The Writings of Walter Sickert and the "New Art Criticism"



Caricature of Walter Sickert by Whistler 1885

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Short Abstract

This thesis looks at the writing and the painting of Walter Sickert and in particular at his part in the critical debate in art at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Falling between the period in which Ruskin's theories of art had been influential on the work of contemporary painters and the advent of the Modernist orthodoxy heralded by the writing of Roger Fry and Clive Bell, this period was viewed with extreme pessimism by many of the art critics of the day. The younger generation of English painters was looking towards France for its ideas, and an examination of the New Art Criticism reveals the influence of French art criticism. Sickert's earliest art criticism is largely unknown but examined here, in the context of the other New Critics, it reveals the full extent of his understanding of French art and the significance he attached to the subject matter of paintings. It also helps to explain why he later found the theories of Fry and Bell so noxious. By examining Sickert's earliest writing on art and by following the development of his ideas through both his painting and his later writing it is possible to place his late, and somewhat idiosyncratic, paintings within the context of a consistent ideology. While Sickert's ideas may have appeared somewhat reactionary at the time, the subsequent decline of the Modernist ideology and the aesthetics that have developed since, all suggest that Sickert's theory and practice was striving towards a definition of modern painting defined by its concern with the modern human condition.

Abstract

The formation of the New English Art Club in 1886 was intended to challenge the monopoly position held by the Royal Academy of Arts. It provided not only an alternative venue for artists to exhibit but also became a focus for much heated debate about the nature and future direction of art in England. Anecdotal or literary painting, which had flourished under the Academy, came under attack from artists and critics whose aim was to promote the ideals they perceived in modern French painting. The writers, who included George Moore, D.S. MacColl and R.A.M. Stevenson, were labelled the "New Art Critics". Before 1886 Whistler had advocated the idea that subject matter was of no importance to the artist whose sole aim was to produce visual poetry through his treatment of any subject. The New Critics appeared to be slightly ambivalent about the relative importance of the subject and the treatment of a painting. It appears that they wished to define a new ideology for art founded on a primarily visual response to nature. Walter Sickert was a very active participant in this debate and promoted the idea that the definition of nature should encompass all aspects of the modern world, in particular urban life. He suggested that "if Millet had been born a modern cockney, he would have found sublime themes in Upper Street, or Piccadilly", and despite the obvious influence of his master, Whistler, he was reluctant to accept the unimportance of subject matter to the artist. Unlike the other New Critics, Sickert continued to write on art regularly after the next generation of critics, led by Roger Fry and Clive Bell, had started to promote an art based almost exclusively on formal concerns. There is a consistency in Sickert's writing that is helpful in understanding his own work and his objections to the latest avant-garde theories.

Through an examination of Sickert's writing I have attempted to reveal what I believe to be the ideology underlying his art criticism. Despite his suspicion of theories and contempt for critics, his own writing clearly shows the development of a very particular theory of art. Much of his earliest writing takes the form of propaganda written on behalf of his master Whistler, which drew him into a debate about both *l'art pour l'art* and Realism. In particular he was able to rely on his knowledge and understanding of both French art and French art criticism. As well as writing in support of Whistler, Sickert also promoted the "modern" painter. In particular he defined what he called "Modern Realism". He rejected the pedantic Naturalism of painters such as Bastien-Lepage, who was very popular with many of the younger artists in England at that time, and promoted a way of looking and painting which owed more to Millet. Sickert believed that Realist art should continue the best traditions of painting and that these included the artist idealising, or making an informed and intelligent selection from the confusion before him. In particular Sickert wanted to see the artist turning his attention to the modern urban environment, and in this respect believed the subject matter was important to the painter. It appears that the differences between his ideals and Whistler's notion of a formalist art are never resolved. He wanted the artist to represent the modern world in such a way that it revealed something about the human condition, relying upon the artist's perception, drawing and memory rather than photography.

Having examined Sickert's ideology I have gone on to look at how he applied this to the work of particular artists. It is possible that part of Whistler's appeal to his student was his *dandysme* and his presentation of himself as a modern man and a *flâneur*, both qualities that Baudelaire had associated with the painter of modern life. Whereas Sickert subsequently came to a more mature and independent assessment of

the importance of Whistler, he never felt it necessary to revise his opinions on Millet, whom he consistently referred to when he wished to define the Realism that he believed the artist should strive to attain. He was, however, aware that the subject matter of Millet's painting had perhaps lost some of its relevance to life at the end of the nineteenth century. In Degas he found an artist working from observation and memory, and drawing his subject matter from his experience of urban life. It was harder to find these qualities in the work of his English contemporaries, although he did praise the work of Philip Wilson Steer, Sidney Starr, Theodore Roussel and Albert Ludovici. Above all else in his writing on artists Sickert was anxious to praise that which he saw as being modern, provided modernity was not achieved at the expense of the lessons to be learned from the art of the past.

Sickert was not the only critic in England trying to outline a new modern aesthetic and I believe that it is necessary to consider the work of other writers in order to assess properly the contribution made by Sickert. Among the New Art Critics, Moore was perhaps the wittiest but also the least consistent. In the articles he wrote for *The Speaker* he is at the very least ambivalent and on occasion quite hostile to the work of Monet and other artists who worked directly from nature. Like Sickert he believed that the painter should rely on selection and memory. He held that the mission of art should be the pursuit of beauty not truth. He rejected Realism and believed that the importance of the subject in painting had led to the decline in art. He held an essentially humanist belief in man at the centre of the pursuit of beauty, which he thought should be found in painting through formal considerations, or "treatment". He wanted art to look beyond a superficial and exterior appearance. Above all he believed that a painting had to have an atmosphere, an idea which he seems to have confused with aerial perspective and creation in a painting of a

credible notion of space. His requirement of painting was that it should give rise to a combination of physical, cognitive and emotive responses. Failing to find modern painting that lived up to these ideals he started to write about music and so he was no longer writing regularly about art by the time of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1910.

MacColl was not such an entertaining writer as Moore, but from his dry and thoughtful criticism a more consistent, if no less pessimistic theory emerges. He did not believe in an art that was tied to a hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, and in his defence of Degas he showed his distaste for moralising art. He believed that painting should strive for the highest comprehension of human life. His was an essentially idealising aesthetic that owed much to the writing of Reynolds. Like Sickert, MacColl never denied the importance to the artist of subject matter and saw the dialogue that existed between the subject of an image and its treatment as an essential part of the art of painting. MacColl believed in the idea of a constructive or synthetic imagination that drew a coherent image from chaos. The rôle of the imagination for MacColl was to interpret the eternal beauty of life in a fresh disguise. His post-Darwinian acceptance of the position that man occupied within Nature meant that he adopted an approach to the subject which was similar to Reynolds: nature was to be seen as the point of departure; it was not to be copied but to be refined by the artist. MacColl was increasingly caught up in political debates about the administration of art in England and this restricted the amount of art criticism that he wrote. In 1906 he was appointed as Keeper of the Tate Gallery and so, like Moore, he too was less obviously actively involved in the public debate in the newspapers and art journals, which arose as a result of the new theories on art put forward by Roger Fry and Clive Bell.

The last of the New Critics whose writing I have considered in order to contextualise Sickert's writing is Stevenson. Stevenson believed that the only source of feeling in the plastic was the thing seen, and that poetic art derived from a revelation of the essential aspect of nature. Like Moore he believed that the painter should strive, by depicting the masses and constructed plains of nature, to place forms within a credible, illusionist space on the canvas. He did not believe in the ideal beauty of autonomous objects but in the grandeur found in the combination of forms in a painting. He believed in the individual perception of the artist that could transform nature into art. Despite the importance that he gave to vision he also believed that the mind was a part of the creative, poetic imagination. He wanted the artist to grasp what was before him and later do without the model, painting what he imagined rather than what was seen. He considered painting to be the most material of the arts; tied to representation, but not recording every incident slavishly, rather attempting to record the 'truth', which should be a personal response by the artist, 'feeling' through his eyes. Stevenson believed these ideals were to be found in the art of the Impressionists whose work was a development of the formal language of the tradition of painting.

Stevenson died in 1900, ten years before Roger Fry introduced a new generation of French painters to the English public. By this time Sickert was the most prolific of the New Critics. Sickert's response to the theories of Fry and Bell can be best understood by looking at both his art criticism and his paintings. By doing this it is possible to understand how his practice and theory developed, and to identify the way in which his early writing and painting complements his later work. In the 1880s Sickert demonstrated his desire to be modern in part through his choice of subject matter, and also through the formal qualities of his paintings. I have attempted to

show how both the music hall and the audiences that he painted can be seen as being at the same time deliberately provocative, and of genuine interest to an artist who wished to reveal the 'truths' of the modern city. At the beginning of the twentieth century he appeared to move to still more shocking, and possibly modern subjects, and also to look at the possibilities for narrative in modern painting. This work would appear to be consistent with the objections that he raised to the Post-Impressionist exhibition. He was largely sympathetic towards the artists but vilified certain theories put forward by Fry and Bell that he saw as elitist. Sickert was interested in the idea of an inclusive art, that had the potential to appeal not only to the educated but also to the "somewhat vulgar". Sickert saw the new "Higher Art Criticism" as being directed at an intellectual audience, while the "gross herd", which Bell found so objectionable, was the very subject of Sickert's paintings. The rarefied formal values that were considered so important by Fry and Bell were for Sickert too divorced from direct sentient existence, episodes from which should be the starting point for the artist if the viewer was to become involved in the final painting. Sickert wanted the artist to reveal something of the transitory and ephemeral nature of modern life and in doing this himself explored a number of different sources for his images including perhaps most radically photographs taken from newspapers.

Sickert's ideas on painting are closely related to the ideas developed by Baudelaire in his essay on *Le peintre de la vie moderne*. The eternal beauty that was to be found in the transitory nature of the modern city was something that Baudelaire had identified in the work of Guys, and which Sickert praised in the drawings of Keene. Sickert sought these qualities in his own work and found them in such subjects as the music hall, in the lives of the most ordinary people and ultimately in images from newspapers. I have argued that in these late paintings he was using photography not

for its ability to record detail but because of its voyeuristic qualities, and its ability to capture the transient beauty of urban life. The nature of Sickert's modernity, which I believe can be best understood by looking at his writing, in the context of the work of the New Art Criticism, and his painting, meant that at times he appeared, superficially, to be reactionary in his response to certain theories of art. The subsequent decline in the support of these ideas and a re-examination of Sickert's work as a painter and as a critic suggest, however, that he consistently pursued an understanding through art of the modern human condition.

CHAPTER 1

Sickert's Critical Ideology.

The voice of the aesthete is heard in the land, and catastrophe is upon us.
"Mr Whistler's Ten O'clock", February 1885.

In 1881, at the age of twenty-one, Walter Sickert abandoned his career as an actor and, determined to become an artist, enrolled at the Slade School of Fine Art. By 1882 he was no longer attending classes there but had become, instead, one of Whistler's students. In the same year Sickert wrote what I believe to be the first of his many letters to a national newspaper[1]. Over the next fifteen years Sickert's writing became prolific and an article in *The Sun* newspaper, 5th April 1897, referred to him as an "art critic and artist"[2]. Readers of Sickert's early criticism may have been bemused by his sardonic, elusive style but few would have failed to recognise the work of a "student of Whistler". In his writing up to 1908, Sickert explored two issues which had originally been introduced into the current debates on art in France, namely *l'art pour l'art*, and Realism in painting. Just as the most advanced painting in England showed the influence of French art, so too the "New Art Criticism" followed on from the ideas that had first been introduced by Gautier, Baudelaire, Zola and other writers in France, in addition to the example of English writers such as Ruskin and Pater.

A consideration of Sickert's earliest writings on art shows how he developed from being a propagandist for Whistler, into an idiosyncratic writer who would generally support the modern artist against other, reactionary critics, while still maintaining a slightly ambivalent attitude towards the importance of the subject matter of paintings. In 1897 Sickert's relationship with Whistler ended in acrimony, when the two artists appeared on opposite sides in court, and Sickert went to live in Dieppe

and Venice for the next six years[3]. In 1908 Sickert wrote a review of "The New Life of Whistler"[4], by Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell, the biography of his former master. This article, which was Sickert's most sustained and developed essay on Whistler, marked the end of this first stage in Sickert's writing and coincided with the beginning of a change in the critical debate on art in England. Despite his mistrust of "theories" and "schools", I believe it is possible to see in Sickert's earliest writing, allowing for its inconsistencies and contradictions, an individual ideology, which helps us to understand both the art he was writing about and his own painting.

The influence of Whistler, and Sickert's earliest writing on art.

Sickert, like his "master", Whistler, was always suspicious of critics and theoreticians and, in a letter, to Wilson Steer of about 1900, written from Paris, he stated that he hated the pen and believed that there was: "Too much journalism in London"[5]. Nevertheless the importance to Sickert of his writing, particularly in his early days as an artist, should not be underestimated. In the same letter Sickert admitted that his career might have been very different if he had not left England for Dieppe in 1898:

> What a lucky chance brought me to Dieppe! I should have been art critic of the Licensed Victuallers Gazette by now, and doing articles for them on Johns and Albert Rothensteins! if I had stayed in Robert St.[6]

Although he himself wrote on art, he maintained a low opinion of critics and would frequently attack them in his writing. For example I believe that Sickert conducted a public squabble with H. Marion Spielmann, the art critic of *The Pall Mall Gazette*, in the pages of *The New York Herald,* (London edition)[7], and, on advice given by the critic of the *St James's Gazette* to Millais, he wrote:

> He advises him to paint out not only the duck, but the ducklings, and I presume herewith the pond. ... Imagine a literary critic who,

> after praising a sonnet as one of the poet's finest, should go on to throw out a hint that the obliteration of the last three lines would be an improvement. These things are only possible in art. Poor art![8]

His dislike of journalism may have increased as a result of the trouble that he brought on himself through his writing. An article he wrote on transfer lithography, in which he attacked Pennell[9], resulted in a court case, in which Whistler appeared as a witness for Pennell, which led to the final split between master and student.

Robert Emmons, who was taught by, and wrote the first biography of Sickert, suggested that it was only as a result of his contact with Whistler, that Sickert wrote at all:

> Whistler's influence … was not only felt in relation to art. It was strongest at that most impressionable age, the early twenties. For the time Whistler was the ideal, not only in painting, but in life, in manners, in everything. Sickert's literary style, indeed his habit of writing for the press at all, owes much to the caustic author of *The Gentle Art.*[10]

Sickert's writing, which in these early years was eclectic and derivative, was frequently prompted by a desire to defend Whistler, starting with a letter to *The Pall Mall Gazette,* in 1882:

> ... the want of artistic sincerity is certainly the last charge that can be brought against a man who has followed his artistic intention with such admirable and unswerving singleness of purpose as Mr. Whistler.[11]

Over the years he would describe Whistler as "the great original artist of our age"[12], "a living Old Master"[13], and as late as 1896, when their relationship had started to cool, he still talked of Whistler as "a genius"[14]. It was only in 1897, during Pennell's libel action, that the unrivalled position which Whistler occupied in Sickert's mind seems to have been challenged, and Whistler became, with Degas, "one of the two greatest living painters in the world"[15].

Unlike other contemporary writers, Sickert applauded all areas of Whistler's art without exception:

> ... every stroke of his brush, and every scratch of his needle. ... work like the portrait of the painter's mother, or a monument of colour decoration like the *Peacock room*, or, more wonderful perhaps than either, for such triumphs of selection and summary expression in pure line ... his latest etchings ... [16]

He despised those who could appreciate only one aspect, or period, of Whistler's varied work as an artist:

> How often have I encountered the three fatuous platitudes which sum up the opinion of the well bred-indifference on the subject of Whistler! The first step is, "Do you admire Whistler?" to which the answer is, "As an etcher." The next step invariably is the assertion of his early Thames etchings over the later Venetian, Dutch, Belgian, Parisian and London ones, if indeed the speaker has ever heard of these latter. If the master be admitted at all as a painter the conversation takes this turn - "he gave great promise in the sixties" - in fact, the verdict somewhat tardily bottled by the *St. James's Gazette* ... [17]

Sickert compared Whistler most favourably with other artists, in a way that reveals the blinding nature of his devotion: looking at a work by Manet, he described it as:

> ... an admirable example of the work of one of the most brilliant and powerful painters who have ever lived. He had not the imagination or the poetry of Whistler. We cannot feel before a Manet the reverential awe, the sense of something superhuman, that are ours before some great gaunt canvas of our London master. Manet had none of Whistler's infinite variety.[18]

A detailed examination of Sickert's views on Whistler's art is left until later, but I believe that it is essential to take as a starting point the importance of Whistler to Sickert, and to consider the younger artist's almost unconditional admiration of his master. This seems to have been sustained in Sickert's writing long after he met Degas in 1883, despite the fact that the Frenchman's influence was apparent in Sickert's painting almost immediately. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that,

where any clear ideology can be drawn out from Sickert's early writing, it appears to have been heavily reliant on Whistler's ideas. Consequently before looking at Sickert's criticism, I should like to examine Whistler's creed, as defined in "The Ten O'clock" lecture[19].

Whistler's "Ten O'clock" demonstrated how closely he was influenced by the ideas of Pater and gave a most precise account of his ideas regarding the proper intention of art. His theories were in direct conflict with Ruskin, who believed that the artist could never perfect what God had created in nature, and who could be said to have developed an aesthetic of the "eye". In *The Renaissance*, published in 1873, Pater wrote that he expected the artist not simply to regard the world with a morally pure eye, as Ruskin had done, but to use his intellect, to unravel and overcome the perplexity and distractions of the modern world, and to strive, almost as though the mind or intellect had a separate existence, to combine these forms into "the supreme, artistic view of life". Pater believed that the artist could best serve society by "rearranging the details of modern life" according to reason. Seeking a unity in the moment, the artist was to collect the "flood of external objects" with which our sight is constantly bombarded, and to construct from these fleeting impressions, reformed in the artist's mind, one unitary moment. Pater's aesthetic seems to have been fundamentally revelatory and it could be thought of as an aesthetic not just of the "eye" but also of the "mind".

Much of Whistler's writing upheld the aesthetic outlined by Pater in *The Renaissance*. In the course of the "Ten O'clock" lecture Whistler described the way in which the artist should work, in order to achieve the ends set out by Pater, and explicitly also acknowledged the possible existence of a higher, spiritual state, beyond the material existence of nature:

In all that is dainty and lovable he finds hints for his own combinations, and *thus* is Nature ever his resource and always at his service, and to him is naught refused.

Through his brain, as through the last alembic, is distilled the refined essence of that thought which began with the Gods, and which they left him to carry out.

Set apart by them to complete their works, he produces that wondrous thing called the masterpiece, which surpasses in perfection all that they have contrived in what is called Nature; and the Gods stand by and marvel, and perceive how far away more beautiful is the Venus of Melos than was their own Eve.[20]

Whistler also seemed to be referring, indirectly, to the ideas that Théophile Gautier had developed in his *Salon* criticism. Gautier, more than thirty years before Pater, had attributed to the artist the ability to look at the world around him and to reorder it. He described this process in his *Salon de 1839*[21], and referring directly to Goethe he explained the process by which, he believed, the artist, using his own internal *microcosme,* could produce an image of a perfect or ideal world. Gautier's *microcosme* became, in the writing of Pater and Whistler, more simply, the mind, or "brain", of the artist.

Gautier had also developed the theory of the uselessness of art, or of *l'art pour l'art*, in the preface to his novel, *Mademoiselle de Maupin,* published in 1835. Whistler's lecture showed not just the strength of the influence of Pater on his thinking, but also the importance of French art and art criticism on his ideas on painting. Whistler had acknowledged the superiority of French art criticism in 1878, when he described the French critic as "the *fine fleur*", compared to the "rough-hewn and blundering" Englishman[22]. In the "Ten O'clock" he seemed to echo Gautier's theory, with the suggestion that: "Art seeks the Artist alone"[23]. This was heard and repeated, if not fully understood or upheld, by Sickert in the phrase:

> ... no artist may be judged except by that portion of his work which is done purely and solely to please himself.[24]

Whistler, in a slightly earlier passage in the lecture, in which he deplored the way that people looked at pictures, had given his idea more substance:

> Beauty is confounded with virtue, and, before a work of Art, it is asked: "What good shall it do?"
>
> Hence it is that nobility of action, in this life, is hopelessly linked with the merit of the work that portrays it; and thus people have acquired the habit of looking, as who should say, not *at* a picture, but *through* it, at some human fact, that shall, or shall not, from a social point of view, better their mental or moral state. So we have come to hear of the painting that elevates, and of the duty of the painter - of the picture that is full of thought, and of the panel that merely decorates.[25]

As well as pouring scorn on the idea of the moral purpose of a painting, Whistler was also attacking the whole idea that paintings could be read, and he was strongly opposed to what he considered to be a literary response to art.

Alongside Gautier and the aesthetic theories that had been successfully applied to the Romantic art of the 1830s, which could be described as being essentially escapist in nature, there would also seem to be some direct parallels between Whistler's ideas, and Baudelaire's art criticism. For example, when explaining the creative process Whistler described the world in terms of music:

> Nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music.
>
> But the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful - as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he bring forth from chaos glorious harmony.
>
> To say to the painter, that Nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player that he may sit on the piano.[26]

This idea may have been taken from Baudelaire's notion of nature being used by the artist as a dictionary, first explained by Baudelaire in his *Salon de 1859.*

It was, perhaps, only Whistler's wariness of any idea that combined literary and visual references, which led him to adapt Baudelaire's theory and produce this musical alternative. In the conclusion to *The Renaissance,* Pater had stated his belief that painting and sculpture were, in their own ways, inferior to music and poetry and that the "power of giving pleasure" was in the form of art, "as distinct from its matter". Pater's ideas seem to have been reflected in the musical references Whistler made in the titles of his paintings, and also in Whistler's insistence on the primary importance of formal concerns in painting.

Whistler's own ideas influenced Sickert and he also furthered Sickert's knowledge of French art and art criticism. Sickert demonstrated this comprehension of French art in his writing, as well as in his painting, and it is this that supplied the most interesting, and eventually the most original element in that writing. It was when Sickert began to write on Realism in painting, which had been imported from France and which he believed had been misunderstood, that he came closest to developing a coherent theory of art. The argument was first rehearsed in an article for *The New York Herald,* (London edition), April 1889[27], in which he described the difficulties for the artist who tried to work exclusively from nature, and explained what artists in England could learn from Millet and Degas:

> ... that action cannot be studied from a fatigued and posturing model, but must be observed and remembered ...[28]

Little more than a month later, in a review of the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition in the same newspaper, Sickert warned of the dangers of following "second-rate French painters". In a way that seems almost to consciously challenge

the language and ideas of Ruskin's *Modern Painters,* Sickert described what he called the different "truths" which the artist should strive to attain and also the dangers, for the artist, of simply following nature:

> The method of recording touch by touch from nature straight on to your final picture what you observe has its abuse as well as its use. It is fitted for the portraiture of figures in repose, or for the rendering of scenes containing elements of permanence. For the creation of pictures of passion and movement it is totally unfitted and ridiculously inadequate, and it results, in the ablest and most industrious hands, in a contrast between truth of detail and falsehood of essentials that is painful in proportion to the capacity so wasted.[29]

This argument was developed in a subsequent article by Sickert on the work of the younger and, supposedly, more modern school of British painting.

In a review of the New English Art Club Exhibition of 1889, Sickert examined the different ways in which the modern artist attempted to paint the figure. He identified three approaches: first the habit of posing and copying the model, which he dismissed. Then he attacked the practice of working from photographs:

> From the moment when this relief is sought, all progress in art is at an end with the painter, whatever his talent. Daily more and more is left to the indefatigable and remunerative glass lens, till the eye and the hand forget all but the cunning of the copyist.[30]

Finally he recommended what he called "the way of the artist". This was the approach adopted by Millet, and further developed by Degas, and relied on the painter observing actions until he knew them by heart and then rendering them on canvas without recourse to either a model or a photograph.

While this was the way that Sickert believed the artist should proceed, he found so little evidence of it among the members of the New English Art Club that he warned again of the dangers for the painter of relying on the camera:

> The modern tolerance for glaring falsehood of essentials, and the morbid craving for literalness of unessentials into which a young school in a hurry has educated the public, is working out its own destruction. A moment's thought soon convinces the ambitious beginner that he had best go it the whole hog at once, and be at the top of the tree - interviews and all - without further trouble. Buy a Kodak. Snap it around. Have the photos mechanically enlarged on the canvas, and colour to taste![31]

He returned to the theme of the way in which the artist should work in an article for *The Whirlwind*[32]:

> Fragments of nature at her strangest and loveliest, seen and selected with the eye of a poet, and executed with the brush of a master. No hasty tour with a camera here, followed by long periods of mysterious incubation.[33]

These articles are typical of Sickert's best writing; demonstrating not just his wit and irony, but also his perceptive understanding of modern painting and contemporary taste. The ideas that had first been promoted in this early criticism were more fully developed in Sickert's essay "Modern Realism in Painting", which was written for the book, *Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art,* edited by A. Theuriet and published in 1892[34].

In this essay Sickert looked again at the idea of the artist selecting from the confusion of nature. Referring to the work of Millet, he described the particular qualities of the painter and why they were essential to "Modern Realism":

> He was gifted with the comprehension in its entirety of the import of any scene in nature which he wished to render. An unerring analysis enabled him to select what were the vital constituents of such a scene, and exquisite perceptions, trained by incessant labour, to render them in fitting terms in accordance with the tradition which governs the use of each material.[35]

Sickert confirmed that the idea of nature being made up at any one time of a confusion of external signals, which had to be analysed by the trained mind of the artist, was indeed central to his thinking about art:

> It may seem that the process here summarized is after all only that which governs all art production, and that the work of the second-rate and the ordinary differs only from that of the master in the degree of the capacity exercised.[36]

In itself this could be said to constitute the skeletal structure of an aesthetic which was not dissimilar to that explained by Baudelaire and Pater and then, later, by Whistler.

However, it was for Sickert merely one of the requirements of art. He readily acknowledged that only the "inartistic" simply looked at nature and recorded it, perhaps in the way that Ruskin had suggested in *Modern Painters*, and believed that this was just "the sterile ideal of the instantaneous camera"[37]. It is hardly surprising to find a student of Whistler opposing the ideas of Ruskin. For Sickert the essential ingredient, which could bring vitality to a work of art and would distinguish the "master" from the "second-rate", was:

> ... a profound and convinced reverence for tradition. For the illustration of that tradition I can find no more convenient source than the work of Jean François Millet, and that for a typical monument of its disregard, the more fair to cite in that it is respectable in its achievement, the work of Bastien-Lepage affords me a timely and perhaps the most appropriate example possible.[38]

This insistence on the importance of the rôle of formal tradition in art suggests that Sickert understood the dilemma for the artist seeking to reproduce the grandeur of Renaissance art while embodying a spirit of modernity. Sickert believed that the artist who had learnt the lessons of earlier masters was able to present, with a revelatory clarity, a fresh image of the world.

Sickert's aesthetic, inasmuch as any discrete theory can be found in his writing, would seem to be that the artist, presented with fractured, constantly changing moments in an external and visible nature, should endeavour to bring these together in his mind

and rearrange them, according to the best traditions in art, into a single moment. In so doing he produced an image which revealed a truth in nature and introduced clarity where previously there had been confusion:

> ... uninterrupted by the exigencies of execution, and his execution untrammelled by the fortuitous inconveniences incident on the moment of observation, and undisturbed, moreover, by the kaleidoscopic shifting of the pictorial elements which bewilder and mislead ... [39]

He only hinted at what may be seen as suitable subject matter for painting and suggested that the artist could do worse than to turn to that which surrounded him and was familiar to him:

> It might be well if they can paint their brother, whom they have seen, before they elect to flounder perennially in Olympus.[40]

Sickert stressed the fact that the artist was, "dealing with materials in their essential nature living and fleeting"[41], and rejected the work of the *plein-airiste* as futile; since nature would never remain unchanged long enough for him to complete his work. Even if this were made possible, by using a camera, the result would suffer from being unselective, never having been filtered through the mind of the artist. Instead, he recommended that the artist should work away from direct contact with his original subject, making use of drawings and also, most importantly his "highly-trained artistic memory"[42]. In doing this Sickert demonstrated a more refined understanding of Realism in general, and the work of modern French painters in particular, than most of his English contemporaries.

Sickert's ideas were not strikingly original and a similar doctrine can be found in Baudelaire's essay, *'Le Peintre de la vie Moderne'*[43]. In this essay, written in 1863 and originally published in *Le Figaro,* Baudelaire had described the problems that faced the artist who attempted to translate the world around him:

> Il s'établit alors un duel entre la volonté de tout voir, de ne rien oublier, et la faculté de la mémoire qui a pris l'habitude d'absorber vivement la couleur générale et la silhouette, l'arabesque du contour. Un artiste ayant le sentiment parfait de la forme, mais accoutumé à exercer surtout sa mémoire et son imagination, se trouve alors comme assailli par une émeute de détails, qui tous demandent justice avec la furie d'une foule amoureuse d'égalité absolue. Toute justice se trouve forcément violée; toute harmonie détruite, sacrifiée; mainte trivialité devient énorme; mainte petitesse, usurpatrice.[44]

The essay did not simply describe the way that an artist should work, but more importantly provided a prescriptive account of what Baudelaire believed to be the pertinent subject matter for the modern painter. This was not an attempt to define a manner in which art could supply a missing moral lead to modern life, of the sort that, in different ways, was suggested by Arnold, Pater and Ruskin but rather set out how painting could celebrate that life.

In seeking a painter of modern life, Baudelaire had not been looking for an artist but for a man of the world. In Constantin Guys, Baudelaire believed that he had found a man who already succeeded in capturing the combination of the eternal and the transitory, which he considered to be the two essential elements of beauty. Baudelaire described the way that Guys had given poetry to the fleeting beauty of modern life:

> Souvent bizarre, violent, excessif, mais toujours poétique, il a su concentrer dans ses dessins la saveur amère ou capiteuse du vin de la Vie.[45]

Baudelaire's essay concentrated on the subject matter that might have been considered appropriate by the painter of modern life. He discussed military parades, women, both honest and others, make-up and carriages. Above all he encouraged artists working at the time in Paris to find the material for their art in the life of the city. These were ideas which Sickert may have heard from Degas, and Sickert

acknowledged in his writing the way in which Degas developed the essential qualities of the artist.

Sickert recognised that what he was recommending was not a new theory of art, and was careful to explain that following this way of working the artist was "equipped like the masters of old"[46]. While the ideas in Sickert's writing, which found their most complete expression in the essay, "Modern Realism in Painting", may not have been without precedent, it would seem to me that the essay remains a clear and intelligent statement on the work of Millet, Degas, other French artists, and Realism in nineteenth-century painting. It also helps to give the clearest possible understanding of Sickert's aesthetic, which combined the importance of the eye and the mind; looking at the constantly shifting modern world and recreating it in paintings, in a way that demonstrated a knowledge of and a respect for the traditions of art.

Where Sickert and Whistler differ: the importance of the subject matter of a painting.

That many of the ideas in Sickert's writing can be traced back to Whistler, is almost to be expected. It is, however, interesting that this influence seemed to linger longer in Sickert's writing than in his painting, nonetheless, this predominance of Whistler's ideas should not disguise the most significant difference which emerged between the writings of Sickert and Whistler.

There are some superficial similarities in the writing of Whistler and Baudelaire, especially in what they considered to be suitable subject matter for art. Both believed that it could be found in the modern city, and it is interesting to compare Whistler, writing about the experience of walking next to the Thames, with Baudelaire writing on Whistler's etchings. First Baudelaire:

> Tout récemment, un jeune artiste américain, M. Whistler, exposait à la galerie Martinet une série d'eaux-fortes, subtiles, éveillées comme l'improvisation et l'inspiration, représentant les bords de la Tamise; merveilleux fouillis d'agrès, de vergues, de cordages; chaos de bórumes, de fourneaux et de fumées tirebouchonnées; poésie profonde et compliquée d'une vaste capitale.[47]

This, as well as Baudelaire's other writing on the potential for the artist of the modern city, may at first appear, to the uncritical reader, to lie at the heart of Whistler's description:

> And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, … fairy-land is before us ...[48]

It is also worth noting that these sentiments were quickly picked up by Whistler's young student. Sickert even quoted them directly in a letter he wrote in Whistler's defence to the *Daily News,* in 1886[49]. When Sickert came to write on a picture by Roussel, *The Plumbago Works, Battersea,* he described the painting in very similar terms:

> The factory of brick and slate, pointing its tall fingers to the sulphurous break in the leaden London sky seems to me not only beautiful, but sensational. To me, there is drama in the moment chosen, and in the piling up of the dreary mass of masonry high in the picture, on its dusky base of mud. The eye, dazzled by the lurid gleam on the water finds and loses the lines of the Thames.[50]

However, I would suggest that it is misleading to lay much stress on the undoubted parallels between these descriptions. Whistler's fundamental perception of the cityscape probably owed more to Pater's ideas regarding the importance of the "quality" of the "moments as they pass", than to Baudelaire. Whistler's statements suggest that he had found in the city the particular light and atmosphere which Pater described as being a "relic from the classical age, laid open by accident to our modern atmosphere". It would appear that while Whistler's comments may derive from

Baudelaire their sentiment is closer to Pater's ideas of "diaphaneité". Where Whistler perceived "fairy land" his student saw a "dusky base of mud". Sickert considered the scene beautiful and sensational in itself, whereas for Whistler it was necessary to transpose that reality and draw parallels with another time and place. The deceptive similarities between the statements by Whistler and Sickert only serve to disguise the very real difference in emphasis that the two artists put on the rôle of subject matter in painting.

For Whistler, subject matter became as peripheral as Zola had believed it was for Manet. Writing about the latter's work in 1867 Zola suggested that the subject matter of a painting was no longer important. This anti-literary idea of art was part of a defence of the work of Manet, which had been condemned partly as a result of its shocking subject matter. Zola believed that, while this may have been a preoccupation of the crowd, it was of no consequence to the artist:

> Les peintres, surtout Edouard Manet qui est un peintre analyste, n'ont pas cette préoccupation du sujet qui tourmente la foule avant tout; sujet pour eux est prétexte à peindre, tandis que pour la foule le sujet seule existe.[51]

In his "Ten O'clock" lecture Whistler berated the English critic, or "unattached writer", for the way in which he treated pictures as if they were "hieroglyphs" and saw them simply as telling a story. Whistler believed that, by insisting on considering a painting "absolutely from a literary point of view", the critic had misunderstood painting:

> He fails entirely and most naturally to see its excellencies, or demerits - artistic - and so degrades Art, by supposing it a method of bringing about a literary climax.[52]

In addition to this attack on the literary approach to art of the critics, Whistler had also been quite unequivocal about the unimportance of the subject of his paintings in

an article he wrote for *The World,* entitled "The Red Rag", in 1878, and which was reprinted in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies.* In this essay he stated that:

> The vast majority of English folk cannot and will not consider a picture as a picture, apart from any story which it may be supposed to tell.
>
> My picture of a "Harmony in Grey and Gold" is an illustration of my meaning - a snow scene with a single black figure and a lighted tavern. I care nothing for the past, present, or future of the black figure, placed there because the black was wanted at that spot. All I know is that my combination of grey and gold is the basis of the picture. Now this is precisely what my friends cannot grasp.[53]

If this left the reader in any doubt at all as to Whistler's meaning, later, in the same article he repeated the point, with still greater clarity:

> As music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight, and the subject-matter has nothing to do with the harmony of sound or of colour.[54]

Unlike Zola, this was no theorist or apologist trying to explain the seeming eccentricities of an artist. This was the painter proclaiming the basis of his anti-literary position in relation to his own, and indeed all, art.

I have tried to show the importance of Whistler to Sickert in these early years. I have shown Sickert's almost blind admiration for his master, his constant defence of Whistler's painting, and, through the similarities that existed between their writing, the way that Sickert's voice at times seemed to be an echo of the opinions of Whistler. However, I cannot find anywhere in Sickert's writing such a complete renunciation of the importance of subject matter in painting. Since Sickert seemed to have taken up so many of Whistler's ideas, it would almost have been expected, and the fact that he did not must suggest, inasmuch as a failure to do one thing can ever imply a desire to do the opposite, that Sickert believed that subject matter was still

important in modern painting. It is not necessary to rely on this supposition alone, since Sickert gives a more positive statement of his position, even though in this he was in opposition to his master, in a number of articles.

In 1889 Sickert wrote about the work of Albert Ludovici. Praising him first for having "thoroughly acquainted himself with the works of Whistler"[55], Sickert went on to explain what it was that he particularly enjoyed in Ludovici's painting:

> A Londoner himself, he neither cooks for us a Peckham Pompeii, nor a Bloomsbury Barbizon, but, like his master, drifts from Primrose Hill to the property-room.[56]

He repeated this use of a description of the subject of a painting as a form of praise when he compared the work of Whistler with that of Ingres:

> He [Ingres] cannot take you, as Whistler does, up into an exceeding high place, and bid you watch from above the living crowd stream up and down the Rialto steps and under the sunlit blinds.[57]

In this passage he again demonstrated his closeness to Baudelaire's ideas about painting, and, at the same time, started to suggest where the defining nature of his modernity could be found.

This was made still clearer when Sickert wrote the preface for the catalogue of an exhibition, at the Goupil Galleries, of "London Impressionists", in December 1889[58]. First he attempted to define Impressionism:

> It is not occupied in a struggle to make intensely real and solid the sordid or superficial details of the subjects it selects. It accepts, as the aim of the picture, what Edgar Allen Poe asserts to be the sole legitimate province of the poem, beauty. In its search through visible nature for the elements of this same beauty, it does not admit the narrow interpretation of the word 'Nature' which would stop short outside the four-mile radius. It is, on the contrary, strong in the belief that for those who live in the most wonderful and complex city in the world, the most fruitful course of study lies

> in a persistent effort to render the magic and the poetry which they daily see around them, by means which they believe are offered to the student in all their perfection, not so much on the canvases that yearly line our official and unofficial shows of contemporary painting, as on the walls of the National Gallery.[59]

In this description of the modern painter, Sickert underlined, once again, the importance to him of tradition, but now made it quite clear how this was in no way in conflict with his position as a modern painter. Like Baudelaire he believed that modernity could be expressed through the depiction of modern life, and, like Gautier, he believed that art should copy, or at least be informed by art as well as by nature.

I do not want to suggest that Sickert's criticism was, like the more reactionary writers whose work he despised, essentially literary in its approach, but that subject matter always remained for him an important element in painting. When Degas's painting "*L'Absinthe*" was shown in London in February 1893, it helped to provoke a debate, not only about the state of modern painting, but also the nature of the "New Art Criticism"[60]. Sickert's contribution to the argument was, uncharacteristically, brief, but nevertheless quite illuminating. He deplored those critics who had tried to introduce into their writing on the work, the idea that the subject of a painting could be seen as carrying a moral value. Sickert wrote, in his letter to the editor of *The Westminster Gazette*:

> Much too much has been made of "drink," and "lessons," and "sodden," and "boozing" in relation to the picture by Degas.[61]

However, Sickert did not try to maintain that the subject matter should not be taken into account, or that it should not be considered when the critic was considering his response to the work. Moving still closer to what could be seen as a literary

argument, he confined the rest of his letter to a discussion of the title of the painting, which he concluded would have been given careful consideration by Degas:

> ... Degas measures the exact range of a word as carefully and as unerringly as he does that of a line or tone.[62]

The idea that the title of a painting was important to the spectator to understand the work would suggest that the subject matter might also be of importance. However, Sickert's ideas on the value of the subject of a painting cannot be drawn out from such a short comment but may be better understood in relation to his own painting.

Responding to a review in *The Scotsman*, of the 1889 exhibition of the New English Art Club, Sickert, who had been represented in the exhibition by his painting, *Collins's Music Hall*, defended himself from the accusation that he had only painted a picture of the music-hall because of the influence of French art on his work. He suggested that his choice of subject was a much more deliberate and positive act, and one that should surprise no one:

> It is surely unnecessary to go so far afield as Paris to find an explanation of the fact that the Londoner should seek to render on canvas a familiar and striking scene in the midst of the town in which he lives. The fact that this most natural, and, I might say, inevitable proceeding should excite surprise, and in some quarters even indignation, is surely a symptom that fashion has obtained a dangerous sway over the art of the country.[63]

Sickert was, perhaps, protesting too much. I believe that he was perfectly aware of the contentious nature of his choice of subject. The previous year his painting *Gatti's Hungerford Palace of Varieties: Second Turn of Miss Katie Lawrence,* another "music hall" picture, had only been accepted with some reluctance by the hanging committee of the N.E.A.C.. This was as a direct result of the subject, which was considered to be typical of the squalor of modern existence. Sickert had ignored classical conventions

and stylistic rules and so his painting risked failing to rise above the crude character of its subject.

I would argue that it was by painting these scenes that Sickert hoped to demonstrate the modern nature of his art. The critic Frederick Wedmore even recalled the lengths to which Sickert would go to find exactly the right venue:

> Sickert frequented the music hall; and for choice, not the West End music hall, to find the right subject he went not just to Piccadilly Circus and Drury Lane but even to, I forget what haunts of popular pleasure in the far East End.[64]

It could be therefore that the choice of the music-hall was a deliberate act, intended to provoke a response and draw attention to Sickert's position as a 'modern' painter. It was through his subject matter, rather than the formal properties of his work, which he believed were best rooted in tradition, that he proclaimed his membership of an avant-garde and his opposition to reactionary art. Subject matter was one of the ways in which Sickert defined the modernity of his painting and that of other artists.

Sickert's own defence of his music-hall painting was, however, slightly ambivalent with regard to its subject. This may have been either because he was mindful of the lessons he had learnt from Whistler and recognised the trend in the "New Art Criticism" to avoid what may have been considered a literary response to painting; or that he wished to draw attention to another aspect of the music-halls, which made them such a suitable subject for the work of a modern painter. In the letter to the *Scotsman* he discussed, once again, the idea of the artist being able to observe a number of images at one moment and, by reproducing these in a single picture, apprehend this moment and find a poetry in the every day world of the city. As I have already shown, at first he demonstrated what I consider to be mock indignation,

at the fact that his choice of subject had caused any surprise. He then continued to describe in detail how he had come to paint the picture:

> I found myself one night at a little hall off Islington Green. At a given moment I was intensely impressed by the pictorial beauty of the scene created by the coincidence of a number of fortuitous elements of form and colour.[65]

He concluded his description, drawing attention to the precise pose of the "girl leaning forward from the stage", the audience, the light and even the mood in the hall. He emphasised the complexity of the scene, and especially the fractured nature of the initial vision before it had been reordered by the mind of the artist.

In this letter Sickert came as close as he ever would to the ideas of Whistler and Zola. The description of the scene on the music hall stage is reminiscent of Zola's writing on Manet. Furthermore, having begun his defence of his own work by insisting on the inevitability of an artist, resident in London, finding his subject matter all around him he concluded his statement:

> ... the fact the painter sees in any scene the elements of pictorial beauty, is the obvious and sufficient explanation of his motive for painting it.[66]

This is the nearest that Sickert came to denying the importance of subject matter in painting. Rather than unreservedly echoing the ideas of Whistler and Zola he was acknowledging the need for the artist to find the correct balance of the essential elements of a picture: its subject and form. It seems also true that, as well as using the music-hall as an image that was representative of a modern city, Sickert also believed that it provided him with precisely the formal variety he required for a painting.

In many of his music-hall pictures, Sickert deliberately created visually complex and confusing compositions by making use of the mirrors that hung around the halls, as in *Little Dot Hetherington at the Bedford Music Hall,* 1888-89, and *The P.S. Wings in an O.P. Mirror,* c. 1889. In doing so he was emphasising the combination of eye and mind, which he judged, as revealed in his writing, to be essential in painting. His music-hall subjects at first appear to suggest one possible rational scene but then, on closer examination, it becomes clear that this is not in fact the case and the viewer has to try again to construct the image. By finding certain clues, for example the gilt edge of a frame or, more obviously, by reading the title, the picture starts to come together, to unite and form a different sense of order. This was typical of the way that Sickert made use of the ideas on the importance of artifice and the artificial, which had been imported from French painting. The pictures that Sickert made of the music-hall partly draw attention to the process of looking, through the devices described. This was also achieved by including the audience, the voyeuristic nature of which was at times exaggerated by the inclusion of shadowy figures, which appear out of the darkness, as in the male figure in a box at the side of the stage in *Little Dot Hetherington* .... By association they also include reference to sound, and Sickert even used the titles of popular songs for his paintings, in his attempt to recall a complex set of sensory experiences.

It seems that the subjects of Sickert's paintings were chosen with extreme care and his interest in subject matter extended to his consideration of other artists, even to the work of Whistler, who personally believed it to be of no importance. Sickert recognised the importance of "decorative painting" and stated clearly his belief that:

> Every good picture is decorative, and no picture that is not decorative can be described as entirely good.[67]

Nevertheless, having first explained the importance of decoration in painting, he immediately turned to the need for the artist to consider his subject matter:

> And I believe that it is in the life of his own time, that the painter of the future will find the only inexhaustible mine of study, and the only living spring of inspiration.[68]

From studying both Sickert's writing and his painting, it would appear that subject matter was an essential element in Sickert's consideration of art. However, this does not necessarily imply that he placed any less value on the potential "poetry" of vision, which he had learnt from Whistler, or that his criticism was reactionary and literal as a result. I would suggest instead, that Sickert's ideology was predicated on his recognition of the possibility for the artist to represent through painting the appearance of the modern world, and by so doing re-order it, to reveal it in a new form. His theory would also appear to have been an essentially idealising one, and one which had its roots in tradition. Sickert did not, however, want to see sentimental idealisation in art, nor did he believe in the possibility that formal qualities in painting could allow art to transcend the material world, as was suggested in what I have called the escapist theories of Gautier and those who followed him, including Whistler. For Sickert the ideal that art should strive to achieve, was to bring a new awareness of the modern world, using all the formal means that had come to be at its disposal over years of development.

Conclusion: a mature consideration of Whistler.

I have discussed the influence that Whistler had on Sickert's ideas on art and I have tried to describe what I see as the fundamental difference that existed between them. This did not exclude the possibility of their friendship, nor did it diminish the part that Whistler played in the development of Sickert's thoughts on art and their often

striking similarities. However, Whistler's belief that art could rise above the confusion of the world was not one that Sickert shared. Sickert's own paintings and the ideas that he expressed in his writing both show him struggling to bring a new order into the chaos of modern life. When he had written most perceptively about Whistler, he had done so in a way that echoed Baudelaire's writing on the Thames etchings. He had even quoted from Whistler's "Ten O'clock" the passage in which Whistler described the potential beauty of the city, which most closely resembled Baudelaire's writing. However, by 1908, when he came to write "The New Life of Whistler", after six years in Dieppe, living away from Whistler's influence and after his master's death, Sickert was able to be much more objective about the "Butterfly".

Firstly, Sickert accused Whistler of failing to recognise the significance, to the artist, of tradition which, as I have shown, was of crucial importance to Sickert, and he used the article as an opportunity to explain that a respect for tradition was not contradictory to a modern approach to art:

> Pissarro is in no way lessened if a student is told, as a point of departure:- "You may consider him as a kind of Courbet grafted on to a Corot."[69]

Secondly, although he praised Whistler for having increased "our better understanding of the visible world", and for helping to introduce English painters to French art he also drew attention to what he considered to be the weakness in Whistler's painting. He imagined Whistler's initial confusion when he first arrived in London, removed from Paris, the centre of modern art, and trying to respond to a perceived English sensibility for painting:

> Suppose we get the loveliest woman procurable, and put her in the finest robe imaginable! Suppose we even design the dress! Greco-crinoline, shall it be? No, Japanese, perhaps? Let us surround her with the most precious china! Let there be sprays of azalea, and so

> on! Perhaps we shall thus create a very Paradise of art! Who knows? Ought not the product to be the very syrup of the purest taste? Why should it not contain the *bonne peinture* as well.[70]

By thinking of art in this way, Sickert believed that Whistler had brought about his own decline. The attempt to concoct this falsified, artistic paradise was, according to Sickert, a surrender to the vagaries of taste, and nothing could be worse for the painter. He wrote that: "Taste is the death of a painter", and suggested how the artist could be better employed:

> He has all his work cut out for him, observing and recording. His poetry is in the interpretation of ready made life.[71]

In this consideration of Whistler's life and work, Sickert conclusively pointed to what he believed was its greatest weakness. By belittling the importance of the subject of a painting, Whistler had made the mistake of believing that it was possible to fabricate a fashionable Eden, which would appeal to a particular taste, and that the formal qualities of his painting could rise above this artifice, to give poetry to his work. Sickert felt that the attempt had failed and described Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 3*, as:

> A bad picture ... badly drawn, badly painted, the low water mark of the old manner ...[72]

However, he did not think that all of Whistler's work had been so disastrous. In the *Nocturnes*, when Whistler had taken the city as the starting point for his work, Sickert thought that Whistler had produced images that would come to be regarded as the very essence of his work.

This criticism of Whistler showed again that Sickert sought in art, not escapism but revelation, and enjoyment of the modern world, just as Baudelaire had done. This was demonstrated both in Sickert's writing and in his painting, and would eventually

come to form the foundation of the ethos of the Fitzroy Street and later Camden Town Groups. Sickert's vision of Realism in art was by no means unique and existed in literature as well. It is perhaps most eloquently expressed by Gissing in *The New Grub Street*,

> I want to deal with the essentially unheroic, with the day-to-day life of that majority of people who are at the mercy of paltry circumstances. Dickens understood the possibility of such work ... Other men who deal with low-class life would perhaps have preferred idealising it - an absurdity. For my own part, I am going to reproduce it verbatim, without one single impertinent suggestion of any point of view save that of honest reporting. The result will be something unutterably tedious. Precisely that is the stamp of the ignobly decent life. If it were anything but tedious it would not be true.[73]

An anonymous letter written to the editor of the *Speaker*, in June, 1891, suggested that there were two different kinds of "realistic novel";

> There is a realism, of which Zola's is an eminent example, which paints humanity in such utterly vile colours, making it altogether so bestial and disgusting, that one wishes for a deluge to destroy a race so irredeemably degrading.[74]

This seems to echo some of the criticism of Sickert's paintings, and, ironically, suggests that the Realism of Zola and Sickert was not as far apart as may have been imagined, given the theoretical difference that I have suggested existed between the two of them. While this definition of Realism may have been suitable for certain subjects in Sickert's painting which described the *violent* and *excessif* modern world that Baudelaire had written about, I would suggest that Sickert's Realism was closer to the second sort described by the anonymous writer:

> ... which paints men and women as the average are: mixed characters with good and evil in pathetic conflict.[75]

Based on sound practice, and careful observation, Sickert wanted the artist to "honestly report", by which he meant reveal to others the state of the world around

him. As late as 1933 he had encouraged Virginia Woolf to write about his painting and in the resulting essay, "Walter Sickert: a conversation" she compared him with Gissing and other writers[76].

Sickert's Realism would appear to have been encouraging a new sort of literary painting. By recording what they found, artists could produce images that contained an uncertain narrative, which would only be discovered by searching for the clues. In Sickert's own work this circumstantial evidence was often misleading. As well as the visual devices that he developed in his paintings of the music-hall, it should be remembered that these pictures alluded to a world where illusion and double meanings were central to the entertainment. The paintings also contained evidence relating to the social status of the members of the audience: for example the bowler hats of the "mashers" or the red hat of a prostitute. This approach to art was perhaps most obviously exploited in Sickert's *Camden Town Murder* paintings of 1908-09, in which the suggested subject of the paintings was itself an unsolved mystery. In *Summer Afternoon,* or *What shall we do for the Rent?*, *The Camden Town Murder* or *What shall we do for the Rent?*, and *L'Affaire de Camden Town*, Sickert constructed anecdotal paintings which both invite the spectator to unravel the story and frustrate one of the fundamental principles of narrative, by evading any absolute reading of the events presented thereby constantly forcing a re-examination of the visual evidence. Whatever suspicions may have been encouraged by the suggested narrative, Sickert was simply and honestly reporting the events of lives which were for the most part "unutterably tedious" without any implied "point of view" or didactic resolution.

At the same time that this Realist ideology was beginning to be established in art, the first manifestations of Modernism were also emerging. Sickert, who had said in his essay on Whistler that, "a painter must not quarrel", found himself drawn into a new

debate. From 1910 onwards, the year of the first of the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions in London, and the date which, for Virginia Woolf, marked a change in "human character", Sickert wrote even more criticism than he had done before. However, while the nature of the debate changed, I believe that what I have described as Sickert's ideology remained at the heart both of his writing, and his painting.

Notes to Chapter 1.

[1] The Pall Mall Gazette, 7 June 1882, p. 4, which is the letter referred to by Sickert as the:

> ... defence of Whistler begun in 1882 by a very *convaincu* paragraph to the *Pall Mall Gazette*. ...

In, Sickert, "The New Life of Whistler", The Fortnightly Review, December 1908, p. 1018. "The New Life of Whistler", is the earliest essay by Sickert included in, Osbert Sitwell, A Free House! or The Artist as Craftsman being the Writings of Walter Richard Sickert, 1947. I am very grateful to Wendy Baron for her help in finding Sickert's earlier writing.

[2] Anonymous, "*Saturday* Libel. Art Critics and Editor in an Intricate Case", The Sun, 5 April 1897, p. 3.

[3] For a full account of Sickert's friendship with Whistler see, Andrew Dempsey, "Whistler and Sickert: a friendship and its end", Apollo, LXXXIII, January 1966, pp. 30-37.

[4] Sickert, "The New Life of Whistler", The Fortnightly Review, December 1908, pp. 1017-1028.

[5] Letter to Steer, cited in, Robert Emmons, The Life and Opinions of Walter Richard Sickert, 1941, p. 90.

[6] Ibid, p. 89.

[7] Anonymous, "Corot Indifferent to Colour", The New York Herald, London, 8 March 1889, p. 5, and Sickert, "Mr. H. Marion Spielmann", The New York Herald, London, 19 April 1889, p. 4. In the Appendix I have discussed why I believe that these articles were among several written by Sickert from March to June 1889 for the London edition of The New York Herald and referred to by Sickert in, "The New Life of Whistler", The Fortnightly Review, December 1908, p. 1019.

[8] Anonymous, "Picture-Pasters", The New York Herald, London, 5 April 1889, p. 4.

[9] Sickert, "Transfer Lithography", The Saturday Review, 26 December 1896, pp. 667-668.

[10] Emmons, op. cit., p. 43.

[11] Sickert, "...", The Pall Mall Gazette, 7 June 1882, p. 4.

[12] Sickert, "Mr. Whistler and Mr. Menpes", The Pall Mall Gazette, 27 April 1888, p. 5.

[13] Sickert, "Literature", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 1, 28 June 1890, p. 13.

[14] Sickert, "Transfer Lithography", The Saturday Review, 26 December 1896, p. 668.

[15] Sickert, "The Royal Academy", The Sun, 10 February 1897, p. 1.

[16] Sickert, "Impressionism - True and False", The Pall Mall Gazette, 2 February 1889, p. 3.

[17] Sickert, "Whistler To-day", The Fortnightly Review, April 1892, p. 545.

[18] Sickert, "Art", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 1, 28 June 1890, p. 6.

[19] A copy of the text for this lecture is included in The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, 1890, pp. 129-159. The Lecture was first delivered in London on 20 February 1885.

[20] Ibid, pp. 145-146.

[21] Gautier had first referred to the idea of the *microcosme* in his *Salon de 1833,* La Presse, but the theory was not fully explained until the later article, *Salon de 1839,* La Presse.

[22] Whistler, "Art & Art Critics", 1878, reprinted in, The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, 1890, p. 27.

[23] Whistler, op. cit., p. 157.

[24] Anonymous, "The Dowdeswell Galleries, [Second Notice]", The New York Herald, London, 5 April 1889, p. 4.

[25] Ibid, pp. 137-138.

[26] Ibid, pp. 142-143.

[27] Anonymous, "Messrs. Dowdeswell's Galleries [First Notice], The New York Herald, London, 1 April 1889, p. 4.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Anonymous, "The Royal Academy. (Second Notice.)", The New York Herald, London, 16 May 1889, p. 4.

