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Arthur Lismer
in the Context of Sheffield

Anita Grant

A Thesis

in

The Department of Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

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Abstract

Arthur Lismer in the Context of Sheffield

Anita Grant

This is an analysis of the writings and lectures of Arthur Lismer on the subject of art appreciation and how they reflected the socio-political influences of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Sheffield. A detailed examination of this environment discusses the radical political history of the city, its support of non-conformist religions, and the educational system, all of which would have affected Lismer. Also discussed is the art milieu in Sheffield, which included three museums, a school of art, the Heeley Art Club, and particularly the pervading influence of John Ruskin. Parallels are drawn between Lismer's Sheffield background and his views on art appreciation, which included concerns about art training and education, the lack of aesthetic awareness, and the need for social and civic responsibility in the general public.

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I would like to thank my mother, who passed away when I began work on this thesis, for the appreciation of art she instilled in me at an early age, and my husband Chris Cummins who was always ready with a hug when I felt I would never finish. Finally, special thanks to Ron and Eileen Cummins who worried on my behalf, searched for obscure second-hand books on my behalf, and even travelled to Sheffield on my behalf. They have become second parents to me and it is to them that I dedicate this thesis.

To Mum and Dad

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Introduction

Building a Past: Lismer in Sheffield

Several biographies of Arthur Lismer have been published, as have a number of biographical essays in exhibition catalogues, newspapers, and other publications.¹ Very little space, however, has been devoted to the first twenty-five years of Lismer's life, which he spent in Sheffield, England. For example, John McLeish devotes only eleven pages of his 204-page biography *September Gale* to Lismer's time in Sheffield. Lois Darroch, in *Bright Land: A Warm Look at Arthur Lismer*, gives this period only eight columns in 164 pages. In her catalogue *Arthur Lismer: Paintings 1916-1919*, Gemey Kelly gives Lismer's Sheffield years one and a half columns, citing McLeish and Marjorie Lismer Bridges for personal information on the artist. Lismer Bridges quotes her father's unpublished autobiography in *A Border of Beauty: Arthur Lismer's Pen and Pencil*, where Lismer himself only devotes five paragraphs of 13 pages to his time in Sheffield.

The type of information provided in these, and other, biographies varies. McLeish's biography emphasizes Lismer's work in children's art

¹ The principal monographs on Lismer's life and career are: John McLEISH, *September Gale* (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1955); Marjorie Lismer BRIDGES, *A Border of Beauty: Arthur Lismer's Pen and Pencil* (Toronto: Red Rock, 1977); Lois DARROCH, *Bright Land: A Warm Look at Arthur Lismer* (Toronto: Merritt, 1981); and Dennis REID, *Canadian Jungle: The Later Work of Arthur Lismer* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1985).

education; the information seems anecdotal and is not substantiated. Darroch provides facts not included by McLeish, like the names of Lismer's parents and street addresses where he lived; however, she relies heavily on McLeish for the bulk of her material, particularly regarding Sheffield. In general, McLeish seems to have become the sole source for personal information on the artist even though, as mentioned, he provides no references.

Michael Tooby, in his catalogue *Our Home and Native Land: Sheffield's Canadian Artists*, includes some biographical data on Lismer's time in Sheffield as part of his overall essay. He provides more details on the Heeley Art Club, of which Lismer was a member, and describes to a limited extent life in Sheffield during the period from the turn of the century through the 1920s. For personal information, however, Tooby also relies on McLeish, Darroch, and Lismer Bridges. Although his catalogue discusses Lismer and fellow Group of Seven member Fred Varley a good deal, the emphasis is on the number of artists who left Sheffield for Canada, not on any one artist.

In his autobiography, the five paragraphs which Lismer devotes to his life in Sheffield are superficial and give little insight into the man and the early years of his life. Lismer mentions only his entrance examination for the School of Art, his "dull" classes at the School, his apprenticeship, and of a group of fellows with whom he sketched. Lismer does not elaborate. It is as if he was hurrying through the past so that he could speak about his current

interests. It is, therefore, not surprising to find so little concrete information about the artist's life in Sheffield when he himself was so unwilling to discuss it.

It is important, however, to discuss Lismer's life in Sheffield if one is to understand the philosophy of art which he was to promote in Canada. None of the biographies of Lismer have provided a link between his education, work, and other activities in Sheffield and the man he was to become once he came to Canada. It was during this time that Lismer's ideas were formed and took shape; when he learned about work and life. When Lismer left for Canada in 1911, he was a twenty-five year old man with talent, experience, and hopes to improve his fortune in the colonies. It will be demonstrated that Lismer's formative years in Sheffield were a lasting influence on him, and that the multiple facets of his English upbringing are reflected in his writings and lectures in Canada. Of particular concern in this study is Lismer's concept and definition of art appreciation. While the influence of his art training in Sheffield had an obvious effect on his art production, such an analysis is beyond the parameters of this thesis.

Arthur Lismer was born on June 27, 1885 to Edward and Harriet Lismer in Sheffield, and was one of six children. Although a draper's buyer, his father was able to support his large family. Like most Victorians, they were a God-fearing family, who were active members of the Upper Chapel (Unitarian) — his sister Constance was Honourary Secretary to the *Young*

*People's Religious Union*² — and Arthur and his siblings attended, and sometimes even taught, Sunday school. Lismer attended the Central Secondary School and studied art under John Fanshaw, whose son Hubert Valentine Fanshaw was also to come to Canada.³

Lismer's aunt was married to Sir Thomas Barlow, R.A., an engraver known for his mezzotints of Landseer's work, and she encouraged her young nephew to pursue his interest in art. Her brother, Lismer's father, could not afford to keep an artist, but when at the age of twelve his son wrote an examination for and was awarded a scholarship to the Sheffield School of Art, the elder Lismer did not discourage him. As part of his scholarship, Lismer was apprenticed for seven years, from 1898 to 1906, to Willis Eadon, a photo-engraver. In addition to working during the day, Lismer was expected to attend the School's evening art classes. During this period he also became a member of the Heeley Art Club, which met regularly to discuss the members' work and had excursions to sketch the surrounding countryside. In 1904, at the age of fifteen, Lismer seems also to have worked as a black-and-white artist for a local paper, the *Sheffield Daily Independent*. He described his work as sketching "cartoons, courtroom scenes, 'the spot where the body was found,' and the festivals, royal visits, football matches, and so on of a great

² J.E. MANNING, *A History of Upper Chapel, Sheffield* (Sheffield: Independent Press, 1900), 175.

³ Michael TOOBY, *Our Home and Native Land: Sheffield's Canadian Artists* (Sheffield: Mappin Art Gallery, 1991), 7-8.

manufacturing city.”⁴

After his apprenticeship with Eadon was completed in 1905, Lismer decided to attend the Académie Royal des beaux-arts in Antwerp. The Académie had been established in 1683 following models in Paris and Rome. The Musée Royal des beaux-arts was founded from the Académie’s collection of works of art and was like nothing Lismer could have seen in Sheffield. At the time Lismer was in Antwerp, the newly-opened (1890) Musée encompassed six enclosed courtyards on two levels and held some eight hundred works by old masters and three hundred by modern painters, that is, works which had been completed after 1830. A 1909 guide to the museum included in the latter group single works by E. de Latour, A. Auchenbach, and Bouguereau; however both collections were comprised primarily of works by Flemish painters.⁵

Deciding to spend time in Antwerp was not as exotic as it might sound. There was a regular ferry to Antwerp from Hull and Harwich (easily reached by train from Sheffield) and, in his capacity as a draper’s buyer, Lismer senior would have been familiar with the route from his own business trips to the textile centre of Antwerp. A further incentive to travel was that Lismer had received an invitation to stay with a friend, George Gale, a teacher at the

⁴ Marjorie Lismer BRIDGES, *A Border of Beauty: Arthur Lismer’s Pen and Pencil* (Toronto: Red Rock, 1977), 11.

⁵ Esther SINGLETON, *The Art of the Belgian Galleries* (Boston: L.C. Page, 1909), 136-138, 225, 227.

Berlitz language school there.⁶ His hospitality, the free tuition at the Académie Royal des beaux-arts, and the chance to sample art on the Continent proved irresistible. It is unlikely, therefore, that Fred Varley, a fellow School of Art graduate who had studied in Antwerp for two years from 1900 to 1902, was the primary reason Lismer went there to study. Varley returned to Sheffield in 1902, moved to London the following year and remained there until 1908, when he returned to Yorkshire, settling in Doncaster.⁷ While at the Académie, Lismer apparently made short trips to Holland and France, likely Paris, but did not stay long, returning to Sheffield a year and a half after he had first left.⁸

In 1908 Lismer opened his own photo-engraving business in Haymarket Chambers,⁹ specializing in pictorial publicity. He was listed as one of the few individuals or businesses with a telephone.¹⁰ Lismer's office was in the same building as that of Willis Eadon, his old mentor from the School of Art and the Heeley Art Club, and it was also the location of the Great Central and Northern Railway's Ticket Agency, for which Lismer designed

⁶ Lois DARROCH, *Bright Land: A Warm Look at Arthur Lismer* (Toronto: Merritt, 1981), 6.

⁷ Eric MACKERNESS, unpublished research notes from the files of the Heeley Art Club, Sheffield. For biographical information on Varley, see Christopher VARLEY *F.H. Varley* (Edmonton Art Gallery, 1981).

⁸ BRIDGES, *A Border of Beauty*, 12.

⁹ *White's Directory of Sheffield* (1910), 175.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

tickets and letterhead.¹¹ The office of Messrs. Dean and Dawson, who advertised themselves as having the cheapest tickets to Canada, were also in the Haymarket, and it may well have been from them that Lismer purchased his own ticket to Canada in 1911.¹²

Lismer also became involved in amateur dramatics, as a member of the Sheffield Technical School of Art Musical and Dramatic Club. In the 1908 production of "Knight of the Burning Pestle" he acted in the role of Venturewell, and in 1909 played Sir Roger Oateley in "The Shoemaker's Holiday" and designed the newspaper cartoon.¹³ A reviewer of the 1908 production, while generally praising the play, complained of the lack of scenery.¹⁴ This taste of the theatre in Sheffield may have influenced Lismer's decision to participate in the amateur dramatics of Hart House in Toronto, and his contribution of scenery for its productions.¹⁵

Lismer's lack of regular and ongoing work in Sheffield no doubt encouraged his emigration to Canada. This was not an unusual step. Both company and government representatives from Canada regularly visited Sheffield, and other English cities, in hopes of enticing skilled individuals to

¹¹ TOOBY, *Our Home and Native Land*, 16.

¹² *Sheffield Daily Independent*, March 15, 1904, 1. During this time Lismer lived at 100 Sharrow Street.

¹³ TOOBY, *Our Home and Native Land*, 13.

¹⁴ *Sheffield Daily Independent*, January 31, 1908.

¹⁵ Catherine SIDDALL, *The Prevailing Influence: Hart House and the Group of Seven* (Toronto: Oakville Galleries, 1987), 17, 19.

emigrate. In the March 15, 1904 edition of the *Sheffield Daily Independent* alone there appeared notices of a visit of Canadian farmers' representatives to Sheffield and of up-to-date information on the country, available free from the Commissioner of Emigration for Canada, as well as four shipping advertisements, all of which highlighted special fares to Canada.¹⁶ Lismer's school-friend William Smithson Broadhead had emigrated several years earlier and was working as a commercial artist for the Grip Engraving Company in Toronto. Lismer also met, in 1910, with Fred Brigden, of Brigden's Limited in Toronto, who had come to Sheffield to recruit commercial artists and encourage them to emigrate to Canada.¹⁷ It was undoubtedly because of these various incentives that Lismer decided to go to Canada in January 1911.

¹⁶ *Sheffield Daily Independent*, Volume XLIV, No. 15,379.

¹⁷ John A.B. McLEISH, *September Gale: A Life of Arthur Lismer* (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1973), 17-18.

Chapter 1

The Political and Social Environment of Sheffield

Sheffield was an interesting place in the late nineteenth century. Its long tradition of socio-political radicalism and religious non-conformity meant that it readily accepted the political ideologies of socialism, and that its non-conformist religions adapted to the upheaval caused by Darwin's theories on evolution. It was this environment that shaped the adult ideas of Arthur Lismer.

Sheffield had developed along the banks of the Rivers Don and Sheaf. No doubt because of its plentiful supply of charcoal, essential for the smelting of iron, and because of the ready water supply of the Don, Sheffield is recorded, as early as 1340, as having produced knives and arrowheads. By 1624 the Company of Cutlers had been created through an Act of Incorporation by Parliament, as a means of greater freedom to control the iron and steel-working craft. The invention in Sheffield in 1742 of silver plating stimulated industry further.¹ With the ensuing growth of this industry, more unskilled workers from the countryside came to the city. This led, in turn, to the overcrowding and associated health and social problems which affected most cities of the Industrial Revolution.

¹ J. Edward VICKERS, *A Popular History of Sheffield* (Sheffield: Appelbaum Bookshop, 1992), 74-75, 77.

