Whistler trial, Ruskin denouncing the artist for spending only two hours on his painting, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, 1875 (Figure 2), Whistler arguing for a professional level of skill that had nothing to do with time spent. Millais informed Stephens that portraits were labor-intensive and therefore costly, hoping he would share this inside information with potential buyers: ‘Portraits take a great deal of time, and one must be paid for them, and I have got £1000 for a half length and £500 for head to shoulder’.³³

Figure 2. James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, 1875, oil on panel, 60.2 × 46.7 cm. Detroit Institute of the Arts, Gift of Dexter M. Ferry, Jr., 46.309.

Strategically, artists dramatized their hard work to Stephens: Alfred William Hunt wrote, ‘I am half killed with working at picture’.³⁴ John Inchbold explained that ‘some pictures cost me nearly two years in their work’.³⁵ Artists were discouraged when their works were rejected by the Academy and when their works were accepted but badly hung, high up (“skied”) which would obscure vital features of a work or its quality, failing to reveal the artist’s considerable time and effort (Figure 3). Charles P. Knight complained that a badly hung work of his ‘only looks like a thing that I could paint in a week instead of being nearly three months [sic] work exclusive of the studies from nature . . . I wish there was no such thing as painting, as I can copy nature without the slightest wish to paint the beauty that I see’.³⁶ William B. Richmond wrote that he would spend another year working on a painting: ‘I feel I can much improve it’. He then asked if Stephens could mention this in the press, as more labor implied a work’s increased value, and he then described the work in detail for Stephens.³⁷ He later thanked Stephens for the mention and said, however, that it might yet go to the Grosvenor for exhibition, concluding melodramatically,

‘unless I break down’.³⁸ Martineau wrote that he worked from 7 AM to 12:30 AM to get it to the exhibition, leaving him ‘no time for a quasi public exhibition’, the phrase for the pre-exhibition showing of works later sent to the RA.³⁹ Brown wrote Stephens that he worked from 10 AM to 10 PM, seven days a week, painting his Manchester murals.⁴⁰

Figure 3. Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Charles Pugin, *Exhibition Room, Somerset House*, 1 January 1808. Aquatint and etching, 194 mm × 259 mm, Royal Academy of Art. Engraved by John Hill. Published by Rudolph Ackermann in *Microcosm of London*, London: R. Ackermann, 1808–10, vol. I, pl. 2. Photographer Julie Codell.

Dramatic mention of hard work had weight with patrons, too. Hunt’s letters to Combe were notorious for rhetorical self-dramatizations: ‘my work has left me in such an exhausted state and with such ashes on my poor head’⁴¹ and ‘I have been silent in this solitary room of mine at night tied to my chair while one, two, three, four and five have struck’.⁴² Painting was arduous and painful: ‘My days are too burdensome to be endured with patience. Anything like a true reflex of my state of mind would cause you pain and do me no honor as a would be Christian’.⁴³ Painting was described as a struggle to the near death: ‘I am altogether a slave to this most fearful picture and I cannot tell when, how, or whether it will ever release me alive . . . I am now however at a sort of life and death struggle with the great difficulty . . . if not quite broken-spirited . . . the depth of misery I have suffered and that I still suffer in the prosecution of this task’.⁴⁴ He often reported how many hours he worked.⁴⁵

Artists regularly described works in progress and studio inventories and invited critics into the studio. Works in progress, like drawings, came to embody the magic of the creative process and were published in the press as in *The Magazine of Art* (Figure 4). Constructing an economy of cultural capital, artists offered drawings as gifts for reviews or for studio visits in which artists requested critics’ opinions and consultations about which works to exhibit, a request meant to suture them into a social relationship tied to the professional one. Artists intended their explanations of their work to be printed unchanged, and often, their comments were used verbatim by critics. In one letter, Brown included the text he hoped Stephens would publish verbatim: ‘Mr. Madox Brown has just completed another of his King Lear subjects—this *picture* is in water-colour, for we think it is time to give up applying the term *drawing* to works which though in water have all the seriousness and solidity of oil. He called it Cordelia’s Portion. The moment chosen is

just after Lear had uttered the words “thy truth then be thy dower””.⁴⁶ Brown also coached Stephens on exactly how to report that Frederic Shields was not doing any Manchester murals but that Brown was doing them all, a decision still in process when Brown wrote Stephens. He told Stephens to use phrases such as ‘There is a report that’ and to suggest in his column that Shields’s decision ‘might simplify the problem of how the distinct works of two painters would agree in one room’ by having Brown do them all. In this letter, he coaxed Stephens to intervene in the Town Council’s decision by suggesting that Brown do all the murals.⁴⁷ Repeatedly asking Stephens to write about his mural subjects, Brown urged that ‘a kind word from you might sway them my way’, referring to the influence Stephens had in the artworld, including the Manchester Town Council.⁴⁸ Ford Madox Brown was constantly seeking ways of increasing his income through exhibitions and prints and asked Stephens for names of publishers ‘to whom I might offer the copyright of my “Wycliff on Trial”’.⁴⁹ Carl Haag invited Stephens to see Haag’s pictures before they went to the Watercolor Society Exhibition.⁵⁰ Elizabeth Stanhope Forbes asked for help finding a publisher for her book of illustrations of the Arthurian legends.⁵¹ Through critics’ ventriloquizing artists’ comments in letters, artists tried to control their public relations, display their rhetorical skills, describe their motives, inspirations, and intentions, and appeal to Victorian spectators’ appetite for the ‘personal’ side of art making. These topics were treated in the press as information necessary to interpret and appreciate artworks. Such journalistic personalization, one product of the New Journalism’s emphasis on the personal and intimate, permitted artists significant agency in articulating their needs and shaping their careers behind the scenes through letter writing.