[30] Anonymous, "The New English Art Club. [Third Notice.]", The New York Herald, London, 14 June 1889, p. 4.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Sickert, "Art", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 1, 28 June 1890, p. 6.

[33] Sickert, "Art", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 1, 28 June 1890, p. 6.

[34] Sickert first wrote the essay in 1891.

[35] Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting", an essay published in Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art, edited by A. Theuriet, 1892, pp. 133-134.

[36] Ibid, p. 134.

[37] Ibid, p. 135.

[38] Ibid, p. 135.

[39] Ibid, p. 136.

[40] Ibid, p. 138.

[41] Ibid, p. 136.

[42] Ibid, p. 135.

[43] Baudelaire, "Le Peintre de la vie Moderne", 1863, reproduced in Curiosités esthétiques, L'Art romantique, et autres Oeuvres critique, Paris 1962, pp. 453 - 502.

[44] Ibid, pp. 470-471.

[45] Ibid, p. 502.

[46] Ibid, p. 137.

[47] Baudelaire, "Peintres et Aqua-Fortistes", Le Boulevard, 14 September 1862, reproduced in, Curiosités esthétiques, L'Art romantique et autres Oeuvres critiques, Paris 1962, p. 413.

[48] Whistler, "The Ten O'clock", The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, 1890, p. 144.

[49] This letter is cited in, Andrew Dempsey, "Whistler and Sickert: a friendship and its end", Apollo, LXXXIII, January 1966, pp. 30-37.

[50] Sickert, "The Whirlwind Diploma Gallery of Modern Pictures. II", The Whirlwind, Vol. I, No. 4, 19 July 1890, p. 51.

[51] Zola, "Édouard Manet", 1867, reproduced in, Mon Salon, Manet, Écrits sur L'Art, Paris 1970, p. 108.

[52] Whistler, op. cit., p. 146.

[53] Whistler, "The Red Rag", The World, 22 May 1878, reproduced in The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, 1890, p. 126.

[54] Ibid, p. 127.

[55] Sickert, "Painter-Etchers. Hamlet, With the Part of Hamlet Left Out. Ludovici in London", The New York Herald, London, 7 March 1889, p. 4.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Sickert, "The Dowdeswell Galleries [Third Notice], The New York Herald, London, 10 April 1889, p. 4.

[58] Sickert, "Impressionism", A Collection of Paintings by London Impressionists, December 1889.

[59] Ibid., p. 7.

[60] For details of this debate see, Ronald Pickvance, "'L'Absinthe' In England", Apollo, Vol. lxxvii, May 1963, pp. 395-8, and Kate Flint, "The 'Philistine' and the New Art Critic: J. A. Spender and D. S. MacColl's Debate of 1893", Victorian Periodicals Review, Vol. 21, Spring 1988, pp. 3-8.

[61] Sickert, "The New Art Criticism", The Westminster Gazette, 20 March 1893, p. 2.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Sickert, "The New English Art Club Exhibition", The Scotsman, 24 April 1889, p. 8.

[64] Frederick Wedmore, Some of the Moderns, London 1909, p. 47.

[65] Sickert, "The New English Art Club Exhibition", op. cit.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Sickert, "The Royal Academy", The Art Weekly, 17 May 1890, p. 102.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid, p. 1020.

[70] Ibid, pp. 1025-1026.

[71] Ibid, p. 1026.

[72] Ibid, p. 1026.

[73] George Gissing, The New Grub Street, 1891, quoted from the Penguin edition, 1985, pp. 173-174.

[74] Scrutator, "Letters to the Editor", Speaker, 6 June 1891, p. 677.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Virginia Woolf, Walter Sickert: a conversation, 1934. A second edition was published in 1992 with an introductory essay by Richard Shone in which he cites a letter written by Virginia Woolf to Quentin Bell in which she described Sickert's enthusiasm for the project.

CHAPTER 2

Sickert on Art and Artists.

Mr. Sickert is not only one of the best painters of his generation, but a sound, as well as a brilliant critic, when he is not writing about his contemporaries with his tongue in his cheek.
D.S.MacColl

Seven years after Sickert first wrote to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1882, in defence of Whistler, he once again engaged in a public debate with H. Marion Spielmann, the art critic of that newspaper. In an unsigned article in the *New York Herald* (London edition), which is attributed here to Sickert[1], the writer attacked the critic and suggested that he should limit his writing to simply listing the works to be seen in an exhibition, a lazy journalistic style which Sickert himself adopted on rare occasions. Above all Sickert recommended that Spielmann should avoid "venturing ... on the thorny path of criticism, proper, and expressing opinions on the works as he comes across them"[2]. If Sickert believed that expressing opinions on particular works seen was the true "path of criticism", it is interesting how rarely he wandered on to it himself. While criticising those who wrote, in haste, about paintings which they had not had time to consider at their leisure, Sickert regularly chose not to write about specific works at all, especially with regard to those artists for whom he expressed an almost reverential admiration, and who appear, in his writing, to take on the status of a holy trinity of art: Whistler, Millet and Degas.

Sickert required that the modern artist accept the broadest definition of nature and that he work from the subjects presented to him by the modern world which shaped his daily existence. Sickert did not want art to become a form of pictorial story-telling and believed that this could be avoided if the painter drew on the best traditions of the art of the past. His aesthetic was not intended to be iconoclastic but

progressive, developing art for the demands of the modern world. In his praise of Whistler, Sickert frequently avoided analysis of the paintings and etchings themselves, and similarly, when writing about Millet and Degas, he only rarely mentioned specific works. Instead, Sickert seems to have been attempting to refine his creed, and to promote it and his own work by association with these artists. It is also possible to detect the promotion of Sickert's ideology in his writing on other contemporary English artists, in particular the members of the New English Art Club, and in his criticism of the establishment, embodied in the form of the Royal Academy. Sickert's writing should not be too cynically dismissed as self-aggrandisement. His elusive approach, avoiding "expressing opinions on the works" he came across, frequently demonstrated his wit and perception, adding to the critical debate on art in England at the end of the nineteenth century. Although there probably was a degree of self-interest in his writing, in particular in his early support of Whistler, self-interest cannot explain the consistent argument, which he developed over the course of several years in numerous articles.

Sickert on Whistler: a *charmeur* and a dandy, with a passion for work.

Sickert's writing on art, between 1882 and 1908, is dominated by his fascination with Whistler. Sickert began his defence of Whistler in the newspapers in 1882, the same year that he first started to refer to himself as a "Student of Whistler." In his early writing he showed himself to be an able propagandist, not simply offering general praise of Whistler but carefully challenging the more harmful and commonplace misconceptions about the artist's work. Many of these had been voiced when Whistler sued Ruskin for libel, in 1877, after the critic had famously accused him of "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face"[3]. During the course of the trial Whistler's seriousness as an artist, the lack of finish in his work, and the time he

spent on his paintings were all scrutinised. Subsequent writing, by hostile critics, about Whistler's work, suggests that, despite the court having found in his favour, albeit with the derisory award of a farthing damages, Whistler's painting was found wanting. Four years after the trial, the "Art Student", as Sickert called himself, who wrote to *The Pall Mall Gazette*, still felt it was necessary to address these issues. He wrote that the *Scherzo in Blue* by Whistler, which the newspaper's reviewer had seen at the private view in the Grosvenor Gallery, may indeed have been "without form and void", and recognising this as another attack on the "finish" of Whistler's work:

> It was then, and professed to be, unfinished. It was removed the next day, and has since been finished.[4]

Whether or not the art critic of *The Pall Mall Gazette* would have agreed with this assessment of the final work is open to speculation but, having attempted to defend Whistler against the accusation that his work lacked finish, Sickert continued to challenge the popular notion that Whistler and his painting should not be taken seriously and that the artist was an eccentric figure who only intended his work to be humorous.[5] In this letter Sickert directed his attention to two of the arguments most frequently used to attack Whistler and, in a later article, he dismissed those people who "thought that perhaps the point of the show consisted in the number of works executed in a given time"[6] as foolish. His strength as a propagandist for Whistler was to be found not so much in the number of the articles he wrote, defending the artist and his work, but the care he took to address these particular issues.

Sickert regularly returned to the debate regarding both the sincerity of Whistler the artist, and the finish of his paintings. In subsequent articles he described Whistler's work as being, "essentially and invariably serious"[7], and vilified the art critic of the *Truth*, who as late as 1892,

> ... still hints at the existence of pictures by Whistler which are "artistic jokes"[8]

Sickert also made use of his wit and ironic rhetoric, to try to demonstrate the absurdity of the idea that Whistler was no more than a joker:

> ... the world finds it hard saying that our flippant and fiendish and intolerable Jimmy Whistler should at one and the same time be indeed a living Old Master. But it is so, nevertheless, and we must make the best of it.[9]

In one article in which Sickert returned to the question of the "finish" of pictures, he did so by linking Whistler's name with Velázquez and by considering the importance of the public's understanding of how to look at paintings:

> If Velasquez and Whistler must postulate of the spectator a knowledge of where to stand, before they can show their work, is it reasonable to expect that other painters should be independent of this courtesy?[10]

Sickert often associated Whistler's name with great artists of the past, sometimes by way of comparison; suggesting that he was a greater artist than Corot, Ingres and Manet, while on other occasions Sickert simply flattered Whistler, by including him in the same company as Rembrandt, Velázquez and Millet. Sickert not only wanted to establish Whistler's reputation as a great modern painter but to insist that he was "a living Old Master", and an artist continuing a great tradition of art. He claimed that Whistler was "nothing more or less than classical"[11], and that Whistler had achieved this classicism not by manufacturing an Olympian or rural idyll but by depicting the Thames at Chelsea, which "his master's brush and needle have made forever classic"[12].

Writing about an exhibition of French nineteenth-century art at the Dowdeswell Galleries, which included work by Millet, Courbet and Corot, Sickert explained that

this was the tradition that had given birth to Whistler's work and that, in his opinion, the new generation had surpassed the work of these earlier masters:

> The exhibition is an important one. It represents fairly that great revival of serious painting that was made in France by a group of painters all born about the beginning of this century. Of enormous importance in itself, but destined in the pitiless judgment of posterity to assume intrinsically a secondary importance to that which it bears as the cradle in which was nursed the art which is hitherto the flower of all time, the art of Whistler and Degas.[13]

In 1892 the retrospective exhibition of Whistler's work at the Goupil Gallery was a success, and Whistler received several commissions for new work. Sickert wrote that Whistler had:

> ... wrung from the nation and the world an acknowledgement that his place in art is with the great of all time.[14]

This suggests that Sickert believed that there was no longer a need to constantly promote Whistler's art and that public opinion had been won over.

Sickert did not, however, immediately end his support of Whistler in the press. He was aware of how important Whistler's reciprocal support could be to him and had described how "the student" could bask "gratefully in" Whistler's "generous rays"[15]. In 1896 Sickert showed that he was conscious of the importance of staying on the right side of the Butterfly who had, on occasion, proved himself to have a very vicious sting in his tail. In an article in which he condemned the practice of referring to prints made from transfer paper, rather than from stone, as "lithographs"[16], Sickert must have realised the danger of offending not just Joseph Pennell, who was his intended target but also, by association, Whistler. In an attempt to avoid this he described the difference in the quality of the work of the two artists:

> These drawings of Mr. Pennell's are skilful and would make nice illustrations in a book but they are not quite important enough for the parade of rough paper and forty frames. Mr. Whistler is a genius. His lightest utterance is inspired. If it pleases him to touch for a moment any instrument, pure or debased, he conjures from it celestial harmonies. Mr. Whistler's almost nothings are priceless. His smallest change is golden.[17]

Sickert's efforts to mollify Whistler were unsuccessful and Pennell was able to rely on Whistler's support in the subsequent court case. Pennell repeated, with seeming satisfaction, the way in which Whistler had described his former student:

> " ... an absolutely unknown authority ... an insignificant and irresponsible person."... and he added that Mr. Sickert's pretended compliments and flatteries were a most impertinent piece of insolence, tainted with a certain obsequious approach.[18]

This argument, and Whistler's suspicions that Sickert had been disloyal by associating with Sir William Eden, with whom Whistler was engaged in an acrimonious dispute, ended their friendship. Sickert did not write about Whistler again until 1908, five years after his death, and then it was a more carefully measured response, which had lost much of the effusive enthusiasm of the earlier writing.

The notion that Sickert, and others, may have wished to be associated with Whistler for personal gain was explored by the Pennells in *The Life of Whistler*, 1908. They were extremely dismissive of the position and motives of artists who surrounded Whistler in the 1880s but were not in the least surprised by this confirmation of Whistler's undoubted charm:

> The relation between Whistler and many of the artists now often in the studio was less that of friends than of Master and Followers, as they called themselves ... Whistler always had the power of attracting people to him, and the devotion of one special group became almost infatuation.[19]

They stressed the extreme control exercised by Whistler over this group, and suggested one possible source for the ideas contained in Sickert's earliest writing,

> It was said that the Followers were not allowed by him even to rely upon their own opinions.[20]

Not content with belittling the "Followers" behaviour, the Pennells suspected that they were witnessing not selfless devotion but selfish ambition:

> The Followers, however, knew that if they were of use to Whistler, he was infinitely of more use to them, and that submission to his rule and exposure to his wit were a small price to pay for all he helped them to learn.[21]

This rather unflattering description of the parasitic young artists who besieged Whistler certainly offers one explanation for the defence of his Master, begun by the "Student" in 1882 and concluded by Sickert in 1908, when he reviewed the Pennells' biography of Whistler. It is, however, not a very satisfactory or complete analysis of the relationship between Sickert and Whistler.

The idea that Whistler had been surrounded by a group of slightly duplicitous sycophants was not entirely original. Mortimer Menpes had described the affiliation between Whistler and his "Followers" four years earlier than the Pennells in his book *Whistler as I Knew Him:*

> The Whistler Followers were privileged people; but among them were only two genuine pupils. These were Walter Sickert and myself. The followers never met under the Master's eye; but they formed themselves into a society whose main object was to fight his battles. Individually we meant to fight for ourselves, too; but that was a bold idea and we never let the Master know it.[22]

Menpes suggested that Whistler would have preferred not to have had the support of these friends, and that they only harmed the artist:

> The cry of Whistler's life was, "Save me from my friends!"... His friends are foolishly, though no doubt unwittingly, raising up a cloud behind which the real Whistler is obscured ... Just as nothing harms the dead Whistler so much as this exaggeration, nothing harmed the living Whistler so much as the foolish adulation of the sycophants by whom he was surrounded. His friends often upset him in his work by gush.[23]

While the rush, after Whistler's death, by former friends to demonstrate their superior personal knowledge of the artist, did not do Whistler's reputation any lasting damage, Menpes's suggestion does not offer a very flattering, or wholly satisfying, explanation for the conduct of the "Followers".

Sickert admitted that there were advantages to being a student of Whistler's, but this does not account for the number of times he wrote to the newspapers in his Master's defence. Similarly, the lack of any detailed praise or analysis of the work suggests that it could not have been the paintings and prints on their own which inspired such loyalty. In seeking an alternative explanation to that of cynical self promotion, as proposed by the Pennells and Menpes, for Sickert's early support of Whistler in the numerous letters and articles he wrote, it is necessary to ask the questions: what was Whistler's peculiar attraction and why did the young student become such an ardent disciple? Menpes was in no doubt that Whistler was a universally attractive figure:

> Wherever Whistler went he caused interest and excitement: men, women, and children flocked about him.[24]

The Pennells, by inviting comparison between Oscar Wilde and Whistler, in describing the friendship between the two men, may offer a possible explanation of Whistler's appeal to a young artist:

> Their friendship was closest in the early 'eighties when Whistler was bewildering the world by deliberate eccentricities of dress, eccentricities which Wilde copied rather clumsily. The world, that did not know them personally, soon mistook one for the other and

> actually supposed Whistler to be as much the founder of the so-called "Aesthetic" fad of the day as Wilde.[25]

Like Wilde, Whistler had been influenced by the ideas of Gautier, who had espoused the theory of *l'art pour l'art.* Subsequent generations had come to see in Gautier's writing the possibility of a hedonistic pleasure in the senses, satisfied not so much by nature, which was still imperfect, but by art. Gautier himself had even claimed that, as a young art student, he had been so disappointed by the models that he had to draw from that, from that moment on, he preferred statues to women and marble to flesh.[26] This idea, of the celebration of the artificial, was developed by Baudelaire and was an important tenet of the artistic practice of a number of artists and writers in England, who recognised Paris as the centre of modern aesthetic thought. Art was no longer considered to have a moral function and, freed from social responsibility, the artist could now pursue pleasure for its own sake and could further separate himself from society by assuming various guises. Gautier had assumed the rôle of the artistic bohemian, while Baudelaire had affected the pose of the dandy.

In England certain artists, to set themselves apart from the strict morality and utilitarianism of Victorian society, used the deliberate cultivation of individuality. Whistler, according to the descriptions of his contemporaries, seems to have embraced these ideas and to have self-consciously adopted characteristics that were very close to the definition of the dandy described by Baudelaire:

> C'est avant tout le besoin ardent de se faire une originalité, contenu dans les limites extérieures des convenances. C'est une espèce de culte de soi-même, ... C'est le plaisir d'étonner et la satisfaction orguelleuse de ne jamais être étonné.[27]

Whistler's *dandysme* could have formed part of the appeal for the young Sickert. The studied avoidance in Sickert's writing of any detailed analysis of Whistler's work,

might even suggest that it was the main source of attraction, and I believe that Menpes, Sickert's contemporary and a fellow student of Whistler's, offered a clear and succinct insight into what Sickert may have considered to be the most seductive of all Whistler's qualities:

> Never did mortal man create more excitement during a simple afternoon's stroll than Whistler.[28]

This simple description adds to the more general adulation, the notion of Whistler as a dandy and the image of Whistler strolling in the city, a *flâneur,* bringing him close to Baudelaire's vision of *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne.*

Sickert was attracted as much by the idea of Whistler, the *flâneur* and painter of modern life, as by his *oeuvre.* This argument is supported by looking at two articles in particular. The first, "Whistler by a Whistlerite", was written anonymously, in 1885, for the *Truth*[29], and the second, "The New Life of Whistler", was written in 1908 for *The Fortnightly Review*[30]. Despite the twenty-three years that separates the two articles, they were linked by Sickert when he helped to identify himself as the author of the anonymous essay by listing, in "The New Life of Whistler", the newspapers and journals, including the *Truth*, in which he had carried on his obstinate defence of Whistler's work. In "Whistler by a Whistlerite", which was a review of Whistler's work on show at the Society of British Artists, the anonymous writer, whom I believe to be Sickert, was keen to remind his readers of Whistler's past success in Paris. In particular he mentioned the support that Whistler had won from the champion of *l'art pour l'art*:

> ... in Paris, his "White Girl" attracted the notice of Théophile Gautier in the "Salon des Refusés." [31]

This reference to Gautier would have been understood by some readers in London as an allusion to modern, decadent French attitudes to art, although these ideas were probably better known among writers than painters in England. He then went on to discuss Whistler's recent presentations of his "Ten O'clock" lecture before finally turning his attention to the pictures themselves.

Sickert started his criticism of Whistler's paintings in the exhibition by writing first about "four little landscape "notes" in water-colour". This could be considered slightly perverse, if it is taken into consideration that among the other work that Whistler had on show was his *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of Señor Pablo de Sarasate.* The smaller paintings, which Sickert chose to consider first, were less obviously impressive, but he thought that they were:

> ... dainty and fleeting ... impressions of grey skies and green grass, of tall silver houses by a silver sea, and of a London Bridge with hurrying clouds and hurrying figures - figures that pass as figures do in real life, before we have time to render to ourselves a complete account of every detail of their appearance.[32]

This description of Whistler's paintings by Sickert is very close to Baudelaire's praise of the work of Guys and the inclusion, in the review, of references to Whistler's cosmopolitan appeal, his ideas on aesthetics and his detached observation of the crowd, all echo Baudelaire's description of the ideal painter of modern life:

> Je le nommerais volontier un *dandy* implique une quintessence de caractère et une intelligence subtile de tout le mécanisme moral de ce monde; mais, d'un autre côté, le dandy aspire à l'insensibilité, ...[33]

In Whistler, Sickert believed that he had found a man who satisfied the essential criteria of the painter of modern life, just as Baudelaire had first identified them in

Guys twenty years before. Baudelaire had explained that such a man would have to be much more than the commonly accepted and narrower definition of the artist:

> Lorsque enfin je le trouvai, je vis tout d'abord que je n'avais pas affaire précisement à un *artiste,* mais plutôt à un *homme du monde.* Entendez ici, je vous prie, le mot *artiste* dans un sens très restreint, et le mot *homme du monde* dans un sens très étendu. *Homme du monde*, c'est-à-dire homme du monde entier, homme qui comprend le monde et les raisons mystérieuses et légitimes de tous ses usages; *artiste*, c'est-à-dire spécialiste, homme attaché à sa palette comme le serf à la glèbe.[34]

It would also appear that, if the painter of modern life was not to be a slave to his palette, then the modern critic, in writing about him, need not feel obliged to concentrate his text exclusively on the paintings, but could attempt to explain to the public the genius of the artist in all its manifestations.

This offers a more satisfactory explanation of Sickert's persistent support of Whistler. When he wrote about Whistler, he concentrated as much on Whistler's complete genius as he did on the paintings, and if he did write about the work he tended to do so in a way which made use of rich descriptive prose, but avoided analysis, in a style which is perhaps reminiscent of some of Gautier's art criticism:

> The "Nocturne in Blue and Silver - Bognor" ... can never be surpassed. The blue of the summer sea, growing black with intensity at the horizon, the silent stars, the ghostly wreaths of cloud trailing in the watery sky. ... The waves creep in while they seem not to move, except where they curl and break and tumble at your feet on a dusky shore. You are conscious, at the water's edge, of shadowy figures going on about their mysterious business with the night. All these things and a million-fold more are expressed in this immortal canvas, with a power and a tenderness that I have never seen elsewhere. The whole soul of the universe is in the picture, the whole spirit of beauty. It is an exemplar and a summary of all art. It is an act of divine creation. The man that has created it is thereby alone immortal a thousand times over. Who are we that we should scribble and nag at him?[35]

Sickert, however, became less enamoured of Whistler's brilliance; immortality it seems did not last as long as might have been imagined. Five years after Whistler's death, in his review of the Pennells' biography, Sickert wrote a more detached and incisive article about Whistler's work.

Sickert started his essay, "The New Life of Whistler", by gently attacking the Pennells, and clearly the events of 1896-7, when they had sued Sickert over the article about transfer-lithography, were in no way forgotten. However, it was not Sickert's intention simply to review their new biography of Whistler, since he also wanted to use this opportunity to pose the question,

> ... in what way has our comprehension of Whistler's talent altered by the observation and reflection of a quarter of a century?[36]

He hoped both to correct the accounts of others, and also to reassess Whistler's importance as an artist and his own reaction to him. Once again he started by considering Whistler's philosophy, rather than his work. In particular he rebuked Whistler for having tried to stress his originality, by denying his debt to the art of the past:

> It was Whistler's incessant preoccupation to present himself as having sprung completely armed from nowhere. And it certainly was a flaw in his philosophy that he did not understand that it was no shame to be born.[37]

This comment suggests that Sickert would have received only disapproval from Whistler for the numerous articles he had written, in which he tried to establish the worthy, artistic tradition that had given birth to Whistler. It also implies that the argument put forward by the Pennells: that the "Followers" were not "allowed by him even to rely upon their own opinions", was, at the very least, overstated.

The next theme that Sickert developed in his essay was the importance to Whistler of sketching. Through sketching, by which Sickert meant drawing rapidly in front of the subject, Sickert believed that Whistler had recorded particular momentary "truths":

> ... let those who despise sketching remember that there are certain truths, certain beauties, certain swift relations between the thrilled observer and the fleeting beam of light, of which sketching, and sketching alone, is the human and intellectual expression.[38]

Sickert would appear to have been returning to the arguments put forward by Baudelaire, and other French critics, regarding the "transitory" nature of beauty and the need for the artist to try to make this "eternal". He proceeded to explore an idea which owes still more to Baudelaire, as he approached the subject of Whistler's "campaigning" and the disguises he used to present himself to the world:

> *"Tu sais Whistler, c'est bon de faire le charlatan à Londres: ici ça ne prendra pas,"* though quoted in reprobation, perhaps expresses the opinion of nine out of ten Frenchmen on Whistler's campaigning, as apart from his work. ... But if the charlatan attracts us to his booth by strange devices, it is said that he takes your teeth out better than his more academic brother.[39]

As a student Sickert had been taken in by Whistler, the "charlatan", he had eagerly rushed into his "booth", which he found altogether more appealing than that of the "academic brother", moreover he had encouraged others to do the same. He also recognised the attraction and the importance of artifice and disguise and suggested that these were present in all art. In his show-ground metaphor the "charlatan" is closely related to the "academic" and these ideas were consistent with the aesthetic theories which had been developed in France by Gautier and Baudelaire.

Sickert believed that any number of people had been "taken in" by Whistler but that he had been better prepared to understand the true nature of Whistler's work.

Sickert claimed to have been introduced to French art in the 'seventies by his father, "who had studied at Couture's, and was influenced by Courbet", and then come into contact with Otto Scholderer "who had been subjected to the same influences". As a result of this early acquaintance with French painting, Sickert was in a position to understand Whistler's own work and, perhaps most significantly of all, to appreciate the importance of Whistler's impact on English art:

> Whistler has ... sent the more intelligent of the generation that succeeds him to the springs whence he drew his own art - to French soil. He had the great good fortune to learn painting in Paris, while the traditions of David, and Ingres, and Delacroix were still vivid, and his talent had the extraordinary instinct of self-preservation through years of residence in England, never to let go of what he had learnt from Gleyre, Lecocq de Boisbaudran, Courbet and Fantin.[40]

Whistler's pose as a dandy, coupled with this thorough knowledge of French art, was at the heart of Sickert's genuine admiration for the artist he chose as his master and whom he supported, constantly, in his writing. Sickert also recognised that Whistler was fatally flawed. Having left Paris so early in his career, he had cut himself off from the vital lifeblood of French art, and, as Sickert had explained, he even refused to recognise its importance to him, insisting that he had "sprung completely armed from nowhere".

Sickert maintained that it was as a result of Whistler's contact with "the generous *pot-au-feu* into which Courbet dipped his ladle to such good effect", that Whistler had been able to paint the Nocturnes. These small paintings represented for Sickert the culmination of Whistler's contact with French art and the pinnacle of his achievement as an artist:

> I imagine that, with time, it will be seen that Whistler expressed the essence of his talent in his little panels, *pochades*, it is true, in

> measurement, but masterpieces of classic painting in importance. ... He has solved in them a problem that had hitherto seemed insoluble: to give a result of deliberateness to a work done in a few hours from nature. It was the admirable preliminary order in his mind, the perfect peace at which his art was with itself, that enabled him to aim at and bring down quarry which, to anyone else, would have seemed intangible and altogether elusive.[41]

Sickert's writing on Whistler was in this respect extremely consistent. In 1885 he had praised Whistler's small watercolours. Whereas he may have tried to deter other critics from concentrating on just one aspect of Whistler's work, he had, wherever possible, tried to avoid writing at any length about any of Whistler's work other than these, the Nocturnes, and similar work which Sickert interpreted as having taken the city for their subject. There are echoes of much French critical writing in the way that Sickert described these small paintings of Whistler's: the "order" and "perfect peace" of Whistler's mind, restate Gautier's theory of the inner *microcosme* of the artist, while the idea of the painter finding "eternal beauty", where others would only have found a subject that was "intangible and altogether elusive", places Sickert's ideas very close indeed to the ideas of Baudelaire.

In this final, lengthy essay on Whistler's development as a painter, Sickert confirmed that the most plausible explanation for his support of Whistler was Whistler's adoption of the ideas and the pose of the modern French artists. By asking himself: "in what way has our comprehension of Whistler's talent altered by the observation and reflection of a quarter of a century", Sickert also hinted at a possible reason why he had avoided writing extensively about Whistler's work. Sickert believed that Whistler's most important contribution to English art, and artists had been made by furthering their understanding of French art, and that this was best seen by looking at the Nocturnes. He also felt that Whistler had corrupted that French influence by trying to make it palatable to an English audience.

> I see *la bonne peinture* breaking up. A confusion - how natural to a young man so isolated - creeping in upon him. Perhaps the aesthetes were right? Perhaps he could retain his good painting and yet satisfy the English thirst for sentimentality?[42]

This was, Sickert believed, Whistler's greatest weakness. He wanted to pursue the goals of modern French painting but he also hoped to accommodate the expectations of his English audience. This was anathema to Sickert who maintained that "Taste is the death of a painter" who wanted to develop the ideas of David, Ingres, Delacroix, Courbet and the new generation of modern French painters, for such an artist should find "His poetry is in the interpretation of ready-made life"[43]. This precept was at the centre of Sickert's ideology, which he had developed over the twenty-five years in which he had been writing about Whistler. He believed that Whistler had perverted this idea, with predictable results:

> So here we have on the one hand Whistler tying Mrs. Leyland's dress up with little ribbons, and placing bows of pre-ordained colours through-out points. We have him placing her in a confused Paradise of invented check-patterns, and apple blossoms, in a nowhere of his own, and producing a very wreck of a painting, while Renoir, in Paris, makes a classic of a plump little lady, standing simply in her bourgeois salon, in her black silk Sunday dress, as it was sent home to her by her dressmaker.[44]

If this was Sickert's view of Whistler's work it would explain why he was reluctant to commit himself to commenting directly on the paintings. He had shown early on in his writing a suspicion of those artists who sought respectability by trying to moderate the ideas of the modern painters of Paris, among whom it would appear he now numbered Whistler. With the exception of the Nocturnes he felt that Whistler had betrayed his early training. While Baudelaire had described Delacroix, in the obituary he wrote in 1863, as:

> ... un cratère de volcan artistement caché par des bouquets de fleurs.[45]

Sickert now seemed to be suggesting that Whistler's well known sulphurous exterior which may have been part of the appeal of the artist whom Sickert remembered as "a *charmeur* and a dandy"[46], was little more than a disguise, and at the heart of the *volcan* there was only a bouquet of rather tastefully arranged flowers.

Sickert on Millet and Degas: Into the Region of the Sublime.

During his time spent as a student of Whistler, Sickert completed his introduction to modern French painting. When he sent Sickert to Paris to deliver the *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, to the *Salon* of 1883 Whistler had even given Sickert letters of introduction to Manet, who was too ill to see him, and to Degas, who took him to his studio. While Sickert was in Paris he stayed with Oscar Wilde at the *Hôtel du quai Voltaire*. Sickert believed that the generation of French painters born at the beginning of the nineteenth century were responsible for a "great revival of serious painting", and that among the most important of these artists was Jean François Millet. In particular, Sickert discovered in the work of Millet an adherence to the principles of "observation, selection, and expression". Unlike Whistler, who presented "himself as having sprung completely armed from nowhere"[47], Millet also demonstrated a respect for "the teachings of the greatest masters", which, Sickert argued, was an essential element of modern painting.

In his writing on Millet, Sickert described what he called "the way of the artist". He rarely attempted to address himself to any particular works by Millet, but used those commentaries on the painter that he wrote during the period from 1889 to 1891 to define his own aesthetic and ideas on modern painting and what he believed to be the indigence of English painting. Sickert described Millet as a consummate artist:

> ... a great draughtsman and a great colourist. He was gifted with the comprehension in its entirety of the import of any scene in nature which he wished to render. An unerring analysis enabled him to select what were the vital constituents of such a scene, and exquisite perceptions, trained by incessant labour, to render them in fitting terms in accordance with the tradition which governs the use of each material.[48]

The combination of observation of the world around him and an understanding and respect for tradition were the qualities that Sickert required of the modern painter. By describing the way in which these characteristics were manifested in the work of Millet, Sickert was able to promote his own ideology, and, at the same time, he demonstrated the depth of his understanding of Millet's painting and his abilities as a writer on art.

Sickert was not the first writer to have remarked on Millet's debt to tradition. In *La Vie et l'Oeuvre de J. -F. Millet*, published in 1882, Alfred Sensier quoted from Millet's recollection of his arrival in Paris:

> Dans les premiers jours de mon arrivé à Paris, mon idée fixe était de voir le vieux musée.[49]

Sensier also described what Millet saw in the Louvre and the way in which he studied the work of the great masters:

> ... il étudie Michel-Ange, il analyse Corrège. Il va au Louvre; il le copie rien, mais il vit dans l'atmosphère des maîtres.[50]

and in his *Salon* criticism of 1853, Gautier had recognised the "attitudes des statues de Michel-Ange"[51] in certain figures in Millet's painting. Sickert may not have known that the young Millet had studied so assiduously at the Museum, but he certainly recognised that such a traditional course of action would have been in no way antipathetic to the artist who wanted to "render the magic and the poetry which they daily see around them", for whom Sickert believed "the most fruitful course of

study" was to be found "on the walls of the National Gallery"[52]. A familiarity with the greatest art of the past was, for Sickert, essential if the artist was to bring to modern subjects the grandeur and substance necessary to elevate them "into the region of the sublime."[53]

It was also Sickert's practice to link the names of artists of the past with contemporary painters, although he recognised the inherent difficulties of this strategy. Although he may have been mindful of the unfavourable comparison that was made between the work of Whistler and a supposed work of Titian's, now attributed to Vincenzo Catena, by the defence during the trial against Ruskin, and aware of attacks on his own writing for associating the work of the "London Impressionists" with that of Velázquez[54], he nevertheless continued to promote the idea that painters must learn from the old masters:

> I know that it is dangerous to mention an old master by name in discussing modern paintings ... How is it that ... any attempt by a painter to deduce from the classics of painting canons of criticism to be applied to modern work is resented as an impertinence? We painters spend half our lives with the old masters. They are a great deal more in our thoughts than the Government or the Opposition, or the last Gaiety burlesque, and we have as much right to talk about them as anyone.[55]

I believe that it was the combination of a concern for the art of the past and for contemporary society that made the work of Millet so appealing to Sickert. He readily used the example of the French painter, whose work was attracting increasing amounts of critical acclaim and value in the art market, to promote his idea that this was still the correct course for the artist to follow.

This was not the only paradigm that Sickert constructed through his writing on Millet. He analysed the way he believed that Millet painted his pictures, working from a combination of drawings and memory:

> To begin with, Millet, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, had seen his picture happen somewhere in nature. Its treatment generally involved complex difficulties of suggestion of movement, or at least of energy, to say nothing of those created by the variety of lighting and atmospheric effect; the management of sunlight, of twilight, of the lighting of interiors. All of these elements he was enabled by means of a highly-trained artistic memory, to retain and render on the summary method which we call inspiration ... [56]

Sickert maintained that this approach to a subject, the synthesis of observation and memory until a familiar scene was fixed in the artist's mind to be recalled at will, together with "a profound and convinced reverence for tradition", was essential to the production of "purely artistic painting"[57]. Sickert's description of the model of ideal artistic practice, which he projected onto the work of Millet, was not artificially manufactured, but demonstrated his understanding and knowledge of Millet's work. Sickert explained how Millet's "execution was in the main separated from his observation"[58], and this statement is supported by a letter Millet wrote to Sensier:

> ... il faudrait un peu de calme pour s'arrêter le temps voulu sur l'idée qui vous vient, jusqu'à ce qu'elle ait pris dans la tête le temps de se concentrer pour ne donner que le vraiment essentiel de l'idée.[59]

The story of Millet's struggle against poverty and rejection, and the high prices his work currently commanded in the market, a consequence of "the well-known blind enthusiasm of Americans for Millet's works"[60], would have been known to Sickert's readers and this awareness would have been to Sickert's advantage when he attempted to demonstrate the value of his theories on artistic practice through the example of Millet. Sickert also understood that with this acceptance of the work of Millet came certain dangers of incomprehension, which he was eager to dismiss:

> Now that Jean François Millet has achieved a posthumous commercial success - every whit as unintelligent as was the comparative neglect of his day - the walls of every gallery have swarmed with sowers, and bristled with gleaners, painted by young

men who dress for dinner, and live in West Kensington. The raw reader of the rawer art magazines has heard so much about the nobility of the peasant, and the dignity of labour, that he has been obliged to conclude that Millet was great because he painted peasants, and that therefore peasants are the tip. He has not a suspicion that Millet became an accomplished painter because he developed to the full all his faculties of observation and expression, and that under no possible conditions could they have had such varied nourishment, and such a full play, as when they were exercised on the subjects by which he was perpetually surrounded. If Millet had been born a modern cockney, he would have found sublime themes in Upper Street, or Piccadilly. He would have had supreme contempt for the latter-day "Romanticist" of Bond Street.[61]

Sickert was aware that Millet's work appealed to a pastoral fantasy of repose shared by many who lived in the city and that this disguised the Realism of his painting. The respect that Millet's work commanded made him, for Sickert, a useful example of correct artistic practice, but the slightly antiquated nature of his imagery meant that he could only be seen as part of the great tradition of French painting of the 1830s, and not as a model of the painter of modern life.

This air of respectability was not shared by Degas, whose work was still considered shocking by commentators in England at the end of the nineteenth century. Degas' notoriety was based on a limited knowledge of the painter's work, in particular the exhibition of *L'Absinthe* in London in 1893. However, aspects of Degas work came to represent for Sickert the expression of an art that was "the flower of all time". After their first meeting, in Paris in 1883, Sickert returned to England and, according to Menpes, a fellow student of Whistler's,

> He brought enthusiastic descriptions of the ballet girls Digars [sic] was painting in Paris.[62]

He met the artist again in Dieppe, in 1885, and Degas made a drawing in pastel at the time showing Sickert, Jacques Émile Blanche, the writer Ludovic Halévy with his son

Daniel, Henri Gervex, and Albert Cavé, titled *Six Friends at Dieppe,* that suggests that the acquaintanceship had developed. With this friendship came a fuller understanding of Degas' work, manifested not only in Sickert's painting but also in his writing on art. Typically, Sickert did not attempt to describe any specific work by Degas but instead promoted Degas as the consummate modern artist. The first time that Sickert made reference to work by Degas he did not actually name the French artist, but the description is nonetheless unmistakeable:

> ... the visitor to the exhibition of the "Société de Impressionistes" in Paris may well be pardoned if he overlooks, in the crowd of prismatic mannerisms, the calm and unobtrusive presence of works by the greatest draughtsman since the time of Holbein, ... [63]

As in the case of Whistler and Millet, Sickert was eager to establish a suitably worthy pedigree for Degas by linking his name with one of the old masters.

By referring to the example of Degas, and possibly as a result of their friendship, Sickert introduced into his writing on art ideas which had first been developed by Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran, in his book, *Education de la mémoire pittoresque, application aux arts de dessin*, 1862, and by the French realist writer Louis Émile Edmond Duranty, whose portrait Degas had painted in 1879. In particular Sickert supported the contention first expressed by Duranty, in his pamphlet, *La Nouvelle Peinture*, 1876:

> L'idée, la première idée a été d'enlever la cloison qui sépare l'atelier de la vie commune, ou d'y ouvrir ce jour sur la rue ... [64]

and suggested that Degas had succeeded in removing this partition between the artist's studio and the world beyond. Sickert explained how Degas had learnt from Millet,

> ... that action cannot be studied from a fatigued and posturing model, but must be observed and remembered.[65]

Furthermore Degas had, according to Sickert, not only understood the importance of working from observation and memory but had extended the possibilities of this way of working:

> ... it is to its further and more exquisite development that we owe the profoundly learned and beautiful work of Degas. His field of observation is shifted from the life of the village and the labour of the plains, to the sordid toil of the greenroom and the hectic mysteries of stage illumination; but the artistic problem remains the same, and its solution is worked out on the same lines.[66]

Writing about the work of Degas, I believe that Sickert was able to demonstrate the importance of the subject matter of a painting. Neither the work of Millet, who belonged to the previous generation, and whose subject had been rural rather than urban, nor of Whistler, who had publicly renounced the importance of the subject of a painting to the artist, allowed Sickert to discuss this final and essential constituent of his ideal of the modern painting.

In the work of Degas, Sickert had discovered what he believed to be the direction that painting must follow and, together with Whistler and Millet, Degas was frequently presented by Sickert in his art criticism as a guide for the artist. Only the cartoonist Charles Keene was the recipient of the same regular praise as these three painters. Sickert greatly enjoyed popular entertainment and his admiration of Keene, who was highly regarded by both Degas and Camille Pissarro, is consistent with his desire to see art engaging with modern life. Keene was a fine draughtsman, and his inclusion by Sickert with Whistler, Millet and Degas is, I believe, similar to Baudelaire's selection of Guys - who was an illustrator for the *Illustrated London News* at the same time as Keene - as his epitome of *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*. Sickert

considered it "a scandal" that Keene was allowed to die without ever receiving any official recognition of his genius. Despite the genius of Keene, Sickert acknowledged that Paris was the "art-centre of European painting" and he was often disappointed by the work of his British contemporaries. He was particularly scathing of those British painters who claimed to have been influenced by the new art of Paris, and "the Franco-cosmopolitan student of to-day"[67] was as much a target of his wit as any of the members of the Royal Academy, who were more commonly lambasted by writers and artists who regarded themselves as being progressive.

Sickert on his contemporaries: the genius of painting still hovers over Paris and must be wooed on the banks of the Seine.

In his novel *L'Oeuvre*, first published in eight instalments in *Le Gil Blas*, starting on 23rd December 1885, Zola had created a meretricious painter, Fagerolles, possibly based on the artist Henri Gervex, who developed an opportunistic and pragmatic style of painting founded on the radical ideas of his friends but rendered more palatable for his bourgeois public, and the market. I would suggest that Sickert might have considered that the description of the character of Fagerolles could equally well have been applied to Jules Bastien-Lepage, whom in the 1880s, W.B. Yeats explained, was admired "by young men fresh from the Paris art schools". The painter William Rothenstein described his time at L'Académie Julian, where with other Englishmen he was a student, and explained how "We all admired Bastien-Lepage", and W. J. Laidlay, one of the founding members of the New English Art Club, argued that only good could result from the Royal Academy including in its exhibitions the work of Bastien-Lepage. Sickert did not share the views of his peers and no artist seemed to attract his ire to quite the same degree as Bastien-Lepage, whom he regarded as "an

inveterate *salonnier*, with all the ideals and limitations of the typical uncultured Paris art student."[68]

Sickert was wary of the demands of the market and of the effect that this could have on an artist's work. He warned that by yielding "to an uninformed ambition or the exigencies of the market" a student could become "as clever as any one else, and cleverer"[69]. He believed that the future did not lie with those who had "thoroughly mastered a style" but that it was:

> ... with those who observe for themselves and whose work often contains the hesitations and imperfections, as well as the convictions, of a single-handed struggle with nature. That supreme absence of manner which we call style is often shared with the greatest masters ...[70]

He also held that "commercial painting in France is as bad, and perhaps more offensive than the mass of commercial painting here"[71]. Sickert believed that Bastien-Lepage exhibited the signs of an ambitious artist, eager to appeal to the market, that he had disregarded tradition and that his work lacked the analysis and selection which should have formed a part of the artist's struggle with nature. Instead he had become preoccupied with preparing work for the walls of exhibitions and "the necessities and allurements" of what Sickert called "competitive painting"[72], with the consequence that his art was bereft of any other ideas:

> *Faire vrai* is the sum and aim of his intention. Realists he and his like have been jauntily labelled by the hasty journalist. But the truth in their work is the truth of unessentials, and their elaborate and unlovely realities serve only to uncover themes that are profoundly unreal.[73]

Because Bastien-Lepage insisted on working directly from nature, as opposed to relying on drawings and memory, like Millet and Degas, he was forced to pose models. Sickert had described how this practice had vitiated the work of Jules

Breton, producing paintings which displayed a "silly insincerity"[74], and Sickert saw the practice as a further perversion of the truth of the new generation of "Realists":

> ... your picture necessarily becomes a portrait of a model posing by the hour. The illumination, instead of being that of a north light on Newman Street, is, it is true, the illumination of a Cornish or a Breton sky. Your subject is a real peasant in his own natural surroundings, and not a model from Hatton Garden. But what is he doing? He is posing for a picture as best he can, and he looks it. That woman stooping to put potatoes in a sack will never rise again. The potatoes, portraits every one, will never drop into the sack, and never a breath of air circulates around that painful rendering in the flat of the authentic patches on the very gown of a real peasant. What are the truths you have gained, a handful of tiresome little facts, compared to the truths you have lost? To life and spirit, light and air?[75]

Working in this way Sickert believed that these "so-called realists", or "modern photo-realists", made work which was so similar that they could contribute to each other's pictures without any "appreciable discord of execution" being apparent.

The work of several of the members of the New English Art Club displayed this anodyne homogeneity. This society had been formed in 1886 in London by a group of artists whose common bond was that they had all been students in Paris. They were dissatisfied with their failure to be properly represented on the walls of the Royal Academy and hoped to establish a more democratic selection procedure for their exhibitions, which would draw on a wider suffrage of artists than the more elitist, and consequently limited, Academy. These principles were shared by Sickert who, in one of the first moves he made to assert his independence from Whistler, became a member of the N.E.A.C. in 1888. The next year, he wrote of the club's "generous and catholic constitution"[76], and in a slightly later article he described the N.E.A.C. as "an experiment in the direction of radicalism in the management of picture exhibitions". After first explaining their selection and hanging procedure, he pronounced that:

> It would be difficult to formulate a fairer or more generous scheme for the management of a representative picture gallery. [77]

Ironically, it had been the intention of the original members of the club to try to reproduce, in London, the same possibilities for an artist to exhibit his work as those that existed for painters in Paris. Sickert recognised the similarities with Paris but was wary of the growing number of opportunities for artists to exhibit their work. He argued, just a month after his article on "The New English Art", that over-exposure could be dangerous to the development of serious art, and would lead to the reproduction of "the worst academic vices", but that was not his greatest fear:

> The real injury is deeper seated. Clever and rising painters are tempted and encouraged by the exceptional opportunities of display to the manufacture of that most detestable bane of all modern art - the exhibition picture or the *machin* as it is called in Paris.[78]

This was one of the faults which Sickert had detected in the work of Bastien-Lepage and was another dubious quality shared by many members of the N.E.A.C. In the paintings of Henry Tuke, Sickert thought he recognised the signs of "carefully posed models", and other "fallacious French methods", such as the "square touch which is the sole stock-in-trade of the *massiers* of the Anglo-French school"[79]. Sickert found these same techniques in the work of La Thangue, and wrote of a portrait of his that:

> It has the air of saying:- "Sitters may be assured that none but the square brushes are used, and the values are numbered to secure accuracy."[80]

Sickert was wary of the wholesale adoption of French ideas. His reservations included the following of "the style of cheap impressionism, which covers a multitude of sins"[81], and it is possible that within the N.E.A.C. were those painters whom Sickert referred to as "many of our best friends" who "paint very badly"[82].

Sickert's response to the faults, which he perceived existed in the N.E.A.C., went beyond this passive criticism. Fred Brown, another of the founder members of the club recollected Sickert's active participation at meetings and his particular empathy with certain other club members:

> The clique which was to have an important bearing on the history of the N.E.A.C. consisted in 1887 of myself, Steer, Starr and Roussel, strengthened by the addition of Francis Bate and Walter Sickert. We frequently met at the house of the last-named, and planned to obtain a greater and, if possible, a dominating influence. I need not say that with Sickert as host our little conspiracies were not very sombre affairs. ... By 1892 the 'Impressionists,' as we were indiscriminately called, were in full control.[83]

These were the English artists to whom Sickert offered his support in the press. In particular he praised the work of Philip Wilson Steer, whose painting *The Sofa*, exhibited at the N.E.A.C. in 1889, Sickert said bore "throughout an impress of unity and distinction which is nothing less than classical."[84]. Sickert made a print, after Steer's painting of children playing "knuckle-bones" on the beach at Walberswick, which was reproduced in *The Whirlwind* together with an essay by Sickert praising the original picture. He explained how Steer had trained in Paris but had:

> ... escaped altogether the terrible stereotyped manner, which is the badge of many English painters of French training.[85]

Once again he criticised artists who made use of posed models, of "properties" and "acting", before praising Steer's painting:

> Mr. Steer's children are not acting at all. They are playing among themselves without a trace of self-consciousness. The painter has caught the grace and beauty of the unconscious action, and presented it from a novel and personal point of view.[86]

Sickert believed that the painting represented the "best in modern Impressionism" and that Steer was, an "intelligent student of the old and modern masters" who made use of "observation and experience" to produce his work.

Sickert mentioned others in this group of "Impressionists" in his exhibition reviews and other articles. Sidney Starr was particularly praised by Sickert for taking as his subject matter the life of the city. Sickert seemed to be turning once again to Baudelaire, who had demanded paintings in which the protagonists should be seen in their *frac* and *botines vernies*, when he wrote about Starr's painting in the New English Art Club exhibition of 1889:

> More power, then to the fist of the modern! May the cut of his coats never grow worse, or his pumps lack polish! His "Abercorn Place from Maida Vale," again proves that when the lilacs are in bloom landscape is loveliest in London, and that poetry is not divorced from St. John's Wood.[87]

A year later he wrote about the "beauty " and "gaiety" in Starr's work and once again drew attention to his modern subject matter. Similarly, Sickert described a work by Theodore Roussel as being what he understood "by oil painting at its best", and as, a "picture in the truest sense of the word"[88]. Sickert chose Roussel's painting *The Plumbago Works* as the subject of another of his prints for *The Whirlwind* and wrote of this painting, of a factory by the Thames, that he considered it "to be highly dramatic". He then described it in a way that added to the drama, drawing attention to, "the sulphurous sky" which he said was, "not only beautiful but sensational" and to the "drama" of the "chosen moment", and, finally, how he held Roussel to be "a truer poet, and a better painter, than all the manufacturers of the decapitation pieces in the Salon"[89].

The only other artist from the New English Art Club to receive such regular praise from Sickert was Albert Ludovici. Sickert's writing on Ludovici's work concentrated on the same themes: he admired the way that Ludovici avoided hackneyed images by painting, subjects drawn from his experience of the city, and he singled out a painting by Ludovici at the Royal Academy Exhibition, in 1890, for revealing "in its few inches of surface more painter-like qualities than many acres of the productions around it."[90] Sickert's campaigning support of the "London Impressionist" was always consistent with the general principles that governed all his criticism and his own work as a painter and seems to confirm Brown's suggestion that he was deliberately promoting the group that existed within the N.E.A.C.

Conclusion. The salaried servant of a form of stock gambling.

Sir Frederick Leighton, the President of the Royal Academy, was reported as having tried to dismiss "these impressionists"[91] of the New English Art Club. Sickert's treatment of the work of Leighton was more generous and he even suggested that his painting *Summer Moon*, shown at the Academy exhibition of 1889, gave its creator "claims to immortality". This was, however, an exception to the treatment that the mass of work shown at the annual exhibition usually received from Sickert:

> For sheer irresponsible show-making, without conscience, without shame, and without authority, the Academy takes the cake.[92]

Despite this condemnation of the work, Sickert was prepared to search through the "flotsam and jetsam" to find examples of good painting. The result of this produced what I consider to be one of his more perverse judgments. Sickert began his review of the Academy exhibition of 1890 by applauding James Hook R.A. and proclaiming that his painting *A Jib for the New Smack* took "the honours of the exhibition". This

statement is perhaps not surprising given Whistler's admiration for this artist, but Sickert continued his article and explained that, having only managed in his catalogue preface to the exhibition of work by the "London Impressionists", 1890, to give a negative definition of Impressionism:

> This picture affords me a concrete and positive illustration. It is what I understand by Impressionism at its best.[93]

I am unhappy with the idea that this statement should simply be dismissed as a bit of whimsy. Sickert was capable of far more effective humour and damning sarcasm and I believe that his comments on the work of Hook need to be considered in the context of his other writing.

In his *Salon* criticism of 1879, Zola had commented, with very little regard for historical accuracy, that all the greatest artists had to struggle at the beginning of their careers. The veracity of this statement is perhaps less important than the credibility that it acquired. The idea was soon generally accepted and in France the artists of the avant-garde sought the aspersion, rather than the approbation, of both public and critics. Sickert, who appears from his own work to have been capable of taking advantage of such strategies, was also wary of the market and the effects that it could have on the work of ambitious artists. He was equally circumspect with regard to "fads", and the opinions of the "Prismatic gentlemen of the latest Paris pattern":

> The radical fallacy of the superficial element in the Paris movement, variously known as *Impressionisme, Vibrisme, Luminisme*, is that the making of pictures can be subjected to the same law of regular advance as the manufacture of torpedoes or ironclads. *Il faut être dans le mouvement.* Pictures are worn so, or so, this season. Do not let us be behind hand in the cut of our art.[94]

He was anxious to embrace the Modern, but never at the expense of tradition. Throughout his writing he stressed that the two ideas were not in the least

incompatible and that a proper regard for tradition could elevate the modern subject and enable the painter to produce pictures that could hang next to the work of Holbein, Velázquez and Rembrandt. It is this belief which, I think, explains his praise of Hook and his determination to describe him as an Impressionist. He concluded his comments on *A Jib for the New Smack*, stating that since this example of Impressionism "comes from Mr. Hook, it is evident that Impressionism is not, like Bovril, the invention of yesterday."[95] Sickert's discovery of an example of Impressionist painting at the Royal Academy, produced by an Academician, after he had failed to find any such work at an exhibition of "London Impressionists" suggests that he considered Impressionism and tradition to be inextricably linked. It also implies that the title "Impressionist" had no meaning as a dismissive term of abuse by elderly academicians visiting exhibitions of work by young artists. Replying to a comment in the *Globe*, Sickert defended the Impressionist school against an assault from Alma Tadema and highlighted the research "and study of tradition" of the "great masters of the 'impressionist school'."[96]

In his writing on art, and his campaigning on behalf of certain artists, Sickert revealed himself to be a perceptive and able propagandist, whose opinions were strengthened by their simplicity and consistent application. In 1889 Sickert had feared that the increasing number of exhibitions that were taking place each year would mean that art criticism would fall into the hands of reporters who were only interested in the potential "news-element" of an exhibition. The emergence of writers on art such as George Moore, D.S. MacColl and R.A.M. Stevenson and others, who were labelled the "New Critics", guaranteed that Sickert's anxiety was misplaced.

Notes on Chapter 2.

1 See Appendix.

2 Anonymous, "Corot Indifferent to Colour", The New York Herald, London, 8 March 1889, p. 5. This is probably one of the articles referred to by Sickert in "The New Life of Whistler", The Fortnightly Review, December 1908, pp. 1017-1028. He continued to attack Spielmann in the first article he wrote for The Whirlwind, a signed article, "Art", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 1, 28 June 1890, pp. 12-13.

3 Ruskin, "Life Guards of New Life", Fors Clavigera, July 1877

4 Anonymous, Untitled, The Pall Mall Gazette, 7 June 1882, p. 4. Reprinted in, E.R. and J. Pennell, The Life of Whistler, 1908, p. 309, and acknowledged by Sickert in "The New Life of Whistler", The Fortnightly Review, December 1908, pp. 1017 – 1028.

5 Ibid.

6 Sickert, "Impressionism - True of False", The Pall Mall Gazette, 2 February 1889, p. 3.

7 Ibid.

8 Sickert, "Whistler To-day", The Fortnightly Review, April 1892, p. 544.

9 Sickert, "Art", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 1, 28 June 1890, p. 13.

10 Anonymous, "The New English Art Club" (First Notice), The New York Herald, London, 16 April 1889, p. 4. For an explanation of the attribution of this article see n. 1, p. 1.

11 Anonymous, "The Private Galleries", The New York Herald, London, 4 May 1889, p. 4. See n. 1, p. 1.

12 Sickert, "Art", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 4, 19 July 1890, p. 51.

13 Anonymous, "Messrs. Dowdeswell's Galleries" [First Notice], The New York Herald, London, 1 April 1889, p. 4. For an explanation of the attribution see n. 1, p. 1.

