

Part 5

You are going to read a review of a recent book. For questions 31–36, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text. Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

Joanna Knight reviews Roger Scruton's book 'Beauty'

Roger Scruton's new book 'Beauty' is a lucid and often graceful compendium of his reflections. He discusses beauty in nature and art, and above all in buildings. Even in an artistic paradise like the city of Venice, Scruton's attention moves quickly from the heroic buildings on the waterfronts to the 'modest neighbours' that surround them. 'Ravishing beauties,' he says, 'are less important in the aesthetics of architecture than those that create a soothing context, a continuous narrative as in a street or a square, where nothing stands out in particular.'

Beauty may have its roots in sensuous enjoyment, but even at its humblest it appeals to something larger: a willingness to consider, compare and arrive at a judgement. The 'judgement of taste', as the philosopher Immanuel Kant called it, spans two worlds: a private world of individual subjectivity, as idiosyncratic as you please, and a public world where you defend and develop your tastes through conscientious discussion – where you try to reason me out of wearing a yellow shirt, for instance, and I try to persuade you to get rid of the Carmen ringtone on your phone.

Scruton explores beauty in its various forms, starting with nature. He maintains, for instance, that the beauty of unspoilt wilderness depends on an evident absence of any fixed centre, a lack of prescribed edges. The beauty of birds, animals and flowers, on the other hand, is rooted in their existence as self-defining entities with boundaries of their own. And the special beauty of the human body belongs not to a mere assemblage of body parts but to the personality that finds expression in it. All this beauty gives you, as Scruton puts it, a sense that 'a world that makes room for such things makes room for you.'

Gardens are different again. They are places where wild nature has been disciplined, more or less sympathetically, into artificial forms. Their beauty is not that of infinite landscapes but of bounded spaces that surround us, rather like architectural interiors; and they enable Scruton to move smoothly from considering natural beauty to the far more contentious terrain of high art. Scruton can be as perceptive about sculpture, painting and classical music as about the varieties of natural beauty, but inevitably he is more controversial.

It is curious to observe how Scruton's feelings lead him to transgress his own standards of courtesy and decorum, and indeed of accurate and well-tuned prose. And you do not have to be a complete punk to suspect that the cause of his anguish may lie within him, and particularly in his premise that there is an unbroken continuum between the beauties of nature and works of art. Any attempt to cover the entire spectrum of reasonable pleasure with a single concept of beauty is bound, after all, to be quite a stretch.

Take the literary arts. Scruton is conspicuously vague when he invokes the concept of 'beautiful novels', and he sounds distinctly uneasy when describing story and dialogue as 'sensory features' of fiction, as if they could appeal to the same aesthetic sense as glorious sunsets. Yet, in the case of literature, beauty is only half the story, and this applies to other art forms too. In a revealing passage, Scruton confesses to a general dislike for cinema as an art form, but he makes one exception: you could take a still from any film by Ingmar Bergman, he says, frame it and hang it on your wall, and it would hold its own there like a picture. That may or may not be true; but single, silent images, however beautiful, are hardly a promising basis for understanding cinematic techniques or judging how they may have extended the ancient arts of storytelling.

Scruton sometimes reminds me of R G Collingwood, one of the most gifted philosophers of the 20th century, with a marvellous sense of history and, apart from a weakness for irritable sarcasm, a wonderful way with words. Like Scruton, he worked out his philosophical ideas in constant engagement with the arts. Unlike him, though, he was aware that there is more to art than beauty. In his autobiography, he described how he came to realise that works of art, however beautiful, will fail if they are unreal or imperceptive; and that works that disappoint lovers of beauty may still articulate issues about the world. If a work does not achieve beauty, it may still bear witness to truth.

- 31 In describing the buildings of Venice, Scruton reveals his belief that
- A they are less beautiful than some architects claim.
 - B some of the streets lack anything of aesthetic value.
 - C a harmonious whole is crucial in architecture.
 - D beauty can be oppressive if it is overdone.
- 32 What point is being made in the third paragraph?
- A None of us should feel excluded from notions of beauty.
 - B Physical beauty is no indication of character.
 - C Observing wild creatures gives us a true sense of what beauty is.
 - D Landscape is only beautiful if nothing man-made is visible.
- 33 The reviewer thinks Scruton's discussion of gardens
- A provides an opportunity for him to condemn artificiality.
 - B allows him to emphasise the importance of discipline.
 - C acts as a link between two different aspects of the broader topic.
 - D balances the previous section on wild nature.
- 34 How can the reviewer's argument in the sixth paragraph best be summarised?
- A Including a section on works of art was a mistake.
 - B The assumption about beauty underlying the book is flawed.
 - C Scruton had difficulty fitting all his conflicting ideas on beauty into the book.
 - D Scruton's normal writing style is inappropriate for a book of this type.
- 35 What is the reviewer's opinion of Scruton's section on the cinema?
- A The idea of displaying a still from a film is imaginative.
 - B His coverage of film as an art form is inadequate.
 - C He is right to concentrate on the beauty of Bergman's films.
 - D Describing film as an extension of story-telling is exaggerated.
- 36 In the final paragraph, why does the reviewer refer to R G Collingwood?
- A to suggest that Scruton was not sufficiently involved in the arts
 - B to point out the importance of taking history into account
 - C to indicate how Scruton should have widened his view of art
 - D to compare the two writers' fondness for sarcasm