STUDY OF A HEAD.
(By Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Bart.)

Figure 4. Edward Burne-Jones, *Sketch, The Magazine of Art*, v. 20–21 (1896–97), insert between pp. 50 and 51.

5. Professional Capital: Balancing Ambition and the Socio-Professional Network

Artists' letters exposed relationships and hierarchies in the artworld—who needs whom for what goals, exemplified by their myriad letters F. G. Stephens and Marion Harry Spielmann (Figure 5). Artists and critics reveal a mutual relationship since letters were meant to be answered, indicating fundamental reciprocity in the assumed relationship of writer and reader, what some critics have called the epistolary pact—relationship, reciprocity, and referentiality to some event or topic.⁵² Artists needed critics' puffs, and critics needed knowledge of studio practices and Academy politics. Under New Journalism, critics needed 'secret' or insider knowledge such as RA votes or notices of a new work in progress to tantalize the public in columns of 'art gossip'. Artists' letters to F. G. Stephens reveal how artists used rhetorical strategies to convey their professional concerns in such a way that these concerns could enter journalism's circulation of knowledge for artists' economic benefit.⁵³ Stephens was both a source of information for readers and of promotion for artists. He was also a grateful recipient of information about their pending projects, intended RA pictures, and behind-the-scenes art politics, content that gave him an edge in the world of New Journalism that embraced secret information, interviews, and celebrity.⁵⁴

Figure 5. John Henry Frederick Bacon, *Marion Harry Spielmann*, 1904, oil on canvas. 24 in. × 20 in. (610 mm × 508 mm). Image ID: 4352. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

With critics, then, artists had some cache. Frederic Leighton offered to help Stephens if he is 'in need of a paragraph to fill a gap in this week's number'⁵⁵ and offered as filler a notice of pictures for sale by one of Leighton's friends, Frederick Craven.⁵⁶ He shared confidential information about RA elections⁵⁷ and asked Stephens to make announcements

for him and thus spare him correspondence over matters that presumably piqued the public, such as a picture Leighton had withdrawn from the RA.⁵⁸ Painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema wrote on Stephens's behalf when he was trying to get a job as an Art Inspector.⁵⁹

Artists' letters not only reflected artworld machinery but also shaped that machinery as artists wrote to control critics' authority or to create a quid pro quo to equalize the power between artist and critic or between artist and patron. Artists wrote out of their own agency, even when pleading for attention from a critic, in the belief that they had to intervene in their own public image and in the representation of their works. Artists strove to be recognized as professionals with special knowledge, and the authority of expertise, making their networks with critics important means of negotiating the transference of economic to social capital and ultimately to the cultural capital of a future reputation.

However, relations with critics could be fraught, requiring artists' strategic rhetorical skills. Brown complained that several papers, including the *Athenaeum*, refused to mention his murals until they were completed, revealing 'the crass ignorance in matters of the art of the great political papers' and failing to understand how long these murals take and thus how such labor deprived Brown of needed publicity. The importance of being frequently mentioned and the regular press practice of describing works in progress must have made this decision doubly frustrating for Brown. He linked the failure of mention with the lack of appreciation for art in general: 'It seems to me, however, that to this poor, downtrodden, dull nation it does matter somewhat whether they are ever to have any beautiful art at all'.⁶⁰ Brown mentioned his projects to encourage Stephens to write about them in the *Athenaeum*.⁶¹ While he thanked Stephens for 'your grand puff of my pictures in Weldon's'⁶², he also complained about Stephens's criticism of him:

That I have not liked your notices of me for a considerable time is true, more especially of my 'Jacob' this spring, which (if a lady friend who informed me, was correct) curtly stated that I had just finished two pictures '*not for the R. A.*', a sort of notice calculated to injure me exceedingly with those touchy gentlemen . . . I never authorised anyone to trouble you on the subject and you know it is quite contrary to my principles to complain or in anyway interfere with your liberty . . . I will never be offended with you whatever annoyance I may feel at your remarks in print unless I were to think they were *intended* to offend or done in spite.⁶³

This is an interesting letter rhetorically. Brown implied that he did not read reviews but found out about them from friends⁶⁴, that his complaints were about economic injury, not about aesthetic taste, that his principles forbid him from complaining or asking others to intercede despite asking Stephens to write on his behalf, and that such comments were only bad if intended to hurt, something he did, in fact, attribute to Stephens ('calculated to injure me exceedingly'). Here, Brown took the moral high ground while insisting he was not complaining about criticism or accusing the critic of intentionally offending him.

This letter reflects the artist's capacity for rhetorical subtleties. Brown, one of the most literary of artists, had to maintain his relationship with Stephens—in subsequent letters, he explained the narratives of his Manchester Town Hall murals, explanations he hoped Stephens would publish. His frankness reflects the close, long-standing relationship he had with Stephens, not the case for most artists writing to the critic. Artists pointed out to Stephens the sometimes dire effects of his harsher criticism: Basil Bradley commented on Stephens's praise for his draughtsmanship, color, and finish but took issue with Stephens's remarks that his images of cattle 'are neither robust nor rough enough for nature'.⁶⁵ Bradley asked, 'Kindly give me your authority for the above assertion'. Some artists like Charles Eastlake complained that Stephens ignored them, reflecting the basic tenet of the emerging Victorian culture of celebrity—bad criticism is better than none at all.⁶⁶