14 Sickert, "Whistler To-day", The Fortnightly Review, April 1892, p. 543.

15 Sickert, "Impressionism - True or False", The Pall Mall Gazette, 2 February 1889, p. 3.

16 Sickert, "Transfer Lithography", The Saturday Review, 26 December 1896, pp. 667-668.

17 Ibid, p. 668.

18 E. R. & J. Pennell, The Life of Whistler, 1908, p. 189.

19 E.R. & J. Pennell, The Life of Whistler, 1908, p. 18.

20 Ibid., p. 20.

21 Ibid., p. 20.

22 Mortimer Menpes, Whistler as I Knew Him, 1904, p. 15.

23 Ibid., pp. xix-xx.

24 Ibid., p. 4.

25 E. R & P. Pennell, op. cit., p. 17.

26 Gautier, L'Illustration, 9 Mars 1867, cited in, Snell, Théophile Gautier: A Romantic Critic of the Visual Arts, 1982, p. 11.

27 Baudelaire, "Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne", 1863, reproduced in Curiosités esthétiques, L'Art romantique, et autres Oeuvres critique, Paris 1962, p. 483.

28 Menpes, op., cit., p. 9.

29 Anonymous, "Whistler by a Whistlerite", Truth, 7 may 1885, p. 726.

30 Sickert, "The New Life Of Whistler", The Fortnightly Review, December 1908, pp. 1017-1028.

31 Anonymous, "Whistler by a Whistlerite", Truth, 7 May 1885, p. 726.

32 Ibid.

33 Baudelaire, op. cit., p. 463.

34 Ibid., p. 460.

35 Sickert, "Whistler To-day", The Fortnightly Review, April 1892, p. 547.

36 Sickert, "The New Life of Whistler", The Fortnightly Review, December 1908, p. 1018.

37 Ibid, p. 1019.

38 Ibid, p. 1021.

39 Ibid, p. 1021.

40 Ibid, p. 1023.

41 Ibid, p. 1027-1028.

42 Ibid, p. 1025.

43 Ibid, p. 1026.

44 Ibid, p. 1026.

45 Baudelaire, "L' Oeuvre et la Vie d'Eugène Delacroix", first published, 1863, reprinted in, Curiosités esthétiques, L'Art romantique, et autres Oeuvres critiques, Paris 1962, p. 438.

46 Sickert, "The New Life of Whistler", The Fortnightly Review, December 1908, p. 1028.

47 Sickert, "The New Life of Whistler", The Fortnightly Review, December 1908, p. 1018.

48 Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting", an essay published in Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art, ed. A. Theuriet, London 1892, pp. 133-134.

49 Sensier, La Vie et l'Oeuvre de J. -F. Millet, Paris 1882, p. 53.

50 Ibid., p. 77.

51 Gautier, "*Salon de 1853*", La Presse, Paris 21 July 1853.

52 Sickert, "Impressionism", A Collection of Paintings by London Impressionists, December 1889, p. 7.

53 Anonymous, "The New English Art Club. [Third Notice.]", The New York Herald, London, 14 June 1889, p. 4.

54 Sickert, "Impressionism", A Collection of Paintings by London Impressionists, December 1889, and subsequent correspondence in The Scots Observer, February - March 1890.

55 Sickert, Catalogue of Water Colour Drawings by Francis E. James, N.E.A.C., preface to the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Dudley Gallery, 6-25 December 1890, pp. 8-9.

56 Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting", an essay published in Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art, ed. A. Theuriet, London 1892, pp. 135-136.

57 Ibid., p. 135.

58 Ibid., p. 136.

59 Sensier, La Vie et l'Oeuvre de J. -F. Millet, Paris 1882, p. 196.

60 Anonymous, The New York Herald, London, 12 July 1889.

61 Sickert, "Art", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 5, 26 July 1890, p. 67.

62 Menpes, Whistler as I Knew Him, 1904, p. 19.

63 Sickert, "Impressionism - True and False", Pall Mall Gazette, 2 February 1889, p. 3.

64 Duranty, La Nouvelle Peinture, Paris 1876.

65 Anonymous, "Messrs. Dowdeswell's Galleries. [First Notice]", The New York Herald, London, 1 April 1889, p. 4.

66 Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting", an essay published in Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art, ed. A. Theuriet, London 1892, pp. 136-137.

67 Sickert, "The Royal Academy", The Sun, 17 February 1897, p. 1.

68 Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting", an essay published in Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art, ed. A. Theuriet, London 1892, p. 138.

69 Anonymous, "Uninspired Art Notes" and "The Lady Artists", The New York Herald, London, 27 March 1889, p. 4.

70 Ibid.

71 Sickert, "Art", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 1, 28 June 1890, p. 6.

72 Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting", an essay published in Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art, ed. A. Theuriet, London 1892, p. 138.

73 Ibid., p. 138-139.

74 Anonymous, "The Dowdeswell Galleries [Third Notice]", The New York Herald, London, 10 April 1889, p. 4.

75 Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting", op. cit., pp. 139-140.

76 Anonymous, "A Concession, But -", The New York Herald, London, 6 March 1889, p. 4.

77 Anonymous, "The New English Art", The New York Herald, London, 13 April 1889, p. 4.

78 Anonymous, "The Private Picture Galleries", The New York Herald, London, 4 May 1889, p. 4.

79 Anonymous, "The New English Art Club. [Third Notice.]", The New York Herald, London, 14 June 1889, p. 4.

80 Anonymous, "The Old and New Grosvenor Galleries. [Second Notice.]", The New York Herald, London, 31 May 1889, p. 4.

81 Ibid.

82 Sickert, Catalogue of Water Colour Drawings by Francis E. James, N.E.A.C., preface to the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Dudley Gallery, 6-25 December 1890, p. 10.

83 Brown, "Recollections: The Early Years of the New English Art Club", Artwork, Vol. VI, 1930, p. 277.

84 Anonymous, "The New English Art Club" (First Notice), The New York Herald, London, 16 April 1889, p. 4.

85 Sickert, "Art, the Whirlwind Diploma Gallery of Modern Pictures", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 3, 12 July 1890, p. 37.

86 Ibid.

87 Anonymous, "The New English Art Club. [Third Notice.]", The New York Herald, London, 14 June 1889, p. 4.

88 Anonymous, "The New English Art Club. [Second Notice.]", The New York Herald, London, 27 April 1889, p. 4.

89 Sickert, "The Whirlwind Diploma Gallery of Modern Pictures. II.", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 4, 19 July 1890, p. 51.

90 Sickert, "The Royal Academy Exhibition", The Art Weekly, 10 May 1890, p. 90.

91 Leighton's comments are recorded by Laidlay in, Laidlay, The Origin and First Two Years of the New English art Club, London 1907, p. 57.

92 Anonymous, "The Royal Academy. (First Notice.)", The New York Herald, London, 8 May 1889, p. 4.

93 Sickert, "The Royal Academy Exhibition", The Art Weekly, 10 May 1890, p. 89.

94 Anonymous, "The Dowdeswell Galleries. [Second Notice.]", The New York Herald, London, 5 April 1889, p. 4.

95 Sickert, "The Royal Academy Exhibition", op. cit.

96 Sickert, "Knowledge in Art", the Globe, 30 July 1895.

CHAPTER 3

George Moore: Rhapsodies of Appreciation.

... people felt that they were living amid changes and struggles, intellectual, social, and spiritual, and the interpreters of the hour - publicists, journalists and popular purveyors of ideas of all kinds - did not fail to make a sort of traffic in the spirit of the times.
Holbrook Jackson

The 1890s were portrayed by Holbrook Jackson[1] as demonstrating a combination of the pessimism that accompanied the end of the century, and the enthusiasm welcoming the next. The idea of degeneration, found in the writing of "the Jeremiah of the period", Max Nordau was also, more significantly, present in Tolstoy's book *What is Art?*, first translated into English in 1898[2]. Tolstoy described what he saw as the bankrupt nature of art at the end of the century and was profoundly critical of the writings of the philosopher aestheticians, from Baumgarten to Taine. He believed that their construction of numerous theories had merely provided various conceptions of Beauty which amounted to no more than either something with an independent existence, a manifestation of the Perfect, the Idea, the Spirit, the Will, or, a certain kind of received pleasure. He judged the first idea to be a fantastic definition founded on nothing, and that the second unacceptably reduced Beauty to that which pleases; an intelligible paradigm but too inexact to be of any use. According to Tolstoy, art deserved such theoreticians, since it had become elitist, a perversion that had nearly destroyed it, and it had lost its fundamental connection with the highest comprehension of life, becoming instead, a vehicle for hedonistic pleasure.

The translation of Tolstoy's book was widely reviewed in England, where an increasingly volatile debate became focused on the subject of the Royal Academy. William Laidlay[3] described the Academy as a corrupt and corrupting organisation

which could no longer offer the aesthetic lead to the country's artists, as it had in the time of Reynolds, but which was instead responsible for the feeling of discontent and uncertainty which existed among certain painters in England. Alfred Thornton[4] specifically condemned the English fascination with prettiness and anecdote, which led so many of the younger painters to study in France. Furthermore, the Whistler v. Ruskin trial, in 1877, had undermined the standing of Ruskin and his teaching, leaving an ideological vacuum.

It was this space that was filled by a group of critics, prefixed with the modish adjective "new", which might, misleadingly, suggest that they were among the more optimistic observers described by Jackson. They shared the sense that art was in danger of being reduced to a form of facile entertainment, divorced from any higher aesthetic purpose and based on false and corrupting theories which had nothing to do with art. The three main exponents of the "New Art Criticism" were: the Irish novelist George Moore, art critic for *The Speaker*, from 1891 to 1895; D.S. MacColl, who wrote first for *The Spectator*, from 1890 to 1896, and then for *The Fortnightly Review*, from 1896 to 1906; and R.A.M. Stevenson who, after working spasmodically for various journals, was art critic for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, from 1893 to 1896. Through their writing they produced a new language of art criticism[5] which placed an increased emphasis on the formal properties of painting. They also insisted on the importance to art of the critic and, like Sickert, constructed an aesthetic theory that encompassed the art of the past, the new art from France, and provided an alternative doctrine for the beleaguered contemporary English artist. There are many similarities in the work of the three writers, some of whose qualities were shared with Sickert, but it is important to look at each one separately to judge if their ideas constituted a single, discrete, new manifesto for art.

Although George Moore is probably the best known of the three critics under consideration he is, in many ways, the least significant. His writing was contradictory and eclectic. He only worked actively as an art critic for four years, 1891-1895, after which time he started to review music. Later he wrote retrospectively - with the benefit of hindsight and a selective and self-aggrandising memory - about the reception of impressionist painting and of his own, often fictive, experiences of the painters of Paris. He wrote frankly of his loathing of the work of certain artists, including Herkomer, Fildes, Leader, Dicksee and Frith, and believed that British artists in general, suffered from "weary hands" and "weary eyes", making paintings that were the product of "what weary brains have half-understood."[6] In England he was happy to place part of the blame for this on the doorstep of "that dishonest mercantile bourgeois institution known as the Royal Academy"[7]. He did not think that the problems for art stopped at the English Channel but that "ninety per cent. of the pictures exhibited in France and England", were "horrible and hateful things."[8] His bile also extended to his own profession, and he believed that the art critic had to accept a degree of responsibility for the decline in art, working for the "Press" which was "in truth the great dupe; the unpaid jackal"[9], and the state of art criticism was a subject to which he often returned, as a diversion from discussing the paintings on show in current exhibitions.

Art entering by a side door.

The author of an unsigned article in *The Speaker*, 1891, warned Moore that he might one day regret expressing his opinions so violently, since, he predicted, unless Moore chose to "arrest his mental development by blowing out his brains"[10], he would eventually have to renounce some of the ideas that he declaimed with such vigour. Moore ignored this advice and his writing was always forthright. The prediction

proved to be accurate when Moore was forced to renounce part of his original comments made when Degas' painting, known as *L'Absinthe*, was shown in London, becoming the centre of an ideological dispute between the Philistine and the New Critics:

> ... in truth it was I who first meddled with the moral tap, and am responsible for the overflow. ... *The tale is not a pleasant one, but it is a lesson.* ... I have written many a negligent phrase, but the italicised phrase is the first hypocritical phrase I ever wrote. I plead guilty of having played to the gallery. ... In writing the abominable phrase *"but it is a lesson,"* I admitted as a truth the ridiculous contention that a work of art may influence a man's moral conduct.[11]

Without necessarily wishing to court controversy, Moore believed that he had "an aestheticism to formulate" and was determined that his criticism should be more than "a couple of columns of artistic reporting."[12] He ironically suggested that he lacked the skills of the "hack" critic:

> ... The faculty of being able to walk by a hundred masterpieces, bestowing upon each a casual remark, has been denied to me[13]

He expressed his disapproval of the habit of editors who "publish the long columns of catalogue which pass for art criticism."[14] He was equally disparaging about the critic who attempted to go beyond this limited listing of work:

> Ruskin's name, although quite discredited among artists, still stands high with the public. ... He is the finest art critic in the world - only he is always wrong.[15]

He was adamant that it was "as impossible to artificially develop as it is to create taste" and it was futile to hope for any "improvement ... in the state of some art critics."[16] Moore's views may have made him a radical, but the spirit of pessimism that is present in his writing is typical of the *fin-de-siècle* mood of many commentators.

His despair at the quality of art criticism was not without some relief and there were critics whom he admired. For example he was full of praise for Sickert's essay "Modern Realism in Painting", in which he said Sickert had "anticipated all my thoughts on the art of Bastien-Lepage"[17], and which he maintained was the most "interesting and instructive" essay he had read about painting. As well as claiming an absolute sympathy with the ideas contained in the essay, Moore also proposed an affinity with Sickert's motive for writing the piece:

> Mr. Sickert's art criticism is a defence of Mr. Sickert's pictures, just as my criticism of novels must be in the main a defence of my own novels. Such criticism gains in personal intensity what it loses in eclecticism.[18]

Moore believed that this idea extended beyond his own criticism, and Sickert's, and developed the maxim that "the criticism of a creative artist never amounts to more than an ingenious defence of his own work"[19], which he applied to the writing and the painting of MacColl. He believed that MacColl was "our ablest art critic" and a "painter of talent."[20] Both Sickert and MacColl were a particular type of critic, not drawn from the ranks of those who had striven but failed as painters, who then "comes forward to expound, to aestheticise", as Moore himself did, but they were among the few who could "create", and who were also, "able and willing to expound" their "doctrine". According to Moore this type of criticism was, "more incisive, more intimate, more constructive"[21] than the pedestrian alternative. But despite recognising these qualities in the writing of Sickert and MacColl, Moore remained pessimistic about the general state of art criticism in England.

Moore felt that the lack of a sufficiently large number of critics with the necessary integrity meant that it was unlikely that there would be any significant changes made to the unhealthy artistic environment in England:

> ... if ever there exist in London six resolute art critics, each capable of distinguishing between a bad picture and a good one, each determined at all costs to tell the truth, and if these six critics will keep in line, then, and not till then, some of the reforms urgently needed and so often demanded from the Academy will be granted. But this enterprise would require not only six honest, but six capable, critics; therefore my scheme is no more than an innocent fairy-tale: an El Dorado, a poet's dream.[22]

Even if such a body of progressive critics had existed, it was by no means certain that they would have been able to achieve their ends. It was unlikely, according to Moore, that they would have found much sympathy from the "public", whom he regarded as "the despair of the artist", irritatingly self-willed and consequently unwilling to "accept his art as the Roman Catholics accept their religion - without question upon authority."[23] The *status quo* would, therefore, in Moore's opinion be maintained and it would remain true that in "England it is customary for art to enter by a side door."[24] Nevertheless, Moore was determined to do what he could to promote an alternative aesthetic, which emerged, erratically, from his numerous articles for *The Speaker.*

The inchoate and discordant jumble which we call nature.

Ruskin had sought a rejuvenation of artistic values by directing the artist to turn back to nature. Although, as Moore suggested, Ruskin's views had been, among certain groups of artists, discredited by the end of the nineteenth century, the study of nature was still regarded by some commentators, including Stevenson, as the correct course for the artist to follow. An examination of Moore's attitude towards nature reveals the inconsistencies and contradictions that obfuscate any attempts at a coherent reading of his criticism. He left little doubt as to his own response to nature:

> ... wild Nature repels me, and I would as soon admire a Hottentot girl as the primeval forest ... In vain I ask myself why landscape

> painters leave London. St. James's Park is the most beautiful country in the world.[25]

The revulsion that he experienced when confronted by nature was exacerbated when he was presented with a landscape painting which he felt was too closely copied from nature. His criticism of these paintings was not, as one may have suspected, based on their subject matter but on their too close adherence to the original scene. It was apparently not nature that Moore found repugnant but the idea of its "wild" state. Nature could never be an end in itself for Moore, who believed that the artist must look inside himself for the qualities that were necessary for art. Writing about an exhibition of paintings by Corot, he explained how the landscape painter, had, like Ingres, found "an essentially Greek quality of perfection":

> For the rhythm of line as well as of sound the artist must seek in his own soul; he will never find it in the inchoate and discordant jumble which we call nature.[26]

Moore did not completely deny the value of nature to the artist but considered that it had only a very limited and subservient part to play in the process of creating a work of art.

Moore believed that the artist using nature as the starting point for his work had to bring a new order to the scene. This was lacking from the landscape paintings he saw on exhibition, in which he felt "nature seems to have been more copied than observed."[27] Unfortunately he never gave a more precise explanation of how the artist was to "observe" nature. In his review of Sickert's essay, "Modern Realism in Painting" he suggested that "we copy nature too much and study nature too little"[28], but apart from this agreement with Sickert's thesis, Moore failed to present an alternative approach to nature, although it is possible to try to construct this from the

negative comments he made about modern landscape painting, the work of the old masters and the art of Japan.

The decline in art which Moore noted had begun, he believed, with the cult of the painter working outside, directly from nature. Moore could not resist making fun of what he considered to be the ridiculous habit of the painter struggling to carry large canvases out into the countryside in pursuit of nature.

> ... art began to slip into decadence, ... the school of *plein air* was invented, and Bastien Lepage was supposed to be a great painter![29]

Three years before Moore identified the moment at which art had gone into decline - and it should be noted that the study of nature was only one of a number of critical developments that Moore held responsible for the demise of painting - he had already recognised that this way of working, or at least the equivalent in figure painting, was falling from favour and he stated that there was "most certainly a revolt against the model that poses by the hour."[30] Even more significantly he had identified an example of a more reasonable approach that the artist could adopt before nature. He had discovered this alternative by looking at the newly fashionable art of Japan that was being exhibited in London at that time, and at the beneficial influence it had on the work of Whistler. His initial comments only repeated his earlier assertion: that the Western artist "had thought it sufficient to copy nature, but the Japanese knew it was better to observe nature"[31], but offered no further explanation of the difference that he wished to imply between "copying" and "observing". In the same article, however, he introduced another idea, derived indirectly at least from the writings of Baudelaire and other French critics, when he attempted to define more precisely what it was that Whistler had learnt from Japanese art with regard to the representation of nature:

> Japan taught him to consider Nature as a storehouse whence the artist may pick and choose, combining the fragments of his choice into an exquisite whole - the exquisite intention of the artist.[32]

In this analysis the artist would seem to have tamed nature. The painter was able to use nature as a starting point but not as a definitive end in itself. Moore stated that for him, "all competition with Nature" was "intolerable"[33], but, by following the model suggested by Japanese art, and those Western artists who had fallen under its influence, nature could be allowed to assume a rôle in painting.

Moore also gave some indication as to the way that the artist might achieve this victory over "wild nature." In a review of the exhibition of the "British Artists", in 1891, he referred to a painting of *Boulogne Harbour*, by Dudley Hardy, which he felt to be flawed from its conception:

> ... instead of seeking synthesis and harmony, the painter seems to have striven hard to recall something which he had not succeeded in committing to memory.[34]

This was perhaps the closest Moore came to the theory of art that Sickert's early writings embody. He was suggesting that the artist should attempt to create, from the confusion of nature, a synthesis that would reveal a harmony that existed, albeit concealed by the general confusion in nature. The mechanism he recommended was simply memory; this represented an appeal for an internal rather than an external ordering and excluded the activity of the absurd *plein airiste*, struggling with "six-feet canvases" taken out into the fields, so that the artist could industriously copy nature[35]. He suggested instead, that the artist should paint a scene he knew well and rely on the selective process of his memory to reconstruct the image, with a new, personal, internal harmony. As well as deriding the painter who insisted on working directly from nature, Moore also warned the artist of the dangers of working as a pictorial travel guide:

> ... imagine a young English painter setting up his easel in, let us say, Algeria. There he finds himself confronted with a new world; everything is different ... Selection is impossible, he cannot distinguish between the important and the unimportant; everything strikes him with equal vividness ... So the Artist is obliged to take Algiers in the lump ... and so his pictures are at best only the truth, photographic truth and the naturalness of the fac-simile.[36]

Moore seems to have considered nature as an equally bewildering, foreign country. He encouraged the artist to treat it with a similar caution, and only represent it when he was sure that he was able to control its various elements and, through the selective process of his memory, reveal them in a new, synthetic harmony.

Like other progressive painters and critics, Moore attempted to draw comparisons between the great art of the past and the theories that he was proposing for the art of the future. In doing this Moore revealed precisely how little regard he really had for the pursuit of beauty in nature by the artist. He believed that it was "sometimes by neglecting nature that the old masters succeed in conveying not an illusion but an impression of life."[37] Furthermore, when he wrote about the paintings of Botticelli and Filippo Lippi, he explained how he believed that "Beauty for beauty's sake was the first article of their faith", and how their art, which was totally unconcerned with truth of effect and local colour, had been mercifully saved from the vitiating influences that governed nineteenth-century art:

> ... they by some miracle were always saved from the base naturalism from which none escapes to-day.[38]

He admired their blindness to the ugliness that he acknowledged must have existed in their day and suggested that they owed their art to, "a wise aestheticism" or, more precisely, "to a fortunate limitation of sight."[39] Towards the end of his time as the art critic for *The Speaker*, Moore demonstrated that he had little appetite left for art that concerned itself with the domestic or political concerns of the day. He increasingly

seemed to be embracing a doctrine similar to Gautier's *l'art pour l'art.* Moore had never revealed any clear theory about the way that the artist should proceed with regard to nature. At best he had been prepared to reiterate the ideas of the painters and writers whom he admired.

In 1893, reviewing the exhibition of the New English Art Club, Moore stated his belief that it was, by then, only "the old fogeys who paint direct from nature"[40], and perhaps this is why he never developed a clear argument about mimetic realism. By 1894 he rejected the very idea of the artist being judged at all by his ability to make a drawing which corresponded to the thing which he had set himself to copy, as anathema to true art; he even expressed his belief that the very idea was "the blight that has fallen on European art."[41] The anonymous writer, who had predicted that Moore would be forced to renounce some of the ideas he expressed in his writing with such vehemence, was proved correct. In one of the last articles on art that he contributed to *The Speaker*, Moore as usual attacked Bastien-Lepage, the school of *plein air* painting, and the whole business of modern realism, but also acknowledged the degree to which his own thinking on this subject had changed over the years:

> I am not inclined to defend myself; I am too conscious of my realistic sins. I am too repentant to deny them.[42]

His repentance included an attack on his own novel, *Esther Waters*, and an expression of hope that he would get away from "exterior realism" in his next book. I intend to return to the idea of "exteriority" which appears in Moore's writing but, first, I want to look more generally at his response to modern painting, to try to understand the nature of his rejection of realism.

The happy hunting ground of the *bourgeois*.

Moore's art criticism was never more pessimistic than when he wrote about modern art. He endorsed the idea that the modern painter should not try to court popularity and even suggested that selection for the annual Royal Academy Exhibition might damage the reputation of the serious artist:

> ... rejection of the work of the new genius by the Hanging Committee would expedite rather than retard his discovery.[43]

This idea, which seems to have originated in Paris in the late 1870s[44], helped to encourage the young artist whose work was rejected by the Academy, and fuelled the idea that contemporary painting was either reactionary, popular and fit for the Academy or new and difficult to comprehend. Moore certainly believed in this view of modern art, which he ridiculed for its constant pursuit of idiosyncrasy:

> Modern art is like a costume ball; everyone wears a different cloak, and having assured himself that his cloak is not cut or coloured like his neighbour's, he is satisfied.[45]

Moore seemed to find this constant searching for eccentricity tiresome, and expressed his preference for the familiar art of the past:

> When the art critic goes to an exhibition of modern masters he looks round in despair. "Have I," he asks himself, "to write about these things? What shall I say?" But when he visits a collection of old masters he thinks, "How can I write about these pictures in a column or two columns? How jolly it would be to write a book about this exhibition."[46]

Moore's apparent disenchantment with much modern painting may explain why he eventually stopped writing about art and started writing about music.

Despite Moore's sardonic comments, which made him an unlikely supporter of the progressive painting to be seen at the annual exhibitions of the New English Art

Club, he wrote enthusiastically about the pleasurable "sensation of novelty" which greeted the visitor to the Club's exhibition in 1891[47]. However, when he wrote about the N.E.A.C., little more than eighteen months later, he referred not to the sensation of novelty, but of recognition with a suggestion of nostalgia:

> The New English Art Club is very typical of this end of the century. It is young, it is interesting, it is intelligent, it is emotional, it is cosmopolitan - ... an agreeable assimilation of the Montmartre Café of fifteen years ago.[48]

Moore's comfortable memories of what he considered to be his finest hour, when Manet spoke to him in the café of the Nouvelle-Athènes - described by Moore as "a great event in my life"[49] - are a more probable explanation for his support of the work of the N.E.A.C., than novelty, which he either despised or ridiculed. The only justification for the cult of the pursuit of novelty, which Moore was prepared to allow, was the development of art:

> ... the mere choice of a scene from modern life is not sufficient. There is only one reason why it is well to paint modern life - because modern life demands an unceasing search for new artistic formulae.[50]

This was also his expressed motive for his work as a critic and, despite the contradictions of his writing and his frequent drift into amusing rhetoric[51], it is possible to extract from Moore's criticism an artistic theory that was not completely original but to which he gave a new character.

Moore's criticism reveals a debt to the ideas found in the writing on art of both Zola and Whistler, with regard to the unimportance of subject matter in art. These theories were slowly gaining currency among a small group of writers and artists in England at the end of the nineteenth century. Despite his attempted didacticism, and the occasional belligerence of his writing, Moore failed to delineate a clear ideology

regarding the rôle of subject matter in painting, but his various discussions of the issue illuminate his thinking on the possibilities and pitfalls for the development of modern painting. Wandering around the galleries of the Louvre, he identified two diametrically opposed ways in which artists had worked in the past, and condemned to certain failure anything in-between:

> I think how little it matters which we choose, pure realism or pure dream: only let us go to either end or the other, the space that lies between is the happy hunting ground of the *bourgeois*.[52]

Moore often appears to be more comfortable when writing about the art of the Renaissance or seventeenth-century Dutch painting and found in the work of these artists, who epitomised for him the two poles of art, an aesthetic which he valued and for which, I believe, he sought a modern equivalent.

To illustrate his theory, Moore turned to the work of Michelangelo, whom he maintained had chosen his subjects "merely because of the opportunities they offered for the delineation of form".[53] Moore's ideas, which are very close to the radical ideas of Whistler and Zola, may have appeared to be even more shocking because he applied them not to dubious modern painters but to the great artists of the past:

> When Titian painted the "Entombment of Christ," what did he see? A contrast - a white body, vivid and dead, carried by full-blooded, red-haired Italians ... that is how he understood a subject.[54]

This was the way he described the work of the "dreamers", the Italian artists of the Renaissance. Through his descriptions of the work of the Dutch painters he admired, he developed the idea further:

> ... the absence of subject is even more conspicuous in the Dutchmen than in the Italians ... In the Dutchmen it is dispensed with altogether. No longer do we read of miracles or martyrdoms, but of the most ordinary incidents of every-day life.[55]

The avoidance of the primacy of engagement with subject matter, seems from these comments, to have been at the heart of Moore's thesis, whatever the original source of the work:

> Italian art is invention from end to end, in Dutch art no slightest trace of invention is to be found; one art is purely imaginative, the other is plainly realistic. ... in neither does the subject prevail.[56]

Such comments were not without precedent. They owe their origins to Zola, and Moore may have discussed them with Manet, whom, as he never tired of reminding anybody who would listen, he had met in Paris in the late 1870s. By repeating them in his articles in *The Speaker*, Moore insisted that they took their place in the debate about contemporary painting in England.

Moore developed his theory by suggesting that it was not only that subject matter had been of no consideration to Michelangelo, Titian and the Dutch painters, but that it was an aberration that had only recently been introduced into art. He believed that "subject in painting is entirely an invention of modern times"[57], and worse still that:

> ... it is to the illegitimate importance that the subject has acquired in modern art that I attribute the decline of painting.[58]

He identified the source of this degeneration as being Greuze and attacked the very qualities in his painting which had won him the support of Diderot:

> ... Greuze was the first to conceive a picture after the fashion of a scene in a play ... domestic dramas ... in which the subject so clearly predominates.[59]

Alongside this corruption of the original intention of painting went "the vice of subject for subject's sake" and also "derivative vices - exactness of costume, &c."[60]

Moore appeared to lament the loss of a humanist belief that placed man at the centre of the pursuit of beauty:

> In the beginning the beauty of man was the artist's single theme. Science had not then relegated man to his exact place in creation: he reigned triumphant, Nature appearing, if at all, only as a kind of aureole.[61]

From this notion of art pursuing ideal beauty, Moore extracted what he considered to be a vital lesson which modern painting must learn if it were not to fall into decadence. Once he had identified the pitfalls for the painter who became obsessed with the subject matter of his art, Moore was bound to propose an alternative motivation for the artist.

Moore drew a parallel between the activities of the writer and the painter in an attempt to throw some light on what he saw as the legitimate concern of the artist:

> ... the writing of the great writer differs from that of the reporter. It is not what is recorded, but the manner of recording that is important.[62]

The implication of Moore's comment, when applied to painting, was that poetry in art was to be derived not from the events portrayed but from the way the painting was constructed. The spectator should not waste his time examining the iconography of a picture but should allow the formal qualities of the painting to act on his senses, in the same way that the language of poetry supersedes the narrative content of the text. Moore was promoting the formal qualities of painting, ahead of the narrative, which required an alternative to the teaching and practice of the Royal Academy.

Typically, Moore failed to define precisely what form these elusive qualities took, although he did hint at their existence in the work of the painters who exhibited at the New English Art Club in 1891:

> We find there no anecdotes, sentimental, religious, or historical, nor the conventional measuring and modelling in which the Academy delights.[63]

In his review of the N.E.A.C. the following year, Moore gave a title, but no definition, to the essential characteristic of painting:

> Muslin ballet-girl or satin duchess it matters no jot, nothing counts with the jury but *l'idée plastique.*[64]

Moore's inability to define this fashionable but slightly mystifying term suggests that he was simply unable to put into words precisely what it was that he was looking for in painting, although he seemed to recognise it when he saw it. This must be regarded as a serious flaw in his abilities as a critic, particularly in one who had demonstrated his wish to formulate an aesthetic.

Moore was an advocate of "art for its own sake", which he believed should be free of all moral, or extraneous, questions:

> ... all adventitious attractions, whether pornographic or sentimental, interrupt that serenity, that aloofness which, believe me, is indispensable if we would enter the true paradise of aesthetic contemplation.[65]

As with his attempts to define the importance of nature to the artist, Moore's writing about the importance of subject matter in painting was at times contradictory. He could wittily deride as futile the efforts of certain painters, whose work he thought would inevitably fail simply because they had chosen to look in the wrong place, notwithstanding his stated belief in the unimportance of the subject:

> In art the giraffe and the zebra are as impossible as Swiss scenery. That the treatment is everything is an easy and flippant phrase, but it may be doubted if the greatest landscape painter that ever lived could make a picture out of the lake, the châlet, the pine forest, and the blue mountain with the white mountain just behind it. Nothing is impossible to genius, but, up to the present, genius has shrunk from the zebra and from Switzerland.[66]

Although he recognised the meaninglessness of the simple repetition, like a mantra, of the idea that "treatment is everything", this does not seem to have encouraged Moore to pursue a concise theory of what he demanded from art.

Moore appeared to be following the doctrine outlined by Baudelaire, when he exhorted the artist to be of his own time and, "if he would find the eternal type he must seek it in his own parish."[67] This idea however seems to be inconsistent with Moore's championing of an aesthetic which sought to judge art only according to the imprecisely defined criteria of *l'idée plastique.* Finally, I would cite Moore's own admission that he was responsible for introducing the idea of a painting's potential to purvey moral lessons into the debate that was generated, when Degas's *L'Absinthe* was exhibited in London. In this last case, Moore retracted his original comments and also offered a possible explanation for the apparent ambiguities in his writing by admitting that he was unable to resist the temptation to play to the gallery.

It is paradoxical that Moore should have vitiated his argument by seeking to entertain a public whom he held in very low esteem. He was strongly opposed to the idea of egalitarianism, which he viewed as another perversion of the late nineteenth century:

> ... no fact is more painful to the modern mind than that men are not born with equal brains; and every day we grow more and more determined to thwart Nature's will in this respect with public education.[68]

One of the unfortunate consequences of trying to teach the unteachable was that the modern "public", no doubt fortified with a little education, wanted "to divert art

from its true aim - intellectual sensuousness - and to force art into competition with the library, the lecture-room, and the pulpit"[69], as Moore himself had tried to do in his first article on Degas's *L'Absinthe.* The only way that the dull mass could be educated, according to Moore, was by persistently demanding their acquiescence:

> The taste of the ordinary man is merely vexatious and vain, for he always accepts the opinion of artists in the end; if he would do so in the beginning, it would save much trouble.[70]

This idea of familiarity leading to acceptance repeats the idea that the scorned genius will eventually be recognised. The artist need not seek popularity by painting anecdotal pot-boilers, but should strive to achieve the formal harmony essential to all art, relying on the fact that the public would eventually come around, however unpopular his work might be at first:

> A picture is either the harmonious development of a set of lines or the harmonious development of a passage of colour ... Musical, pictorial, and literary anecdotes leave me untouched. A most unpopular aestheticism, I am aware; one that shuts me out from admiration of nearly all that my generation goes mad over ... [71]

I suspect from both the content and the tone of Moore's writing that any slight sadness he may have experienced as a result of this alienation from his peers was more than offset by the snobbish pride which he felt as he relished the idea that he was a member of an intellectual elite which, alone, understood the source of the true value of art. He was convinced that, left to their own devices, "nine-tenths of the population" would derive "more enjoyment from turning over the leaves of a photograph album than from looking at the pictures in the National Gallery."[72] He wanted to see a gallery "from which popular painting is excluded"[73], and must have understood that this would discourage the ordinary man from entering, as there would be nothing there for him to enjoy.

Moore did not claim to be a member of this intellectual aristocracy as a matter of birthright but felt that he had earned his place through his efforts:

> Long patience and earnest striving have enabled me to look below the surface, and I think I have at last learnt to recognise life by essentials - in some measure I am sure I have.[74]

Having learnt to look at, and to understand art, Moore tried, through his art criticism, to pass this knowledge on to any of his readers who, like him, possessed the intellectual capacity to understand the importance of the formal properties of painting. The fact that his promotion of "painting for the mere love of paint", was "wholly repugnant to every healthy minded Philistine"[75], only seems to have added to Moore's enthusiasm for his task.

Moore's "most unpopular aestheticism" was constructed around his belief that "*l'idée plastique* is the whole of art - the moment anything else enters into art decadence begins"[76], but, despite its importance to his theory of art, he never explained what he meant by this term. In his less obscure writing he repeated the comparisons made by Whistler, and others, between art and music. He explained that "the palette is to the painter what the orchestra is to the musician"[77], and constructed a slightly more extended metaphor based upon a similar idea of equivalence:

> The colour is the melody, the values are the orchestration of the melody; and as the orchestration serves to enrich the melody, so do the values enrich the colour."[78]

He also described a work he identified as *Ladies under trees*, by the Japanese artist Utamaro, as corresponding "more nearly to a sonata by Mozart than to anything else."[79] All of these references to music were, I believe, an attempt by Moore to find an alternative to writing about the anecdotal or iconographic content of paintings and instead to describe the less concrete qualities of art. Occasionally his attempts were

less than enlightening, and having compared Utamaro's art to Mozart he was reduced to admitting that, "we can only say these are beautiful because they are beautiful"[80], equally enigmatic and unhelpful was his reference to "this mysterious power which produces what artists know as 'quality'..."[81]. Moore was only able to provide a meaningful definition of an aesthetic that considered line and colour to be of primary importance by reference to specific artists.

Writing about the work of Ingres, he compared the French painter to "the ancients", and praised his "exquisite simplifications." However, he was unable to sustain the clarity of this article, which at the outset had suggested that Moore might finally de-mystify the theories he was constructing. He confused his notion that simplification may be an essential element in the artist's pursuit of beauty by introducing, to his description of the work of Ingres, ideas of the soul:

> Apelles could not have realised more exquisite simplifications, could not have dreamed into any of his lost works a purer soul of beauty than Ingres did into the head, arms and torso of the "Source"...[82]

As well as the idea of simplification, he suggested, from looking at the work of Manet, the importance to the artist of colour:

> I know that the manipulation of colour is not the whole of art: but it was the whole of Manet's art.[83]

Similarly, from the work of Degas, he took the idea of a line that could be extracted from nature:

> ... what he really perceived in nature was the character and the picturesqueness of the arabesque ...[84]

These three elements: line, colour and simplification, seem to have made up part of Moore's idea of the beauty that could result either from the perception, idealisation or handling of the painter.

Moore believed that examining an artist's "handling" was the most tenable way to judge his abilities. He held that this went beyond a simple judgment of the craft skills of the painter:

> Technical skill is the soul as well as the body of art; disguise it as you will, all things in the end resolve themselves into questions of treatment.[85]

Moore's insistence on the importance to painting of treatment led to the suggestion that art should not be seen as a cerebral exercise but as a matter of the skill of the hand. He wanted to overturn the popular conception of the way the artist worked:

> A work of art proceeds straight from the brain, unassociated by the materialism of the hand; the hand is but the humble instrument ... so does modern sentiment deny all genius to the flesh, preferring to credit all genius to a mass of white gelatine. ... I am eager to rehabilitate the hand in the position it has wrongfully been deprived by the usurping brain.
>
> And not only will I speak of the genius of the hand, I will even speak of the genius of the material.[86]

This placing of the physical and material qualities of painting above the intellectual, viewing "ideas" as being embodied in the physical form rather than in the literary content of a painting, is what Moore meant by *l'idée plastique*. This was not a new idea since Moore seemed to be suggesting a return to the ideals of the Renaissance.

Moore encouraged the comparison between the work of Corot and Ingres, and the "essentially Greek quality of perfection"[87], and so suggested that the artist should pursue a form of ideal beauty. When he wrote that the only merits in painting were "technical merits"[88], I believe that what he meant was that the only ideas in painting

were physical or plastic, and that the simplifying, or clarifying, activities of the artist, colour and line, were the ways in which these ideas were revealed to the spectator. Furthermore, I would suggest that this was the ideal beauty that Moore hoped the artist would pursue, and which the spectator should seek in art. Monet had demonstrated that:

> ... poor houses with a single square church tower ... are beautiful as Greek temples ...[89]

and, despite Moore's seemingly elitist ideas, he believed that this approach to art was more accessible to a greater number of people:

> At the beginning of the century it was discovered that many more could delight in descriptions of physical than in mental phenomena[90]

For the spectator to be able to apprehend the idea that was held within the forms of painting, it was necessary that he should be prepared to learn, as Moore had done, to look beyond the "exterior", to perceive the essential qualities which lay beneath the surface.

Exteriority.

By 1894 Moore was confident that regular readers of his articles would have started to recognise certain ideas that he had consistently repeated over the years:

> Some readers of THE SPEAKER must have begun to perceive that I loathe the particular, the photographic.[91]

This is one of the few arguments which Moore persistently endorsed, and which he was also able to illustrate with references to the work of specific artists. He believed that Bastien-Lepage epitomised the work of a particular type of art: "painting that is no more than an exteriority" and that it only amounted to the equivalent of "a

coloured photograph."[92] It would be all too easy to dismiss these comments as a simple repetition of the ideas that appeared in Sickert's essay on Bastien-Lepage, for which Moore had declared his support, but Bastien-Lepage was not the only artist he considered to be guilty of the production of vacuous images; equally culpable was another French artist, Meissonier, who, according to Moore "gives just what the photographer gives - an externality."[93] This was the type of painting that Sickert had identified as a realism reliant on unessentials and which Moore believed to be the result of a misguided concentration on a visible exterior.

Moore thought that this infatuation with the reproduction of superficial appearance and illusion was a perversion of art that was particular to Western painting; in the East artists thought differently:

> The Japanese artist never thought to deceive; the art of deception they left to their conjurers. The Japanese artist thought of harmony, not of accuracy of line ... [94]

Moore maintained that the pursuit of "externals", to the detriment of art, had been in response to public demand and he judged the quality of an artist according to his ability to resist this appeal:

> Ingres is greater than Cabanel because he represents life and beauty in their essentials. Like Beethoven, he does not seek to captivate by externals. But the public only knows life by its external aspects. "Give us externals!" is the eternal cry.[95]

Moore also recognised that his desire, to see artists searching for these essential qualities, was no more likely to win popular support than his promotion of treatment above anecdotal subject matter in painting. He acknowledged that "Externals are for all, essentials for the few"[96] but he had already vigorously pronounced, in *Confessions of a Young Man*, published in 1888, that he had no time for the idea of democratic art and believed art was the "direct antithesis to democracy." Characteristically, Moore

failed to provide a clear definition of the "essentials" necessary for the creation of great art, although it is possible to distinguish certain ideas that emerge through the more general rhetoric of his art criticism.

One of the essential qualities, which Moore believed had been sacrificed to the pursuit of "externalities", was "atmosphere." To define what Moore meant by this elusive term it is necessary to look at his writing on particular painters. He was critical of Wilson Steer's picture of a ballet-dancer, exhibited at the N.E.A.C. in 1891, in which he felt insufficient consideration had been given to the space in which the girl was placed:

> To paint a ballet-dancer a foot high in the middle of a canvas eight feet by four, and to leave the figure unrelieved by any background whatever is to loose oneself in the chaos which lies outside the district of art.[97]

Moore frequently returned to the theme of the importance of the construction, by the artist, of space. He even thought that Whistler, whose work he admired, had failed in the *Portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell*, since he had "not told us where the lady is."[98] Wherever Moore found in a painting a credible space he delighted in describing it. Writing about Whistler's portrait of his Mother he drew the readers attention not only to the figure, but also to the surroundings:

> ... we wonder by what wizard-craft was accomplished the marvellous pattern on the black curtain that drops past the engraving on the wall. We muse on the extraordinary beauty of that space of grey wall, on the black silhouette sitting so tranquilly, on the large feet on the foot-stool, on the hands crossed, on the long, long black dress that fills the picture with such solemn harmony. The wall is a shudder of colour, and the delicacy of the execution transports us.[99]

An indication of the importance Moore placed on the space within a painting is provided by the lengthy descriptions he gave of examples of pictures where the

illusion had been achieved. Reviewing an exhibition of the Institute of Painters in Oil-Colours, in 1891, he wrote, at some length, about the work of William Mouat Loudan, demonstrating the care that the artist had dedicated to those parts of his work, which provided a convincing illusion of space. Moore referred to a gate seen against "the pale green bloom of the summer trees", "the bright air" and "a long grey stone building at the back", complete with "cold violet shadows", "the sunset" and even "some clouds."[100] The illusion of physical space in painting is perhaps a crude way to define atmosphere but the existence of pictorial depth was one of the qualities that Moore seemed to look for in painting, a yardstick to judge success or failure.

Moore was prepared to overlook other shortcomings in a painting if the work had space or "atmosphere". He even suggested that "atmosphere" might have been of more importance to him than treatment when he wrote about George Clausen's painting of two men mowing:

> The handling is woolly and unpleasant, but handling can be overlooked when a canvas exhales a deep sensation of life. The two men are well in the atmosphere ...[101]

The creation of the space in which the figures were located was, for Moore, an essential and defining quality of a painting: "... The picture has depth - in a word, it is a picture."[102] Moore repeated this idea when he considered Bernhard Sickert's painting, *Boats on the Medway*. He alerted the spectator not to the boat or its long mast, but to the distance on the right of the picture, which he described as being "full of a pure and beautiful enchantment", and stated unambiguously that "this distance is the picture."[103] The emphasis that Moore put on the rôle of space in a painting may have been quite new but Moore was dubious about the attempts of modern painters to discover new ways of depicting that space. Responding to an article by

D.S. MacColl, on the work of Steer, Moore took issue with the way the artist had treated the subject and the defence mounted by the critic:

> How the infinities of aërial perspective can be expressed by a symbol I have no slightest notion; nor do I think that Mr. MacColl has.[104]

He returned to consider Steer's painting, *Yacht Race*, at the exhibition of the N.E.A.C. the following year, 1893, when he thought he recognised a fatal flaw in the artist's aesthetic:

> The beauty I look for in such a subject is aërial perspective, those delicate gradations of tones which fill the canvas with mystery and charm ... Mr. Steer will answer that such qualities are not possible if the object is to render the quick passing of racing yachts. Perhaps not![105]

Insofar as he thought that Steer had sacrificed space in order to gain a sense of the fleeting, transitory nature of the subject, Moore seemed to be suggesting that Steer would never reconcile the transitory and the eternal, in the way that Baudelaire had hoped. The eternal was only to be obtained where the artist created depth. He described Whistler's painting, *The Ocean*, as one of the artist's finest works, and he attributed its success to the treatment of space:

> ... all the way up to a high horizon is the great grey sea, infinite and mournful image of eternity ...[106]

Moore's comments on specific works provide some evidence of the importance that he placed on the illusion of space in a painting. They also provide a partial definition of the term "atmosphere", or at least describe one of the pre-conditions, which had to be satisfied before Moore believed "atmosphere" could exist on canvas.

Moore suggested that it was not enough for the artist simply to offer an illusion of depth; comparing the work of Monet and Sisley[107], he praised the former's touch and

his vision but declared that on their own they amounted to no more than "*décor de théâtre*", which was admirable but ultimately unfulfilling. According to Moore, Monet's work lacked a "sympathy with the nature of the place", which was present in the work of Sisley, and was necessary if the artist was to make "nature a mirror for the soul to view itself." The artist's ability to offer a representation of space, giving the spectator an alternative view of his own world relied upon the artist feeling some sympathy for the scene depicted. Not only did Moore suggest that this relationship, between the artist and nature was necessary, but also that the scene shown, and any figures in it, should be fully integrated. He wrote about Manet's *Bon Bock*:

> ... we look at the picture, and the man and his environment becomes part of our perception of life.[108]

This inseparability of man and his environment was, I would suggest, one of the elements that lifted this painting, in Moore's opinion, above the work of other contemporary artists:

> His appearance, and his mode of life which his appearance so admirably expresses, can never become completely dissociated from our understanding of life. For Manet's "Bon Bock" is one of the eternal types.[109]

In the work of Manet, Moore had found an artist who, through his ability to integrate figure and environment, raised an image of the modern world from the prosaic to the eternal.

The creation of a space from which the figure was inseparable forms part of what Moore meant by "atmosphere." He discovered these qualities in Crome's painting, *The Village*:

> A line of hills drawn across the sky, hills full of loneliness; a faded red brick village, hardly seen in the landscape of which it is an

> integral and harmonious part, a dark foreground, a grey evening sky - that is all ... the loneliness of nature ...[110]

Moore had detected these qualities in the work of a contemporary English painter, a year earlier. In an article comparing the work of the N.E.A.C. and the Royal Academy in 1892, Moore stated that "whatever art there is at present in England is to be found in the New English Art Club" and went on to describe a painting by Edward Stott:

> ... a picture of a girl feeding chickens in a wood ... The wood is suffused with sunlight and mist, and the girl and the chickens are in the atmosphere.[111]

The most remarkable attribute, of an otherwise quite unremarkable painting, would seem to have been the artist's ability to unite the figure of the girl with a credible illusion of space.

Moore did not wish to suggest that this phenomenon was a discovery of recent art. He was anxious to show that it was in fact one of the qualities of the great art of the past and should be preserved by modern painters:

> You enter into the pictures of the old masters, you wander for ever through their landscapes, there is unity, there is atmosphere; I do not mean that curse of modern painting, *plein air* - I mean *une atmosphère de tableau.*[112]

This description, of the experience of the spectator in front of a painting, introduces the final element in understanding what Moore meant by "atmosphere." He did not just want the artist to create an illusion of space which the spectator could observe, like a member of the audience at the theatre, held back and aloof from the drama by the proscenium arch, but to construct a space which the viewer could enter. For Moore, the weakness in the work of Degas was his inability to do this:

> In Degas we never find that *belle mise en place* which is so obvious in the works of Manet and Whistler. His figures live on the canvas, they do not live in the canvas ... Degas is small, confined, scattered; there is no view; it is never like looking out of a window, it is more like poring over the text of a book.[113]

Moore believed that Degas recognised this weakness in his own art and that he was "always endeavouring to overcome it." Moore noted that on occasion this attempt was successful, for example in a painting of "a woman in a shop trying on a bonnet", in which Degas, according to Moore's description, had created the illusion of space.

Moore believed that the weakness that he had perceived in the work of Degas was still more detrimental to the very different paintings of Alma Tadema, whose art was, for Moore, without any redeeming features:

> I will tell Mr. Alma-Tadema why I thoroughly dislike his two pictures "Mrs. Rowland Hill and Children" and "Mrs. George Simonds and Family." All pictures by the old masters are in the canvas, but Mr. Tadema apparently holds that pictures should be out of the canvas; he has modelled his heads until they look like bas-reliefs; the illusion is so complete that they seem as if they were going to drop every moment out of the frame.[114]

For Moore, painting such as this was the very antithesis of art. It was not only the art of external appearances but it extended the idea of "exteriority" to the work itself, which resisted the spectator, holding the gaze on the surface of the canvas rather than encouraging him to enter into the space and experience the "atmosphere".

Creating a space, to draw the spectator into the painting, was not the only device encouraged by Moore. He believed that the artist should strive for other qualities which could be created by the "atmosphere" of a painting, or add to it:

> The charm of mystery is, I know, essential in every picture, but the atmosphere gives this. Without atmosphere, realism is impossible; with atmosphere, the lowly and prosaic may be invested with sweetness and dignity.[115]

Moore did not satisfactorily explain in what way "atmosphere" could create mystery but, in a later article, he returned to the theme and suggested that the "element of mystery and *cachotterie*", which "must enter into all art", could only be produced "through the values."[116] He maintained that the artist should be aware of the possibilities offered by "values", or the effects of light:

> ... an alteration in the light and shade will create beautiful pictures among the meanest brick buildings that ever were run up by the jerry-builder. See the violet suburb stretching into the golden sunset. How exquisite it has become! how full of suggestion and fairy tale.[117]

He reminded his readers that the "mission of art" was "not truth but beauty", and stated the imperative for the artist that "he must find mystery and suggestion in the light and shade", so that "the humble life of the place is transformed and poetised."[118] Moore urged artists to look, once again, at the art of the past, to learn the lessons of *chiaroscuro*, and the possibilities it offered to introduce mystery into paintings, giving them the necessary poetry and beauty.

Moore deplored the work of certain contemporary artists who failed to make use of the potential offered to painting by the "elements of strangeness, of fancy, of caprice, of everything except facts." He identified in the work of Clausen the danger of realism without "atmosphere" or mystery:

> ... until I saw Mr. Clausen's picture I did not fully realise how terrible a thing art becomes when divorced from beauty, grace, mystery and suggestion. It would be difficult to say where and how this picture differs from a photograph; it seems to me to be little more than the vices of photography magnified.[119]

In particular Moore believed that Clausen's work was monotonous and that this was the inevitable result of working directly from nature, *en plein air*. Since the artist had no colour which could replicate the tonal value of bright sunlight, he must either use

a comparative tonal scale, and the tradition of *chiaroscuro*, or chose to paint only on grey days, when a dull grey light reduced all the tones to an insipid generality, lacking in interest:

> Mr. Clausen has neglected the admirable lessons which our Dutch cousins taught us two hundred years ago; he has neglected to avail himself of those principles of chiaroscuro which they perfected, and which would have enabled him to redeem the grossness, the ugliness, the meanness inherent in his subject.[120]

Moore believed that Clausen's painting was even more bland than a photograph, which would at least have caught some gleam of light, which would have offered a focus to the spectator, or included some shadows, which might have hidden something and introduced an element of intrigue and mystery. Moore recognised that the failure of the painter to enliven his work by making use of the "mystery of light and shade", was typical of the work of Bastien-Lepage and the "preference shown in this school for grey days", and a symptom of working directly from nature.

In 1893 Moore seems to have been delighted to be able to announce that: "now it is the old fogeys who paint direct from nature"[121], but any pleasure he may have taken in witnessing the decline of this form painting, based on external realism, was matched by the bewilderment he experienced in front of the alternative approach offered by the new generation of painters. He seemed to feel that modern painting was in danger of becoming divorced from the traditions from which it had much to learn:

> Values have been diverted from their original mission, which was to build up *une atmosphère de tableau*, and now every value and every colour finely observed seem to have for mission the abolition of chiaroscuro. Without atmosphere painting becomes a mosaic ...[122]

Moore seems to have been uncomfortable with the developments which he could see being made in the formal approach of modern painters such as Wilson Steer. He was

also bemused by the support that these ideas received from a critic whom he had admired and supported: "Mr. MacColl seems prepared to defend this return to archaic formulae."[123] "Atmosphere" and the artist's manipulation of "values" were among the qualities that Moore had looked for in painting, and which he believed were missing from the work of the new generation of artists.

Moore believed the artist should seek out the essential qualities in his subject, looking beyond the superficial, external appearance and irrelevant truths, to reveal a real beauty. He was looking for an artist who was:

> ... willing to sacrifice the superfluous and circumstantial for the sake of the immortal beauty of things.[124]

As well as creating a space beyond the surface of the canvas, or an "atmosphere", and inventing, according to the tradition of *chiaroscuro*, a tonal scale of "values" to invest the work with mystery and poetry, Moore wanted the artist to take the process of interpretation of the subject still further:

> If a landscape does not interpret some human emotion, we shall weary of it. If a landscape is no more than a brilliant appearance, of what greater worth is it than a piece of gold or jewel work?[125]

Moore urged artists to apply themselves to moving beyond physical beauty to appeal to the emotion of the spectator. I believe that this was what Moore meant by the "purely pagan joy in the beauty of natural life"[126] which he had found in Manet. The atmosphere of the painting provided the environment for the spectator to enter the work psychologically, the use of tone provided the mystery to further engage the viewer's mind, but these qualities on their own were not enough to produce the emotive response that Moore sought.

When discussing the expressive potential of painting, Moore frequently referred the reader to musical analogies, to describe both the final effect that a painting could produce and also the way in which the artist should proceed if he was to attain an "uninterrupted expression of ... beauty." He also suggested that the artist should rely on his memory, rather than his eyes:

> The subject is ... like a piece of music, it is practised over and over again, until they know it so thoroughly that they can paint it right off without correction, or the faintest hesitation.[127]

For Moore "Great art", that is to say, art that was "concerned with the expression of ideas - pictorial, literary, and musical" as opposed to art which simply "narrates anecdotes", was produced and enjoyed in part by a mechanism similar to Gautier's idea of the artist's inner *microcosme*: "a clairvoyance, an inner light."[128] Moore believed that art should be directed at the "innate sense of harmony within us"[129] to illicit an emotive response from the viewer.

Moore described the "pagan joy" that he experienced on seeing the work of Manet and I believe that this sort of spiritual sensation was for Moore an indication of the presence of the finest painting: "Great art dreams, imagines, sees, feels, expresses - reasons never."[130] Moore's peculiar requirement of painting was that it should elicit a mixture of physical, cognitive and emotional responses:

> Painting is at once the most objective and the most subjective of the arts: the most objective because it is concerned only with the visible world; the most subjective because the art of the painter resides more completely in himself than the art of the writer or the musician.[131]

Moore felt that these qualities were increasingly rare in modern painting. In the past, artists such as Millet and Wilson had succeeded in mastering their "subject-matter for the 'expression' of a human emotion".[132] Now, Moore felt, even painters in France,

were allowing reason to gain the upper hand and the "idea" had assumed too much importance:

> The separation of the method of expression from the idea to be expressed is the sure sign of decadence. France is now all decadence ... the man of the hour is he who has invented the last trick in subject or treatment ... for many years nothing will come from France but the bleat of the scholiast.[133]

Contemporary painting, according to Moore, had started to neglect "atmosphere" and "values" and allowed "reason" to interfere with the appeal of art to the "innate sense of harmony". His increasing disillusionment with modern painting may offer an explanation for his decision to stop writing about art and to write instead about music.