The poor living and working conditions were not simply accepted in Sheffield and the workers formed organizations to try to protect themselves. By 1720 "sick clubs" or "benefits societies" existed — these groups were for all intents and purposes unions disguised to avoid legal prosecution. Poor pay and twelve-hour work days caused strikes in the knife, scissor and file trades. In 1786 there were fifty-two "unions" and when the Company of Cutlers sided with the employers in 1790 there was open hostility. From 1820 onward, confrontations became increasingly violent: 1843 - a factory bombed; 1854 - men shot at by rioters and gunpowder placed in chimney stacks; 1866 - explosives destroyed houses. A strong workers' movement like that in Sheffield cannot but have been a factor in the passage of the Trade Union Act in 1871 which finally legalized trade unions.²

The labour union movement was only one aspect of Sheffield's radical history; another was the unwillingness of the general populace to accept what it felt was unfair treatment by those holding political power. The passage of the Inclosure of the Commons Acts in 1779 allowed certain private owners to acquire large tracts of common lands, which had a tradition of use by the general public. The public was given no say in the disposal of the lands nor any compensation. In Sheffield the populace responded with rioting, many instances of which had to be put down by force of arms. On another occasion, after being granted a second member of Parliament in 1832, the failure of the

² *Ibid*, 80-81.

rate-payers to elect a candidate popular with the poorer, non-voting populace caused a stone-throwing riot and led to the reading of the Riot Act.³

A few years later, Parliament passed the Municipal Corporations Act. To have obtained a town charter would have meant that Sheffield would be ruled by a Town Council, could have a Quarter Sessions Court and a Commission of the Peace, and could appoint Town officials. When this motion was defeated by voting householders (who feared higher rates), disgruntled members of the population formed a Chartist movement, like that which had originated in London. After unsuccessful petitions, they too resorted to violent action in 1839. When plans for a larger, armed uprising were discovered in 1840 and the leaders imprisoned, the death of one of the men brought out crowds to view the body. A subsequent petition was successful, and a Charter was granted in August 1843.⁴

It is easy, then, to surmise how this tradition of radical, and often violent, political action made Sheffield amenable to alternative political positions. Lismer's brother Edward was one of many who embraced the new ideologies, eventually becoming a Communist and going to post-revolutionary Russia. Variations of the ideas of Marx and Engels manifested themselves in many ways in Sheffield. When speaking of nineteenth-century English socialism, especially in Sheffield, one cannot refer solely to

³ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

one specific group, but must consider the movement's different factions. From 1880 onwards, organizations in Sheffield included the Socialist Society, which was led by Edward Carpenter and the members of which included anarchists; the Workingmen's Radical Association, a group which discussed socialism and promoted working-class political action; and the more extreme Central Radical Club, which called for the nationalisation of land and the abolition of the House of Lords. Socialist political parties were also active in Sheffield with branches of the communist Independent Labour Party formed in 1893 and the Social Democratic Party in 1894. Despite its rather innocent name, the Clarion Cycling Club was founded specifically to spread socialist ideas in villages around Sheffield by its cycling members.⁵

The existence of these groups showed a committed concern for social issues; for the general population to actually do something about their living conditions. The problems of the early nineteenth-century contributed to the success of socialism in Sheffield. Poor sanitary conditions had led to a cholera epidemic in 1831-32. In response, a small Dispensary was opened for the "sick poor," but had to be moved to larger premises within a year because of an inadequate number of beds.⁶ The Health Committee to the Town Council presented a report in 1847. Although the report described overflowing

⁵ Bill MOORE, "What attracted Ruskin and Carpenter to Sheffield?" Unpublished paper delivered at the conference *Ruskin, Morris and Carpenter – A Vision of Britain: Industrial and Beyond* (Sheffield: September 11-12, 1993), 7.

⁶ VICKERS, *A Popular History of Sheffield*, 112-113.

middens, liquid excreta running down lower walls of inside rooms, and the resulting high rates of fever and tuberculosis, and a higher than average rate of infant mortality, the only action taken was to reduce the number of Health Committee members because of a lack of work.⁷ It is not surprising, therefore, that socialist thought of the type proposed by John Ruskin, Edward Carpenter and William Morris, which gave a share of political power to everyone, found a foothold in Sheffield and would prove to have an influence on Lister.

Religion in Sheffield, like its politics, had a radical and non-conformist tradition. As the Industrial Revolution progressed and the numbers of working poor grew, the developing unions could help with wages and working conditions. In spiritual matters, however, they could not guide. Just as the general populace was unwilling to accept political norms, it was equally unwilling to find solace in the Church of England. The Church of the land had a hierarchical structure in which they could not participate and in which they could have no say. By choosing to follow the teachings of non-conformist leaders, they were rejecting the traditional system of "deferential relationships."⁸ These non-conformist religions were, by and large, evangelical and encouraged lay members to become involved both through religious recruitment and in teaching these beliefs in Sunday schools.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁸ Alan D. GILBERT, *Religion and Society in Industrial England* (London: Longman, 1976), 145-146.

When Parliament had passed the Fourth Act of Uniformity in 1662, and subsequent acts to try to enforce adherence to the Church of England, non-conformist religions had gone underground. Ministers who lost their livelihoods became travelling evangelists, as did the members of their "congregations."⁹ Religion went out to the people.¹⁰ A powerful middle class developed during the Industrial Revolution and, instead of remaining within the Church of England, this group espoused what Max Weber was to describe as "the Protestant ethic" — "the earning of money within the modern economic order is, so long as it is done legally, the result and the expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling."¹¹ As such, they favoured Unitarianism, Methodism, and other non-conformist religions that did not hold with the view that the love of money is the root of all evil. Making money showed the diligence and religious virtue of the maker. Sheffield was no different in this respect from other industrialized towns. Proof of the position of these religions in Sheffield is evident in their construction of halls of worship. Of the non-conformist religions, the Unitarian Upper Chapel was built in 1700, and a new, larger chapel erected in 1881 in its present location;

⁹ MANNING, *A History of Upper Chapel*, 1-2.

¹⁰ The Roman Catholic sympathies of Charles II and James II led to the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672 and the Declaration for Liberty of Conscience in 1687, suspending actions against non-conformists. Parliament passed the Toleration Act in 1689 (without opposition). MANNING, *A History of Upper Chapel*, 7-8.

¹¹ Max WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 53-54.

the Society of Friends (Quakers) built their meeting house in 1709, and the Methodists constructed their first small chapel in 1741.¹² By the mid-nineteenth century these groups had grown and expanded.

In Sheffield it seems that of these non-conformist religions, it was the Unitarians who had the largest membership and those members held key positions of power and influence in the city. Unitarianism had undergone a number of changes of dogma in the nineteenth century, nowhere more so than in Sheffield. When, in 1714, a faction of some two hundred members of the church did not see their more orthodox candidate selected as the new minister, they left the Upper Chapel congregation and formed Nether Chapel.¹³ A distinction in Sheffield must therefore be made between the more liberal Upper Chapel, of which the Lismers were members, and the more conservative Nether Chapel. Any references made to Unitarianism in Sheffield in this study will describe only Upper Chapel practice. A contemporary (1900) definition of Unitarianism is useful in understanding the guiding forces in Sheffield:

Unitarians deny the doctrine of the Trinity, maintaining the absolute unity of the Godhead.... They believe, in harmony with the teaching of Christ, that the Father alone is God. There is considerable variety of opinion among them with regard to Christ, but they are all agreed in rejecting the doctrine of his deity. They also reject the doctrine of original sin, the atonement (the work of Christ affects *man* not God), and eternal punishment — indeed, the whole orthodox "scheme,"

¹² VICKERS, *A Popular History of Sheffield*, 124, 128, 130.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

regarding it as both irrational and unscriptural.¹⁴

It is this rejection of that which is "irrational and unscriptural" which best characterizes the Upper Chapel which Lismer attended.

Although politics and religion often do not mix, the involvement of Upper Chapel's members in local government, as members of the Town Council and as aldermen, was longstanding.¹⁵ Unlike the established churches, Unitarianism did not discourage political radicalism, such as that followed by Unitarians like Edward Lismer and others.

In addition to its involvement in government, Upper Chapel reinforced the socialist groups within Sheffield by being concerned with the welfare of its poorer parishioners and the community in general. Besides providing a Sunday school, some of Upper Chapel's activities included a Sick and Savings Society, Sewing Guild and Ladies Sewing Society (members of which made clothes for the poor), the Literary Society (which organized special lectures and met to discuss papers), and Postal Mission (which sent out Unitarian literature through the post).¹⁶

¹⁴ MANNING, *A History of Upper Chapel*, 73-74 (footnote).

¹⁵ Three such men were John Hobson, Robert Thomas Eadon, and Michael Hunter, all of whom served first on the Town Council and later as Aldermen. Hobson was also treasurer of the Literary and Philosophical Society and sat some years on the Council of the School of Art, twice declining the Mayoralty. Eadon was a businessman who was also the first member to the Sheffield Board of Education, helped found the School Board in 1873 and was named a Justice of the Peace in 1886. Hunter had been a Master Cutler, was elected Mayor twice, and was an Upper Chapel and Town trustee. *Ibid.*, 152, 155-156, 161.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 176, 179.

From 1876 through the turn of the century, when Lismer attended the Upper Chapel, the ministers were men with modern ideas who were willing to accommodate the rapid scientific changes of the nineteenth century in England. Reverend Eli Fay gave a series of lectures around 1880 on "The Old and the New Science" which brought many new members to the church. His successor, Reverend John Bland, was a Freemason who also had a gift for public speaking, and although his tenure was short, he filled the Chapel with his evening lectures. Reverend John Manning, who replaced Bland, was active during the time Lismer would have attended Upper Chapel. Manning was a prolific contemporary author with publications ranging from "Darwin and Darwinism" to "The Poets and the Flowers." In 1897 he hosted the Triennial National Conference of Unitarian, Liberal Christian, Free Christian, Presbyterian and other non-conformist congregations, and delivered a lecture on "The Means of Recruiting our Ministry."¹⁷ Except for the Sunday school and Sick and Savings Societies, all of the "special" Unitarian groups were begun under his tenure. Lismer's sisters Constance and Lucy were very much involved with these groups, the latter marrying and moving to a new Chapel branch in the Attercliffe suburb of Sheffield.¹⁸

Suffice it to say that this "rational" view of religion and religious tolerance brought to the congregation by well-educated, open-minded

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 169-171.

¹⁸ Basil SHORT, *The Unitarian* (No. 1046, February 1991), 10.

ministers gave a young Lismer exposure to a wide range of contemporary religious, scientific, and philosophic ideas. It is most likely that he was introduced to the theosophical ideas of Annie Besant and Edward Carpenter when they spoke to the Unitarian-founded Sheffield Literary Society. Moreover, Upper Chapel's willingness to allow speakers with other religious viewpoints helped instill in Lismer a flexibility and willingness to listen to new ideas which he would later bring to Canada.

In spite, or perhaps because of, his involvement with the Unitarian church, Lismer questioned his religion during the late Victorian "crisis of faith," in which the findings of science undermined long-held beliefs. A contemporary writer, Benjamin Kidd, in his book *Social Evolution* (1895), described it as a "struggle which has been waged between Religion and Science within the century, and [those within the Churches] who have realised the full force of the new weapons which the latter has brought to bear on her old antagonist, have cause for reflection at the present time."¹⁹ Kidd argued that the social problem was the cause of the religious question, in which organizations like the Salvation Army found growing support. He also suggested that the questions raised by evolution and other scientific findings caused extreme shifts in religious belief; some people returned to the Church of Rome, while others sought answers of the "super-rational" kind in

¹⁹ Benjamin KIDD, *Social Evolution*, 2nd Edition (London: Macmillan, 1895), 15.

Theosophy and other "new" religions.²⁰ Kidd's book was just one attempt to reconcile religious, social, and economic thought with scientific findings.

Lisner seems to have been one of those who fell into Kidd's second group, for he thought he found the answers he was looking for in Theosophy. That Lisner even considered Theosophy as an alternative was not unusual given that he lived in Sheffield and was a member of the Unitarian Church. As mentioned, many speakers were invited to discuss their religious perspectives, including theosophists Annie Besant and Edward Carpenter.

Theosophy claimed that it provided a synthesis of science and religion, by applying the basics of Eastern religions to modern society. Besant herself had been a practising Anglican and married to a clergyman, but had begun to seriously question her faith. Her conversion to Theosophy was chronicled in her pamphlet *Why I Became a Theosophist*, and it is likely that her speaking of this conversion would have influenced the young Lisner who, like her, had begun to question his own religious beliefs. The Theosophic Society was founded in 1875 by Madame Helena Blavatsky, a Russian emigrée living in New York. The principles of Theosophy were based on the "accumulated wisdom of the ages," and held that nothing is dead, that everything has a consciousness, and that individuals have to work out their own salvation.²¹ Who could become a Theosophist was clearly outlined:

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

²¹ Christmas HUMPHREYS, *The Field of Theosophy* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), 32-34.

Any person of average intellectual capacity, and a leaning towards the metaphysical; of pure unselfish life, who finds more joy in helping his neighbour than in receiving help himself; one who is ever ready to sacrifice his own pleasures for the sake of other people; and who loves Truth, Goodness and Wisdom for their own sake, not for the benefit they may confer — is a Theosophist.²²

To a young Sheffield lad, who had already been exposed to the socialist theories of Ruskin, Carpenter and others, as well as the good works of his church, and who was training to be an artist, Theosophy must have seemed like the ideal philosophy — the one which could provide the answers he sought.

Little is known of Lismer's involvement with the Theosophic Society in Sheffield or of when he joined, though it is probable that he heard the noted left-wing political and social activist Edward Carpenter speak at Upper Chapel. After joining the Theosophic Society, it likely that Lismer would have then become personally acquainted with Carpenter. If this was indeed the case, Lismer would have made a connection with Carpenter which he could not have made with Ruskin, for example, whom he had never heard speak, let alone met. For Lismer, Carpenter would have been a model of someone who had successfully combined spiritual beliefs with secular ones. That Carpenter had an influence on Lismer, even after Lismer had fallen away from Theosophy, is evidenced by the fact that Lismer was given a copy of Carpenter's *The Art of Creation* as a parting gift from a group of artists in

²² *Ibid.*, 47-48.

the Heeley Art Club before he came to Canada.²³ It is possible, then, that it was Carpenter who was the most important philosophical influence on Lismer in Sheffield.

