In Defence of *On the Standard of Taste*.

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Introduction

Aesthetic disagreements have been a delicate and often discussed subject ever since aesthetics emerged as an independent academic discipline in the 18th century. Many of us encounter aesthetic disagreements in our quotidian lives even if we have not studied aesthetics as an academic discipline. We may for example have an acquaintance who claims Wagner is a better composer than Mozart. If we disagree with our acquaintance’s statement we have initiated an aesthetic disagreement concerning the aesthetic value of Wagners and Mozart's musical works. However, when it comes to these kinds of aesthetic disagreements we may wish to avoid any further debate by saying "Let us agree to disagree". But this stance is problematic for three reasons. Firstly, it trivializes aesthetics since it implies that aesthetic judgements and disagreements are trivial matters which are not to be taken seriously since they are a mere matter of diversity of taste. Secondly it complicates matters for art related criticism. For if aesthetic judgements are relative we cannot claim that some aesthetic judgements are more pertinent than others. Furthermore, this kind of relativist stance completely ignores that fact that we do in fact take other people's aesthetic judgements seriously. Although there may not be as much at stake as with moral judgements it can indeed be difficult to remain friends with a dedicated Wagnerian if one is hostile to Wagner’s aesthetic universe. Is there more to aesthetic judgements than disagreement of taste? Is there a way to re-establish the importance of a standard of art in our contemporary aesthetic climate? If so could the said re-establishment provide amateurs and professional critics alike with criteria for how to know if their aesthetic judgements are pertinent?

The aim of this dissertation is to examine how we can account for the diversity of taste without compromising the standard of art. For I will argue that the real problem with
aesthetic relativism is that it implies that the standard of art must be adapted to suit the
diversity of taste. While it is true that there is a diversity of both aesthetic and gustatory taste
it seems as if this diversity cannot be applied to the standard of art. However, since it seems
as if the standard of art cannot be reduced to a set of rules which guarantee aesthetic value in
an artwork it seems as if taste must somehow be taken into account when discussing the
standard of art. We will therefore need to examine if there is indeed a certain kind of taste
which can be applied to our more refined aesthetic judgements concerning the aesthetic value
of an artwork.

Content

In the first chapter we will disentangle the notion of taste as presented in On the Standard of
Taste. Doing so will allow us to examine whether taste is indeed as entirely personal as we
may think it is. I will also investigate to which extent the distinction drawn by Hume between
mental and bodily taste affects the possibility to uphold the standard of art.¹ We will discuss
Korsmeyer's “Hume and the Foundations of Taste” in which the author claims that the
diversity of bodily as well as mental taste complicates the maintaining of the standard of art
since the diversity of taste makes it impossible for the true judges to form a joint verdict. The
last part of the first chapter will be dedicated to finding out if the potential diversity of mental
taste affects the true judges when they attempt to form a joint verdict. Or if it is so that On the
Standard of Taste contains useful criteria for true judges (and aspiring true judges) so that
they will not let the diversity of taste get in the way when they attempt to evaluate the
aesthetic value of an artwork. For in order to dispose of the type of aesthetic relativism which

¹ Hume uses the standard of art and the standard of taste interchangeably in On the Standard of Taste. Both of
these terms refer to the joint verdict of the true judges. Thus, the standard of art and the standard of taste are
both defined as the joint verdict of the true judges.
would have the standard being moulded on diversity of taste, we need to find a set criteria for the true judges. Which will also allow us to know exactly how to form pertinent aesthetic judgements and evaluate the aesthetic value of an artwork. Nonetheless in the second chapter we will have to discuss the extent to which the true judge's verdict establishes the standard of art. We will consider Levinson's *The Real Problem of Humes "On the Standard of Taste”* in which the possibility of the verdict of the true judges as an *indicator* of the standard of art is discussed. The discussion will also touch upon the issue of why those among us who do not aspire to become true judges should be concerned about the verdict of the true judges.

Hitherto the discussion concerning the verdict of the true judges has been centred around true judges and those who wish to emulate their aesthetic expertise. However, if we are to argue that the standard of art is universally relevant we will need to examine how it can improve the aesthetic experiences of the general public. Although we may manage to determine to which extent the verdict of the true judges establishes the standard of art. We will still need to examine if the true judges need to come to a *full scale unanimous verdict* among themselves in order for the standard of art to be established. Therefore, the third chapter will discuss if the true judges need to come to a *full scale unanimous verdict* in order to be able to establish the standard of art. We will also need to investigate if aesthetic disagreements among true judges are disagreements in sentiment or judgements. For if it is so that they disagree in judgement the idea of upholding the standard of art by referring to the unanimous verdict of the true judges is seriously endangered. The discussion concerning the nature of the unanimous verdict of the true judges will be centred around Shelley's “*Hume and the Joint Verdict of the True Judges*”. To conclude will we conjoin our thesis to the previous discussion and briefly investigate if the results of this paper could be beneficial for contemporary criticism in a digitalized age.
Questions

How can we account for the diversity of taste while maintaining a standard of art? Does Hume present any clear criteria in *On the Standard of Taste* which can help us define the standard of art? Is there a different kind of taste which needs to be taken into account when we consider the standard of art? If so to which extent could a potential distinction between different kinds of taste be of use when aiming to establish the standard of art? For if it is so that the taste which the true judges use when evaluating works of art is entirely separate from the kind of taste which we use when processing immediate sensory impressions. It might be possible to argue that only a certain kind of taste (and the judgements which stem from it) need to be taken into consideration when establishing the standard of art.

Furthermore, if it is so that Hume’s standard of art does not need to be constructed from the diversity of taste. It seems fitting to enquire into which extent Hume’s standard of art could be relevant for us in this day and age. Although at a first glance “On the Standard of Taste” might seem dated and unfit for a revival in a time where aesthetic relativism is more wide spread. After all, with the dawn of the internet it is no longer necessary to be a trained journalist and / or art critic in order to write about the latest exhibition at Tate Modern. However, instead of dismissing “On the Standard of Taste” on the grounds that it a certain democratization of criticism makes it irrelevant. I will argue that because of the democratization of criticism, it is worth enquiring into if Hume’s standard of art could provide us with appropriate criteria when trying to navigate in a world where criticism seems to be more readily available than ever. I will mainly be asking how the guidelines formed by Hume in “On the Standard of Taste” can help us know if our aesthetic judgements are relevant. Furthermore, I intend to examine if Hume’s criteria for how to recognize a true
judge can help us discern if a piece of criticism which we come across is indeed based upon aesthetic judgements and/or relevant for the genre of the work which the critic, (untrained or not) is evaluating.

Chapter 1

**Mental Taste and Bodily Taste**

Towards the beginning of “On the Standard of Taste” Hume talks about the resemblances and differences between mental and bodily taste in the following way:

> The great resemblance between mental and bodily taste will easily teach us to apply this story. Though it be certain, that beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external; it must be allowed that there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings. Now these qualities may be found in a small degree, or may be mixed and confounded with each other, it often happens that the taste is not affected with such minute qualities, or is not able to distinguish all the particular flavours, amidst the disorder in which they are presented. Where the organs are so fine, as to allow nothing to escape them; and at the same time so exact, as to perceive every ingredient in the composition: This we call delicacy of taste, whether we employ these terms in the literal or metaphorical sense. (…) To produce these general rules or avowed patterns of composition, is like finding the key with the leathern thong; which justified the verdict of Sancho's kinsmen, and confounded those

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2 Hume is referring to Cervantes *Don Quixote* in which Sancho's kinsmen partake in a wine tasting contest. They insist that the wine has a slightly leather like and metallic taste. They are at first mocked by the bystanders but they are proven to be right since it turns out there was an iron key with a leather thong at the bottom of the barrel.
pretend judges who had condemned them. (...) In like manner, though the beauties of writing have never been methodized, or reduced to general principles; though no excellent models had ever been acknowledged; the different degrees would still have subsisted, and the judgement of one man would have been preferable to another (...) 

