"I CARVE THE MARBLE OF PURE THOUGHT": WORK AND PRODUCTION IN THE POETRY OF ARTHUR O'SHAUGHNESSY

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Abstract
In this article I consider the concepts of "work" and "production" in the life and poetry of Arthur O'Shaughnessy, viewed in terms of the conflicting aesthetic theories of Socialist art-for-society and Aesthetic art-for-art. In order to express his discontent with his "day job" as a naturalist at the British Museum, O'Shaughnessy embraced the revolution of non-work offered by the Aesthetes, as they affected an aloof aristocracy of art, removed from the bourgeois concerns of the consumerist public. Adopting this self-aggrandising language, O'Shaughnessy undermined the importance of the ordinary world, and with it the significance of his own failures in his work at the museum.

However, his most famous poem, which begins 'we are the music makers', evinces a commitment to socially engaged literature, a desire rebuked by the Aesthete's emphasis on "useless" art. In his support of "art for humanity" O'Shaughnessy aligned himself with the aesthetic theories of men such as William Morris. The tension between these two conflicting aesthetic theories is expressed in moments of surprising violence in O'Shaughnessy's verse, in which the Aesthetic figure of the solitary artist is persecuted for his difference. It is only in his final volume of poetry that O'Shaughnessy was able to reconcile these theories and resolve this tension by redefining art as 'work', with an emphasis on the act of production. In this act of redefinition he finally accepts himself as a worker: not a mere cog in the bureaucratic system, but a producer of beauty. It is in the act of production that O'Shaughnessy found use, and in the redefinition of art as his career, he was able to come to a middle ground between art for humanity and art for art's sake.

In contemporary criticism, Arthur O'Shaughnessy is most often classed as a Pre-Raphaelite, but during his lifetime he was seen as being far more influenced by French aesthetic theory than the practices of his English contemporaries.[1] Thus, *The Academy* noted in a review of his first volume, 'the influences to which we should be inclined chiefly to refer it are those of a section of the French Romantiques, Baudelaire and Gautier at their head, who set themselves […] a conscious purpose of art, and with an immense care for the technical execution, finish, and symmetry of their art'.[2] In reality, the divide between Pre-Raphaelitism and the later Aestheticism in England was a fluid one, and O'Shaughnessy's work embodies both movements. In 1882, Walter Hamilton included O'Shaughnessy as one of the seven 'principal

[1] See Inga Bryden, *The Pre-Raphaelites: Writings and Sources*, 4 vols. (New York: Routledge / Thoemmes Press, 1998), vol. 1; Valentine Cunningham, *The Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry and Poetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Florence Saunders Boos, 'The Pre-Raphaelites', *Victorian Poetry*, 45:3 (Fall 2007), pp. 321-30.
[2] 'Review: An Epic of Women and Other Poems', *The Academy* (November 15th 1870), p. 33.

poets' of the Aesthetic school, a list that also included Dante Gabriel Rossetti, nearly always categorized as a Pre-Raphaelite in contemporary criticism, and Oscar Wilde, traditionally considered the embodiment of the Aesthetic Movement.[3] This article will consider the ways in which these two schools interact and come into conflict in O'Shaughnessy's own aesthetic theory, by focusing on his notions of work and utility. It will demonstrate that O'Shaughnessy allied himself with what he perceived as the "non-work" culture of the anti-bourgeois Aesthetic movement as a reaction to his dissatisfaction with his daily working life as a naturalist at the British Museum. A pervasive desire for utility in his art, however, left him at odds with aspects of Aesthetic theory, creating a source of tension in his early poetry. It is only in his final volume of poetry, I will suggest, that he was able to ease this tension by a redefinition of "work" and "production" in relation to poetry.

In a letter written shortly before his death, and published as part of the preface to his posthumous collection *Songs of a Worker* (1881), O'Shaughnessy attempted to define himself in relation to contemporary artistic labels, saying:

> I have been represented as saying with Baudelaire, 'Art for Art', and laying myself open to all the unfavourable limitations which that dictum is unjustly supposed to imply. Truly I think that a little 'Art for Art' has already done a great deal of good in England, and that a little more is needed, and would be equally beneficial. But with Victor Hugo I do not say, 'Art for Art,' but 'Art for humanity', and my meaning is that Art is good – is an incalculable gain to man; but art in itself equally perfect, which grows with humanity and can assist humanity in growing – is still better.[4]

This passage shows the main point of contention for O'Shaughnessy within the aesthetic theory of the late-Victorian period: the utility of art. Here he straddles the line between a Ruskinian utility-based art appreciation and the need for art to be governed by nothing but beauty, as promoted by men like Baudelaire.[5] I contend that O'Shaughnessy's allegiance to both of these theories was based less on his

[3] Walter Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1882).