Carpenter's views would have strongly represented the sum of the different ideas to which Lismer was exposed while growing up in his household in Sheffield. Carpenter's socialist politics would have, at least in part, been transmitted to Lismer at home by his brother Edward. For a brief time before his move to Millthorpe in 1878, Carpenter had lived at St. George's Farm, Totley, which had been founded by Ruskin as an experimental communal farm. Once settled in Sheffield, Carpenter had signed the Sheffield Socialists' Manifesto in 1886 and was an active participant in the different socialist functions in the city. His work with the Socialist League brought him into regular contact with William Morris, whose politics also leaned to communism. In his book *Love's Coming of Age* (1896), Carpenter argued that communism was needed, as only in a non-competitive society could men and women achieve equality.²⁴ This echoed the arguments of Ruskin who, in *Sesame and Lilies* (1871), had himself argued for equality in education, for the most part, for men and women.

Carpenter's relationship with American poet Walt Whitman may have directly or indirectly influenced Lismer. Carpenter had made two trips

²³ TOOBY, *Our Home and Native Land*, footnote 46.

²⁴ Sheila ROWBOTHAM, "Commanding the Heart: Edward Carpenter and Friends," *History Today* 37 (September 1987): 42.

to visit Whitman in Camden, New Jersey before the poet died in 1892, was a long-time admirer of the American's work and published essays about his visit to Whitman in the *Progressive Review* in 1897, re-issuing these in book form in 1906.²⁵ Although Whitman's work was not popular at the time in the United States, the British edition of *Leaves of Grass* edited by W.M. Rossetti in 1868, censored of "gross things, in gross, crude, and plain terms," found a following.²⁶ In reading Whitman's work, Carpenter encountered a kindred spirit who gave life to even the most inanimate object, and promoted man's community with humanity and with nature. Carpenter's essays on Whitman are very personal yet informative descriptions of the poet, his life, and views.

Around the time of the publication of these essays Lismer would have met Carpenter through the Sheffield Theosophic Society. It is possible, nay probable, then that Lismer heard some of the Whitmanesque ideas put forward by Carpenter. In describing his two visits to Whitman, Carpenter quotes their conversations extensively. When Whitman says that "we must grow generous, ungrasping masters of industry" and that "the creation of a large, independent, democratic class of small owners is the main thing," Carpenter could just as easily have been presenting his own views.²⁷ Carpenter's socialist circle of acquaintances included William Morris, Ruskin,

²⁵ Edward CARPENTER, *Days with Walt Whitman* (London: George Allen, 1906).

²⁶ Douglas GRANT, *Walt Whitman and His English Admirers* (Leeds University Press, 1962), 7.

²⁷ CARPENTER, *Days with Walt Whitman*, 39.

Charles Ashbee, Beatrice and Sydney Webb, Havelock Ellis, George Bernard Shaw, and a large group of feminist writers and activists. Although these socialists may have disagreed on how to go about changing society, they all shared the Whitmanite views put forward by Carpenter. In Whitman, Carpenter and other socialists found an ally. One opinion of why Whitman was popular in England at the turn of the century is that he was seen by some people at the time as a prophet — “a profound source of spiritual energy and reassurance: especially if they were young, confused, dissatisfied; impotent observers of the ‘darkly plain,’ where ‘ignorant armies clashed by night’ — intellectual England in the mid-nineteenth century, torn by social, moral and religious doubts.”²⁸ Lismer, given his own doubts about religion and society at the time, might well have identified Whitman as a prophet as, it is likely, Carpenter already had.

It was not only existing political ideologies that experienced change at the end of the nineteenth century. Like other towns at the end of the century, Sheffield was affected by changes in the public education system. Prior to 1899 three national bodies controlled education: the Education Department, the Science and Art Department and the Charity Commissioners. Although each originally controlled specific areas of education, there was a great deal of overlapping jurisdiction, and hence conflict, particularly in the areas of higher grade and evening schools. The Board of Education Act of 1899

²⁸ GRANT, *Walt Whitman and His English Admirers*, 9.

merged these three groups into one department with the hope of reforming education and streamlining the system.

Like the Education Department, the Science and Art Department before the merger was a government department headed by a Permanent Secretary. It had originally been created to stimulate the interest of the “industrial classes” in art and science.²⁹ The notion of a link between science and art education was a popular one. Herbert Spencer, in his book *Education: Intellectual, Moral, Physical* (1861), argued that while it was important not to ignore the “aesthetic culture” in education, it should not take precedence over science. He stated that:

...the highest Art of every kind is based on Science — that without Science there can be neither perfect production nor full appreciation.... That science necessarily underlies the fine arts, becomes manifest, *a priori*, when we remember that art products are all more or less representative of objective or subjective phenomena; that they can be good only in proportion as they conform to the laws of these phenomena; and that before they can thus conform, the artist must know what these laws are.³⁰

After completing primary school, Lismer entered the Sheffield School

²⁹ The Education Department laid down the conditions under which a government grant would be paid for elementary education in a code of regulations. This code controlled the life of the schools. It was rarely challenged although the rules were established unilaterally by the Department. Similarly, the Charity Commissioners also oversaw the spending of particularly designated funds. Grants from the Charitable Trusts Acts and the Endowments Acts were administered and distributed by the Commissioners. For information concerning the Education Department, see E.J.R. EAGLESHAM, *The Foundations of 20th Century Education in England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

³⁰ Herbert SPENCER, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1893), 35-36.

of Art. This school was governed by the Science and Art Department and, therefore, affected by the organizational changes which took place. The resulting changes undoubtedly affected Lismer's thinking about art and art education.

To summarize, the Sheffield environment of the late nineteenth century, the environment in which Lismer grew up, was one of change. At home, Lismer had heard of the new socialist theories from his brother, a communist, and of poor social conditions from his sisters, from their outreach involvement with the Unitarian church. His church had introduced him to the ideas of Ruskin, of other religions, like Theosophy, and addressed the implications of new scientific discoveries. All affected Lismer, and contributed to the development of the opinions which he was later to express in Canada.

Chapter 2

The Art Milieu in Sheffield

When Lismer left England, he was twenty-five years old and, except for the year and a half studying in Antwerp, had spent his entire life in Sheffield. How he was affected by the political and social environment of that city is important in understanding the philosophical importance of the art which he espoused, and which appears in his writings and lectures in Canada. It is difficult, in examining how the Sheffield environment affected Lismer, to discuss one issue without mentioning another as they do not fit into distinct categories. For example, Lismer was a Unitarian and it was at church that he heard about Theosophy, probably from Edward Carpenter. Carpenter, however, also espoused communitarianism and was a Marxist who funded the first Marxist newspaper in England, *Justice*. Lismer's brother Edward, who was also a committed Marxist, would no doubt have known Carpenter and others in the Sheffield socialist circle and brought his political ideas to the Lismer home. This mix of religion and politics is typical of the radicalism of Sheffield. Figure 1 shows how these interconnecting influences affected Arthur Lismer.

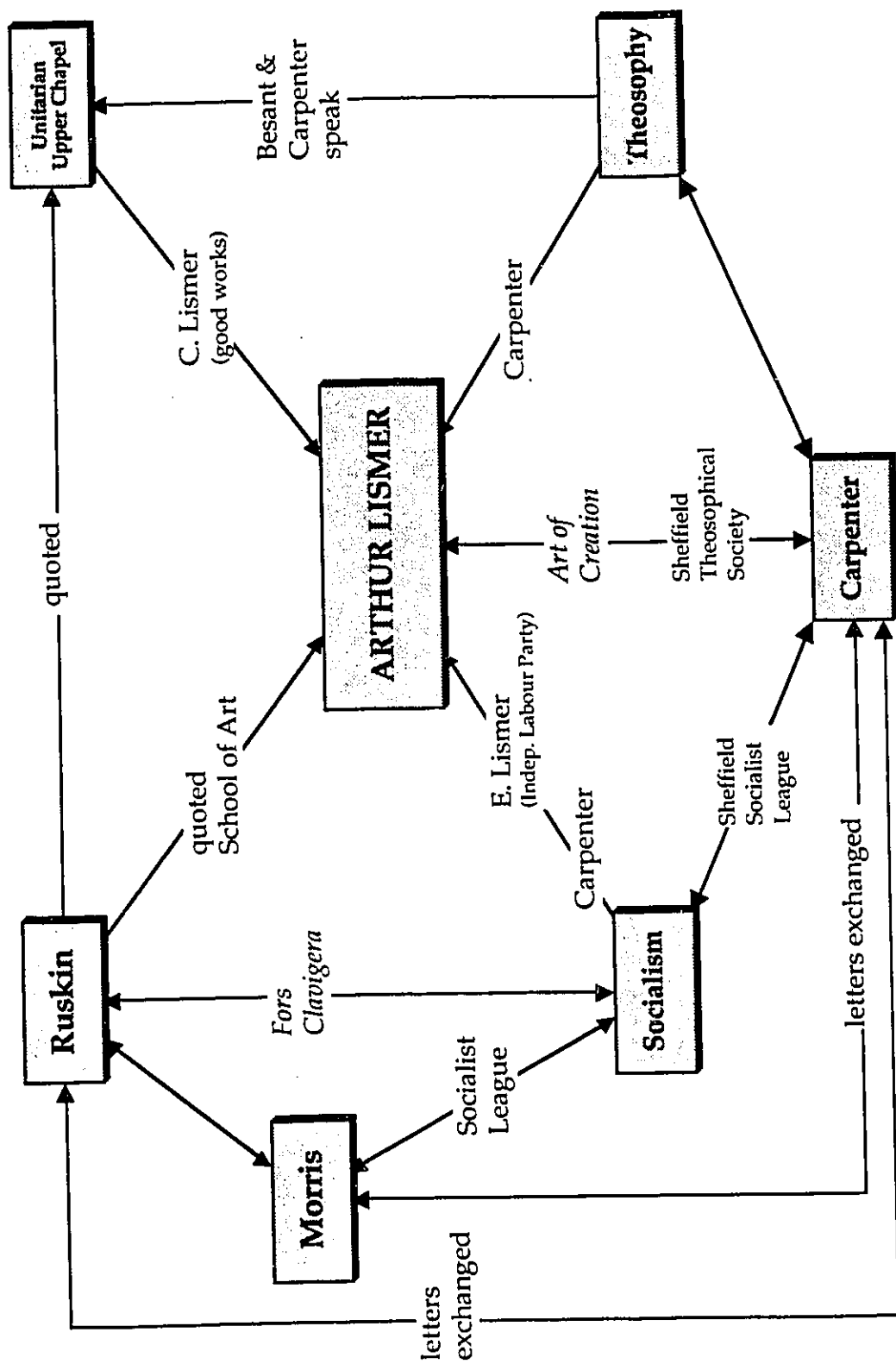


Figure 1: Late Nineteenth Century Sheffield Influences on Arthur Lister.

The influences on Lismer can, perhaps, be differentiated as spiritual and artistic. His spiritual exploration began with his family's involvement in the Unitarian church, which led him to read Ruskin and to later seek spiritual answers in Theosophy. The involvement in Theosophy introduced Lismer to the more radical social and political ideas of Edward Carpenter. At the same time, Lismer's artistic side developed both through his formal education at the Sheffield School of Art and through his other artistic pursuits. He would have visited museums and galleries and would no doubt have been exposed to popular Victorian artworks, among others. He not only experienced the freedom of artistic expression through his membership in the Heeley Art Club, but also the camaraderie of artists. Through one, Lismer became aware of the social conscience of art; through the other, he learned the joy of art.

Although not the largest industrial town, Sheffield was home to three art museums: the City Museum, the Mappin Art Gallery, and Saint George's Museum. The small City Museum opened in 1875 and had a variety of donated examples of the fine and applied arts. Included in the Museum were important collections of cutlery and English pottery, as well as small collections of prehistoric antiquities from Yorkshire and Derbyshire, and of natural history.¹ The Mappin Art Gallery, which opened a decade later in

¹ J. Edward VICKERS, *A Popular History of Sheffield* (Sheffield: Appelbaum Bookshop, 1992), 229-230.

1887, showed a collection of works reflecting Victorian taste. It hosted the annual exhibition of works from the School of Art as well as some visiting exhibitions. Of course there were exhibitions of works by the Pre-Raphaelites, but there were other shows as well. These included works by the New English Art Club (formed in 1886), and large travelling exhibitions from the Turner Bequest to the National Gallery.² However, it was Saint George's Museum, founded by John Ruskin, which perhaps would have interested Lismer most.

The Saint George's Museum was established by Ruskin in Sheffield in 1876, the city having been selected as the site for three reasons: "to acknowledge Ironwork as an art, because Sheffield is in Yorkshire and its inhabitants shared in values by which Old England lived, and because it was easily within reach of beautiful natural scenery (and the best in English art)."³ Unofficially, it more likely had to do with the strong radical tradition in Sheffield which was sympathetic to Ruskin's own, increasingly radical, socio-political views. It has also been suggested that he might have wished to ingratiate himself with the populace of Sheffield after having supported the Governor of Jamaica's massacre of rebelling black farmers in the 1860s. Sheffielders had a long anti-slavery trade tradition dating from 1791 and

2 Michael TOOBY, *Our Home and Native Land: Sheffield's Canadian Artists* (Sheffield: Mappin Art Gallery, 1991), 10-11.

3 Robert HEWISON, *Art and Society: Ruskin in Sheffield 1876* (London: Brentham Press, 1981), 9-10.

including a boycott of West Indian produce in 1820 to protest the treatment of slaves.⁴

Already familiar with Ruskin's work from the Unitarian church, Lismer, like many other late-Victorians, could not but have had an interest in the man and, hence, in his museum. Although Lismer biographer John McLeish indicates Lismer owned a copy of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, Lismer in fact bought the book only after he had come to Canada.⁵ This does not, however, diminish the influence of the work of Ruskin, and particularly of *Sesame and Lilies*, on Lismer.