Hume argues that bodily taste or gustatory is exercised when trying to discern if the wine we are drinking is agreeable to our palet. Although it is possible to refine our bodily taste in order to become an expert at wine tasting the majority of all instances when we exercise our bodily taste are matters of immediate responses to sensory stimuli. According to Hume this kind of taste cannot be discussed in terms of right and wrong since the outcome of our wine tasting depends on the disposition of our organs and our bodily senses. Although Sancho's kinsmen certainly had more refined palettes than the pretend judges who could not feel the iron and leather taste. Their refined palettes were the result of the dispositions of their organs which were better at filtrating the nuances of immediate sensory stimuli and not the cultivation of what Hume would call mental taste. Mental taste is what we use when processing sensory, stimuli induced by a work of art which requires that we do not use our immediate sensory impressions as a foundation for our aesthetic judgements. Because the aesthetic qualities of an artwork require greater analysis and scrutiny than can be provided by the way we process immediate sensory when using gustatory taste. If we were to use our immediate sensory impressions as the only groundwork for our aesthetic judgements, we would not be able make informed aesthetic judgements. By aesthetic judgements I refer to judgements concerning the artistic qualities of the artwork such as composition, colour, lighting. Which we might perceive but not process adequately by restricting our aesthetic

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judgement of the work to our immediate sensory impressions. Furthermore, when forming aesthetic judgements, it seems appropriate to consider how a certain artwork compares to other works in its genre and/or if it can stand the test of time (which we cannot discern by only relying on our immediate sensory impressions). Bodily taste or gustatory taste is what we use when encountering immediate sensory stimuli which does not acquire us to use the aesthetic sensibility in the same way as we would when encountering an artwork. It is also worth noting that the subjectivity of gustatory judgements is not really a problem since there really is not a lot at stake if we find ourselves unable to adhere to the culinary preferences of our acquaintances. However, when it comes to mental taste, it seems as if taste is no longer a subjective matter. For unlike judgements of gustatory taste, mental taste is concerned with deliberate aesthetic judgements which require processing beyond the immediate responses which are associated with judgements of gustatory taste. Although it may be very tempting to extend the proverb À Chacun son Goût to the realm of mental taste (and consequently to the realm of aesthetic judgements), I argue that doing so would be most inappropriate. For while Hume conjoins Hutcheson's argument that beauty is not a quality in the things themselves it does not mean that all aesthetic judgements are equally pertinent. It is true that there is a kind of diversity of mental taste which makes us appreciate different kinds of art works. Yet there still seems to be some sort of rules or general indicators of aesthetic value since we would not be able to

"(…) assert an equality of genius and elegance between Ogilby and Milton" without making a spectacle of ourselves in polite society. Not only would such a comparison seem outré since Milton and Ogilby's works do not belong to the same genre. It also shows that contrary to

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4 Hume, *Idem*, Page 24. "Beauty is no quality in things themselves. It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them, and each mind perceives a different beauty".

bodily taste the mental taste which we use in order to make aesthetic judgements is not as personal as we may think. For while the rules for aesthetic beauty are not decided *a priori*, it seems as if there still is a standard of art which we need to apply when trying to determine the aesthetic value of an artwork. As Hume stated when discussing the tale of Sancho's kinsmen even though "no excellent models had ever been acknowledged" there would still be aesthetic judgements that would seem more pertinent than others. To resume: The rules of aesthetic beauty are not decided *a priori*. Yet there is a standard of art which we need to apply when determining the aesthetic value of an artwork. Because even if we had no examples of aesthetic excellence we would still be able to say that some aesthetic judgements are more pertinent than others. For example; claiming that a green painting was yellow would still be a false statement although "no excellent models" for paintings had ever been acknowledged.

We argue that the main reason for why the principle of the natural equality of taste is to be laid aside when it comes to evaluating an art work is that unlike bodily taste which is an immediate response to sensory stimuli that we do not necessary need to cultivate. Mental taste requires a greater refinement since it is not our immediate response to beauty which makes us form pertinent aesthetic judgements. Although we may have immediate reactions to artworks such as "This particular production of *The Magic Flute* was terrible" it is not until we have thoroughly considered all aspects of the said production (and thereby refined our immediate response to the artwork) that we can make a pertinent aesthetic judgement. If we consider the guidelines which Hume argues that the true judges should follow we clearly see that it is not enough to make aesthetic judgements based on sentiment alone. We argue that

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6 Hume, *Idem*. Page 25. "It is evident that none of the rules of composition are fixed by reasoning *a priori*, or can be esteemed abstract conclusions of the understanding, from comparing those habitudes and relations of ideas which are eternal and immutable".


although Hume intended these guidelines to be for the true judges they could be of equal use for the aspiring true judge or the aesthetic novice. Firstly, we must have had sufficient practice of studying and comparing artworks of a similar kind as the one we are currently trying to evaluate. Which means that in order for us to be able to say that the particular production of *The Magic Flute* which we previously mentioned was subpar we must have had some previous experience of Mozart's operas. Most importantly in order for us to be able to judge that particular production of *The Magic Flute* we must have either listened to a few recordings or seen a few productions of the said opera. If we have sufficient practice of comparing and evaluating artworks of a particular kind we may also meet the second criterion which is possessing a certain delicacy of sentiment which makes us capable to discern the aesthetic qualities of an artwork. If we were not in possession of a delicacy of sentiment towards music which made us unable to hear the subtle nuances of the orchestra we would not be able to make proper aesthetic judgements about opera. Finally, we need to be able to set aside our prejudices about a certain genre or artist in order to be able to properly judge the artwork which we have in front of us. If we were particularly hostile to Mozart as a composer or to opera as a genre we would hardly be suited to review the previously mentioned production of *The Magic Flute*. For if it is so that we are blinded by prejudice when trying to evaluate an artwork we will not be able to give a nuanced verdict. 9 Bearing this in mind we must conclude that mental taste is not as idiosyncratic as bodily taste since the true judges must set aside the oddities of their personal taste in order to form the joint verdict which becomes the standard of art.

9 Hume, *Idem*, Page 36. "Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty".
**Bodily Taste in Relation to the Standard of Art**

Consequently, we aim to propose that although there is a veritable diversity of taste it is not necessary to the end of our project to take it into account when considering the standard of art. Bodily taste has very little to do with the aesthetic judgements which we make when evaluating the aesthetic qualities of an artwork and it is not the diversity of mental taste which makes the true judges reach a joint verdict. One of the main problem with the kind of aesthetic relativism which sees the upholding of the standard of art as impossible due to the diversity of taste is that it does not distinguish between bodily and mental taste. For it is the possibility for the true judges to refine their mental taste to the point where they will no longer let themselves be influenced by their own personal prejudices and preferences when beholding an artwork that makes the upholding of the standard of art possible. Furthermore, the consequences of having the standard of art adjusting itself to the diversity of taste would be disastrous for the artworld as a whole since it would heavily impair the autonomy of the artist if he or she were obliged to adapt their aesthetic universe to suit the diversity of taste of people who have little to no knowledge about art. We do not argue that the artist should be seen as a solitary genius who works alone without ever receiving feedback. But it must be said that there is a big difference between a conductor receiving a well-researched and constructive review of their latest performance from an experienced critic who aspires to be a true judge and receiving a poorly written email with negative critique stemming from the sender's prejudice and ignorance. Yet it is not entirely certain that the distinction between bodily and mental taste can guarantee the joint verdict of the true judges. Could it be so that there is a diversity of mental taste which plays a part in the joint verdict of the true judges? Although Humes guidelines advises the true judges to set their personal preferences aside
when evaluating an artwork, it is not certain that they always do so. Does the possibility of a
diversity of mental taste affect our ability to uphold the standard of art?

**Korsmeyer’s Objection**

In “Hume and the Foundations of Taste” Korsmeyer argues that the foundations of the
standard of art are dubious since Hume cannot seem to reconcile the diversity of taste with
what she calls "the widespread uniformity of taste". The "widespread uniformity of taste"
refers to the standard of art (in other words the joint verdict of the true judges). The argument
for the possibility of a diversity of mental taste is presented in the following way:

Hume’s major essay on aesthetics cannot be rendered entirely free from anomaly and
ambiguity, even given some elucidation about the qualities and principles of art to
which the good critic becomes attuned. Ironically, perhaps it is Hume's very talent as
an essayist that makes the final acceptance of a standard of taste difficult, so
convincing is his initial description of the multiplicity of tastes. In the opening pages
of "The Standard of Taste" he argues that differences of aesthetic preferences are so
prevalent that they pervade the most homogenous group, yet he ends the same essay
with an assurance of widespread uniformity of taste. Even his explanations of critical
sensitivity and of the development of delicate taste cannot wholly reconcile these
disparate observations.  

Korsmeyer's argument makes sense in the way that it can indeed seem confusing that the
diversity of taste would co-exist with the seemingly uniform joint verdict of the true judges.

Unless we bear the distinction between mental and bodily taste in mind it seems as if there

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would be no reason for us to accept the idea that the diversity of taste would co-exist with the
joint verdict of the true judges. If we accept Korsmeyer's statement that Hume cannot seem to
reconcile the diversity of taste with the joint verdict of the true judges it would seem that our
attempts to uphold the standard of art would be fruitless. For if Hume fails to reconcile the
diversity of taste with the joint verdict of the true judges we must accept the possible
existence of a diversity of mental taste. For our understanding of Korsmeyer's argument is
that although Hume fails to provide sufficient grounding for the standard of art, he still
manages to provide a convincing account of the diversity of taste. Therefore, if we choose to
accept the idea of a diversity of mental taste (supposing that the said diversity would make
mental taste no different from bodily taste) the true judges would not be able to form a joint
verdict. If the true judges cannot form a joint verdict we would not be able to uphold the
standard of art.