[4] Arthur O'Shaughnessy, 'Preface' to *Songs of a Worker* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1881), p. viii. This collection was published only a few months after O'Shaughnessy's death in January 1881. It was assembled by his cousin, Alfred Newport Deacon, but it seems clear that Newport Deacon had little to do in the way of compilation, as the manuscript was almost complete at O'Shaughnessy's death.

[5] See, for example, Linda Dowling's discussion of Ruskin's post-"unconversion" utilitarian theory of art, in Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996). For Charles Baudelaire's rejection of utilitarian beauty, see Baudelaire, 'The Universal Exhibition of 1855: the Fine Arts', in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art & Artists*, trans. by P. E. Charvet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 115-39.

engagement with specific artistic theories and more on the way he related art to the rest of his life: specifically his "day job" as a naturalist.

The Aesthetic movement of the late-Victorian period is often considered to have been 'an engaged protest against Victorian utility, rationality, scientific factuality, and technological progress – in fact, against the whole middle-class drive to conform'.[6] That is, an anti-bourgeois movement, associated with the French literary idea of *l'art pour l'art*, made famous by Théophile Gautier.[7] Buried within the idea of "art for art" is the rejection of art for anything else. Aestheticism can be seen as a cultural retreat from social or political engagement, into the ivory tower of art.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the presumed audience of art had become the consumerist and religious middle class, the newly rich bourgeoisie, which feigned shock at all art that could not be 'lisped in the nursery or fingered in the schoolroom'.[8] The middle class wielded new, but considerable, power over the arts during this period: with disposable income to spend and a desire for a culture of their own, they had become independent of the aristocracy for the first time. Their patronage of the arts was, in part, shaped by a desire to flaunt their new wealth, but often in a way that made it clear they were different from the dissolute upper classes they saw themselves as supplanting. Rather than following the standards of "taste" as set by the upper classes, the middle class demanded standards of their own, which were often shaped by decorum and morality as much as, if not more than, beauty or skill.[9]

This newly created audience placed a burden on the artist to conform to the market and to create art that matched bourgeois demands. One of these demands, indicated by Swinburne's complaint quoted above, was for a standard of morality in art. This demanded a narrative – in both literary and pictorial art – that supported and reinforced Victorian middle-class moral values. Beyond that, however, in a utilitarian culture, in a class that had founded itself on values of industry and labour, art that was merely beautiful seemed to have very little "use". While philosophers of aesthetics had, for over a century, been arguing for a disconnect between use and beauty, the middle class refused art that had no higher moral or social purpose.[10] Reinforcing

[6] Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), p. 3.

[7] See Théophile Gautier, 'Preface' to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* [1835], trans. by R. & E. Powys Mathers (London: Folio Society, 1948).

[8] Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1866), p. 20.

[9] See Linda Dowling's suggestion that the drive for realism (as promoted by John Ruskin and his "truth to nature") can be traced to middle-class religious faith, and a conflation of "truth to nature" and "truth to God", bringing Christian morality to bear on an even degree of representational skill, Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art*, pp. 28-29.

[10] See, for example, Kant's distinction between free and adherent beauty, in his *Critique of*

religious and moral ideals became an acceptable "use" of art.[11]

To negate the consumerist culture of art, which pandered to middle-class respectability, the Aesthetes attempted to render art autonomous, to remove it from the demand for utility by declaring it "useless". As Gautier, perhaps the first Aesthete, declared, 'There is nothing really beautiful but that which is useless; everything useful is ugly, for it is the expression of some want, and man's needs are ignoble and disgusting, like his poor infirm nature. The most useful part of the house is the toilet'.[12] In these lines Gautier degrades utility to the level of filth, undermining the belief that it could have any connection to art or beauty. Here he rejects Kant's adherent beauty, suggesting that utility actively negates aesthetics. These attitudes culminate in the ultimate Aesthete, Oscar Wilde, declaring, 'Art never expresses anything but itself'[13]. Regenia Gagnier, in her *Idylls of the Marketplace* (1986), suggests that this attitude is merely a posturing of the Aesthetes to reject a market culture that was rejecting them in turn.[14] While this may certainly be a factor in the Aesthetes' withdrawal from popular culture, I am more interested in the narrative they created for themselves, figuring themselves as an artistic elite, separate from the public and consumerist spheres. This is particularly important for artists on the outskirts of the movement, like O'Shaughnessy, who were not creating these narratives, but merely making use of them.

Gagnier argues that the Aesthetes' rejection of utility manifested itself in a glorification of a culture of non-work which would be inaccessible to the middle-class public.[15] Utility, as expressed by Gautier in the quote above, becomes associated with necessity, the fulfilment of a need. The ultimate necessity of working- and middle-class life is that of earning a living. This necessity, Henri Lefebvre posits, robs work of its creative possibilities and transforms it into a societal punishment: '[the worker's] labour, which ought to humanize him, becomes something done under duress instead of being a vital and human need, since it is itself nothing more than a means (of earning a living) rather than a contribution to man's essence, freely

Judgment (1790), in which free beauty, that which is not tied to purpose or use, is privileged over adherent beauty, that is, beauty in utility. For a discussion of Kant within the wider aesthetic/utilitarian debate, see Paul Guyer, *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[11] See Eric Warner and Graham Hough's discussion of morality in nineteenth-century art in Warner and Hough, *Strangeness and Beauty: An Anthology of Aesthetic Criticism: 1840-1910, Vol. 1, Ruskin to Swinburne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[12] Theophile Gautier, 'Preface' to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* [1835]. reprinted in Warner and Hough, *Strangeness and Beauty*, p. 163.