I cannot admire what I shall never understand.

Moore was unable to construct a theory of art that could encompass the new art that he saw at the end of the nineteenth century. The definition which he provided of Impressionism: "the rapid noting of illusive appearance"[134], suggested that he considered these painters to be guilty of a concentration on superficial "externalities" rather than "essentials." He noted that even members of the N.E.A.C., whose "mission" he had disparagingly described as being to "accustom the public to various novelties in artistic thinking, seeing, and feeling"[135], had "been discovered reading Reynolds's discourses, on the Thames Embankment."[136] Moore might have wanted to refer them to Reynolds's remarks on art that "follows nature" and art that "sometimes departs from it":

> The Theatre, which is said *to hold the mirrour* [sic] *up to nature*, comprehends both those ideas. The lower kind of Comedy, or Farce, like the inferior style of Painting, the more naturally it is represented, the better; but the higher appears to me to aim no more at imitation, so far as it belongs to any

> thing like deception, or to expect that the spectators should think that the events there represented are really passing before them ...[137]

Moore was suspicious of any sort of theatricality in painting and he would probably have endorsed Reynolds' misgivings about art attempting to mirror the appearance of nature.

Moore was eager to demonstrate his credentials as a New Critic, a progressive thinker and writer on art but he was reluctant to praise the form of Impressionism practised by Monet. It is possible that Moore may himself have had Reynolds in mind when he wrote about the work of Monet in 1891:

> This eternal decoration; this touch, so much more precious than profound; this vision, so rapid that the intimate note is lost; this ever-changing but ever shallow, brilliant appearance; this - I have hesitated long enough, let the word be said - this *décor de théâtre*, appealing as it does, almost entirely to the eye, wearies, and, despite our eager admiration, we long for the underlying note of human sympathy which makes nature a mirror for the human soul to view itself.[138]

This idea of nature providing a mirror for the soul was far removed from the superficial way in which Moore believed that Monet's art reflected the image of nature, as he described it in an article on the French painter written in 1895:

> His vision seemed to me to be as impersonal as a photograph; there is neither sadness nor joy in him; the temper of his mind does not illuminate his pictures; he is a mere exteriority, a marvellous mirror, reproducing all the passing phenomena of Nature. And the art of the naturalist is becoming less and less sufficient for me.[139]

Moore's attitude towards Monet typified his thinking about even the most innovative contemporary art that he saw exhibited in London. He believed that Monet's paintings were "as brilliant as they" were "superficial, an externality and very little else"[140], that the painter had allowed his "handicraft" to grow like a weed that had

choked the "idea", the result of expression that "outruns the thought."[141] Moore's assessment of Monet's contribution to painting was profoundly pessimistic:

> Monet is now looked upon as the creator of the art of landscape painting; before him nothing was, after nothing can be ...[142]

This damning judgment on what seemed to be the future of painting was consistent with the ideas in Moore's art criticism and could explain why he stopped writing his regular reviews of exhibitions.

Moore frequently referred his readers to what he considered to be the poverty of modern painting compared to the riches of the art of the past:

> ... the old masters hold their own, and not withstanding their *mistakes* make Monet's modern skies and trees seem very hollow and superficial[143]

and looking at the most recent work from France, he could see nothing to make him feel more sanguine about the future of painting. He thought that the paintings of Seurat were "scientifically-painted pictures" and as such they were, to say the least, "strange, absurd," and "ridiculous":

> The theory of the division of the tones is no more foolish than the theory of *plein air* or the theory of the square brush work; it is as foolish, but not a jot more foolish.[144]

Moore had attacked art that relied on subject matter, promoting in its place treatment and formal strategies designed to elicit an emotive response in the spectator. But, as painters started to apply these principles, Moore thought that he saw only trickery and "the separation of the method of expression from the idea to be expressed" which was "the sure sign of decadence."[145] This would seem to be further evidence of the traditional nature of Moore's ideas on art. His writing does not show him to be a modern champion of formal art giving no consideration to subject matter, but

rather reveals a critic who, like Gautier, upheld the neo-Platonic theories of the Renaissance; seeking a unity of ideas and emotions expressed through the artist's innate ability to represent ideal form. In the last of his regular articles on art for *The Speaker*, he was humble enough to recognise his own fallibility, ascribing it to his age, and described his shocked bewilderment in front of most modern painting:

> Each generation thinks and feels and sees differently from the generation which preceded it; the elder generation naturally repudiate the new aestheticism, and in speaking of it uses opprobrious epithets - ridiculous, grotesque, superficial, ugly.[146]

These comments repeat the bewilderment that Gautier had experienced in front of the work of Courbet, Manet, Monet and *"tutti quanti"*, and, although the honesty may be admirable it also reveals an inability to construct a modern aesthetic.

Moore despaired of contemporary painting and of the "mass of mankind", whom he believed would "continue to delight in exteriorities."[147] He thought that they did not understand how to look at paintings and he was not convinced that they had the will, or ability, to learn. Manet was perhaps the only contemporary artist whom he supported unstintingly. For the time that he was the art critic of *The Speaker,* Moore did, however, praise Sickert's painting. He thought that the latter's *Hotel Royal in Dieppe*, exhibited at the N.E.A.C. in 1893 "shows knowledge of the old masters, and appreciation of their work and genius.[148] In his last review of the work of the New English Art Club exhibition, written in 1895, he praised Sickert's *The Gallery of the Old Bedford*:

> I like it because of its beauty of tone, colour, and composition. I admire it for the fine battle the painter has fought against the stubborn difficulty of the subject.[149]

However, the occasional opportunity to support an old friend was not enough to sustain Moore in carrying on writing about a discipline that he believed had become decadent.

Notes to Chapter 3.

[1] Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties, 1913.

[2] Leo Tolstoy, What is Art?, Translated by Aylmer Maude, 1898.

[3] William Laidlay, The Royal Academy, Its Uses and Abuses, 1898.

[4] Alfred Thornton, The Diary of an Art Student of the Nineties, 1938.

[5] See Kate Flint, unpublished thesis, The English critical reaction to contemporary painting, 1878-1910, 1985.

[6] Moore, "The British Artists", The Speaker, 31 October 1891, Vol. 4, p. 527.

[7] Moore, "The New Gallery", The Speaker, 8 October 1892, Vol. 6, p. 437.

[8] Moore, "A Select Few", The Speaker, 28 May 1892, Vol. 5, p. 645.

[9] Moore, "Picture Dealers", The Speaker, 12 November 1892, Vol. 6, p. 586.

[10] Unsigned, "Mr. George Moore's Essays", The Speaker, 21 March 1891, Vol. 3, p. 352.

[11] Moore, "The New Art Criticism", The Speaker, 25 March 1893, Vol. 7, p. 342.

[12] Moore, "A Modern Painter", The Speaker, 11 April 1891, Vol. 3, p. 428.

[13] Moore, "The Masters of Old Time", The Speaker, 16 January 1892, p. 76.

[14] Moore, "A Select Few", The Speaker, 28 May 1892, Vol. 5, p. 646.

[15] Moore, "Mr. Whistler. The Man and his Art", The Speaker, 26 March 1892, Vol. 5, p. 375.

[16] Moore, "Advice to Critics", The Speaker, 12 August 1893, Vol. 8, p. 159.

[17] Moore, "A Book About Bastien-Lepage", The Speaker, 20 February 1892, Vol. 5, p. 226.

[18] Ibid., p. 227.

[19] Moore, "Mr. Whistler. The Man and his Art", The Speaker, 26 March 1892, Vol. 5, p. 376.

[20] Moore, "The New English Art Club. - II", The Speaker, 3 December 1892, Vol. 6, p. 677.

[21] Moore, "A Diary of Moods", The Speaker, 9 December 1893, Vol. 8, p. 641.

[22] Moore, "The Royal Academy", The Speaker, 23 April 1892, Vol. 5, p. 498.

[23] Moore, "The National Gallery", The Speaker, 9 September 1893, Vol. 8, p. 271.

[24] Moore, "More About Artistic Education", The Speaker, 6 February 1892, Vol. 5, p. 165.

[25] Moore, "Impressions in St. James's Park", The Speaker, 30 September 1893, Vol. 8, p. 352.

[26] Moore, "Corot", The Speaker, 20 August 1892, Vol. 6, p. 227.

[27] Moore, "A Modern Artist", The Speaker, 11 April 1891, Vol. 3, p. 428.

[28] Moore, "A Book on Bastien-Lepage", The Speaker, 20 February 1892, Vol. 5, p. 226.

[29] Moore, "Exteriority", The Speaker, 22 June 1895, Vol. 11, p. 685.

[30] Moore, "A Book About Bastien-Lepage", The Speaker, 20 February 1892, Vol. 5, p. 226.

[31] Moore, "The Society of Portrait Painters", The Speaker, 11 July 1891, Vol. 4, p. 50.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Moore, "The New Gallery", The Speaker, 12 May 1894, Vol. 9, p. 526.

[34] Moore, "The British Artists", The Speaker, 31 October 1891, Vol. 4, p. 528.

[35] Moore, "The Glasgow School", The Speaker, 10 December 1892, Vol. 6, p. 708.

[36] Moore, "Curiosity in Art", The Speaker, 21 November 1891, Vol. 4. p. 617.

[37] Moore, "A Modern Among the Ancients", The Speaker, 23 January 1892, Vol. 5, p, 108.

[38] Moore, "The New Gallery", The Speaker, 13 January 1894, Vol. 9, p. 44.

[39] Ibid, p. 45.

[40] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 15 April 1893, Vol. 7, p. 423.

[41] Moore, "The Japanese Genius", The Speaker, 10 February 1894, Vol. 9, p. 168.

[42] Moore, "Exteriority", The Speaker, 22 June 1895, Vol. 11, p. 685.

[43] Moore, "Money in Art", The Speaker, 4 July 1891, Vol. 4, p. 16.

[44] For a more thorough examination of the impact of these ideas see, Haskell, "The Enemies of Modern Art", reprinted in, Past and Present in Art and Taste, 1987, pp. 205-221.

[45] Moore, "A Modern Artist", The Speaker, 11 April 1891, Vol. 3, p. 429.

[46] Moore, ""The Old Masters", The Speaker, 21 January 1893, Vol. 7, p. 72.

[47] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 18 April 1891, Vol. 3, p. 460.

[48] Moore, "Mr. Brabazon", The Speaker, 17 December 1892, Vol. 6, p. 737.

[49] Moore, "Art", The Speaker, 16 July 1892, Vol. 6, p. 78.

[50] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 18 April 1891, Vol. 3, p. 460.

[51] See for example, "Royalty in Art", The Speaker, 12 December 1891, Vol. 4, pp. 707-709.

[52] Moore, "The Louvre Revisited", The Speaker, 6 June 1891, Vol. 3, p. 670.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Moore, "The British Artists", The Speaker, 31 October 1891, Vol. 4, p. 528.

[58] Moore, "The Subject", The Speaker, 14 November 1891, Vol. 4, p. 586.

[59] Ibid., p. 587.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Moore, "The Subject", The Speaker, 14 November 1891, Vol. 4, p. 586.

[62] Moore, "The British Artists", The Speaker, 31 October 1891, Vol. 4, p. 527.

[63] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 5 December 1891, Vol. 4, p. 677.

[64] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 26 November 1892, Vol. 6, p. 644.

[65] Moore, "The Genius of Japan", The Speaker, 3 February 1894, Vol. 9, p. 137.

[66] Moore, "The Zoo in Art", The Speaker, 5 March 1892, Vol. 5, p. 283.

[67] Moore, "Mr. G.F. Watts", The Speaker, 19 November 1892, Vol. 6, p. 619.

[68] Moore, "The Organisation of Art", The Speaker, 4 June 1892, Vol. 5, p. 675.

[69] Moore, "Facts and Ideas", The Speaker, 11 June 1892, Vol. 5, p. 704.

[70] Moore, "The National Gallery", The Speaker, 9 September 1893, Vol. 8, p. 271.

[71] Moore, "Half a Dozen Pictures in the Academy", The Speaker, 22 July 1893, Vol. 8, p. 73.

[72] Moore, "The Whistler Album", The Speaker, 16 December 1893, Vol. 8, p. 667.

[73] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 26 November 1892, Vol. 6, p. 644.

[74] Moore, "The National Gallery", The Speaker, 9 September 1893, Vol. 8, p. 271.

[75] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 26 November 1892, Vol. 6, p. 644.

[76] Moore, "The Grafton Gallery", The Speaker, 25 February 1893, Vol. 7, p. 216.

[77] Moore, "Institute of Painters in Oil-Colours", The Speaker, 7 November 1891, Vol. 4, p. 556.

[78] Moore, "Values", The Speaker, 27 August 1892, Vol. 6, p. 259.

[79] Moore, "The Japanese Genius - II", The Speaker, 10 February 1894, Vol. 9, p. 168.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Moore, "Handling", The Speaker, 30 July 1892, Vol. 6, p. 136.

[82] Moore, "The National Gallery. - II", The Speaker, 16 September 1893, Vol. 8, p. 298.

[83] Moore, "Handling", The Speaker, 30 July 1892, Vol. 6, p. 136.

[84] Moore, "Degas in Bond Street", The Speaker, 2 January 1892, Vol. 5, p. 19.

[85] Moore, "Mr. Whistler. The Man and His Art", The Speaker, 26 March 1892, Vol. 5, p. 375.

[86] Moore, "Handling", The Speaker, 30 July 1892, Vol. 6, p. 136.

[87] Moore, "Corot", The Speaker, 20 August 1892, Vol. 6, p. 226.

[88] Moore, "The New Gallery", The Speaker, 8 October 1892, Vol. 6, p. 436.

[89] Moore, "Corot", The Speaker, 20 August 1892, Vol. 6, p. 227.

[90] Moore, "Exteriority", The Speaker, 22 June 1895, Vol. 11, p. 684.

[91] Moore, "The Japanese Genius. - II", The Speaker, 10 February 1894, Vol. 9, p. 167.

[92] Moore, "Exteriority", The Speaker, 22 June 1895, Vol. 11, p. 685.

[93] Moore, "Meissonier", The Speaker, 22 April 1893, Vol. 7, p. 452.

[94] Moore, "The Japanese Genius. - II", The Speaker, 10 February 1894, Vol. 9, p. 167.

[95] Moore, "The National Gallery", The Speaker, 9 September 1893, Vol. 8, p. 270.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 18 April 1891, Vol. 3, p. 460.

[98] Moore, "Mr. Whistler's Portraits", The Speaker, 2 April 1892, Vol. 5, p. 406.

[99] Moore, "The Society of Portrait Painters", The Speaker, 18 July 1891, Vol. 4, p. 77.

[100] Moore, "Institute of Painters in Oil-Colours", The Speaker, 7 November 1891, Vol. 4, p. 557.

[101] Moore, "An 'Average' Academy", The Speaker, 30 April 1892, Vol. 5, p. 528.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Moore, "The New English Art Club and the Academy", The Speaker, 21 May 1892, Vol. 5, p. 616.

[104] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 3 December 1892, Vol. 6, p. 677.

[105] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 15 April 1893, Vol. 7, p. 422.

[106] Moore, "The Whistler Album", The Speaker, 16 December 1893, Vol. 8, p. 667.

[107] Moore, "Two Landscape Painters", The Speaker, 19 December 1891, Vol. 4, p. 776.

[108] Moore, "A Hint for Manchester and Glasgow", The Speaker, 6 August 1892, Vol. 6, p. 166.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Moore, "The Price of the Masters", The Speaker, 10 June 1893, Vol. 7, p. 655.

[111] Moore, "The New English Art Club and The Academy", The Speaker, 21 May 1892, Vol. 5, p. 616.

[112] Moore, "A Modern Among the Ancients", The Speaker, 23 January 1892, Vol. 5, p. 107.

[113] Moore, "Degas in Bond Street", The Speaker, 2 January 1892, Vol. 5, p. 19.

[114] Moore, "The New Gallery", The Speaker, 4 May 1895, Vol. 11, p. 487.

[115] Moore, "The Zoo in Art", The Speaker, 5 March 1892, Vol. 5, p. 283.

[116] Moore, "Decadence", The Speaker, 3 September 1892, Vol. 6, p. 285.

[117] Moore, "The New Gallery", The Speaker, 8 October 1892, Vol. 6, p. 436.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Moore, "The New Gallery", The Speaker, 8 October 1892, Vol. 6, p. 435.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 15 April 1893, Vol. 7, p. 422.

[122] Moore, "The New English Art Club. - II", The Speaker, 3 December 1892, Vol. 6, p. 677.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Moore, "Corot", The Speaker, 20 August 1892, Vol. 6, p. 226.

[125] Moore, "Decadence", The Speaker, 3 September 1892, Vol. 6, p. 286.

[126] Moore, "A Hint for Manchester and Glasgow", The Speaker, 6 August 1892, Vol. 6, p. 166.

[127] Moore, "An Orchid by Mr. James", The Speaker, 17 June 1893, Vol. 7, p. 686.

[128] Moore, "Advice to Critics", The Speaker, 12 August 1893, Vol. 8, p. 158.

[129] Moore, "The Japanese Genius - II", The Speaker, 10 February 1894, Vol. 9, p. 167.

[130] Moore, "The Division of the Tones", The Speaker, 10 September 1892, Vol. 6, p. 316.

[131] Moore, "Exteriority", The Speaker, 22 June 1895, Vol. 11, p. 685.

[132] Moore, "Mr. Steer's Exhibition", The Speaker, 3 March 1894, Vol. 9, p. 249.

[133] Moore, "The Division of the Tones", The Speaker, 10 September 1892, Vol. 6, p. 316.

[134] Moore, "Decadence", The Speaker, 3 September 1892, Vol. 6, p. 285.

[135] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 23 November 1895, Vol. 12, p. 548.

[136] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 15 April 1893, Vol. 7, p. 422.

[137] Reynolds, Discourses on Art, (Ed) Wark, 1975, p. 238.

[138] Moore, "Two Landscape Painters", The Speaker, 19 December 1891, Vol. 4, p. 776.

[139] Moore, "Claude Monet", The Speaker, 15 June 1895, Vol. 11, p. 657.

[140] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 15 April 1893, Vol. 7, p. 422.

[141] Moore, "Claude Monet", The Speaker, 15 June 1895, Vol. 11, p. 657.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 15 April 1893, Vol. 7, p. 422.

[144] Moore, "The Division of the Tones", The Speaker, 10 September 1892, Vol. 10, p. 316.

[145] Moore, "The Division of the Tones", The Speaker, 10 September 1892, Vol. 6, p. 316.

[146] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 23 November 1895, Vol. 12, p. 548.

[147] Moore, "Claude Monet", The Speaker, 15 June 1895, Vol. 11, p. 657.

[148] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 25 November 1893, Vol. 8, p. 581.

[149] Moore, "The New English Art Club", The Speaker, 23 November 1895, Vol. 12, p. 548.

CHAPTER 4

D.S. MacColl: Sporting Before the Philistines.

He who thinks nature, in the narrow sense of the word, is alone to be followed, will produce but a scanty entertainment for the imagination ...
Sir Joshua Reynolds

During his years as an undergraduate at Oxford, 1881-84, Dugald Sutherland MacColl came into contact with Walter Pater, who was at the time a Fellow of Brasenose College. Pater's hedonistic pursuit of beauty and the love of art for its own sake, must have been in sharp contrast to MacColl's upbringing as the son of a Scottish Presbyterian minister. Nevertheless, Pater had an undoubted influence on the young man, although MacColl was never fully converted to the doctrine of "art for art's sake." It is also interesting to note the similarities between MacColl's ideas on painting, as they are revealed in his writing, and the views of the most flamboyant of all the Aesthetes, Oscar Wilde, another Oxford man and, like MacColl, a winner of the Newdigate Prize for poetry. MacColl's beliefs about art are remarkably close to the ideas expressed by Wilde in his essay on "The True Function and Value of Criticism"[1], in which he wrote that "the most perfect art is that which most fully mirrors man in all his infinite variety." MacColl would also have been sympathetic to Wilde's theory that "the purification and spiritualising of nature" which was central to art, was "essentially aesthetic" and "not moral", and it was this notion of the separation of the aesthetic ideal from moral or ethical constraints which so angered "The Philistine", J.A. Spender and led to the exchange of articles on the subject of Degas and "New Art Criticism", for which MacColl's journalism is perhaps now best known.

MacColl abhorred the literary pictures which, for him typified the art of the Academy, but he never fully dismissed the anecdotal and narrative possibilities of painting. He believed that elements of both of these could exist together, and that art should not strive for the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, nor assume an attitude of moralising superiority, but that it should, according to its traditional rôle, seek the highest comprehension of human life. These opinions, among other ideas, were expounded in the articles he wrote, first for the *Spectator*, 1890-1896, and then for *The Saturday Review*, 1896-1906. They can also be found in his book *Nineteenth Century Art*, 1902, which was an extraordinarily perceptive review of the art of the century that had just passed. The ability to write at length in the book offered MacColl greater potential to apply his theories to the art which had been produced in a period in which he thought, "in painting discovery and the passion of beauty ... seem to have completed their journey."[2] It is possible that it was because he felt that the development of painting was, in this sense, at an end that his articles at the beginning of the new century were as often about the administration of art, as they were about contemporary painting. His art criticism lacked the wit of George Moore but this was more than adequately compensated for by the clarity with which he developed his theory of a new, imaginative vision for painting.

In 1906 he accepted the position as Keeper of the Tate Gallery and his new duties curtailed his writing. His later articles revealed him to be uncomfortable with some of the ideas of the next generation of critics, which is surprising given how heavily they borrowed from him. Without the enthusiasm and iconoclasm, all that remained of his earlier writing was the caustic arrogance.

Wine-tasters, not wine-drinkers.

MacColl did not rush to embrace a career as a journalist. After coming down from Oxford he travelled and found some part-time employment as an Oxford Extension lecturer. When he was invited by the editor of the *Spectator* to take over from Harry Quilter as the art critic, it was only his arrogance that prevented him from being surprised that the job should have been offered to someone with so little experience. MacColl, like others with more progressive views on painting, was suspicious of journalist critics and, even after he had been writing his own articles for nine years, he wrote scornfully of his colleagues:

> "It is all very well for you," lamented one of them ... "but I must fill my column and a half." I confess I do not understand or even believe in this peculiar police regulation.[3]

Although he clearly wished to distance himself from the hack writers, whom Whistler had viciously vilified in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, MacColl was himself capable of slipping into the lazy, damning language of the journalist. He boldly stated, in 1897, that "British Art is in a bad way"[4], and five months later that, "there is no Australian Art"[5], and he described the work at "The Arts and Crafts Exhibition" of 1899, as being "more and more flaccid tangles."[6] These lapses into easy invective were rare and for the most part MacColl's art criticism was considered, consistent and carefully argued.

MacColl was not only wary of art critics but also of the business of art criticism. He believed that the activity demanded that the writer, in order to gain the necessary detachment from the subject of his article, had to contain his emotive response to the work:

> I wish to speak with all respect of the professional critics, of their knowledge, their patience, their scruples. Their work, as I conceive it, is to be a kind of sceptical keepers of the imaginative store, of things disused as well as of those brilliantly in vogue, and the hardest of their tasks is to guard works of art against the attacks of angry genius ... And they must do it at this sacrifice, that in anxiously refining on their sense of mastery, they renounce the emotions that give rise to art. They are wine-tasters, not wine-drinkers.[7]

Despite these reservations about the necessarily limited response of the critic, there were a number of writers on art whom MacColl admired. He frequently recalled Reynolds, both indirectly and by including quotations from the *Discourses*, and this former President of the Royal Academy seems to have been the single greatest influence on MacColl. He also referred, somewhat unfashionably, to Ruskin as "the enchanter of my youth"[8], but very little of that influence remained in his writing. More characteristically, MacColl admired Whistler's writing and almost plagiarised the artist when he wrote:

> In the exhibition of the Royal Society of British Artists, there is a very large section which is British, and a small one which is artistic.[9]

As well as the "Master", MacColl also noted the writing of the "Student", and praised Sickert's criticism for its marked and "unusual measure of sense and wit"[10], which he also believed were present in the young artist's painting. But above all his other contemporaries, he admired the writing of R.A.M. Stevenson. MacColl was particularly impressed by Stevenson's book on Velázquez, which MacColl recognised as:

> ... the most substantial contribution to the theory and defence of modern painting since Ruskin's *Modern Painters*.[11]

MacColl was, however, aware of what he considered to be a flaw in Stevenson's writing for the *Pall Mall Gazette*:

> ... his journalistic criticism, serviceable as it has been, has been somewhat choked up by the mistaken kindness that tempts a critic to say a good word for everybody.[12]

MacColl did not dwell on this perceived weakness[13] but went on to praise Stevenson in the highest possible terms:

> He is the rare case of a philosopher who can write, and of a writer on painting who has been severely trained to paint.[14]

I believe that MacColl would have been pleased if those words had been used to describe him and it is interesting to note that the writers for whom he reserved the highest praise were also all painters. MacColl considered critics of such quality to be rare exceptions to what he thought of as the generally impoverished state of art criticism.

In particular MacColl deplored the faddishness of those writers on art who responded to Whistler's chastisement of their profession by rushing, without any comprehension, to embrace the latest ideas on painting and aesthetics:

> Already the whipped critic is making haste to become the pedant of a new jargon, to treat what he confusedly calls "literature" as the accused thing, and to reduce pictures to terms of the retina.[15]

MacColl seemed to regard this ignorant embracing of all the ideas on painting which were starting to influence certain members of the younger generation of painters, for example the members of the New English Art Club, as more dangerous than open hostility. This could be regarded as an indication of MacColl's belief in the ideal of the artist as *refusé*, and he may have feared that the early acceptance of the work of these artists could rob them of that status and harm their progress:

> ... now that the undiscriminating critic enters the gallery with a pre-possession in favour of "advanced" work, and praises good and bad alike, the bad a shade more warmly than the good, it behoves the friends of the Club to deal severely with them.[16]

MacColl was most at ease when fighting the more obvious and open animosity of the "Philistine". The debate between MacColl and J.A. Spender, which resulted from the latter's bellicose and deliberately brutish attack on the "New Art Criticism", produced some of MacColl's finest writing.

MacColl was drawn into the debate on the nature of art criticism by J.A. Spender who was an assistant editor on the *Westminster Gazette*, and quite possibly aware of the potential to generate increased circulation by creating a controversy. Spender adopted the title of "Philistine" and, in an article titled "The New Art Criticism. A Philistine's Remonstrance", he claimed to represent the opinions of the ordinary people against the "superior person". From this populist position he proceeded to lambaste MacColl, who, as art critic for the *Spectator*, had praised Degas's *L'Absinthe*, when it was exhibited at the Grafton Gallery in February and March 1893. In response to this article MacColl attempted to define the ideals of New Art Criticism:

> ... what is this New Art Criticism? It is simply the attempt to apply to current art the same standards which we apply to ancient art, to disengage from the enormous stream of picture-producers the one or two contemporary masters who are worthy to be named beside the ancients, the one or two promising talents that may some day deserve the same praise; to refuse steadfastly to confound the very good with the pretty bad, and to take mediocrity at its own estimate.[17]

Intended as an explanation of the writing of the New Art Critics, MacColl's statement can be seen as a manifesto of his own critical writing.

Not only did MacColl want to apply the same standards to modern painting as those which were applied to the art of the past, but he also hoped to show how a similar idealising aesthetic to that which Reynolds had defined, by reference to the work of the Masters of the Renaissance, was evident in the work of contemporary painters.

MacColl believed that these qualities were to be found in the work of Whistler and Degas who were:

> ... among the few modern painters who have any claim to real scholarship, to an understanding of the Old Masters. They have developed old methods to include new material, the one with a rare fastidiousness of abstraction, the other with a rare curiosity of beauty in rapid and accidental effect.[18]

MacColl wanted to find a way of defining absolute values in painting. He aspired to clearing "people's heads of the bewildered slang" that surrounded ideas of "advanced painting", "impressionism", and "new criticism", and focus on "the simple distinction between good painting and bad, whether new or old."[19] It is ironic that he should have returned to the writing of Reynolds, a former President of the Royal Academy to find the foundations for his theory, since the Academy was the last place he expected to find the fulfilment of the ideals he promoted:

> The great painter of to-day is at home with Old Masters, and a stranger to the Academies.[20]

MacColl's attempts to reform the administration of the Chantrey bequest brought him into direct conflict with the Royal Academy, but even before that he had recognised the stifling influence of this institution on the development of painting in England.

The Royal Academy: the official stewards of art.

MacColl's suspicions about the self-serving and ultimately damaging nature of the Royal Academy's influence on the development of painting in England became focused on the administration of the Chantrey Trust. His efforts to bring to light, what he saw as the mismanagement, by the Academy, of this important purchasing fund, succeeded in the establishment, in 1904, of a Parliamentary Select Committee

to investigate the affair. This battle was the first of a series of political skirmishes that occupied much of MacColl's time but his dislike of the Academy was not simply confined to matters of administration. He was equally troubled by the aesthetic influence of this self-perpetuating oligarchy, which he regarded as a dead weight that was slowing down the development of British art. He attempted to suggest that the annual summer exhibitions at the Academy should not be taken seriously as art but only looked upon as a popular entertainment, almost in the spirit of bread and circuses, to distract the populace from the real business of art:

> ... the kind of amusement that the Academy annually provides for the kind of people who can be amazed that way. No one, truly, except perhaps a New Journalist, would feel tempted to interrupt so harmless a debauch. Why should not the Great Public have a place of resort where they can have their "painting" without tones and qualities and relations ... ?[21]

The only question that remained for MacColl, as he developed this ironic attack on the Academy, was why the critic or the painter should bother with the exhibition at all. He was aware that the Academy could not be so easily dismissed and in his review of the exhibition the next year he decided that it was "necessary to call attention to the deplorable laxity of the standard that prevails at the Academy"[22]. Rather than providing a lead for the younger generation of artists, MacColl regarded the Academy as a reactionary body that promoted an anodyne art.

In 1891, MacColl saw in some of the work of the Academicians similar weaknesses to those that had been identified by Sickert in the art of Bastien-Lepage and others. MacColl described the paintings of the "average Academician" as being "huge depressing photographs of funerals, meetings and medicine bottles"[23]. Nevertheless, by 1900, MacColl recognised that, despite the intentions of the Academy, as stated in

their own catalogue, among the work at the exhibition were pictures which demonstrated the values that MacColl was seeking in art:

> "*It is only the disease of the unskilful to think rude things greater than polished.*" - BEN JOHNSON
>
> This text figures as the motto in the catalogue of the one hundred and thirty-second exhibition of the Royal Academy. It is oddly chosen, for it sounds like an echo of the taunts directed in the past against impressionistic art, while in the exhibition itself this art holds the place of highest honour.[24]

MacColl had already noted, two years before this, the tendency of the Academy to appropriate both the ideas and members of the New English Art Club:

> ... since the activity of the Club began, the Academy has lived almost entirely on the Club's cast-off ideas, and detached members.[25]

Despite these superficial similarities, MacColl suggested that there were profound differences between the two institutions:

> While the Academy has put forward Bouguereau as its idea of what is important outside itself in modern painting, the Club put forward Messrs. Whistler, Degas, Legros.[26]

He believed that support of the work of an artist such as Bouguereau was indicative of the inability of the Academy to establish an aesthetic principle that could guide the modern painter.

MacColl did not suggest that this failure was restricted to the Royal Academy in London, but was shared by other academies. He argued that the "classic" tradition was bereft of any meaningful direction and that the supposed inheritors of this atrophied school produced work with a certain "suavity of line" but which ultimately led to a "feeling of nausea" in the spectator:

> Were there no academies to continue the shadow of a "classic" tradition? Yes. There was Cabanel and there was Bougereau [sic]. But the idea of these men was to seize on any pretext to be found within the "classic" canon for prettiness to sugar the academic study so that it might become a popular middle-class recreation. Academicism is respectable so long as it stands out for ascetic discipline, for severe restraint in drawing and colour. When the schoolmaster becomes a seducer professions are unpleasantly mixed.[27]

By focusing on the saccharine and lascivious qualities of these French painters, who had received the support of the academies, MacColl was able to hint at the irony of the supposed moral qualities of this art, compared to the outrage that had been caused by Degas and, closer to home, Sickert and other members of the N.E.A.C. This decline in the "classic" tradition, and the inability of the academies to suggest an alternative, meant that the young painter, who might look to Burlington House to provide the lead that could be expected from a "stern schoolmaster", found only the confusion of "the accommodating eclectic." MacColl believed that the advances in science that had been made throughout the nineteenth century presented a challenge to the artist creating a requirement for a new aesthetic, which was unlikely to originate from the Royal Academy.

MacColl described the changes that had taken place during the nineteenth century as having had the effect of forcing Man to reconsider his relationship with Nature and, most significantly, with the, or any deity. He explained how he believed this change had affected the development of art:

> Science professed to have accurately assigned to Man his 'Place in Nature' ... Man was held up as no longer the image, the enemy, or the servant of a God ... On this fabric he turned his eye to question its basis, to explore at close quarters the colour and texture of common life ...[28]

According to MacColl there were few paintings at the annual exhibitions at the Royal Academy which showed any evidence of the artist looking analytically at Nature -

defined in the broadest terms - in an attempt to locate Man's place in the world. From this visual exploration of Nature, MacColl believed that the artist should be able to discover the "divinity" of a still-life[29], or to recognise the comparison drawn by MacColl between a tree and a Cathedral[30]. The pictures at the Academy seemed to be concerned with different problems:

> ... our Academy with its cult of narrative incident ... The somewhat indifferent pleasure people take in them is that of puzzle, and unless the catalogue supplies the unmistakeable clue ... the canvas keeps its ill-expressed intention to itself.[31]

It was only as members of the N.E.A.C. were gradually admitted to the exhibitions at Burlington House, that MacColl found work that moved beyond this visual presentation of a previously determined text.

A particular nuance of significance.

MacColl did not, however, want to be associated with what he had described as the pedantry of the new jargon in criticism, which rushed to condemn "literature" in painting and only recognised the importance of the "retina". Unlike Whistler and others, MacColl did not dismiss the importance of the subject of a painting and recognised that there were qualities that were shared by both literature and by the best pictures, whether they were painted by the old masters or contemporary artists:

> Poetry is an effect common to literature and painting. Hence as has frequently been insisted on in these columns, to call poetic painting literary is to beg the question.[32]

What distinguished MacColl's writing from that of the majority of his peers, was his recognition of the importance of the formal qualities of painting:

> The poetry does not exist if the technique is not sufficient to express it. And "literary" is properly used to depreciate painting in

> which an allusion is made to a poem or story to bolster a feeble pictorial treatment of the theme.[33]

MacColl believed the habit of certain artists to insist on painting their models as goddesses was ridiculous, and resulted in the flaccid art of the modern Academies. He suggested that the painter should instead rely on a direct visual response to the figure:

> Better the ironic study that can enjoy her character, not a Venus at her bath but a model at her tub. Better to catch the formal beauty of rhythmic gesture in a ballet than to compromise with it in a got-up "Daphnephoria."[34]

MacColl did not believe that such paintings, which claimed to draw their inspiration from classical or historical texts, drew on the artist's full poetic powers, but that they restricted the use of the imagination, which he regarded as one of the artist's most important senses.

MacColl recognised the importance of the imagination but, like Baudelaire, he did not mean by this the flights of fancy that were excused by reference to a classical, or similar text:

> It is generously supposed that when a painter takes a subject out of Homer, or, it may be, Lemprière, and that subject includes some mythic or chimeric creature, that his art thereby becomes imaginative. The fact is otherwise.[35]

MacColl recommended that artists would do better to turn their attentions to the more "grotesque beasts" of Greek folklore, but also warned that even when painting dragons, Lord Leighton was able to conjure up an image that was like nothing so much as "his umbrella entangled with an exploding boiler". In his *Salon* of 1859, Baudelaire had written in praise of *la reine des facultés*, and explained precisely why the imagination was important to the artist:

> Elle est l'analyse, elle est la synthèse; et cependant des hommes habiles dans l'analyse et suffisamment aptes à faire un résumé peuvent être privés d'imagination. Elle est cela, et elle n'est pas tout à fait cela. Elle est la sensibilité, et pourant il y a des personnes très sensibles, trop sensibles peut-être, qui en sont privées. C'est l'imagination qui a enseigné à l'homme le sens moral de la couleur, du contour, du son et du parfum. Elle a créé, au commencement du monde, l'analogie et la métaphore.[36]

Furthermore, Baudelaire believed that the imagination was *"la reine du vrai"*, and these ideas would seem to have influenced MacColl, who did not regard the supposedly imaginative paintings that drew on sources from literature as works full of poetry. For that the artist must rely not on a story, however moral, but on vision and the image, or analysis and synthesis.

If the artist was disadvantaged because his work was temporally static, he had the advantage that he could make direct contact with one of the senses:

> ... he cannot render and expound character in a sequence of expression and speech. But he has the emotional compensation that he renders to the eye directly what literature can only refer to, and therefore his image shares the inexhaustibility for thought and delight of the living thing, along with its less certain import.[37]

This did not mean that painting could not address ideas. MacColl had argued in an article written in 1892 that "thought and feeling were not particular to literature"[38]. Literature in art was at best a distraction, drawing painting away from its "natural methods" and MacColl encouraged the artist to work instead in a way that would allow "the eye" to "take its poetry directly from life"[39]. The artist should rely on painting, not to "vaguely evoke, but definitely give, the image"[40], rather than trying to compete with literature's powers of "argument and narrative". MacColl thought the idea that paintings could exist which did not have a subject was absurd but the thrust of his argument was with those who maintained that poetry and ideas were the preserve of literature and could not exist in the direct appeal made by painting.

MacColl had started to develop this argument in the very first article that he wrote after being appointed as the art critic for the *Spectator*. As Stevenson would do five years later, MacColl used the excuse of paintings by Velázquez to write about Impressionism. In particular he contrasted the work of two different types of artists, those who worked with "thought" and those who worked directly from what they could see. He paraphrased what he saw as the simplistic argument of the "Impressionist":

> ... the general line of their creed is that the side of thought in painting (they usually beg the question by calling it "literature") is of little account beside the pure painter's power of rendering what he sees ...[41]

MacColl was equally unhappy with both of these extremes. He did not believe that thought was confined to literary images or that mimesis and a more purely visual approach to art was the correct philosophy for the painter:

> Between [the] extraordinary fanatic who cannot paint, but says he can think, and the other who does not think, but says he can paint, we may complacently allow the battle to rage.[42]

Despite this early, mild, condemnation of the "Impressionists" and his disavowal of the ideas of an aesthetic which considered only the visual qualities of a painting, ignoring its subject, MacColl was frequently regarded as an advocate for the ideal of pictures without a subject or with an immoral subject.

As the debate about the importance of the subject of a painting developed it became more polarised and the argument was confused by invective. In 1895, MacColl attempted, once again to explain the difference between "literature" and the "subject" of a painting:

> There is no ambiguity more dear to stupid critics than the ambiguity that lurks in their expression, "subject-pictures." By this

> they do not mean pictures with a subject, since pictures without a subject are inconceivable. They mean by "subject," *a subject as it is treated in literature.* They cannot conceive that poetry exists apart from literature, that the eye may take its poetry directly from life ...[43]

MacColl knew Whistler's writing on art, and so he would have known of the vehemence with which Whistler rejected the idea that the subject of a painting was of any importance. This did not prevent him, in his book, *Nineteenth Century Art*, from using Whistler's writing about the Nocturnes, to illustrate the symbiotic relationship between the visual image, its subject and poetry:

> ... we are little advanced when we have confuted an artist's theory as a theory for other artists or even for himself; and we have only to turn to [a] page of Mr. Whistler's writings, the famous passage in which he translates his nocturnes into literature, to see that a particular nuance of significance and poetry is as necessary a part of these pictures as their tone. If they were copies of stains in a carpet they would be beautiful stains; as a vision of luminous vapour and of London seen in this beautiful stain they are poetry.[44]

Unlike Sickert, who had carefully avoided confronting his "Master", and had consequently been prevented from writing directly about the importance of the subject to an artist, MacColl had no such reservations, and in a number of articles throughout his career as a critic he debated what might be considered to be suitable subject-matter for the modern painter.

MacColl attempted to demystify the arguments surrounding the subject-matter of paintings and encouraged the idea that the most appropriate subjects were also the most accessible. The greatest danger for the artist was a form of dishonest invention intended to promote the idea of the artist as *refusé*:

> ... a painter will often choose quite simply what seems to him a fine and obvious subject in unpromising material ... but if he has a touch of bravado and a turn for sporting before the Philistines, he will be apt to arrange for accidents, and to seek out the commonplace, and perhaps, in the end, to spoil a fine talent.[45]

This affectation, of deliberately seeking out low-life subjects, was in direct opposition to what MacColl regarded as the essential quality of those paintings, in which the artist had been able to "catch something of life", demonstrating the "highest form of 'correctness.'"[46] The implication of this statement would seem to be that MacColl hoped to counter the suggestion of immorality, which was ascribed to paintings of commonplace subjects, by alluding to their honesty. MacColl was not seeking out an art of invention and falsification, whatever the motivation, but rather an observation of the modern world that clearly located man in this new "Nature" and brought beauty to the ordinary and mundane.

Once the artist had selected a suitable subject, simply by looking at his own world, MacColl believed that he must then extract the poetry, which was latent within even the most ordinary and seemingly unprepossessing scene. It was the work of Whistler, and more specifically the *Nocturnes*, which MacColl used to illustrate this process:

> Because the recognisable in them is reduced to its most evanescent terms, the recognition is the keener pleasure; the blue-and-gold patchwork is delicate in itself, but it is poetic also, because it is redeemed out of a familiar squalor. This by daylight was a mudbank, by night is silver; the fine lacework was chimneys and crazy-bridge by day, and it is lamp-posts and railway lights that are read as topaz and emerald.[47]

This was for MacColl the highest achievement of the contemporary painter: taking the prosaic life of the modern world as his subject and finding in it, and in his treatment, an unexpected poetry. These two elements were given equal importance by MacColl, and he also recognised that they were inseparably bound. He dismissed the suggestion that artists should turn their attention to more popular subjects in order to make their work more accessible and pleasing to a wider audience, and explained how subject matter could not be taken in isolation:

> Why not paint the Bishop's, the Babies, the Puppies ... ? The reply is obvious. If the thing could be done it would be done in vain. If it were possible to disentangle from a popular painting what you call its "subject" and treat it artistically, the popularity would be found to have vanished.[48]

MacColl refused to allow his ideas on art to be defined by the criticism of the "Philistine" or other reactionary writers, who insisted that the New Critics proclaimed a theory that was predicated on the dismissal of the importance of the subject of a painting.

Writing about Sickert's painting, *Miss Minnie Cunningham*, which was exhibited at the New English Art Club exhibition, 1892, MacColl defended Sickert's choice of subject and attempted to describe the essential qualities of the music-hall which made it such an ideal source of material for the painter:

> It is one of the commonplaces of stupid criticism to suppose that a music-hall subject must be something ugly, chosen by a painter out of bravado. Quite apart from the fascination of stage-lighting, and the accidents of stage-colour, the fact is, of course, amusingly different. Among the various highly trained performers - dancers, singers, acrobats - beauty and grace hold the stage as well as grotesqueness and vulgarity. An artist knows how to beat all three if his range be great enough, but in a case like this there is nothing in the subject that would not delight a Botticelli.[49]

Provocatively linking the names of Sickert and Botticelli, MacColl demanded that the spectator should look beyond - but not ignore - the peculiar attraction of the music-hall and consider the technical possibilities it offered the artist in colour and light and accidents of composition. It was not the subject on its own which commended itself to MacColl, but the combination of the fascination of the music-hall and the way in which Sickert had treated the theme, which had produced an image that he considered to be worthy of comparison with the art of the Renaissance.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that MacColl discovered similar qualities in the work of the Degas, the artist who had exerted the greatest influence on Sickert, when writing about *L'Absinthe* in one of the articles that provoked "The Philistine":

> M. Degas understands his people absolutely; there is no false note of an imposed and blundering sentiment, but exactly as a man with a just eye and comprehending mind and power of speech could set up that scene for us in the fit words, whose mysterious relations of idea and sound should affect us as beauty, so does this master of character, of form, of colour, watch till the *café* table-tops and the mirror and the water-bottle and the drinks and the features yield up to him their mysterious affecting note. The subject, if you like, was repulsive as you would have seen it, *before Degas made it his.* If it appears so still, you may make up your mind that the confusion and affliction from which you suffer are incurable.[50]

MacColl's criticism did not suggest that "the subject is nothing", but that it was Degas' complete understanding of his subject and the honesty of his vision, which allowed him to produce great art from such seemingly unpromising material.

Four years later MacColl noted that the critics who were unable to look beyond the subject of a painting came to see any picture of a music-hall as an indication that the work must be "advanced and artistic"[51], and later still he ridiculed the supposedly experimental nature of some of the work which had been exhibited at the N.E.A.C.:

> Portraits of Mr. George Moore and scenes in music-halls were at one time, it is difficult to say why, regarded as fantastic extravagancies.[52]

However, MacColl's amusement at the fashion for certain subjects did not imply that he no longer recognised the importance for the artist of trying to find a certain poetry in the modern world. He praised Sargent's effort to come to terms with the "restless, nervous age - an age on the edge", in his paintings of the "ladies and gentlemen of today":

Behold them on his canvases, caught and fixed there for a brilliant instant in the midst of the whirling overwork and overplay, swished on there in a manner that accords so brilliantly well to its matter - a manner that is, moreover, itself a justly contemptuous criticism, profound in its very superficiality. Here are ladies and gentlemen whose bodies are still vibrating from the motion of motor-cars. Their ears are still buzzing from talks down telephones. Their eyes are still strained from staring at cinematographs ... and here they are ... snap-shotted into immortality by a great painter and psychologist.[53]

Sargent's paintings of "crowds of black-coated men", hastily depicted, in a manner that mirrored the "jumpiness" of modern life, appeared to combine, for MacColl, the necessary fusion between the subject and the treatment of a painting and irresistibly invited comparison with Baudelaire's writing on the work of Guys and on suitable subjects for the Painter of Modern Life.

MacColl's comments on the importance of the subject were not always so unequivocal. He suggested that "any object, however humble, may become the pretext for a picture"[54], and that it was "not the critical event but the insignificant accident" that was "the painter's opportunity"[55]. Writing about Manet, he even suggested that it was possible for an artist's genius to rise above an ill considered subject:

> ... if Manet were nothing but a magnificent voice and singer, engaged on the wrong material, I would rather listen to him than to those who chirp my own favourite words and things.[56]

However, throughout his time as a critic he persistently refuted, absolutely, the idea "that the subject is nothing":

> This is so far from being true, that a painter is at once found out if he attempts a subject that does not belong to him.[57]

He recognised that the selection of a suitable subject, which the artist understood and could claim as his own, was only a part of the "real problem", which was: "given a

subject, to render it with a *congruous* beauty"[58]. This idea was combined in the simple expression that "a man should paint beauty where he feels it"[59]. He acknowledged that this could be found in the most unlikely places, as in the case of Chardin:

> It is seldom that we find an artist with Chardin's exquisite talent for pouring over the beauties of a loaf or a cheese, who will let his eyes do their own work instead of making ambitious excursions over matters which intelligence tells him are more important than cheese. Cheese is his appointed gate into beauty and mystery: if only he sticks to the road he will go amazing lengths, further than he would reach by any grander track.[60]

These comments do not relegate the importance of the subject but promote the idea that the artist should strive to reveal the particular beauty from his subject matter. There were not subjects for paintings that were more suitable than others, only the handling of those themes by the artists:

> ... for pictorial purposes, a nude woman is from most points of view an exceedingly ugly object. Sculptors and painters have expended enormous ingenuity in managing the subject so as to make it beautiful. The only other way is grotesque, getting value out of oddity, and a designer of genius like Degas is aware of this.[61]

It was Degas, who, perhaps above all other artists provided MacColl with the ideal paradigm of an painter who could reveal a peculiar beauty, which had been unnoticed by others.

MacColl stressed the importance of Degas's individual perception, that could find the poetry or beauty in a particular scene, or in the most unexpected form:

> No one can make anything in art of an ample lady in tights and ballet-dress, unless he has an ironic perception of the grotesqueness of the spectacle. Degas is not foolish enough to take on the vanity of the dancer; he finds beauty in the spectacle in a fashion that must shock the subject.[62]

and demonstrated how the same subject could be treated by two different artists to produce completely different paintings, altering the perception of the spectator:

> It has been suggested that Degas may have taken the idea of race-course subjects from Mr. Frith's *Derby Day*. Whether that be so or not, the picture offers a capital example of what the 'same subject' becomes to different minds. Mr. Frith, with all his remarkable ingenuity and skill, spreads over everything an emollient of prettiness, flattering the laziness of the general eye. The other applies a sharp 'developer,' stamping horse and jockey as strange beings we have not seen before, but will often see after.[63]

MacColl believed that the artist should aspire to encourage the spectator to re-examine the world about him and that this could best be done if the painter represented scenes from the modern world in a way that made them appear surprising and new. The potential for this was part of "the glory of life"[64], which MacColl held to be the "real subject" of art.

MacColl rejected the hedonism of Gautier who, in the preface to his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, described the contempt in which he held the merely utilitarian, which he regarded as the antithesis to the beautiful:

> il n' y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir a rien; tout ce qui est utile est laid ... L'endroit le plus utile d'une maison ce sont les latrines.[65]

MacColl did not regard beauty as such an absolute entity, only present in certain objects. He believed that it was possible for the artist to reveal a beauty that was an integral part of modern existence. In an article for which he adopted a dialogue form, he discussed the idea that it was not necessary for the artist to depict a "smile" rather than a "smirk", or that the painter could be concocted by arranging the necessary ingredients, starting with Degas and adding "a little archangel" and consulting "Mr. Ruskin about the sentiments"[66]. Using the example of Degas he went on to examine the relationship between the subject and the treatment:

> Reluctant Friend - ... my painter shall not be the slave of weather or of facts. Your Degas, with his endowment of vision, seems to me like a man who has a passport given him to be a spectator of

the Greater Mysteries (and they are enacted to the imagination within the head), but who lingers by the way to look "through keyholes" at lesser mysteries; he will spend all his time in the corridors, and never arrive; he is accredited to a Court, and loses his way into the servants' hall.

Arrogant Painter - ... I prefer the dialogue of the lackeys as reported by a Shakespeare, to that of the angels as distorted by a lackey; and that is what you will get if you cling to your subject criterion.[67]

This idea would seem to be a long way from Gautier's escapist ideal to be discovered through the pursuit of beauty, which was upheld by Pater and Wilde. MacColl understood that it was "the dignity of the performance that matters, and not that of the subject"[68], and that it was the failure of the Philistine to understand this which impoverished his ability to enjoy the visual arts. MacColl compared the Philistine's inability to look beyond the subject of a painting to an inability to enjoy the poetry of language whatever the subject under discussion:

> To praise *Macbeth* is not exactly the same thing as encouraging murder, or insisting that only murder should be written about.[69]

MacColl was searching for a balance between subject and technique. He did not wish to apply a rigid dogma to art and occasionally appeared to be slightly frustrated by the tendency of others to polarise the debate.

The extremes that MacColl identified were those who claimed that they could think but not paint and those who claimed they could not think but that they could paint: a literary ideal placed in opposition to a purely formal conception of art. The former approach seemed to find a natural sympathy in England where the public, or certain voluble critics, demanded that art should be moral:

> In England, the "great heart of the people" is a conscience, and all art gravitates naturally to the form of the Sermon. This Hogarth found and traded upon.[70]

This he compared to the purely visual and unthinking response of the artist who painted pleasing topographical landscape pictures of exotic locations:

> What the *clientèle* that winters in a "special locality" desires, as a rule, in a "rendering of the subject," is a picture that will compete with a photograph in exact definition and relentless inclusion, something that will "conjure up associations" of where the hotel lay in the town, or of the views starred in the guide-book ... but there is very little of the elimination and selection and disposition and emphasis that make the difference between photographer and artist; and the effects chosen are rather those in which the subjects are seen clearly than seen pictorially.[71]

MacColl recognised that neither of these alternatives produced modern art that could be considered with the greatest art of the past, although both appeared in different measure to enjoy a popular appeal which was commended by the "philistine" critics and the Royal Academy.

Repeatedly charged with a disregard for the subject of the paintings that he praised, or, worse lauding the immoral and the salacious, MacColl ironically considered the moral art of the Royal Academy's annual exhibitions, which was celebrated by the Bishop of Ripon in his speech at the Academy banquet, 1905:

> ... what are those consistently noble subjects which speak to us of the lofty thoughts which can lift the characters of man? Is it the "Cup of Tantalus" in this year's exhibition? Its subject is one little girl teasing another. Is it the "Asterie" of last year? Its subject was a naughty little girl whose lover is out of town showing herself in a transparent dress at the window to somebody from round the corner who is whistling in the street. Or is it the "Visit to Aesculapius"? The subject is a coquettish young woman displaying her charms to an elderly connoisseur. The Bishop could hardly have meant that when these subjects are called by classic names they become noble and animate the mind and character of a nation.[72]

MacColl believed that "thoughts and ideas" which were "scholastically chaperoned" could not disguise "frivolity of thought and smallness of vision", which similarly could "not become nobility by a geographical change"[73]. These devices simply

disguised the poverty of painting that had not recognised the limitations of narrative painting:

> How is an art to convey narrative that has no verb among its means of expression, no conjunction that is not ambiguous, that must present all its facts simultaneously instead of in a definite order, and that can give only one moment of an action? These disabilities leave painting not an independent story-teller, but an illustrator of moments in otherwise known myths and histories.[74]

Not only did this theory of art disregard the formal possibilities of painting, but it could also be argued that the "Cup of Tantalus" was not a myth that would have been known universally. These subjects, which MacColl had described as the "imposition of the schoolmaster"[75], could as easily have been described as the preserve of the "superior person", rather than the "people of ordinary understanding", whose cause was, supposedly, championed by the "Philistine".

MacColl resisted the patronising view of the spectator, which suggested that they would not be able to understand or recognise beauty and continually commended the artist to draw on poetry, wherever he might find it, as a source for his work:

> The drift of criticism is now so strong against the suspicion of meaning in a painting, cheap anecdote-mongering and cheap sentiment have brought such discredit on poetry when expressed in paint, that it is opportune and wholesome to be reminded that, the puckered face of pedantry notwithstanding, poetry is as good an excuse for the assembling of images as any other. A breeze or a sunbeam are good collectors in their way; a fog or a moonlight have an abstracting and selecting power; the accident of light and air will dignify with a unity of effect the most miscellaneous collection of images, but a thought will gather them also to pictorial purpose.[76]

MacColl defined precisely what he meant by subject matter and where the artist should find it. His theory was not exclusive or elitist and avoided dogmatic prescription, encouraging the idea that the individual artist should discover and reveal his own subject as a response to his particular sensibility:

> Subject is important in this sense, that for every artist there is a key-thing, or group of things in Nature that calls out his feeling, for one man the character in the lines of a face, for another the mystery of light and air on a heap of stones; it is the justification of modern art to have brought this latter kind of sensibility into play.[77]

MacColl believed that this initial stimulus should be visual, corresponding most directly with the potential and the limitations of painting.