The range of economic effects of journalism was expressed in a letter from H. Dawson to Stephens, taking him to task for his criticism of an exhibition:

The tone in which you speak of our exhibition is too severe in matters where it would have been but fair to have been silent in your unmitigated condemnation of our rooms you injure us in a thing we cannot help . . . the serious objection I have to the remark is, that it assumes that none ought to paint and exhibit but those who produce fine works . . . as you are well aware there are thousands of people who buy and hang pictures who cannot afford to buy first class works, so there may surely be charity enough to allow painters to paint who cannot produce such works. If none were to purchase landscapes but those who can buy such works as Vicat Cole, Leader, etc., what is to become of the Dawsons, Oakes, etc.? . . . You must be liberal enough to say a few words of encouragement even to bad painters, for out of them come the good ones.⁶⁷

The Bond St. Gallery was a collective with thirty members, while the New British Institution was a private concern, whose surplus was the profit of its owner, not, like the Bond St. Gallery, spent to improve a collective space. Thus, Stephens's praise of the New British Institution 'is in fact helping a man to establish a picture dealing concern while discountenancing the efforts of artists to combine for the exhibition and sale of their own works', implying that Stephens's criticism should take these kinds of issues into consideration. Nevertheless, Dawson assured Stephens that his comments were not to be taken personally: 'Your kindness in speaking of our works and your true judgment in finding whatever beauties they may possess has commanded and obtained, I trust, a true appreciation of your kindnesses added to admiration of your ability', despite Dawson's concern over what he assumed was an off-hand remark, especially damaging to artists with few venue options: 'having my pictures on the top line in the R. A. shuts out all hope of sale and does injury by its situation', so he must exhibit at Bond St. Artists like Dawson confined to that space were then harmed by Stephens's condemnation which left them 'no goose to cook'. Here is a good example of the required rhetorical gymnastics of artists' letters to critics: the need to express a view, and even a vulnerability to remind the critic of the effects of criticism, and then softening that reminder to maintain much-needed goodwill with the critic.

Stephens estimated that by the end of his career, he produced 280 pages of art gossip.⁶⁸ Letters to Stephens reveal artists' desperate attempts to get him on their side in difficult situations. They often wrote about having one-picture mini-exhibitions publicized before they submitted their paintings to the RA, needing both the press coverage and the mini-exhibition in anticipation of the reality that their works would likely be poorly hung and relatively invisible at the RA exhibition. G. D. Leslie wrote Stephens that his painting would be exhibited at Agnew's on Bond Street before it goes to the RA; it was eventually sold from Agnew's, as well.⁶⁹ Val Prinsep asked if Stephens could put in a good word for his picture of Gordon 'now exhibiting at Goupil Gallery', in order to get subscriptions for his project, already delayed by the 'grudging conduct of the Chatham authorities'.⁷⁰ Brown mentioned 'a watercolour I am finishing for Gambart (for more reasons than one) and for one reason in particular, that as I promised it to him some time since, I fear he may make it an excuse for refusing to take it—in his present touchy state . . . Never mind about the article in *Athenaeum*, I don't care much for articles on pictures still in private, it savours always somewhat of partizanship and behind the scenes friendship'.⁷¹ The irony here, certainly not lost on Brown or Stephens, was that partisan material constituted the majority of critics' content provided by artists who tried to co-author critics' texts and control the timing of their publication. Some artists requested Stephens's help finding temporary space for work or for exhibition. C. P. Knight asked Stephens, 'Can you give me any help as to getting a studio in which to show my picture for a few weeks? You must have some knowledge of such places', and he complained of his need to have such exhibitions because he cannot 'fight singly against a huge monopoly [the RA] aided by the Government that seems to exist for the express purpose of crushing landscape art'. He asked Stephens to tell him if 'I have any chance of being able to save my picture from being lost as far as this year is concerned' with reference to the hanging of his picture in the RA exhibition.⁷² Knight

later thanked Stephens for his review of the painting: 'It is not the thing to offer thanks for independent criticism', sustaining the illusion that his relationship with Stephens and his complaints about the RA had no effect on Stephens's review of his painting.⁷³

Such requests bonded artists and critics and served each other's social and professional needs and shared reciprocal authority, creating an economy of their negotiations best reflected in artists' thanks to Stephens. W. B. Richmond thanked Stephens for his kindnesses 'upon many occasions when I was in the background'.⁷⁴ G. H. Andrews of the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colour thanked Stephens for his notice: 'It appears to me that the only return I can make you, is to *work harder, do better*, and so show you that you have not sown *good seed* on stoney ground. I have, in art matters, had neither help, or even good feeling from anybody, except the press men, with the exception of yourself and Godfrey Turner I don't know one of them, even by sight, yet they have behaved most generously to me and *I am brimful of gratitude for their kind help*'.⁷⁵ Inspired by Stephens's praise, Andrews 'commenced a drawing of the very largest dimension for the next summer show, if it turns out a success the credit will be yours for without the *pat on the back* from you it would never have been done though the materials and sketches were ready'. Frederic Goodall thanked Stephens for praise: 'Coming as it does from so high an authority, I am more than gratified'.⁷⁶