However, there are two problems with Korsmeyer's argument: Firstly, it supposes that there
is no clear distinction between mental and bodily taste. For while Hume does point out that
there is a great diversity of bodily taste the said diversity does not apply to the mental taste
which we use when evaluating an artwork. Korsmeyer does not seem to fully take the
Humean distinction between bodily and mental taste into account when developing her
account of the Humean standard of art. For the existence of a particular aesthetic sensibility
which we make use of when evaluating the aesthetic value of an artwork relies on the
distinction between mental and bodily taste. For if there is no difference between mental and
bodily taste we cannot speak of a specifically aesthetic sensibility which makes our aesthetic
experiences different from other more mundane experiences. 11 Secondly, the argument

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11 Nota bene: We are using the word sensibility in the 18th century sense. If Hume had written his essay today
he would have written something along the lines of aesthetic mindset. For in 18th century english sensibility is
both a kind of sensitivity to ex. beauty. But it is also a certain set of mind which enables out sensitivity to beauty.
supposes that the true judges do assess the aesthetic value of an artwork based on their idiosyncratic inclinations. If we adopt Korsmeyer's argument the standard of art would be nothing but the result of a coincidental coherence between the true judges' personal preferences. As stated in “On the Standard of Taste” it is possible for critics to prefer different authors depending on how old they are and what is currently important in their lives: "At twenty Ovid may be the favourite author, Horace at forty and perhaps Tacitus at fifty". However, even a true judge with an amorous temperament which makes her prefer the Ovid will aim to set aside her personal preferences when she evaluates the poetry of Horace. For although Horace may not be what she prefers she will set aside her personal preferences and prejudices when forming her verdict. When doing that she will see that Horace's poetry has a considerable aesthetic value. Which (just like Ovid's poetry) has stood the test of time and provided generations of readers with rich aesthetic experiences.

Thus, we may conclude that arguing in favour of the diversity of mental taste as an obstacle for the standard of art is erroneous because the criteria presented in “On the Standard of Taste” prevents the true judges for forming their joint verdict based on their personal preferences and prejudices. The distinction between mental and bodily taste is vital if we are to uphold aesthetic sensibility, and thus the standard of art. Because if we adopt Korsmeyer's argument, we might be lead to underestimate the importance of Hume’s distinction between bodily and mental taste. Furthermore, if we underestimate the importance of Hume’s distinction; we might be inclined to adopt the kind of aesthetic relativism which would have the standard of art adapting itself to suit the diversity of taste. In doing so we would not only risk neglecting to see that there is a distinction between immediate sensory stimuli (bodily taste) and the aesthetic sensory stimuli which need to be cultivated and refined in order for us to be able to form pertinent aesthetic judgements (mental taste). We would also expedite the
expansion of relativism concerning aesthetic judgements. Which would have ignorant and prejudiced aesthetic verdicts being seen as equal to deliberated and well informed joint verdicts of the true judges.

A common misconception regarding Hume’s aesthetic is that the upholding of a standard of art goes hand in hand with the upholding of a bourgeois elite. Although it certainly is true that Hume mainly wrote for educated middle class men who frequented the salons and aspired to become true judges. Nothing prevents us from using the criteria for true judges as presented in “On the Standard of Taste” to keep demagogy and populism as far away as possible from aesthetics. One of the most important criteria for the joint verdict of true judges is that it stands the test of time. In order for the joint verdict of the true judges to stand the test of time it cannot pay heed to the prejudices of the era in which the joint verdict was made. The particular kind of aesthetic relativism which would have the standard of art submitting itself to the diversity of taste could not result any works which would stand the test of time. Because under such circumstances artists would have to make sure that their works suited the prejudices of their contemporaries. Which means that they would not be able to produce works that did not challenge the current aesthetic norms or communicate existential questions which transcend our particular day and age.

Chapter 2

**Levinson and the Test of Time**

Although Hume defines the standard of art as the joint verdict of the true judges we will need to discuss to which extent the said joint verdict defines the standard of art. For it is not

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12 Although, the artwork and the joint verdict are interdependent, I argue that it is the work which must stand the test of time once the true judges have formed their joint verdict.

clear whether Hume intended the joint verdict to be a strict definition or a mere indicator of the standard of art. In “Hume’s Standard of Taste: The Real Problem” Levinson argues that the joint verdict of the true judges should be seen as an indicator and not a strict definition of the standard of art. Levinson presents his argument in the following way:

What needs to be explained is why critics of a certain sort are credible indicators of what works are artistically best, in the sense of ones capable of affording better, or ultimately preferable, aesthetic experiences. I will suggest that it can only be done by putting the accent on the special relationship such critics bear to works of unquestionable value, that is, masterpieces, whose identification is in turn effected, though defeasibly, by the passage of the test of time. 14

Thus, Levinson argues that the joint verdict of the true judges is an indicator of the standard of art. Instead of being a strict definition of the standard of art, the joint verdict of the true judges is best understood as an indicator of ultimately preferable aesthetic experiences. I argue that if we understand the joint verdict of the true judges as a strict definition of the standard of art, we misunderstand its function. For, although it could be argued that the joint verdict of the true judges could be seen as a strict definition of the standard of art, because the joint verdict of the true judges seems to shape what we consider as our literary / art historical canon. I conjoin Levinson’s argument, because as far as I have understood the role of the true judges, their task is not to set the literary / art historical canon once and for all. Instead, it seems as if their role is to indicate preferable aesthetic experiences by pointing to the features of the artwork. By pointing to the features of the artwork, they show us how those who are not yet ideal critics learn how to discern important features of similar artworks in the future.

Furthermore, I argue that if the joint verdict of the true judges had been a strict definition of the standard of art (as opposed to being an indicator of preferable aesthetic experiences), Hume would most likely not have adopted Hutcheson’s argument that beauty is not a quality in the things themselves.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, since Hume clearly states that the rules of beauty are not fixed \textit{a priori} “or can be esteemed abstract conclusions of the understanding, from comparing those habitues and relations of ideas which are eternal and immutable”.\textsuperscript{16} It seems unlikely that the aesthetic judgements of the true judges would result in a strict definition of the standard of art.

Thus, if we were to argue in favour of the joint verdict of the true judges as a strict definition of the standard of art, we might risk misunderstanding one of the most important aspect of Hume’s aesthetics: The test of time. Bearing in mind the importance of the test of time in Hume’s aesthetics, it seems improbable that the joint verdict of the true judges is indeed a strict definition of the standard of art. For if artworks can cease to stand the test of time, it seems equally probable that the joint verdict of the true judges can cease to stand the test of time.

As a rebuttal to this point, it could be argued that Levinson's emphasis on the test of time is not a very important indicator of aesthetic value in an artwork. Instead it would be possible to argue that the emphasis on the passage of the test of time is an indicator of the underlying outdatedness of Hume's aesthetics. Because if we see the passage of the test of time as the most important indicator of aesthetic value in artworks we run the risk of equating aesthetic merit with a particular western canon. However, although we concede that there is a problem with critics and art appreciators only focusing on a limited set of works from a particular

\textsuperscript{15} Hume, \textit{Idem}, Page 24  
western canon. We still find it inappropriate to argue that Levinson's emphasis on the passage of the *test of time* would automatically lead us to equate aesthetic merit with a particular western canon, although it is true that most of the works mentioned by Hume in *On the Standard of Taste* belong to what Harold Bloom calls the *western canon*.\(^{17}\) We argue that there is nothing in Hume’s guidelines for (aspiring) true judges that would automatically make us equate aesthetic merit with the western canon. The key to understanding Levinson's proposition (thus avoiding amalgams concerning the passage of *the test of time*) is that the identification of *masterpieces* is *defeasible*.\(^ {18}\) Since works declared to be *masterpieces* the true judges could just as well fall out of favour if they in one way or another cannot stand the passage of the *test of time* there is no reason to believe that adopting Hume's aesthetics would confine us to a dated western canon. On the contrary, we argue that the passage of the *test of time* allows the true judges to discover masterpieces which for some reason or another have been forgotten due to prejudice or convention. Furthermore, Levinson argues that the true judges must also be able to identify future masterpieces which have not yet stood the test of time.\(^ {19}\) Since the true judges must be attuned to contemporary art and literature in order to be able to identify masterpieces it seems improbable that adopting Hume's aesthetics would automatically lead to us equating aesthetic merit with a dated western canon.

The joint verdict of the true judges (and the standard of art which is defined by the said joint verdict) can indicate "ultimately preferable, aesthetic experiences".\(^ {18}\) We argue that the most important indicator of aesthetic value in an artwork is indeed the passage of the *test of time*. For while the prejudices of a time period may favour mediocre artworks which are better at catering to current preconceived notions of what an artwork should be. The test of time will

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\(^ {19}\) Levinson, *Idem*. Page 234. "Ideal critics are thus reliable indicators of artistic value in works of art generally, and most importantly, those who have not yet stood the test of time". Levinson, *Idem*. Page 231.
allow us to see which works still have an aesthetic value although they are no longer à jour
with the latest aesthetic fads. Because if an artwork manages to hold an aesthetic for several
generations it is an indicator not only of aesthetic value but that it also might be able to
communicate existential questions which transcend a particular day and age. Although
Homer’s Iliad contains elements which are particular for the time it was written such as the
dominance of a pantheist religion and a rather problematic view on slavery, it also contains
beautiful verse and a tragic tale of war, wrath and love which has managed to engage readers
across the centuries. In spite of several things having changed in warfare it still seems as if
the line "Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills
upon the Achaeans" still rings true when we think about the horrors of modern warfare. 20
Therefore, we may conclude that Homer managed to capture something about the horrors of
war and wrath which made that his work stood the test of time while other poems that also
spoke of the Trojan wars were forgotten over time.