Developing the dialogue between the "Arrogant Artist" and his "Reluctant Friend", he appeared to put into the mouth of the painter the most extreme realisation of this theory of subject matter that he was prepared to countenance. The "Arrogant Artist", analysing the work of Monticelli for his friend, explained how anyone with "the sense for painting need not think of other connections of the subject than the visible", and describe other ideas about the subject as "grosser ties" which were "irrelevant". However, despite this attempt, by a character whom MacColl characterised as arrogant, to adopt the most progressive attitude and to deny that the subject of a painting was any more than a pretext to paint, MacColl insisted that the importance of this visual response was not simply to produce a potentially beautiful painting but to encourage the spectator to reconsider the modern world and "by this sense ... learn to see nothing common or unclean but beauty everywhere"[78]. MacColl recognised essential qualities of painting which were particular to the visual nature of the work and which enjoyed equivalents with other arts:

> ... drawing is at bottom, like all the arts, a kind of gesture, a method of dancing upon paper. The dance may be mimetic; but it is the *verve* of the performance, not the closeness of the imitation, that impresses, and tame addictions of truth will encumber and not convince[79]

and regarded this as the concrete quality of painting as opposed to the more "abstract" nature of subject matter:

> The test by which we finally judge paintings is intensity, exquisiteness and fitness of vision at the chosen pitch, not the abstract order of subject.[80]

Most importantly he acknowledged a dialogue between the subject and the treatment of a painting. He believed that to criticise the subjects of Manet's paintings as "insignificant" and "his views as superficial", was to say "nothing to those who adore the radiant surface of the world and behold it in a glory"[81].

MacColl was, however, anxious that the emphasis that was being placed on treatment should not be at the expense of the subject but that these two elements of painting should compliment each other. In another article for which MacColl adopted a *paragone* style of debate, he constructed a dialogue between a "Symbolist" and an "Impressionist". MacColl gave voice to his ideas through the comments of the "Symbolist":

> ... we have crossed from the region of surfaces and lustres and textures, to the perception that these make not merely a pattern, but a thing or person; why now are we to strip this thing or person of all that thought and pleasure and pain have done to multiply its appeals, or horror and disgust to cancel them? How is it to undress at your command, and come a naked colour-and-angles, into your canvas? Why, in the name of - of Impressionism, must I do anything of the sort to my other impressions? It is you who are the intellectual juggler contriving this filter, this strainer of associations, of which the general law is that no one may employ two faculties on the same object, and the particular application that the painter must be nothing but eyes.[82]

It is interesting to note that MacColl did not align himself with the more doctrinaire principles by which he defined Impressionism - ideas which derived in England from Whistler - but wished to suggest an alternative aesthetic which recognised a less selective approach to visual art, allowing for its mimetic qualities without detracting from the importance of surfaces, lustres and texture. MacColl defended those artists who were condemned as the "authors of the shilling dreadful and the drawing-room

ballad in paint", who it was imagined did not "know their business" because they refused to recognise "that painters should care nothing for 'subject'". MacColl insisted that:

> ... to the painter, subject is half the battle, but his "subject" is seldom the same as the "subject" that commends itself to the book-maker and accordingly they have deserted the good old anecdotes and neglected to illustrate any new ones ...[83]

MacColl's theory on the necessary tension between these two halves of the battle is perhaps best expressed by his fictional "Symbolist" who teased his friend the "Impressionist" by forcing him to acknowledge that in portrait painting at least, the Impressionist never completely abandoned the construction of a recognisable form, but played a subtle game of "hide-and-seek". By reducing to a minimum the portrait touches of the subject but never ignoring them, the "Symbolist" explained how the "Impressionist" painter played "the game of all decorators", and described the sensation of looking at an Impressionist painting:

> I am first aware only of the patchwork pleasure; but all the time I know, and am excited by the anticipation, that it will resolve itself into constituent natural objects ... From this view I return at will to the pattern-effect, and between the two I am sent backwards and forward as in a see-saw, with a heightened pleasure in the sensation because of this reverberation from perception.[84]

These were the "poles of natural effect and symbolism between which the pendulum of painting always swings"[85], which MacColl identified, and he considered any attempt to deny the existence of one or other of these to be equally inane.

MacColl was opposed to ideological dogmatism that would limit the way the artist worked and the spectator then considered the image. He thought that it would be "absurd" to allow any sort of "purism" to "limit the painter to the shape and colour of his image, if he sees his way to doubling its appeal by using it as a symbol"[86].

Instead he believed that the artist should exploit what he described as "the paradoxical essence of the artistic image" which was its constant state of flux, that it should at one and the same time "be *and* not be". MacColl also described the enjoyment that the spectator experienced before a painting, "enjoying a certain amount of concealment" and finding that the artist had ensured that they are "met half-way" in the game of "I spy". This was what MacColl meant by "Symbolism", not the resolution of the physical and spiritual worlds, but the discovery in paint of equivalents or metaphors for the visual experience of Nature. The English artist who best exploited this approach for MacColl was Steer. MacColl described the struggle of the painter trying to find the balance between the subject and its handling, writing about Steer's painting, *Boulogne Sands*, at the N.E.A.C. Exhibition in 1892:

> It becomes a subtle problem in the dialectic of painting how far the more obvious characteristics should give way to the more subtle, how far the expression of truth of colour should be allowed [to] invade the facts of form and texture. The sky of the beach scene, for example, if it be taken as representing form and texture, is ridiculous; it is like something rough and chippy, and if that suggestion gets too much in the way, the method has overshot its mark. Its mark is to express by a symbol the vivid life in the sky-colour, the sea-colour, and it is doubtful if the richness and subtlety of their colour can be conveyed in any other way.[87]

MacColl's use of the word "symbol", which displeased George Moore, suggests that MacColl wanted to distance himself slightly from the ideas of Impressionism, which he believed were leading towards an art which would only exploit one part of the potential of painting.

As perhaps the most influential of the New Critics, MacColl's aesthetic ideology can be seen to represent the orthodoxy of the modern reforming artists and critics at the time. His ideas were not as extreme as Whistler's, as they were expressed in the latter's writing, nor as those of the younger generation of French painters. MacColl's

fascination with the formal possibilities of painting, able to express a visual beauty which was derived from discovering ideal forms as they existed in the modern world, was tempered by his absolute belief in the importance of the chosen images:

> For the life of me I cannot see the advantage of explaining a thing as essentially consisting in half of itself. I can imagine an art which plays only with lines and colours that have no meaning; but once an image is taken on board (and this is the art of painting), why minimise the consequences and pretend it was only taken on board as a steerage passenger who pays his way by taking a hand at the ropes? No; when the image comes on board he comes as the pilot, and all beauties of material handling, &c., are thenceforth judged as they obey and further his orders.[88]

MacColl attempted to explain the difference between the iconography of "subject-pictures", which he regarded as "a subject as it is treated in literature", and the poetry of a painting which was in part generated by the individual artist, and subsequently the spectator, responding to the perceived iconology of a scene "taken from life".

MacColl acknowledged that Steer was criticised because he did not paint "poetic subjects", and that Sickert did not "affect Biblical scenes"[89], but refuted the idea that this failure to allude to a literary idea, or a known text meant, "nothing is said" in their work:

> ... Nothing is said to the man who is chiefly literary, to whom circumstances and an approximate facial expression are the whole image; he must be content with the illustrators. But on the other side of his limitations a sense extends, to which the beauty of vital form and character speaks directly, is significant and moving apart from being nailed to the text incident.[90]

MacColl did not think that painting should be dependent on a pre-existent text, or only capable of one particular reading, but that it should be a synthesis of the relationships between the forms in the painting and also of the relationship of those forms with reality. He wrote that, "a bad painter paints an association because he cannot paint the thing" whereas "a good painter paints the thing, and trusts to its

beauty to compel the association"[91]. Ultimately the need to rely on an essentially literary form demonstrated that the particular painter lacked one of the most important qualities of the artist:

> It is a mind weak in pictorial imagination that must rely on poetry ready-made in literature, and whose pictures beg, "Please think of this subject as you have read about it."[92]

It was through the pictorial imagination that MacColl believed that the artist was able to discover, and reveal, the particular beauty of his chosen subject, and it was the individual pictorial imagination of the artist that enabled the synthesis of the subject and its handling in order to realise the particular poetry of the painting.

The most complete expression of an existing thing.

Once again the ideas of one of the New Critics would appear to be indebted to Baudelaire's writing on art. It is, however, possible that Baudelaire's ideas were influenced by English writers such as Coleridge and he himself even acknowledged one English source that corresponded with his thinking on the importance of the imagination in art: *The Night side of Nature*, by Mrs. Crowe, published in London in 1848:

> By imagination I do not simply mean to convey the common notion implied by that much abused word, which is only *fancy*, but the *constructive* imagination, which is a much higher function, and which, in as much as man is made in the likeness of God, bears a distant relation to that sublime power by which the Creator projects, creates, and upholds his universe[93].

This idea of a constructive and creative imagination, as opposed to mere fancy was taken up by MacColl to explain the moment in art when "accomplishment leaves off and magic begins", which was "attained through mastery of Nature"

> ... the weak-eyed dreamer ... must distort Nature to the terms of his fancy to feel her poetical. It is another and stronger vision that studies and contemplates the real thing till the chaos becomes coherent, and from the refinements of visible fact the vision detaches itself, a natural mystery.[94]

MacColl wished to direct the artist away from fancy and towards the constructive or synthetic imagination, which could help to bring order to the confusion, and "gross images" that were otherwise imposed on the painter.

In almost direct opposition to "fancy", another problem was posed for the imagination by photography and a taste for "mechanical realism". MacColl believed that the artist could learn many useful lessons from photography, particularly the way that forms were revealed by light and the "unexpected fusing of parts into a mass" which resulted from "the obliteration of all sorts of details". However, the artist could not rely solely on the photograph and, as well as colour, which the painter had to find for himself, he must also, according to MacColl, "simplify and emphasise where the photograph is chaotic"[95]. The artists whom MacColl most admired in 1890, were those who were able to progress beyond this chaos: Whistler, "a fresh contingent from Parisian studios", the "English and American Impressionists" - John Sargent and Stott of Oldham, the artists of the New English Art Club, the Newlyn School and "a new band of Scotch painters". MacColl believed that all of these artists and different groups shared a unifying aesthetic, which meant that they could be considered as a single school:

> Its general character is, that while handling the resources of modern technique it uses them to a distinctly decorative purpose. The real is there, but the artists are not satisfied with that subjection of the object to the nature of paint where the modern artist often sets up his rest; they compel the thing into a tapestry.[96]

It was this ability to find order and to unify images which MacColl sought in art and which he seems to have believed to be a function of the imagination.

MacColl was aware that this ideal, of the artist simplifying and drawing the complexity of nature into a decorative image, was not one that found favour with the "outsider". MacColl believed that in the popular consciousness "a picture is simply an imitation, or rather an illustrated catalogue, of Nature"[97], and he appeared to be not wholly unsympathetic to this notion:

> There is an inventiveness in Nature that, strange to say, goes beyond our own, an attention to detail and construction that our dreams refuse, a play of features of which the ideal is incapable.[98]

However, MacColl did not believe that the artist should attempt to "reproduce the thing" but "what he felt about the thing". He recognised an "opposition ... in painting between mechanical realism and expression"[99], and it was in the resolution of this conflict that the artist found a different solution to that which might have been sought by the "outsider".

MacColl wished to dispel the popular misconception which he perceived, which maintained that a picture was "a contrivance for exhibiting a maximum of facts", and attempted to explain the way in which the "artist" approached the study of nature, stressing the importance to the painter of his materials:

> ... the obligation to Nature and fact is an accidental one. Reproduction of Nature is not his object; and if he does borrow a thing or two, he is no way bound to take over all the effects of the establishment. Where he does feel a constant obligation is to his means, because they are also his end. If it is part of his game to refer us to a beauty in Nature, it is another part to delight us with the nature of a material.[100]

MacColl even considered this concern, for the formal qualities of painting, to be a part of the process of producing work that corresponded to nature:

> A fine effect of nature strikes us, not as something laboured and overwrought, but as effortless and fresh. To this, a fact of the first order in Nature, corresponds the look of directness in Art, to

> elaborate for the sake of lesser facts is to lose the expression of a larger one.[101]

Whether a work of art was to be regarded as a formal, decorative arrangement, or as an image with a particular iconology, the artist or "designer" could only reveal the beauty of Nature if he were able to reduce it to "a great simplicity"[102], and this act of editing required the artist to rely not on "fancy" but on imagination.

MacColl differentiated between the use of the imagination as it applied to the subject of a painting and to its form:

> When a consummate master renders the materials of common day, the art of rendering can hold its own with the art of imagination[103]

confirming that the poetry of a picture was not to be found in the choice of a particular subject, and that the lowest and most commonplace theme could be reproduced in such a way as to invest the image with a particular poetry. The inventive and creative potential of painting could be equally well realised through the formal language of the painting as through the fanciful depiction of invented scenes from antiquity, or other such supposedly elevated sources.

Just as the subject of a picture could not, on its own, guarantee the poetic quality of a painting, similarly the artist had to develop more than simple technical facility. MacColl believed that art should strive to bring order and coherence to the chaos of the modern world, and to do this the painter must be able to reproduce the world with a revelatory clarity:

> Technique only gains artistic value through something else … and that something else is vision. And this faculty of fine vision, if it cannot be said to invent, may be said to discover; if it does not create an image out of its head it re-creates one out of the surfeit of gross matter by the refinements of its choice, the justice of its omissions, the emphasis of its presentation. And between this image-making power, this imagination, that can see pictures in

> things, that grapples with matter in immediate presence, and that other imagination that combines from it in absence, who shall prove a difference in rank. Is a greater fallacy possible than to speak of the former process as the copying of a determined object.[104]

The "vision", or "image-making power", or "imagination" which MacColl held to be an essential quality of the artist was not fanciful invention but the re-ordering of existing objects; the imagination of the painter was required to represent these in such a way as to reveal an "atmosphere", or to catch "some moment of the brute object when it is transfigured into a design and a radiance".

The imagination of the artist was required in the creation of a painting, and MacColl also believed that it was necessary for the painter to engage the imagination of the spectator:

> He wishes to convince the imagination, not to delude the sense; and the shear beauty of his handling will do this more effectively than a lifelike projection or a multitude of circumstance.

MacColl seems therefore, to be dismissing the more fantastic images, which Sickert had described as a "Peckham Pompeii" or a "Bloomsbury Barbizon", and also the sterile realism which resulted from the emulation of mechanical, or photographic reproduction of a particular scene. He was suggesting that the viewer's response to an image was as dependant on the formal qualities of the painting as it was on the more obvious subject of the work:

> In the lines of abstract ornament, you will often get a more striking impression of conflict or of repose than from the most document-supported picture of a battle or of sleep; and it is this element, the music of space and form, that really plays to the imagination behind the images that represent person or thing. A division of the paper will do more to enthrone a figure or dignify a landscape than the dress of kings or the presence of palaces, and the drift or swing of a composition across the canvas be more eloquent of its motive than the particular attitudes and occupations of its constituent persons.[105]

MacColl was not proposing that the subject was of no consequence, rather that it had to be understood and seen with the particular vision of the artist. Imaginative painting should strive to represent this selective perception, by using the full range of possibilities of the chosen medium:

> ... the radical difference between painting that is imaginative, and painting that is poor photography ... consists in this, that the artist has digested nature; that instead of timidly walking round an object, making a try at it here, and a dab at it there, he has made up his mind what he wants from the object, what in the object impresses or amuses him. Therefore, being thus clear, he can play with it, *make an image out of it.* He has formed for himself a clear image of a Tree, a Cow, a Field, a River; he takes of them a characteristic action and a pleasing colour pattern, and he plays with his image as a musician with notes. And this invention, this sport of fancy or selection of the character and the action of the image, bring in the element of strangeness beside the element of likeness when a familiar scene is handled.[106]

MacColl appears to have been extolling the artist to find a satisfactory balance between the object, as it existed, and its formal representation, which might encourage the spectator to look at a thing known, the object, and thereafter see it with the same imaginative vision, and consequent clarity, as the artist.

MacColl summarised the particular imagination of the artist as being "the power of seeing images in things, and making images out of them"[107]. The imagination performed two functions for the painter:

> ... one exercise of the painter's imagination, - the ordering and command of things into their due places ... . Another, and one more vital, is its congruity. It is a work of the imagination that sees its object for what it is, that presses close to it, that does not pass it off under some alien form of poetry or misfitting convention. It is an imagination with the courage to treat the *mondaine* on her own admirable terms of fashion and elegance, that takes the beauties proper to her, and gives them to the quick.[108]

Just as Sickert had considered that the work of Millet demonstrated "the way of the artist", MacColl found that it was by virtue of what he described as "imaginative fitting and refitting" that Millet's work developed its "full and commanding stature":

> ... dreaming over a subject till its character asserts itself in leading and eloquent lines, till it fits itself into the given space compactly so as to satisfy the vital metrical and rhythmical demands of the eye, is a very different exercise from scratching and messing the half analysed motives of a picture, or from copying a slab of Nature in an accidental scale. The result of such an exercise, by which the subject purges and cleans itself of the superfluous and the interfering, and becomes strenuous and conscious in every part, is to bite upon the attention, to hold and fill the vision.[109]

The process of analysis described by Sickert, which allowed the artist to select "the vital constituents" of a scene, and to separate these from the "unessentials" which would otherwise "bewilder and mislead", became, for MacColl a function of the imagination of the artist.

Despite the importance that MacColl gave to the imagination in the creative process, he found it difficult to define the precise nature of this elusive faculty. He described the imagination as, "multiplying the circumstances in which a fixed image of life appears"[110], and the act of painting itself as "an arrest in the contemplation of things seen or imagined"[111]. These two statements appear to be slightly contradictory: the first implying that the imagination should defy attempts to limit the consideration of an image, the latter suggesting that the purpose of painting was to define the nature of things quite precisely. MacColl acknowledged the difficulty for the art critic of attempting to "explain what is the nature of the imaginative transaction by which ... violences done to truth give us a heightened sense of it"[112], however, he had no difficulty in recognising the antithesis, which abounded at the Royal Academy's Annual Exhibitions: the "pursuit of real colour and tone", which MacColl saw as "the pursuit of actuality, of accidents that have no importance for the imagination"[113].

Nevertheless, he insisted on the "emotional effect" of the imagination, and believed that the artist's imaginative potential could be increased by the examination of "foreign" and "former art". In *Nineteenth Century Art*, he suggested that one of the contributions that Courbet made to the development of art was to limit the rôle of the imagination to "being able to find the most complete expression of an existing thing, but never to suppose or to create the object"[114]. Perhaps the most coherent statement that MacColl made about the part to be played by the imagination in painting was in of a review of work at the New Gallery, written in 1893, when he ascribed to the pictorial imagination the ability "to interpret the eternal beauty of life in a fresh disguise"[115]

The art of the accident of light.

The art, which, for MacColl, most successfully fulfilled these ideals, was rather imprecisely defined as Impressionism. MacColl ascribed certain qualities of this art to the influence of Japanese art, which recognised the association between the expression of different sensations evoked by external perception resulting in poetry. MacColl was conscious of the difficulties that an art dedicated to the rendering of sensations would present to the spectator who sought a "literary" element in a painting as the cipher for the ideas that the artist wished to express. MacColl described the painting to which he believed that artists should aspire as being the "art of the accident of light":

> Its object, ... is quite frankly to render a sensation, not to express an idea, - an object which will appear culpable only to those who have a prejudice against sensations as such. ... To the spectator who has no habit of eye for the charm of visible matter, such painting must appear unmeaning (as it is) ... he will seek for an idea, and be vainly offered a sensation; he is accustomed to find his interest in causes, and is put off with an effect. ... But with any one with an eye for the visible, with the habit of seeing pictures

> where they are, and that is everywhere, how curious sounds the talk of realism as a name of scorn ...[116]

While trying to represent visually the emotional response to a scene or an object the artist, according to MacColl, had to be able to refine the image. He had to be able to see in terms of "large relations instead of small" and it was this ability which made the "difference between a great and little artist"[117]. In the fictional debate between the "Reluctant Friend" and an "Arrogant Painter", MacColl explained the value of an art which relied on a visual response:

> It is to teach you to see, and what you refuse to your vision is an expansion and a refuge ... he who has the sense for painting need not think of the subject of the visible. Its grosser ties become irrelevant. And by this sense you may learn to see nothing common or unclean, but beauty everywhere.[118]

MacColl, however, remained suspicious of the "intellectual juggler" who contrived to filter out the added appeal of the response to the particular subject, which had been the artist's starting point. In another imagined dialogue between an "Impressionist" and a "Symbolist", he argued that rather than being negative about this starting point the painter should "make a merit out of necessity"[119], and consider the possible part that could be played by the subject of a painting. MacColl's primary concern was, however, with eyes that were capable of "steady and extended vision" rather than minds that were "petty" and easily "distracted"[120].

Most importantly MacColl saw the unique vision of Impressionism bringing a "unity and order of impression gained by focusing the subject"[121]. MacColl compared this development in the vision of the artist with the unifying effect of linear perspective. He emphasised the difficulties that this new art presented to the artist and the precise nature of the process of selection required. The painter had to employ his particular vision to decide the exact balance that should exist between the "parts" and the

"whole" in a picture, as a response to the perceived image. It is typical that MacColl should have compared this nineteenth century idea with the art of the Renaissance. Like other apologists for Impressionism, MacColl hoped to show that this latest manifestation of art was part of the overall development of painting, which had begun in the Renaissance. He referred particularly to Venetian art, which he described as a "synthesis of form and colour, which are inextricably bound up, and affect one the other"[122]. By constantly seeking to find these parallel qualities in the art of the past, MacColl hoped to lend credibility to this much derided modern movement. In the painting of Holbein, Velázquez, and Rembrandt, MacColl believed that he could detect a similar control of the "central emotion of vision", which he defined very simply as "the pleasure of looking at things"[123].

In describing the apparent simplicity of this emotional response to the appearance of objects, MacColl did not intend to suggest that this was a superficial form of art. MacColl explained that the proper response to the stimulus of vision was a "deep motion of the mind", which he also defined as "a rapt and solemn contemplation"[124]. Furthermore, MacColl believed that by relying on this theory of a unifying "vision", which included an element of profound consideration of the object, the journalistic confusion, which was brought about by the division of painting into "subject" and "technique", could be avoided:

> Say "vision" instead of "technique", and understand that the range of sensual, intellectual, and emotional rank is infinite within this sphere of deciding upon, choosing, creating an image out of the common camera matter, and the journalistic idea of an artist choosing a "subject" and then passing to a process of "slavish copying" what his "eye" sees becomes ludicrous.[125]

The process of "vision" implied something beyond simply looking and recording, to produce an image like a photographic reproduction. It was this that differentiated

Impressionism from facile realism. MacColl described the unwitting process of selection embarked on by the spectator when confronted by nature, which removed the need for the artist to deliberately engage in acts of choice; what MacColl described as the "secrets of beauty" were to be discovered by relying on taste and the editing of information, which was an automatic function of vision.

MacColl explained how he believed that much of the ingenuity of the modern artist had been used to reduce technical difficulties. This had been done by concentrating the artist's efforts in the act of seeing. Forms and tones were to be analysed and synthesised so that they could be rendered in simple, broad patches of paint. In this way MacColl described the modern painter "abstracting into a shorthand as ruthlessly as a primitive artist"[126]. He illustrated this idea by giving an example, not of the work of an artist but a description of the natural vision of the modern man:

> ... a business man hurrying to catch a train in the morning, and thinking of his engagements for the day. If one could note down what he sees of the familiar street it would be a vague space out of which a few short signs of distance, of turning places would emerge, a minimum of signals and recognitions by which he finds himself guided to the platform of his station. He sees, out of what falls on his retina, what his mind requires of it. Practical, business vision, therefore, is a wild form of impressionism.[127]

In this modern art, suited to the modern world, MacColl saw the possibility for the revelation of a "divinity" in the simplest of objects. This was a result of a "power of seeing" which could find "in the most ordinary matter, a beauty made of flower-like lights and shining shadows"[128]. It was this art, which was developed at the very end of the nineteenth century, that MacColl believed had brought painting to its zenith.

MacColl differentiated between "flurried painting", and "quick seeing", which he described as "the miracle of knowledge"[129]. He believed that this had been understood by both the Old Masters and the New; both made work which was

"fresh" and both made use of a "poetry" that was "purely pictorial"[130]. This was the essence of painting that did not depend on any aesthetic theory but helped to find the order that existed in reality:

> The true art of painting is ... to resume in one tone or tint a dozen minute differences, so as to present to the eye something of the fresh simplicity and breadth of statement that it instinctively makes for itself when it looks at reality without a theory.[131]

MacColl associated a "refined vision of the object" with Impressionism, while he recognised that the public applied "the word to painting that any way discomforts them"[132]. They were in the odious habit of estimating a picture by the amount of detail in it, which MacColl compared to "estimating a piece of music by the number of semiquavers in it"[133], and to judge an artist according to his ability to "reproduce the absurdities of the instantaneous photograph"[134]. The Impressionist painter was able to "grasp the whole effect", rather than "peddle among unrelated facts":

> Nor does the art of suggestion stop here. By a kind of metaphor implicit in the whole texture of his work, by a vigour and vivacity of handling that argue an agitation of impression, the painter may communicate a sense of life; and by the way he paints even the inanimate surroundings, give them a vibration and intensity that make them partners in the general excitement, like the images of poetry that reverberate upon a fact the energy and spirit of a flame.[135]

This was the combination of selective vision and handling that MacColl looked for in the best painting of any period and which he found in the work of those artists whom he described as "Impressionist". MacColl recognised the importance to the painter of light, and noted that this was generally accepted by artists of "modern ideas", but he made the distinction between the Impressionist and those for whom light was "an ill-natured detective agent", collecting so much information that it led to "bald and silly gossip"[136]. MacColl believed that true vision was more precisely focused than this and that the painter's attention should be "governed by feeling".

The response of the artist would determine the way the image would affect the viewer, since "every change in the definition of an object means a change in our emotion about it"[137]. Vision was, for MacColl, the most important quality for an artist and "Impressionism, in a word", was the art which employed "the means of emphasis natural to vision"[138]

MacColl's critical response to the work of the Impressionists was certainly not dogmatic, unquestioning, campaigning support. The artist he associated most closely with this development in painting was Monet. He considered the Frenchman's work to be chiefly concerned with an "analysis of visual effect", but, even at the end of 1891, MacColl was not persuaded that Monet's art was anything more than "experimentalist" and that it would, perhaps, "be more in place in some museum of painting research than in a gallery of pictures"[139]. Moreover, MacColl believed that Monet's painting was "more lopsided" and "less complete", than the painting of Degas and Whistler. While he admired Monet's ability to engage in "conversation" with nature, he, nevertheless, thought that this resulted in a "prolonged diary", rather than being "digested into a poem". This MacColl saw as a direct result of Monet's over-eagerness for "fresh views"[140]. In this respect, MacColl judged Monet as an "habitual student", but he still admired the painting of the artist whom he considered to be more than a pioneer. MacColl wrote about *Gelée blanche* and *Effet de Neige*, when they were exhibited in London in 1901:

> ... rosy frosty smoke blots out detail, transforming the trees into ghosts of ethereal tone ... a mantle of snow does the same tender office .... In subjects like these, when nature is simple enough for an artist who must work under her immediate present stimulus, we get the essence of Monet, and it is a rare one.[141]

However, MacColl thought that Monet was possessed by a "narrow, devouring interest", and was far from being one of the greatest painters. MacColl admitted that

he had only ever written about Monet with "due, or even grudging reserves", but he appreciated that he represented an "extreme development, in our time, of landscape painting" and that he had been "a valuable influence on more balanced artists in our own country"[142].

MacColl was more guarded than other critics in his use of the term Impressionism. He was conscious that others were in the habit of lumping together artists as diverse as Whistler, Degas and Monet, under the "nick-name" Impressionism. MacColl believed that the word, "as a piece of slang history" only really belonged to the latter. He praised the work of a variety of artists in terms which suggest that he understood the debt that they owed to the innovative work of this group of painters, but was cautious about using the word Impressionism in anything other than an historical sense, to refer to a number of specific exhibitions or very particular contributory artists. MacColl saw in the work of Steer qualities which were also to be found in Impressionist painting, particularly the ability to subordinate certain things seen in order to "hold a picture":

> A good many people can see a picture; to hold a picture till it is painted, across all the minor problems of emphasis and subordination, is a harder task, and it is this grasp that gives largeness and immediacy of address to a picture like *The Sofa* … The painter has not stopped to flirt with a pretty intruding motive in a corner, nor allowed an interesting detail to come forward and make a speech; he has held his picture.[143]

This quality of vision, which MacColl ascribed to Steer, was very similar to the definition that he had given of Impressionism, but he resisted the temptation to place Steer, or other English artists under this heading. Similarly he recognised in Whistler that the artist was "logically continuing the dropped thread of fine painting"[144] but did not draw from this the conclusion that he was an Impressionist. MacColl believed that this title should be reserved for "Monet and his group (Camille Pissarro,

Alfred Sisley, Paul Cezanne ...)", although he recognised that in "English critical usage the word has come to have a more extended application"[145].

Even within the limits of MacColl's precise definition of Impressionism, his support was neither partisan nor blinkered. Unlike Sickert's early support of Whistler, MacColl did not allow his desire to promote what he understood, and explained, as the aesthetic of Impressionist vision and selection, to prevent him from revealing the failings of some of the paintings. He was aware of the dangers of an unselective approach to criticism. He recognised that the less accomplished work in an exhibition could be detrimental to the stronger paintings and, in 1901, he wrote that the time had come to start to discriminate. He believed that Monet's *Gelée blanche,* and *Effet de Neige*, were weakened by being shown alongside second rate work by Pissarro and Sisley and "rubbishy" Renoir. He described the work of Pissarro and Sisley as being vitiated by the "ungainliness of subject and the fervour of handling" and stated that the paintings of Renoir were "daubs without drawing or colour"[146]. It was MacColl's refusal to become a propagandist for any school of painting which ensured that his writing on art maintained its critical insight. He developed a particular aesthetic theory and judged the work he saw against these ideas. His ideology was not entirely without precedent and it is interesting to note that it would seem to have been derived from the most unlikely of sources for a critic who so scandalised and outraged the more reactionary, establishment writers of the day.

MacColl believed that the "method of Impressionism" had been "laid down by" Reynolds, whom he described as "the leader of English painters". He drew parallels between the definition of Impressionism which he had constructed, based on an attempt to simulate the vision of the modern man, and the theory of an idealising art which had been developed by Reynolds in the "Discourses":

> Once the impressionist theory of vision and painting is grasped, it is easy out of various writers, even out of Ruskin himself, to collect passages skirting it or glancing at it. It is the doctrine Reynolds attempted to state.[147]

It seems most likely that MacColl was referring to the similarity between Ruskin's theory of the "innocent eye" and the Impressionists desire to escape from their knowledge of the art of the past when they approached nature. Referring the reader to Reynolds in a later article, MacColl identified the basis for the allusion to the writing of the former President of the Royal Academy:

> The word "impressionism" can of course be used in different senses. I have been accustomed to apply it to the logic of concentration and broadened effect in painting, to the effects which group about the conception of focus, and depend in practice on the use of Reynolds' "dilated eye."[148]

I believe that MacColl's enthusiasm for the writing of Reynolds went beyond this facile comparison, and that many of the notions of an idealising art which are to be found in the *Discourses*, underlie the ideas of the New Art Criticism, as it was defined by MacColl.

The expression of the utmost energy and majesty.

Reynolds believed that above all else art should pursue beauty and that this was to be derived, initially, from the study of the object. As well as the formal qualities of any painting, arising out of the artist's use of line and colour, the painter should also strive to give embodiment to his perception and understanding of the object. This should include the ethical and moral properties which he believed, following an aesthetic theory derived from Plato, were inherent in the material objects. Reynolds held that Nature presented the artist with a point of departure, but that this should not be copied, but refined by the artist. This idea was adopted by MacColl who

quoted Reynolds, repeating the warning that an artist should not be judged according to his ability to demonstrate a

> ... more minute attention to details, but from that enlarged comprehension which sees the whole object at once, and that energy of art which gives its characteristick [sic] effect by adequate expression.[149]

MacColl further developed the notion that the artist should seek to perfect nature, to suggest that this implied a rejection of one of the "ancient fallacies", "that Nature is always right", which had been use to defend the argument "that man (in modern dress) is necessarily vile" and that:

> The object of painting is illusion, whereas the object is not an illusion of Nature, but a decoration by way of an allusion to Nature.[150]

MacColl believed that that artist should mould Nature like a "toy-maker", fashioning out of its "inordinate clamour" a "clear and accordant image". This seems to be very close to Reynolds's theory that from imperfect nature could be derived an ideal form.

As well as this general adoption of the principal thesis of the *Discourses*, MacColl's examination of the work of Michelangelo, so radically admired by Reynolds, followed the ideas that are to be found in Reynolds's statements on art:

> He could abstract and yet convince the imagination, because of his command and knowledge of visible fact, and his imagination lay in seeing and seizing the essential and expressive trait. Without observation and knowledge there is no virtue in abstraction.[151]

It is also interesting to note that Reynolds believed that the "great end" of "art is to strike the imagination", although MacColl's adoption of this particular idea would seem to owe more to Baudelaire than to Reynolds. However, the idea that art was an intellectual pursuit, which should aim to produce a response on the emotion of the spectator, was common to both Reynolds and MacColl. MacColl described Reynolds

as having "compromised with nature at the end of a long tussle"[152], while he emphatically stated that in front of nature "no artist can altogether dodge the necessity for a series of deliberate acts of choice"[153]. MacColl was not slow to recognise the way in which this approach differed from Ruskin's instruction to the artist, to follow nature without assuming the arrogance to believe that it was possible to improve on what had been created by an omnipotent deity.

MacColl saw beauty as being closely related to nature, but questioned Ruskin's assessment of the work of Turner. MacColl recognised in Turner's work a "traceable reference to Nature", but believed that this was "at a great distance". MacColl maintained that Turner's genius was to be found in the results he achieved "working out finesses of form in the studio"[154], and not from a faithful reproduction of precise details of form. MacColl was also aware of the dangers that were presented by this approach to nature. While an artist like Manet could dare to "shock" and to "challenge", he thought, "in Cézanne's painting the simplification becomes almost ludicrous"[155].

MacColl's attitude towards nature seems to have been influenced by his post-Darwinian acceptance of the position that man occupied as part of nature. MacColl believed that nature had been "added to man" and that art had not been slow to follow the lead that it had been given by science and also turned its gaze to its environment:

> In painting, the look of the world, the tangled, the slippery, the involuntary parts, reality off guard, the vague, bland life of mortals, was not so thoroughly explored as by writers. But the ironic drawing of Degas and the cruel school that sprang from him is one interpretation of the consign. Others have given us the town, our hive, our coral reef, as it might flash on the eye of another species; others have replaced the traditional dramatic eagerness in scenes of action by varieties of preoccupation, as of persons variously absent instead of present; others yet, discarding the sugars of colour, the

> poultices of form, that pretend romance, have turned a pallid light upon worn, dejected heads, not of fable. Such was the keen, difficult air, with possibilities of nervous and poignant revelation, when art took the eyes of science.[156]

It was this development in the art of the nineteenth century which MacColl believed had delivered painting from "Olympianism". The searching eye of the artist finding an order in nature - which he understood to include the urban environment - and reproducing this in a way that revealed the beauty of the image.

MacColl's ideas on art, so clearly influenced by the writers and artists of France in the second half of the nineteenth century, were considered by his contemporaries to be radical and iconoclastic. However, it appears that much of the underlying theory can be traced back to the writing of Reynolds. MacColl never attempted to disguise this source and frequently quoted from the *Discourses*. The next critic to give these works so much attention was Roger Fry, who like MacColl eagerly engaged in lively public debate and often shocked an insular English public.

Notes to Chapter 4.

1 First published, Nineteenth Century, July and September 1890, and later included as "The Critic as Artist", in, Intentions, 1891.

2 MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, 1902, p. 1.

3 MacColl, "Arrears of Galleries", The Saturday Review, Vol. 85, 26 March 1898, p. 426.

4 MacColl, "Fantasy, Photography, Exhibitions", The Saturday Review, Vol. 84, 20 November 1897, p. 549.

5 MacColl, "Australian Art - British Art - The British Warrior Queen", The Saturday Review, Vol. 85, 16 April 1898, p. 520.

6 MacColl, "The [6] MacColl, "Arrears of Galleries", The Saturday Review, Vol. 85, 26 March 1898, p. 426.

Arts and Crafts Exhibition. II.", The Saturday Review, Vol. 88, 21 October 1899, p. 514.

7 MacColl, "Ruskin and His Critics. - II.", The Saturday Review, Vol. 90, 20 October 1900, p. 487.

8 Ibid., p. 488.

9 Unsigned, "The New English Art Club, and the Royal Society of British Artists", Spectator, Vol. 64, 5 April 1890, p. 479.

This comment is very similar to the remark made by Whistler after he had resigned as President of the Royal Society of British Artists:

" ... the 'Artists' have come out, and the 'British' remain ..."

"An Interview with an ex-President", Pall Mall Gazette, 11 June 1888, and reprinted in, The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, 1890, pp. 205 - 210.

10 MacColl, "Recent Exhibitions", Spectator, Vol. 74, 2 March 1895, p. 295.

11 MacColl, "A Book on Impressionism", Spectator, Vol. 75, 28 December 1895, p. 933.

12 Ibid.

13 I believe that these remarks were somewhat disingenuous and that Stevenson's regular articles were consistently incisive.

14 Ibid.

15 MacColl, "Mr. Whistler's Pictures at Goupil's", Spectator, Vol. 68, 2 April 1892, p. 464.

16 MacColl, "The New English Art Club", Spectator, Vol. 68, 16 April 1892, p. 529.

17 MacColl, "The Standard of the Philistine", Spectator, Vol. 70, 18 March 1893, p. 357.

18 MacColl, "The New English Art Club and the Meissonier Exhibition", Spectator, Vol. 70, 22 April 1893, p. 523.

19 MacColl, "Winter Exhibitions", Spectator, Vol. 71, 23 December 1893, p. 912.

20 Ibid.

21 MacColl, "The Royal Academy. - I", Spectator, Vol. 68, 7 May 1892, p. 642.

22 MacColl, "The Royal Academy", Spectator, Vol. 70, 29 April 1893, p. 572.

23 Unsigned, "The Royal Academy. [First Notice.]", Spectator, Vol. 66, 2 May 1891, p. 625.

24 MacColl, "The Academy. I. - 'Rude Things.'", The Saturday Review, Vol. 89, 12 May 1900, p. 583.

25 MacColl, "The Academy", The Saturday Review, Vol. 85, 7 May 1898, p. 615.

[26] Ibid.

[27] MacColl, "Academicism and Lord Leighton", The Saturday Review, Vol. 83, 6 March 1897, p. 241.

[28] MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, 1902, p. 25.

[29] Ibid., p.25.

[30] MacColl, "Richmond Hill and Marble Hill", The Saturday Review, Vol. 92, 6 July 1901, pp. 12-13.

[31] MacColl, "The Academy. - II. 'Subject-Pictures'", Spectator, Vol. 74, 18 May 1895, p. 684.

[32] MacColl, "Notes on a Recent Controversy", Spectator Vol. 70, 1 April 1893, p. 421.

[33] Ibid.

[34] MacColl, "Academicism and Lord Leighton", The Saturday Review, Vol. 83, 6 March 1897, p. 241.

[35] MacColl, "The Royal Academy. [First Notice.]", Spectator, Vol. 66, 2 May 1891, p. 625.

[36] Baudelaire, "Salon de 1859", first published in, la Revue Française, 10, 20 June, 10, 20 July 1859, cited in Curiosités esthétiques L'Art romantique, et autres Oeuvres critiques, Paris 1962, p. 321.

[37] MacColl, "The Academy. - II. Subject - Pictures, or Pictorial Imagination *v.* The Illustration of Narrative", Spectator, Vol. 74, 18 May 1895, p. 684.

[38] MacColl, "At the Old Masters. *A Symbolist. An Impressionist*", Spectator, Vol. 68, 6 February 1892, p. 200.

[39] MacColl, "The Academy. - II. Subject - Pictures, or Pictorial Imagination *v.* The Illustration of Narrative", Spectator, Vol. 74, 18 May 1895, p. 684.

[40] MacColl, "Mr. Henley and Another", The Saturday Review, Vol. 95, 7 February 1903, p. 168.

[41] MacColl, "Old Masters at the Burlington", Spectator, Vol. 64, 15 February 1890, p. 235.

[42] Ibid.

[43] MacColl, "The Academy. - II. Subject - Pictures or Pictorial Imagination *v.* The Illustration of Narrative", Spectator, Vol. 74, 18 May 1895, p. 684.

[44] MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, 1902, pp. 155-156.

[45] MacColl, "Old Masters at Burlington House", Spectator, Vol. 64, 15 February 1890, p. 236.

[46] MacColl, "The Royal Academy', and the Hanover Gallery", Spectator, Vol. 66, 30 May 1891, p. 757.

[47] MacColl, "Mr. Whistler's Pictures at Goupil's", Spectator, Vol. 68, 2 April 1892, p. 465.

[48] MacColl, "The Royal Academy - I", Spectator, Vol. 68, 7 May 1892, p. 643.

[49] MacColl, "The New English Art Club", Spectator, Vol. 69, 26 November 1892, p. 769.

[50] MacColl, "The Grafton Gallery", Spectator, Vol. 70, 25 February 1893, p. 257.

[51] MacColl, "Fantasy, Photography, Exhibitions", The Saturday Review, Vol. 84, 20 November 1897, p. 549.

[52] MacColl, "New English Art, 1900", The Saturday Review, Vol. 90, 24 November 1900, p. 646.

[53] MacColl, "A Gallery of Significant Pictures", The Saturday Review, Vol. 95, 18 April 1903, p. 483.

[54] MacColl, "Mr. W.B. Richmond on Portrait", Spectator, Vol. 66, 25 April 1891, p. 595.

[55] MacColl, "Degas and Monticelli", Spectator, Vol. 68, 2 January 1892, p. 18.

[56] MacColl, "Manet", The Saturday Review, Vol. 82, 12 December 1896, p. 622.

[57] MacColl, "Notes on a Recent Controversy", Spectator, Vol. 70, 1 April 1893, p. 422.

[58] Ibid.

[59] MacColl, "Recent Exhibitions", Spectator, Vol. 74, 2 March 1895, p. 296.

[60] MacColl, "Exhibitions and a Book", The Saturday Review, Vol. 87, 28 January 1899, p. 109.

[61] MacColl, "The Pastel Society", The Saturday Review, Vol. 87, 11 February 1899, p. 172.

[62] MacColl, "The Royal Institute of Painter's in Watercolours", The Saturday Review, Vol. 90, 27 October 1900, p. 515.

[63] MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, 1902, pp. 159-160.

[64] MacColl, "Manet", The Saturday Review, Vol. 82, 12 December 1896, p. 621.

[65] Gautier, Mademoiselle de Maupin, first published, 1835, edition Garnier, p. 23, cited in Michael Clifford Spencer, The art criticism of Théophile Gautier, 1969, p. 12.

[66] MacColl, "Degas and Monticelli", Spectator, Vol. 68, 2 January 1892, p. 17.

[67] Ibid.

[68] MacColl, "The Standard of the Philistine", Spectator, Vol. 70, 18 March 1893, p. 358.

[69] MacColl, "Subject and Technique", Spectator, Vol. 70, 25 March 1893, p. 388.

[70] MacColl, "The Fine Art Society, and the Grosvenor Gallery", Spectator, Vol. 65, 29 November 1890, p. 771.

[71] MacColl, "Three Exhibitions", Spectator, Vol. 67, 21 November 1891, p. 727.

[72] MacColl, "The Academy Banquet", The Saturday Review, Vol. 99, 6 May 1905, p. 587.

[73] Ibid.

[74] MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, 1902, p. 22.

[75] MacColl, "At the Old Masters. - II", Spectator, Vol. 68, 30 January 1892, p. 168.

[76] MacColl, "The Leyland Sale and Guildhall Exhibition", Spectator, Vol. 68, 28 May 1892, p. 745.

[77] MacColl, "The Old Masters. - III. Old Masters and New", Spectator, Vol. 76, 8 February 1896, p. 204.

[78] MacColl, "Degas and Monticelli", Spectator, Vol. 68, 2 January 1892, p. 18.

[79] MacColl, "Painting and Imitation", Spectator, Vol. 68, 18 June 1892, p. 846.

[80] MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, 1902, p. 23.

[81] Ibid., p. 153.

[82] MacColl, "At the Old Masters. - III", Spectator, Vol. 68, 6 February 1892, p. 200.

[83] MacColl, "The Royal Academy, and the Hanover Gallery", Spectator, Vol. 66, 30 May 1891, p. 757.

[84] MacColl, "At the Old Masters. - III", Spectator, Op. cit. p. 201.

[85] MacColl, "The Leyland Sale and Guildhall Exhibition", Spectator, Vol. 68, 28 May 1892, p. 745.

[86] Ibid.

[87] MacColl, "The New English Art Club", Spectator, Vol. 69, 26 November 1892, p. 769.

[88] MacColl, "Mr. Armstrong's 'Gainsborough'", The Saturday Review, Vol. 87, 25 February 1899, p. 235.

[89] MacColl, "The Old Watercolour Society and Other Exhibitions", Spectator, Vol. 74, 27 April 1895, p. 578.

[90] MacColl, "Burne-Jones.", The Saturday Review, Vol. 87, 7 January 1899, p. 12.

[91] MacColl, "Notes on a Recent Controversy", Spectator, Vol. 70, 1 April 1893, p. 422.

[92] MacColl, "The Academy. - II. 'Subject Pictures,' or Pictorial Imagination *v.* The Illustration of Narrative", Spectator, Vol. 74, 18 May 1895, p. 684.

[93] Cited by Baudelaire, "Salon de 1859", originally published in la Revue Française, 10, 20, July 1859, cited in, Curiosités esthétiques L'Art romantique, et autres Oeuvres critiques, Paris 1962, p. 324.

[94] MacColl, "The Old Masters and Amateurs", Spectator, Vol. 70, 28 January 1893, p. 128.

[95] MacColl, "The Old Water-Colour Society, and Anton Mauve", Spectator, Vol. 64, 26 April 1890, p.589.

[96] MacColl, "The Grosvenor Gallery", Spectator, Vol. 64, 10 May 1890, p. 659.

[97] MacColl, "Water Colours and Pastels", Spectator, Vol. 65, 20 December 1890, p. 903.

[98] MacColl, "Mr. W.B. Richmond on Portrait-Painting", Spectator, Vol. 66, 25 April 1891, p. 595.

[99] MacColl, "Painting and Imitation", Spectator, Vol. 68, 18 June 1892, p. 847.

[100] MacColl, "Water Colours and Pastels", Spectator, Vol. 65, 20 December 1890, p. 904.

[101] Ibid.

[102] MacColl, "The English Water-Colourists", Spectator, Vol. 66, 14 February 1891, p. 243.

[103] MacColl, "Painter-Etchers and Others", Spectator, Vol. 66, 7 March 1891, p. 343.

[104] MacColl, "Mr. W.B. Richmond on Portrait Painting", Spectator, Vol. 66, 25 April 1891, p. 595.

[105] MacColl, "Painting and Imitation", Spectator, Vol. 68, 18 June 1892, p. 846.

[106] MacColl, "Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow", Spectator, Vol. 69, 22 October 1892, p. 561.

[107] MacColl, "Subject and Technique", Spectator, Vol. 70, 25 March 1893, p. 388.

[108] MacColl, "The New Gallery", Spectator, Vol. 70, 6 May 1893, p. 606.

[109] MacColl, "The Painter Etchers", Spectator, Vol. 72, 24 March 1894, p. 403.

[110] MacColl, "Burne-Jones", The Saturday Review, Vol. 87, 7 January 1899, p. 12.

[111] MacColl, "Ruskin and his Critics. - I", The Saturday Review", Vol. 90, 13 October 1900, p. 455.

[112] MacColl, "Probity and *Parti-Pris*", The Saturday Review, Vol. 90, 10 November 1900, p. 584.

[113] MacColl, "The Academy. - II. The Rape of Painting", The Saturday Review, Vol. 91, 18 May 1901, p. 633.

[114] MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, 1902, p. 145.

[115] MacColl, "The New Gallery", Spectator, Vol. 70, 6 May 1893, p. 606.

[116] MacColl, "Mr. W.B. Richmond on Portrait", Spectator, Vol. 66, 25 April 1891, p. 595.

[117] MacColl, "The Old Water-Colour Society", Spectator, Vol. 67, 12 December 1891, p. 847.

[118] MacColl, "Degas and Monticelli", Spectator, Vol. 68, 2 January 1892, p. 18.

[119] MacColl, "At the Old Masters. - III", Spectator, Vol. 68, 6 February 1892, p. 200.

[120] MacColl, "The Old Water-Colour Society and Other Exhibitions", Spectator, Vol. 74, 27 April 1895, p. 578.

[121] MacColl, "A Book on Impressionism", Spectator, Vol. 75, 28 December 1895, p. 895.

[122] MacColl, "Spanish Art at the New Gallery. - I", Spectator, Vol. 76, 4 January 1896, p. 16.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

[125] MacColl, "Alfred Hunt", The Saturday Review, Vol. 83, 6 February 1897, p. 138.

[126] MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, 1902, p. 3.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid., p. 153.

[129] MacColl, "The New English Art Club and the Meissonier Exhibition", Spectator, Vol. 70, 22 April 1893, p 524

[130] MacColl, "Winter Exhibitions", Spectator, Vol. 71, 23 December 1893, p. 912.

[131] MacColl, "Chivalry, Water-Colours, Lepidoptera", The Saturday Review, Vol. 84, 18 December 1897, p. 710.

[132] MacColl, "The New English Art Club", Spectator, Vol. 66, 18 April 1891, p. 544.

[133] MacColl, "Mr. Whistler's Pictures at Goupil's", Spectator, Vol. 68, 2 April 1892, p. 464.

[134] MacColl, "The Royal Academy. - II", Spectator, Vol. 68, 14 May 1892, p. 676.

[135] Ibid.

[136] MacColl, "The New Gallery", Spectator, Vol. 72, 5 May 1894, p. 615.

[137] MacColl, "A Book on Impressionism", Spectator, Vol. 75, 28 December 1895, p. 934.

[138] Ibid.

[139] MacColl, "The New English Art Club", Spectator, Vol. 67, 5 December 1891, p. 809.

[140] MacColl, "The Guildhall Exhibition and the New English Art Club", Spectator, Vol. 72, 21 April 1894, p. 536. It is interesting to note that MacColl continued this article by stating his belief that:

> Mr. Sickert has an ambition beyond the diarist's, but a hesitation seems to trouble him in the last stages of his task. His music-hall scene strikes an extremely true and beautiful note in its effect of illumination.

[141] MacColl, "Impressionists in London", The Saturday Review, Vol. 91, 26 January 1901, p. 106.

[142] MacColl, "The French Impressionists", The Saturday Review, Vol. 99, 11 February 1905, p. 175.

[143] MacColl, "Mr. Steer's Exhibition", Spectator, Vol. 72, 17 March 1894, p. 372.

[144] MacColl, "The New Gallery as it is and as it Might Be", Spectator, Vol. 74, 4 May 1895, p. 613.

[145] MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, 1902, p. 161.

[146] MacColl, "Impressionists in London", The Saturday Review, Vol. 91, 26 January 1901, p. 106.

[147] MacColl, "A Book on Impressionism", Spectator, Vol. 75, 28 December 1895, p. 933.

[148] MacColl, "Mr. Armstrong's 'Gainsborough'", Spectator, Vol. 87, 25 February 1899, p. 235.

[149] Reynolds, "Discourses on Art", ed. R. Wark, 1975, p. 194. Cited by MacColl, "The Old Water-Colour Society", Spectator, Vol. 67, 12 December 1891, p. 846.

[150] MacColl, "Mr. Whistler's Pictures at Goupil's", Spectator, Vol. 68, 2 April 1892, p. 464.

[151] MacColl, "A Reply to Mr. Richmond", Spectator, Vol. 70, 8 April 1893, p. 453.

[152] MacColl, "The Old Masters", Spectator, Vol. 74, 16 February 1895, p. 231.

[153] MacColl, "Defying Convention and Sinking Personality", The Saturday Review, Vol. 84, 17 July 1897, p. 58.

[154] MacColl, "Mr. Ruskin's Turners", The Saturday Review, Vol. 90, 7 July 1900, p. 11.

[155] MacColl, "Art at the Paris Exhibition. - II. Manet", The Saturday Review, Vol. 90, 22 September 1900, p. 358.

[156] Ibid. p, 26.

CHAPTER 5

R.A.M. Stevenson: The Road to a Certain Kind of Art.

... the question, what is beauty? remains to this day quite unsolved ...
Leo Tolstoy

In 1874, at the age of twenty-seven, R.A.M. Stevenson, a cousin of Robert Louis Stevenson, enrolled as a student at the studio of Carolus-Duran in Paris. Stevenson was a supporter of the French painter throughout his later career as a critic, but of still more importance to his later writing was his introduction, at this time, to the work of the Barbizon painters, in particular the paintings of Corot and Rousseau. All of his later criticism seems to have been coloured by the impression made on him by the response of these artists to nature. During the 1880s, after he had returned to London, he continued to paint, but despite having work accepted for the annual Royal Academy exhibitions, he won little reward from his art. By 1885 he was contributing occasional, unsigned, articles for the *Magazine of Art*, and the *Saturday Review*. In 1888 he was elected to the Roscoe Chair of Fine Art, at Liverpool University, but there is no precise record of the teaching he did there. He continued to work as a critic and perhaps the most important article he wrote at this time was on Corot, for the *Art Journal*[1], in which he considered the perception of "truth", "harmony" and the importance of the "observation of nature". These were the ideas which would come to dominate his later writing. In 1892 he resigned his chair in Liverpool. Without any alternative form of regular employment, and with the responsibilities of a family, a son born in 1894, it was perhaps inevitable that he would turn to art criticism as a way of earning a living. In 1893 he started writing for *The Pall Mall Gazette*. He continued to write for the newspaper until he suffered a stroke in 1899, which led to his death in 1900. During this time he contributed as

many as three articles a week. Although these were ostensibly reviews of current exhibitions, they frequently took the form of an argument which developed over a number of weeks and which extended beyond the obvious issues raised by the paintings in any one show.

Apart from his journalism, his most considered work was his book, *The Art of Velasquez* [sic], 1895[2], which included his thoughts on French art during the nineteenth century and the meaning of Impressionism. The reviewer of *The Pall Mall Gazette* believed that the book could more appropriately have been titled, "A Defence of Impressionist Painting as Illustrated by the Works of Velazquez."[3] In this book Stevenson described what he saw as the importance of the critic to the artist:

> ... writing can do nothing to help art unless like a sign post it makes painters aware of the road to a certain kind of art.[4]

In order to discover what path Stevenson was recommending to the artist, I intend to look at the ideas contained in *The Art of Velasquez*, and the articles he wrote for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, which represent the most consistent body of work in his short but prolific career as a writer on art.

Stevenson shared the same pessimism as other critics writing at the time, and believed that the language of art had become "a weary babble of trivial observation."[5] In England he perceived an historical perversion of art, which meant that "verbal suggestion" was valued "rather than the aspect of the picture."[6] He suggested that contemporary painting risked slipping into easy conventions, creating "a school of ornament which contains its own seeds of decay"[7], and that these inferior modern painters needed to "follow some creed"; he proposed "the joint cult of nature and the old masters."[8] These two sources: nature and tradition are central to Stevenson's ideology, but he was not convinced that others would necessarily share his views:

> ... The critic doubts the universality of his feelings, and is not easily persuaded that all men admire and shudder upon the same proclamations.[9]

Despite these doubts he continued to protest against what he saw as the "vulgarity of the Salons" and the "encouragement of bad art" at the Royal Academy, where "two thirds of the pictures are trash"[10] . When he was called on, by the editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette,* to review the art of the reign of Queen Victoria[11], he wrote about the "sick art" which he had seen in the exhibitions he reviewed, which he suggested "needs medicine". He explained that "neither the malady nor the remedy is bound to be the same", in all cases. Nevertheless, his own personal belief, possibly the result of his exposure to the work of Corot when he was in France, meant that he consistently preached the combined doctrine of nature and tradition as the most likely source of salvation for contemporary painting.

Ripe and rotten glories.