[13] Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying: A Dialogue', *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, XXV (January-June, 1889), pp. 35-56 (p. 50).

[14] Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace*, p. 12.

[15] Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace*, p. 10.

imparted'.[16] Work, then, is useful, fulfilling the need of earning a living: therefore, in the language of the Aesthetes, it is inherently opposed to art and beauty. Charles Baudelaire insisted artists must 'possess, to their hearts' content, and to a vast degree; both time and money, without which fantasy, reduced to the state of ephemeral reverie, can scarcely be translated into action'.[17] A man must be 'freed from any profession' in order to 'cultivate the idea of beauty'.[18] The Aesthetes adopted a stance outside of the productive system of labour and earning, creating the figure of the withdrawn, solitary genius that often characterizes the Aesthetic movement.

In this article I would like to consider O'Shaughnessy in relation to Aestheticism and its assumed stance outside the world of production and consumption. I suggest that O'Shaughnessy was particularly drawn to this 'revolution of non-work' as Gagnier describes it, not as a rejection of work / utility in itself, but of his *own* specific work, and the lack of utility he felt in his own career.[19] O'Shaughnessy appropriated the language and self-aggrandising narratives of Aestheticism as an antidote to the frustrating lack of utility which he saw as symptomatic of his own bourgeois existence.

O'Shaughnessy worked in the Natural History Departments of the British Museum from 1863 until his death in 1881. He was appointed as a Junior Assistant in the Zoology department amid a storm of controversy; Henry Walter Bates, a renowned entomologist, had also applied for the position.[20] The disparity in qualifications between the two candidates is almost laughable. O'Shaughnessy was a nineteen-year-old boy who had worked in the Department of Printed Books for two years as a transcriber, and had shown no interest in natural history up to that point. Bates had recently returned from an eleven-year expedition in the remotest parts of South America, accompanied by Alfred Russell Wallace, the co-discoverer of evolution by means of natural selection. Furthermore, the same year the appointment took place, Bates published his popular *Naturalist on the River Amazons* (1863), with Darwin's encouragement.[21] However, despite his obvious qualifications, Bates' application was non-standard. The Museum favoured promotion from within its own

[16] Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, trans. by John Moore, 3 vols. (London: Verso, 1999), vol. 1, p. 166.

[17] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. by Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon Press, 1964), pp. 1-40 (p. 27).

[18] Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', p. 27.

[19] Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace* , p. 10.

[20] British Museum Standing Committee Minutes (July 11th 1863), C.10372.

[21] Bates writes in his Preface: 'At that date I became acquainted with Mr Darwin, who, having formed a flattering opinion of my ability for the task, strongly urged me to write a book, and reminded me of it months afterwards, when, after having made a commencement, my half-formed resolution began to give way.' Henry Walter Bates, *The Naturalist on the Amazons: A Record of Adventures, Habits of Animals, Sketches of Brazilian and Indian Life, and Aspects of Nature under the Equator during Eleven Years of Travel* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1863), p. v.

ranks: to receive an initial appointment a candidate had to be recommended by a member of the Board of Trustees. O'Shaughnessy earned his place in the Department of Printed Books at the recommendation of Lord Lytton, an influential friend of the O'Shaughnessy family, and was poised for promotion within the museum's ranks.[22] Even more importantly, it is quite likely that the Departments, headed by Richard Owen and J. E. Gray, did not want such a staunch Darwinist as Bates in their midst. This is the conclusion W. D. Paden reaches in his consideration of the matter, stating, 'Darwin was Bates' other supporter, but he was also the man who, by suggesting the transmutation of species, had shaken the foundation of Dr. Gray's concept of zoology as taxonomy'.[23] It is likely, therefore, that the choice of O'Shaughnessy over Bates was ideological in nature. Nonetheless, Bates came to the museum with the backing of the most eminent naturalists of the day, and there was uproar in the naturalist community when O'Shaughnessy was granted the position instead.