Artists' letters of thanks are often poignant and obsequious, revealing an unequal relationship and a hierarchy. M. Phipps Jackson wrote, 'There is no man living for whose opinion on any matter of art, I have so high a respect as your own', in thanking Stephens for his comments on Jackson in the *Chronicle*.⁷⁷ Even more moving were the requests of relatives on how to dispose of the paintings of their dead artists; Jackson's sister, Ada Villiers, trying to find a venue to exhibit her brother's drawings, wrote to Stephens for advice on whether to risk the expense of a London venue for only 'slightly higher prices'.⁷⁸ Daniel Maclise thanked Stephens for appreciating his painting and understanding his intentions.⁷⁹ Charles Sinton's letter is one of the most peculiar for its explicit reference to payback for a good review: 'I hope you will not think me indiscreet by haste to ask you, what I am indebted to you for the valuable essay you have written on my work, but I should be glad to know your fee, though it is not possible to pay the debt I hold to you, but at any rate that I might settle an account so far as your time and patience is concerned, it being impossible by any means that I shall ever be able to reduce my obligation to you, for your beautiful and kindly felt writing on my attempts, but will treasure it in gratitude and pride always',⁸⁰ a subsequent letter included a cheque and a drawing of Sinton's daughter.⁸¹ Frederic Shields thanked Stephens for 'the *first public assertion* of many merit in the work which has engaged me since I settled in London', indicating, as did many of these letters, how a positive word about their work determined their career trajectory.⁸² Such thanks were heartfelt attempts to maintain bonds with the critic, even if occasionally subservient and sycophantic.

Finally, when Stephens wrote about deceased artists, he often asked their friends to examine and correct his copy, as in the case of Richard Redgrave's letter on Stephens's life of Cole⁸³ or Alfred Fripps's information on Jenkins for a biography Stephens did of Jenkins following his death.⁸⁴ Through such channels, artists in letters wrote each other's posthumous biographies, eulogies, and obituaries.

6. Critics' Multiple Roles: The Case of M. H. Spielmann

Critics served multiple economic needs for artists—to meet patrons, find studios for exhibition, circulate commentary from the artist in press reviews, and educate the public about how to appreciate art while maintaining misrecognitions (the disguise of economic matters) and anonymity when necessary. Artists behind the scenes generated critics' texts to send their messages to the public. Sometimes artists sought help for their colleagues; critic Francis T. Palgrave asked Stephens to write on behalf of Miss Blunden: 'She is always bemoaning the neglect with which (she avers) the critics treat her ... she certainly has

real merit'.⁸⁵ Palgrave criticized Frith's advertisement and puffery to get people to buy a print of one of his paintings. Palgrave suggested to Stephens that he write against such practices.⁸⁶ Watts, Hunt, and William Richmond also described their intentions in detail, explaining images, symbolism, working conditions, and titles for the same purpose.⁸⁷

Even more than critics, editors' words had an economic force to promote artists as a profession. Of the 1294 letters in the John Rylands Spielmann Collection, there are two generations of artists who sought Spielmann's advice and whose letters reflected changing conditions of artistic life in England in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Spielmann corresponded with first-generation pre-Raphaelites—Brown, Hunt, Millais—and other leading artists, such as Frith, Hubert von Herkomer, Hamo Thornycroft, Alfred Gilbert, Leighton, Edward Poynter, G. F. Watts, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, and Richmond, as well as dozens of lesser-known artists. He befriended designer-artists and English Impressionists, such as Walter Crane, James Whistler, Mortimer Menpes, and Frank Brangwyn. In addition, he often assisted artists' protégés at their mentors' requests. Spielmann published works by young artists and knew patrons and museum directors who could help them.

Artists' letters provided Spielmann material for his essays and art gossip, or 'art causerie', as he called his column in *The Graphic*. Thornycroft described the meaning of his *Cromwell* in one letter and the symbolism of his *Alfred* in another, information for Spielmann to use in his articles.⁸⁸ Spielmann's prominence in the infrastructure of the late Victorian artworld is apparent through the tone as well as the contents of these letters that reveal the network of relations lately classified as socio-aesthetic: the relationships among institutions (e.g., the press, galleries, museums, and schools), market factors (dealers, prices of living artists and Old Masters, fluctuations in the fortunes of patrons and the State as patron), social preconditions (class, education, income), and audience expectations (about media, genre, educational level, myths about art and artists). Although Spielmann believed women possessed lesser talents than men, women artists' letters to Spielmann indicate how helpful he was in promoting women.⁸⁹ He devoted a section of his book on sculpture to women sculptors and published a series of essays on women's art education in England and on the Continent in *The Magazine of Art*, and wrote a book on Kate Greenaway.

The clearest example of Spielmann's intervention in an artist's career is the case of Hubert von Herkomer. Their long correspondence from 1889 to 1912 records Herkomer's requests for advice on how to present his technical innovations and get reviews of his books and notices about the production of his plays or the achievements of students attending his school at Bushey: 'I write to you because I feel that I must let you know all that is going on, as a true and faithful friend who has helped me through many things, and I hope will help me through many more'. He frequently asked Spielmann to assist a protégé or student.⁹⁰ Herkomer, in turn, provided Spielmann with confidential information about Royal Academy votes, the composition of the Hanging Committee, and secret votes on new members.⁹¹

Herkomer asked Spielmann's advice on printing retaliations against Joseph Pennell, who attacked Herkomer's claim to originality in his printing process, on how to coordinate publicity for his new printing technique, on whether or not to apply for the Directorship of South Kensington, on how to approach running for President of the Royal Water-Colour Society (a particularly bitter election), or for President of the Royal British Artists.⁹² He asked Spielmann's approval of his book *My School and My Gospel* before he dared send it to a publisher and later asked Spielmann to review the book in *The Graphic*, which Spielmann did, honoring all such requests from artists.⁹³ Spielmann duly published every honor awarded Herkomer—German knighthood (allowing him to use the prefix 'von'); commissions to paint portraits of American millionaire John Jacob Astor, or the Prince Regent of Bavaria; the crowds of 2000–3000 that Herkomer estimated attended his lectures. Herkomer incorrectly assumed that Spielmann knew the authorities who picked paintings for the Louvre and the Luxembourg Museums in hopes that one of his works would be picked.⁹⁴