However, it is important to understand that the true judges do not set general rules for
artworks when pronouncing their joint verdict. Instead they are individuals who are attuned
to greatness in art and suited to identify and explain it to those who are not yet true judges. 21
Just because a play follows a set of rules such as Boileau's La Règle des Trois Unités (which
requires the unity of time, space and action in a play) it does not mean that the said play will
stand the test of time. 22 Although Racine’s Phedra is a play which follows the rules of

20 Homer, The Iliad. Translated by Samuel Butler, retrieved from The Internet Classics Archive on the 20th October 2017: http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/iliad.1.i.html.
22 Boileau, L'Art Poétique. Chant 3, Verse 45-46. "Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour, un seul fait accompli Tienne jusqu'à la fin le théâtre rempli". Retrieved from:
classicism and continues to stand the test of time. Racine’s *Phedra* does not stand the test of time because it follows the rules of 17\textsuperscript{th} century classicism. It continues to stand the test of time because of the poetic virtue of Racine’s verse and because it explores themes which continue to fascinate and disturb audiences.\textsuperscript{23} The joint verdict of the true judges can indicate that this play may be able to provide us with rich aesthetic experiences which will make us consider our own experiences with adultery in a different way. In spite of the joint verdict of the true judges being able to show us which works may provide us with rich aesthetic experiences there is a remaining problem which needs to be addressed: Hitherto the discussion concerning the joint verdict of the true judges has only been centred around the true judges and those who aspire to emulate their aesthetic expertise. Yet if we want to argue that the joint verdict of the true judges is universally relevant we will have to enquire if the joint verdict of the true judges is relevant for the general public. When using the term "general public" we are referring to those among us who do not desire to emulate the aesthetic expertise of the true judges. Is it possible that the joint verdict of the true judges is irrelevant for the general public? This question will prove to be fundamental for if it is so that the joint verdict of the true judges is not universally relevant we might risk returning to the particular kind of aesthetic relativism which we rejected in the first chapter.

**The True Judges, The General Public, The Kulturman and the Issue of Aesthetic Bildung**

Although there is a lot at stake if we choose to accept the idea that the joint verdict of the true judges is irrelevant for the general public, we still find it necessary to examine how one might try to reconstruct an objection against the universal appeal of the joint verdict of the true judges. For it is in reconstructing the objection that we will be able to answer the question

\textsuperscript{23} In the case of Racine’s *Phedra* we are specifically referring to adultery, homicide, incest and lying servants.
concerning *why* the general public should care about what the true judges have to say. If we were to present an objection against the idea of joint verdict of the true judges being relevant for the true judges we would proceed in the following way: The joint verdict of the true judges cannot be relevant for the general public because it is nothing but a way for a cultural elite to project their taste onto the unsuspecting general public. We might argue that those who wish to emulate the true judges (and acquire their level of aesthetic expertise) should pay heed to their joint verdict. But the general public does not need to be concerned with the joint verdict of the true judges since they do not aspire to emulate the cultural elite which the true judges supposedly represent.

However, if we adopt this argument it would mean that the standard of art (which consists of the joint verdict of the true judges which indicates *masterpieces*) is not universally relevant. Consequentially these *masterpieces* would not need to be explained or made accessible for the general public since they are only relevant for the true judges and those who aspire to be like them. This way we would end up reserving rich aesthetic experiences for a small part of the population. Although arguing in favour of the irrelevance of the joint verdict of the true judges for the general population may at first seem like a democratic and egalitarian stance it only contributes to isolating the general public from its cultural heritage and confines them to what we will call *impoverished aesthetic* experiences. We will need to find a way to argue why the general public *should* be interested in the joint verdict of the true judges unless we want to end up reserving works of great cultural importance for a cultural elite. In “Hume’s Standard of Taste: The Real Problem” Levinson argues that even those who do not wish to emulate the true judges *should* pay heed to their joint verdict. He presents his argument in the following way:
The answer to this objection is simple. The objection underestimates the prima face reason for benefit to you that the convergent preference of ideal critics of your cultural temperamental sort provides. That convergent preference grounds much more than the mere possibility that you will be better off, offering something much closer to a reasonable likelihood. (...) What this brings out is the role that an assumption of shared human faculties plays in the argument, that it is rational to care what ideal critics of your cultural temperamental sort prefer, can be understood to have an implicit proviso, to the effect that you are not in fundamental respects cognitively or affectively different from such critics. But until you find out that you are, it remains rational to lend your ear and your mind to their counsels. ^24

The joint verdict of the true judges is relevant for the general public because even those who do not aspire to become true judges themselves can benefit from richer aesthetic experiences which can challenge our prejudices that limit our aesthetic sensibility. By “richer aesthetic experiences”, I mean aesthetic experiences which make a great impact on us and might change the way we view the world and the people in it. In contrast to these richer aesthetic experiences I will be referring to aesthetic experiences which do not challenge us in the same way as “impoverished aesthetic experiences”, because although they succeed in entertaining us, their content does not usually manage to challenge us and/or encourage us to think about our aesthetic experiences from a different point of view. These richer aesthetic experiences which the true judges are able to indicate could even teach the most aesthetically inexperienced person about what it is to be a person in the world. Therefore, one does not need to be a true judge (or aspire to become one) in order to be able to comprehend what an artwork might have to teach its beholder. For example: A member of the general public who

has never been to the opera might still be able to tell that his experience of Wagner's *The Valkyrie* differs from his previous aesthetic experiences. Although he might not be able to detect the same nuances as a true judge who also happens to be a dedicated Wagnerian. The said member of the general public would most likely be able to understand that something in his view of the world changed the moment the leitmotif started playing. In this case it does not matter if he wishes to emulate the true judges after the performance is over. What we deem to be truly fundamental is that by paying heed to the counsel of the true judges (and going to see *The Valkyrie*) the member of the general public has been given access to a richer aesthetic experience which has changed his view of what it is to be a person in the world.

Most of the sources we have hitherto discussed concern how the aesthetically inexperienced person who does not aspire to become a true judge can benefit from the joint verdict of the true judges which can indicate richer aesthetic experiences. We aim to propose ways in which an aesthetically experienced person can benefit from the joint verdict of the true judges. To illustrate our proposal, we will consider the case of the *kulturman* who is very cultivated but only reads works written by other men. The problem with the *kulturman* is not that he is unfamiliar with the *masterpieces* of the western literary canon. Instead, the issue lies in the fact that he thinks that definition of what works are considered to be *masterpieces* has not been updated since 1940. He has in other words completely missed that "the identification of *masterpieces* is defeasible". If he chooses to remain indifferent to the fact that works by

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women and other marginalized groups have been added to the literary canon after having passed the test of time, he will remain halvbildad.\textsuperscript{26} In which case he will be much worse off than the aesthetically inexperienced member of the general public. For unlike the aesthetically inexperienced member of the general public the kulturman has a problem admitting that there is something missing in his aesthetic education. While the aesthetically inexperienced member of the general public would be able to admit that he or she could benefit from the counsels of the true judges, the kulturman who does not manage to see that he is halvbildad is less likely to admit that he could benefit from the counsel of the true judges. When asked to expand his aesthetic horizons beyond the works of Strindberg, Lars von Trier and Wagner he may claim that he does not need to pay heed to the joint verdict of the true judges because he is already familiar with all the masterpieces worth knowing. However, if he paid heed to the joint verdict of the true judges he would understand that there are artworks outside of his immediate literary sphere which have stood the test of time. By letting a true judge explain to him why the poetry of Sappho is worth reading he will realize that his literary bildung is incomplete. Although it may at first hurt his ego, the insight will allow him to expand his literary horizons and reject the idea that an aesthetic education can be completed once and for all.

But what does the kulturman stand to gain by broadening his aesthetic horizons? Could it be argued that he has already acquired sufficient bildung by reading all the great classics written by dead white men? My answer to this objection is the following: Although it might seem as if the kulturman has already acquired a sufficient amount of bildung by believing that his aesthetic education begins and ends with the works of Strindberg ; he would greatly benefit from broadening his aesthetic horizons for two reasons. Firstly, if he does not expand his

\textsuperscript{26} Witt-Brattström, \textit{Idem.} Page 26.
aesthetic horizons he is likely to remain halvbildad, as opposed to becoming the truly cultivated man which he aspires to be. For as long as he sees his aesthetic education as something which can be completed once and for all, he cannot become the truly cultivated man which he aspires to be because he has not understood that his aesthetic education is infinitive and that there will always be things left for him to learn. Secondly, as long as the kulturman remains as he is, he can never hope to become a true judge. For in order to become a true judge he must learn to make competent aesthetic judgements about several different types of artworks without being influenced by his prejudices. As long as he thinks that the process of his aesthetic education is finite (as opposed to finite), he is most likely to make erroneous judgements about the works of women because he remains blinded by prejudice against anyone who is not a dead white man.

