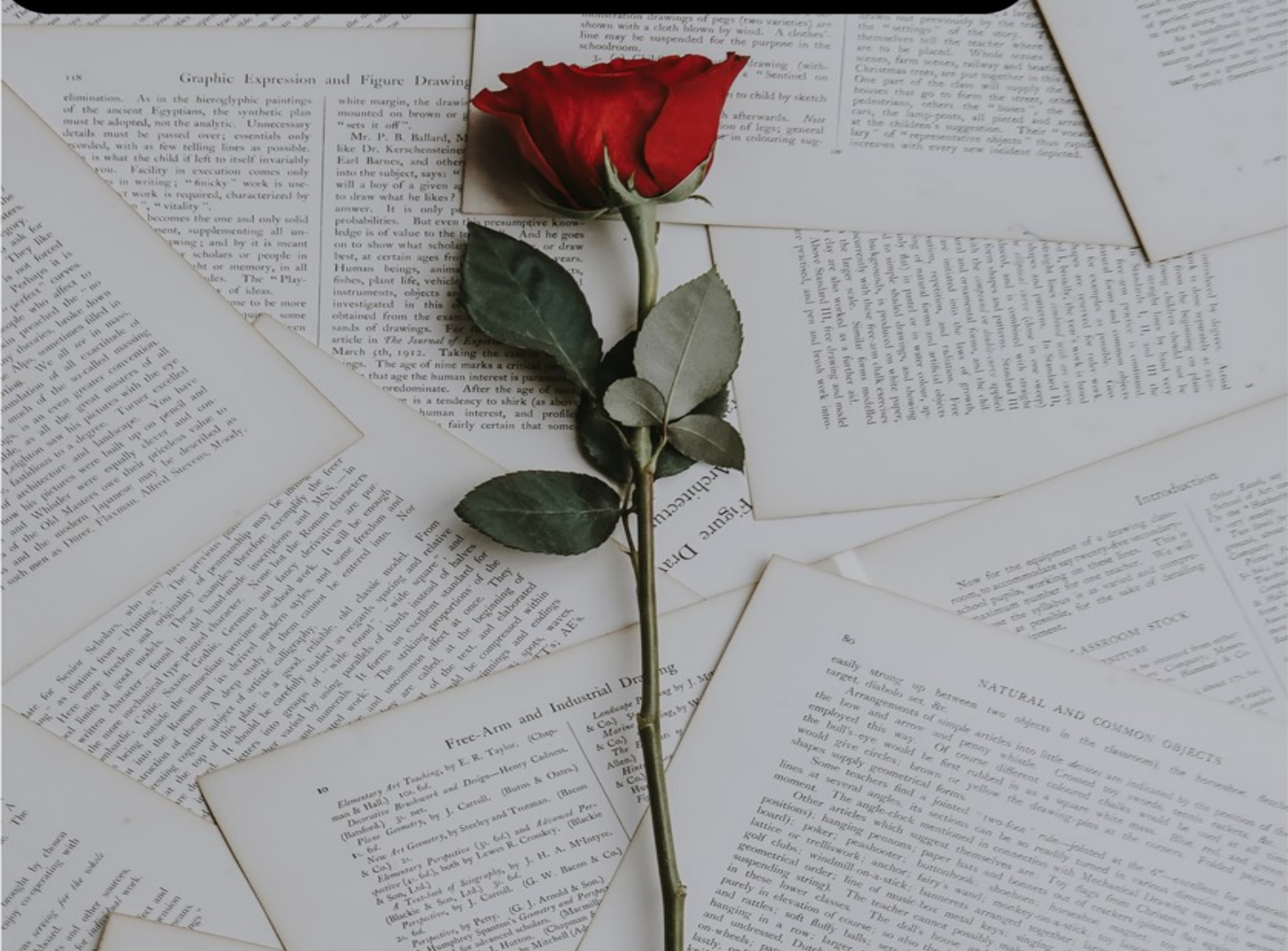


# STEWART ANDREW MCDOWALL



# BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

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**Stewart Andrew McDowall**

# **Beauty and the Beast**

**An Essay in Evolutionary Aesthetic**

EAN 8596547124672

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: [DigiCat@okpublishing.info](mailto:DigiCat@okpublishing.info)



# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

[PREFACE](#)

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[PART I THE THEORY](#)

[PART II BEAUTY IN EVOLUTION](#)

[CONCLUSION](#)

[APPENDIX ART FORMS IN DEVELOPMENT](#)

# PREFACE

[Table of Contents](#)

I wish to take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to Mrs R. B. Goodden and Mr R. M. Y. Gleadowe for the help they have given me in writing this book. With Mrs Goodden the theory was discussed point by point, and her criticisms and suggestions are largely responsible for the final shaping of the argument, as well as for an important development of the theory. To Mr Gleadowe I am indebted for some useful hints, which led to a partial rearrangement of the material, by which the form of the book has been greatly improved.

S. A. McD.

WINTON,  
*October 1919.*

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# INTRODUCTION

[Table of Contents](#)

Are we to look at the Beautiful with our feet firmly planted on the Natural, or are we to look at the Natural from the apparently precarious height of the Beautiful? This, after all, is the dilemma of aesthetic, slow though men have been to realise it. As we read the history of Aesthetic Theory we are puzzled by the tentativeness and the uncertainty even of those philosophers who played the greatest part in moulding human thought, until it dawns on us that, idealist though they might be in all else, in this they were

unconsciously disloyal to their own systems, being in some measure materialist.