Stevenson outlined a brief history of art in *The Art of Velasquez.* He described how art began with "folk-drawing", which relied upon "conventions for expressing individual objects"[12]. These simple conventions, Stevenson suggested, then gave way to more complex "canons of proportion", which he regarded as an attempt to "formalise the vague traditions of the past"[13], which, in their turn, became "the sciences of perspective and anatomy." He also noted that the development of art was not wholly reliant on these abstract and scientific advances and he considered "Lionardo's [sic] constant appeal to nature"[14]. The later Venetian painters had, Stevenson believed, to some extent, broken away from these conventions but the basic pattern of the history of painting; combining an understanding of its traditions, while also having regard to the natural world, had been established, and this paradigm

was exploited and developed by Velázquez. Stevenson held up this model for contemporary painters:

> The sight of Velasquez at Madrid ... gives the man of our century confidence that he is following a path not unlike that trod to such good purpose by the great Spaniard.[15]

This very brief outline of the development of art underpinned Stevenson's art criticism, and he judged painting according to the degree to which it successfully synthesised the ideals of tradition and nature.

Looking at the more immediate past Stevenson recognised Corot as the artist who had most successfully combined these two essential elements. With the balance swung firmly in favour of nature, he considered Corot to be "the supreme master of landscape."[16] However, turning to recent English painting, he was only able to point to the gradual, and somewhat reluctant, recognition of the importance of nature:

> ... the ripe and rotten glories of Landseer, Lewis, Frith, Faed, Frost ... this last orgie of debauched commonplace to mark the slow awakening of English painters to an interest in visible beauties which may be studied even in the sluggish face of the Royal Academy.[17]

He was prepared to acknowledge the value of Ruskin's contribution to art, which he described as "a spirit" that "blew over English art", which was "at any rate spiritually vital"[18], but he was notably less sympathetic to those artists whom Ruskin had supported. He considered the art of the Pre-Raphaelites to contain "no principles of its own, no seeds of growth", and believed that their ideals had been damaging to painting in England:

> ... by insidiously substituting much talk about subjects, religion, politics, morals, mysticism for the true technical traditions of art.[19]

Stevenson maintained that their anecdotal art suffered because it neglected the lessons of nature and tradition.

The repetition of the importance of tradition that appears throughout Stevenson's art criticism seems to contradict the idea that he, and the other "New Critics", were setting up "a new standard"[20]. Indeed, the ideas that I have identified in Stevenson's art criticism might suggest that his manifesto for art was fundamentally reactionary. This view of Stevenson is misleading and inaccurate. I would propose that precisely because of the originality of his ideas he sought eagerly to establish their credibility by insisting on his dependence on the art of the great masters of the past. Stevenson remained wary of the "fashions of the hour" and reviewing the annual exhibition of the New English Art Club in 1899, warned that:

> ... the see-saw of matter and manner should not occupy an artist to whom only two matters are of moment - his own impressions of nature and the main consonance of tradition from the Greeks onwards.[21]

Stevenson also recognised the importance for the modern artist "to do something no one has done before."[22]. I want now to consider more precisely what it was that Stevenson was proposing.

Nature acknowledged as the mistress.

Stevenson's insistence on the importance to the artist of nature was not in itself new but the force and frequency of his demands for the artist to "conjure poetry directly out of nature"[23], were striking. What was, perhaps, more surprising for his readers was the way that he linked these ideas with the art of, among others, "young English imitators of French impressionists"[24]. As well as his defence of modern painting, based on the observance of tradition and the observation of nature, Stevenson's

writing was also extremely didactic, suggesting only one correct path for the artist to follow, and offering no support to any who wandered from this path. He stressed that this had always been the way that artists had worked:

> ... the old masters ... by no means intended to express anything above nature, but nature itself; only not nature as seen by a spectacled savant, a hunted swindler, or a wall-eyed bookworm. What some call idealisation is the content of true sight disposed by a master who can play with the elements of an artistic medium ... there is no other source of feeling in the plastic arts but the thing seen.[25]

The simplicity of Stevenson's call to arms, for the artist to look to nature, is reminiscent of the early writing of Ruskin. Stevenson, however, frequently chastised artists whose work displayed what he described as "niggling" detail. He exalted the artist to turn to nature, but required that he did so in a particular way.

In *The Art of Velasquez*, Stevenson stated his belief that it was the French Romantics, 1815-1855, who had returned the artist to the study of nature. In particular he held that:

> It was in landscape with figure that France independently worked out the principles of a new art[26]

and that it was French painters who had most consistently developed the practice of looking at nature. He believed that Millet had "consulted" nature "only in chosen moments"[27], that Manet's painting *La jetée de Boulogne*, was "arranged to appear like a slice cut out of Nature"[28], and that Monet was a "great, unaffected prophet of nature."[29] Above all he admired the work of Corot, and expressed the conviction that he knew "nothing so fascinating as the informal study of nature by Corot."[30] He was not blinded by his respect for the work of Corot, and in *The Art of Velasquez* he reminded his readers of the advice he had been given when he was a student of Carolus-Duran's, who had warned him: when you go into the fields you will not see a

Corot; paint what you see.[31] The simplicity of this statement is deceptive and much of Stevenson's work as a critic was devoted to trying to explain what the artist did see when confronted with nature.

According to Stevenson, he had been encouraged by Carolus-Duran to "look at nature - by masses and by constructive planes"[32], in other words, to analyse the way that the forms which occurred naturally divided up the space, rather than becoming obsessed by representing the details of those forms. He wrote that his former master had:

> ... regarded drawing as the art of placing things rightly in depth as well as in length and breadth ... [33]

This approach to nature, Stevenson believed, not only omitted the "niggling" presentation of endless, irrelevant detail, but also helped to create a sense of the space that exists in the world, and which it was the business of the artist to try to recreate, on the two dimensional plane of the canvas or support. This was also, according to Stevenson, one of the main deficiencies of the English schools, which had "never taught one to "place" a figure or cast on the canvas."[34] This he saw as a major failing since the existence of the illusion of space was necessary in order "to impart some quality or some meaning to the chief object."[35] This simple vision of nature was necessary if the artist were to be able to represent the "true and natural beauty" which was to be found in nothing more complicated than " the broad impression of nature"[36]. This description of the way in which Stevenson believed the artist should work from the landscape does not explain why he believed that the painter required the "disposition to brood over nature", and why the painter should strive for this "faculty by no means easily cultivated"[37] as opposed to adopting the "niggling", "photographic" style which had infected English landscape painting.

Stevenson's belief in the importance to the artist of nature at times verges on the spiritual and in this respect suggests an association with Ruskin's pantheistic vision. Indeed, MacColl compared the two writers when he wrote about the contribution made to art by Stevenson's book on Velázquez. Stevenson was not, however, a religious man, and Robert Louis's father, shocked by the conversations between the two young men, even feared that the older cousin might have turned his son into an atheist[38]. Rather than seeing the work of a deity in nature, Stevenson saw in the work of Rousseau, Jacque, Corot, Millet, Troyon and Dupré, made from studying nature the possibility for the highest form of human expression:

> The aërial and luminous stuff in which Nature mysteriously but modestly shapes and reveals forms and tints they considered as the chief truth, the source of artistic unity and the very vehicle of poetry.[39]

Stevenson did not believe that discovering these "qualities" was achieved easily, or that they were simply to be found by mindlessly copying the scene, which would only produce "facsimiles of photographs"[40], but that "they must be won by imagination from nature", and that this was the only way that the artist could hope to "lift a picture one inch out of the mud of the commonplace treatment."[41] These ideas, of a poetic art derived from a revelation of the essential aspect of nature, were central to Stevenson's art criticism and his thinking on the future of painting.

Recreating the eye of childhood.

Stevenson felt that the relationship between the artist and nature was the starting point for the production of a work of art, and, echoing Zola's idea that art was the result of nature seen across the temperament of the artist, he described the work of Corot, the artist in the nineteenth century who, according to Stevenson, had succeeded in doing this better than any other painter, as; "reality ... very much filtered

through the painter's individuality."[42] The individual intellect and perception was essentially part of the process of transforming nature into art:

> The artist takes a suggestion from nature, caresses it daintily in his mind, and there is born this quaint and morbidly-refined creature of poetic imagination.[43]

In this way the artist could strive to attain "the highest order in art", to "express the highest universal truth."[44] Landscape painting should, Stevenson believed, "recall nature and awake dormant memories of its freshness, its mystery or its pathetic gravity"[45] but this would only be achieved if the artist could find his "own way of seeing things"[46], and also if this way of seeing was consistent with the aesthetic that Stevenson's writing revealed.

Stevenson admired the way that he believed that Velázquez had taught his eye to, "communicate directly with what was before him without the intervention of traditional rules or scientific study."[47] He did not want the artist to be bound by nature but to use the visible world as a starting point from which his art should depart, returning, if need be, at a later stage. This was the way that he believed the artist should proceed and was the foundation of the artist's special relationship with the world around him:

> The prerogative of grasping what is before you does not preclude you from afterwards learning to do without the model, and to paint what you imagine instead of what you see, but it provides you a perpetual stronghold in case of defeat, and a base of operations for future excursions into the unknown.[48]

In this way the artist would not be ruled by the tyranny of reproducing, in a photographic manner, the thing seen, but could use his mind and imagination to select and extract the poetry of nature.

This was what Stevenson referred to as "the stimulus of the thing seen"[49], and which, he believed, was essential for the painter who would otherwise remain held by "a strong prosaic grip of fact"[50], or else fail to observe nature at all and behave not like an artist but rather like the "commonplace person, whose aim is art when it should be nature."[51] This is not to say that he totally dismissed the traditional discipline of drawing but he saw it as only one part of the creative process:

> Mere skill of hand and eye may not be art, but it is one of the indispensable legs upon which art must walk. The great difficulty is to get people to take the sportsman's interest in art, to patronize it as they patronize the prize-ring; to admire not only the result, but the noble qualities of the performer.[52]

By comparing the formal qualities of painting to the skill of the pugilist, Stevenson avoided the accusation that he was, a "superior person" or a "superior critic."[53] More importantly he was able to reiterate the idea that the poetry of a painting was not simply reliant on the beauty of the thing it depicted, or its subject matter, but was tied to a more holistic vision of art, which gave due consideration to all aspects of the finished work. In order to make pictures that were worthy of such treatment, the artist had to appreciate that, "the modern painter should concern himself very much about what seems and scarcely at all about what is"[54], and to do this he must rediscover a particular way of seeing.

Stevenson suggested a way of looking that implied a sort of innocence, but this was not a repetition of Ruskin's idea of the "innocent eye", rather Stevenson maintained that the artist needed to rediscover a conceptual visual immaturity. He attributed the origin of the idea to the French landscape painter, Leon Pelouse, who, according to Stevenson, had claimed "that the gift of the naturalist lay in the power of recreating the eye of childhood."[55] Stevenson explained his belief that the child starts to see colour without either any knowledge of the existence of forms in space, or any

understanding of defining shapes or of the significance, commercial, religious, sexual or otherwise.

> He sees patterns, and it takes him years to know what these patterns, these changing gradations, these varying smudges signify, and when he has learnt that, in proportion as he has succeeded, so he has ceased to know the original vision, and to perceive mentally the signs by which he originally determined the truth.[56]

His description of the development of the sight of a child is reminiscent of the experience of some earlier critics, seeing the work of the Impressionist painters in France for the first time, or to his own contemporaries' bewilderment in front of the work of Steer. Stevenson's theory was not, however, intended as a defence of the Impressionists or their later English followers, but as a necessity of all art. In future the "modern painter" was not to concern himself with "what is" but with "what seems."[57] These impressions should approximate to the experience of the infant's perception of un-delineated colour values, a visual sensory perception, which remained unrestricted by the identification of objects.

The loss of identity described by Stevenson was to extend beyond the external world seen by the artist to the artist himself. Artists ought to break the "dull habit of the eye which causes them to spell out nature", which was at best a childish reading of the individual words without ever gaining "the sense of a page."[58] The artist should instead strive to develop "an effective visual impression" which moved beyond individuation of specific forms:

> ... he ceases to think, to feel his own identity, for his whole consciousness is absorbed in the eye. At these moments a certain focus is used, a certain width of field is embraced, and these are not determined by the man's conscious will, but by the nature of his impression.[59]

Stevenson was suggesting an innocence not just of painting but of the fabric of the world and of self-knowledge. The alternative, described by Stevenson[60], was to risk boredom as a "keen-eyed" competitor to the mimetic potential of the camera. He believed the artist could release his eyesight from this dull and pointless exercise at will:

> ... by some wish to express feeling in his execution or make his canvas a harmonious symphony of forms and colours.[61]

Stevenson's aesthetic seems to have added to the idea contained in Sickert's writing of art acting in a revelatory rôle by bringing harmony to a chaotic reality, the idea of the expression of the feeling of the artist, partly manifested by the formal properties of the painting.

Stevenson believed that, through painting, the artist could "recommend a present sentiment to the spectator's old habits of visual emotion"[62], and that "he must allow something for personal feeling."[63] There was nothing intrinsically new about the idea of painting as a vehicle for the expression of emotion, but Stevenson was not suggesting that this should be done by way of the subject of the painting, which he believed to be a limited, anecdotal or literary response to art, or that the emotional impact of the work was experienced through the gesture of any individual characters or the manifestation of some dramatic moment in nature. His theory of expression in painting was essentially visual. He commended above others those painters who nurtured the ability to "feel through their eyes"[64], and thought that the depiction of "the ethereal qualities of air and space that transfigure the face of nature" could "most potently affect the moods and the temper of mankind."[65] This ideal governed his choice of the artists who won his praise, for example Manet, who had "received from sight sensations which none before him had felt or at least cared to record"[66].

Among the English painters of the day he recognised this link between sight and emotion in the painting of Steer, who, despite occasional "exaggerated hints of expressiveness", nevertheless possessed the "fascinating power of forcing you to look out of the eyes of the painter"[67], and Mark Fisher, whom he described as:

> ... determined to understand his own eyes, to render his own impressions, to make others feel what he felt and see what he saw.[68]

It was this promotion of expression of emotion, by visual stimuli, which permitted Stevenson to emphasise the formal properties of paintings above the subject. It was also this tendency which so angered the Philistine critic of the *Westminster Gazette*, and which was one of the defining ideals of the New Critics.

Realism and Impressionism.

Stevenson's principle of the reliance of the artist on a way of looking was partly derived from his understanding of the work of the Impressionists. In a review of an exhibition of the New English Art Club written in 1893, he described the way that he believed Impressionism had developed, in part, from the artist paying a particular kind of attention to what he saw around him, "an attention which may be described as an almost hypnotic act of perception."[69] Two years later, I believe, he defined the "hypnotic act of perception" more precisely as the "eye of childhood". This, together with the reminder of Carolus-Duran's advice, to look at nature not for the details, but for the main masses and plains out of which nature is constructed, led Stevenson to the ideal of the artist revealing the harmony of nature, and the formal properties of a painting acting as a cipher for the expression of emotion. This theory moved beyond the aesthetic that Sickert was constructing in his writing at the same time, inasmuch as it included an element, which, as Tolstoy did, placed an emphasis

on the expressive possibilities of the abstract qualities of painting. This new idea should not be allowed to dominate an analysis of Stevenson's contribution to the contemporary debate. He himself defined the most important aspect of the work of art as its ability to disclose the world to the viewer:

> If we could fit the key to its meaning the thing worth doing were to know the universe in its true proportions.[70]

His confirmation of the importance of the revelatory potential of art inevitably drew Stevenson into the debate concerning the nature of realism in painting at the end of the nineteenth century.

On various occasions, in his articles for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Stevenson discussed the relationship between art and the world of material objects, space and the other various wonders of nature. He was opposed to what he called the typically British attitude, which he blamed upon a public who "see through their ears"[71], and which was liable to encourage the artist away from the study of nature:

> Some literary gentlemen are always telling us how poor it is to see in art what you can see everyday in the world.[72]

Stevenson feared that the excursions made by certain artists into worlds of fantasy, without reference to reality, diverted the painter from the pursuit of "the highest order in art", namely the expression of "the common universal truth."[73] This did not mean that he was willing to admit the validity of any work that purported to be a representation of some existent place or object. He spoke as "a partisan of what I consider to be the true realism, as opposed to the false realism."[74] In order to examine more precisely Stevenson's attitude towards the issues of verisimilitude, and the use that the artist could make of the world around him as suitable subject matter,

at least as a point of departure for his art, it is necessary to examine, and exclude, what Stevenson saw as false realism, as well as pursuing a definition of true realism.

For Stevenson it was important to distinguish between the realist, whose work had the potential to make "the truth majestic" and the idealist, who, according to Stevenson, only succeeded in making "the strange awful."[75] He believed that there was no point in the artist trying to work without first studying nature:

> There is a modern idealist whose whole cause seems to be hatred of matter, of the truth, of the visible, of the real, and a consequent craving for the spiritual, the non-material. That this man should choose painting or sculpture, the most material, the most tied to representation of the arts seems indeed a non-sense.[76]

These idealists would never be able to achieve the goal of producing a "great picture", which "is the poem or translation of a fine sight or subject, or motif into the expressive language of drawing and colouring on the flat canvas."[77] Stevenson thought that the artist should pursue beauty "of the large enwrapping kind that hides worrying details and permits the mind to float into space."[78] Such beauty would only be achieved under certain conditions. These were "fact", "decoration" and "medium". Anyone of these on their own would be insufficient.

In *The Art of Velasquez*, Stevenson identified one of the main sources of the more mendacious forms of realism as a group he labelled the "Ruskinians." The vitiating element in their art was a weakness for "namby-pamby modelling", rather than for the broader approach which had been recommended to the young Stevenson by Carolus-Duran. This limited the expressive potential of their work to a "red line between the lips, a contour line to the nose, and a careful rigger track round the eyes and eye brows."[79] This group were just one of the many schools of decorators and idealists who Stevenson believed were either too literal in their approach or who had

mistakenly turned away from nature all together. In both cases the artist would arrive at the same end: if you paint the trivial and uncharacteristic, your picture must be commonplace.[80] By pursuing, piecemeal, every incident in a scene, or by ignoring the real world, Stevenson believed that these artists had turned away from the possibility of "depicting truth", and their art suffered accordingly.

Stevenson explained that it was not the choice of subject that could render a painting common place but "a small and an inartistic eye."[81] Perhaps the most inartistic "eye" of all, in Stevenson's opinion, was the camera. He bemoaned the idea that art was, after a glorious history, to be reduced to the levels that could be achieved through photography:

> ... in its old age art must see itself be mocked by a toy of science - a two-penny lens, and a man with his head in a box.[82]

He recognised the enormous, and irrevocable, impact of photography and accused the images it produced as being guilty of a similar sort of mendacity to the "niggling" precision of the Ruskinians:

> ...photography, a discovery of this reign which has affected art and artists; by its measurement of fact, and by its modification of all processes of artistic reproduction, photography presents us with a certain kind of accurate lie; it gives false but circumstantial and scientific record of facts, instead of a translation of man's impressions of natural appearances.[83]

Stevenson's idea of the camera, lying precisely because it failed to lie, is similar to Baudelaire's complaint, in 1859, levelled against the landscape painters of France:

> ...la plupart de nos paysagistes sont des menteurs, justement parce qu'ils ont négligé de mentir.[84]

The "lie" reduced nature to a single moment, without the intervention of the individual perception, poetry and imagination of the artist, and made it appear mundane and commonplace.

It was not only the camera that produced these lifeless images. The habit of certain artists of compiling their images from a number of separate studies resulted in still more lies:

> The compilation of sketches, or focuses of impression, induces false perspective, false values, false colour, a false proportion of detail to mass, and a combination of interests in false relation to the interests of the whole picture.[85]

The deleterious consequences of these "laborious effects of realism" were "niggled small drawing", which was only "true to the trivial elements of a scene."[86] In the exhibitions that he was called upon to review, Stevenson thought that the result of these practices were much in evidence. He bemoaned the fact that "the prosaic or photographic realist abounds and has a deadly effect on exhibitions"[87] and, like Sickert, turned to the example of Millet to illustrate the potential for the artist of working from nature:

> ... the treatment, if one is to feel any interest, must show the things in a real world. Millet's eye fetched the fantastic out of nature[88]

The realism that Stevenson sought was the synthetic, revelatory work of the artist, not the prosaic and mechanical reproduction of the camera, or the disparate detail of the pedant.

Finally Stevenson discriminated between realism and impressionism. The distinction that he drew is similar to the differences that Sickert elucidated between the work of Millet and the false realism of Bastien-Lepage. For Stevenson, realism could be defined simply as the work of a man who paints "real life", but this was a "bastard

realism of *motif*", which tended to result in pictures of "low life" subjects. This was not the only form of realism that Stevenson was prepared to recognise:

> ... there is a realism, not literary, but pictorial; the realism of treatment which is applicable to any subject, religious, mythological, heroic, courtly, or low lived, even to still life and landscape ... may any of them be conceived realistically and painted from the model.[89]

This realism was, however, no more than the "piecemeal sort of observation" that Stevenson dismissed as being unable to ever give a truthful and cohesive image, without which a painting could never possess the necessary "unity of consummate grandeur."[90] This could only be achieved by the recording of "a truth of general aspect"[91] and this was what Stevenson understood by Impressionism:

> The whole effect of the canvas conveys a definite idea which has ordered every element - drawing, colour, and definition.[92]

For Stevenson, Impressionism was the consummate art of the age that had witnessed a crisis in art, since it combined the dual aspects of attention to nature and the development of the formal language of the tradition of painting:

> ... this reign has been passed in a struggle for supremacy between several views of art - the conventionalised art of decayed formula, the realistic or photographic, the decorative, the literary or anecdotic, the illustrative, compounded of realism and anecdote, and (for want of a better term) the impressionist, compounded perhaps of realism and decoration or style.[93]

Stevenson's definition of Impressionism was of an art based on nature which exploited the expressive and formal qualities of painting. While the other New Critics never seemed able fully to overcome their ambivalence about the relative importance of subject matter and "decoration or style", Stevenson believed that these were reconciled in the painting of the Impressionists, which was not wholly decorative or illustrative, but a complete art in which the subject and the formal

qualities of the painting were combined to give the fullest expression of the artist's intentions.

Conclusion: the ready made sauce of harmony.

Stevenson's aesthetic relied not on an ideal beauty of autonomous objects but on the grandeur that could be found in a combination of forms in a painting. By finding this harmony in nature the artist could reveal a "sublime unity" which would not be "measured in details" but would arise from "an artistic sentiment of proportion"[94]. Stevenson was dismayed at the failure of artists, whose work was shown on the "walls of the popular dealer's gallery" to make use of this "language of art" and to progress beyond a,

> ... weary babble of trivial observation and stupid particularity ... .
> Twice too much is said in each picture, and little worth hearing ...[95]

This "sublime unity" was to be revealed by the artist, not through endless details or the selection of a particular "*motif*", for which Stevenson did not think the true artist should "give a rap", but as a result of a proper consideration for the formal qualities of painting:

> ... true art ... preserves the first impression by a decorative unity of handling, treatment and imagination[96]

The ideal that Stevenson was seeking in art was, he believed, a result of the "logic that determines the value of the whole before the part"[97].

For this harmonious unity to be found it was necessary for the artist to be able to reconcile the objects of his pictures within the space that they were to occupy. The painting of people with a "figure interest" and landscapes with a "landscape interest" was unsatisfactory. Stevenson was seeking an art that was able to resolve these

different subjects in one painting, and he believed that this "natural fusion of the two" was a task that had been pursued by "modern art" since Millet, Courbet, Gleyre and others between 1845 and 1855. For this to be achieved it was necessary for landscape painters to be able to "recall depth of space" but the most important consideration was unity:

> Above all, everything must count, everything must co-operate in the result; superfluity is disastrous.[98]

Stevenson believed that the necessary breadth of vision was evident in the work of certain contemporary British artists. In the work of Sargent, Stevenson believed he had found a

> ... fine example of the logical subordination of every part of a picture to the unity of the general impression[99]

In the painting of Sickert he admired the care that the artist gave to securing "an impression of the large poetry of the scene"[100]. It was, however, once again in his book on Velázquez that Stevenson was able to explore more fully the importance of treatment as well as vision in the creation of painting that could aspire to a sublime unity.

In *The Art of Velasquez* Stevenson explored the principles that made a "new art". He wished to ascribe a new importance to the rôle of formal qualities, in the production of a painting:

> Composition, colour, brushing, etc., receive a new consideration. Their effectiveness and their possibilities of style are overhauled and esteemed according as they can forward the expression of the central conception of beauty.[101]

Stevenson once again reiterated the importance of the artist's ability to create the illusion of space. This was "necessary to impart some quality or some meaning to

the chief object", although he recognised that this was anathema to the artists of the English schools, who had never been taught how to "place a figure" in a painting. In order that the artist be able to do this Stevenson believed that he had to be able to exploit the "realism of treatment ... of drawing, of effect, of local colour, of atmosphere, of values"[102]. These "pictorial" concerns were amongst the essential qualities of painting that relied not on the particular beauty of the subject matter but on the painter's ability to penetrate the interior of his canvas and "express man's vague, half-awestruck feelings about the external world"[103], and achieve a sublime unity.

Stevenson continued to develop these ideas in the articles that he wrote but he was disappointed to note that painting which demonstrated this grandeur was the exception rather than the rule:

> The great majority of the pictures is still niggled in execution .... Niggling requires little explanation in these columns.[104]

Rather than seeing an art that appeared to aspire to a new ideal and sought a harmonising beauty in nature, he saw only paintings that were superficial:

> ... convention seems to bear the same relation to the natural world that an old frock-coat does to the Greek ideal of human beauty. Shabby and formal, it tends to disguise rather than reveal the fine majesty of facts.[105]

Or else, in the most recent art from France, he detected an obfuscation rather than a clarification of Nature. Specifically in what Stevenson saw as the "formal manner" called "*pointelisme*" [sic] he found only a "speckled confusion"[106]. When he came to review the N.E.A.C. Exhibition in 1898 he believed that too many of the artists had allowed style to triumph over form. They were seeking beauty in style not in "the magical resources" that could "convey perceptions of real character and natural

poetry". Although he had sought to redefine Realism, elevating the importance of treatment above verisimilitude and subject matter, ultimately he believed that the best painting must be a response to Nature:

> The art of painting, even when it is employed upon a decorative purpose, cannot be divorced from its better or, if you will worse half, the representation of the effects, mysteries, and beauties revealed by real light. If you draw a model at all you recall nature, you suggest depth, shape space upon the flat. You invite us to enter your world, which can only be made according to the laws of nature.[107]

Stevenson maintained that the "great picture" was a "translation of a fine sight" into the "expressive language of drawing and colouring". However, among the works on display at the N.E.A.C. that year he found pictures which he believed relied on something other than " a fine sight, subject or motif": "a formula of art, rather than an impression of nature, has inspired many of the exhibitors"[108]. This was no more evident any where than in the work of "Messrs. … Fry … and others"

A year before he suffered the stroke which prevented him from writing, he was once again describing his bemusement in the face of the work of the new generation of artists. In their work he detected "an imagination that has nothing to do with the world of sense". His evident unease before the work of Lucien Pissarro made him unwilling to venture a critical opinion:

> Since this kind of art affects me with anaesthesia and creeping paralysis, I shall take care not to criticise what I may not understand.[109]

However, despite these misgivings and a conviction that he should "look no longer", he suffered the irritation that the work caused him, which he compared to seasickness, and found that:

> ... the ordinary confusion of untreated nature seems complicated instead of simplified by Mr. Pissarro's art[110]

Stevenson's death in 1900 meant that he was never called upon to write about the work that Roger Fry would introduce into England in the exhibitions of Post-Impressionist art.

Notes to Chapter 5.

[1] Stevenson, "Corot", The Art Journal, 1889, pp. 208-212.

[2] Stevenson's other publications include the text for Pennell's illustrated book, The Devils of Notre Dame, 1894, Rubens, 1898, and Raeburn, 1900.

[3] Unsigned, "The Art of Velasquez.", The Pall Mall Gazette, 17 December 1895, p. 11.

[4] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 101.

[5] R.A.M.S., "Mr. Maclean's Gallery", The Pall Mall Gazette, 23 October 1893, p. 4.

[6] R.A.M.S., "Old English Art", The Pall Mall Gazette, 15 January 1895, p. 3.

[7] R.A.M.S., "The New Salon. Paris", The Pall Mall Gazette, 30 May 1893, p. 3.

[8] Ibid.

[9] R.A.M.S., "Picture Galleries", The Pall Mall Gazette, 28 January 1895, p. 3.

[10] R.A.M.S., "The Royal Academy", The Pall Mall Gazette, 1 May 1897, p. 1.

[11] R.A.M.S., "The Art of the Reign", The Pall Mall Gazette, 16 June 1897, p. 2.

[12] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 103.

[13] Ibid, p. 103.

[14] Ibid, p. 104.

[15] Ibid, p. 109.

[16] R.A.M.S., "Exhibitions", The Pall Mall Gazette, 28 March 1899, p. 3.

[17] R.A.M.S., "Corporation of London Art Gallery", The Pall Mall Gazette, 25 April 1895, p. 5.

[18] R.A.M.S., "The Art of the Reign", The Pall Mall Gazette, 16 June 1897, p. 2.

[19] R.A.M.S., "Exhibitions", The Pall Mall Gazette, 9 June 1896, p. 3.

[20] A Philistine (J.A. Spender), "The New Art Criticism. A Philistine's Remonstrance", The Westminster Gazette, 9 March 1893, p. 1.

[21] R.A.M.S., "The New English Art Club", 11 April 1899, p. 2.

[22] R.A.M.S., "The Paris Salon - I", The Pall Mall Gazette, 19 March 1893, p. 3.

[23] R.A.M.S., "The New Gallery - II. Final Notice", The Pall Mall Gazette, 13 May 1893, p. 3.

[24] A Philistine, op. cit.

[25] R.A.M.S., "The Grafton Galleries", The Pall Mall Gazette, 21 November 1893, p. 3.

[26] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 102.

[27] R.A.M.S., "Charles Jacque", The Pall Mall Gazette, 30 November 1894, p. 4.

[28] R.A.M.S., "Romantics and Impressionists", The Pall Mall Gazette, 23 May 1896, p. 4.

[29] R.A.M.S., "The International Society", The Pall Mall Gazette, 10 May 1899, p. 2.

[30] R.A.M.S., "The Goupil Gallery", The Pall Mall Gazette, 8 March 1898, p. 4.

[31] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, pp. 104-105.

[32] Ibid., p. 103.

[33] Ibid., p. 103.

[34] Ibid., p. 123.

[35] Ibid., p. 119.

[36] R.A.M.S., "The Institute of Painters in Oils", The Pall Mall Gazette, 28 October 1893, p. 4.

[37] R.A.M.S., "The New English Art Club", The Pall Mall Gazette, 16 April 1898, p. 3.

[38] See, Denys Sutton, "Biographical Study. R.A.M. Stevenson: Art Critic", published as part of the introduction to, Stevenson, The Art of Velazquez, 1962.

[39] R.A.M.S., "The Grafton Galleries", The Pall Mall Gazette, 3 February 1896, p. 3.

[40] R.A.M.S., "Minor Galleries", The Pall Mall Gazette, 4 June 1894, p. 3.

[41] R.A.M.S., "The Picture Galleries", The Pall Mall Gazette, 2 February 1894, p. 3.

[42] R.A.M.S., "Exhibitions", 13 July 1894, p. 3.

[43] R.A.M.S., "The Fine Arts Society", The Pall Mall Gazette, 25 June 1894, p. 3.

[44] Ibid.

[45] R.A.M.S., "The Royal Academy. - IV.", The Pall Mall Gazette, 9 June 1897, p. 1.

[46] R.A.M.S., "The New English Art Club", The Pall Mall Gazette, 16 April 1898, p. 3.

[47] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 104.

[48] Ibid., p. 105.

[49] R.A.M.S., "The New Gallery", The Pall Mall Gazette, 1 May 1894, p. 3.

[50] R.A.M.S., "The Royal Society of Painter-Etchers", The Pall Mall Gazette, 15 March 1894, p. 3.

[51] R.A.M.S., "Picture Galleries", The Pall Mall Gazette, 28 April 1894, p. 3.

[52] R.A.M.S., "Australian Art at the Grafton Gallery", The Pall Mall Gazette, 4 April 1898, p. 1.

[53] A Philistine (J.A. Spender), "The New Art Criticism. A Philistine's Remonstrance", The Westminster Gazette, 9 March 1893, p. 1.

[54] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 114.

[55] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 113.

[56] Ibid., p. 114.

[57] Ibid., p. 114.

[58] R.A.M.S., "The Grafton Galleries", The Pall Mall Gazette, 1893, p. 3.

[59] Stevenson, op. cit., p. 116.

[60] R.A.M.S., "The Grafton Galleries", The Pall Mall Gazette, 11 May 1893, p. 3.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 112.

[63] Ibid., p. 118.

[64] R.A.M.S., "Exhibitions", The Pall Mall Gazette, 2 November 1896, p. 3.

[65] R.A.M.S., "Messrs Agnew's Exhibition", The Pall Mall Gazette, 15 February 1898, p. 9.

[66] R.A.M.S., "The International Society of Sculptors, Painters, and Gravers", The Pall Mall Gazette, 16 May 1898, p. 1.

[67] R.A.M.S., "The New English Art Club", The Pall Mall Gazette, 9 April 1895, p. 4.

[68] R.A.M.S., "Mark Fisher", The Pall Mall Gazette, 12 June 1895, p. 4.

[69] R.A.M.S., "The New English Art Club", The Pall Mall Gazette, 24 November 1893, p. 3.

[70] R.A.M.S., "The Devils of Notre Dame", The Pall Mall Gazette, 12 December 1893, p. 3.

[71] R.A.M.S., "Theories of Decoration", The Pall Mall Gazette, 4 November 1893, p. 4.

[72] R.A.M.S., "The Grafton Galleries", The Pall Mall Gazette, 21 November 1893, p. 3.

[73] R.A.M.S., "The Fine Arts Society", The Pall Mall Gazette, 25 June 1894, p. 3.

[74] R.A.M.S., "The New Gallery. - I", The Pall Mall Gazette, 29 April 1895, p. 3.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 112-113.

[77] R.A.M.S., "The New English Art Club", The Pall Mall Gazette, 14 November 1898, p. 1.

[78] R.A.M.S., "The Landscape Exhibition", The Pall Mall Gazette, 16 January 1899, p. 4.

[79] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 107.

[80] Ibid., p. 108.

[81] Ibid., p. 113.

[82] R.A.M.S., "The Photographer's Claims", The Pall Mall Gazette, 11 October 1893, p. 4.

[83] R.A.M.S., "The Art of the Reign", The Pall Mall Gazette, 16 June 1897, p. 1.

[84] Baudelaire, "Salon de 1859", Revue Française, 10, 20 June & 10, 20 July 1859, reproduced in, Curiosités esthétiques, L'Art romantique et autres Oeuvres critiques, Paris 1962, p. 381.

[85] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 116.

[86] R.A.M.S., "Picture Galleries", The Pall Mall Gazette, 4 November 1894, p. 4.

[87] R.A.M.S., "The New English Art Club", The Pall Mall Gazette, 4 April 1896, p. 6.

[88] R.A.M.S., "The New Salon. Paris", The Pall Mall Gazette, 30 May 1893, p. 3.

[89] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 120.

[90] R.A.M.S., "The Royal Academy", The Pall Mall Gazette, 6 January 1896, p. 3.

[91] Stevenson, op. cit.

[92] Ibid.

[93] R.A.M.S., "The Art of the Reign", The Pall Mall Gazette, 16 June 1897, p. 2.

[94] R.A.M.S., "The Devils of Notre Dame", The Pall Mall Gazette, 12 December 1893, p. 3.

[95] R.A.M.S., "The Photographer's Claims", The Pall Mall Gazette, 11 October 1893, p. 4.

[96] R.A.M.S., "The 'Old Masters' at Burlington House", The Pall Mall Gazette, 5 January 1894, p. 3.

[97] Ibid.

[98] R.A.M.S., "The Royal Society of Painter-Etchers", The Pall Mall Gazette, 6 March 1895, p. 11.

[99] R.A.M.S., "The New Gallery – I", The Pall Mall Gazette, 29 April 1895, p. 3.

[100] R.A.M.S., "Picture Galleries. Messrs. Dowdeswell", The Pall Mall Gazette, 28 January 1895, p.3.

[101] Stevenson, The Art of Velasquez, 1895, p. 111.

[102] Ibid., p. 120.

[103] R.A.M.S., "The Devils of Notre Dame", The Pall Mall Gazette, 12 December 1893, p. 3

[104] R.A.M.S., "The Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours", The Pall Mall Gazette, 23 April 1897, p. 3.

[105] R.A.M.S., "Messrs. Agnews", The Pall Mall Gazette, 15 February 1898, p. 9.

[106] R.A.M.S., "The Continental Gallery", The Pall Mall Gazette, 3 February 1898, p. 5.

[107] R.A.M.S., "The New English Art Club", The Pall Mall Gazette, 14 November 1898, pp. 1-2.

[108] Ibid.

[109] R.A.M.S., "Two Exhibitions", The Pall Mall Gazette, 12 December 1898, p. 3.

[110] Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

Sickert and Modernity

It's not the hen that cackles the most that lays the largest egg
music-hall song

The mid-nineteenth century witnessed the development of a concept of contemporaneity in art that was to allow an artist to choose to be 'modern'. In the 1830s and 1840s the French philosopher Saint-Simon gave birth to the idea of new art, whatever form it might take, constituting an avant-garde; art was to be seen as a leading force in the creation of a new society. In the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin,* published in 1835, Théophile Gautier put forward the idea that art should be free from the laws that governed the rest of society and that it was justified by a demand for sensation and delight in beauty. It was perhaps inevitable that if artists chose to reject the accepted mores of society they would meet with a degree of hostility. In 1859 Charles Baudelaire, in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne,* suggested that beauty was to be found not just in visions of the eternal but also in the transitory, ephemeral life of the city which, though often bizarre, violent and excessive, was for him always full of poetry. By the 1870s and 1880s the term avant-garde had come to stand for a particular kind of artist who was, in some way, ahead of other artists and society. This final nineteenth-century manifestation of the avant-garde frequently meant that new art was unpopular, moving in advance of, and ultimately away from, accepted ideas. As a result, artists and critics of the avant-garde viewed immediate approval and acceptance with suspicion; the modern artist deliberately sought an initially hostile reception.

The success of this concept of modernity in art is perhaps made most apparent by the number, and the vehemence, of the attacks led against it by the critics and other

interested parties. The contemporary response to French art of the nineteenth century provides the most notable and the best-documented evidence of this. Indignant outrage, however, has never been restricted to France and in 1877 Whistler took the debate into the English courts, when he stood accused by Ruskin of "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face". While in Paris, from 1855-1859, Whistler had been influenced by Realism, the 'modern' movement at that time, and he brought an enthusiasm for these ideas with him to England. As a young disciple of Whistler's, in the 1880s, Sickert would therefore have had the opportunity to gain an understanding of contemporary French art that was not generally available in London. Knowledge of the existence of modern French painting does not, of course, imply either an understanding or acceptance of it, for, as already mentioned, it was considered both crude and shocking by many intelligent and sensitive observers of art.

As well as the painters of the newly emerging avant-garde there were a number of French artists, influenced by photography and the Realism of Bonvin rather than by Courbet, who hoped to make modern painting more acceptable, but succeeded only in producing anodyne images. One such painter, Bastien-Lepage, was, according to W.B. Yeats, greatly admired in London at the end of the 1880s by "young men fresh from the Paris art schools". Sickert showed a greater comprehension of French art than these English painters, when he disparaged the work of the "so-called realist" whom, he believed, had failed to reveal the truth of "life and spirit, light and air" and had instead managed to paint only the "truth of unessentials" and "tiresome little facts". Zola had also damned Bastien-Lepage. Applying the myth of the creative genius as a misunderstood outcast, he had been suspicious of the artist's early success. Sickert seemed to realise that, to be modern, the artist had to eschew

acceptability, and he actively chose to reject what his first biographer, Robert Emmons, described as "the two chief tenets of academic painting, 'high' finish and a strictly moral theme."[1] In his choice of the music hall as the subject of the first paintings that show him to be breaking away from the direct influence of Whistler, and in the way that he handled paint, Sickert demonstrated, not only that he had understood the principles of the new French painting, but also that he intended to pursue them. In this respect Sickert actively chose to be "a modern", a position which, through his knowledge of French painting, renewed with frequent visits to Dieppe and Paris, he was able to sustain in England, a country which, at that time, knew little and understood less of the work of Manet, Degas and the Impressionists.

This situation was maintained until the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions organized by Roger Fry in 1910 and 1912. Unlike many artists and critics in England, much of this work was familiar to Sickert and he seemed to enjoy demonstrating his knowledge of contemporary French art in the review of the first exhibition that he wrote for the *Fortnightly Review* of January 1911. Nevertheless, the exhibitions still offered a very real challenge to Sickert who, having cast himself as a modern, now found that he no longer led the way, as he had done for a number of younger painters. Not only did he have to come to terms with no longer leading, but also he now found himself unwilling to follow the new avant-garde. Indeed in his review of the second exhibition, published in the *English Review* in January 1912, his tone had become much more reactionary. Not only did he allude to the story of the "Emperor's New Clothes" but suggested the only respect in which it was an inappropriate analogy was that the "conspiracy of semi-unconscious 'spoof'", as he described the exhibition, did not affect the whole nation, as it had done in the story, but only a small coterie of dealers.

Sickert had partly defined his modernity in the 1880s and 1890s through his choice of subject matter and he continued to do this when, in 1909, he painted *L'Affaire de Camden Town*, (plate 1) a picture of the infamous Camden Town murder, which had received a large amount of attention from the press. But the new critical language of art that started to develop after 1910 was more concerned with the formal properties of a work than with its subject. By the time Clive Bell came to write *Art,* published in 1914, Sickert was confined to a footnote:

> Of course there are some good artists alive who owe nothing to Cézanne ... there are a few who belong to the older movement, *e.g.* Mr. Walter Sickert, M. Simon Bussy, M. Vuillard, Mr. J. W. Morrice. I should be as unwilling to omit these names from a history of twentieth century art as to include them in a chapter devoted to the contemporary movement.[2]

Sickert's position as a "contemporary" artist no longer seemed to be sustainable. Publicly, in the numerous articles and letters that he wrote to the press, he deplored the views of Roger Fry and Clive Bell, although privately he was welcomed into their circle. In the final stage of his career Sickert gained acceptance not from the radical critics but from the Royal Academy and the public: his portrait of *Rear Admiral Walter Lumsden, CIE, CVO* was voted Picture of the Year at the 1928 Royal Academy exhibition. He became a full member of the Academy in 1934, but resigned the next year when Sir William Llewellyn, who was President at the time, refused to sign an appeal to preserve Epstein's sculptures on the British Medical Association building. Sickert found himself between the two camps, no longer a member of the avant-garde, which he now regarded with a degree of suspicion, and unwilling to accept a rôle as a member of the Academy.

After 1926 most of Sickert's paintings fell into two categories: the *Echoes,* which had as their source black and white Victorian wood engravings; and work derived from

photographs, either from the press or else in some way controlled by Sickert. Clive Bell thought the *Echoes* were "ridiculous and feeble", but Sickert had abandoned the "struggle to please the *'critique d'avant-garde*'" and instead he was "coming to an understanding with the plain man to furnish some obvious requirements". He had compared his art to the work of a Realist novelist, now he believed that:

> Painting should take a lesson from literature where works of art are produced in obedience to ordinary needs ... [3]

In 1933 he wrote to Virginia Woolf that he had "always been a literary painter, thank goodness, like all the decent painters". In the work that he made in the last fifteen years of his life he rejected "what is called expert opinion" and, like the performers, by whom he had been fascinated at the music halls, he played to the gallery.

The choice to be modern: a delicious mixture of grace and *gaucherie*.

Whistler had carried "the first seeds of rebellion from France to England"[4], he had won success at the *Salon des Refusés* in 1863 and Baudelaire had praised his etchings. He facilitated Sickert's introduction to Degas in 1883, but when Sickert entered a portrait-sketch in 1883-4 to the Society of British Artists in Suffolk Street, he still announced himself as Whistler's pupil. According to the painter and writer Jacques-Emile Blanche, who had become friends with Sickert after they met in Dieppe in 1885, Sickert was still influenced by Whistler, "under whose fascination he remained until the arrival of Degas in Dieppe in 1886."[5] It is possible that Sickert started to break away from his master because he had already begun to recognise the limitations of Whistler's work, which he described in 1910 when he wrote "that Whistler was hampered by an excessive dose of taste"[6]. George Moore, who for many years was a friend of both Sickert and Blanche, by 1886 no longer considered Whistler to be modern:

> Whistler's art is Classical ... He knows it well enough! ... he risks nothing, all is brought down, arranged, balanced, and made one ... Mark you, I deny that I am urging any fault or flaw; I am merely contending that Whistler's art is not modern art, but classical art - yes and severely classical ... [7]

By the end of the nineteenth century the title of "classicist" was something that was to be avoided by any young artist who wanted to be identified as a modern painter. Zola's comments in his *Salon* of 1879, - made with little regard for historical accuracy - that all of the greatest artists had to struggle at the beginning of their careers, had been heeded by certain young artists who now deliberately sought the disapprobation of the more reactionary critics and of the public.

This infamy was unlikely to be found by following the example of a master whose work demonstrated "an excessive dose of taste" and was considered to be "classical". Moore, writing retrospectively about art in Paris at this time, left little doubt as to whom he believed were the modern painters, and as to how they were received by the public,

> The mass can only appreciate simple and naïve emotions, puerile prettiness, above all conventionalities. See the Americans that come over here; what do they admire? Is it Degas or Manet they admire? No, Bouguereau and Lefebvre.[8]

Degas represented modernity and offered an alternative to Whistler's teaching which he explained to Sickert when the two men met in Dieppe, *"je veux ... regarder par le trou de la serrure"*[9]. This idea seems to have delighted Sickert, who immediately recognised the potential for outrage of such a doctrine, and who wasted no time in testing the effect that this idea might have upon the critics in England:

> This expression, when promptly and duteously retailed by me in London, was received with raised hands by the English press. The somewhat excusable prurience of our Puritans could not conceive of anything being seen through a key-hole but indecencies, and on the strength of this subjective and mathematically erroneous

> opinion, Degas was promptly classified as a pornographer. "Qu'est-ce qu'ils feraient à l'Académie Royale si je leur envoyais ça?" he asked me. "Ils vous mettraient sûrement à la porte!"[10]

Sickert appreciated not just the method of observing a particular scene that Degas was suggesting, but also the new scope for a more shocking choice of subject matter than the "Whistlerian motifs" to which he had so far been limited. Moore also had noted that one of the qualities that made Degas and Manet modern was that they painted their subjects in their natural environments.

Sickert, who had already made etchings of music-hall subjects in 1884, owned a lithograph by Degas, *Mlle Bécat at the Cafés des Ambassadeurs*, 1877 (which Degas reworked in pastel in 1885), and it seems likely that the idea of making paintings based on music halls, a partial English equivalent to the *cafés-concerts* of Paris, would have come to him as a result of his increased interest in the work of Degas. Frederick Wedmore, in *Some of the Moderns* published in 1909, clearly recognised the influence on Sickert in his choice of subject matter:

> An influence much deeper than Whistler's upon Sickert is, I conceive, the influence of Degas. The shrinking from no theme because of the unworthiness or commonness, must indeed have been characteristic in Sickert from the beginning - since he has never wanted audacity, joy in audacity, and a little inclination to surprise people. But I am certain that the courage and frankness of his experiment has been confirmed by Degas's example and friendship.[11]

In following the example of Degas, Sickert chose to be a modern painter and to reject the good taste of Whistler and the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art.* The Goncourts, as early as 1865, had described the *cafés-concerts* as meeting places for all manner of low-life, where prostitutes could mix with shop assistants, and, in the stupidity of the crowd, they saw the threat of revolution. In London the music halls provided a

similar environment and a perfect subject for a young painter who wanted to step out of the shadow of his master and into his own spotlight.

Sickert first exhibited a painting of a music hall scene at the New English Art Club. He submitted his picture of *Gatti's Hungerford Palace of Varieties: Second Turn of Miss Katie Lawrence*, in April 1888, which was accepted only after acrimonious discussion. It was felt that the music hall, which Sickert had first chosen as his subject for a painting in 1887, *The Lion Comique* (plate 2), was typical of the squalor of modern existence and that, by ignoring classical conventions and stylistic rules, Sickert's painting failed to rise above the crude character of his subject. His work also demonstrated a development away from the references to classical music that were present in the titles of the work of Whistler, towards deliberate references to popular culture. The music-hall tradition had its birth in the 'free-and-easy' amateur entertainments that were performed in some public houses, the more exclusive 'song-and-supper' clubs and stage shows of the eighteenth-century pleasure gardens. The first music-hall in London was opened in 1851 and by the 1880s there were more than thirty. At these new music halls, alcohol was served and audience participation encouraged and soon they became associated in the minds of the middle-classes with drink and prostitution and attracted much prurient attention in the press. This meant that they started to entice a wider audience than the one for which they had originally been intended, encouraging a dangerous mixing of the middle-classes with the urban working-class. By the 1880s it was believed that they were morally dangerous and that they posed a threat to public safety, and new licensing laws were introduced.

Of all the venues in London, 'Gatti's Hungerford' was possibly the most offensive to the self-elected moral guardians of Victorian England, and in choosing it Sickert helped to guarantee that his painting would be controversial. It was located in

Villiers Street, just off the Strand and close to Trafalgar Square, where thousands of London's unemployed had rioted in 1887. It was typical of Sickert that he should have chosen such a provocative setting. These were the places that young clerks arriving in London were advised to avoid, where they would only meet 'mashers' and the lower classes and, perhaps most dangerous of all, they were likely to come across the sort of women who could ruin the morals of a stranger to the city.

In Sickert's music-hall paintings of the 1880s the obvious focus of the picture was usually the performer: *Little Dot Hetherington at the Bedford Music Hall*, 1888-89, *The Sisters Lloyd*, 1888-89, *The P.S. Wings in an O.P. Mirror*, 1889, *Red, White and Blue*, 1889. As the spectator, Sickert turned his attention to the stage, although the audience is included and adds to the atmosphere and construction of the paintings. It was not, however, a flattering image of the crowd, it became, in the dark tones in which it was depicted, an ambiguous mass, although not so ambiguous to prevent reviewers from spotting a "low dame de plaisir" or a "monstrous red hat", the badge of a prostitute in nineteenth century England. These paintings are formally quite complex, particularly *Little Dot Hetherington at the Bedford Music Hall* (plate 3) and *The P.S. Wings in an O.P. Mirror* (plate 4), in which the majority of the picture is seen as a reflected, mirror image. Sir Joshua Reynolds, when discussing an "inferior style" of painting and the "lower kind of Comedy and Farce"[12], had quoted Shakespeare, noting that the theatre is said, "to hold the mirrour [sic] up to nature"[13]. Sickert was now holding the mirror up to the theatre and to nature, in the form of the audience. In *Little Dot Hetherington* ... he showed the performer, framed by the proscenium arch of the stage, as the object of the audience's gaze, and at the same time held both performer and audience within the gilt frame of the mirror as the object of his, and now our, attention. He was not the first English artist to have linked the theatre with

voyeurism: Hogarth, in *Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn,* 1738 (plate 5), included a face peering in on the scene through a hole in the roof. Sickert's approach to this painting suggests that he fully understood the possibilities of looking at his subject through a keyhole.

During the 1890s, Sickert turned his attention away from the stage and up towards the gallery, to the poorer members of the audience, as in the *Gallery of the Old Bedford,* 1895 (plate 6). Emmons claimed that:

> The Bedford music hall, known as the Family Theatre, was preferred by Marie Lloyd to any other. The audience was said to be the most democratic to be found in London.[14]

The subject of Sickert's paintings was now that 'democratic' crowd, a feature of the modern city. Gustave Le Bon's book, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind,* published in 1896, gives a contemporary "account of the characteristics of crowds" in "the modern age that represents a period of transition and anarchy"[15]. Le Bon believed that civilisation could only be "created and directed by a small intellectual aristocracy", and that crowds were a powerful force of destruction, which he likened to microbes. He was alarmed at the way ideas could spread through a crowd,

> The opinions and beliefs of crowds are specially propagated by contagion, but never by reasoning. The conceptions at present rife among the working classes have been acquired at the public-houses as the result of affirmation, repetition and contagion. It will be noted that ... contagion, after having been at work among the popular classes, has spread to the higher classes of society. This is what we see happening at the present day with regard to the socialist doctrines which are beginning to be held.[16]

These effects were most apparent at "theatrical representations" which "always have an enormous influence on crowds"[17]. This dangerous, anarchic mass was what Sickert chose to paint and according to George Moore the artist had no alternative but to look to the mass for his subject matter:

> ... all ideals have gone; nothing remains to us for worship but the Mass, the blind, inchoate, insatiate Mass ... [18]

Sickert again made use of the device of including a large mirror in the composition, which would have allowed the crowd to have seen itself, framed as if in a picture, incongruously surrounded by the decoration of the music hall, just as it appeared in Sickert's painting. The eyes of the audience are fixed on the stage and they are unaware that they are being observed. He continued to represent the crowd as an anonymous mass in *Noctes Ambrosianae,* 1906 (plate 7), and the *Gallery of the Old Mogul,* 1906. At this time he also started to work on images of domestic interiors, which featured the same people, removed from a public arena. In these paintings the figures have been given a personal identity and these individuals were to be the main subject of Sickert's work for the next decade.

I should like to return, briefly, to the conception of the New English Art Club in 1886. The Royal Academy, in the second half of the nineteenth century, had encouraged a classical revival in English art, which can be seen in the painting of Lord Leighton, George Watts and Albert Moore. This work was in contrast to the scenes of everyday life by William Frith, whose painting *Derby Day*, 1856-58 (plate 8), was admired by Manet, and the genre pictures of Robert Martineau and Augustus Egg. It was in reaction to this 'classicism' that a number of younger English artists established the N.E.A.C. They were interested in Realism in painting and believed that they could learn from the lessons of French art. Their knowledge of French painting was limited but they were aware of a kind of Realism that would appeal to English taste, which they found in the work of French *plein air* artist Bastien-Lepage. Sickert was also interested in Realism but he was less impressed by the work of the "so-called realist" Bastien-Lepage, who, he felt, was just a painter of exhibition pictures. However, he appreciated the importance of the N.E.A.C. and in 1910

commented that he believed it set the standards of painting in England, he was, nevertheless, critical of the nature of the paintings that they exhibited, and in particular of their choice of subject matter, 'themes already long approved and accepted in this country'[19]. He believed that their work was not sufficiently directed towards the concerns of the "plain man", was too reliant on "the smartened-up-young-person motif" avoiding the depiction of modern life:

> A glance around the walls of any New English Art Club exhibition does certainly not give us the sensation of a page torn from the book of life.[20]

Sickert, influenced by Degas, was looking for an art that came closer to Baudelaire's ideal, of paintings that would show modern life as it was in the city, often bizarre, violent, excessive, but always full of poetry.

Between 1898 and 1905 Sickert lived in Dieppe and travelled to Venice and Paris. For most of this time he devoted himself almost exclusively to landscape, but in Venice, in 1903, he started to develop a theme which he had previously only explored in occasional drawings: painting figures in interiors. His models for these pictures were the local prostitutes and he delighted in posing these women, like "angels" in *The Beribboned Washstand*, 1903-04 (plate 9), in the less formal, and less angelic, *Conversations*, 1903-04 (plate 10) and *Fille Vénitienne Allongée* 1903-04. Such paintings anticipated the pictures that he would make on his return to London. In 1905 he started to work in Camden Town. It offered an alternative from the good taste which he believed was so deleterious to a painter, a sentiment that was echoed by Moore, who felt that the artist should shun respectability and the "so called decencies of life; and he can best protest by frequenting a tavern and cutting his club"[21]. Sickert also intended that his paintings of the nude should be different from the posed images more usually found in art. In 1910 he described the way that an artist

should proceed, not by dressing up the model and making her assume artificial poses in a strange environment, but by trying to achieve a greater degree of naturalism:

> But now let us strip Tilly Pullen of her lendings and tell her to put her own things on again. Let her leave the studio and climb the first dirty little staircase in the first shabby little house. Tilly Pullen becomes interesting at once. She is in surroundings that mean something. She becomes stuff for a picture. Follow her into the kitchen, or better still - for the artist has the divine privilege of omnipresence - into her bedroom; and Tilly Pullen is become the stuff of which the Parthenon was made, or Dürer, or any Rembrandt. She is become a Degas or a Renoir, and stuff for the draughtsman.[22]

In *La Hollandaise,* 1906 (plate 11), Sickert succeeded in uniting the figure and her surroundings, the naked woman merging into the gloom of the dingy room. This was a particularly productive time for Sickert, and the other paintings and drawings that he made from 1905 to 1907 of single nude figures on a metal bedstead, in shabby surroundings, include: *Nude on a bed*, 1905, *Le Lit de Cuivre*, 1906 (plate 12), *Mornington Crescent Nude, Contre-Jour*, 1907, and *Mornington Crescent Nude*, 1907. All these suggest that he had found a subject that both fascinated him and satisfied his need for images of modern life.

