



AESTHETICISM

Turning the back to Victorian values



VICTORIAN VALUES

❖ Utilitarianism: theorized by Jeremy Bentham

(1748- 1832)

1. Neglected human and cultural values
2. Any problem could be overcome by reason
3. Usefulness, happiness, avoidance of pain



- Evangelicalism . John Wesley (1703 -1791) founder of Methodism.

1. Strict code of behaviour
2. Dedication to humanitarian causes and social reforms
3. Base of Victorian emphasis on moral conduct

- Empiricism. John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873)

1. Legislation to develop man's natural talents
2. Progress came from mental energy
3. Supported: education, trade union organization, emancipation of women.

- Social Darwinism



In short, the Victorian period focused on:

1. Respectability
2. Decorum
3. Success
4. Duty
5. Hard work
6. Materialism
7. Prudery
8. Repression
9. Gentility
10. Keeping up appearances



THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

- ❖ The Romantic artist believed art could change society for the better
- ❖ He was the sensitive man endowed with imagination
- ❖ Art/poetry was the means the artist used to communicate/ teach the people he wanted to elevate
- ❖ On this purpose the language of poetry had become more bourgeois.
- ❖ Had the Romantic poet accomplished his task?



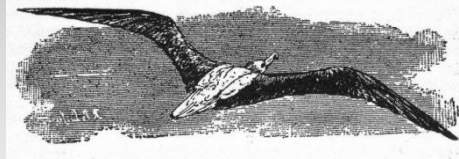
ART FOR ART'S SAKE

- ❖ Having failed their mission, artists started to retreat from society
- ❖ Art didn't have to be contaminated by Victorian values
- ❖ To the «ugliness» of Victorian values the artist opposed models of beauty and taste, which had to be seen unattainable to average, middle class man.
- ❖ Gap between artists and Victorian middle class
- ❖ Why?



THE ALBATROSS

- ❖ Often to pass the time on board, the crew will catch an albatross, one of those big birds which nonchalently chaperone a ship across the bitter fathoms of the sea.
- ❖ Tied to the deck, this sovereign of space, as if embarrassed by its clumsiness, pitifully lets its great white wings drag at its sides like a pair of unshipped oars



How weak and awkward, even comical
this traveller but lately so adroit -
one deckhand sticks a pipestem in its beak,
another mocks the cripple that once flew!

The Poet is like this monarch of the clouds
riding the storm above the marksman's range;
exiled on the ground, hooted and jeered
he cannot walk because of his great wings.

(Charles Budelaire)