Herkomer's letters reveal Spielmann's role in advising artists about their career activities in professional societies, public works, exhibitions, and press promotions. Spielmann brought artists and patrons together, sending the Hull Committee in 1907 to artists' studios to scout for works for their municipal museum.⁹⁵ While on the committee for the Cosmo Monkhouse Memorial, Spielmann successfully persuaded the National Portrait Gallery to accept Monkhouse's watercolor portrait of Turner.⁹⁶ Spielmann attempted with great difficulty to negotiate the sale of a painting by G. A. Storey to D. S. MacColl, Director of the Tate (and later of the Wallace Collection), despite the National Collection's lack of cash, which meant the artist would receive only a fraction of his asking price.⁹⁷

Artists duly thanked Spielmann in warm terms. Architect R. Norman Shaw admitted that he 'profited by much of the information you gave me'.⁹⁸ Mortimer Menpes considered Spielmann 'as my very best friend'.⁹⁹ Frith, who repeatedly revealed secret votes and changes sanctioned by the R. A. to Spielmann, called Spielmann his 'guide, philosopher, and friend 'of the future''.¹⁰⁰ Poynter acknowledged Spielmann's expertise on drawing and illustration, the 'black and white arts'.¹⁰¹ Brown asked Spielmann to be the Honorary Secretary of the Rossetti Memorial Committee 'as one name favorably viewed by Academicians and all parties'.¹⁰² Val Prinsep credited his book's success to Spielmann's help.¹⁰³ Briton Riviere wished all art critics were as sensitive as Spielmann to the difficulties artists had with dealers.¹⁰⁴ Hunt, generally reluctant to speak in public, agreed to participate in the Westminster Palace Hotel Meeting in 1887 for the Peace and Arbitration Society of which Spielmann was an active organizer during the Boer War (later that year, Hunt requested Spielmann publish a long article by Hunt in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, one obvious example of the reciprocity between critics and artists).¹⁰⁵ Frith asked Spielmann for a notice in the *Pall Mall Gazette* to announce that he was taking advanced pupils into his studio in the Continental style of art training and repeated his request in order to get a few more students two years later.¹⁰⁶

One of Menpes's letters indicates why he and other artists sought Spielmann's counsel: 'The Sickert, Steer, and Co. seem to be managing their affairs badly and so does the little master [Whistler] ... '¹⁰⁷ The number of artists whose careers were badly managed is difficult to estimate, but the fact that some of the better-known artists suffered from naive business transactions indicates the importance of Spielmann's role. The son of a banker and familiar with the worlds of money and manufacturing and with patrons whose fortunes were made by those activities, Spielmann was especially qualified to be artists' counselor. When Gilbert returned to England after his self-imposed exile in Belgium, Spielmann advised him not to keep the press at arm's length too long or risk their hostility.¹⁰⁸ Mentioning his new entrepreneurial scheme, Harry Furniss wrote, 'I have always taken the liberty to bother you with my secrets since I have [sic] the pleasure of knowing you'.¹⁰⁹

Even George Frederick Watts, one of the most reclusive painters in England who strenuously avoided publicity (and feared its effects on young artists) and who declined a baronetcy, felt obliged, over the period from 1885 to 1903, to explain to Spielmann his general philosophy and the specific allegories of his paintings.¹¹⁰ Spielmann wrote several studies of Watts and greatly admired him. In his letters, Watts reveals his own peculiar phobia of publicity; he was ever watchful of his own words and deeds, excessively worried over his public image, afraid of appearing dogmatic, and continually revising his statements. In short, he was the exact opposite of Herkomer in response to the conditions of the late Victorian artworld. Watts, in ill health after 1888 and always pressed for money, was perhaps the only artist among Spielmann's friends and acquaintances who believed his work was worth more if *not* reproduced in *The Magazine of Art*.¹¹¹ He frequently requested that Spielmann refrain from 'forcing his works' into notice.¹¹²

Letters reveal dissonances between artists' positions and their special pleading. Although Hunt decried the social pretensions and hobnobbing of the Royal Academy, its banquets and courting of aristocrats, wealthy patrons, and publicity, he was not above

hoping to become an Academician and of requesting that Spielmann publicize the fact that he was in the process of painting *May Morning at Magdalene Tower* or mentioning that the painting had already been cited in *The Oxford Times*, providing details about the painting and the ceremony it depicts.¹¹³ Although Frith argued against the commercialism of the Pears Soap advertisement using Millais's *Bubbles* (in *Magazine of Art*, xii (1889), pp. 421–23, followed by a reply from Spielmann, pp. 423–27), he was notoriously anxious for self-promotion, asking Spielmann to mention in the press how many volumes of his autobiography had already been sold.¹¹⁴ H. Stacy Marks, questioning Frith's attack on Millais, confided to Spielmann that if Frith had a chance to sell a work to an advertiser he would 'with his elastic temperament well get over his grievance' about the collusion between art and advertising. Marks believed that such a union was 'simply a matter of business' and not a concern of art '(with a large A)'.¹¹⁵ Another time, Frith maneuvered to get Spielmann the proofs of his autobiography from the publisher so that a favorable review could appear at the moment the book was published.¹¹⁶ Edwin Abbey described at length his slow method, which he refused to hurry for the sake of commercial gain, but he mentioned that he would not mind it if Spielmann wrote 'upon 'my career'', and he even promised to send Spielmann illustrations from the copyright holders to accompany such an article.¹¹⁷

