

AESTHETICISM

Turning the back to Victorian values

The Victorian period focused on values such as:

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





But, how did
artists cope
with all this?

Were they still
fine with what
society had
become?

Could they still
claim to have a
function?

THE ROLE OF THE ROMANTIC 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 eventually?

Of course, the
Romantics had
meant to elevate
man spiritually
rather than
materially.

That is why
they felt like
having failed
their mission!

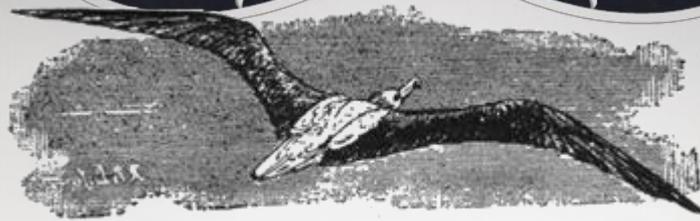
But there was one
risk more: being
contaminated by
those same values!





THE ALBATROSS

- ❖ Often to pass the time on board, the crew will catch an albatross, one of those big birds which nonchalantly chaperone a ship across the bitter fathoms of the sea.
- ❖ Tied to the deck, this sovereign of space, as if embarrassed by its clumsiness, pitiably 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)

THE ARTIST ALBATROSS

- ❖ People, now slave to materialistic values, can't understand the artist's message and language.
- ❖ Artists no longer set the example, but rather, are mocked and become object of contempt.
- ❖ In such society, disfigured by materialistic values, the artist/albatross, cannot but keep flying on his own, regardless of man's fate.



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.
- ❖ The **Gap** between artists and Victorian middle class became wider.
- ❖ Now **art** was only for **art's sake**.