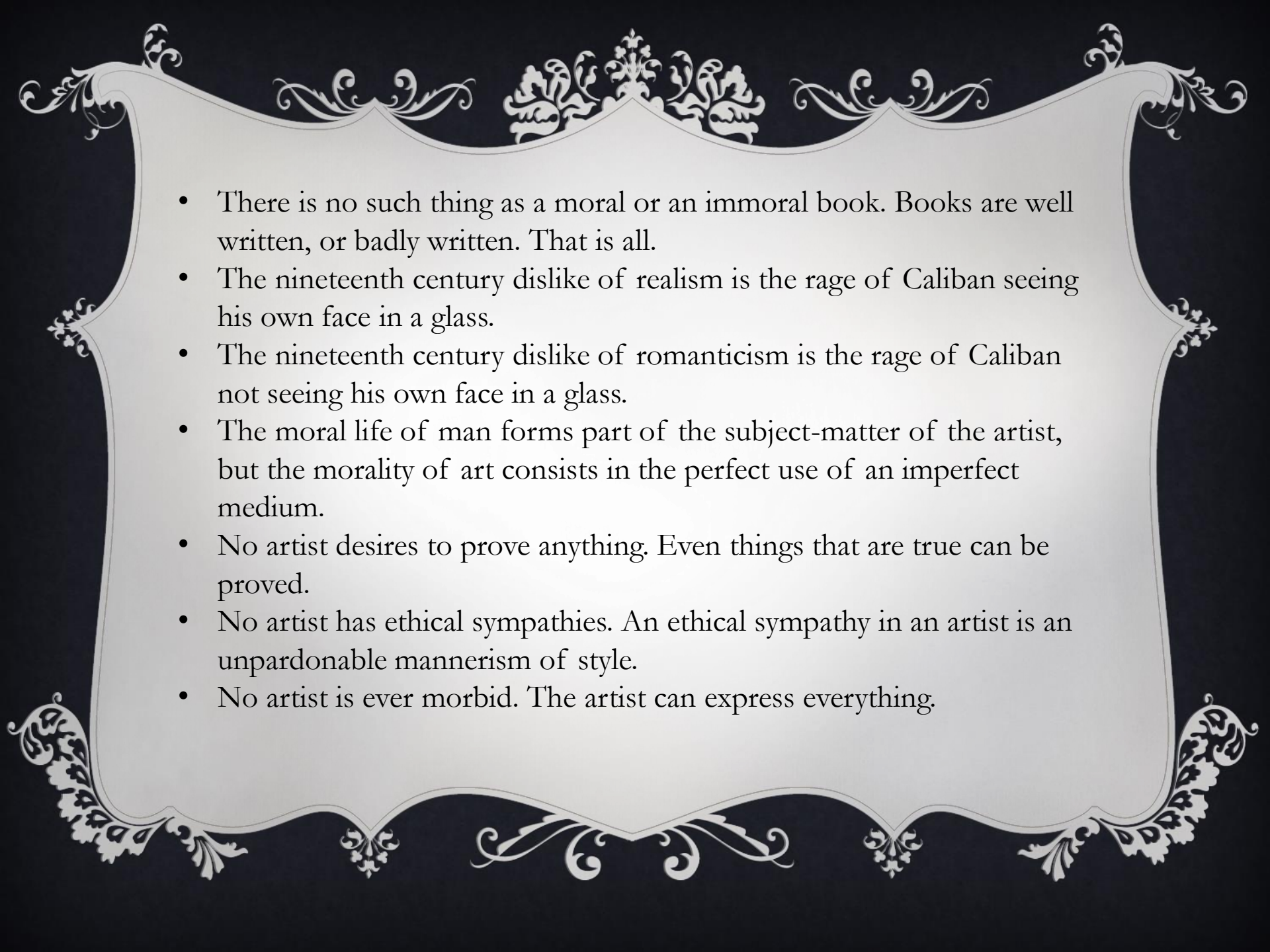
ORIGINS

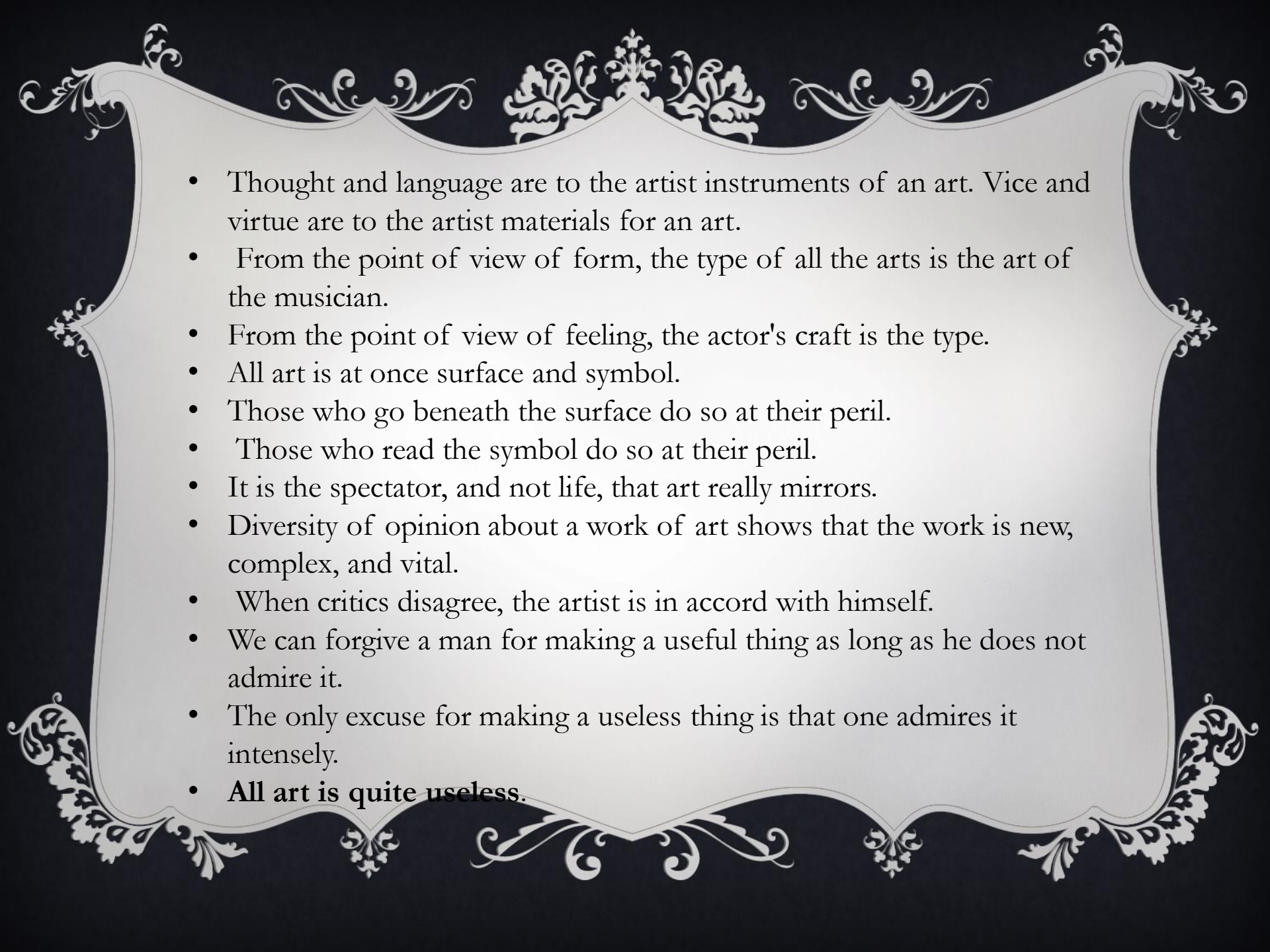
- ❖ France
- ❖ Universities and upper classes
- ❖ Theophile Gautier: «Art for art's sake»
- ❖ In England:
 1. John Keats («beauty is truth, true beauty, that is all you need to know»)
 2. Pre-Raphaelites (they were opposed to the Royal Academy's promotion of the ideal as exemplified in the work of Raphael)
 3. John Ruskin (art has a moral purpose)
 4. Walter Pater (art has no moral purpose)



THE PREFACE

- ❖ **The artist is the creator of beautiful things.**
- ❖ To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.
- ❖ The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things.
- ❖ The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.
- ❖ Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.
- ❖ Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope. They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only beauty.

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- There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.
 - The nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass.
 - The nineteenth century dislike of romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass.
 - The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium.
 - No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved.
 - No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style.
 - No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything.

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- Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art. Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.
 - From the point of view of form, the type of all the arts is the art of the musician.
 - From the point of view of feeling, the actor's craft is the type.
 - All art is at once surface and symbol.
 - Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.
 - Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.
 - It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.
 - Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital.
 - When critics disagree, the artist is in accord with himself.
 - We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it.
 - The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely.
 - **All art is quite useless.**