To make matters worse, O'Shaughnessy was not well suited for the position. He had extremely poor vision, which prevented him from conducting the kind of minute observations essential for a naturalist.[24] He was unable to work on the smaller specimens in the collection, which led to an initial transfer from entomological research to the Geology Department. Eventually he returned to Zoology, but his defective vision barred him from a large portion of the work normally required of a man in his position. He found little enjoyment in his work, as his superiors constantly reminded him of his shortcomings. His correspondence demonstrates his longing to be able to support himself through his poetry alone, and to leave a job in which he felt like an incompetent outsider. In this sense, his friend and mentor Dante Gabriel Rossetti probably represented his ideal of the figure of the artist. Rossetti was in some ways the ultimate non-worker, a 'marginal within the productive system', as Gagnier puts it.[25] Unlike Morris and Swinburne, who were both independently wealthy, and thus had the freedom to pursue their artistic careers, Rossetti had no inherited wealth. This left him at a disadvantage, but also meant that in his artistic life he was situated outside of class boundaries, as well as the world of commerce. He published little and nearly always refused to show his paintings. He supported himself almost entirely through private commissions, forging a network of like-minded artists and art connoisseurs, the ultimate artistic aristocracy.[26] This was, in many ways, the ideal

[22] W. D. Paden, 'Arthur O'Shaughnessy in the British Museum: Or, the Case of the Misplaced Fusees and the Reluctant Zoologist', *Victorian Studies*, 8:1 (September 1964), pp. 7-30 (p. 11).
[23] Paden, 'Arthur O'Shaughnessy in the British Museum', p. 11.
[24] See the letter from the Keeper of the Department of Zoology, J. E. Gray, to the Principal Librarian of the British Museum, John Winter Jones, dated November 2nd 1870, British Museum Original Papers, C.11280.
[25] Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace*, p. 10.
[26] See Lionel Stevenson, *The Pre-Raphaelite Poets* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1972), as well as *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by William E. Fredeman, 8 vols. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002-2012).

lifestyle of the Aesthete, and one O'Shaughnessy longed for. It is important to remember that among his artistic circle, only O'Shaughnessy held a "day job". I suggest the impact of this was far-reaching in his poetry.

For O'Shaughnessy his career at the museum was "work", his way of earning a living, and his poetry could never be categorized as such. It was these distinctions, art *v.* science, poetry *v.* work, which drew him to the language of the Aesthetic movement. In his poems about the nature of art (of which there are many) O'Shaughnessy categorizes poetry as an act of spontaneous genius, a moment when an artist gains access to another world, another plane of being. This is a kind of access that is only granted to a special breed of person, the artist.

> A thousand thrilling secrets lived in me;
> Fair things last whispered in that land of mine,
> By those who had most magic to divine
> The glowing of its roses, and to see
> What burning thoughts they cherished inwardly;
> Yea, and to know the mystic rhapsody
> Of some who sang at a high hidden shrine,
> With voices ringing pure and crystalline.[27]

Here O'Shaughnessy appropriates the language of the Aesthetic movement to privilege the special status of the artist. This language is evident in Baudelaire's essay 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863), in which he describes the artist as 'a singular man, whose originality is so powerful and clear-cut that it is self-sufficing' – a man who has access to vision greater than the average man and can distil life into something better and more beautiful. 'Things seen are born again on the paper, natural and more than natural, beautiful and better than beautiful, strange and endowed with an enthusiastic life, like the soul of their creator'.[28] As Eric Warner and Graham Hough note of Baudelaire, '[he] develops the romantic line of Rousseau by conceiving of the creative process as an entirely subjective matter; art, he claims, is born out of the solitary artist fathoming his own mind and tracing the design of his own thought: which is why every true artist is unique, *sui generis* as he puts it'.[29] O'Shaughnessy appropriates the image of the solitary artist so common in Aestheticism in order to distance himself from "ordinary" men, in his poetry represented by his scientific colleagues. By undermining the importance of the ordinary world, he undermines the significance of his own failures at the museum. He adopts a stance outside of society, not to reject utility or consumerist claims on

[27] Arthur O'Shaughnessy, 'Nostalgie des Cieux', in *Music and Moonlight* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1874), p. 151.
[28] Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', pp. 5, 12.
[29] Warner and Hough, *Strangeness and Beauty*, p. 170.

art, but to downplay his own inability to successfully participate in the productive system.

In his "art poems" O'Shaughnessy regularly contrasts art with science.[30] But rather than science as a whole, it is really the work of a museum naturalist in particular that he rejects. The root of his discontent was in the professionalization of science taking place in the mid-nineteenth century. As science became a career, it took on the tedium of everyday working life, and was imbued with all the bureaucracy that comes with any profession. For O'Shaughnessy science was inextricably linked with the Museum and the problems he had there. For many, the British Museum was a place of discovery, but for O'Shaughnessy it was an office, with paperwork to file and superiors to appease. Thus, O'Shaughnessy appropriated Aestheticism and its anti-consumer narratives to express the discontent of the lowly worker, the office drone. He glorifies the useless precisely because of the frustrating lack of utility he found in his everyday life.