Through the complex construction of space in *The Studio: The painting of a Nude*, circa 1906 (plate 13), he managed to investigate again a voyeuristic element in painting; by including a reflected image of the model and the presence of the artist in an image which itself must have been a reflection. There is an added tension, which is derived from the unavoidable sexual overtones of the painting, as the artist's, and in turn our gaze, is fixed on a woman, probably a prostitute, standing naked in a domestic space. Windows and mirrors are frequently present in these single figure paintings and serve to increase a sense of intrusion or of being overlooked. The potential for this sort of

psychological drama was greatly increased when Sickert started to include a second, male figure in the paintings.

One of the original prerequisites of Realism had been to remove the need for the viewer of a painting to have any previous knowledge of the story that was being told in order to appreciate a painting. Sickert did not completely avoid a literary text in the narrative paintings that he produced in 1908 and 1909, but deliberately referred to a text that was widely known and had as its source a real event in contemporary life which had been popularised through the press. The 'Camden Town Murder' was the widely reported story of a prostitute, called Emily Dimmock, who had lived and worked in the Camden Town area and was murdered, in her room, in 1907. This general heading was given by Sickert to a number of paintings, but it seems to have been used more as a generic, than as an actual title for pictures, which were also known as: *Summer Afternoon* (plate 14), *What shall we do for the rent* 1908 (plate 15) and *L'Affaire de Camden Town* (plate 1), so that even the titles are ambiguous and suggested rather than fixed.

If Sickert's Camden Town paintings are compared with Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode. Shortly after the Marriage*, 1744 (plate 16), Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience*, 1853 (plate 17), or with Augustus Egg's *Past and Present: Number I*, 1858 (plate 18), it becomes apparent that while these painters have included signs that need to be read before the picture can be fully understood - the extinguished candle, crumpled letter and broken statue in the painting by Hogarth; the unravelled embroidery in the work by Hunt; and the half-eaten apple and the unstable house of cards in the image that Egg produced as part of a triptych - Sickert leaves only vague clues - a pair of shoes under the bed, a cap left on - which do not combine to form a single, didactic image, or formulated moral message. Although his paintings give the impression of being

staged dramas with an ambiguous sexual theme, the text is not clearly legible and the idea of impenetrability and uncertainty is echoed in his manner of painting; thick impasted paint and colour that allows the forms to merge. The half-light in which the action takes place adds to the sense of uncertainty and helps to limit suggestions of narrative to the confined space of the room. In 1912 Sickert wrote that he believed all the greatest draughtsmen told stories,

> He may tell it with relentless impartiality, he may pack it tight, until it is dense with suggestion and refreshment, or his dilute stream may trickle to its appointed crisis of adultery, sown thick with deprecating and extenuating generalisations ... [23]

Working within these "generalisations" Sickert told the story of the human comedy of "men and women, and their resultant babies".

It is in these figures-in-interiors that Sickert comes closest to Degas, whose picture *Le Viol* or *Interior*, 1868-69 (plate 19), which exploits the tension that can be created by a male and a female figure in a room, he may well have seen when it was exhibited at Durand-Ruel between 1905 and 1909. The narrative of the Degas painting is similarly unfixed and again the uncertainty is increased by the use of two titles. When Degas warned Henri Gervex, in response to seeing another image with a similar subject, Gervex's painting *Rolla*, 1879 (plate 20),

> You must make it plain that the woman is not a model. Where is the dress she has taken off?[24]

the lesson could equally well have been given to Sickert, (Sickert and Gervex are together in a drawing by Degas made in Dieppe in 1885) who certainly, by 1908, had understood the necessity to follow Tilly Pullen into her own bedroom. Blanche noticed similarities in the narrative paintings of the Degas and Sickert,

> As in the case of Degas, there is cruelty, disgust, and sadness in the scenes and characters of his genre paintings, a pathos which never degenerates into sentimentality; and principally a disdainful discretion, a sort of self-defence, in his attitude towards human contacts - *noli me tangere*. He needs but a commonplace object well set in an uninteresting interior in order to evoke a dramatic quality, to suggest situations guessed rather than seen. All relations with Sickert have an extraordinary, a mysterious character.[25]

This dramatic quality and the earthy subject matter of his work were not always well received and still Sickert found himself in the position of the modern painter whose work was considered outrageous. In 1911 he exhibited a number of drawings of nude and clothed figures at the Carfax Gallery and the exhibition inspired Sir William Richmond R.A. to write,

> From an artistic point of view the drawings are worthless. From others they are abominable. Ugly dirt is odious. Sexualism in Art can only be redeemed by grand treatment. This is worse than Slum Art, worse far than Prostitution, because it is done by a man who should know better.[26]

Fred Brown, who was professor of painting at the Slade School and a member of the N.E.A.C., felt obliged to end his friendship with Sickert because of the sordid nature of these pictures.

Sickert did not apply this anecdotal method of constructing a non-specific narrative only to the 'Camden Town Murder' paintings. He also produced other work in which he developed slightly less dramatic scenarios between a male and a female figure: *Off to the Pub*, 1911 and 1912, *Sunday Afternoon*, 1912-13, *Jack Ashore*, 1912-13, and *Ennui*, 1913 (plate 21) and 1914. In all of these the drama is built out of the stillness, the expressionless nature of the figures, and an uncertainty worked up from numerous drawings, "situations guessed rather than seen". Sickert's anecdotal paintings both invite the spectator to unravel the story and frustrate one of the fundamental principles of narrative, by evading any absolute reading of the events

presented and so constantly forcing the viewer to re-examine the visual evidence before him. This was fully understood by Virginia Woolf in her essay, *Walter Sickert, a conversation*, written in response to seeing an exhibition of Sickert's work in 1933, in which she constructed one possible imagined narrative around the characters in *Ennui*. She likened Sickert's work to the work of a novelist,

> But to what school of novelists does he belong? He is a realist of course, nearer to Dickens than Meredith. He has something in common with Balzac, Gissing and the earlier Arnold Bennett. The life of the lower middle class interests him most - of innkeepers, shop-keepers, music-hall actors and actresses. He seems to care little for the life of the aristocracy whether of birth or intellectual.[27]

It had been painting of this sort that had established Sickert's reputation among a number of younger artists in England, including Harold Gillman, Spencer Gore and Lucien Pissarro.

Sickert believed that he had been "sent from heaven" so that he might complete their education. However, in 1914 another young artist, Wyndham Lewis wrote,

> Mr Sickert for 20 or 30 years was the scandal of the neighbourhood (as a painter) and he was very proud of it. His bed-room realism, cynical and boyish playfulness with Mrs Grundy, his French *légèrté* (as he would write), all marked him out as a Bohemian plague-spot on clean English life... . But now he has survived his sins into the bandit's mellow and peaceful maturity. He sits at his open front door, and invents little squibs and contrivances to discomfort the young brigands he hears tales of, and of whose exploits he is rather jealous.[28]

The "young brigands" were, amongst others, the Post-Impressionists who were introduced in England as the new avant-garde. Sickert recognised the way in which they were being presented, which was the way in which he had promoted himself.

> The position of the *refusé* has in the last few years, I know, assumed a complex nature. The *refusé* was, at first, always a painter who was simply doing his best, and whose work was in theory supposed not

> to reach a certain professional standard of competence. But the sense of advertisement has created the professional *refusé* ... [29]

He may not have been aware in 1914 of the irony of the situation that he was describing. Similarly he may not have realised that the warning he wrote in 1910, to those critics who sought to praise the new in art, at the expense of the old, would so soon sound like a personal appeal:

> How barbarous you would seem if you were unable to bestow your admiration and affection on a fascinating child in the nursery without at once finding yourselves compelled to rush downstairs and cut its mother's throat, and stifle its grandmother! [30]

After the two exhibitions that were organised in England by Roger Fry, "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" in 1910 and the second Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1912, Sickert understood that there was a new *enfant terrible* in the nursery but he was not ready to be seen as the poor, elderly relation.

The changing face of modernity: John Bull and his lady, who love a joke, walk up, and learn a few things.

Before examining Sickert's reaction to the Post-Impressionist a closer look at his career is necessary. By 1898, when he left England and went to live in Dieppe, the exhibition he had shared with his brother Bernard, at the Dutch Gallery in London, run by Van Wisselingh, in 1895, had failed to attract any notable critical attention, his first marriage had broken down and his friendship with Whistler was at an end. After his separation from his wife he was left financially in a very weak position and it became more important to him to start to sell his work. This may have influenced his subject matter and for a while he painted 'picturesque' scenes of Dieppe (plate 22), which he perhaps hoped would appeal to the French market. In 1900 he had his first one-man exhibition at Durand-Ruel's gallery in Paris and in 1901, Sickert wrote

to the dealer to tell him that he intended to do a series of views of the corner of Saint Mark's Cathedral in Venice. It appeared that his Paris dealers were pleased with his work and he anticipated that his Venetian scenes would easily find a market. Sickert, unlike any other English painter of his generation, had established himself in France and by 1902 he was sufficiently well-off to take his own house in Dieppe. His success continued when, in 1903, he was one of six artists invited to exhibit with the *Société Nouvelle des Peintres et des Sculpteurs* at Durand Ruel. In 1903 he also exhibited at the *Salon des Indépendents*, including four commissioned views of Dieppe, and he showed his work in the French section of the *Glasplast* exhibition in Munich. His career seemed to be flourishing, with works owned by a number of private collectors, including Blanche and André Gide.

It is important to note that, while in England Sickert's work was considered to be modern because of his knowledge of French art, in Paris he was not involved with the more daring and experimental art that was developing, although he had met Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis and Signac, and Bonnard and Signac both bought paintings by him in 1909. His financial needs had limited his subject matter to less controversial themes than the music halls that he had painted in London. In the preface for the catalogue of his exhibition at Bernheim Jeune in 1904 Blanche wrote:

> His education is purely classical; his vision quite modern ... there can be found in him no pretension to initiate others; no cry of revolt destined to flatter the present *avant-garde* but a charming artist's nature, refined and conscientious.[31]

By 1907, when he saw his work in the *Salon d'Automne* he wrote to a friend that he was conscious that his work looked very old-fashioned in Paris.

Despite the success that he was enjoying in France, by 1905 Sickert was once more resident in London. He almost certainly returned originally for the Whistler

Memorial Exhibition of 1905. Albert Rothenstein (later Rutherston) and Spencer Gore had both visited him in Dieppe and apparently tried to persuade him to return, and he may have been flattered by the attention. Once back in London he enjoyed a position as patriarch among a group of younger artists, including Spencer Gore, Harold Gillman and Charles Ginner. By 1907 the Fitzroy Street Group, as they became known, had started to show their work, informally to each other and to possible collectors, on Saturday afternoons, under the title of 'Mr Sickert at Home'. It is also possible that Sickert withdrew from Paris because he was disillusioned by the direction that French art had taken and the operation of the gallery system. He explained to Miss Hudson, one of the members of the Fitzroy Street Group, that he wanted to accustom people to look at work that was "in a different notation from the current English one", and to create a "Salon d'Automne milieu in London", an atmosphere in which rich and poor, and even people who were "to some extent vulgar", could look at and enjoy painting. To these ends he had started to make paintings that recorded the lower middle-class life of Camden Town, without making any moral observations or judgments about that world.

This period, in which Sickert produced some of his most interesting paintings and enjoyed a position of influence over a number of artists working in London, was brought to an end by a growing awareness of the new French painting and principally by the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions of 1910 and 1912. The first of these exhibitions, which opened on November 5th, 1910 was described as, "a wide-spread plot to destroy the whole fabric of European painting"[32], and it marked the introduction into England of a new type of modernity in painting, the latest manifestation of the avant-garde. As may have been expected, and, on the part of some artists, even hoped for, the more reactionary critics and members of the

Academy were outraged by this work, but Sickert was part of a Realist movement in London which was itself considered to be avant-garde and unacceptable, and which now found that critical attention had moved on to consider this more shocking form of the 'modern'.

Sickert's response to the exhibitions needs to be examined in three parts; firstly his critical opinions about the work of individual artists, secondly his reaction to the critics who organised the exhibitions and who were trying to influence the artistic taste of the public and, finally, the paintings that he made and any change in the direction that his work may have taken at this time. Despite the apparent tone of his articles in 1911, he was generally supportive of the artists whose work was shown. He questioned Cézanne's inclusion in a 'Post-Impressionist' exhibition and argued that Cézanne had been embedded in the Impressionist movement and influenced by Delacroix, Daumier and Courbet, but Sickert also praised him:

> History must needs describe Cézanne as *un grand raté*, an incomplete giant. But nothing can prevent his masterpieces from taking rank.[33]

He was still more ebullient about Gauguin whose Tahitian works showed: "lessons exquisitely learned from Degas" and made Gauguin "one of the finest flowers of modern European painting"[34]. Sickert went so far as to say that he thought it would be a crime if one of Gauguin's paintings were not acquired for the nation. He admitted to a personal dislike of the work of Van Gogh but nevertheless found the work "interesting and stimulating". He was even quite reconciliatory in his comments on Picasso, whom he found to be "a quite accomplished sort of minor international painter"[35].

Sickert could not find anything to praise in the work of Matisse, in which he saw only art school tricks, deformations and distortions. This criticism should, however, be judged against the comments he made in the same article about English art:

> Painting here is kept alive, a dim little flickering flame, by tiny groups of devoted fanatics mostly under the age of thirty ... The young English painter, who loves his art, ends ... by producing the chocolate-box in demand.[36]

Compared with some of the reactionary reviews of the exhibition, Sickert appears almost as a supporter, if not of the theory, then at least of the practice of the artists whose works were included.

By the time of the second Post-Impressionist exhibition Sickert's attitude had hardened. In a general article, which had concerned itself mainly with a discussion on etching, he included a short invective against Matisse and Picasso:

> Picassos and Matisses could be painted by all the coachmen that the rise of the motor traffic has thrown out of employment.[37]

Sickert thought he detected a possible conspiracy. He suspected dealers, left with stock of this incompetent work, of trying to reverse the standards of criticism so that such paintings would be considered sublime. In this way he was able to refer, indirectly, to the people whom he genuinely felt to be at fault, those critics who had supported this avant-garde;

> It is after all, an extremely small circle ... who find amusement and excitement in going one better than the other in ecstasy at the incomprehensible.[38]

While there was little that was original about Sickert's criticism, it should be remembered that this came from an artist whose own work had been considered shocking, and who was aware of the strategies of avant-garde artists. He had also

supported the majority of the work that had been shown in the first exhibition, so he clearly did not believe that all the painters were part of this "spoof" or conspiracy.

In trying to account for this change in Sickert's attitude, it is necessary to look beyond the paintings and the artists who were in the two exhibitions. Although, characteristically, Sickert, in the second article, allowed his enjoyment of rhetoric to carry his argument to an amusing extreme, which ultimately vitiates it, he had also given an indication as to why he was now assuming such a seemingly reactionary stance. I believe that his objection was not to the nature of the work that had been exhibited but to the way in which it had been selected and, more importantly, to the idea of critics of the avant-garde who wanted to direct the public's taste. In an article written in 1912 the reader is more or less invited to hiss the villain:

> Roger Fry's earth-shaking jumble at the Grafton Galleries, where everything was booked through, like the baggage of a travelling company, as "Post-Impressionism", ... the cubical, conical, cylindrical, rhomboidal invasion is, I think, routed, ... The only Lady *fauviste* in the country is reported to have taken the night boat to Montmartre, disguised in a thick blue outline ... [39]

Fry's crime was not that he had introduced this new French painting into England but that he spoke "the Double-Dutch of the Higher Art Criticism"[40] and was only intelligible to other intellectuals, those who had a "Super-University Education". Sickert, who had painted the music hall performers and audiences, prostitutes and daily life in Camden Town, now recommended English painters, ambitious for success, to select the subjects of their paintings with care:

> I would not advise a British painter to depict a scene dealing with anyone lower in the social scale than, say, a University Extension Lecturer and his fiancée, or to set his scene in a "Lokal", as they say in Germany, less genteel than a parlour, or to costume it otherwise than in "faultless evening dress".[41]

Sickert had also previously made fun of the lady at her tea party who had to ask Fry, or Berenson, or McColl, whether or not she ought to like the paintings she had just seen.[42] This intellectual elitism was the antithesis of the Realist painting which he had pursued.

Although Sickert was manifestly not working in accordance with any social or political manifesto, he had, in a way that bears comparison with the writing of Arnold Bennett, always attempted to break down the prejudices of the intellectuals, whom he had previously identified as the Academy, and to depict the human tragedy and comedy of lower middle-class life. Sickert had recognised, and made use of, the need to attract a hostile reception to his work in order to satisfy those who were suspicious of an artist who was immediately welcomed by the reactionary critics and the Academy. In doing this he had first turned to the music hall, a form of entertainment that was seen as a meeting-place for dangerous low-life, and then made these same people, and the facts of their lives, the focus of his painting. Sickert's Realist narratives were dependent on the spectator understanding not a prescribed literary text but the psychological drama being suggested. The "Higher Art Criticism", as explained by Clive Bell, a friend and supporter of Fry, in his book, *Art*, published in 1914, believed that "we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions"[43] in order to enjoy art and that representation was indeed a form of weakness in an artist:

> A painter too feeble to create forms that provoke more than a little aesthetic emotion will try to eke that little out by suggesting the emotions of life.[44]

Bell believed that "all artists are aristocrats"[45] and that they should not concern themselves with "what the grocer thinks"[46]. It was the "grocer" that Sickert had chosen to depict, and for him some of Bell's comments must have sounded a little

like the criticism that his painting had received in the past from the Academicians who had seen only "ugly dirt" and "slum art"[47].

Sickert was not interested in belonging to Bell's aristocracy of artists. In the 1890s he had started to make the "gross herd" that "still clamours for likeness"[48] in painting, the subject of his art and, during the period between the opening of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition and the publication of *Art,* he continued to focus on their lives. He believed that the artist should never underestimate the public:

> It is admitted that the painters in this country are crying out. Whatever we utter, from north, south, east or west, is one long litany. Art is not encouraged! The Briton is inartistic, and will not buy our bow-wow! ... Are we quite sure that we have not overlooked one little point? Have we underrated our audience, the most fatal of mistakes? [49]

In the same way that the prize-fighter Tom Sayers, a bust of whom Sickert included in his *Self Portrait: the Bust of Tom Sayers,* 1913-14 (plate 23), might have fought his corner, Sickert continued to develop the narrative paintings that he had begun in 1908. He was not interested in belonging to an avant-garde that was now not just unpopular but which was being supported, in England, by theories that seemed to want it to be anti-popular, to dissociate art totally from the majority of the population: Bell believed that,

> Only artists and educated people of extraordinary sensibility and some savages and children feel the significance of form ...[50]

Sickert was fascinated by the life of the modern, industrial city from which Fry and Bell wanted art to be separated.

For Bell the aim of art was to provide an aesthetic experience to lift the spectator out of the stream of life. Bell believed that this could not be done by representing that life but only by creating "significant form". A distinction was developed between

'subject' and 'treatment' and the new theory attacked the notion of art that had not moved beyond narrative representation. These ideas were in contradiction to Sickert's stated beliefs about art:

> The real subject of a picture or a drawing is the plastic facts it succeeds in expressing; and all the world of pathos, of poetry, of sentiment that it succeeds in conveying, is conveyed by means of the plastic facts expressed, by the suggestion of the three dimensions of space, the suggestion of weight, the prelude of the refrain of movement, the promise of movement to come, or the echo of movement past. If the subject of a picture could be stated in words, there had been no need to paint it.[51]

Sickert believed that he must first create an illusion of a solid, material, reality and convince the spectator that the non-didactic, ambiguous, narratives that he painted were episodes from a sentient existence. He hoped to engage the viewer so that they became involved in the scene and even added to it by extending it temporally. This, which he might at another time have described as literary painting, did not depend on any fixed text but still satisfied a desire in the spectator to seek out a narrative. The painting was the catalyst for a number of 'literary' explanations, with no solution to the puzzle produced by the clues, the "plastic facts", in the painting, to be seen as definitive. As I have already mentioned, Sickert was happy to change the titles of his work possibly to frustrate any attempt at finding a final, comprehensive reading of a picture, but each painting was carefully constructed to involve the audience in a private drama. On the other hand he saw the theories that Fry and Bell put forward as an attempt to "state pictures in words". They provided a text that it was essential to have read before a painting could be enjoyed. Sickert considered this to be the "literature" that should be avoided by art, and on which art was in danger of becoming dependent.

Sickert's response to the paintings of the Post-Impressionists had not been, initially, particularly hostile and he came to admire the work of Van Gogh and even Matisse, whom he described as a "great painter". Like his original master, Whistler, who had taken his dispute with Ruskin to court, Sickert's disagreement was with the critics who attempted to direct the public's taste. In 1926 he wrote,

> We are suffering from too much subservience on the part of the public to what is called expert opinion. That painting must have no subject, must not be too literary, has been so dinned into our ears that we have forgotten that the choice lies only between an interesting and an uninteresting subject. Can we be surprised that public bodies are not inclined to commission, or even accept, as permanent decoration, such a subject, since subject there must be, as *A Party of Art-Students Showing the Proletariat how to Behave with Oddity and Decorum in the Public Parks?* And how long can a plain man be deluded into the belief that a portrait of an empty straw stool conveys to him "profound emotional significance"?[52]

He saw two opposing theories: that painting should contain a didactic literary message, or that it should reduce the subject to a consideration of form, with no suggestion of narrative. The one was similar to the moralising art of the Victorian Academy; the other was the product of the aesthetic theories of the critics of the avant-garde. Sickert dismissed these theories and attempted to produce paintings that, as Baudelaire had suggested in 1859, would celebrate the transitory beauty of modern life.

The late works: The instinct of self-preservation in a talent.

During the First World War Sickert consolidated his work as a Realist painter. He attempted to work on subjects inspired by the War, such as *The Soldiers of King Albert the Ready,* 1914 (plate 24), which may have been inspired by a newspaper photograph. He also returned to favourite subjects, such as the music hall, *The New Bedford,* 1915-1916 (plate 25), and intimate human drama, *The Objection*, 1917. After the War he

moved to Envermeu, outside Dieppe, with his second wife Christine, whom he had married in 1911. While in France he recorded the life he now saw around him, the casino in Dieppe, *Baccarat*, 1920 (plate 26), and the cafés, *Vernet's Dieppe*, 1920 (plate 27), and *Au Caboulot au bout du Quai,* 1920 (plate 28). He might have stayed longer in France but for the sudden death of Christine in 1920. By 1922 he had returned to London, where he sought acceptance by the establishment and in 1924 he was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. In June 1926 he married Thérèse Lessore and started to work increasingly from found or ready-made images. I should like to look at two particular sources of imagery which he chose at this time, Victorian black-and-white popular prints and newspaper photographs. His interest in both of these appears to have developed from the interests that he had revealed in his art and writing since his first music-hall paintings.

Sickert had always regarded taste as a dangerous thing for an artist and he despised those people who sought to discover the secret of refinement:

> For guidance in these matters we rely entirely on *snobisme*, on the hope to secure the tip from someone else who has got the tip from the "right" tipster. The refined are perhaps further from art, who is a robust and racy wench, than any class.[53]

In *Civilisation,* published in 1928, Bell also wrote of the dangers of taste, but for him this was popular taste, which allowed such things as music halls and popular journalism to flourish. While he did not wish to be so intolerant as to try to control the taste of the "stupid and the vulgar", he did not believe that they should be able to impose their crude pleasures on the "sensitive and the intelligent":

> It is shameful to suffer an addiction to crude sensualities to benumb a capacity for subtler enjoyments and more thrilling experiences.[54]

While he was not referring directly to the paintings that Sickert made after Victorian popular prints (most of which were painted after the publication of *Civilisation*), which became known as 'Echoes', it seems that Bell believed the images they were taken from could lower a civilised man's "capacity for clear thought and fine feeling"[55]. Reproducing them onto canvas Sickert was also transferring them into the gallery and so feeding the addiction of otherwise civilized men, in a way that was similar to the contamination he had risked when he had put the music hall crowd into his paintings. Sickert, on the other hand, regretted the "mist and driving rain of intellectual snobbishness" which, a little like puberty, makes people "ashamed of our true loves, and fidget from novelty to novelty after the will-o'-the-wisp of authority"[56]. Just as Sickert had caused offence to the reactionary critics of the 1880s and 1890s with his paintings of popular culture, the music halls and the low-life of Camden Town, he now risked offending the avant-garde critics of the 1920s with these paintings that were derived from popular prints.

Sickert had partly established his reputation as a modern painter by provoking a hostile response to his work; this may not have been a deliberate strategy but he could not have been unaware of the results. Once again the 'Echoes', consciously or unconsciously, attacked the principles of what Sickert seemed to fear would become the new orthodoxy, namely the aesthetic theories of Fry and Bell, which were being taken up by young artists. These theories would have been anathema to Sickert who had always enjoyed and supported popular entertainment of all sorts:

> Anything popular in art is said to be bad because it is not "high". A great many of the men you are taught to gibe at are considerable artists, and will be remembered long after some of us are snuffed out.[57]

It is possible that the 'Echoes', the first of which, *Suisque Praesidium,* painted in 1927, was based on a design on a pot lid, were meant simply to celebrate the art of the Victorian illustrators, Sir John Gilbert, Kenny Meadows, Francesco Sargent, Georgie Bowers and Adelaide Claxton, from whom the images had been taken. Sickert intended that these paintings should persuade young artists to look again at these "English sources of inspiration"[58]. The Louvre bought *Hamlet,* an 'Echo' after Gilbert, in 1932, and the paintings attracted much popular support; they were, however, dismissed by Bell who thought Sickert was simply playing the fool.

The second source of images for Sickert at this time was the newspapers. T. S. Eliot, writing in the *Criterion* in 1938, stated that newspapers simply affirmed the complacency and prejudice of the unthinking mass, and F. R. Leavis, in 1933, believed that the mass media aroused a cheap emotional response and offered satisfaction at the lowest level. Sickert had consistently shown his interest in similar subjects and so it is not surprising to find him working from newspaper photographs. Bell, when writing about the paintings of Frith, unintentionally described what I believe to have been the attraction for Sickert of these images:

> For an account of manners and fashions we shall go, in future, to photographs, supported by a little bright journalism, rather than to descriptive painting.[59]

For Sickert, whose modernity had been so close to Baudelaire's, and who had always looked for the 'ephemeral', newspapers became, not an alternative to descriptive painting, but an inexhaustible supply of images. Sickert's painting of the American aviator Amelia Earhart, *Miss Earhart's Arrival,* 1932 (plate 28), clearly demonstrates the way in which he sought to show the heroism of modern life. The work was completed and exhibited in the Beaux Arts Gallery just six days after the photograph had been published in the *Daily Sketch.* This painting recalls the voyeuristic themes

present in Sickert's earlier work: Earhart is glimpsed through the crowd and despite the public nature of the event she is portrayed as though she was unaware of the eyes that were upon her.

In the music-hall paintings Sickert had avoided directly confronting the subject of his gaze, by viewing the scene through a mirror which also framed the image, he now avoided direct confrontation, by 'viewing' the image through the photograph. In this sense the paintings that he made from newspaper photographs can be seen as a continuation of the idea of seeing the subject of a painting in a mirror or through a keyhole. Sickert was able to exploit the ability of the press photographer to intrude and produced such paintings as, *King George V and his Racing Manager: A Conversation Piece at Aintree*, 1930 (plate 29), and *The Wedding*, 1934. Perhaps the most startling example of this are the paintings of Edward VIII, *H. M. King Edward VIII,* 1936 (plate 30), who, as with many of Sickert's subjects, seemed to be preoccupied and unaware that he was the object of the photographer's attention. This feeling of intrusion is heightened, just as it was in *Ennui* twenty years earlier, by the lack of any interaction between the two figures in the painting. Sickert gave a similar, slightly haunted appearance to his portrait of Lady Berwick, *Lady in Blue: Portrait of Lady Berwick,* 1933 (plate 31), and *Self-Portrait in Grisaille,* 1935, for which he and his wife took the photographs.

Sickert's use of photography either represents a rather expedient change of heart by the artist who in 1892 had written that,

> The tacit assumption on which the theory and practice of the so-called realist rests, is that if photography, instead of yielding little proofs on paper in black and white, could yield large proofs on canvas in oils, the occupation of the painter would be gone. What a radical misconception of the nature and function of art this is . . .[60]

or else he believed that he had now found a use for photography other than verisimilitude. Sickert made no attempt to disguise the photographic source of his work in the paintings he made after 1926 which may confirm the ambiguously voyeuristic nature of the images. The way in which they are squared up seems almost to repeat the framing of the audience and performers in the mirrors of the music hall paintings, another reminder of how the gaze of the artist can turn the figures into objects, frozen and framed, to be stared at. In a letter to *The Times* in 1929 Sickert had commented on the use of photography by artists:

> A couplet in one of the most treasured music-hall songs of the last century runs:
>
> "*Some do it* h*openly,*
> *Some on the sly, etc.*"[61]

There was nothing sly about the way in which Sickert used photographs in these paintings. There was no attempt at deception, the paintings deliberately recall the original photographs, but perhaps suggest that the photographer had not acted quite "h*openly*". Sickert was now using photographs in the same way that he had used drawing, as a way of looking at and recording the human drama of modern life and, by blatantly displaying the way the paintings were made, he increased the spectator's awareness of the constant presence of the artist.

There are three paintings which Sickert made after 1927 that should be treated separately from the other late works, the three self-portrait images, *Lazarus breaks his Fast: Self-Portrait,* 1927 (plate 32), *The Servant of Abraham: Self-Portrait,* 1929, and *The Raising of Lazarus,* 1929 (plate 33). Sickert had in the past used self-portraits as a way of commenting on how he saw his own development as a painter. One, *Self Portrait: The Bust of Tom Sayers,* 1913-14 (plate 23), already mentioned, seems to offer a

comparison between himself and the prize-fighter as Sickert began his fight with the Post-Impressionists. He had painted a self-portrait with a number of unidentified busts in *The Painter in his Studio,* 1907 (plate 34), and it is tempting to imagine that he was hinting at a view of himself as a serious elder statesman and teacher among the younger artists he hoped to influence. Another self-portrait from this period, in which he appeared with an equally serious countenance, was given the title *The Juvenile Lead,* 1907 (plate 35) when it was first exhibited in 1928. The title may have been referring to the rôle that he played when, aged nearly fifty, he returned to London and led the Fitzroy Street Group. In the final, late self-portraits he appeared once again to be constructing ambiguous narratives with some autobiographical content. After the death of his second wife, Christine, Sickert was in a state of shock and may even have suffered a breakdown. *Lazarus breaks his Fast ...* , was most probably meant to show his return to health, and, possibly, to a new period of creativity. In the other two paintings he has once again returned to the persona of the patriarch or even the saviour. Like so much of his work, they invite the construction of a narrative and it is tempting to conjecture that at this late stage in his career, Sickert, who had the audacity to portray himself as Christ, intended to produce an image in which he was seen as raising painting from the dead and preventing art from falling by the wayside.

Einstein or no Einstein, we live in a wobbling world.

Sickert was aware that just as the public had originally "laughed at Manet" only later to pay high prices for his paintings, so the public that now "laughed at Matisse" would be persuaded to pay high prices for his paintings as well. While he was unwilling to accept this as a way of judging the relative merits of an artist, and suspicious of the critics who did, he nevertheless recognised the inevitable

acceptance of modern painters by the public, and equally their subsequent rejection by the "up-to-date-critic". When Robert Emmons wrote the first biography of Sickert he questioned whether or not Sickert was modern:

> One of the most amazing questions ever asked about Sickert's work (it must have come originally from the Elephant's Child) was, 'is he modern?' The answer, I suppose, is, 'ask his income-tax collector!' For how else than as a riddle can such imbecility be treated ... What the questioner really means of course ... is, 'Does he belong to my clique?': in which case the answer can be amended to, 'No, Madam, Mr Sickert is *not* a modern.' [62]

In this respect Emmons is correct, for Sickert was never really a member of any 'clique'; he was a follower of first Whistler and then Degas, he was critical of the N.E.A.C., and he resigned from the Royal Academy. He enjoyed a position of influence for a while as a member of the Fitzroy Street Group, which became the Camden Town Group, but this soon divided into different factions after the Post-Impressionist exhibitions. He also rejected the idea of modernity as defined by an avant-garde which he believed was increasingly manipulated by theorists, critics and dealers. There is, therefore, no discrete clique to which he could be said to have belonged, membership of which might have helped to define his modernity.

Sickert's modernity is perhaps best judged by his contemporaries but once again no clear picture emerges. He admitted that he thought his work in Paris, at the *Salon d'Automne* of 1907, looked very old fashioned, but in England he was included in the book *Some of the Moderns,* published in 1909, with only nine other artists, by Frederick Wedmore who in 1883 had written the first important article to be published in English on the Impressionists. The critic may have thought differently in 1910, after the first Post-Impressionist exhibition. During the First World War, while she was staying with the Sickerts in Bath, Nina Hamnet wrote about Sickert to Roger Fry:

> He admits he can understand nothing of modern art. I understand that he does not, but why he does not I do not see.[63]

In order to judge Sickert's modernity it is necessary to know which country the work was being exhibited in and in which year the judgment was being made. Sickert was not persuaded by contemporary opinion, believing that in order to understand modern art it was necessary to be able to see a gradual but continuous development of the traditions of art:

> To understand modern art at all, you must have understood Poussin, since it is by way of Poussin, among other channels, that modern art has become what it is. [64]

Sickert traced what could be called an ancestry of influences and was in this way, through his contact with Whistler and Degas, able to relate himself to Poussin, or Courbet or Ingres.

Sickert's belief in the importance of tradition was such that he denied that there could be anything new in art, he saw only continuation and renewal:

> There is no new art. There are no new methods. There is no new theory. The old one is great. It prevails, it has prevailed, and it will prevail. There can no more be a new art, a new painting, a new drawing than there can be new arithmetic, new dynamics or a new morality.

> When it seems that a new man or a new school have invented a new thing, it will only be found that the gifted among them have secured a firmer hold than usual of some old thing.[65]

If the question of an artist's modernity was to be assessed in this way it was only possible to be modern so long as you were at the end of this continuing process. The difficulty for an artist was in sustaining that position:

> That instinct of self-preservation in a talent is what constitutes genius. George Moore has quoted Degas: *"Tout le monde a du talent à vingt-cinq ans. La difficulté est d'en avoir à cinquante ..."*[66]

Once again the argument returns to the same place, the myth of the young 'modern' developing into the old Academician, a position from which Sickert resigned; it can only give us an indication of Sickert's contemporaneity. Perhaps Emmons was right to dismiss the question of Sickert's modernity as a riddle that could not be satisfactorily answered.

In trying to solve the riddle, an essay that was written at the same time that Sickert was making his late paintings, based on photographs from newspapers, may prove useful. Although I doubt that he would have read it, or even known of its existence, and I do not want to suggest that he would necessarily have agreed with the sentiments it expressed, it is at least a contemporary text directed at some of the same issues as Sickert's late paintings. In 1936 Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* was published in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung.* In this essay Benjamin described how he, as a Marxist, viewed the development of art in the second half of the nineteenth century:

> With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, photography, simultaneously with the rise of socialism, art sensed the approaching crisis which has become evident a century later. At the time, art reacted with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art,* that is, with a theology of art. This gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of the idea of 'pure' art, which not only denied any social function of art but also any categorizing by subject matter.[67]

I have already described Sickert's reaction to Clive Bell and Roger Fry's theories of art, embodying the idea of "pure" art. Benjamin referred to the "transitoriness and reproducibility" of the images in picture magazines, which undoubtedly seem to have been qualities that appealed to Sickert in the images he found, and to the intrusive nature of photography, which is again relevant to the way that Sickert used both the images that he found and also the photographs that he took himself. Benjamin

explained what he believed to be the difference between the images that can be produced by the painter and by the camera:

> The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law. Thus for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, ... And that is what one is entitled to ask from a work of art.[68]

This contemporary view of the differences between painting and photography seems to come close to describing the way that Sickert attempted to make use of photographic images in his late work. The fragmentary images that he produced stressed their photographic sources and acknowledged the fact that the paintings, as was frequently the case, did not have to be the work of one artist, and were easily reproduced. Benjamin described a process whereby images had to be considered within their social context, which seems a long way from Bell's idea of art to lift the spectator above the industrial society and close to Sickert's ideology. The transitory and fragmentary photographic image that Benjamin described in 1936, six years before Sickert's death, is reminiscent of the modernity that Baudelaire had described in 1859, the year before Sickert was born, and it is these two very different theories of the rôle of art in the modern age which I believe finally define Sickert's modernity

Notes to Chapter 6.

1 Robert Emmons, The Life and Opinions of Walter Richard Sickert, London 1941, p. 53.

2 Clive Bell, Art, London 1914, n.1, p. 220.

3 From a lecture entitled "Straws from Cumberland Market" given by Sickert at the Royal Institute, January 1924, cited in Emmons op. cit., p. 249.

4 Ibid, p.54.

5 Jacques-Emile Blanche, Portraits of a Lifetime, The Late Victorian Era, The Edwardian Pageant, 1870-1914, London 1937, p. 46.

6 Walter Richard Sickert, "Where Paul and I differ", The Art News, 10th February, 1910, cited in Osbert Sitwell (ed.), A Free House! Or the artist as craftsman, being the writings of Walter Richard Sickert, London 1947, p. 22.

7 George Moore, Confessions of a Young Man, first published 1886, all references to the Heinemann edition (The Travellers' Library), London 1928, pp.102-3.

8 Moore, op. cit., p. 100.

9 Emmons, op. cit., p. 63.

10 Ibid, pp. 63-4.

11 Frederick Wedmore, Some of the Moderns, London 1909, p. 46.

12 Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses on Art, Robert Wark (ed), San Marino 1959, p. 238.

13 Hamlet, III. ii. 24.

14 Emmons, op. cit., p. 48.

15 Gustave Le Bon, The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind, London 1896, p. xiv.

16 Ibid, p. 131.

17 Ibid, p. 57.

18 Moore, Ibid, p. 119.

19 Sickert, "The New English and After", The New Age, 2nd June, 1910, cited in Emmons, op. cit., p. 102.

20 Ibid, p, 103.

21 Moore, Ibid, p. 141.

22 Sickert, "The Study of Drawing", The New Age, 16th June, 1910, cited in Osbert Sitwell, op. cit., pp. 315-316.

23 Sickert, "A Critical Calender", the English Review, March 1912, cited in Emmons, op. cit., p. 8.

24 Quoted in A, Vollard, Degas. An Intimate Portrait, trans. R. Weaver, New York 1927, p. 71 and cited in Susan Sidlauskas, "Resisting Narrative, The Problem of Edgar Degas's *Interior*", The Art Bulletin, Volume LXXV, Number 4, December 1993, p. 691.

25 Jacques-Emile Blanche, More Portraits of a Lifetime, 1918-1938, London 1939, p. 117.

26 William Richmond in a letter to the critic Robert Ross, in M. Ross (ed.), Robert Ross: Friend of Friends, London 1952, cited in, Richard Shone, "Walter Sickert, the Dispassionate Observer", Baron and Shone (ed.), op. cit., p. 4.

27 Virginia Woolf, Walter Sickert, a conversation, London 1934, p.17.

28 Wyndham Lewis replying to letters written to the Pall Mall Gazette by Sickert about Epstein, quoted in Emmons, op. cit., p. 148.

[29] Sickert, "Democracy in Ease at Holland Park", The New Age, 25th June 1914, cited in, Emmons, op.cit., p. 148.

[30] Sickert, "The Spirit of the Hive", The New Age, 26th May 1910, cited in Sitwell, op. cit., p.5.

[31] Jacques-Emile Blanche, preface to the catalogue of Sickert's work exhibited at Bernheim Jeune, June 1904, Paris, cited in Denys Sutton, Walter Sickert, a biography, London 1976, p. 125.

[32] Robert Ross, "The Post-Impressionists at the Grafton: The Twilight of the Idols", the Morning Post, 7th November 1910, p. 3, reprinted in, J. B. Bullen (ed.), Post-Impressionists in England, the Critical Reception, London 1988, p. 100.

[33] Sickert, "Post-Impressionist", Fortnightly Review, January 1911, reprinted in Bullen, op. cit., p. 162.

[34] Ibid, p. 163.

[35] Ibid, p. 157.

[36] Ibid, p. 155.

[37] Sickert, "The Old Ladies of Etching-Needle Street", English Review, 22nd January 1912, cited in Bullen, op. cit., p. 257.

[38] Ibid, p. 257.

[39] Sickert, "A Critical Gallery", English Review, March 1912, cited in Sitwell, op. cit., p. 174.

[40] Ibid, p. 175.

[41] Ibid, p. 178.

[42] See, Sickert, "Post-Impressionism", Fortnightly Review, January 1911, reprinted in, Bullen, op. cit., p. 162.

[43] Bell, op. cit., p. 25.

[44] Ibid, p. 28.

[45] Ibid, p. 242.

[46] Ibid, p. 192.

[47] See note 26.

[48] Bell, op. cit., p. 39.

[49] Sickert, "The New English and After", The New Age, 2nd June 1910, cited in Sitwell, op. cit., p. 59.

[50] Bell, op. cit., p. 81.

[51] Sickert, "The Language of Art", The New Age, 28th July 1910, cited in Sitwell, op. cit., p. 88.

[52] Sickert, "Working at Play", Daily Telegraph, 3rd February 1926, cited in Emmons, op. cit., pp. 235-236.

[53] Sickert, "The Language of Art", The New Age, 28th July 1910, cited in Sitwell, op. cit., p. 92.

[54] Clive Bell, Civilization, first published in 1928, all references to the Pelican Books edition, London 1947, pp. 90-91..

[55] Ibid, p. 91.

[56] Sickert, "The Derby Day", The Burlington Magazine, December 1922, cited in, Sitwell, p. 203.

[57] Sickert, The Times, 22nd October 1932, cited in Emmons, op. cit., p. 217.

[58] Sickert, Letter, 1931, to the Leicester Art Gallery after they had purchased *The Bart and the Bums,* 1930, cited in Baron and Shone (ed), op. cit., p. 308.

[59] Bell, Art, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

[60] Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting", Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art, A. Theuriet (ed.), 1892.

[61] Sickert, Letter to The Times, 15th August 1929, cited in Emmons, op. cit., p. 201.

[62] Emmons, op. cit., p. 300.

[63] Letter from Nina Hamnet to Roger Fry, cited in, Denys Sutton, Walter Sickert, a biography, London 1976, p. 188.

[64] Sickert, "O Matre Pulchre!", The Burlington Magazine, April 1916, cited in, Sitwell, op. cit., p. 197.

[65] Sickert, "The International Society", English Review, May 1912, cited in, Sitwell, op. cit., p. 124.

[66] Sickert, "The New Life of Whistler", The Fortnightly Review, December 1908, p. 1019.

[67] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", first published in 1936, translated by Harry Zohn, references to, Illuminations, Fontana Press edition, London 1992, p. 218.

[68] Ibid, p. 227.

Conclusion

In the final decades of the nineteenth century it would appear that a number of critics believed that it was necessary to develop a new aesthetic to support the somewhat beleaguered practice of painting. Technological and philosophical developments, such as photography and Darwinian theory, had challenged many of the principles that had given purpose to earlier generations of artists without providing a suitable alternative. In England the New Art Criticism drew on theories that had first appeared in the work of a number of French critics, and their writing is full of echoes of the work of Gautier, Baudelaire and Zola as well as influences from closer to home such as Reynolds and Pater. This is true of none more so than Sickert who promoted French art in both his writing and in his painting. The critical ideology that emerges from his art criticism, at first heavily dependent on the ideas of Whistler, was an attempt to promote painting as a medium that could be used to depict the modern world. This was to be made possible by the artist turning to the bewildering chaos of the city and representing it in accordance with the best practice of the tradition of painting and based on observation and memory. It was also important to Sickert that painting should remain relevant to any audience that was prepared to look. His writing suggests that he was anxious that art should not be allowed, or worse still encouraged, to become an elitist activity, only to be understood and appreciated by those who had read and understood the latest theories put forward by the intellectual critics. These notions of art almost inevitably brought Sickert increasingly closer to photography, which he had believed at one time to be a most destructive influence on the artist, but which he came to appreciate as a potential tool in the production of paintings.

Sickert's ideas on art, developed over a number of years as a part of his contribution to a lively debate which took place in newspapers, and in specialist journals and magazines, are perhaps most interesting when he was able to identify a contrary or antagonistic theory. Whether he was writing in defence of Whistler, or attacking the writing of Fry and Bell, Sickert appears to have developed a consistent aesthetic theory that was more enduring than many others and which perhaps helps in understanding some of the changes in the subject matter of his art and certain technical developments in his approach to the making of paintings.

Suitable subjects

Analysis of Sickert's early art criticism would suggest that he was never prepared to denounce the importance to the artist of finding suitable subject matter. An examination of the subjects that he chose for his own work as well as the work of the artists he admired reveals more precisely what Sickert considered to be suitable material for the modern painter. This would also seem to demonstrate the similarities between Sickert's ideas and the writing of Baudelaire, which may have been commended to Sickert by Degas. It could be that it was Whistler's insistence on the unimportance of the subject of a painting, as well as his unavoidable good taste, which Sickert explicitly condemned, which was partly responsible for the more critical opinion that Sickert formed of his master's work. It is possible that it was Whistler's *dandysme* which provided at least part of his appeal to Sickert, who recognised that Whistler was very much a 'man of the world', in the sense that this was intended by Baudelaire as a necessary defining characteristic of the *peintre de la vie moderne*.

Sickert's interest in, and praise of, the work of Charles Keene reveals a similar interest, not so much in the character of the artist but in his chosen medium. Keene was best known for his work as an illustrator but was also the subject of several essays and articles by the New Critics and was greatly admired by Whistler, Degas and even Pissarro. Keene was himself an admirer of the work of Holbein and of Hogarth. Possibly as a result of editorial demands his work was concerned with contemporary subject matter, once again in a way that is consistent with Baudelaire's ideals concerning the modern painter. Indeed Keene worked for the *Illustrated London News*, on images of the Crimea War in 1854 – 55, at the same time as Constantin Guys and there are undoubted parallels to be found between Keene's intense observation of transient moments in contemporary life and the work of the painters who expressed their admiration for his drawing. What is perhaps most surprising about Sickert's praise of Keene is Sickert's refusal to discriminate between the work that Keene made for newspaper illustrations and other forms of drawing:

> The whole category of artists in his line are in the position of the happy woman who has no history. Their pictures are not on the line, they are on every line. They are marked by no red stars, because they are sold at birth. Above all, they require no explanation. They explain themselves. … Such works have undoubtedly added to the happiness, and education, of countless inarticulate millions. These artists are not only the entirely successful rivals of the painters, they are, in a sense, their masters.[1]

Sickert appears to be extolling the virtues of working in a medium that was not generally regarded as belonging to the fine arts. In the same way that Baudelaire had chosen an artist who was primarily an illustrator rather than a painter as his example of an heroic painter of modern life, Sickert praised the graphic talents of Keene above all others. Sickert had found in Whistler the character of the ideal modern painter and in Keene an artist working in a medium that he considered to have been appropriate for the portrayal of the transient nature of modern life.

In his own painting Sickert explored those subjects that he considered to have been suitable for the modern painter. He painted the music hall, prostitutes, the ordinary lives of those who lived in the city, stories from newspapers, images from popular prints and photographs in newspapers. These were not, however, images that showed moments of drama. Apart from the choice of the subjects they were in no way sensational, rather they attempted to show the lives of those who lived in the city and through their depiction reveal something of the human condition. Any idealisation was to bring a revelatory clarity to the nature of contemporary life in a way that was not judgmental. However, I believe that there is a consistency between Sickert's writing on art and the paintings that he made, which suggests that the subject matter of his work was as important to him as the treatment of those subjects. In both his choice of subjects and his formal handling of various media he showed himself to be endlessly inventive. He appears to have been aware of the pace of change of modern life and the consequential ephemeral and chaotic qualities that it demonstrated. His desire to produce a modern, accessible art defined the nature of his Realism and it can be questioned whether or not this was superseded by the Modernism of Fry and Bell and subsequent generations of artists or if the ideas developed by Sickert and the other New Critics are not part of a continuing development of the language of art.

Sickert defined the artist of the modern age as a man of the world and as somebody working in any medium, however ephemeral and transitory. These ideas would appear to be inevitably opposed to the intellectual and elitist theories of the early Modernists. Sickert desired an art which was inclusive and directly related to the modern world. Another important aspect of Sickert's theories was his ability to reconsider his ideas on certain subjects. Most notable perhaps are the ways in which

he was able to re-evaluate his opinions of the work of Whistler and to understand the potential for the use by the artist of photography.

Abuses and uses of photography.

In 1888 George Eastman invented the Kodak camera which brought photography within the reach of a public that was hungry for the precision and factual verisimilitude offered by the photograph. This also posed a threat to the artist whose appeal was limited when compared to the mass popularity and accessibility of the camera. Sickert's response to photography at this time was to show how it was almost the antithesis of art. He condemned the unessential truths that the camera recorded and suggested that simply buying a Kodak and snapping it around was unlikely to produce anything of the same value as the work of an artist who was able to select "with the eye of a poet" and to seek out "elements of pictorial beauty". The artist's ability to represent the modern world with a revelatory clarity could not be replaced by the literal facts that could be recorded by the camera. Consequently Sickert condemned those painters who relied too heavily on photographs to replace selection and perception with tedious facts and truths.

Once again Sickert's ideas and the writing of Baudelaire seems to coincide. Over-reliance on the camera as anything other than an aid to the artist's memory was in direct opposition to the artist's selection and imagination. However, later in his career Sickert was able to see the value of the photograph to the artist. As photographic images started to proliferate, for example as they were reproduced in newspapers, Sickert increasingly made use of the camera's ability to capture the transient fleeting moments of modern life. Many of Sickert's images that most obviously rely on a photographic source also seem to refer to the voyeuristic nature

of the camera that could 'look through the keyhole' and record what it saw in a way that was not possible for the painter unaided. It is quite possible that Sickert's ideas about the use that could be made of photographs may have been influenced by Degas and this again implies that he was fully aware of the voyeuristic qualities that were intrinsic to the photograph.

A painting made in 1938 by William Roberts, *He knew Degas*, shows Sickert and Thérèse Lessore at work surrounded by newspapers. It is perhaps worth noting that these are not *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, but the *Daily Mirror*, *Sketch* and *Photonews*. These were newspapers that would have been associated not with the highest standards of serious journalism – the *Daily Mirror* was the first tabloid newspaper - but with the idea that news could include stories about the life of ordinary people. It is perhaps also worth noting that the rise in the popularity of newspapers and the mass media was considered abhorrent by the intellectuals whose views on painting Sickert considered to be deleterious to the development of art. Sickert's use of newspaper photographs, therefore, while perhaps contradictory given his earlier warnings to artists to beware relying on photographs, is in fact wholly consistent with the aesthetic principles that were developed throughout his writing.

For Sickert and to some extent the other New Critics there had always been an essential relationship between the artist and his subject. While the artist should be prepared to develop the manner in which he treated his subject, a concentration on formal concerns alone risked divorcing art from an analysis of the modern world which they believed to be central to the purpose of art. Sickert's support for the work of Millet and Degas above the work of the next generation of French painters should not, however, be seen as an indication of a reactionary tendency in his writing or his work as a painter. The presence of Sickert and MacColl in a caricature by

Henry Tonks, *The unknown God. Roger Fry preaching the New Faith and Clive Bell ringing the Bell*, c.1912, sitting in the seemingly unsympathetic audience, is perhaps an indication of the fact that the theories of the New Critics were being superseded by those promoting the work of Cézanne and the Post Impressionists, despite the similarities in their respective ideologies. For many years the writing of the New Critics has been eclipsed by the theories of Fry and Bell and others that have been seen as emerging from the formalist ideas put forward by Whistler. However, the idea that the development of Modernism and its associated theories would replace all previous aesthetic theories now seems to have lost its credibility. An analysis of the writing of Sickert and the New Art Criticism provides an understanding of both the development and the inherent weaknesses of those Modernist theories, and beyond this of the ideas that have replaced them.

Notes to Conclusion.

[1] Sickert, The Daily Telegraph, 6 May 1916, cited in Osbert Sitwell, (ed.), A Free House! Or the artist as craftsman, being the writings of Walter Richard Sickert, London 1947, p. 255.

APPENDIX

Walter Sickert and Sheridan Ford: the *New York Herald* articles.

During the spring and early summer of 1889, a number of anonymous articles appeared in the London edition of the *New York Herald*, on the subject of art and art criticism. Anticipating the writing of the "New Critics" in other newspapers and periodicals, these essays form part of the debate on art in England that developed at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1908 John McClure Hamilton, an American-born portrait painter and a friend of Whistler's, suggested to Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell, who were collecting information for their "authorised" biography, *The Life of Whistler*, that these articles had been written by Sheridan Ford. An American, free-lance journalist, Ford had been commissioned by Whistler to help him to edit a collection of his writing on art, to be called *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. Before the work was completed, Whistler dismissed Ford who, nevertheless, produced a "pirated" edition of the book, which included a dedication to Hamilton. Later in the same year, the Pennells' book was reviewed in the *Fortnightly Review*, by Whistler's former student, Walter Sickert. In his essay, Sickert claimed that he had written the *New York Herald* articles, and that they were part of his long defence of Whistler, which he had begun as soon as he became Whistler's student. It is my belief that these articles were indeed written by Sickert and that Hamilton was misguided or at least mistaken in his attribution.

The Pennells were hampered in their work on Whistler's biography by their failure to gain permission to print Whistler's private letters. Despite their claims to be the artist's "authorised" biographers, Miss Birnie Philip, Whistler's sister-in-law and the executrix of his will, believed that it would be contrary to his wishes to allow the reproduction of his correspondence. Frustrated by the absence of this material they had invited Whistler's

friends, and others, to write to them and to pass on their recollections of the dead artist. These added to the interest of an otherwise rather sycophantic and self congratulatory account, which stressed the closeness of the Pennells' to Whistler, and it was an acceptable way of obtaining first hand information. Nevertheless, this approach opened up the way to the repetition of apocryphal stories and myths of the sort which had surrounded Whistler all his life. This point was not lost on Sickert, who commented on the advantages and disadvantages of "this manner of execution". He noted that, although they had gained from gathering information while "memories are fresh", they had also suffered, since they had been prepared to "accept gratefully, and embody gravely, stories about Whistler to which jocular writers have for years given currency, where careful narration would have been more interesting."[1] Hamilton's statement regarding the events leading up to the publication of the original edition of *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, which so angered Whistler that it led him to take legal action against the editor, Ford, was, perhaps, an example of the Pennells being too eager to believe the account of "willing and friendly witnesses", without questioning their evidence.

Hamilton was anxious to state his case and to explain how he had become involved with Ford, an American journalist who was the representative in London for the Bacheller Newspaper Syndicate of New York, which distributed special articles amongst the American papers. Hamilton began his long account of the affair by recalling his first meeting with Ford:

> In the Spring of 1889, I met Mr. and Mrs. Sheridan Ford. Sheridan Ford was writing notices for the *New York Herald*, and Mrs. Sheridan Ford had been interesting picture-dealers in the work of such men as Swan, Clausen, Melville and others. Ford had a very strong inborn taste for art, and seemed to be conscientiously opposed to all forms of trickery, and was engaged at that time on a series of articles, which appeared almost daily in the columns of the *New York Herald* (London Edition), upon Whistler and his work.[2]

In this version of the story there is little doubt about either the content, they were about "Whistler and his work", or the dates of the articles in question, Ford was writing them "at that time", the spring of 1889, and they were being published "almost daily". It is most certainly the case that, between March and June 1889, the London edition of the *New York Herald* published a number of articles which commented very favourably "upon Whistler and his work", although this was not, exclusively, their subject matter. I want to consider nineteen articles and letters that were printed that spring. These all seem to have been written by the same author and are of a substantially different tone to the other essays and interviews on art, printed by the *New York Herald* (London edition) at the same time, and I believe they probably to include the ones referred to by Hamilton.