In 1871, the same year he founded the Guild of Saint George, Ruskin began *Fors Clavigera*, a personal newsletter addressed "to the workmen and labourers of England."⁶ In these letters he spoke of his hopes for them, and detailed his plans for the establishment of a museum. Ruskin's relationship with the "working men" of Sheffield was, however, a unique one, as is affirmed when, beginning with letter 76 (4 March 1877), he speaks to "my Sheffield men."⁷ Ruskin, who for so long had been associated with the aesthetic appreciation of art, turned his attention to the steeltown of Sheffield

⁴ Bill MOORE, "What Attracted Ruskin and Carpenter to Sheffield?" Unpublished paper delivered at the conference *Ruskin, Morris and Carpenter — A Vision of Britain: Industrial and Beyond* (Sheffield: September 11-12, 1993), 5-6.

⁵ TOOBY, *Our Home and Native Land*, footnote 66.

⁶ Robert HEWISON, *Art and Society: Ruskin in Sheffield 1876* (London: Brentham Press, 1981), 6.

⁷ John RUSKIN, *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain (in four volumes)* 4 (New York: University Press), 3.

in the 1870s, thereby reflecting his increasing involvement in social issues. It was in Sheffield that Ruskin put one of his ideas for the improvement of the social condition for workers into practice. His original plan had been to establish communities, a "National Store," where, in his own words,

there were no taxes to pay; that everybody had clothes enough, and some stuff laid by for next year; that everybody had food enough, and plenty of salted pork, pickled walnuts, potted shrimps, or other conserves, in the cupboard; that everybody had jewels enough, and some of the biggest laid by, in treasuries and museums; and, of persons caring for such things, that everybody had as many books and pictures as they could read or look at; with quantities of the highest quality besides, in easily accessible public libraries and galleries.⁸

Although he never realized this ideal community, the opening of a museum in Sheffield was the one aspect of the endeavour in which he did succeed.

The Guild of St. George was founded with the aim of furthering the education of workers. It was, therefore, under its auspices that Saint George's Museum was established. Ruskin had originally indicated his hope of finding room in Sheffield "to place some books and minerals, arranged first for 'workers in iron.'" A long-time acquaintance and assistant of his, Henry Swan, lived in Walkley, a working men's district of Sheffield, and in this area obtained a small cottage which was to become Saint George's Museum. Ruskin had the foresight to make his museum as available to the working man as possible. Not only was it located in their district, but the extended hours made it accessible to them: unlike other museums and galleries, it was

⁸ HEWISON, *Art and Society*, 8-9.

open daily, except Thursday, from nine in the morning until nine at night, by appointment, and on Sunday from two to six in the afternoon. Admission was free to students.⁹ Ruskin retained full control of his small museum, deciding in fact what would be shown, designing display cases, and providing it with works from his private collection.¹⁰ Differing from the City Museum and the Mappin Art Gallery, Saint George's Museum displayed articles more suited to learning about art than to reinforcing Victorian taste. One reviewer of the day described the Museum as "a rich mine of wealth to the earnest seeker after knowledge, an ever-fresh oasis of Art and culture amidst the barrenness and gloom of an English manufacturing district."¹¹

Surprisingly, the Museum had few works by Turner (only a few drawings). Its collection was otherwise eclectic, and included a Verrocchio, two sheets of Mantegna drawings, watercolours by Edward Burne-Jones, J.W. Bunney and William Small, copies by Charles Fairfax of works by Carpaccio and Hans Holbein, some Dürer engravings, a few early illuminated Bibles, casts of antiquities, and a gem and mineral collection, as well as works by Ruskin himself.¹²

⁹ Susan P. CASTERAS, "'The Germ of a Museum, Arranged First for 'Workers in Iron': Ruskin's Museological Theories and the Curating of the Saint George's Museum," *John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye: with essays by Susan P. Casteras, Susan Phelps Gordon, Anthony Lacy Gully, Robert Hewison, George P. Landow, and Christopher Newall* (New York: Harry N. Abrams and Phoenix Art Museum, 1993), 194.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹² *Ibid.*, 191, 193, 195-196.

The Museum was relocated in 1890 from the small cottage in Walkley to larger quarters in Meersbrook Park in the Heeley district, very near to the Heeley Art Club, which Lismer was to join in 1902, and which met in Meersbrook Vestry Hall. In 1900 the Lismers moved from Heeley to 7 Raven Road, in Nether Edge across the river, and later to 100 Sharrow Street. Lismer would have been able to visit this museum while he was a student of the School of Art as it was less than a mile away from his home and a mile and a half from school. The hours would have accommodated Lismer's full schedule: his workday as an apprentice, followed by night classes at the School of Art.

Artists can go to museums and read about art, but they must still learn how to be artists. This Lismer did at the Sheffield School of Art, and through associations formed while at the School. A national School of Design had been formed in 1837 as a result of a House of Commons Select Committee which had been established to enquire into "the best means of extending a knowledge of the Arts and the Principles of Design among the People (especially the Manufacturing Population) of the Country; also to inquire into the Constitution, Management and Effects of Institutions connected with the Arts."¹³ Under the auspices of the Board of Trade, "branch" schools of design were set up in industrial towns. The Sheffield School of Art opened in 1843

¹³ Christopher FRAYLING, *The Royal College of Art: One Hundred & Fifty Years of Art & Design* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1987), 13.

as one of these branch schools.¹⁴

The schools of design purposely had no connection with the Royal Academy, which taught the "higher" or fine arts; design was seen as a "lower" or applied art. When in 1837 history painter Benjamin Haydon held a public meeting in Sheffield to raise support for a School of Art, there was little initial interest. In fact, only three people (including Haydon) showed up. On the reverse of a cartoon of this event, the following resolution was inscribed:

That, notwithstanding the neglect of the leading men of the town in not meeting, it is the duty of those who are assembled, amounting to three, to persevere till the object be accomplished, being aware from history that much greater revolutions have been attempted and begun by much more incompetent means.¹⁵

Haydon was more successful when he returned later, putting design education into an industrial context, and the Board of Trade was subsequently petitioned to open a school.¹⁶ In the years that followed, the School was run by artists and by bureaucrats, to its advantage and to its detriment.

The schools of design became schools of art in 1854-55, when control was given to Henry Cole, under the auspices of the Department of Science

¹⁴ John KIRBY, *"Useful and Celebrated," The Sheffield School of Art 1843-1940* (Sheffield City Polytechnic and Sheffield Arts Department, 1987), 2-3.

¹⁵ Arthur Wightman, Honourary Secretary of the Sheffield School of Art in his address at the School's *Conversazione* held April 19, 1901 reprinted in *The Fifty-Seventh Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art* (Sheffield: Independent Press, 1901), 22.

¹⁶ The reasons given were: improving the quality of local designers (who were cheaper to hire than foreign ones), and elevating public taste among potential customers so that they might buy these local goods. KIRBY, *"Useful and Celebrated" The Sheffield School of Art*, 2-4.

and Art.¹⁷ Cole was a career civil servant who disagreed with the Sheffield School of Art's concept of design education. It was during this time that, by order of Cole's department, the emphasis of education changed from training designers in industry to teaching drawing to children. Schools, Sheffield included, were subjected to strict financial constraints if they did not comply. Only after Cole's retirement in 1873 was the training of school children no longer required by the schools of art.¹⁸ In 1882, painter John Cook (also a competent administrator) was appointed Master of the Sheffield School of Art, and the philosophy of the School changed. Henry Archer, a former student with trade experience, was hired and returned to the School as Second Master under Cook.¹⁹ A.C.C. Jahn, a designer and craftsman, was appointed the new Head Master in 1902.²⁰

The School's range of subjects was expanded under both Cook's and Jahn's Head Masterships. The "traditional" subjects of drawing from life, technical drawing, machine drawing and exercises based on copying from texts were supplemented by woodcarving, lithography, painting and decorating, china painting, embroidery, and metalworking.²¹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰ Other Art Masters during the period Lismer attended were J.R. Duffield, who also acted as Librarian, George Burden, A.L. Elliott, A.B. McDonald, and William Petch, who was a member of the Heeley Art Club and acted as its Vice-President until 1905 when he appears to have left the Club.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

The most significant change for the School, at least during the period Lismer attended, occurred in 1901 when management of the School was taken over by the Sheffield City Council, and the School was renamed the Technical School of Art.²² After this occurred, the School became less reliant on non-municipal government grants, fees, and local subscriptions and under the City Council was at least assured of financial viability.²³ No annual reports remain for the four years immediately following this transfer of management to confirm whether the curriculum was altered as a result, or for that matter which courses Lismer took. It may be deduced, however, that because Jahn continued as Head Master, and Lismer was able to complete his course of study, that the curriculum remained relatively unchanged.

In his speech at the Technical School of Art's *Conversazione* in 1906 (for the 1904-1905 school-year when Lismer completed his studies), Jahn noted the things which he considered important in a School of Art:

It had long been the ambition of the managers to make the school not only an institution for the study of the fine arts, which, of course, was of extreme importance, but also a thoroughly practical school, where artisan students and apprentices might obtain a sound art and technical education, enabling them to become art craftsmen, and so directly

²² This change reflects the decision of the national Science and Art Department in 1896 to allow any county or borough to become the authority for science and art in its area simply by obtaining recognition from the Department. E.J.R. EAGLESHAM, *The Foundations of 20th Century Education in England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 32.

²³ KIRBY, "Useful and Celebrated" *The Sheffield School of Art*, 23.

benefit the trades and crafts of the city.²⁴

Lismer attended the School of Art from 1898 through 1905 and experienced first-hand the changes resulting from the transfer of the School to the Sheffield City Council and the naming of a new Master. Although new courses were added, the method of education at the School did not change. The South Kensington Museum's Art Department continued to set and grade the end-of-year examinations for students of the School of Art as it had done since the 1850s when control of the schools had been transferred from the Board of Trade. The examiners in South Kensington awarded the certificates and, as noted in the School Prospectus (under revision) in 1901, they even restricted who could sit these examinations by imposing strict regulations concerning attendance.

The School of Art had its own library and art museum. The Library was open to students upon application to the Head Master and had reference and lending departments.²⁵ Ornamental metal featured prominently in the collection, not surprising as Sheffield was well known for its metalwork, both

²⁴ *Proceedings at the Conversazione of the Sheffield Technical School of Art*, 23 February 1906, (Sheffield Hallam University archives), 1-2.

²⁵ The contents were in themselves telling: "The Reference Department contains many valuable books on Art, and includes a large number of the best illustrated books on Ornamental Art. There are also collections of photographs of the figure, and ornament and electrotypes reproductions of celebrated examples of ornamental metal work (tankards, tazzas, shields, caskets, &c.) Loans and grants of works on Art from South Kensington are made to the library from time to time." *The Fifty-Seventh Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 10-11.

ornamental and practical. The small art museum which was attached to the School opened in 1898. Many of the objects were on loan by the Science and Art Department of the South Kensington Museum.²⁶ This practice continued with examples of fine metalwork and other ornamental art on regular loan.²⁷

The curriculum followed traditional lines. In his first year, 1898-1899, Lismer attended the Male Evening Elementary Class. The curriculum for the course of study he was to follow was clearly laid out:

Freehand drawing of ornament, from copies. Shading ornament, from copies. Drawing models, such as cubes, cones, and cylinders, objects of utility, furniture, &c. Drawing and shading flowers and foliage, from copies. Drawing and shading the figure, from copies. Elementary designing and colouring for decorative purposes. Lectures on Geometry, and Perspective, each subject occupying one evening in each week, the courses extending from September to May.

Students in this class, if well conducted and diligent, will be permitted to use the Art Library, at the discretion of the Head Master.

During the first year, students in this class should attend the examinations in Freehand and Model Drawing, and during their second year, in Geometry, Light and Shade, and Modelling. If they fail

²⁶ The 1899 loan included "many valuable and important specimens of silver work, both antique and modern, the former being specimens of the Hildesheim and Bernay treasures, which were executed between 200 B.C. And 200 A.D. There is also a collection of Indian metal work, Turkish and Damascus tiles, wood carving, copies of Scraffito decoration, &c., some studies of drapery in chalk and Chinese white by Lord Leighton, and large photographs of sections of his frescoes." *The Fifty-Fifth Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, (Sheffield: Independent Press, 1899), 12-13.

²⁷ In 1900, the loaned pieces included "some fine examples of English Silver and Sheffield Plate, also Indian and Persian metal work, and some fine specimens of wrought iron work, three specimens of Limoges Enamel, and a number of framed reproductions of various kinds of ornamental art." *The Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, (Sheffield: Independent Press, 1900), 12.

in any subject, they should present themselves for examination in the same subject again the following year.²⁸

This curriculum thus consisted of eight subjects: Freehand Drawing, Model Drawing, Geometrical Drawing, Light and Shade Drawing, Perspective, Modelling Clay, Principles of Ornament and Design.

In his first year, Lismer was awarded a First Class in both Elementary Freehand Drawing and in Model Drawing, a Second Class in Elementary Drawing from Light and Shade and in Modelling in Clay, and a Pass in Geometrical Drawing.²⁹ He was also one of nineteen students who received a Council Prize of one pound (£1) for obtaining passing grades in four elementary examinations.³⁰ Lismer was not, however, otherwise singled out for any other special recognition. In reviewing the School of Art's Annual Report for 1898-1899, it appears that Lismer, in spite of his two fFirsts, had been a somewhat average student, with many others receiving more Firsts, as well as special Commendations from the examiners.