We can see this attitude summed up in his 1870 sonnet 'A Discord':

It came to pass upon a summer's day,
When from the flowers indeed my soul had caught
Fresh bloom, and turned their richness into thought
That – having made my footsteps free to stray –
They brought me wandering by some sudden way
Back to the bloomless city, and athwart
The doleful streets and many a closed-up court
That prisoned here and there a spent noon-ray.
O how most bitterly upon me broke
The sight of all the summerless lost folk! –
For verily their music and their gladness
Could only seem like so much sadness
Beside the inward rhapsody of art
And flowers and *Chopin*-echoes at my heart.[31]

Here O'Shaughnessy adopts the posture of the alienated, enlightened artist observing city life, as represented in Baudelaire's 'The Painter of Modern Life', in which he says the artist is 'at the very centre of the world, and yet remain[s] hidden from the world'.[32] He is a 'solitary mortal endowed with an active imagination, always

[30] See, for example, Arthur O'Shaughnessy, 'A Discord', 'A Neglected Harp' and 'Exile', in *An Epic of Women and Other Poems* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1870), and 'Azure Islands', in *Music and Moonlight*.
[31] Arthur O'Shaughnessy, 'A Discord', in *An Epic of Women and Other Poems*, p. 174.
[32] Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', p. 9.

roaming the great desert of men'.[33] Although in O'Shaughnessy's own life he was one of the workers in the 'bloomless city', here he adopts a stance that is both in the midst of, and yet distant from, those workers: observing rather than participating. This way of conceiving of the artist as separate from mankind, even when in their midst, became central to O'Shaughnessy's own view of the artist in his early poetry.

O'Shaughnessy's allegiance to Aesthetic theory, however, became complicated by his investment in the idea of utility, in the form of "art for humanity". As I have suggested, for the Aesthetes utility became tied to the productive system of work culture and the consumerist / capitalist mindset of the bourgeois middle class. Thus, they turned to a "non-work" culture as a way of rejecting the demand for utility in art. O'Shaughnessy was drawn to the language of non-work, but we can see in his poetry the desire to be of some use to society, and therefore an inability to fully commit to the idea of a "useless" art. This conflict plays out in O'Shaughnessy's best-known poem, his 'Ode' (1874). In this poem, O'Shaughnessy's conception of the relationship between the artist and society is very different from the one expressed by the Aesthetes. Baudelaire, and the Aesthetes after him, posited the fundamental alienation of the artist from society, an attitude O'Shaughnessy echoed in 'A Discord'. In contrast, the 'Ode' depicts the artist as integral to society.

In this 'Ode', O'Shaughnessy rejects the Aesthetes' idea that art's only responsibility is to itself, a fundamental tenet of Aestheticist theory. Rather, the 'Ode' firmly declares that the artist has a duty to aid society. In this poem, O'Shaughnessy trumpets the power that lies in a poet's words:

> With wonderful deathless ditties
> We build up the world's great cities,
> And out of a fabulous story
> We fashion an empire's glory:
> One man with a dream, at pleasure,
> Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
> And three with a new song's measure
> Can trample a kingdom down.

However, with this power comes the responsibility to guide public opinion in order to bring about a better future:

> The soldier, the king, and the peasant
> Are working together in one,
> Till our dream shall become their present,
> And their work in the world be done.[34]

[33] Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', p. 12.
[34] Arthur O'Shaughnessy, 'Ode', in *Music and Moonlight*, p. 2.

The alienation that Baudelaire posited is still evident here. The disconnect between the artist and society is obvious in the language he uses: '*our* dream' becomes '*their* present'. The artist does not share in this present or this society, but nevertheless should feel a responsibility towards it, a responsibility born of the artistic gift he has been given. There is an uneasy tension evident here, between the kind of social engagement of the artist propounded by poets like William Morris, and the alienation of the Aesthetes, who believed that art did not answer to society.

However, it appears O'Shaughnessy had difficulty fulfilling his own expectations of the artist. Although he declares that artists should shape society, he rarely tries to do so himself. Unlike poets such as Morris or Swinburne, O'Shaughnessy's verse, as well as his private correspondence and papers, do not suggest any interest in political or social concerns.[35] He was an ordinary man, with an ordinary job, but extraordinary ambition. Evident in his poetry is not only the desire to be a great poet, but to say something *important*. Thus, his famous ode speaks of poets as 'movers and shakers', influential and important to society.[36] It appears, however, that O'Shaughnessy had no notion of what direction this influence might take. His attempts at political poetry lack conviction. They are vague and underdeveloped, suggesting the attempt is little more than a gesture.[37] He can conceive of the use that *artists* can be to society, but not the specific purpose *he* might serve.

For O'Shaughnessy, it was a desire for autonomy from bourgeois working life which caused him to ally himself with the Aesthetes and their language of non-work. O'Shaughnessy appears to have taken comfort in his status as poet in the face of his troubles at the museum, relying on the Aesthetes' conception of the artist as special, and superior to the ordinary man.[38] However, the self-aggrandising language O'Shaughnessy appropriated from the Aesthetes denies art a political or social use; the very use we see O'Shaughnessy searching for in his poetry. In this disparity we

[35] See, for example, William Morris's socialist utopia depicted in *News from Nowhere* (1890), or his encouragement of a working class uprising in *A Dream of John Ball* (1888). Swinburne's 1871 volume *Songs before Sunrise* expressed the poet's support of the Italian politician Giuseppe Mazzini and his support of Italian unification.

