

An abstract painting featuring thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of orange, blue, and white. The composition is layered, with darker, more saturated colors on the left and right sides, and a lighter, more ethereal central area. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and emotional depth.

***GEORGE  
MOORE***

***MODERN  
PAINTING***

**George Moore**

# **Modern Painting**

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# WHISTLER.

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I have studied Mr. Whistler and thought about him this many a year. His character was for a long time incomprehensible to me; it contained elements apparently so antagonistic, so mutually destructive, that I had to confess my inability to bring him within any imaginable psychological laws, and classed him as one of the enigmas of life. But Nature is never illogical; she only seems so, because our sight is not sufficient to see into her intentions; and with study my psychological difficulties dwindled, and now the man stands before me exquisitely understood, a perfect piece of logic. All that seemed discordant and discrepant in his nature has now become harmonious and inevitable; the strangest and most erratic actions of his life now seem natural and consequential (I use the word in its grammatical sense) contradictions are reconciled, and looking at the man I see the pictures, and looking at the pictures I see the man.

But at the outset the difficulties were enormous. It was like a newly-discovered Greek text, without punctuation or capital letters. Here was a man capable of painting portraits, perhaps not quite so full of grip as the best work done by Velasquez and Hals, only just falling short of these masters at the point where they were strongest, but plainly exceeding them in graciousness of intention, and subtle happiness of design, who would lay down his palette and run to a newspaper office to polish the tail of an epigram which he was launching against an unfortunate critic who



had failed to distinguish between an etching and a pen-and-ink drawing! Here was a man who, though he had spent the afternoon painting like the greatest, would spend his evenings in frantic disputes over dinner-tables about the ultimate ownership of a mild joke, possibly good enough for *Punch*, something that any one might have said, and that most of us having said it would have forgotten! It will be conceded that such divagations are difficult to reconcile with the possession of artistic faculties of the highest order.

The "Ten o'clock" contained a good deal of brilliant writing, sparkling and audacious epigram, but amid all its glitter and "go" there are statements which, coming from Mr. Whistler, are as astonishing as a denial of the rotundity of the earth would be in a pamphlet bearing the name of Professor Huxley. Mr. Whistler is only serious in his art—a grave fault according to academicians, who are serious in everything except their "art". A very boyish utterance is the statement that such a thing as an artistic period has never been known.

One rubbed one's eyes; one said, Is this a joke, and, if so, where is the point of it? And then, as if not content with so much mystification, Mr. Whistler assured his ten o'clock audience that there was no such thing as nationality in art, and that you might as well speak of English mathematics as of English art. We do not stop to inquire if such answers contain one grain of truth; we know they do not—we stop to consider them because we know that the criticism of a creative artist never amounts to more than an ingenious defence of his own work—an ingenious exaltation of a

weakness (a weakness which perhaps none suspects but himself) into a conspicuous merit.

Mr. Whistler has shared his life equally between America, France, and England. He is the one solitary example of cosmopolitanism in art, for there is nothing in his pictures to show that they come from the north, the south, the east, or the west. They are compounds of all that is great in Eastern and Western culture. Conscious of this, and fearing that it might be used as an argument against his art, Mr. Whistler threw over the entire history, not only of art, but of the world; and declared boldly that art was, like science, not national, but essentially cosmopolitan; and then, becoming aware of the anomaly of his genius in his generation, Mr. Whistler undertook to explain away the anomaly by ignoring the fifth century B.C. in Athens, the fifteenth century in Italy, and the seventeenth in Holland, and humbly submitting that artists never appeared in numbers like swallows, but singly like aerolites. Now our task is not to disprove these statements, but to work out the relationship between the author of the "Butterfly Letters" and the painter of the portrait of "The Mother", "Lady Archibald Campbell", "Miss Alexander", and the other forty-one masterpieces that were on exhibition in the Goupil galleries.

There is, however, an intermediate step, which is to point out the intimate relationship between the letter-writer and the physical man. Although there is no internal evidence to show that the pictures were not painted by a Frenchman, an Italian, an Englishman, or a Westernised Japanese, it would be impossible to read any one of the butterfly-signed letters without feeling that the author was a man of nerves rather

than a man of muscle, and, while reading, we should involuntarily picture him short and thin rather than tall and stalwart. But what has physical condition got to do with painting? A great deal. The greatest painters, I mean the very greatest—Michael Angelo, Velasquez, and Rubens—were gifted by Nature with as full a measure of health as of genius. Their physical constitutions resembled more those of bulls than of men. Michael Angelo lay on his back for three years painting the Sistine Chapel. Rubens painted a life-size figure in a morning of pleasant work, and went out to ride in the afternoon. But Nature has dowered Mr. Whistler with only genius. His artistic perceptions are more exquisite than Velasquez's. He knows as much, possibly even a little more, and yet the result is never quite equal. Why? A question of health. *C'est un tempérament de chatte*. He cannot pass from masterpiece to masterpiece like Velasquez. The expenditure of nerve-force necessary to produce such a work as the portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell or Miss Alexander exhausts him, and he is obliged to wait till Nature recoups herself; and these necessary intervals he has employed in writing letters signed "Butterfly" to the papers, quarrelling with Oscar over a few mild jokes, explaining his artistic existence, at the expense of the entire artistic history of the world, collecting and classifying the stupidities of the daily and weekly press.