During his second year, Lismer began studies in the Male Advanced Evening Course. Again, the curriculum was well defined:

Drawing and shading ornament, from the cast. Study of the history of styles in ornament, from books, copies, and casts. Drawing, shading, and modelling details of the figure, head, feet, and hands, &c. from the cast. Drawing, shading, and modelling whole figures (the antique), from the cast. Modelling ornament, fruit, flowers, &c., from copies, the

²⁸ *The Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 9.

²⁹ At this time examinations were graded First Class, Second Class and Fail for most subjects. For others, simply Pass or Fail.

³⁰ *The Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 29, 32-35.

cast, and nature. Painting ornament, from copies and the cast. Painting landscapes, from copies. Painting flowers, fruit, and still life, from copies and from nature. Painting the figure, from copies and the cast. Anatomical studies of the figure. Architectural drawing, shading, and colouring. Designing for manufactures (applied design, either drawn or modelled), including gold and silver work, wrought and cast iron and brass work; pottery, china, and glass; laces, muslins, and other fabrics; furniture; wall and other surface decoration; and architectural decorations, &c. — Students in this class who have not passed the Elementary subjects, should do so with as little delay as possible, and should also present themselves for examination each year in at least one of the subjects of the Advanced.³¹

There were a total of twenty-three subjects including seven in elementary drawing and shading, three in painting flowers, landscapes and still life, and one each in elementary and applied design.³² At the end of his second year, Lismer sat two advanced level examinations: Drawing from Light and Shade, and Freehand Drawing. Surprisingly, given his later reputation for sketching, the young Lismer received only a Second Class in both courses.³³

Two students who were to follow him to Canada, Frederick Varley and Elizabeth Nutt, were several years ahead of him at the School of Art. Unlike Lismer, their work and studies were regularly recognized. Varley had his

³¹ *The Fifty-Seventh Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 10.

³² The complete list is as follows: Subjects 1-7. Elementary drawing and shading. -8. Drawing the figure. -9. Anatomy. -10. Drawing flowers and foliage from nature. -11 and 12. Painting ornament. -13, 14, and 15. Painting flowers, landscapes, and still life, in oil and water colours, from copies and nature. -16 and 17. Painting the figure from copies and nature. -18. Modelling ornament. -19 and 21. Modelling the figure from copies and nature. -20. Modelling fruit and flowers from nature. -22. Elementary designing. -23. Applied design, and Architectural drawing from measurement. *The Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 8.

³³ *The Fifty-Seventh Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 30-31.

work commended by the South Kensington examiners and received Departmental Free Studentships (valued at £9, 6s. each) in 1897-1898 and 1899-1900. Nutt's record was even more impressive. She completed an Art Class Teachers' Certificate in 1897-1898, received a Free Studentship (£9, 6s.) in 1898-1899, Commendations in 1898-1899 and 1899-1900, a second prize for Best Design for a Casket in Silver Gilt (£7), a Council Prize (£1), and Departmental Prize (10s.) in 1899-1900. For the period from 1897 through 1900, Varley received ten First Class and eight Second Class ratings and Nutt, in addition to completing her teacher training, ten First Class and three Second Class grades.³⁴

Classes were held Monday through Friday, throughout the day and evening, with different sections for men and women. Men's Elementary and Advanced Evening Classes were held Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, from 6:30 to 9:00 pm, and the Evening Life Classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7:00 to 9:00 pm.³⁵ During the first two years Lismer attended, there were over 400 students, of whom about 70 percent were male. Given that the school provided training in both the "higher" and "lesser" arts, it is not surprising that most students from this working-class city attended evening

³⁴ *The Fifty-Fifth Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 29-35; *The Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 28-35; *The Fifty-Seventh Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 26-31.

³⁵ The Head Master regularly asked that "strong representations might be made to employers to induce them to allow their apprentices to leave work in time to arrive at the School by 6:30." *The Fifty-Fifth Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 15.

classes (71 percent Lismer's first year and 82 percent his second).³⁶ Attending class three or five nights a week during the session, it is no wonder that after seven years of study Lismer is said to have described his lessons at the School of Art as "dull."³⁷ He completed his seven-year free studentship in 1905 and received a certificate. In light of his later involvement in teaching, it is interesting that Lismer chose to go to Antwerp to pursue his art studies rather than stay on at the School of Art to complete an Art Class Teachers' or Art Masters' Certificate.

The influence of William Morris on the School of Art was primarily through the examinations, which were still given under the auspices of the South Kensington Museum, later the Victoria and Albert Museum, and originally founded to display decorative art objects for designers and manufacturers.³⁸ From 1876 Morris served as an Examiner with the South

³⁶ Records are incomplete for the School of Art, due to the bombing of the School during World War II. Annual Reports for only the first two years Lismer attended the School are available. Letter from John Kirby, Campus Librarian, Sheffield Hallam University to author, 26 September 1994. Kirby maintains the database of materials related to the School of Art.

³⁷ John A.B. McLEISH, *September Gale: A Life of Arthur Lismer* (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1973), 6.

³⁸ A complete list of the examiners appears in *The Fifty-Fifth Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 28. They were: Maurice B. Adams; Professor G. Aitchison, A.R.A.; H.H. Armstead, R.A.; T. Brock, R.A.; E.F. Brewtnall, R.W.S.; A.F. Brophy, Professor Fred Brown, S.J. Cartlidge, A.R.C.A.; G. Clausen, A.R.A.; Alan S. Cole, Hon. John Collier, Walter Crane, A.R.W.S.; E. Crofts, R.A.; Lewis F. Day, W. De Morgan, E. Onslow Ford, R.A.; G.J. Frampton, A.R.A.; Arthur Hacker, A.R.A.; H. Graham Harris, M. Inst., C.E.; Erat Harrison, T.G. Jackson, R.A.; Goscombe John, G.D. Leslie, R.A.; W.R. Lethaby, Seymour Lucas, R.A.; S.J. Solomon, A.R.A.; J.J. Stevenson, H.H. Stannus, R.R.I.B.A.; R.H.A. Willis, W.F. Yeames, R.A.;

Kensington Board of Education, and from 1884 as Art Advisor on the acquisition of new objects for the South Kensington Museum. However, although he was active politically and had ties to Edward Carpenter through the Sheffield Socialist League (to which he contributed time and money), there is nothing to support the idea of a strong Morris influence at the Sheffield School of Art. There is no evidence of any direct contact between Morris and the School. Nor is there any indication that Morris' work was required reading, or that the School even possessed any books by him in its library during the time Lismer attended, although the library did have a subscription to *The Studio*.³⁹ The only exposure Lismer and the other students would have received to the Arts and Crafts style would have been through the Head Master, A.C.C. Jahn, who painted using this approach.

As one of the criteria for receipt of a scholarship to the School of Art, Lismer was required to complete a seven-year apprenticeship with a local tradesman. Willis Eadon, to whom Lismer was apprenticed for the period he spent at the School, was an important influence on him. Eadon had been a teacher at Sharrow Vale School, where Lismer had been a pupil prior to attending the School of Art. When Eadon left Sharrow Vale to set up his own business in specialist illustration and engraving in 1898, he accepted his former pupil as an apprentice in his new company.⁴⁰ Perhaps the most important aspect of the relationship between Lismer and Eadon was that

with T. Armstrong (Director for Art).

³⁹ Letter from John Kirby to author 26 September 1994.

⁴⁰ TOOBY, *Our Home and Native Land*, 9.

Eadon, who had previously been a member of the Surrey Art Club, was a founder and member of the Heeley Art Club. During his time at the School of Art, Lismer also became a member of the Heeley Art Club.

This likely occurred upon the recommendation of Willis Eadon. There is no clear consensus amongst Lismer biographers on who was in the club: it is said to have been a working men's club,⁴¹ a group of mainly local businessmen,⁴² and an offshoot of the Sheffield Society of Art.⁴³ Suffice it to say that Lismer became very much involved with the group, first as Assistant Secretary in 1904, then as Honourary Secretary, beginning later the same year, through 1906.⁴⁴

The Heeley Art Club was organized in 1895 as the Sheffield Art Society and Sketching Club. The name change to the Heeley Art Club reflected the fact that the group met in a classroom in Wesleyan School on Thirwell Road in Heeley, and that a number of its members lived in or near Heeley.⁴⁵ The

⁴¹ McLEISH, *September Gale*, 11.

⁴² Lois DARROCH, *Bright Land: A Warm Look at Arthur Lismer* (Toronto: Merritt, 1981), 5.

⁴³ TOOBY, *Our Home and Native Land*, 14.

⁴⁴ A list of officers of the Heeley Art Club was provided by Sue Graves, Curator of the Graves Art Gallery (archival material referenced "from Redbook").

⁴⁵ There is some confusion as to the date the Club was founded, probably due to the name change and the fact that the Club did not begin to exhibit until 1898. Keith Oates, current President of the Club, has indicated that it may have been formed two years earlier, in 1893, but that traditionally the 1895 date has been used. Nevertheless, Tooby, McLeish and others have incorrectly named Lismer a founder member – unlikely, given he would have been only ten years old at the time. There is also no evidence that the Club met at Lismer's home as has also been suggested. Letter from

Club carried on a tradition of art clubs in Sheffield. The Sheffield and District Art Club had been founded in the mid-1880s by John Cook, shortly after he had been appointed Head Master of the School of Art, for a few of the advanced students, although outsiders could join for a fee. Two or three years later, when a number of the members wanted a club which was not associated with the School, the Surrey Art Club was formed (named after the street where they met). Besides Willis Eadon, other members included Frank Saltfleet, Charles Ashmore and W. Hunt, all of whom were to become members of the Heeley Art Club after the Surrey club was dissolved.⁴⁶

As cited in a 1902 catalogue, the principle objectives of the Heeley Art Club were "to bring together all who take an interest in Art matters and to foster a love of the beautiful in Nature."⁴⁷ This was followed by a wordy justification of subscription fees and a description of what would be done with these fees. This statement was modified in 1904, most likely to reflect changes in the membership of the Club. References to fees were now omitted and the objectives were more explicit:

To bring together Art Students, and to encourage the study of Pictorial Art, including drawing from the Human Figure. The Club will foster the wish to attain excellence in Landscape work, whether in oils, water-colours, or black-and-white in which members may be interested. They will also have the opportunity of hearing the criticisms delivered at the Monthly Exhibitions by the leading Artists of the City.⁴⁸

Keith Oates to author, 21 April 1995.

⁴⁶ "Local Art Clubs - Past and Present" in the *Sheffield Weekly Independent*, November 18, 1905. From the historical files of the Heeley Art Club.

⁴⁷ Heeley Art Club, *Catalog of Exhibits* (October 8-10, 1902) 1.

⁴⁸ Heeley Art Club, *Catalog of Exhibits* (November 25-27, 1903), 1.

By 1905, any statement of purpose had been dropped from Heeley exhibition catalogues. One can only speculate as to why the practice stopped, though it was presumably because the exhibiting members were well aware of their aims. It was clearly not due to any change in the senior officers of the Club as the executive remained largely intact throughout this period.

The Club provided a creative outlet for Lismer, who spent his days learning a trade and most evenings at the School of Art copying casts of works of art and listening to lectures on subjects such as geometry and perspective. The Art Club held weekly meetings for drawing and painting from the model, organized Saturday afternoon sketching parties to visit some of the scenic spots around Sheffield, and held monthly exhibitions when a well-known local artist was invited to criticize members' work. During the monthly criticisms, Lismer would have seen his work critiqued not as that of a student, but as that of an artist. Although his work met with comment, so too did that of other members of the Club. The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* reported on one such session held on August 2, 1905, when Frank Saltfleet was said to have stated that he saw new and better qualities developing, but that there were also some avoidable "vices" — he condemned the use of "brilliant dark markings to 'force' a sketch, and advised the study of foregrounds." Fred Varley, who was at this time still in London, was another such invited artist/critic (March 7, 1906). The regularity of these monthly criticisms is evident in the fact that the Club had pre-printed announcement

cards with blank spaces for the date and the name of the invitee.⁴⁹

Lismer would have gained much from his membership in the Heeley Art Club. At the weekly meetings or "working nights" he had a regular opportunity to draw figures from life. The School of Art had only two life courses, restricted to advanced students, so these would not have been available to Lismer in his first years at the School. Although possibly the youngest in the Club, membership tended to put Lismer on a more or less equal footing with the other members, including Eadon and one of his teachers, William Petch, as well as the engraver Charles Ashmore, who was fairly successful in Sheffield.

The Heeley Art Club held its first public exhibition in 1898; Lismer exhibited with the Club from 1902 to 1907. Prices were generally affordable, but it is not known if any of the young Lismer's works were purchased.⁵⁰ The number and type of works displayed were varied and Lismer usually contributed watercolours and black-and-white works, including some portrait studies, but consisting mostly of landscapes of the greater Sheffield area.⁵¹ He

⁴⁹ Copy of an invitation, provided by John Kirby. Sheffield Hallam University collection.

⁵⁰ In surveying the Exhibition Catalogues for 1902 through 1907, Lismer's prices seem to have been average, at least until 1905 (coincidentally the year he graduated), when his prices were amongst the highest.

⁵¹ A list of works, taken from the *Catalogue of Exhibits* for the years 1902-1907 follows. 1902: *Coast Scene, Isle of Man*, 3 watercolours, *Fawcett's Farm, Norton*, watercolour; 1903: *Ludgate Hill, Country Lane, Norton, London Bridge, Market Day, Cockshutts Farm, Ecclesall, Norton Lees*, watercolours, *Study, Portrait Study*, black and white; 1904 (Spring): *The Stackyard, The Village Pump, Near Little Norton, In Padley Wood, Market*

regularly displayed pictures of Norton Lees and Alms Hill in Ecclesall, which were close to Nether Edge where he lived. Later, his works also included watercolours of the River Rivelin and its system of weirs and surrounding farms (further away, but still within five miles of Sheffield), as well as of Flamborough and Whitby on the north-east coast of England, within easy reach by rail. It was not until the exhibition in 1907 that Lismer, who had by then returned from studying in Antwerp, displayed anything in oil; all but one of his works that year portrayed scenes in or around Antwerp.