[36] O'Shaughnessy coined the term 'movers and shakers' in the first publication of this poem in 1873.

[37] In 'Europe' O'Shaughnessy makes vague reference to the goal of a 'grand unanimous Europe', but does not back up this vision with any reasons why he thinks unifying Europe is a good idea, or any idea of how Europe will achieve this goal. This poem in particular makes it clear that while he likes the idea of artists shaping public thought, he personally lacks the knowledge or political engagement to have much to say to the public.

[38] In the face of a disciplinary hearing regarding his inadequate work at the museum O'Shaughnessy declared that 'a clerk in the Secretary's Office told me "*it was all about my book*". I am told it is probably owing to some such jealousy', Qtd. in Paden, 'Arthur O'Shaughnessy in the British Museum', p. 18. His special status as a poet negates any failings he might have as a naturalist.

find a source of tension in O'Shaughnessy's early verse, as the figure of the alienated artist is at odds with O'Shaughnessy's desire to be a useful part of society. This tension is revealed in the surprising violence of his depictions of that alienation:

> They set themselves to maim frail, unfelt wings,
> That used to be the fellows of swift will,
> And bring me softly to each glittering sill
> Of joyful palaces, where my heart clings
> Now faintly, as in mere fond hoverings,
> About a distant dreamwork. Wretched things,
> Cold wraiths of joy, they chained me to, to kill
> My soul, yet rich with many a former thrill.[39]

Here we see a very different conception of the alienated artist than the one found in Baudelaire's section on 'The Artist, Man of the World, Man of the Crowd, and Child' in his essay 'The Painter of Modern Life'. Baudelaire described the state of the artist as 'to be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home'.[40] O'Shaughnessy, on the other hand, sees the artist as an 'exile' in his own life, forever persecuted for his differences.[41] Rather than an invisible observer of the world, as Baudelaire suggested, O'Shaughnessy's artist is not only visible, he is visibly *different*, and therefore subject to attacks.

I suggest this violent imagery, of maiming, chaining and killing, stems from O'Shaughnessy's difficulty reconciling the equally influential aesthetic theories of artists such as William Morris (in his appreciation of utility) and Charles Baudelaire (in the figure of the enlightened, distant artist).[42] Unlike Baudelaire, O'Shaughnessy could not easily conceive of an artist who is both separate from, and at the centre of, the world. As we saw in the 'Ode', if the artist is to be a part of the world, O'Shaughnessy felt they needed to *do* their part, to serve some purpose. This, then, is the source of the violence in O'Shaughnessy's verse: the incongruity of being different from the rest of the world, and yet a part of the greater community.

This tension is eased, however, in O'Shaughnessy's final volume of poetry, *Songs of a Worker*. In the titular poem of the collection, 'Song of a Fellow-Worker', the synthesis of O'Shaughnessy's seemingly conflicting aesthetic theories is achieved in a very simple way: redefining art as work. The division between "art" and "work"

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[39] 'Nostalgie des Cieux', in *Music and Moonlight*, p. 153.
[40] Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', p. 9.
[41] See O'Shaughnessy's 1870 'Exile', in *An Epic of Women and Other Poems*, pp. 9-12.
[42] Morris's aesthetic theories centre on the "decorative", or useful, arts. That is, household arts such as furniture, dishes, wallpaper, etc. He was interested in bringing beauty into everyday life, infusing the utilitarian with the aesthetic. See Morris's 'The Decorative Arts, Their Relation to Modern Life and Progress' (1877).

at the time was so widespread that even William Morris, so invested in the artistry of labour, conceived of them as separate. In *Signs of Change* (1888), he classes art as 'leisure', something to be pursued primarily outside of the workday.[43] In considering this divide, so prevalent in O'Shaughnessy's life and poetry, Lefebvre's notion of the divided man becomes very useful. Lefebvre suggests that under a capitalist system, man becomes alienated from his own life, because work is external to him (something merely performed as part of the necessity of 'earning a living'):[44]

> Thus at the same time a distinction was made between man 'as man' on the one hand and the working man on the other (more clearly among the bourgeoisie, of course, than among the proletariat). Family life became separate from productive activity. And so did leisure. […] The discreteness of the elements of the everyday (work – family and 'private' life – leisure activities) implies an alienation.[45]

O'Shaughnessy clearly fits Lefebvre's idea of the divided man. He viewed naturalism as merely the way he earned a living, and poetry as a part of his essential self. This, according to Lefebvre, leads to the feelings of alienation that we see expressed in O'Shaughnessy's verse: a negative, violent alienation, as compared to the privileged position outside of society adopted by the Aesthetes. Lefebvre posits that work is external to man because he is not working 'for himself'.[46] In contrast, a man working 'for himself', 'perceives and becomes conscious of his own self. If what he makes comes from him, he in turn comes from what he makes; it is made by him, but it is in these works and by these works that he has made himself'.[47]