An attempt to form a philosophy of religion which should start from the generally accepted facts of biological science and pass, through the common experiences of personal relationship, to the ultimate problems of Godhead and manhood, left at the close a keen sense of something lacking—something more than the lack of unity and balance inevitable in work written and published step by step. I had tried to find in Love, which is the very nature of Godhead, an essential impulse towards creation. It was clear that this creation must be the creation of something *new*, if it were to be justified; and the conclusion which forced itself upon me was that the creation of personal beings fulfilled this demand.

Yet an unsatisfied sense remained either that even the experience of love reciprocated by fresh personal beings could not be new for God with that utter newness which belief in Him as Transcendent and Perfect required, or else that His experience was not always perfect. At any rate something that would make this newness self-evident was missing. Something vital had clearly been left out. The one thing of which no account had been taken was Beauty; and I began to consider whether this missing something, all-pervading yet intangible, was not Beauty itself. And in Beauty I seemed to find what I had missed.

To Aesthetic has generally been assigned the fate of Cinderella. Her uglier sisters, Epistemology and Metaphysic, have monopolised the court invitations, for the most part. Might she not, after all, be destined to marry the Prince? A



little thought made it clear that, properly arrayed, she would bid fair to outshine the others. This book is not an effort to dress her in a new fashion. Fairy godmother I cannot claim to be, nor have I a magic wand. I shall only try to strip off some of the rags, leaving her, like Psyche, to proclaim her own loveliness.

It is not my intention to give a systematic account of the development of aesthetic theory. Such books as Dr Bosanquet's *History of Aesthetic*, and the historical portion of Croce's *Aesthetic*, from which works the following summary is chiefly derived, fortunately make the task unnecessary. Nor does any detailed criticism of the work of others fall within the scope of the present essay. My aim is merely to suggest an idea, avoiding technicalities as far as I may, and then to link it up with the Christian idea of God on the one hand, and with the development of the human soul on the other. The very briefest note on the course of speculation concerning Art and Beauty will suffice to introduce the point of view that I wish to suggest, which is that Beauty must be a first and not a last consideration for metaphysic. To advocate this is to turn his own weapon against Croce; but that is inevitable. Croce claims that Beauty is the expression of that intuition of Reality which constitutes the first stage of knowledge; but the philosophy of Croce is anti-metaphysical. Since many, while agreeing with the great and original discovery involved in his affirmation, must disagree profoundly with his negation, it follows of necessity that sooner or later they will endeavour to hoist him with his own petard.

Aesthetic theories show a steady and yet very remarkable change in the views of philosophers concerning Art and even Beauty itself. The Greeks tended, on the whole, to regard Art as mere imitation. Thus, at best, the beauty produced by artistic creation was inferior, because second-hand; in fact, as Plato argued, the artist's representation was really third-hand, for there is first the idea, then the concrete individual object, then the representation. Stress was laid on harmony, rhythm, order, as being indicative of the homogeneity of an ideal world and therefore admirable. But, being an incomplete reproduction of nature<sup>[1]</sup>, art could have no primary importance. It might be evil or good, in its own degree; and from the moral standpoint it might be judged, for the beautiful and the good are not completely distinguished. Being so judged, it was found wanting. It is one of the tragedies of thought that the beauty-loving Plato should have been driven to formulate a theory which is the negation of art, because it seemed to him that art was simply the false endeavouring to masquerade as the true. In Aristotle we find the beginnings of a freer idea. Symbolism in art is implicitly recognised, and there is some escape, though not much, from the moralistic bond; some dawning conception, though not much, of the concrete expressiveness of artistic creation. In the Middle Ages the mystical symbolic conception, characteristic of Plotinus, was developed. Symmetry and rhythm are beautiful because they symbolise reason and divinity, and relate the human soul, through the perception of order, to the divine which created that order. St Thomas Aquinas even goes so far as to say that in beauty



desire is quieted[2]—presumably because satisfied. We shall be led to disagree profoundly with this statement.

Of Vico (1725), to whom Croce acknowledges so great a debt, we will only here say that he was the discoverer of the creative intuition, and this discovery entitles him to the honourable position of first founder of a coherent theory of aesthetic. Vico was primarily concerned with the nature of poetry. He showed that poetry was a 'moment' of the spiritual consciousness, by which a man was brought into contact with reality—that it represented a stage of knowledge *before* reflection (and was therefore an intuition) and that it expressed this knowledge (and was therefore creative); while it was distinct from feeling, and therefore free from the stigma which Plato attached to it, and which led to his banishing it from his *Republic*.

Men first *feel* without being aware; they then *become aware* with troubled and affected soul; finally they reflect with pure mind. This dignity is the *Principle of the poetical feelings*, which are formed by the senses of *passions* and of *affections*, as distinct from the *philosophical feelings*, which are formed from *reflection by reasoning*. Hence the philosophical feelings approach more to truth, the more they rise to *universals*; the poetical feelings are more certain the more they approach to *particulars*[3].

Poetry is thus placed on the imaginative plane, says Professor Wildon Carr, as distinct from the intellective, and