In sum, if the kulturman expands his aesthetic horizons beyond the works of other man he not only stands to gain a more complete aesthetic education which will most likely lead to him being able to form more competent aesthetic judgements. He will also be able to become the truly cultivated man which he aspires to be (maybe even a true judge) provided that his aesthetic judgements cease to be obscured by his own prejudices.

**Why We should pay attention to The Joint Verdict of The True Judges**

To resume: The joint verdict of the true judges is an indicator of the standard of art. It is not a strict definition per se of the standard of art, because the purpose of the joint verdict of the true judges is not to set a non-defeasible canon of masterpieces which can never be revised as time goes by. Instead the joint verdict of the true judges is supposed to indicate works which might be worthy of our time and interest. The masterpieces are deemed worthy of our time and interest because they can provide us with richer aesthetic experiences. Ultimately the
joint verdict of the true judges serves as a contribution to our never ending aesthetic education, because paying heed to it can make us discover richer aesthetic experience which may alter the way we view the world and the people in it. Furthermore, paying heed to the joint verdict of the true judges in our aesthetic education can help us when we are trying to form our own aesthetic judgements, because by paying attention to what the true judges have to say about an artwork, we might ourselves become better at detecting important features of artworks and be able to understand them in their art historical context. The joint verdict of the true judges is relevant to both the aesthetically inexperienced member of the general public and the already cultivated person who needs to expand their literary horizon beyond the works of Strindberg, Lars von Trier and Wagner. Since the joint verdict of the true judges is universally relevant we must conclude that investing time in our aesthetic education is important regardless of whether or not we aspire to emulate the true judges. From the moment when we take our aesthetic education seriously and consider paying heed to the joint verdict of the true judges we learn that we cannot limit ourselves to our narrow aesthetic preferences (whether it be Strindberg or Hollywood Blockbusters), because doing so encourages us to hold prejudices against a certain author or genre. If we hold on to our prejudices we are unable to make proper aesthetic judgements since one of Hume’s main criteria for forming a pertinent aesthetic judgement is that we set aside our prejudices.²⁷ I argue that one of the main advantages of Hume’s aesthetics is that while he acknowledges the subjective aspects of our aesthetic experiences and encourages us to take them seriously, he is aware of the fact that we need objective criterias for a relevant aesthetic judgement if we are going to be able to discuss our aesthetic experiences in a constructive way (as opposed to coming to the conclusion “let us agree to disagree”). Instead of denying that there is a

diversity of taste, Hume acknowledges it but empathizes that in order to be able to make a 
competent aesthetic judgement, we must set aside our prejudices and attend to the features of 
the artwork.

We do not mean to argue that we can be completely free from prejudices against certain 
authors or genres. However; if we aspire to form a pertinent aesthetic judgement concerning 
the aesthetic value of an artwork, we would at least need to set our prejudices aside when 
attempting to form a pertinent judgement about the said artwork. We might still hold 
prejudices against a certain author or genre but we cannot let them influence our evaluation 
of the aesthetic qualities of an artwork. Although it may seem tempting to “agree to disagree” 
in aesthetic arguments, doing so is a way of not taking the aesthetic seriously. While it is true 
that there might not be as much at stake as in moral disagreements (where lives could be at 
stake), it does not mean that we should not try to dig deeper into the aesthetic disagreements 
which we have with our friends, family, acquaintances and arch enemies. Because our 
aesthetic judgements can say a lot about who we are and/or who we aspire to be and might to 
a certain extent say something about our moral commitments. For example: It might be 
difficult for someone who sees their aesthetic education as infinitive to remain friends with 
someone who sees their aesthetic education as finitive (either because they think it starts and 
ends with Strindberg and/or because they do not take their aesthetic education seriously). 
The person who sees their aesthetic education as infinitive might think that the fact that her 
friend sees his aesthetic education as finitive shows that he lacks intellectual curiosity and 
that the aesthetic is not an important part of his life. This might make the person who sees her 
aesthetic education as infinitive inclined to believe that since he lacks aesthetic sensibility, he 
might as well lack moral sensibility. While I do not wish to argue that all people with a well 
developed aesthetic sensibility must automatically be in possession of a refined moral
sensibility. It seems that if a friend does not take the aesthetic seriously, it could indicate that we do not value the same things in life and that they therefore might not be worthy of our time.

Even if we do not aspire to emulate the true judges we ought to realize that setting aside our prejudices is an important part of our never ending aesthetic education. For if we do not make an effort to set aside our prejudices we cannot expand our aesthetic horizons. If we cannot expand our aesthetic horizons we will at length be reduced to aesthetic experiences which do not challenge our preconceived notions of what it is to be a person in the world. We need to pay heed to the joint verdict of the true judges because they might be able to indicate masterpieces which can challenge our preconceived notions of what it is to be a person in the world. The joint verdict of the true judges is especially important since we are not always able to find these masterpieces due to us being (at least temporarily) blinded by prejudice.

Chapter 3

**The Issue of Potential Disagreement among The True Judges**

The standard of art is defined by the joint verdict of the true judges. However, it is ambiguous to which extent the true judges need to agree among themselves in order to establish the standard of art. Do the true judges need to come to a *full scale unanimous joint verdict* in order to establish a standard of art? Or is the process of establishing the standard of art compatible with a certain kind of disagreement among the true judges? In “Hume and the Joint Verdict of the True Judges” Shelley discusses Budd and Kieran's objections to the uniformity of the joint verdict of the true judges in the following way:
Despite of the influence it now enjoys, there is one element of Hume’s account which has not aged well, and it is a crucial one. The twenty-first-century reader is apt to approach Hume's eighteenth-century text with a comparatively heightened and awareness of the extent and philosophical relevance of human diversity. To her or to him, Humes expectation that the tastes of the true judges will converge is apt to seem naïve. Malcom Budd speaks for many when he locates the "principal weakness" of Hume's account in Hume's "blithe optimism about the uniformity of response of his true judges of artistic value". According to Budd, "there will not be a (single) standard of taste unless, for any particular work of art, (true judges) respond in a uniform manner (…)" (…)

Indeed, what they are arguing for, in the passages above, is not that the true judges may on occasion disagree. They think that requires no argument. Instead, they are arguing that the degree of blameless disagreement that survives our endeavours to fix a standard of taste – and of greater consequence – than Hume allows. They are arguing in particular, that there is nothing in Hume's characterization of true judges to contain such disagreement within the limits Hume concedes.  

As stated by Shelley, Budd and Kieran’s objection does not concern whether or not the true judges will on occasion disagree. Instead, Budd and Kieran argue that there cannot be a standard of taste unless the judges continuously respond in a uniform manner to artworks. Furthermore, they argue that since there is nothing in Hume’s characterization of the true judges which allows them to disagree (blamelessly or not) without calling the standard of art into question. Since it is the aim of this dissertation to find a way to account for the diversity

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of taste without compromising the standard of art, I find it highly relevant to examine whether or not Hume’s characterization of the true judges leaves room for the true judges to disagree without calling the standard of art into question. Furthermore, if it is so that Hume’s characterization of the true judges leaves room for disagreement among them which does not call the standard of art into question, I find it necessary to enquire into what kind of disagreement the true judges may have among them without calling the standard of art into question.

The main issue with Budd and Kieran’s objection is that they do not seem to have investigated further into what kind of disagreement among the true judges might call the standard of art into question. While I agree with Budd and Kieran that it is impossible for the true judges to agree on every single work of art which is presented for them. Their reasoning, according to which disagreement of any kind among the true judges calls the standard of art into question - might be a bit too radical. For, Budd and Kieran's objection supposes that in order to uphold the standard of art, the true judges must come to a full scale unanimous joint verdict. However, since the true judges will (according to Budd and Kieran) inevitably have more than blameless differences regarding their response to a particular art work, it seems as if the standard of art cannot be upheld. We argue that Budd and Kieran's objection toward "the blithe optimism about the uniformity of response of his true judges of artistic value" is not particularly concerned with whether or not the true judges occasionally disagree in sentiment. For as Shelley remarks "what they are arguing for in the passages above, is not that the true judges may on occasion disagree". Instead, we argue that the main concern of their objection is that the so-called blameless differences of taste among the true judges, are not at all particularly blameless since they may influence the true judge's ability to form a joint verdict. If these differences of taste among the true judges prevent the true judges from
forming a joint verdict, there can be no standard of art, since it is defined by the joint verdict of the true judges. Furthermore, Budd and Kieran argue that "there is nothing in Hume's characterization of true judges", which would make them able to form a joint verdict since the true judges do not only disagree in sentiment, but also in judgement. If their objection proves to be justified, we would have to conclude that Hume's standard of art cannot function, since it seems to collapse to moment we take into account "the philosophical relevance of human diversity". Furthermore, we would have to conclude that while Hume's standard of art might have been a fitting model for 18th century critics and aesthetes, it cannot be of much use for contemporary critics and aesthetes because they possess a greater awareness of human diversity. If we adopt Budd and Kieran's argument, we would have to conclude that the only way to uphold the standard of art would be leave no room for disagreement among the true judges, whether it be in sentiment or in judgement. However, since it does not seem possible to do so without disregarding the relevance of human diversity, it seems as if we would have to conclude that Hume's standard of art is blithely optimistic about the uniformity of response among the true judges.