The sketching parties were perhaps the most enjoyable for Lismer of all the Heeley Art Club's activities. Saturday afternoons were the optimum time to have such excursions because the workday for many had just finished (most companies opened on Saturday mornings) and did not interfere with the church-related activities some might have on Sunday. Sheffield was ideally situated for such excursions. Just east of the High Peak District and

Hall Alterations, Farm (Alms Hill), Off Greenwich, Alms Hill, watercolours, Portrait Studies, 3 black and white; 1904 (Fall): Low Tide, Whitby, Whitby Harbour, A Farmyard, Rivelin, The Cottage Door, A Wayside Cottage, At the Quay Side, Market Day, Low Tide, Beached, Tin Ghaut, Whitby, Waiting for the Tide, A Greyday Whitby, An Ancient Street, Whitby, Hagg Farm, Rivelin, watercolours, Studies, 2 black and white; 1905: Eastcliffe, Whitby, Low Tide, A Wet Day, Whitby, Whitby Harbour, Farm, Norton Lees, Bridlington Harbour, Sphinx Rock, Flamboro', A Winter Landscape, Up the River, Whitby, The Old Town, Whitby, Beuchief, Staithes, Seascape, Flamboro', On the Moors, Alm's Hill, Ecclesall, Robin Lythe's Hole, Flamboro', Runswick Bay, Evening, Sketch, Seascape, Whitby Harbour, A Wayside Trough, watercolours, Clubites, black and white; 1906: On the Canal, Doncaster, Sketch at Rivelin, The Pool, A Belgian Landscape, A Grey Day, Flanders, Antwerp, On the Scheldt, watercolours; 1907: Alms Hill, Autumn Morning, Antwerp, Sketch, Autumn, Wyming Brook, A Belgian Landscape, Sketch, Antwerp, oils.

bordered by moors to the north and west, Sheffield offered a variety of landscapes to a city-dweller like Lismer. Some of Lismer's early work was done in the picturesque area between Hathersage and Castleton, both less than ten miles from Sheffield, and both accessible by rail.⁵² During these outings, Lismer would have experienced the "aliveness of nature" of which both Edward Carpenter and Walt Whitman spoke. Because of the proximity of the Club's headquarters to Saint George's Museum, it is also possible that members of might have obtained special permission to view and sketch the collection. Although their intention was to sketch from life and from nature, they may have opted at some time to visit the "working man's" museum.

In light of the general acceptance of radical political and social ideals in Sheffield, and of Lismer's acquaintance with Carpenter, it is not surprising that a group of members of the Heeley Art Club presented Lismer with a copy of Carpenter's book *The Art of Creation* when he departed for Canada in 1911. This text describes the process of the creation of the world and how, once this process is understood, man can take part in it. Carpenter first describes the system of creation, then addresses each of the different aspects which make up this process, including religion, the physical and mental being of man, Platonic love, and Beauty and Duty. The description of this progression somewhat reflects the religious and moral questions which Lismer himself had. When speaking of art, Carpenter compares it favourably with the entire

⁵² Conversation with Michael Tooby, 2 July 1991, at the Mappin Art Gallery.

process of creation:

[Creation] is a process which we can see at any time going on within our own minds and bodies, by which forms are continually being generated from feeling and desire; and, gradually acquiring more and more definition, pass outward from the subtle and invisible into the concrete and tangible. This process, I say, we can observe within ourselves in the passage from Emotion to thought, and from these again to Action and the External world. It is the foundation of all human Art. The painter, the sculptor, the musician are forever bringing their dreams of Beauty and Perfection forward from the most intimate recesses and treasure-houses of their hearts and giving them a place in the world. And not only the Artist and Musician, but every workman who makes things does the same. The world of Man is created by this process; and I have given reasons for supposing that the world of Nature is continuous with that of man, and that there too innumerable Beings are for ever labouring to express themselves, and so to enter into touch and communication with each other.⁵³

That this book would have been presented to Lismer is evidence of the influence of Carpenter on the mixed group of "working artists" who made up the Heeley Art Club. The combination of high ideals with practical application would have appealed to many of them. Whether Lismer and the Heeley Art Club actually visited Carpenter in Millthorpe is a matter for speculation; there is no known correspondence to support such an event, although Millthorpe was certainly within walking distance of the Club's headquarters.⁵⁴

An interesting aspect of Lismer's membership in the Heeley Art Club was his involvement in its organizational aspects. As noted, in 1904 he

⁵³ Edward CARPENTER, *The Art of Creation* (London: George Allen, 1904), 31-32.

⁵⁴ Letters from Rachel Moffat, Archivist, Sheffield City Libraries to the author, 23 September 1994 and 8 February 1995.

became Assistant Secretary and, later that year, Honourary Secretary of the Club, which was a position requiring strong administrative skills. The Secretary sent out the invitations to the monthly criticisms, organized the exhibitions, and arranged for the catalogues to be printed. In addition, Lismer handled all correspondence sent to the Club, and had to ensure that the membership rules were properly distributed. It was no doubt a trial by fire, as there were well over thirty members, all of whom had to be notified of events. In organizing the Fall 1905 exhibition, for example, Lismer coordinated the display of 382 works by thirty-six members.⁵⁵ Lismer was described as an "energetic secretary" and, with the President, W.B. Hatfield, was credited for the "vigorous condition" of the Club.⁵⁶

It is not surprising, then, that Lismer used this ability to organize so extensively when he established himself in Canada. It is also no surprise that, with his philosophical and artistic background, he would have formed such an easy companionship with the artists with whom he was to share the mantle of the Group of Seven. Common interests included a love of nature and of sketching outdoors (Jackson, Thomson, et al), an interest in mysticism in general (Varley, MacDonald) and Theosophy specifically (Harris), and in Walt Whitman (MacDonald, Johnston).⁵⁷ Lismer's environment in Sheffield

⁵⁵ Heeley Art Club, *Catalog of Exhibits* (November 16, 17, 18, 1905).

⁵⁶ "Local Art Clubs - Past and Present."

⁵⁷ For more information on the influence of mysticism on Canadian painting, see Ann DAVIS, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting 1920-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

had not only given him the skills to become an accomplished artist, but had also given him exposure to socialist ideals of art. Reading Ruskin and Carpenter, he had realized that art was the right of the many, not a privilege of the few. Educated in a school of art which provided lessons in both "high" art and craft, he learned to appreciate the art of crafts. It was this background which Lismer brought with him to Canada in 1911, and which was to serve him so well the rest of his life.

Chapter 3

Lismer in Canada and the Legacy of Sheffield in the Case of Art Appreciation

Upon his arrival in Canada in January 1911, Lismer made his way to Toronto, where he later joined Grip Limited and met the men who were to form the Group of Seven. Lismer's subsequent artistic and pedagogic achievements are a matter of record, and this chapter will detail neither these accomplishments nor his experiences in Toronto, Halifax, Ottawa, Montreal, New York and South Africa. It will, however, address Lismer's views on the subject of art.

Throughout his long career, Lismer wrote over one hundred articles and gave a thousand or more lectures, although these encompassed a limited number of topics.¹ The subjects he addressed can be grouped into six categories: art appreciation, art criticism, art and industry, children's art, Canadian art in general (including the Group of Seven), and specific exhibitions or artists. In reviewing Lismer's Canadian writings and lectures in these areas, a connection with his Sheffield experience could be made with any of the topics. However, it is the first three – art appreciation, criticism, and the relationship of art and industry – which are most conspicuous in

¹ In the latter part of his career he gave some 160 lectures between October 1950 and May 1951 at the Children's Art Centre, McGill University, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal. Ken JOHNSTONE, "The Professor is a Rebel," *Liberty* 28 (May 1951): 52.

their English connection. Because of the sheer volume of his commentaries, however, this chapter will be limited to a discussion only of Lismer's concept and definition of art appreciation. While Lismer wrote and lectured on art appreciation throughout his career, most of his writing in this area was produced during the eight-year period from 1929 to 1937 while he was working as Educational Supervisor at the Art Gallery of Toronto. In terms of a statistical evaluation, about sixty percent of *all* the articles Lismer wrote during his career were produced during this relatively short period, and one-third of these focused on art appreciation.

When discussing art appreciation, Lismer did so in the context of art and life, beauty, understanding art, and the role and importance of the artist. Mention of examples of established and modern art was a means of illustrating his thoughts. Of the "historical" artists, Lismer most often included Titian, Rembrandt, Goya, Constable, Corot and Millet, as well as Cornelius Kreighoff as examples. In the more "modern" group he included Manet, Monet, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, the Group of Seven, Tom Thomson, and Emily Carr. Lismer described art appreciation as a "response to life within a work of art," and "the expression of the life within ourselves rising to meet the new interpretation of new experiences."² By "appreciation" Lismer meant more than the learned, or natural, appreciation

² Arthur LISMER, "The Art of Appreciation," *The Twentieth Century* 1 (June 1933): 27.

of art of a connoisseur or an aesthete. He felt there was need for the general public to gain a better education about art not simply in the context of works of art, but in the context of everyday living. In discussing Lismer's views on art appreciation, a distinction must be made between art training and art education. When he spoke of art training, Lismer was referring to the teaching of technique to the aspiring artist; when speaking of education, he meant the teaching of an artistic sense to non-artists.

What is interesting when reading Lismer's words is the consistency of his opinions and language. Over the course of his lengthy career in Canada, he reiterated the same themes about art appreciation, thus illustrating how his convictions, once formed, changed little. The opinions which he advanced were consistent with views on art appreciation shared by influential English socialists like Carpenter, Ruskin, and Morris.

Although his discussions of art appreciation were often wide-ranging, for the purpose of this thesis they will be divided into three areas. It is understood that these divisions are artificial as all can be equated with art appreciation; however, categorizing Lismer's writings facilitates discussion (Lismer frequently referred to all three issues in the same article). First, he separated the educational needs of the artist from those of the rest of the population. This is the starting point from which he began many of his discussions of the other two areas. Secondly, he dealt with the obvious connection to art education, when he stressed the necessity of the

development of an aesthetic awareness in non-artists, be it through fine art or everyday objects. Finally, as a corollary to the development of aesthetic awareness, he spoke and wrote of the appreciation of art as a social or civic responsibility of the individual. Art appreciation, as far as Lismer was concerned, could be learned to a greater or lesser degree by everyone regardless of their background or artistic leanings.

Art Education and Training

Of the three areas to be discussed, it is that of the improvement of art education and training, for the public in general and for artists in particular, which appears to have been the basis of Lismer's thoughts on art appreciation. He was concerned that the public's perception of art was limited to that which was defined as fine art, and its proper appreciation restricted to a chosen few:

Art of some kind we must have—it is a necessity of existence—but art is like religion, if we don't live it, we haven't got it—and none of these forms of art, second-hand copies and reproductions, radio and records, are sustaining unless we know how to select and how to look and listen with discrimination. Art has so long been confused with technical skill and professional life and the production of pictures by others that we have come to believe that it is a closed book—a mysterious preoccupation of strange people called artists, and connoisseurs of wealth and culture who have the means to satisfy possessive habits by collecting objects and other works of art from past ages. Artists need audiences of appreciators, otherwise no art can flourish in any country....³

Artists were but a small part of society as a whole and their training needs

³ Arthur LISMER, "Art and Adult Education," *Canadian Forum* 15 (January 1935): 150.

were different from that of the public at large. In separating the artist from the appreciator, Lismer acknowledged that the artist was a singular individual with a natural gift and an intuition of what was beautiful. The general public, however, needed to be educated to know what was beautiful. This was made clear when in 1917, as Principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax, Lismer wrote to Dr. A.H. MacKay, President of the Board of Directors of the School:

I find that among the students there are very very few who would benefit by an academic training such as those who make art their career should receive, but there is a wider field of service in so arranging courses of instruction to stimulate art appreciation in educating the young idea as to what is good in design decoration form and colour, in the home, in Art, & in the city. For the true purpose of art teaching is the education of the whole people for appreciation....⁴

Although acknowledging that academic training had a role to play, Lismer's overall recommendation was that the School should also provide courses for non-artists so they, too, could gain a sense of art appreciation. In this way the public could be part of the creative process of the artist: "a seventh-day participator" in the birth of the work of art.⁵ Lismer's own definitions illustrate the clarity with which he separated the two groups of individuals:

The artist, that is the practical producing individual, has no scrap of antiquarian interest or romantic attitude towards the past. It is doubtful if he has any real regard for the future, except where he is consciously evangelistic in his role of educator and contributor to

⁴ Arthur LISMER to Dr. A.H. MacKay, April 29, 1917. Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

⁵ Arthur LISMER, "The Art of Appreciation," *Canadian Comment* 4 (April 1935): 18.

revelation of the richer life. He lives in the present.

The appreciator in this world travels by contact with the same sources of sustenance as do the creative ones in all ages. He learns to see, finding his own way through the chaos of nature and mortal life by the pathway of beauty.⁶

In differentiating the training of the artist from that of the public, Lismer agreed with John Ruskin. However, unlike Ruskin, he believed in an egalitarian approach to teaching art education to the non-artist, one which was not directed by class. Ruskin's views on how this instruction should be carried out were clearly divided along class lines. He believed that drawing lessons for elementary school children should be made as recreational as possible, regardless of their situation, but especially for children of the working classes who would, in the future, have little time to devote to art. For the upper classes, in higher public (*i.e.*, private) schools, Ruskin argued for a different and more rigid approach:

....drawing should be taught rightly; that is to say, with due succession and security of preliminary steps,—it being here of little consequence whether the student attains great or little skill, but of much that he should perceive distinctly what degree of skill he has attained, reverence that which surpasses it, and know the principles of right in what he has been able to accomplish. It is impossible to make every boy an artist or a connoisseur, but quite possible to make him understand the meaning of art in its rudiments, and to make him modest enough to forbear expressing, in after life, judgments which he has not knowledge enough to render just.⁷

Ruskin acknowledged that not everyone had the makings of an artist, but still

⁶ LISMER "The Art of Appreciation," *The Twentieth Century* 1 (June 1933): 28.