O'Shaughnessy is able to reconcile art with work, and therefore, in Lefebvre's terms, reconcile himself with his work, by a focus on "making", the act of production (and, in Lefebvre's terms, the making of himself). In the nineteenth century "production" was inherently associated with industrial work culture and factory life, which, as Morris argued, was devoid of creativity.[48] However, in the notion of being productive, I suggest we can find a dual meaning of "being useful" and "making something new". Here, again, we see O'Shaughnessy's conception of his career as a poet shaped by his career as a naturalist. His work at the museum was predominantly clerical: even in his scientific work he was not generating new information, but merely reassessing the work of those who came before him. His taxonomic papers

[43] William Morris, *Signs of Change* [1888] (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1913), p. 25.
[44] Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 59.
[45] Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, pp. 31-32.
[46] Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 39.
[47] Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 163.
[48] This association is reflected in the language Morris uses in 'How We Live and How We Might Live', in *Signs of Change*.

largely confirm previous species identification, or record details of specimens of known species. Most frequently, O'Shaughnessy performed organizational or secretarial work for his superiors. He produced, in the sense of making or creating, nothing at the museum.[49]

Thus, it is in the act of creation itself that O'Shaughnessy finds a "use" for poetry. I have already demonstrated the way that utility and work become conflated in aesthetic theories of the period, and thus it is in conceiving of art as work that O'Shaughnessy finally found the utility of his poetry. In his final volume O'Shaughnessy focuses on the physical act of creation, and is therefore, in nineteenth-century terms of production, able to shift the label of "work" from his non-productive museum career to that of his poetry. He was finally able to reject the bourgeois culture of the middle class: not by conceiving of himself as a part of an artistic aristocracy, but by aligning himself with the working class, as a physical labourer. Here we see obvious similarities with Morris, who also adopted the voice of the working class. However, while Morris was attempting to infuse production with creativity, O'Shaughnessy needed to find the act of production in the creative.

The unifying symbol of *Songs of a Worker* is stone, as O'Shaughnessy couches his artistic theory in the form of the most physical of the visual arts: sculpture. Like a sculptor carves stone, he carves thought, both craft something new. This act of carving is then equated with the work of the 'lowly' stonemason in 'Song of a Fellow-Worker.' In this poem, the poet speaks of his 'toil': 'my toil was fashioning thought and sound, and his was hewing stone'. In their shared labour, the two men are made equal. Here O'Shaughnessy rejects the language of the alienated artist in favour of aligning himself with a community of workers, in which the work they do, though different, is all performed for the greater good for society.

At the beginning of the poem, the poet speaks of the 'burden of [his] loneliness'. Alienation had dominated O'Shaughnessy's early poetry; this burden is eased by the stoneworker, who demonstrates to the poet that they are both part of a larger fellowship of workers.

> I went forth hastily, and lo! I met a hundred men,
> The worker with the chisel and the worker with the pen –
> The restless toilers after good, who sow and never reap,

[49] The superintendent of the department, Richard Owen, reports: 'The only work in which I have had occasion to avail myself of the services of Mr. O'Shaughnessy has been that of a transcriber', British Museum Original Papers (November 2nd 1870), 11328. Albert Günther listed O'Shaughnessy's duties as 'to name and enter into the Catalogues those of the recent additions which could be easily determined by comparison with previously named examples; to prepare a list of duplicate specimens and the alphabetical Index to the Catalogue of Fishes; to look over the first proof sheets; & to do other miscellaneous work of the same nature', British Museum Original Papers (November 4th 1870), 11400.

And one who maketh music for their souls that may not sleep.[50]

The stonemason creates the streets all men travel down, but the artist creates as well: he crafts beauty and pleasure, soothing the other workers in their toil. For O'Shaughnessy, in this poem, both are equally important and serve a purpose in society. Morris would express a similar "use" of art a few years later in his *Signs of Change*, in which he writes:

> And I may say that as to that leisure, as I should in no case do any harm to any one with it, so I should often do some direct good to the community with it, by practising arts or occupations for my hands or brain which would give pleasure to many of the citizens; in other words, a great deal of the best work done would be done in the leisure time of men.[51]

The "use" of art is the production of pleasure, and for O'Shaughnessy the "work" is the careful craft of poetry. Thus, he unites the desire for utility we find in Morris and other mid-Victorian artists with the craft of poetry, the careful formalism that was a hallmark of the Aesthetic movement. Unlike Morris, whose focus on craft meant championing every man as a potential artist, or at least artisan, O'Shaughnessy continued to depict the artist as privileged with access to a kind of divine realm: the world of art. But this privilege no longer separates the artist from the rest of mankind. Rather, it is their particular gift, or skill, that they bring to their work, just as the stonemason's strength is the innate skill he brings to his own work.