Yet, if we adopt Budd and Kieran's objection, we find ourselves obliged to return to the particular kind of aesthetic relativism which would have the standard of art submitting itself to the diversity of taste. For if the true judges cannot come to a full scale unanimous joint verdict due to disagreements in sentiment among the true judges leading to disagreements in judgement, we cannot uphold the standard of art. Furthermore, we doubt that the true judges disagreeing in sentiment would necessarily lead to them disagreeing in judgement. However, it does not seem apt to conclude that if we are to defend the standard of art against Budd and

Kieran's objections, we would have to argue that the joint verdict of the true judges must be a full scale unanimous verdict, which leaves no room for differences of taste among the true judges. Therefore, we need to enquire if there is another way to defend the standard of art against Budd and Kieran's objection. Does a disagreement in sentiment among the true judges necessarily lead to a disagreement in judgement? Is it possible to maintain the idea of a full scale unanimous verdict among the true judges if we accept the idea of there being disagreements in sentiment but not necessarily in judgement? If so, does the idea of a full scale unanimous joint verdict of the true judges still seem possible? Or does the idea of the full scale unanimous joint verdict need to be nuanced?

In sum: Although I commend Budd and Kieran’s effort to raise the issue of how a potential disagreement among the true judges might affect the standard of art; it might be too hasty of a conclusion that there is no possibility for the the judges to disagree without calling the standard of art into question. For, I argue that if we adopt Budd and Kieran’s argument that Hume’s characterization of the true judges leaves no room for disagreement which does not call the standard of art into question; we might end up adopting the type of aesthetic relativism which would have the standard of art modeling itself after the diversity of taste. Since the standard of art is defined by the joint verdict of the true judges it lies in our interest to conduct further investigations into the ways in which the true judges may disagree without calling the standard of art into question.

**Disagreeing in Sentiment Versus Disagreeing in Judgement**

After having raised Budd and Kieran's objection against the uniformity of response among the true judges, Shelley enquires whether or not the true judges can disagree in sentiment
without disagreeing in *judgement*. The said enquiry is followed by a larger discussion of the point of view which the true judges would need to adopt in order to be able to disagree in *sentiment* without necessarily disagreeing in *judgement*. Shelley also replies to Budd and Kieran's objection that "there is nothing in Hume’s characterization of true judges" which would allow them to disagree in *sentiment* without necessarily disagreeing in *judgement*.

Suppose I am granted that Hume may be read as conceding merely that true judges will sometimes differ in sentiment and not that they will sometimes disagree in judgement. This will leave undisturbed the larger claim that there is nothing in the requirements Hume imposes on true judges to prevent their disagreeing and indeed disagreeing enough to havoc the boundaries of beauty and deformity. But the forgoing ought to have foregrounded a way to disturb this larger claim. The question whether it is a requirement of true judges that they do not disagree has become the question whether it is a requirement of true judges that they do not judge from the peculiar point of view, but only from the general, and I take the answer to this latter question to be clear. The requirement that the true judges be unprejudiced, as I understand it, just is the requirement that they judge only from the general point of view (…).  

Shelley argues that the underlying issue regarding whether the true judges may disagree in *sentiment* without disagreeing in *judgement*, is whether or not the true judges should judge from the peculiar or the general point of view. If we consider the issue of disagreement among the true judges as a problem of basing aesthetic evaluations on peculiar or general points of view, we argue that it there is indeed something in Hume’s characterization of the

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true judges which leaves room for disagreement among the true judges without endangering
the standard of art. In *On the Standard of Taste* Hume argues that the true judges must
possess a "strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by
comparison, and cleared of all prejudice (...)".\textsuperscript{33} With this in mind, we will examine how the
requirement that the judges be "cleared of all prejudice", can provide us with new insights
concerning the joint verdict of the true judges. My previous discussion of the idea that the
true judges must be "cleared of all prejudice" has mainly been centred around how the true
judges (and those who aspire to emulate them), must set aside their own narrow aesthetic
preferences in order to have a richer aesthetic education and succeed in their evaluation of the
aesthetic qualities of an artwork.\textsuperscript{33} However, in this chapter we will discuss the requirement
that the true judges should be "cleared of all prejudice" as the requirement that the true judges
only judge from "the general point of view".\textsuperscript{34} Since there is nothing in Hume's
classification of the true judges which would encourage them to adopt their peculiar point
of view when judging an artwork, I find it fitting to conclude that they must at all times adopt
"the general point of view" when judging an artwork. Yet, there is nothing in Hume's
classification of the true judges which disenables them to keep their idiosyncratic
inclinations to themselves. Although Hume's true judges are required to *judge* from "the
general point of view", there is nothing to prevent them from keeping their personal
preferences in *sentiment*. Therefore, we argue that the true judges may very well disagree in
*sentiment* without necessarily ending up disagreeing in *judgement*, because they are required
to set aside their personal preferences and judge the artworks they come across from "the
general point of view".\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{33} Cf. Chapter 2, 1.3.
\textsuperscript{34} Shelley, *Idem*. Page 147.
Yet, if we accept the idea that the true judges may disagree in sentiment without disagreeing in judgement, we will have to consider whether it is still possible to argue in favour of a full scale unanimous verdict among the true judges. For although we concede that the true judges can only judge from "the general point of view", we might argue that the true judges cannot come to a full scale unanimous verdict, unless they agree both in sentiment and in judgement. This view supposes that the full scale unanimous joint verdict of the true judges can only be established when the true judges agree both in sentiment and in judgement. If we adopt this view, we could argue that although the disagreement in sentiment among the true judges does not necessarily lead to a disagreement in judgement, we cannot talk of a full scale unanimous joint verdict unless there is an agreement in sentiment and in judgement. However, adopting this view would not necessarily imply denying the possibility of upholding the standard of art. For the said view supposes that the true judges can come to a joint verdict in judgement although they cannot reach a full scale unanimous verdict since they do not always agree in sentiment.

Having said that, we find the requirement that the true judges can only reach a full scale unanimous verdict by agreeing both in sentiment and in judgement, to rely on an overestimation of the importance of each individual true judge's peculiar point of view in relation to their evaluation of artworks. When considering the joint verdict of the true judges, we only consider their judgements from "the general point of view" as relevant for their aesthetic evaluation of an artwork. We usually do not consider the true judges idiosyncratic inclinations as relevant for their aesthetic evaluation of an artwork, because they seldom have anything to do with the aesthetic qualities of an artwork. For example; if two true judges come to the conclusion that Puccini's Tosca is a masterpiece which has stood the test of time, we will only consider their agreement in judgement as relevant for their joint verdict. It might
be the case that one of the true judges disagrees in sentiment because he or she is French and therefore finds French composers to be superior to Italian composers. However, this is an idiosyncratic inclination which the said true judge cannot take into account when forming an aesthetic judgement, because it would mean he or she has judged Tosca from a peculiar point of view which essentially has nothing to do with the aesthetic qualities of Puccini's opera. It is the duty of the true judge to adopt "the general point of view" when evaluating an artwork, for if the true judge's idiosyncratic inclinations are given too much consideration, it would "havoc the boundaries of beauty and deformity" and consequently destroy any attempt to uphold the standard of art. Therefore, we argue that the true judges only need to agree in judgement in order for them to be able to form a full scale unanimous verdict.

**Durà-Vilà’s Challenge to Shelley**

In “Sloley on Hume's Standard of Taste and the Impossibility of Sound Disagreement among the Ideal Critics” Durà-Vilà presents an extensive critique of Shelley's defence of the possibility of sound disagreement among the true judges (i.e. disagreement may occur in sentiment but not necessarily in judgement). Furthermore, he challenges the non-hedonic account of artistic value which Shelley uses in order to make sense of how the true judges may disagree in sentiment without necessarily disagreeing in judgement. Durà-Vilà argues that hedonic account of artistic value may be a better option for understanding Hume and that it is possible that the true judges may have implicit characteristics, which would make it difficult to argue in favour of a non-hedonic account of artistic value. We argue that the

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36 Durà-Vilà, *Shelley on Hume's Standard of Taste and the Impossibility of Sound Disagreement among the Ideal Critics*. The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 73, Page 343. "At the center of Shelley's strategy there is a non-hedonic account of artistic value, that is to say, the excising of pleasure from the justification of the value that Hume places on beauty. According to Shelley, while we track beauty and artistic value through pleasure, we do not care about beautiful or artistically satisfying objects because of the pleasure they afford us".
underlying issue of whether or not to adopt a hedonic or a non-hedonic account of artistic value when trying to understand Hume, is related to our previous discussion regarding whether or not the true judges should adopt a general or a peculiar point of view when attempting to form a joint verdict.\textsuperscript{37} If we adopt Durà-Vilà's hedonic account of artistic value, we would be obliged to concede that the true judges may adopt a peculiar point of view when attempting to form a joint verdict. Furthermore, we would have to concede that the chances of a sound disagreement among the true judges seem rather meagre (I use “sound disagreement” among the true judges in reference to disagreements among the true judges which do not call the standard as such of art into question). Especially, if we consider the proposal that the true judges may have \textit{implicit characteristics}, which could possibly make it difficult to argue in favour of a non-hedonic account of artistic value. Yet, we find it necessary to examine Durà-Vilà's proposal in greater detail before drawing any further conclusions:

First and foremost, while it is beyond the scope of this article to enter the debate between those who favour a hedonic account of artistic value and those who favour (as Shelley does) an alternative, there is no doubt that the hedonic option will appeal to many and can marshal several powerful arguments in its favour. Moreover, robust objections can be put forward against every other position developed by Shelley's defence of Hume from Budd. For instance, rather than postulating that Hume would admit nonanthropocentric ideal critics, it seems a certainly plausible (and possibly a much more natural) reading of Hume that he thought of having sentiments expressive

\textsuperscript{37} Durà-Vilà, \textit{Idem}, Page 345.
of human nature as an implicit characteristic of his ideal critics, too obvious to need stating.  