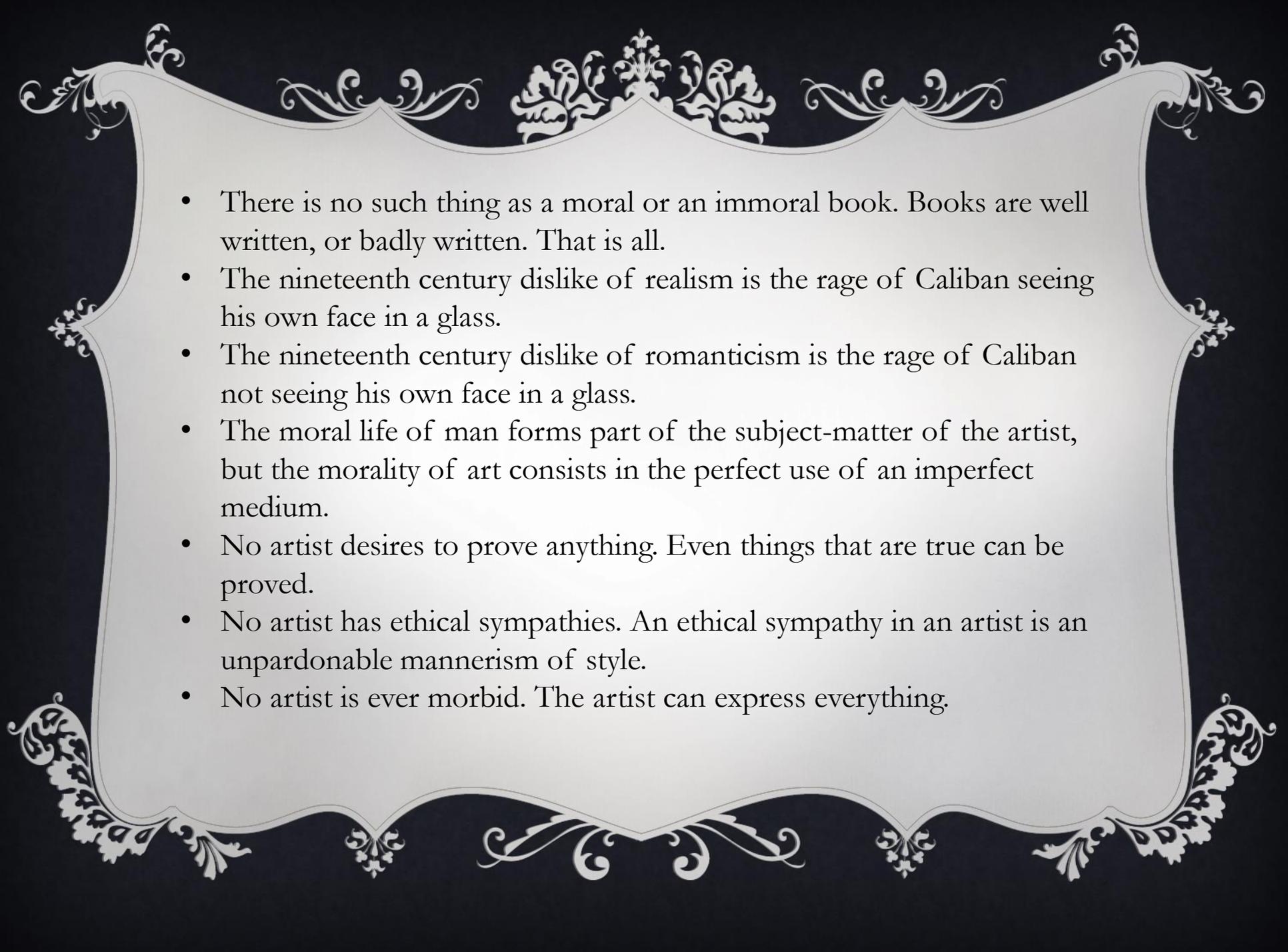
ORIGINS OF AESTHETICISM

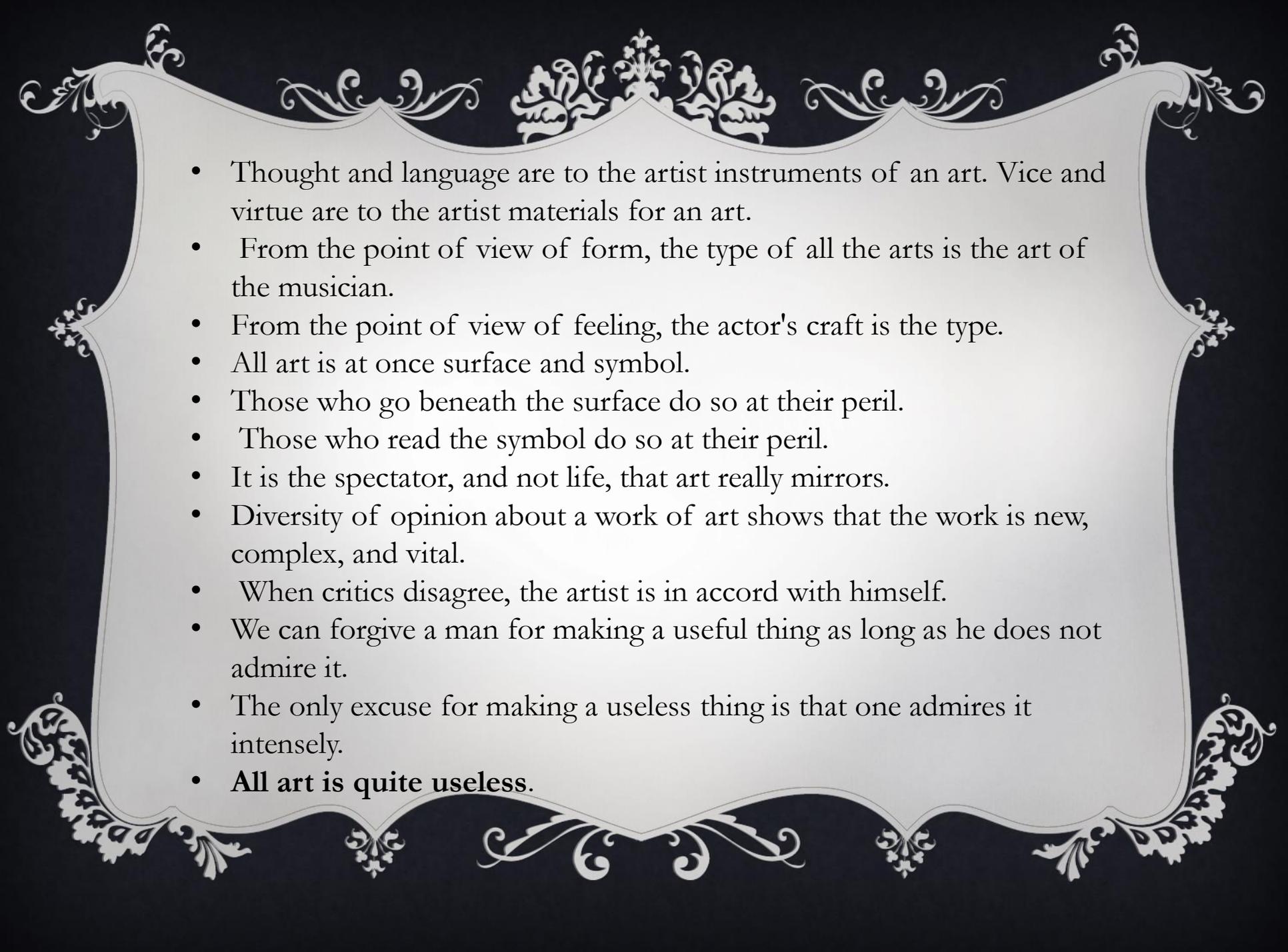
- ❖ France
- ❖ Universities and upper classes
- ❖ Theophile Gautier: «Art for art's sake»
- ❖ In England:
 1. John Keats (*«beauty is truth, true beauty, that is all you need to know»*)
 2. Pre-Raphaelites (they were opposed to the Royal Academy's promotion of the ideal as exemplified in the work of 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.**