The first of the articles in question appeared on 3rd March 1889. It was not about Whistler, but it is certainly "Whistlerian" in tone. Under the headline: "*Abiding Art.* Mr Spielmann's *Great Drypoint - Reproductive Etching* is Dead", the article attacked Spielmann, the art critic of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and more importantly, proposed that the practice of making etchings after works of art was being superseded by photographic and mechanical reproduction. The next article, published on the 4th March looked at a series of lithographs that had been published by Thornley and were used by the writer to celebrate the work of Whistler as well as Degas and Keene. On the 6th March an article appeared titled "A Concession But -", which was a plea to Sir Coutts Lindsay to make the Grosvenor Gallery available to the New English Art Club for their next exhibition and only mentioned Whistler in passing. The next day's edition included an article under the heading, "Painter-Etchers. Hamlet with the Part of Hamlet Left Out. - Ludovici in London." Although it is one of eight articles in this series that mentions Whistler, it cannot, accurately, be called an article "upon Whistler". It was a review of the first

exhibition of the Royal Society of Painter-etchers and of the work of Ludovici. Despite the fact that the Royal Society exhibition did not in that year include the work of Whistler, the reviewer still used it as an opportunity to praise Whistler, describing him as, "*the* painter-etcher *par excellence*" and explaining that his omission from the exhibition was, "an anomaly and a farce." On March 14th, the review of "The Painter-etchers" was continued and there was a letter from "Your Art Critic" to the Editor which berated Spielmann for his ignorance and belief that colour was absent from the work of Corot. Two weeks later, under the headline, "Uninspired Art Notes", the critic once again lambasted "the art apologist of the *Pall Mall Gazette*", and his suggestion that the "Royal societies will positively kidnap a promising painter", and went on to comment that "we may next see Mr. Whistler, with his curls cut, cleaning out the Augean cells of Burlington House." This was followed by a review of an exhibition of work by "Lady Artists", in which the writer encouraged artists to work from nature but to avoid trying to become too "clever" and not to adopt a mannered "style". The ideas contained in the article suggest Whistler's influence, in that the writer knew and understood Whistler's thoughts on painting, but the article can hardly be described as being "upon Whistler and his work".

On April 1st, the newspaper published the first part of a review of an exhibition, at the Dowdeswell Galleries, of French art from the nineteenth century, which the critic considered to be, not only of "enormous importance in itself", but of still more importance "as the cradle in which was nursed ... the art of Whistler and Degas." Despite praising Whistler above all other painters, the subject of this article was French art and the work of Millet, Courbet and Corot. This essay was continued on April 5th, looking at the work of Daubigny, Troyon, Rousseau, Diaz and Dupré and was concluded on April 10th. It was this final article on French art which produced the anonymous

critics first attempt at analysis, rather than simple praise and flattery, of Whistler's work. The next two articles, published on April 13th and 16th, hardly alluded to Whistler at all but, instead, concentrated on the work in the New English Art Club exhibition. In the second of these Whistler is referred to, in passing, as having shown some etchings and, in the company of Velázquez, as an artist who demanded that the spectator must understand from what distance a work of art should be viewed. After another attack on Spielmann, on April 19th, the review of the New English Art Club exhibition was concluded on April 27th.

The article published on May 4th, 1889, was the last in the series to mention Whistler. Under the heading, "The Private Galleries", were included two short paragraphs on the exhibition of Whistler's work, at 29 Queen Square Bloomsbury[3]. The remaining four essays treat various subjects, for example, on May 8th, a review of the Royal Academy exhibition praised Leighton's painting, "The Summer Moon". In the conclusion to this article, on May 16th, the writer was critical of the habit, shared by Bastien-Lepage and certain English painters, of working directly from nature to produce work which included not only "truth of detail" but also "falsehood of essentials", and which was compared unfavourably, by this unnamed critic with the more selective work of Millet and Degas. On May 31st the exhibitions at the Grosvenor and the New Gallery were discussed and on June 14th, the critic returned to the New English Art Club and to the correct way for an artist to work, which he believed was, like Millet and Degas, from memory. After this article the tone of the art criticism in the London edition of the *New York Herald* changed and appears to be the work of a different writer. The support for Whistler and for the new generation of English artists is less apparent and the ideas expressed less progressive. The eighteen articles which I have identified were published by the *New York Herald* (London Edition), during the period mentioned by Hamilton,

"the Spring of 1889", and they certainly appeared regularly, although perhaps not "almost daily" as Hamilton suggested. I am satisfied that these are the articles to which Hamilton was alluding since there are no others in the newspaper at that time about Whistler, but I am less easily persuaded that they are accurately defined as being "upon Whistler and his work". However, they certainly included ideas which suggest that the writer possessed a thorough understanding of Whistler's art and ideas, as well as a sympathetic awareness of the work of other English and French artists, and of the most recent developments in painting at the end of the nineteenth century, qualities which were rare in art critics in England.

Writing these articles would have endeared Ford to Whistler and if Ford were the writer, this would help to explain why Whistler entrusted him to edit a selection of his writing for publication, which lends weight to Hamilton's attribution. It is not, however, the explanation given by Ford for his engagement by Whistler. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge Ford never mentioned these articles, not even as examples of his loyalty to Whistler, by whom he was subsequently treated so unfairly. Interviewed by the *Star* newspaper, he gave a different reason for Whistler's decision to make him the editor of the collected letters, statements on art and other *bon mots*:

> "How did you come to be appointed Mr. Whistler's editor?" "I exposed Mr. Menpes," said Mr. Ford, "in an article for a syndicate of American papers, and this greatly pleased Whistler. ... When we met some time afterwards I suggested that he should publish his writings ..." [4]

On 26th June another article appeared in the *Star*, stating that Ford was, "the representative in London of the Bacheller Newspaper Syndicate of New York", and that "he was formerly on the staff of the *Times* and the *Evening Post* of New York"[5], but did not mention any articles for the London edition of the *New York Herald.*

If Ford was the author of these articles, it is remarkable how quickly and substantially his opinions on art changed. By 1890, in the introduction he wrote for his edition of *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* which he edited, he called Matthÿs Maris, "the master of living Dutch artists" and described one of his paintings as "a dream of witchery and penetrative passion".[6] The writer of the review of the exhibition at the Dowdeswell Galleries published in the *New York Herald* (London edition), on the 10th April 1889, had described Maris in less flattering terms:

> Matthys Maris has suffered much of late from the most dangerous of all detractors - the ignorant and indiscreet admirer. This foe, true to his mission, elects to see in that branch of the painter's work which is less admirable, qualities that are altogether too transcendent and tiresome.[7]

The critic thought that Maris painted "pantomime castles" and "water-colour meadows", producing work he described as "pretty Burne-Joneses". It is also interesting to note that the writer of the articles on painting published by the *New York Herald* (London edition) in the Spring of 1889, considered Millet to be a "master ... of figures in movement" and praised him as one of the great artists of all time, together with Degas and Whistler, whereas Ford wrote that Millet's "Angelus" had been "overpraised"[8]. The views expressed by Ford in his introduction seem to be inconsistent with the ideas on painting presented in the articles written, anonymously, for the London edition of *New York Herald.*

I remain unconvinced by Hamilton's attribution of these articles and I want to suggest an alternative author. In December 1908, Walter Sickert's review of the Pennells' biography of Whistler was printed in the *Fortnightly Review.* This essay was more than just a review of the book; it was the first considered piece of criticism by Sickert on Whistler since his death in 1903. Sickert reminded the reader that it was not the first time he had written on the subject of Whistler:

> It was in 1892 that I may be said to have wound up in these columns a defence of Whistler begun in 1882 by a very *convaincu* paragraph to the *Pall Mall Gazette* duly recorded on p. 309 of the biography. It was a defence that was carried on with some obstinacy in whatever papers would put up with it. In *Truth*, in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Whirlwind*, the London edition of the *New York Herald*, the *Speaker*, and the *Saturday Review*, I insisted, in season and out of season, on the excellence and importance of Whistler's work.[9]

Sickert described the articles he had written for the London edition of the *New York Herald*, as being part of his obstinate defence of Whistler. This seems a more satisfactory description of the content of many of the articles than Hamilton's, over-simplistic: "upon Whistler and his art".

As a propagandist for Whistler, Sickert was particularly effective because he was careful to defend Whistler from the accusations that had regularly been brought against him after their presentation as part of the case for Ruskin in the libel trial in 1878. Whistler was frequently chastised by critics for the lack of finish in his work, and thought of as being little more than a joker and not worthy of being taken seriously. Sickert's first letter, written on Whistler's behalf, had addressed the question of finish in painting[10] and in an article published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* he stressed Whistler's sincerity as an artist:

> ... the want of artistic sincerity is certainly the last charge that can be brought against a man who has followed his artistic intention with such admirable and unswerving singleness of purpose as Mr. Whistler has.[11]

These themes were continued in the articles in the *New York Herald* (London edition). The statement about the need for an audience to know the correct distance from which to view a picture, in the article of 16th April, which also linked Whistler's name with Velázquez, can be seen as further comment on the subject of finish in painting. When Sickert claimed to have written for the London edition of the *New York Herald* he also alluded to the regularity with which he had repeated his propaganda on behalf of Whistler:

> "See here, Mr. Sickert," said the sub-editor of the *New York Herald* to me one day when I met him in Regent Street, "people are asking whether the *New York Herald* is a Whistler organ."[12]

This remark would seem to be appropriate to the articles that I have identified which were defending not merely Whistler, the man, and his art, but also his ideas.

The attribution of these articles to Sickert does not only rely on his accurate description of their content. All the other evidence is, admittedly, only circumstantial, but I believe that it combines to make a persuasive case. The first thing to notice is the distinctive style of the articles. They are both sardonic and elusive; frustrating the reader's attempts to come to a simple understanding and demanding the reader's full attention. This is typical of Sickert's subsequent writing, although it was not been as apparent in the few articles written before these and it is always possible that his later style was derived from the influence of these articles. They are also similar in style to some of Whistler's writing but this would have been well known to both Sickert, who was his pupil and Ford, the editor of his letters and other writing. Simply from an analysis of their style I do not feel that it is possible to attempt to positively identify the writer as Sickert, but his later writing is certainly very similar and equally distinctive.

Quite apart from the style, the content of the articles also leads me to believe that Sickert was most probably the author. I have already mentioned one way in which the articles attempted to defend Whistler from the charge of producing unfinished work. They also expressed opinions consistent with Sickert's constant struggle to identify Whistler, not just with the painting of the future but also with the art of the past. In his essay, "The New Life of Whistler", Sickert had criticised Whistler's "incessant preoccupation to present himself as having sprung completely armed from nowhere". In the *New York Herald* (London edition) articles, the writer linked Whistler's name with Rembrandt, Velázquez, Turner, Courbet, Corot, Millet and Degas, describing Whistler's paintings as

"masterpieces" and as "nothing more or less than classical". However, for the purpose of this attribution of these articles perhaps the most significant of all these comments was the one in which the writer linked Whistler's name with French art, and more precisely the tradition of Delacroix and Ingres, and Courbet, Corot and Millet,

> ... that great revival of serious painting that was made in France by a group of painters all born about the beginning of this century. Of enormous importance in itself, but destined in the pitiless judgment of posterity to assume intrinsically a secondary importance to that which it bears as the cradle in which was nursed the art which is hitherto the flower of all time, the art of Whistler and Degas.[13]

These ideas were echoed quite precisely in Sickert's review of the Pennells' book on Whistler, even repeating the metaphor of an artist being nurtured in a "cradle",

> Then there is not only the cradle of an artist's talent to be sought. There is the immense part played by the action and re-action of contemporaries on each other. Action and manners are formed in art, as in life, by habits of association. Certain groups are inseparable. The whole 1830 group hangs together.[14]

Later in the same article Sickert explained that not only did he believe that Whistler had benefited from this "French art-culture", but that his work would add to future generation's understanding of "the traditions of David, and Ingres, and Delacroix". It was not just in this mature summing up of Whistler's contribution that Sickert made reference to ideas similar to those expressed in the articles. In December 1889 he wrote an essay for the catalogue of, "A Collection of London Impressionists", in which he described Whistler's work as "an art which is the flower of centuries of European thought and experience."[15] In June 1890 Sickert described Whistler as "a living Old Master"[16], and in July 1890 he explained how Whistler's "brush and needle" had made parts of Chelsea "forever classic"[17], and again, in 1892, Sickert proclaimed that Whistler's "place in art is with the great of all time."[18] The comments about Whistler in the London edition of the *New York Herald* were similar to views which Sickert persisted in repeating,

despite the fact that Whistler himself would rather have been seen as totally original and his work thought of as quite without precedent. Not only is the attitude towards Whistler expressed in these articles consistent with the idea that they were written by Sickert but the theory of artistic practice outlined in the articles was central to Sickert's essay, written in 1891, "Modern Realism in Painting", published in *Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art*, in 1892.

The work of Bastien-Lepage was admired by a number of English artists whose knowledge and understanding of French painting was slightly parochial. In his essay, Sickert attacked what he saw as the limitations and weaknesses of the painting of Bastien-Lepage, which he compared, unfavourably, with the work of Millet. I suggest that his argument was first rehearsed and developed in the articles in the *New York Herald* (London edition). If, as I believe, it was Sickert who was writing at that time for the newspaper, then the theory started to develop in April 1889. In this first of three essays on French painting, the critic described the difficulties for the artist who tried to work exclusively from nature, and explained what artists in England could learn from Millet and Degas:

> ... that action cannot be studied from a fatigued and posturing model, but must be observed and remembered ...[19]

Little more than a month later, in a review of the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition in the same newspaper, the writer warned of the dangers of following "second-rate French painters". He described what he called the different "truths" which the artist should strive to find and also the dangers for the artist of simply following nature:

> The method of recording touch by touch from nature straight on to your final picture what you observe has its abuse as well as its use. It is fitted for the portraiture of figures in repose, for the rendering of scenes containing elements of permanence. For the creation of pictures of passion and movement it is totally unfitted and ridiculously

> inadequate, and it results, in the ablest and most industrious hands, in a contrast between truth of detail and falsehood of essentials that is painful in proportion to the capacity so wasted.[20]

The theme was taken up again the following month when the anonymous writer looked at the work of the younger and, supposedly, more modern school of British painting.

The review of the New English Art Club Exhibition in the summer of 1889 examined the different ways in which the modern artist attempted to paint the figure. It identified three approaches: first the habit of posing and copying the model, which was dismissed. Then the practice of working from photographs was attacked:

> From the moment when this relief is sought, all progress in art is at an end with the painter, whatever his talent. Daily more and more is left to the indefatigable and remunerative glass lens, till the eye and the hand forget all but the cunning of the copyist.[21]

Finally the writer recommended "the way of the artist". This was, the writer believed, the approach adopted by Millet, and further developed by Degas, and relied on the painter observing actions until he knew them by heart and then rendering them on canvas, without recourse to either a model or a photograph. While this was the way that the critic of the *New York Herald* (London edition) believed the artist should proceed, he found so little evidence of it amongst the members of the New English Art Club that he warned again of the dangers for the painter of relying on the camera:

> The modern tolerance for glaring falsehood of essentials, and morbid craving for literalness of unessentials into which a young school in a hurry has educated the public, is working out its own destruction. A moment's thought soon convinces the ambitious beginner that he had best go the whole hog at once, and be at the top of the tree - interviews and all - without further trouble. Buy a Kodak. Snap it around. Have the photos mechanically enlarged on the canvas, and colour to taste![22]

This article not only continued the argument that had begun two months earlier but also included mild ridicule of Menpes, another "student" of Whistler's, who had used

photographic sources for his work and had compounded his guilt by indulging, somewhat precociously for a young artist, in the practice of giving interviews when he had talked to Ford. I suggest that it would be unlikely, if Ford were the author of this, and the other articles, that he would have chosen to make fun of the business of artists giving interviews to journalists, since this was apparently providing him with his livelihood. However, if it is assumed that the articles were by Sickert then it can easily be seen how the ideas they introduced were developed in his subsequent writing over the following year.

Sickert turned to the theme of the way in which he believed the artist should work in an article for *The Whirlwind*,

> Fragments of nature at her strangest and loveliest seen and selected with the eye of a poet, and executed with the brush of a master. No hasty tour with a camera here, followed by long periods of mysterious incubation.[23]

These ideas, which I believe had been rehearsed in the earlier articles, were more fully explored in Sickert's essay "Modern Realism in Painting". In this, Sickert's most sustained piece of writing at that time, he looked again at the idea of the artist selecting from the confusion of nature. Referring to the work of Millet, he described the particular qualities of the painter:

> He was gifted with the comprehension in its entirety of the import of any scene in nature which he wished to render. An unerring analysis enabled him to select what were the vital constituents of such a scene, and exquisite perceptions, trained by incessant labour, to render them in fitting terms in accordance with the tradition which governs the use of each material.[24]

He continued by denigrating the work of the "inartistic", who simply looked at nature and recorded it, stating his belief that this was "the sterile ideal of the instantaneous camera". He also confirmed the importance that he placed on "a profound and

convinced reverence for tradition", as opposed to the dubious value of the supposed "truths" of the work of Bastien-Lepage, which Sickert considered to be the "truth of unessentials" whose "elaborate and unlovely realities serve only to uncover themes that are profoundly unreal". The similarities between the ideas, the tone and the style of the earlier articles in the London edition of the *New York Herald,* and Sickert's later writing for *The Whirlwind* and his essay on Bastien-Lepage, not to mention the consistency of these theories with his later statements on art, would be sufficient to convince me that these articles were written by Sickert and referred to, by him, in 1908. It is not necessary, however, to rely simply on the arguments of style and content to settle the question of the attribution of the articles in the *New York Herald* (London edition), since a remark made in them, I believe by Sickert, was the cause of a minor dispute between Sickert and Whistler.

In an article that Sickert wrote on the Royal Academy, for *The English Review* in June 1912, he reminded his readers of an incident, typical of Whistler, which had taken place years before. Sickert referred to Whistler's response "on reading an article I had written in praise of Leighton's *Summer Moon*".[25] Whistler's telegrammed response was well reported in the press, "on both sides of the Atlantic"; less well recorded is the source of the comment which caused offence. In a note on the text, included in his collection of Sickert's writing, Osbert Sitwell stated simply that,

> Sickert's laudatory remarks about Leighton must have appeared in an American paper; probably in *The New York Herald.*[26]

I would like to suggest a slightly more precise identification. I believe that the article in question was written by Sickert and published in the *New York Herald* (London edition), on 8th May 1889. In this article the anonymous writer first acknowledged a common response to the work of Leighton:

> If the pictures of Sir Frederick Leighton invite and justify criticism, and at times of the most ruthless, it is because they are eminently worthy of it.[27]

It was unusual for this writer to take the side of the critic against an artist, even the President of the Royal Academy, and a few lines later he started his defence of Leighton, whose work he had seen in Manchester, in 1887, at the Royal Jubilee Exhibition:

> I saw no picture that seemed to me to have surer claims to immortality than "The Summer Moon" by the President of the Royal Academy, and since that picture he has given us with varying success works redolent of elegance and studied charm. ... Subversive critics had better leave Sir Frederick Leighton's work alone. It can render a good account of itself. I have seen few pictures of his which would not be certain of a place on the line if they were submitted to a jury of the New English Art Club.[28]

I believe that this slightly ironic praise of Leighton, which solicited Whistler's telegram to Sickert: "The summer moon rises at Hampstead and the cocks of Chelsea crow". This seems to confirm Sickert as the author of this article, and of the other articles on art from the Spring of 1889, in the *New York Herald* (London edition), if I am right in believing that they were all written by the same person.

It is possible, although no more than conjecture that at this time Sickert may have been particularly anxious not to incur Whistler's displeasure while trying to assert his autonomy. In 1887 Sickert had refused to join the Society of British Artists, where he had exhibited as a "pupil of Whistler", and had written to Whistler explaining that he did not want to throw himself on Whistler's "good nature", instead he intended to "take my chance and peddle my work where and how I can"[29]. This was one of the first signs of Sickert's desire for slightly more independence from his "master" and was confirmed by his painting *The Lion Comique* of 1887. This was his first picture of a music-hall subject and represented a very definite move away from the influence of Whistler and an adoption of the subject and compositional devices found in certain French painting, and

more particularly the work of Degas. Sickert also joined the New English Art Club at this time and first showed at the N.E.A.C. in 1888. Sickert would have been aware of how dangerous Whistler could be as an enemy and this may be why he chose this moment to prove his loyalty by vigorously supporting Whistler's painting and ideas on art in the press. It also gave Sickert an opportunity to associate these ideas and therefore Whistler's fame, with the N.E.A.C., which despite its faults, he believed represented the best in English painting at the time. The attitude towards the N.E.A.C. expressed in the article of 6th March, was entirely consistent with Sickert's views on the Club, its management, the painting of Wilson Steer and even his ideal of an exhibition selected and hung "by painters for painters", which he would eventually see realised in 1908 in the form of the Allied Artists Association.

The circumstantial evidence and the coincidental speculation all suggest that the articles in the *New York Herald,* were written by Sickert, and not by Ford as was suggested by Hamilton, in the book by the Pennells. It is not surprising that the Pennells should have been reluctant to credit Sickert with this lively defence of Whistler. Joseph Pennell had accused Sickert, and the editor of *The Saturday Review,* of libel in 1896, as a result of an article written by Sickert on the subject of "transfer lithography"[30], and relations between the two men remained such that Sickert refused his help when the Pennells were researching their book. However, in 1911, three years after the Pennells' biography had first been printed, a revised, single volume edition was published, in which the "quotation" from Hamilton's account of his meeting with Ford had been subtly changed. In the original statement Hamilton had been quite definite about when the articles were written, "at that time", the spring of 1889, and when they were published, "almost daily". By 1911 the Pennells appear to have been slightly less certain of the veracity of

Hamilton's original testament, and the revised version, although substantially the same, and, I would suggest, still incorrect, was now slightly modified so that it was less precise:

> Ford had a very strong taste for art, and seemed to be opposed to all forms of trickery, and was engaged on a series of articles which appeared in the *New York Herald,* London edition, upon Whistler and his work.[31]

While the changes to the text were only small, I believe that they may be significant. The second version is less dogmatic, hinting only at the existence of articles upon Whistler which could have been completed, and then printed, at any time in the paper, so that the comment is not so closely associated with the articles I believe to have been written by Sickert in the Spring of 1889. If there was no doubt in the minds of the Pennells about the authorship of the articles, which defend Whistler and his theories on art, then it is hard to imagine why they would have edited the text of the original version of Hamilton's story.

It is possible that the Pennells altered their account as a result of the doubt cast on the authorship of these articles by Sickert's comments, in his review of their book when it was first published. Whatever the reason for the change it is the final piece of evidence that I wish to consider. Sickert's description of the articles as part of his defence of Whistler, their distinctive style, the development of ideas which are further developed in Sickert's later writing and the affair arising from his praise of Leighton's *Summer Moon*, all suggest that Sickert was the author of these enlightening and entertaining essays on art. As such, they represent a significant contribution to the debate on art at the end of the nineteenth century, by an artist who was well placed to comment, and are important in understanding the early development of Sickert's ideas on art and his own painting.

Notes to the Appendix.

[1] Walter Sickert, "The New Life of Whistler", The Fortnightly Review, December 1908, p. 1017.

[2] Hamilton, cited in, E.R. & J. Pennell, The New Life of Whistler, 1908, p. 101.

[3] This exhibition had been organized by Sickert and was largely ignored by both the public and the press.

[4] Star, 21 June 1890, Archives of American Art, Film No. 4687, Whistler Press Cuttings Book, 12, p. 11.

[5] Star, 26 June 1890, Archives of American Art, Film No. 4687, Whistler Press Cuttings Book, 12, P. 14.

[6] Ford, "Mr. Whistler as the 'Unattached Writer'.", The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, 1890, p. 37.

[7] Anonymous, "The Dowdeswell Galleries [Third Notice]", New York Herald, London, 10 April 1889, p. 4.

[8] Ford, "Mr. Whistler as the 'Unattached Writer'.", The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, 1890, p. 49.

[9] Sickert, "The New Life of Whistler", Fortnightly Review, December 1908, pp. 1018-1019.

[10] Pall Mall Gazette, 7 June 1882, p. 4. Reprinted in E.R. & J. Pennell, The New Life of Whistler, 1908, p. 309, and acknowledged by Sickert in, "The New Life of Whistler", Fortnightly Review, December 1908, p. 1018.

[11] Sickert, "Impressionism - True and False", Pall Mall Gazette, 2 February 1889.

[12] Sickert, "The New Life of Whistler", Fortnightly Review, December 1908, p. 1019.

[13] Anonymous, "Messrs. Dowdeswell's Galleries" [First Notice], New York Herald, London, 1 April 1889, p. 4.

[14] Sickert, "The New Life of Whistler", Fortnightly Review, December 1908, p. 1020.

[15] Sickert, A Collection of Paintings by London Impressionist, preface to the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Goupil Gallery, December 1889.

[16] Sickert, "Art", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1 No. 1, 28 June 1890, p. 13.

[17] Sickert, "The Whirlwind Diploma Gallery of Modern Pictures. II.", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 4, 19 July 1890, p. 51.

[18] Sickert, "Whistler To-day", Fortnightly Review, April 1892, p. 544.

[19] Anonymous, "Messrs. Dowdeswell's Galleries [First Notice], New York Herald, London, 1 April 1889, p. 4.

[20] Anonymous, "The Royal Academy. (Second Notice.)", New York Herald, London, 16 May 1889, p. 4.

[21] Anonymous, "The New English Art Club. [Third Notice.]", New York Herald, London, 14 June 1889, p. 4.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Sickert, "Art", The Whirlwind, Vol. 1, No. 1, 28 June 1890, p. 6.

[24] Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting", an essay published in, Jules Bastien-Lepage and his art, edited by A. Theuriet, 1892, pp. 133-134.

[25] Sickert, "The Royal Academy", The English Review, June 1912, cited in, Sitwell (ed.), A Free House! On the Artist as Craftsman. Being the Writings of Walter Richard Sickert, 1947, p. 32.

[26] Sitwell, op. cit., p. 345, n.34.

[27] Anonymous, "The Royal Academy (First Notice.)", New York Herald, 8 May 1889, p. 4.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Sickert, [1885-7] Glasgow University Library, Whistler Collection and cited in, Margaret MacDonald, "Whistler for President", an essay included in, Dorment and MacDonald (ed.s), James McNeill Whistler, Tate Gallery 1994. p. 51.

[30] Sickert, "Transfer Lithography", The Saturday Review, 26 December 1896, pp. 667-668.

[31] E.R & J. Pennell, The Life of Whistler, revised fifth edition, 1911, p. 286.

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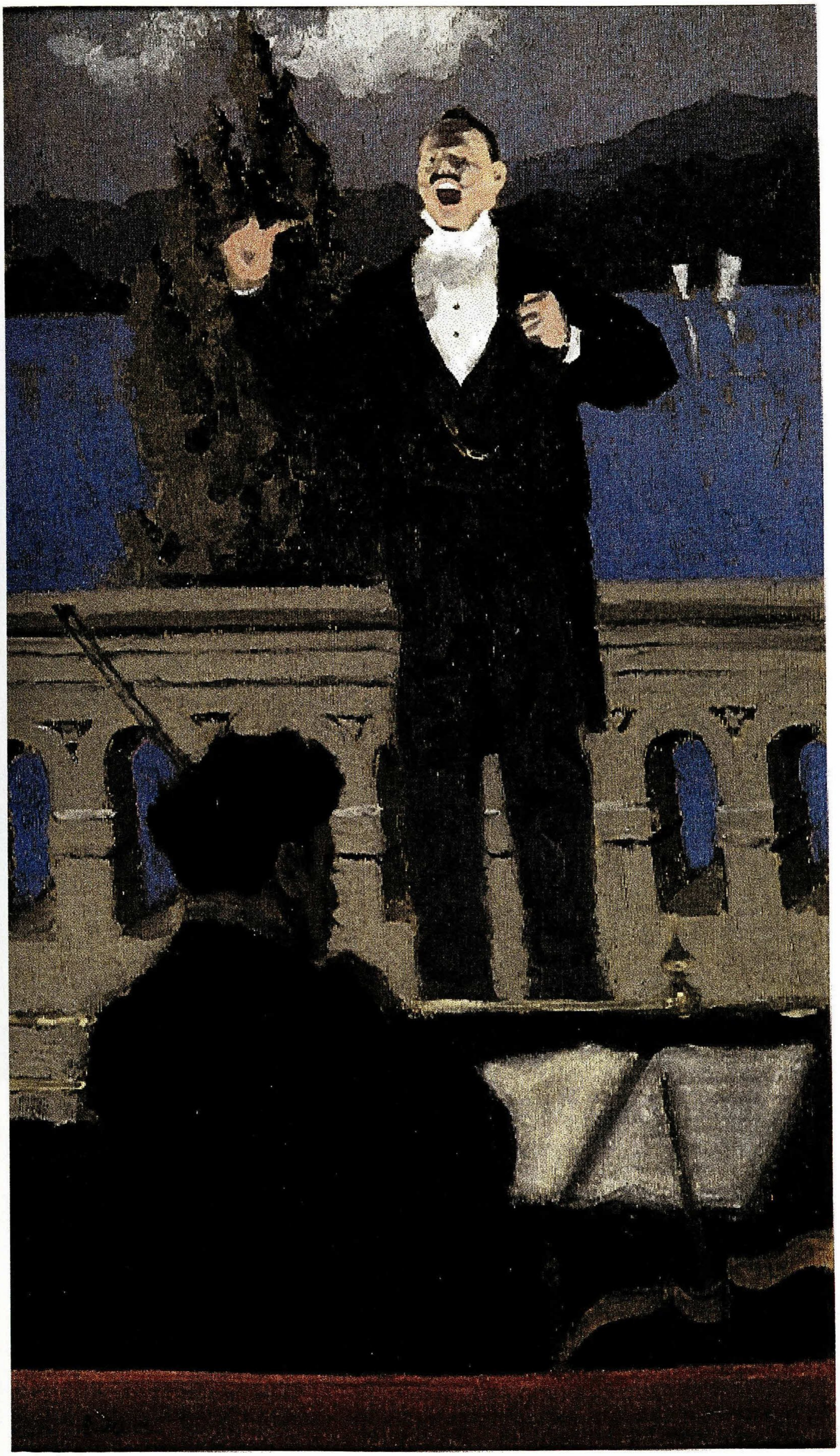


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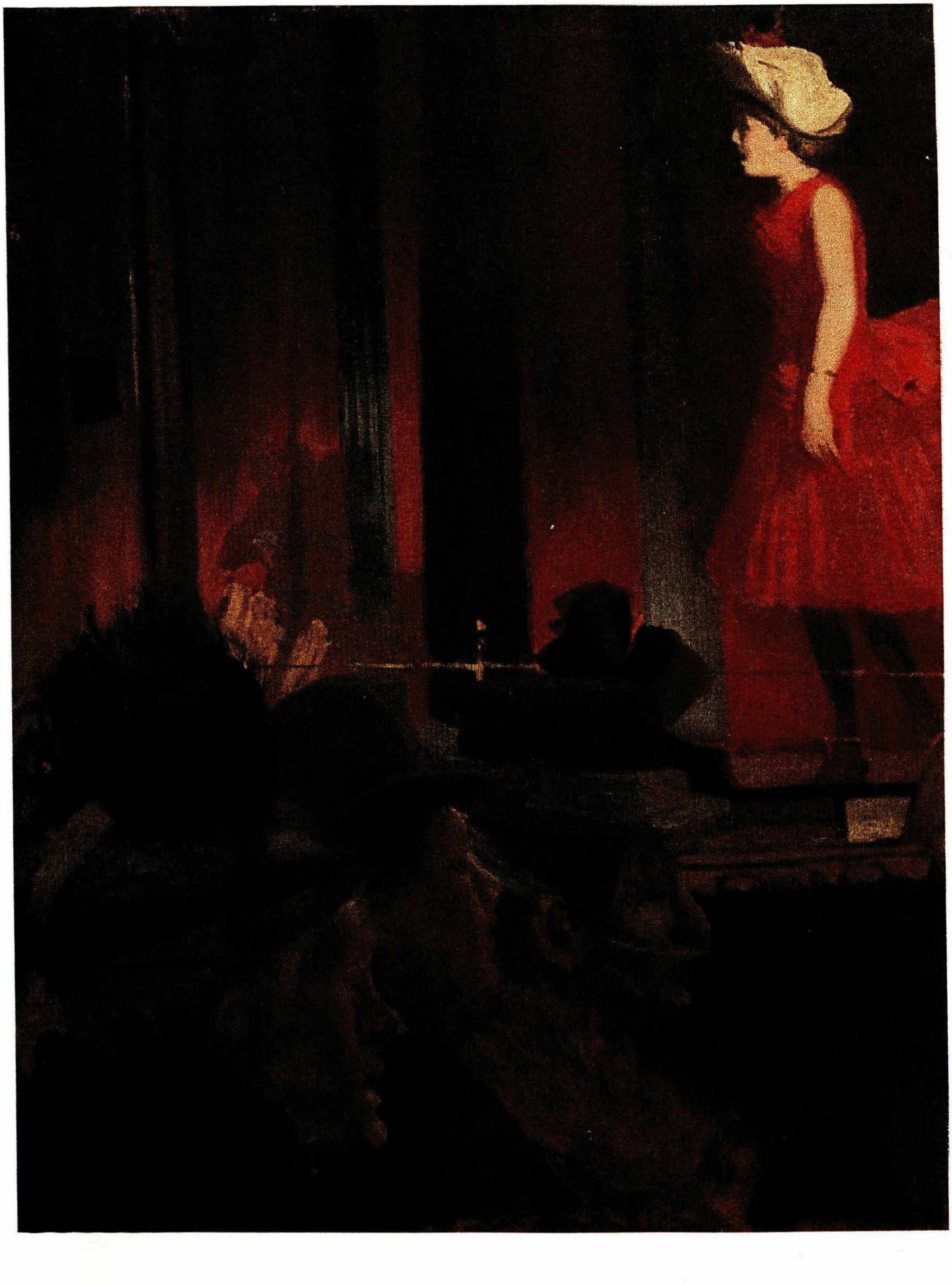


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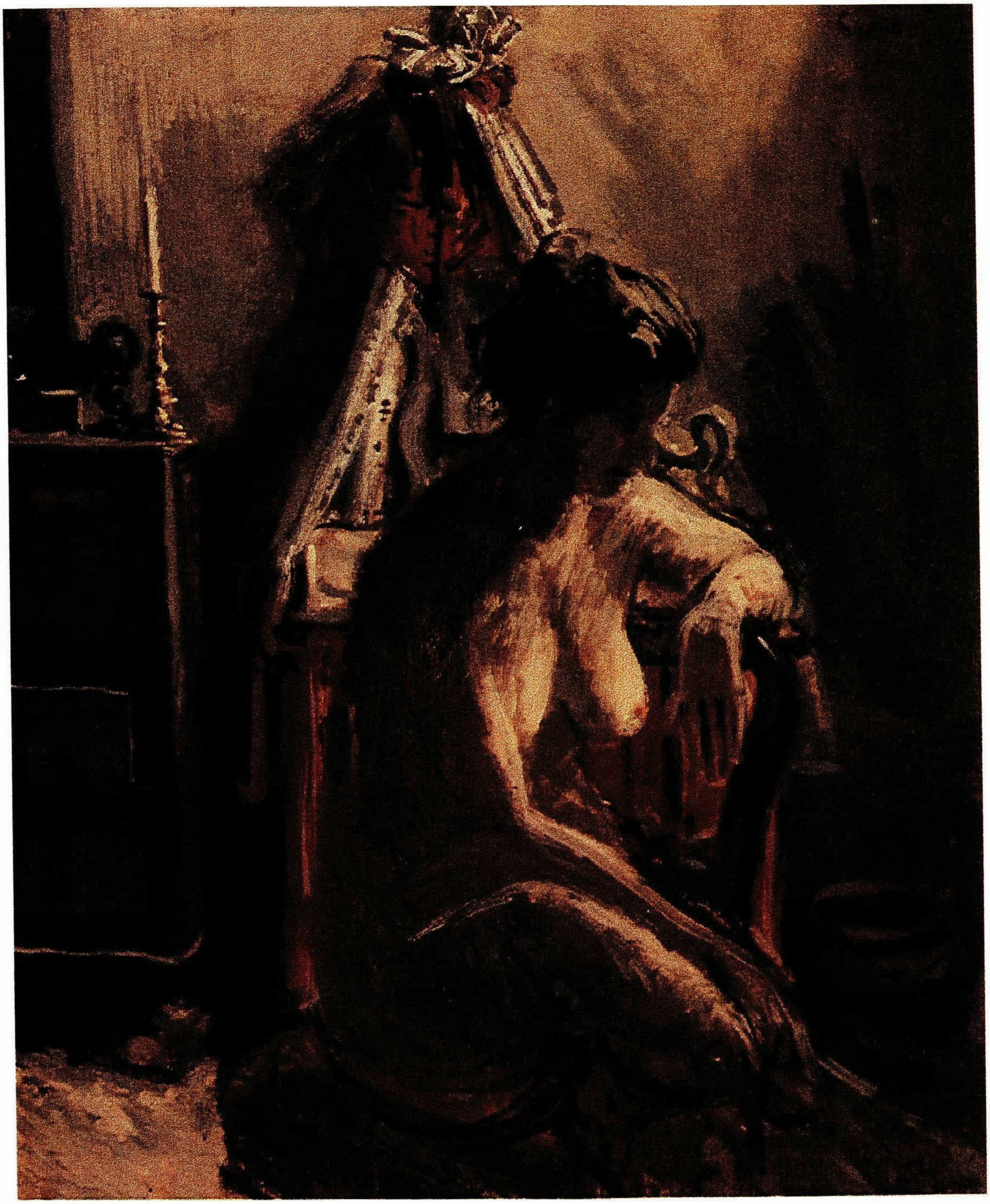


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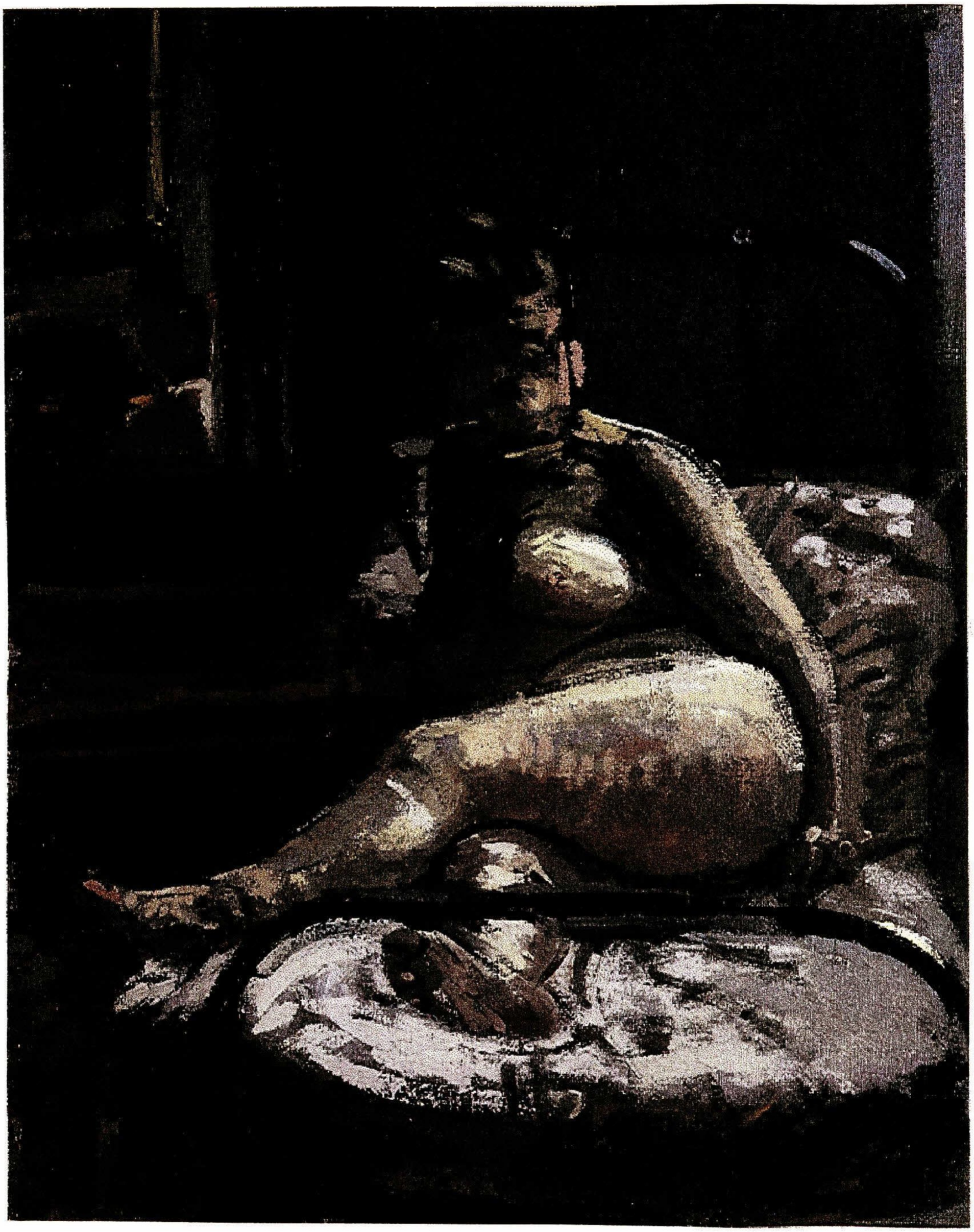


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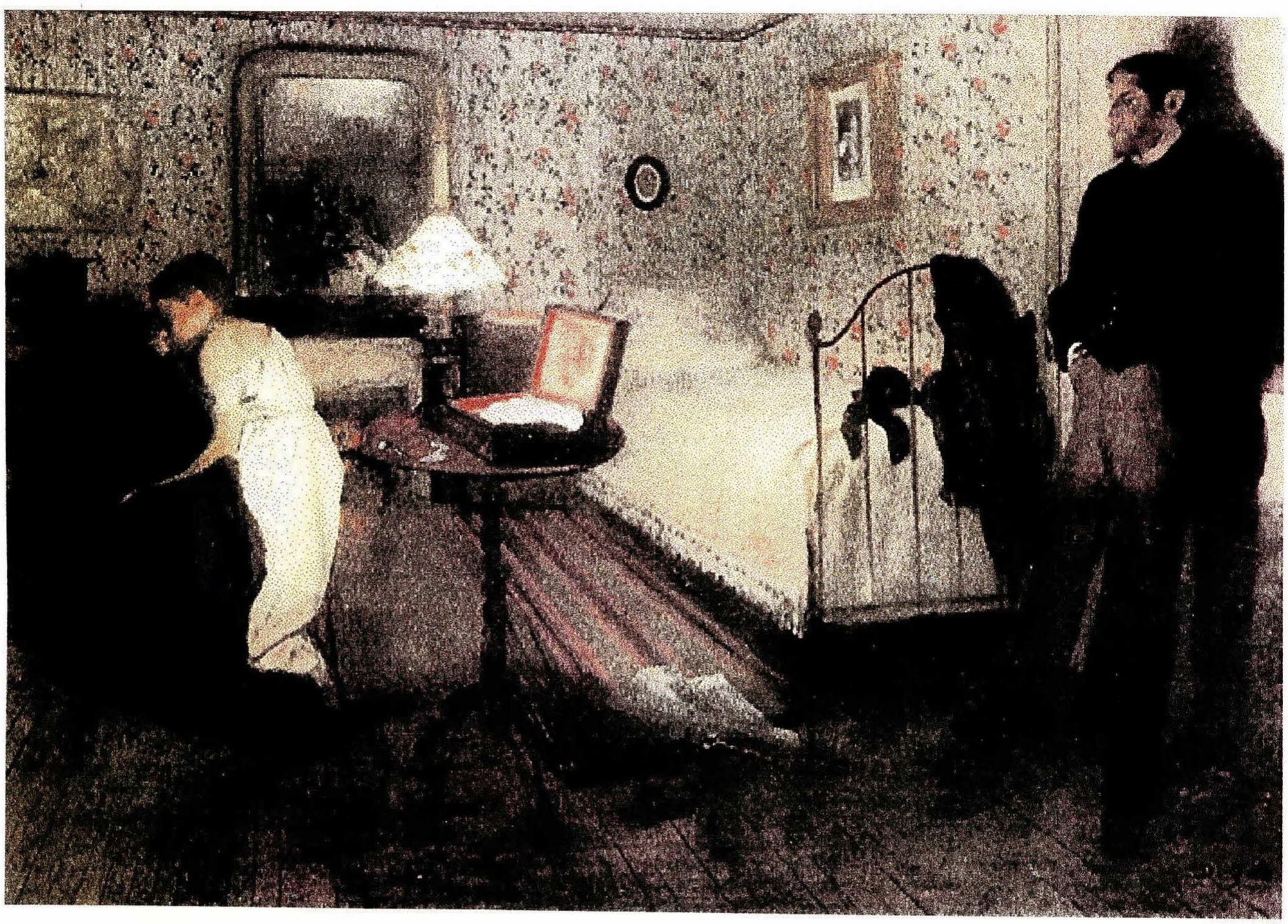


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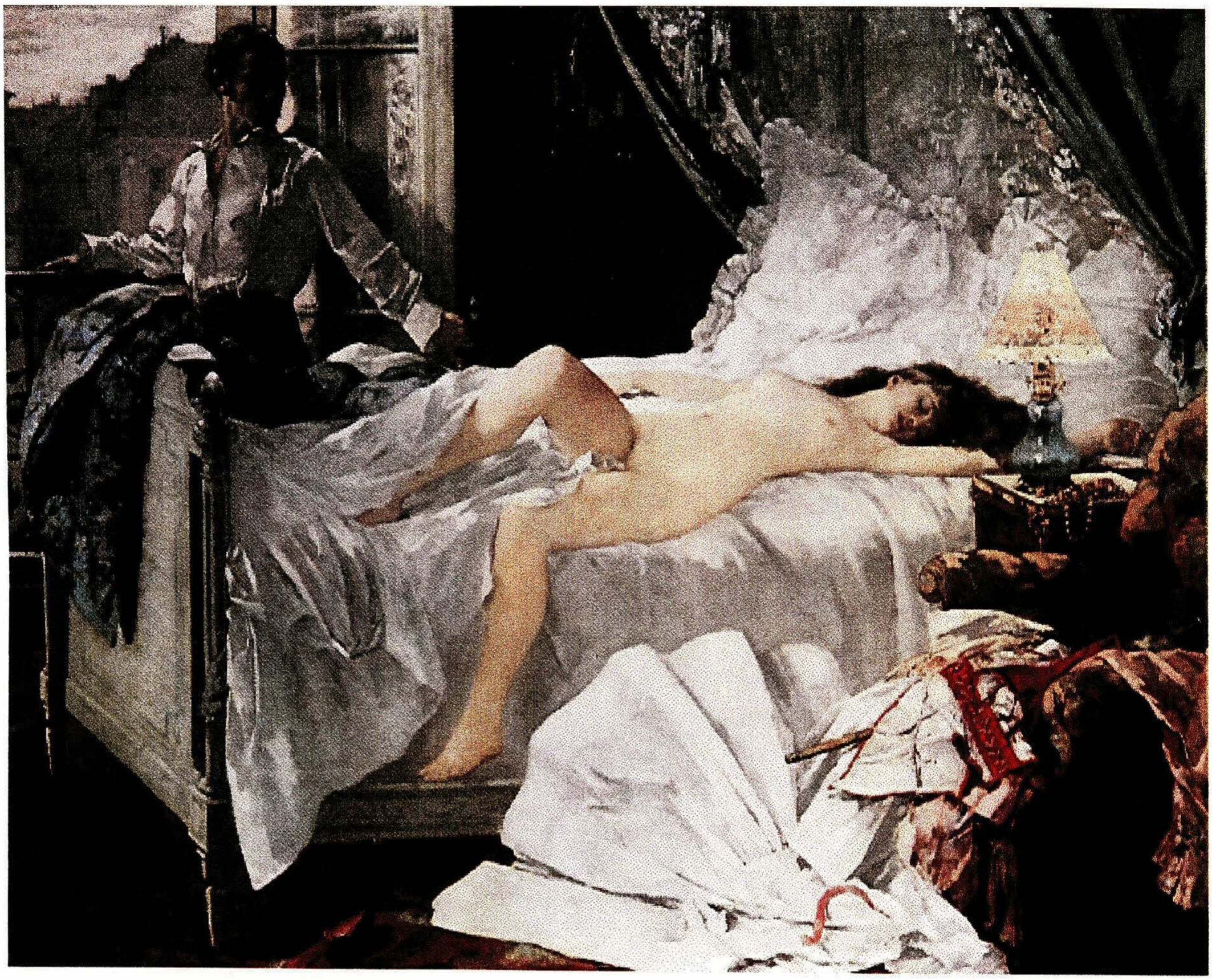


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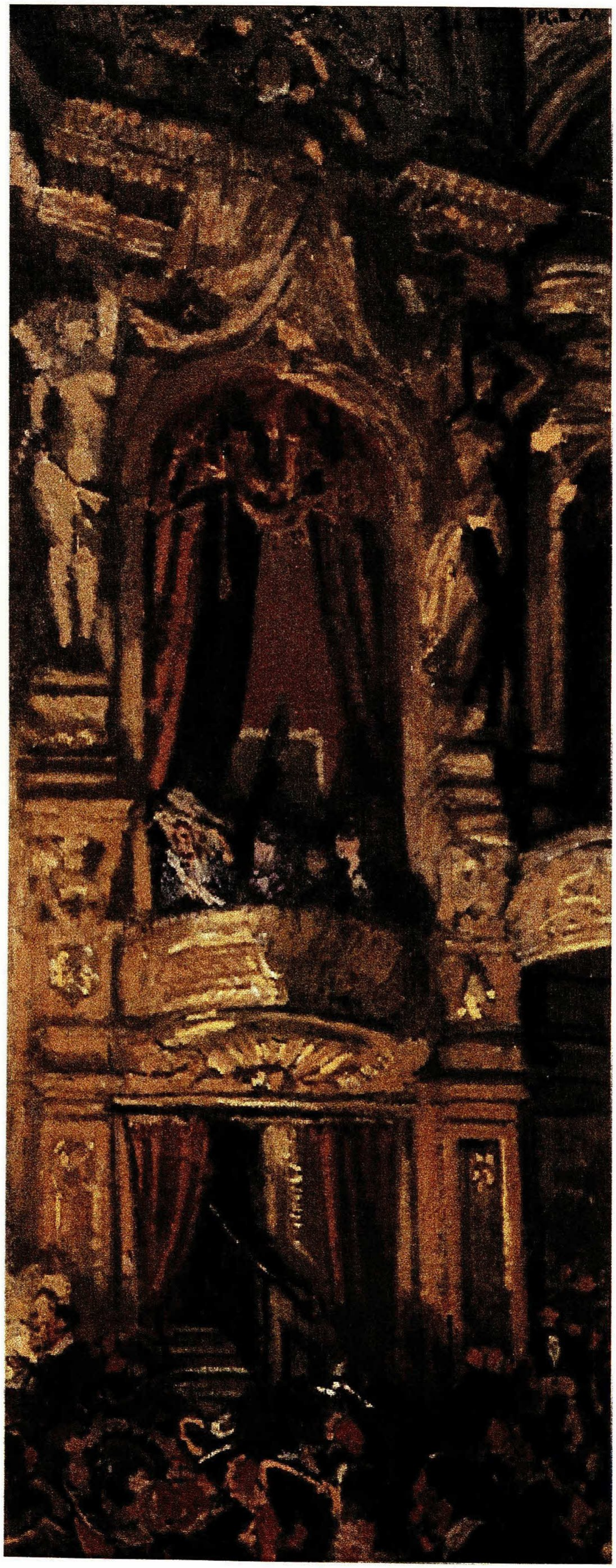


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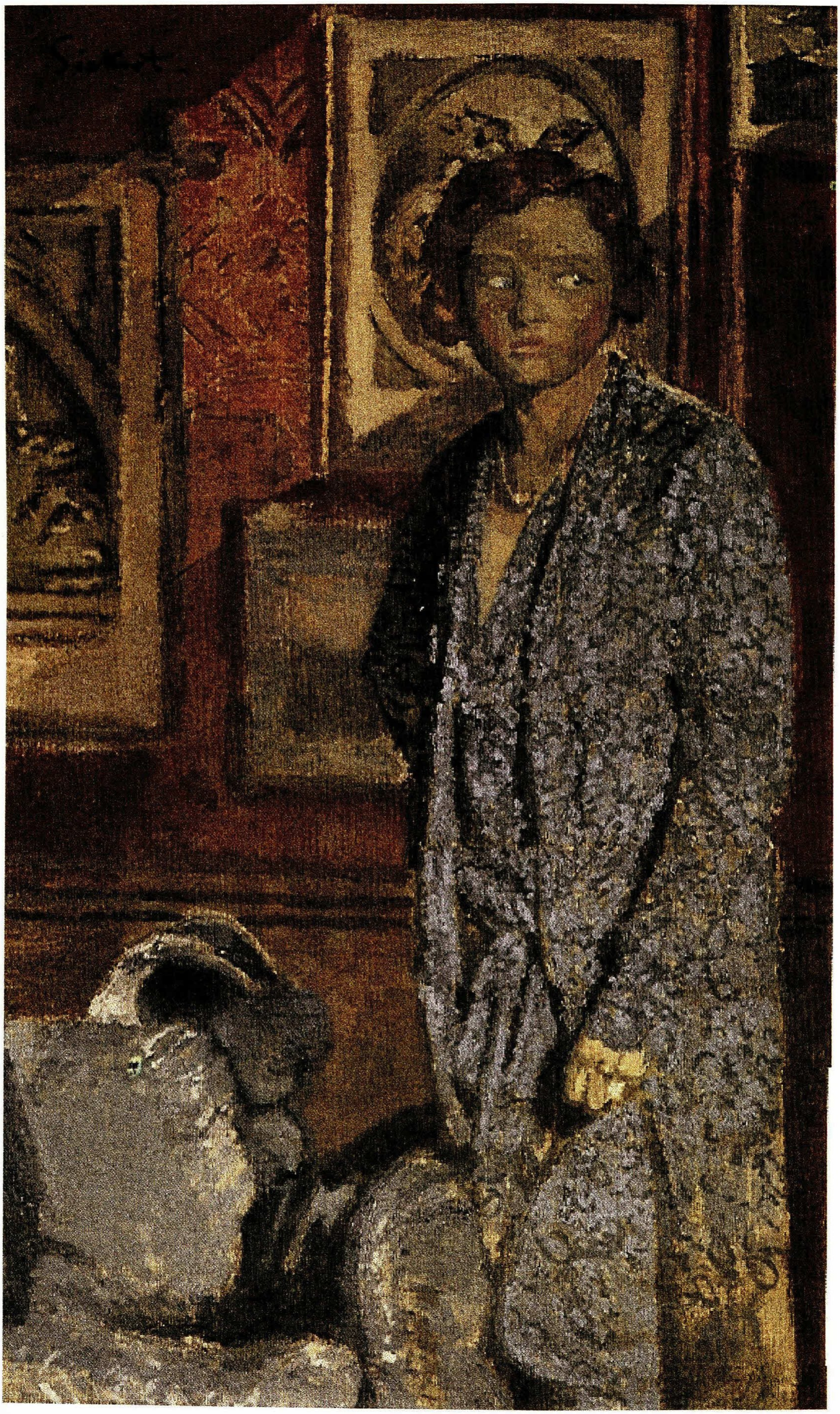


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