We argue that the idea of the true judges having "sentiments expressive of human nature as an implicit characteristic", is closely linked to the "hedonic option" which Durà-Vilà adopts. By “hedonic” we mean an aesthetic framework which argues that we care mainly care about the beauty in artworks because of the pleasure they afford us. Thus, implying that the true judges judge artworks from a particular instead of a general point of view and limiting our capacity of forming aesthetic judgements to our pleasure centered idiosyncratic inclinations. For if we were to adopt a hedonic account of artistic value when reading Hume, we would have to argue that the true judges care about beautiful or artistically satisfying objects because of the pleasure it affords them (as opposed to Shelley's non-hedonic account according to which we track beauty and artistic value through pleasure but do not care about beauty and artistic value because of the pleasure it affords us). If it is the case that the true judges care about beauty and artistic value because of the pleasure it affords them, it would seem plausible that disagreement beyond the so called blameless differences of taste is likely to occur. For, if the true judges care about beauty and artistic value because of the pleasure it affords them, their aesthetic judgements would be biased since they would consider their peculiar point of view instead of adopting the general point of view, when evaluating an artwork. Because, if they care about beauty because of the pleasure it affords them, they are more likely to let their aesthetic judgements be influenced by their own idiosyncratic inclinations. Contrary to true judges who adopt a non-hedonic account of beauty and artistic value, someone who cares about art because of the pleasure it affords them is more likely to

38 Durà-Vilà, Idem, Page 344.
39 Durà-Vilà, Idem, Page 343.
let their aesthetic judgements be misguided by their own prejudices, because their immediate aesthetic pleasure is the only thing that matters. However, I argue that if we adopt a non-hedonic account of artistic value, we are more likely not to let our aesthetic judgements be guided by our prejudices. For, instead of considering whether or not an artwork appeals to our immediate aesthetic pleasure, we are more likely to take into account things such as if the artwork has a cultural significance, how it compares to other works in the same category etc, regardless if the artwork gives us an immediate aesthetic pleasure.

Consequently, if we adopt a hedonic account of beauty and artistic value, we would have to accept the idea that the true judge's aesthetic judgements are biased and that disagreement beyond the blameless differences of taste will occur. A hedonic account of beauty and artistic value would encourage the true judges to adopt the peculiar point of view when evaluating an artwork and thus making it near impossible for them to come to a full scale unanimous verdict formed from the general point of view.

However, we find Durà-Vilà's hedonic account of Hume's aesthetics to be deeply problematic for the following reason: While it is true that Hume has an empirical account of beauty and artistic value (i.e. That beauty and artistic value are not things in themselves/ determined a priori), we do not find it appropriate to equate an empirical account of beauty and artistic value with a hedonic account of beauty and artistic value. We argue that if Hume had a hedonic account of beauty and artistic value, he would not spend so much time stressing that some aesthetic judgements are more relevant than others. For if we suppose that we care about beautiful and artistically stimulating works of art because of the pleasure they afford us, we would have to draw the conclusion that we cannot say that some aesthetic judgements

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are more relevant than others, since we cannot talk of idiosyncratic aesthetic inclinations in
terms of accurate or inaccurate. Yet, anyone who has read *On the Standard of Taste*
attentively, will acknowledge that Hume does not consider aesthetic judgements to be a
simple matter of idiosyncratic inclinations. Although, it is true that he does consider it highly
relevant to discuss *bodily taste* in terms of accurate or inaccurate, it seems as if he considers
that we can discuss judgements of *mental taste* in terms of accurate or inaccurate. 41 In “
When True Judges Differ: Reply to Durà-Vilà ” Shelley answers Durà-Vilà's challenge by
defending his non-hedonic understanding of Hume's aesthetics and clarifying how the true
judges can disagree in *sentiment* without disagreeing in *judgement*. Firstly, Shelley argues
that while no characteristic of the true judges completely eradicates disagreement in
*sentiment*, the requirement that the true judges form their aesthetic judgements without
prejudice rules out disagreement in *judgement*, because it requires that they adopt the general
point of view when evaluating an artwork. 42 Following his defence of the true judges always
adopting the general point of view when evaluating artworks (which enables them to disagree
in *sentiment* without necessarily disagreeing in *judgement*), he belies Durà-Vilà's argument
that Hume holds a hedonic account of beauty and artistic value. Shelley argues that while it is
true that "we approve of the beautiful" by taking pleasure in it, we do not approve of the
beautiful because we take pleasure in it.42

41 Cf. Chapter 1, 1.1 where we discuss the difference between mental taste an bodily taste as presented in *On the
Standard of Taste* in greater detail.
42 Shelley, *When True Judges Differ: Reply to Durà-Vilà*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 73,
Page 346.
"What I concede is that the true judges may differ in their preferences (or responses or sentiments), and that in
some cases in which they may, there is a sense which the preferences of some are better than the preferences of
others. But, as I argue in my article, that true judges differ in their preferences does not imply that they
disagree in their judgements. Wheras no characteristic of true judges rules out difference in preference, lack of
prejudice rules out disagreement in judgement, since lacking prejudice requires only judging from "the general
point of view", which is the point of view from which objects appear the same to all".
However, Shelley's defence of a non-hedonic understanding of Hume's aesthetic raises the following problem: If we accept the idea that we do not care about beauty and artistic value because of the pleasure they afford us, we would have to examine what makes us care about beauty and artistic value. Is it possible that we feel a certain kind of pleasure when appreciating artworks, which has nothing to do with the kind of pleasure associated with a hedonic account of beauty and artistic value? For although Shelley concedes that "we approve of the beautiful" by taking pleasure in it, we find it necessary to clarify what kind of pleasure it is we take when approving of the beautiful. We find that these questions clearly illustrate the limits of Hume's aesthetics: For although he argues that we approve of beauty and artistic value by taking pleasure in them (although we do not approve of them because we take pleasure in them), he never offers an alternative explanation as to why we care about beauty and artistic value.

To resume: A non-hedonic account of beauty and artistic value seems more coherent with Hume's overall aesthetics, especially in relation to the joint verdict of the true judges, which must pay heed to the general point of view and not be too influenced by the true judges idiosyncratic inclinations. While it is true that Hume has an empirical account of beauty and artistic value (i.e. That beauty and artistic value are not things in themselves/ determined a priori), we do not find it appropriate to equate an empirical account of beauty and artistic value with a hedonic account of beauty and artistic value. However, although we find a non-hedonic account of beauty and artistic value to be more coherent with Hume’s overall aesthetics; the non-hedonic account of beauty and artistic value remains problematic in the sense that it does not explain why we care about beauty and artistic value.

**A Non-Hedonic Justification for Beauty and Artistic Value**
I argue that in order to be able to defend a non-hedonic account of beauty and artistic value, it is necessary to find an alternative explanation as to why we are about beauty and artistic value. For, as long as a non-hedonic account cannot offer a more precise explanation as to why we care about beauty and artistic value, a hedonic account of beauty and artistic value will seem more tempting because it attempts to define why we care about beauty and artistic value. As opposed the non-hedonic account which mainly focuses on why / how we do not care about beauty and artistic value. Furthermore, if we cannot find an alternative explanation as to why we care about beauty and artistic value, we are more likely to regard these things as a mean for our pleasure (as opposed to regarding them as intrinsically valuable). I argue that regarding beauty and artistic value as means for our pleasure is one way in which we may encourage aesthetic relativism, because it encourages us to judge artworks from the particular point of view instead of the general point of view.

I argue that one possible answer as to why we care about beauty and artistic value, while maintaining a non hedonic account, can be found in Kant’s Critique of Judgement. Although both Hume and Kant reject the idea that beauty is a quality in the things themselves, there are several differences between their overall aesthetic frameworks which need to be addressed, before delving into why Kant’s aesthetics may explain why we care about beauty and artistic value (without reducing the said things to means for our pleasure). Firstly: While Hume places taste at the foundation of his ethics, Kant considers taste to be entirely aesthetic. Thus separated from moral considerations. Although Kant implies that an inclination to appreciate the sublime is beneficial to our ability to appreciate the moral law, he considers the categorical imperatives (as opposed to taste) to be the foundation of morality.  