7. Conclusions

Jolly and Stanley note 'the peculiar reflexivity and relativity of research in the field' of studies of letters (Jolly and Stanley 2005, p. 92). Letters were written one at a time, focused on particular historical events and relationships and only brought together in archives or books; a complication that often colored or revised their meaning through the material rearrangements of these letters in books or archives. Read as a body outside of the historical sequence they would have had when they were written or read, their meaning would be revised. Despite this change, there were common requests, reciprocities, forms of communication, views of artworld hierarchies and institutions and rhetorical strategies across the many letters cited here that reveal something of the kinds of relationship among artworld players in this period. Artists' letters were fluid, flexible, and rhetorically sophisticated, expressing the affect within layers of social and professional, reputations and networks and always writing with a "purposeful intent" (Jolly and Stanley 2005, p. 95). Letters reveal artists' agency in the intersection of these spheres as well as the limits of that agency and the degree to which artists had to spend time in self-promotion and self-fashioning behind the scenes—creating social and professional bonds to sustain their careers was as important as painting or sculpting. Intimate and candid, sincere and sycophantic, their letters reveal conflicts in career trajectories and within fraternal and individual spheres. Artists wrote to critics and patrons to bond through empathy over long hours or badly hung paintings, to secure economic support through puffs and studio visits, even sometimes providing copy for critics' reviews. Spielmann and Stephens bought these artists' paintings and were gifted art works as well.

By the end of the century, after fifty years of international exhibitions, the market and artists' relationships to it had markedly changed from a national set of concerns and a national audience to an international market with a global circulation of art works. In their many letters to Marion's brother Isidore Spielmann, a leading organizer of British art sections for international exhibitions, artists reveal the strain of late Victorian professional life when professional societies they had organized to expand exhibitions beyond commercial galleries and the Academy no longer served all their individual needs. Societies' presidents or committees chose artists to exhibit internationally at world's fairs. Artists who were not chosen wrote to Isidore Spielmann to ask for consideration as exceptions to the societies' choices and to be included in these exhibitions. Conflicts between these advantageous collective professional societies (providing exhibitions several times a year; direct contact with buyers, fellowship, and fraternity; and endorsing artists' as unbohemian, sociable, and professional) and individual ambitions and anxieties, like those of Hunt, Brown, and

Herkomer, had to be diplomatically and not aggressively promoted. Such tensions existed in a delicate balance in artists' letters, which reveal their finesse at deploying rhetoric, reassurance, vulnerability, and reciprocity to maintain that balance.

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Notes

- ¹ See essays on the art press by Julie Codell and Ysanne Holt and on artists' participation and promotion in the art market by Malcom Warner on John Everett Millais, Brenda Rix on William Holman Hunt, and Patricia de Montfort on James MacNeill Whistler and Dante Gabriel Rossetti in (Fletcher and Helmreich 2011).
- ² (Barton and Hall 2000, p. 1). See also (Nevala and Palander-Collin 2005).
I wish to thank Oliver House, Superintendent, Special Collections Reading Rooms, Special Collections Weston Library, Bodleian Libraries, for his assistance in my research on the Isidore Spielmann archives; and Julia Watson for her suggestions on the genre of letter writing.
- ³ Among my previous publications, see (Codell [2003] 2012); my book chapters and articles in listed in the bibliography as (Codell 2016, 1989a, 1989b).
- ⁴ I refer to collections in the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester (M. H. Spielmann collection), the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (Stephens collection, Isidore Spielmann collection, Hunt correspondence), the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, and individual artists' archives.
- ⁵ I detailed Rossetti's correspondence with his patrons in Codell (2020, pp. 79–93). Rossetti's communication with patrons was often filled with promises, most unkept, and assurances that his work for them was going to be the best version of the subject. To his fellow artists, he complained about this patrons' poor taste and demands on him for replicas.
- ⁶ Jolly and Stanley similarly argue that letters are a site where public and private, professional and personal are "happily confused" (Jolly and Stanley 2005, p. 91) and as do (Nevala and Palander-Collin 2005, p. 3).
- ⁷ See *The Victorian Artist* on artists' interventions in their social status, economic well-being, and public image and the inclusion of their letters in their family biographies.
- ⁸ Bod. ms. don. c. 296, 4 July 1861.
- ⁹ Bod. ms. don. c. 296, 7 March 1862.
- ¹⁰ Letter to Stephens, Bod. ms. don. c. 66, 23 August 1859.
- ¹¹ Bod. ms. don. c. 66 [23/9/53], #27.
- ¹² Bod. ms. don. c. 66 7/59 to FGS.
- ¹³ Bod. ms. don. c. 66, to FGS, 25 August 1863.
- ¹⁴ Bod. ms. don. c. 296, 26 February 1859.
- ¹⁵ Bod. ms. don. c. 296, 13 March 1854.
- ¹⁶ Bod. ms. Eng lett. c. 296, 7 April 1853.
- ¹⁷ (Frith 1888, vol. 1, pp. 103, 138).
- ¹⁸ (Zelizer 1994, p. 628).
- ¹⁹ Bod. ms. don. c. 296, 24 December 1867.
- ²⁰ Bod. Ms. Don. c. 296, 21 February 1854.
- ²¹ Bod. ms. don. lett. c. 296, 30 April 1853.
- ²² Bod. ms. don. c. 296, 12 May 1860.
- ²³ Bod Eng Letters d. 40, #30–31 [ND].
- ²⁴ Bod Eng letters d. 40, #32–33 [ND].
- ²⁵ Bod. ms. don. c. 66, 12 May 1865; other examples are Bod. ms. don. c. 66, 23 April 1866 and Bod. ms. don. c. 66, 30 May 1866.
- ²⁶ Bod. ms. don. c. 66 4 September 1865.
- ²⁷ Douglas (1982), p. 129.
- ²⁸ (Bourdieu 1986, pp. 241–42).
- ²⁹ (Claridge 2004).