⁷ John RUSKIN, "Education in Art," *A Joy For Ever* (London: George Allen, 1906), 217-218.

felt that a degree of art training was required to help the child, who would most likely be in a position to support artists, better understand and appreciate art, and in other words become a true patron.

Ruskin felt, however, that the artistic education of the general public was not happening in England. As with the public schools, he was unhappy with the education given by the schools of art, like that in Sheffield, which focused, he lamented, almost exclusively on the training of the artisan. Ruskin felt that "the designing of patterns capable of being produced by machinery materially diminish (the schools') utility as a general system of instruction (in art)." He believed that students in the schools of art would also benefit from a method of study, particularly one recommended by "some of our best painters, and avowedly sanctioned by them."⁸

A certain responsibility for education was placed by Ruskin on the shoulders of employers. The public needed beautiful things to help them gain an appreciation of what was beautiful. He was concerned that the rapid and uncontrolled expansion of industry was restricting the artist's ability to produce such things. In addressing a group of manufacturers, he asked them to imagine their success as absolute, and that there remained no meadows or trees, no land whose use was not directly related to industry:

Under these circumstances (if this is to be the future of England), no designing or any other development of beautiful art will be possible.... Beautiful art can only be produced by people who have beautiful things

⁸ RUSKIN, "Education in Art," 221-222.

about them, and leisure to look at them; and unless you provide some elements of beauty for your workmen to be surrounded by, you will find that no elements of beauty can be invented by them.⁹

With the artist unable to produce articles of beauty, the public would lose an opportunity for appreciation.

Lismer believed, like Ruskin, that the training of craftsmen, those who would likely be working in the field of commercial design, was more than simply teaching a trade and that they would benefit from a system of study. His concerns were addressed in his 1917 letter regarding the Victoria School of Art and Design:

In the field of industrial design & in the endeavour to instruct sound principles of order & beauty & the need of good workmanship to make a useful thing also a thing of beauty. There is wide scope for the foundation of a good technical school of art — ranking in usefulness with more scientific and commercial schools.¹⁰

Twelve years later, in 1929, Lismer still expressed concern about the type of training commercial artists received and how this training was perceived. In an article on "Art Appreciation" for the *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada*, he wrote:

Perhaps in the opinion of the older artists the affairs of art galleries and schools have been turned in a commercial direction and there is no doubt that the danger of badly informed and merely commercially minded men on official boards, who think that public institutions should serve them and feed them with appreciative customers and

⁹ John RUSKIN, "Modern Manufacture and Design," *Unto This Last and The Two Paths* (London: Collins, 1862?), 127–128.

¹⁰ LISMER to Dr. A.H. MacKay.

trained students, is a very important danger to face.¹¹

In responding to his concern that "commercial interests" had control over art training and education, and in keeping with his view that a system of study was required, Lismer several years later proposed that one solution would be to establish "a national school of design with branches in all centres." He felt that such a school was "a social need just as much as societies for the preservation of hand-woven tweeds and the perpetuation of hooked rugs with landscapes, parrots, and palm trees thereon."¹² Although the last part of this statement was no doubt written with tongue placed firmly in cheek, it is interesting that Lismer would have ultimately recommended the establishment of an overseeing body similar to that which was in existence, through the schools of design/art, in England during the nineteenth century and of which he had personal experience.

For Lismer, the proper training of the commercial artist to produce articles of beauty had an important role in the art education of the general public. Much in the same way as Ruskin had argued that the designer could not produce articles of beauty without himself being surrounded by beauty, Lismer believed that art appreciation in the general public would develop only if they themselves were surrounded by beautiful articles designed by

¹¹ Arthur LISMER, "Art Appreciation," *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada* 1928-1929, ed. Bertram Brooker (Toronto: McMillan, 1929), 60-61.

¹² Arthur LISMER, "Art and Industry," *Canadian Comment* 2 (August 1933): 26.

properly trained commercial artists.

Thus, some sixty years after Ruskin had criticised art education in England, Lismer, as he would do throughout his career, expressed unhappiness with the existing system of art training and education in Canada. Like Ruskin, Lismer felt it served neither the needs of the artist or of the public:

The courses in art schools followed the example and tried to graft on to the pioneer spirit the elements of an antiquated culture.

The European academies were the model, and the aim of art education was the production of professional artists and politely accomplished performers. The art courses in public schools were a potted imitation of the art schools. There was no art criticism except the weary reporting of performance in paint; no public appreciation except that of a social order. If the truth can be told there was no social order except those who thought of art in terms of the galleries of Europe.¹³

Lismer's ideas about art education for artists and the general public — that "Art is necessary to the spiritual life and cannot be understood unless it be realized as a part of life as a whole," and that "the artist has not only to preserve and cherish it for himself, but must open the eyes of others to what unaided they could not see"¹⁴ — had been earlier expressed not only by Ruskin, but also by William Morris, in a lecture given at Oxford in 1883, with Ruskin in the chair:

The artists are obliged (because the public of today has no real knowledge of art) to express themselves, as it were, in a language not

¹³ Arthur LISMER, "Art Appreciation," 60-61.

¹⁴ Arthur LISMER, "Possession and Creation," *The O.C.A. Students Annual* (May 1927), 19.

understood (*sic*) of the people. Nor is this their fault. If they were to try, as some think they should, to meet the public half-way and work in such a manner as to satisfy at any cost those vague prepossessions of men ignorant of art, they would be casting aside their special gifts, they would be traitors to the cause of art, which it is their duty and glory to preserve.¹⁵

For Lismer, artists possessed an internal machinery which "by the Grace of God is inside and functions continually, whether it is rewarded or not," and he argued that "the only people who are today doing anything to enrich or ennoble life are creative artists of one kind or another who do it by virtue of the fire that is in them and in face of the crass apathy of a materialistic public."¹⁶

Aesthetic Awareness

When writing of art education, Lismer was most often concerned with the method used to teach. While one can view aesthetic awareness as a natural part of, or interchangeable with, art appreciation, Lismer highlighted it by discussing it as a separate element within the context of education. Within this context was the overriding belief that there was a need for a greater aesthetic awareness in the general public. He did not want the public to learn how to be art connoisseurs. If anything, Lismer equated aesthetic awareness with a need to appreciate beauty in things other than art. For

¹⁵ William MORRIS, "Art Under Plutocracy," *The Political Writings of William Morris*, ed. A.L. Morton (London: Lawrence and Wishart), 61.

¹⁶ Arthur LISMER, "Art in Canada....," *The Twentieth Century* 1 (December 1932): 7.

Lisner, as it had been for Ruskin and Morris before him, aesthetic awareness included an appreciation of what was beautiful in the home and in the general living environment. In a promotional flyer entitled *A Word to Parents*, most likely issued in 1917, Lisner made these sentiments clear:

A well graded course would teach [your children] to be conscious of what is good in home decoration, would give them skill in the arrangement and making of beautiful and useful things, equip them with a knowledge and appreciation of the beauty in nature, art and life.¹⁷

This sentiment of the importance of beauty in the home was repeated by Lisner in Canada as often as it had been by Ruskin and Morris in England.

Ruskin had placed the responsibility of educating the public's aesthetic awareness in the hands of industry. If industry did not make beautiful, useful things, then the public would not be educated. In a lecture to students at a school of design in 1859, he called attention to this:

...in manufacture: we require work substantial rather than rich to make; and refined, rather than splendid in design. Your stuffs need not be such as would catch the eye of a duchess; but they should be such as may at once serve the need, and refine the taste, of a cottager.... It should be one of the first objects of all manufacturers to produce stuffs not only beautiful and quaint in design, but also adapted for everyday service, and decorous in humble and secluded life. And you must remember always that your business, as manufacturers, is to form the market, as much as to supply it.¹⁸

Morris reiterated the views of Ruskin when he suggested that the "duty and honour of educating the public lies with [the handicrafts men], and they have

¹⁷ *A Word to Parents*, Victoria School of Art and Design, undated. Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax.

¹⁸ RUSKIN, "Modern Manufacture and Design," 136-138.

in them seeds of order and organization which make that duty easier."¹⁹ For him, there was one "golden rule" which could be applied to everyone: *Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.*²⁰

In 1920, a year after his appointment as Vice-Principal of the Ontario College of Art, Lismer published his first article on art appreciation. While publicly decrying the existing system of art training and education, he established the reasons for changing the system of instruction. One of these was aesthetic awareness, and the need for an appreciation of beauty to add to the "enjoyment of life." Lismer repeated many of the concerns raised by Ruskin and Morris:

But there is no system of finding out the talented ones for special Art training in the Art training institution, and certainly no system of developing appreciation of art as an economic, industrial and aesthetic factor in the life of the community. We are still labouring under the delusion that art appreciation and application is a God-given talent granted to a gifted few, instead of recognizing educationally that it is the normal, rightful heritage of all to appreciate the laws of beauty and to be able to produce something that will add to the enjoyment of life for themselves and others.

Principles of beauty can be taught. There is no mystery about them, and we must have citizens who understand what beauty is, and as that appreciation grows the demand for more beauty in the environment will grow.²¹

¹⁹ William MORRIS, "The Lesser Arts," *Hopes and Fears for Art & Signs of Change*, intro. by Peter Faulkner (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 22.

²⁰ William MORRIS, "The Beauty of Life," *Hopes and Fears for Art & Signs of Change*, 76.

²¹ Arthur LISMER, "Art Education and Art Appreciation," *The Rebel* 4, (February 1920): 210.

Fifteen years later Lismer reiterated these thoughts:

Adult education in art is concerned in [art appreciation] because the public as a rule have capricious taste and great uncertainty in their purchases. Guidance and assistance through educational authority could do a great deal to help people how (*sic*) to live aesthetically aware of their own inclinations. There is an economic side to art.²²

Such sentiments reflected the situation of any industrial town, like the Sheffield in which Lismer grew up. At the *Conversazione* of the Technical School of Art held in 1906, honouring Lismer and the other students who had completed their studies the previous year, the Lord Mayor, Herbert Hughes, gave the annual address to students. Hughes quoted lectures of Ruskin extensively, and reverentially called him "the Master" in acknowledging his role as head of the Guild of Saint George which, as mentioned previously, had its museum in Sheffield. Hughes' own remarks revealed the pervading influence of Ruskin:

It may be a reproduction of the beautiful for the enjoyment and elevation of our senses, or it may take the form of the improvement and beautifying of ordinary things for human use, and we may assume with confidence that there is no degradation of Art involved in its application to things of every-day use.

On the contrary, careful consideration of the subject leads us to consider that the use of artistic effort in the domain of things which are useful is in the highest degree praiseworthy, inasmuch as its tendency must be to elevate the masses of the people rather than to appeal to the cultivated tastes of the educated few.²³

This attitude had been present seven years earlier, the first year Lismer

²² LISMER, "Art and Adult Education," 152.

²³ *Proceedings at the Conversazione of the Sheffield Technical School of Art, On Friday, the 23rd of February 1906*, 3.

attended the School of Art, when the then Lord Mayor, Samuel Roberts, spoke to the School of Art. He quoted Ruskin to illustrate what he felt was most important in design: "all art worthy of the name was the energy, neither of the human body alone, nor of the human soul alone, but of both united, one embodying the other, good craftsmanship and work of the fingers joined with good emotion."²⁴ That Ruskin featured in end-of-year addresses given at the beginning and end of Lismer's tenure at the School of Art confirms Ruskin's importance as an influence in Sheffield.

Lismer's writings in Canada also reflected his concern that Canadians lacked aesthetic awareness and an appreciation of beauty, particularly with regard to everyday things. Although this view might at first be perceived as late-Victorian or Ruskinian idealism, it was not inconsistent with the general feeling of government and industry in depression and post-depression Canada. During the depression era particularly, protectionist sentiments quite naturally developed and with little enough capital consumers were encouraged to buy Canadian goods. As the economy improved and there was more available capital, an increasing number of foreign-made articles were being imported. There was concern that consumers, particularly in light of the recent economic depression, would purchase cheap, imported goods rather than the usually more expensive articles produced in Canada. Lismer believed that if the level of art appreciation in the public was raised, then the

²⁴ *The Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Sheffield School of Art*, 24.

quality and beauty of the goods sold would also have to improve to meet the new demand. This would, in turn, discourage distributors from importing articles which did not meet the public's standards of taste and beauty.

As early as 1920, Lismer had complained of control of goods made available to the public remaining in the hands of large distributors, like department stores:

The cheap and trivial in merchandise will have less appreciation, and goods of better craftsmanship will come to be understood and purchased. Decisions demanding the exercise of what is known as taste are continually asserting themselves in life; if we had more knowledge and better taste we should be less at the mercy of the imposed standards of taste as evidenced in our departmental stores.²⁵

Like Ruskin, Lismer placed responsibility for good industrial design in the hands of industry, arguing that to instill beauty in an article was to the industry's advantage. In 1935, as Canada was coming out of the depression, he pointed out that some manufacturers, like those of "motor cars, textiles, fashions in dress, furniture and many other things for adornment and use," had already recognized that aesthetic considerations of shape and colour enhanced their value and sale by their beauty, noting the "common axiom of commercial success that beauty adds 100 percent to the value of an article."²⁶

The language which Lismer used when he spoke of the increased value of an object repeated what Edward Carpenter had said in 1887. In speaking of the difficulty in placing value on a piece of property, Carpenter stated that "as

²⁵ LISMER, "Art Education and Art Appreciation," 210-211.