O'Shaughnessy always conceived of art as beautiful and pleasurable; it is the language of work and production that distinguishes this final volume from his earlier poetry. This linguistic shift can be illustrated by comparing a stanza detailing the act of writing from an 1870 poem, 'Seraphitus', with that of 'Song of a Fellow-Worker' (1881):

But all about that house he set
A wondrous flowering thing – his speech,
That without ceasing did beget
Such fair unearthly blossoms, each
Seemed from some paradise, and wet
As with an angel's tears, and each
Gave forth some long perfume to let
No man forget.[52]

[50] Arthur O'Shaughnessy, 'Song of a Fellow-Worker', in *Songs of a Worker*, p. 5.
[51] Morris, *Signs of Change*, p. 25.
[52] O'Shaughnessy, 'Seraphitus', in *An Epic of Women and Other Poems*, p. 29.

I said, O fellow-worker, yea, for I am a worker too,
The heart nigh fails me many a day, but how is it with you?
For while I toil great tears of joy will sometimes fill my eyes,
And when I form my perfect work it lives and never dies.
I carve the marble of pure thought until the thought takes form,
Until it gleams before my soul and makes the world grow warm.[53]

The former focuses on the special status of the poet: here he is like a heavenly being, with access to unearthly things. The act of writing poetry is compared to a 'flowering plant' – that is, self-generating. The language is of inspiration, not work. In the second poem he 'toils', he 'works', he 'carves' and he 'forms'. There is effort depicted here, and the frustration of potential failure. The former is focused on generation, he 'begets' his poetry, the latter on creation, the act of making. 'Song of a Fellow-Worker' marries the Aesthete's language of the special poetic gift to ideas of work and utility.

Art as the creation of beauty and pleasure can be contrasted with O'Shaughnessy's work at the museum, in which he merely catalogued knowledge, creating nothing. These ideas clearly tie in to the changing world of production and business in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when "work" was no longer about what one made, and business became abstracted from the realities of production or consumption. This was the age of the clerk, the creation of the pencil-pusher, where a man could go to an office every day, and create nothing, change nothing, affect nothing. It was this life, that of the ordinary office worker, that O'Shaughnessy tried to combat in his poetry. Here we find the distinction that Morris would make in *Signs of Change*, between 'useful work' and 'useless toil', in which he defines the middle class as 'non-producers', employed uselessly as mere 'wage earners'.[54]

The designation "worker" had, by the end of his career, become an integral part of O'Shaughnessy's identity. Instead of conceptualizing art as "non-work" in order to distinguish it from his scientific career, he shifted his focus to production and the creation of something new. In this way, he was doing more "work" as a poet than as a naturalist, and was able to privilege his art as his career. He accepted the fact that he was a "worker" – with its entomological signification of being one of the drones, the lower order – but the fact that he is not a 'mover and a shaker' does not mean that his work is unimportant. The nineteenth century is responsible for defining a worker as 'one who is employed for a wage', distinguished from a capitalist or a producer of wealth.[55] O'Shaughnessy, then, rejected this non-productive definition and returned

[53] 'Song of a Fellow-Worker', p. 4.
[54] Morris, 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil', in *Signs of Change*, pp. 141-73. Morris defines the middle class as such in 'The Hopes of Civilization', pp. 109, 112.
[55] 'worker, n.', *The Oxford English Dictionary*, online version September 2011 http://oed.com/view/Entry/230228 [accessed November 2011]. The first use of 'worker' under this

to an older model. In Biblical language, a worker is 'one who makes' and is synonymous with God the Creator.[56] In this act of redefinition, naturalism, the urban office environment and poetry all coalesce under one new heading: work and the worker.

In O'Shaughnessy's early poetry, particularly the 'Ode', we can see a longing for communion with his fellow man, but the separatist posturing of the Aesthetes' language, central to his conception of a work / art divide, denied that communion. By turning his back on this language and redefining art as work, he was able to join with the rest of humanity. In this way, he finally fulfilled his commitment to "art for humanity", quoted earlier. This did not come in the form of great ideas, or political or social reform, but in the acknowledgement that every worker makes a minute difference in the world, and that the artist is no different.

> And so we toil together may a day from morn till night,
> I in the lower depths of life, they on the lovely height;
> For though the common stones are mine, and they have lofty cares,
> Their work begins where this leaves off, and mine is part of theirs.
>
> And tis not wholly mine or theirs I think of through the day,
> But the great eternal thing we make together, I and they.[57]

Thus, O'Shaughnessy not only creates *for* humanity, but *with* humanity. In this way, he comes the closest in his career to unifying the seemingly disparate concepts of "art for art's sake" and "art for humanity's sake" in one productive aesthetic theory.

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[56] 'worker, n.', *The Oxford English Dictionary*, online version September 2011 http://oed.com/view/Entry/230228 [accessed November 2011].

[57] 'Song of a Fellow-Worker', p. 7.

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