- 30 Bod. ms. don c. 296, 10 July 1854.
- 31 Bod. ms. don. c. 296, #44, 13 September 1854.
- 32 ([Barrington 1906](#)), II, pp. 343–44.
- 33 Bod. ms. don. e. 57, Millais to FGS, 3 November 1875.
- 34 83: #92–94, N.D.
- 35 83: #167, 5 May 1879.
- 36 Bod. Stephens letters, #84: #74–75, 26 May [NY].
- 37 86: #75 [ND].
- 38 86: #76 [ND].
- 39 85: #26–27, 12 March [NY].
- 40 Bod. ms. don. e. 61, 1 June 1879.
- 41 Bod. Ms. Engl Lett. c. 296, 7 April 1853.
- 42 Bod. ms. eng lett. c. 296, dated ‘Easter week’ 1853.
- 43 Bod. ms. don. c. 296, 7 Nov. 1871; Landow, 1982.
- 44 Bod. ms. don. c. 296, 25 March 1872.
- 45 Bod. ms. don. c. 296, #133 [ND].
- 46 Bod. ms. don. e. 61, #23–25.
- 47 Bod. ms. don. e. 61, #66–72, [before September 1881].
- 48 Bod. Ms. Don.e. 61, 8 September 1885.
- 49 Bod. MS. Don. e. 61, 31 December 1884.
- 50 d.119. AT letter, #22, 9 April 1875.
- 51 Bod. Ms. Don.83: [1899], #3–4.
- 52 On the epistolary pact, see Liz [Stanley et al. \(2012\)](#), pp. 262–93 and [Altman \(1982\)](#).
- 53 Bodleian, Ms. Don. e. 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86; d.119.
- 54 F. G. Stephen wrote a great deal on Victorian art: many reviews in his 30 years at *The Athenaeum* where he published almost 100 articles on British collectors; books, *Sir Edwin Landseer* (1880), *Memorials of William Mulready*, R.A. (1890), *A Memoir of George Cruikshank* (1891), *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (1894), *Artists at Home* (1884); a DNB Supplement on Brown; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 1911, entries on John Gilbert, Frank Holl, Rossetti; an anonymous pamphlet on Hunt’s *Christ in the Temple*; many articles in other periodicals and in Grosvenor catalogues on Reynolds (1884), Gainsborough (1885), Millais (1886), and Van Dyck (1887), among other writings. On Spielmann, see [Codell \(1989a, 1989b\)](#). A long but not exhaustive list of Spielmann’s publications in addition to his many *The Magazine of Art* articles appears at the end of my 1989a essay, 159–162.
- 55 Bod. ms. don e. 69, #25, 18 January 1864.
- 56 Bod. don. e. 69, #62, 29 May 1880.
- 57 Bod. ms. don e. 69, 3 February 1864; also #58 [ND].
- 58 Bod. don. e. 69, #109 [ND].
- 59 Ms. Don. d. 119, AT to Stephens, #12, 30 November 1873.
- 60 Bod. ms. don. e. 61, 23 February 1881.
- 61 Bod. ms. don. e. 61, #1–15, 1862.
- 62 Bod. ms. don. e. 61, #13 [15 April 1862].
- 63 Bod. ms. don. e. 61, #18, 23 November 1866.
- 64 E.g., Bod. ms. don. e. 61, #28, [27 June 67].
- 65 Bod. Don. D. 116, 13 May 1896. #161.
- 66 Bod. ms. don .d 116, 12 July 1878.
- 67 Bod. MS. don. d. 116, #35, 7 April 1870.
- 68 Letter to Sir Charles Dilke, Bod. ms. don. d. 116, 24 September 1900.
- 69 84: #134–35, 2 Mar 1897, and #136, 21 March 1897.
- 70 86: 4–5, 21 July [ND, after 1882].
- 71 Bod. ms. don. e. 61, #26 [22 November 1866].
- 72 84: #69b–69c, April 28 [ND].
- 73 84: #70–72, 6 June 1873.
- 74 86: #72, 2 August [1895?].
- 75 Bod. MS. Don. D. 116, 3 January 1887.

Bod. Ms. Don. D. 116, 8 June 1888.

83: #174, 29 December 1888.

84: #56–59 [ND].

84: #74–75, 7 November 1861[?].

86: #102, 1 November 1899.

86: #103, 3 November 1899.

86: #144–45, 3 May 1880.

Bod. Don. d. 116, 9 June 1875.

Bod. ms. don d. 116, 17 March 1885.

85: #122–24, 21 May [1867].

85: #134 [ND].

These explanations appear throughout the respective correspondence of Watts (Rylands MS. 1301), Hunt (Rylands MS. 1294), and Richmond (Rylands MS. 1298).

Letter from Thornycroft to Spielmann dated 7 September 1899 (Rylands MS. 1300, letter #6). In a letter dated 20 September 1899 (letter #8), Thornycroft explains the meaning and style of his sculpture of Cromwell, hoping that Spielmann will inform the public of Thornycroft's artistic intentions, something Spielmann always did when possible. In a letter dated 25 September 1901 (letter #9), Thornycroft explains the symbolism of the Alfred statue in terms of combined Anglo-Saxon and Christian imagery.