Furthermore, while Hume mainly aims to find a standard of decision when it comes to aesthetic disputes, by finding a way to simultaneously justify the existence of the standard of art and the diversity of taste. The main objective of Kant’s aesthetics is to find the conditions of possibility for aesthetics judgements, which makes me more inclined to believe that one possible answer as to why we care about beauty and artistic value can be found in Kant’s corpus.

While Hume argues that we take pleasure in the beautiful, although we do not care about the beautiful because of the pleasure it affords us, his philosophical framework does not offer an alternative explanation as to why we care about beauty. We aim to propose an alternative explanation by using Kant's distinction between the beautiful and the pleasant, to argue that we care about beauty and artistic value because of the disinterested pleasure they afford us. The disinterested pleasure is different from the pleasure bound up with interest in the sense that the object itself does not provide us with any immediate satisfaction. We find that this helps us understand that we can take pleasure in beauty and artistic value, without drawing the conclusion that we care about the said things, because of the pleasure they afford us.

In the Critique of Judgement Kant explains how the pleasure which we experience when approving of the beautiful differs from the pleasure we feel when experiencing the pleasant (which we argue would be closer to the kind of pleasure which we associate with a hedonic account of beauty and artistic value).

We wish only to know if this mere representation of the object is accompanied in me with satisfaction, however indifferent I may be as regards the existence of the object of this representation. We easily see that in saying it is beautiful and in showing that I have taste, I am concerned, not with that in which I depend on the existence of the
object, but with that which I make out of this representation in myself. Everyone must admit that a judgement about beauty, in which the least interest mingles, is very partial and is not a pure judgement of taste. We must not be in the least prejudiced in favour of the existence of the things, but be quite indifferent in this respect, to play the judge in things of taste. (…) We cannot, however, better elucidate this proposition, which is of capital importance, then by contrasting the pure disinterested satisfaction in judgements of taste, with that which is bound up with an interest, especially if we can at the same time be certain that there are no other kinds of interest than those which are now to be specified.  

We argue that Kant's distinction between the pleasant and the beautiful offers a plausible explanation as to why we care about beauty and artistic value. For if it is "the mere representation of the object" which makes us approve of the beautiful, it means that we experience a disinterested pleasure, which makes us disregard "the existence of the object of this representation" (i.e. whether or not the said object is useful to us).  

Thus, we would be able to argue that we care about beauty and artistic value because of the disinterested pleasure they afford us. This disinterested pleasure is unique to our appreciation of beauty and artistic value because the pleasure we take in it only concerns the mere representation of the object and the free play of the faculties (imagination and understanding). This does not entail that we are indifferent to the artwork which caused us to engage in the free play of the faculties, however we are not concerned with the existence or the utility of the object. We may for example admire the beauty of Fragonard's The Swing although the scene it depicts is

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most likely fictional and we seem to be able to admire the said painting despite its lack of practical value. Therefore, our admiration for *The Swing* concerns the representation of the painting, disregarding the fictional nature of the depicted scene (existence of the object being represented) and the artworks lack of practical value. Furthermore, the *disinterested* pleasure indicates that we do not care about beauty and artistic value *because of* the pleasure they afford us. If it were the case, we would be concerned with the existence of the object being represented instead of the representation itself which ignites the free play of the faculties.

**Disinterested Beauty and Brief Remarks on Aesthetic Respect**

Let us recapitulate: We agree with Shelley that the true judges only need to agree in *judgement* to be able to form a full scale unanimous verdict and that it seems more fitting to argue that Hume holds a non-hedonic account of beauty and artistic value. For, if he held a hedonic account of beauty and artistic value, it would mean that he would encourage the true judges to form their aesthetic judgements from a peculiar point of view, instead of adopting the general point of view when evaluating an artwork. The requirement that the true judges adopt the general point of view when evaluating the aesthetic qualities of an artwork, is the same as the requirement that the true judges rid themselves of their prejudices when exercising their profession. While the true judges are required to adopt the general point of view when *judging* they do not need to adopt the general point of view in *sentiment*. This means that there is room for disagreement among the true judges in the sense that they may keep their idiosyncratic inclinations to themselves, as long it does not influence their judgement of the aesthetic qualities of an artwork.

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47 Unless one intends to rob The Wallace Collection where it is being exhibited and make a fortune from selling it.

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However, although we conjoin Shelley's non-hedonic reading of *On the Standard of Taste*, we found it necessary to concede the limits of Hume's ideas on the pleasure we take in beauty and artistic value. For while Hume argues that we take pleasure in the beautiful, although we do not care about the beautiful because of the pleasure it affords us, his philosophical framework does not offer an alternative explanation as to why we care about beauty. We proposed an alternative explanation by using Kant's distinction between the beautiful and the pleasant, to argue that we care about beauty and artistic value because of the *disinterested* pleasure they afford us. The *disinterested* pleasure is different from the pleasure bound up with interest in the sense that the object itself does not provide us with any immediate satisfaction. We find that this helps us understand that we can take pleasure in beauty and artistic value, without drawing the conclusion that we care about the said things, because of the pleasure they afford us. Instead, the contemplation of the beautiful and the free play of faculties, are enough for us to care about beauty and artistic value. While these things afford us pleasure, they are not just means to an end (in this case to provide us with pleasure), because they have an intrinsic value which commands a certain kind of *aesthetic respect*. By conceding that a work of art is beautiful and/or has artistic value, we admit that the work is worthy of our *aesthetic respect* and therefore has an intrinsic value which is not immediately tied to our quest for pleasure and instant gratification.

Concluding remarks
If my reasoning is sound, I may conclude that Hume's *On the Standard of Taste* can provide us with useful criteria for how to know if our aesthetic judgements are pertinent. To know if our aesthetic judgement is pertinent: We need to ask ourselves if we have set aside our prejudices concerning the artwork, if we are exercising our aesthetic sensibility and if we
have sufficient experience of artworks from the same genre (for us to be able compare it with artworks in the same genre).

While Hume acknowledges the existence of a diversity of taste, he also concedes that it does not rule out the possibility for the true judges to form a full scale unanimous joint verdict (thus establishing the standard of art). For, the idea that the standard of art would be threatened by the true judge's idiosyncratic inclinations, relies on a misunderstanding of the full scale unanimous verdict. To establish the standard of art, the true judges are only required to agree in judgement. This does not rule out the possibility that the true judges may differ in sentiment. The true judge's idiosyncratic inclinations are not relevant for the joint verdict of the true judges, for the said joint verdict must be made from the general point of view which requires that the true judges set aside their preferences and prejudices.

I argue that these criteria could be particularly helpful when navigating criticism in a digitalized age. The internet has democratized criticism to the extent that anyone can write a review about the latest exhibition they visited, hence criticism is no longer reserved for trained journalists who are hired by a newspaper. Therefore, I argue that the said democratization has made it more important than ever to have solid criteria, for how to know if the aesthetic judgements we come across every day are pertinent or not. I find that Hume's model of criticism could help shift the focus of contemporary criticism which tends to talk more about the artist than the artwork itself. For Hume's model of criticism focuses on the aesthetic qualities of the artwork, instead of retrieving information about the artwork from the creative process and/or life of the artist. While it is true that the creative process behind the work and/or the life of the artist can be partially relevant to our understanding of an artwork. I argue that focusing too much on the ideas behind the work and/or life of the artist, makes it
difficult to conduct evaluative criticism because they provide us with too vague success conditions. Although it could be argued that criticism which focuses on the creative process behind a work could evaluate how well the artist realized his or her intentions. This type of criticism does not provide us with as clear success conditions as Hume’s aesthetics, because criticism which is centered around the artists idea rather than the physical artwork runs the risk of ending up evaluating the artist instead of his or her work.

Furthermore, I argue that Hume’s aesthetic more relevant than ever in our digitalized age, because in addition to providing success conditions for the artist which the critic can bear in mind when writing his or her review. In addition, Hume’s aesthetics provides the critics with success conditions, which are equally relevant for the true judges and members of the general public who are trying to figure out if criticism which they come across online is indeed relevant and well formulated. For I argue that Hume’s criteria for the true judges (aesthetic sensibility refined by practice, lack of prejudice and identifying masterpieces which can stand the test of time), can to a certain extent be used to identify relevant criticism in a digital jungle.

For example: Since we are overwhelmed with access to criticism through social media it might be worth asking ourselves the following questions when reading a review of an exhibition. Is the author of the article really conducting an aesthetic evaluation of the exhibition or is he or she unable to do so due to prejudice against the artist(s) and/ or the genre? Does the author have sufficient experience of works within the same genre or could it be that the author lacks experience of the genre and is therefore unable to make a competent aesthetic judgement? I argue that since Hume sets such clear criteria for ideal critics, his aesthetics are more relevant than ever in a time where we have more access to information
than ever, but may lack means to process the surplus of information and sort the relevant
aesthetic criticism from criticism which might not at all be aesthetic since it is more
concerned with the life of the author rather than providing the general public with an
interpretative aesthetic framework through which it can become more confident (and well
informed) when approaching artworks.

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