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Poynter and Leighton as Aestheticians: The *Ten Lectures and Addresses*

Appraisals of the theories of art and its social function prevalent during the nineteenth century in Britain have concentrated on a canonical hegemony consisting of the writings of John Ruskin, William Morris, Matthew Arnold, Oscar Wilde, and Walter Pater. While this emphasis is understandable in light of the influence exerted by these sages, there is a compelling reason for reinvestigating the theories of other Victorian thinkers about the nature and role of art during the period, particularly the fact that none of these persons was a continuing exhibitor or practitioner of oil painting, albeit in many respects an astute critic. One of the residual legacies of the famous Ruskin/Whistler trial in 1878 was the gradual dethroning of Ruskin's voice as the sole spokesperson of preeminent ideas about art during the era. Whistler's victory was a sign that a number of forces were coalescing to challenge Ruskin's prescriptions about the morality of art. Two of the challengers were men whose own prominence was extraordinary during the later Victorian period, Edward J. Poynter (1836-1919) and Frederic Leighton (1830-96), both destined to be President of the Royal Academy, Leighton beginning in 1878 and continuing until his death, and Poynter after the death of John Everett Millais in 1896 until 1918.

For several reasons it is intriguing to study the artistic theories promulgated by Poynter and Leighton. As Renée Free observes, "Poynter always acknowledged Leighton as his life-long master" (8). Poynter credited Leighton's early support with encouraging him to become an artist when they met in Rome in 1853. On the occasion

of Leighton's death, Poynter told *The Times*: "My friendship with Leighton has been the accompaniment of my whole artistic career. It was he who, in 1853 . . . encouraged me in my desire to become a painter. . . . He not only allowed me to go constantly to his studio, but let me work from his models, attending to me and counselling me as though I were his accredited pupil" (11 December 1896: 10). Both artists are outstanding practitioners of classical-subject painting during the period, having in common a great devotion to mythical subject matter and classical ideals in art.¹ Both also were great administrators of influential art institutions during the period. Leighton, by common consent, is esteemed as the greatest President of the Royal Academy after Reynolds. Poynter became Professor of Art at the Slade School of Art, University College, London, in 1871. In 1875 he was appointed Director of Art and Principal of the National Art Training Schools at the South Kensington Museum, a post he occupied until 1881. In 1894 he became Director of the National Gallery, a position he occupied until 1905. His tenure as President of the Royal Academy spanned the later Victorian and Edwardian periods. Both men had been extremely successful artists amid this administrative preoccupation, Leighton early gaining fame when Queen Victoria purchased his *Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna is Carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence* of 1855.

Concomitant with their administrative positions was the opportunity to deliver a series of lectures at their respective institutions, the volumes of which have not been