²⁶ LISMER, "The Art of Appreciation," *Canadian Comment* 4, 20.

the quality of the work rises, as the quantity of good humanity put into it increases—whether in the shape of manual effort, or ingenious thought, or loving artfulness—so does the true *value* of the object increase.”²⁷ Lismer had taken the socialist definition of value and applied it using capitalist examples. In his own words, “the industrial possibilities of a more enlightened art-appreciating community are illimitable. Better wall-papers, furniture, textiles, are needed, and when the public get these and know they are good and tasteful then a better standard of appreciation of good painting and sculpture will inevitably follow.”²⁸

If standards of art appreciation in the public were not raised, Lismer feared, as had both Ruskin and Morris, the selection of goods and of art would be dictated by purely commercial rather than aesthetic motives:

The present danger of commercial interests, exploiting the merely attractive temptation of brilliant advertising and seductive window display to the susceptible public, is in failing to encourage its artists and craftsmen to put distinguished design and workmanship into the actual making of commodities. It leads ultimately to an unwritten contract between the distributors and the unworthy artist to keep public appreciation at a low ebb.²⁹

Lismer felt that utility and beauty were not necessarily opposing forces in industry, however the products produced should be dependent upon public demand rather than on a demand controlled by others.³⁰ He did not place the

²⁷ Edward CARPENTER, *England's Ideal* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1887), 122.

²⁸ LISMER, “Art Education and Art Appreciation,” 211.

²⁹ LISMER, “Art Appreciation,” 66.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

blame for the selling of articles of poor taste on Canadian manufacturers ,
“who had little courage and faith in the use of good design,” or on the public,
“unable to buy tastefully on the falling market,” but squarely on the shoulders
of the distributors who controlled both industry and the public. These
distributors, he argued, bought articles cheaply abroad, and “dumped” them
on the Canadian market.³¹

Lismer’s view that both the producer (maker) and the purchaser of an
article were hostages of the distributor, whose only goal is to make a profit, is
consistent with the socialist notion of the middle class as a parasitical group
which survives on the backs of others. This concern that the public were
“victims of wholesale dumping” of foreign goods was well-rooted in the
active radicalism of his Sheffield background in showing a consideration for
both the workers and the purchasers. Edward Carpenter summarized the
situation, and many of Lismer’s later views, when he reflected that:

Hitherto I had looked upon cheap goods as a blessing, but now I saw (in
selling my own produce), or seemed to see, that they meant general
ruin. For cheap goods meant low wages, scarcity of money; meant
hungry faces going by, and hands fingering half-pence long and
anxiously before parting with them; meant slow sales and poor returns
to the trader.³²

This interest in the welfare of workers also reflected the concerns of
Lismer’s church. Upper Chapel during the time Lismer attended had, as

³¹ Arthur LISMER “The World of Art,” *Canadian Comment* 2
(January 1933): 31.

³² CARPENTER, *England’s Ideal*, 106-107.

previously described, a number of committees which undertook to assist those whom we would today call the "working poor." With regular Sunday sermons, weekly prayer and literary meetings, and two of his sisters actively involved in charity committees, Lismer could not but have been affected by what he heard. Given this, and the generally socialist slant to everyday life in Sheffield, it would have been difficult for Lismer to have accepted the role of the distributor, whose primary goal was to purchase an item for as little as possible for resale for as much as possible. Lismer was concerned that public taste was being dictated by profit rather than by any sense of aesthetics. This made it important, therefore, that the public's sense of aesthetic awareness be raised to prevent the sale of "ugly" articles.

The dictates of commercial distribution were not only a problem in Canada but also in England. In 1932 Lismer wrote about a British Special Committee, which produced the Gorell Report, formed to report on the state of "articles of good design and everyday use." When Lismer discussed the recommendations of the committee, particularly those of member Roger Fry, he did so to illustrate his own views. The Report indicated that although craftsmanship and quality of work were essential in the production of an object, beauty in these things was elusive because it was not perceived as an important factor in production. Wrote Lismer, "The manufacturer makes what the wholesaler and distributor will buy and the poor public has to take what it can get." He warned that if a similar commission were appointed in

Canada, it would find that "we have very, very little to pride ourselves with in the standard of beauty of Canadian products."³³

Social Responsibility of the Individual

Of the three areas which Lismer discussed in his articles and lectures, it is that of social or civic responsibility which most strongly betrayed the Sheffield connection. Bluntly stated, he believed that the public had to empower itself. This statement in itself described Sheffield's past. Sheffield's tradition of social activism, as has been discussed, was a long one and was particularly active during the nineteenth century, highlighted by the Chartist movement, the widespread embracing of socialism, and the legalization (at long last) of trade unions. Although the rate-payers continued to elect members of Parliament from the established political parties, support for socialist political parties and organizations persisted in Sheffield, likely due in part to Carpenter's presence in the area. Marx's axiom of "workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains" could have been the Sheffielder's motto.

Lismer truly believed it was the public's social and civic responsibility to gain an appreciation of art, an aesthetic awareness of what was beautiful and what was not, of what was good and what was bad art. In a lecture given

³³ Arthur LISMER, "Art's Relation to Industry," *Canadian Comment* 1 No. 7 (July 1932): 20-21.

in 1959, the seventy-nine year old, semi-retired Lismer emphasized the importance of the social responsibility of art appreciation when he said: "it's a social responsibility, this art of appreciation. Appreciation is essential, not only in the arts, but in the international, national and civic lives of people."³⁴

In decrying the manipulation of goods provided by distributors, Lismer placed some of the responsibility to change the situation on the public: if they did not choose to be dictated to, then they could to a certain extent regain control of the market and of the goods which were being produced for them. That responsibility was shared by all groups for the greater good again reflects socialist rhetoric, the kind to which Lismer would have been exposed in Sheffield. Carpenter wrote, in 1887, that the development of individualism as competition in commerce would fail, but would then be replaced by a human solidarity, *i.e.* true equality.³⁵ Whether in writing about the existing situation or suggesting to one group or another how to change their situation, Lismer retained the essence of this radical socialist thought.

In *The Art of Creation*, Carpenter devoted a chapter to "Beauty and Duty." Although he did not mention social responsibility *per se*, Carpenter did try to provide a link between what he called "Art sense" and "Duty," which he associated with unity. For him, all were tied into the principle of One Life (*i.e.*, Humanity):

³⁴ "Artists Revolt - Fed-Up," *Montreal Star*, 18 February 1959, 26.

³⁵ CARPENTER, *England's Ideal*, 57-58.

The sense of Duty derives primarily and essentially from the sense (and the fact) of oneness between ourselves and our fellows. Structurally and through the centuries it may grow and be built up in forms of laws and customs and out of lower motives of Fear and Conformity; but ultimately and in all these forms it is the Common Life asserting itself, and the sense of Common Life and unity....

In the end it is the sense of Oneness, and of the One Life, which underlies these two [Beauty and Duty], and perhaps many other enthusiasms....³⁶

That duty and beauty were linked with the sense of Common Life is consistent with Eastern thought, which is the basis of Theosophy. In discussing the differences between Eastern and Western philosophies of life, Lismer seems to have associated Carpenter's views with those of the East, and adopted them as his own:

In Western Art man and his doings are the supreme symbols and the artist has evolved an anthropomorphism to typify his aspirations and ideals. In Eastern Art he is as a leaf drifting down a stream and his passage reveals pleasant or painful vistas until, entering the quiet waters of his ideal, he becomes merged in the eternal—the source of beauty.

In our Western world the scientific spirit and the measuring brain influence the aggressive nature of man to conquer, to strive and to die with honour. He struggles against forces greater than himself, working out his own destiny and consciously aiming to direct the progress of the race. The Orient is devoid of this fighting spirit—there man submits to the lyrical voice of nature. He does not match his brain against force and cosmic order. He meanders on, with his mind tuned to the rhythm of life.

But East and West, through many centuries of closer association, are approaching the eternal truth – that Art and Life are one.³⁷

For Lismer, as for Carpenter, art or a sense of art (as beauty and duty) was an important aspect of everyday life. That Lismer would have reiterated these

³⁶ CARPENTER, *The Art of Creation*, 188–189.

³⁷ Arthur LISMER, "Art and Life," *The Twentieth Century* 1 (July 1933): 37.

ideas is not surprising when we remember that *The Art of Creation* was one of the books which he brought with him to Canada from Sheffield.

In expanding upon this connection, although using different language, Lismer ultimately associated the appreciation of art with social responsibility:

The appreciation of art is a social responsibility of the individual. When we realize the corruption of these sights and sounds of ugliness we shall realize what the art of appreciation really means.

We shall see art not only as pictures in art galleries. We shall see its preservation in civic and rural life as a duty as important as the exercise of the vote. We shall demand it in education, not as a frill or a fad, or as a drawing lesson, but as the essential study of public responsibility and service, to preserve the elements of natural beauty and to develop parks, conserve trees, make playgrounds, and control architectural beauty in building and town planning...

...Health, clean thinking, and peace and quietness of mind are all desirable aims in the raising of higher standards of living. All these are adversely affected by surroundings. Art Appreciation in the larger sense would aim to raise the quality of such things.³⁸

Although Ruskin and Morris did not specifically use the term "art appreciation" when discussing what they saw as the problems of the day, their concerns with the general state of society, with the work of artists and artisans, and with the environment were not dissimilar to those concerns which Lismer addressed in his discussion of social responsibility.

When speaking of preserving "the elements of natural beauty," Lismer echoed to some extent the concerns of Morris fifty years earlier. Morris was anxious, as Ruskin had been, that the countryside in England was being destroyed by industry. He worried about how the environment, whether in

³⁸ LISMER, "The Art of Appreciation," *Canadian Comment* 4, 19-20.

the workshop, at home, or the area where he lived, affected not only the worker but all classes of the public. In describing his ideal community, the last thing which would develop was art:

Then would come the time for the new birth of art, so much talked of, so long deferred; people could not help showing their mirth and pleasure in their work, and would be always wishing to express it in a tangible and more or less enduring form, and the workshop would once more be a school of art, whose influence no one could escape from.

And, again, that word art leads me to my last claim, which is that the material surroundings of my life should be pleasant, generous, and beautiful; that I know is a large claim, but this I will say about it, that if it cannot be satisfied, if every civilized community cannot provide such surroundings for all its members, I do not want the world to go on; it is a mere misery that man has ever existed. I do not think it possible under the present circumstances to speak too strongly on this point. I feel sure that the time will come when people will find it difficult to believe that a rich community such as ours, having such command over external Nature, could have submitted to live such a mean, shabby, dirty life as we do.³⁹

The responsibility to appreciate art thus extended far beyond the boundaries of either the so-called "higher" or "lesser" arts and into the community at large. Morris' concern with its environment and the importance of appreciation in making the community a more pleasant place in which to live and work, were shared by Lisner. Lisner wrote, in 1935, of the need to change the general perception that appreciation referred to art of the type only found in galleries:

We cannot put art into airtight receptacles and label it culture and history. Art is not things in a museum or art gallery. Art is human

³⁹ William MORRIS, "How We Live and How We Might Live," *Political Writings of William Morris*, 153.

experience. Material environment, bad social conditions, anxieties about war and economic disaster tend to destroy aesthetic feeling in any but artists. To understand the value and purpose of the products of painters and sculptors, discriminating intelligence and concentration are needed, such as the work of the artist rarely gets, be he poet, musician, or painter. But to appreciate the need for beauty in everyday life and environment and to use art as a means towards a better understanding of human social welfare, is possible to every intelligent individual. Appreciation is not reception but response. When art appreciation, as a social duty of every responsible person, becomes more common, the everyday existence of ordinary people will be better for the change in ideas about leisure, labour, environment, and decent living.⁴⁰

For Lismer, as for Ruskin and Morris before him, art education was an important element of an individual's education, not only for aesthetic reasons, but also as an indicator of society.

In discussing how Lismer defined art appreciation, it is clear that his Sheffield past had a lasting impact. Although his language does not have the flowery Victorian characteristics of the writings of Ruskin and Morris, nor the esoteric philosophical qualities of Carpenter's work, Lismer's writings and lectures reiterated the thoughts of Ruskin, Morris and Carpenter. The concerns of Ruskin and Morris with regard to the availability and quality of education, with the general lack of aesthetic awareness in the general public, with the dirty Victorian cities and the resulting pollution of the countryside are all problems which Lismer touches upon. Certainly Lismer was now in a new country, but this new, relatively untouched dominion was trying to emulate the old world and its prosperity. This prosperity had brought, as

⁴⁰ LISMER, "The Art of Appreciation," *Canadian Comment* 4, 21.

Morris so aptly put it, "a mean, shabby, dirty life." When Lismer spoke of the "corruption of sights and sounds of ugliness" was he not saying the same thing? Sheffield had been one of the "dirty" industrial towns of the North which had polluted its rivers and developed in response to industry's needs. Lismer had lived and worked in the centre of it, crossed it everyday to go to school or to church, and with members of the Heeley Art Club escaped from it on the weekends to sketch in the surrounding (and protected) countryside.

Because of Sheffield's history of radical political and religious agitation, it should be no surprise that the city was a hub of socialist activity, particularly after the arrival of Edward Carpenter. That one son of a draper's buyer should become a communist and the other train as a graphic artist, as was the case with Edward and his brother Arthur Lismer, was not unusual in a city like Sheffield. The elder strove to radically change the existing political and social system, while the younger, in entering the School of Art, became part of it. Even in becoming part of the system, though, Lismer worked for change. It was no doubt in remembering the formal and traditional structure of his lessons, that he developed his ideas on art education and what it should and should not be.

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