ART	ARTIST	CRITIC	READER	AGE
Beauty	Creates beauty	May judge form	Left alone	Caliban/ monstruous
Useless	No moral restriction	Can't judge moral content	Forms his own interpretation	Twofold
No moralising function	No moralising attitude		Can enjoy beauty	Romantic attitude
Mirrors spectator	Enjoys pleasure			Realistic attitude
Stimulates diversity of opinion	May express everything			

Aestheticism and Decadence → Victorian Age → 1837-1901

The birth of the Aesthetic Movement

was born in France
it reflects
the uncertainty of the artist

caused by
the materialism
the restrictive moral code of the bourgeoisie

for reaction
the artist moves away from the political scene
and live a life of excess (they drink - they take drugs - they will die young)

he protest
against the monotony and vulgarity of bourgeois life

their slogan
Art for Art's Sake
They are called
bohémien

main features

- excessive attention to the self;
- hedonistic and sensuous attitude;
- perversity in subject matter
- evocative use of language.

The English Aesthetic Movement

was imported into England by

James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)

John Keats ← but also from
Dante Gabriel Rossetti ← Walter Pater
Dante Gabriel Rossetti

The theorist of English Aestheticism

Walter Pater

his masterpieces

Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873)

Marius the Epicurean (1885)

were very successful because they were

subversive

against religion

He thought

life should be lived 'as a work of art', with intense experience

The European Decadent Movement

In the late 1880s

a group of French writers contributed to the journal Le Décadent

they were the Symbolists: Rimbaud, Verlaine, Mallarmé

they were influenced by

Charles Baudelaire's Les Fleurs d'Amal (1857)

WILDE'S Aestheticism

Aestheticism

is an intellectual and art movement

as a reaction for the moral restrictions of the Victorian Society

members of the movement chose to live extravagantly

he adopted Walter Pater's theory of Aestheticism

Everything must be perfect

FREE TO CHOOSE ART ONLY DEVOTED TO ART

For him the artist is the creator of beautiful Things - he doesn't TEACH

Art must be beauty and stimulate sensory pleasures

ART IS NOT A IMITATION OF LIFE

BUT AN ACT OF CREATION WHICH GENERATES BEAUTY AND PLEASURE



Charles Baudelaire