Helen Allingham writes about Spielmann's article on her in Rylands MS. 1302, #13, dated 13 January 1899. Feodora Gleichen, sculptor, responds to Spielmann's query concerning his revised entry on her for the second edition of his book on English sculptors in Rylands MS. 1302, #74, dated 21 July 1907. Amelia Edwards, an Egyptologist, asked Spielmann to publish a notice of one of her lectures in Rylands MS. 1302, #181, dated 13 January 1889.

In a letter dated 12 April 1889 (letter #2) from Rylands MS. #1293, Herkomer asks Spielmann in confidence to make a public notice that one of his pupils, a Mr. D'Urban, is now Art Master and Art Lecturer to Yorkshire College, Leeds, being chosen from a competitive field. In a letter dated 22 October 1890, Herkomer offers Spielmann two drawings by a Miss Sawyer to publish for a smaller amount than another customer's offer, implying that publication would do more good to Sawyer's career than the sale. From Rylands MS. 1293, Herkomer letter #6, dated 26 May 1889, explains his timing of a press notice for the performance of his play and then mentions that *The Illustrated London News* and *The Graphic* are doing drawings, but that no paper has a drawing of Herkomer's except Spielmann's paper: 'I have told this as a compliment to you'. Spielmann frequently received exclusive publication rights to reproductions and engravings, and he reviewed books, such as William Frith's *Autobiography*, early because artists sent him copies before they were available to other reviewers.

In a letter, Herkomer says his place on the Hanging Committee is private information (Rylands MS. 1293, dated 15 March 1892, letter #38). On 29 January 1894, Herkomer asks Spielmann to swear to secrecy concerning information given on the votes over the issue of whether to resort to the use of partial nudes in life classes at the Academy (letter #55).

In letters in Rylands MS. 1293, Herkomer discusses the debate over the originality of his etching technique and the attack on his claims by Joseph Pennell with comments in the public debate by Seymour Haden. Herkomer asked Spielmann's advice about when and how to tell the press of his new etching technique in #29, 2 February 1892; #66, 17 March 1895; and #68, 14 April 1895. Herkomer had hoped to replace John Gilbert as President of the Society after Gilbert's death, and he described his feelings about the election and some of the intrigues in letters #87, 29 February, 1897; #88, 7 October 1897; #89, 8 October 1897; #91, 31 November 1897; and #92, 1 December 1897. Herkomer asked Spielmann's advice on the Royal British Artists election in letter # 126, 13 May 1906: "Tell me your opinions in *confidence of the situation*. I don't want it—but as I said to them who spoke to me—I am willing, provided there was an unmistakable sign in the voting that they do want me," Herkomer trying to appear without ambition for a role he really wanted.

Herkomer letter #132, 30 May 1907, Rylands MS. 1293.

Rylands MS. 1293, #65, dated 14 March 1895.

From Poynter regarding the Hull Committee, Rylands MS. 1297, #12, dated 26 March 1907, and from William Rothenstein following the visit of the Hull Committee to his studio, Rylands MS. 1302, #529, dated 24 March 1907.

Rylands MS. 1302, #449, dated 30 January 1902. The portrait was officially presented to the Tate by Spielmann and Alma-Tadema. Rylands MS. 1302, letters #569–578; this transaction took from April 1910 to January 1912.

Rylands MS. 1302, #552, dated 13 April 1904. In Rylands MS. 1302, #192, dated 8 August 1891, W. Gilbert Fisher thanks Spielmann for introducing him to Wyke Bayliss, who was going to propose Fisher for membership in the Royal British Artists.

Rylands MS. 1296, #3, n.d.

Rylands MS. 1292, #19, dated 26 September 1887; changes revealed in #64, dated 10 April 1889.

Rylands MS. 1297, #10, dated 25 December 1901.

Rylands MS. 1290, #15, dated 22 July 1886. Seddon, the architect of the memorial, was pleased with Brown's choice of Spielman.

Rylands MS. 1302, #479, dated 26 September 1901.

- 104 Rylands MS. 1302, #516, 23 March 1904.
- 105 Rylands MS. 1294, Hunt to Spielmann, dated 10 July 1887, letter #2 on his willingness to speak before the public and letter #4, dated 27 July 1887, on the publication of his article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.
- 106 Rylands MS. 1292, #3, dated 15 May 1886 and #34, dated 2 June 1888.
- 107 Rylands MS. 1296, Menpes to Spielmann, letter #3 [n.d.], probably 1897.
- 108 (Dorment 1985), 308, citing a letter from Spielmann to Gilbert dated 5 August 1926.
- 109 Rylands MS. 1302, #213, dated 20 November 1890.
- 110 Rylands MS. 1301, #80, dated 26 October 1903.
- 111 Rylands MS. 1301, #17, dated 31 May 1888.
- 112 Rylands MS. 1301, #40, dated 29 April 1890, and Watts's letter #54, dated 1 May 1892.
- 113 Rylands MS. 1295, #5, dated 23 January 1889.
- 114 Rylands MS. 1292, #45, dated 28 October 1888.
- 115 Rylands MS. 1302, #414, dated 11 July 1889.
- 116 Rylands MS. 1292, #17, dated 21 September 1887.
- 117 Rylands MS. 1288, #2, dated 7 October 1890, on his slow method, and #7, dated 13 July 1898, on his interest in an article on his career.

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