But the lesser side of a man of genius is instructive to study—indeed, it is necessary that we should study it if we would thoroughly understand his genius. "No man," it has been very falsely said, "is a hero to his *valet de chambre*." The very opposite is the truth. Man will bow the knee only to



his own image and likeness. The deeper the humanity, the deeper the adoration; and from this law not even divinity is excepted. All we adore is human, and through knowledge of the flesh that grovels we may catch sight of the soul ascending towards the divine stars.

And so the contemplation of Mr. Whistler, the author of the "Butterfly Letters", the defender of his little jokes against the plagiarising tongue, should stimulate rather than interrupt our prostrations. I said that Nature had dowered Mr. Whistler with every gift except that of physical strength. If Mr. Whistler had the bull-like health of Michael Angelo, Rubens, and Hals, the Letters would never have been written. They were the safety-valve by which his strained nerves found relief from the intolerable tension of the masterpiece. He has not the bodily strength to pass from masterpiece to masterpiece, as did the great ones of old time. In the completed picture slight traces of his agony remain. But painting is the most indiscreet of all the arts, and here and there an omission or a feeble indication reveal the painter to us in moments of exasperated impotence. To understand Mr. Whistler's art you must understand his body. I do not mean that Mr. Whistler has suffered from bad health—his health has always been excellent; all great artists have excellent health, but his constitution is more nervous than robust. He is even a strong man, but he is lacking in weight. Were he six inches taller, and his bulk proportionately increased, his art would be different. Instead of having painted a dozen portraits, every one—even the mother and Miss Alexander, which I personally take to be the two best—a little febrile in its extreme beauty, whilst some,

masterpieces though they be, are clearly touched with weakness, and marked with hysteria—Mr. Whistler would have painted a hundred portraits, as strong, as vigorous, as decisive, and as easily accomplished as any by Velasquez or Hals. But if Nature had willed him so, I do not think we should have had the Nocturnes, which are clearly the outcome of a highly-strung, bloodless nature whetted on the whetstone of its own weakness to an exasperated sense of volatile colour and evanescent light. It is hardly possible to doubt that this is so when we look on these canvases, where, in all the stages of her repose, the night dozes and dreams upon our river—a creole in Nocturne 34, upon whose trembling eyelids the lustral moon is shining; a quadron in Nocturne 17, who turns herself out of the light anhungered and set upon some feast of dark slumber. And for the sake of these gem-like pictures, whose blue serenities are comparable to the white perfections of Athenian marbles, we should have done well to yield a little strength in portraiture, if the distribution of Mr. Whistler's genius had been left in our hands. So Nature has done her work well, and we have no cause to regret the few pounds of flesh that she withheld. A few pounds more of flesh and muscle, and we should have had another Velasquez; but Nature shrinks from repetition, and at the last moment she said, "The world has had Velasquez, another would be superfluous: let there be Jimmy Whistler."

In the Nocturnes Mr. Whistler stands alone, without a rival. In portraits he is at his best when they are near to his Nocturnes in intention, when the theme lends itself to an imaginative and decorative treatment; for instance, as in

the mother or Miss Alexander. Mr. Whistler is at his worst when he is frankly realistic. I have seen pictures by Mr. Henry Moore that I like better than "The Blue Wave". Nor does Mr. Whistler seem to me to reach his highest level in any one of the three portraits—Lady Archibald Campbell, Miss Rose Corder, and "the lady in the fur jacket". I know that Mr. Walter Sickert considers the portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell to be Mr. Whistler's finest portrait. I submit, however, that the attitude is theatrical and not very explicit. It is a movement that has not been frankly observed, nor is it a movement that has been frankly imagined. It has none of the artless elegance of Nature; it is full of studio combinations; and yet it is not a frankly decorative arrangement, as the portrait of the mother or Miss Alexander. When Hals painted his Burgomasters, he was careful to place them in definite and comprehensible surroundings. He never left us in doubt either as to the time or the place; and the same obligations of time and place, which Hals never shirked, seem to me to rest on the painter, if he elects to paint his sitter in any attitude except one of conventional repose.

Lady Archibald Campbell is represented in violent movement, looking backwards over her shoulder as she walks up the picture; yet there is nothing to show that she is not standing on the low table on which the model poses, and the few necessary indications are left out because they would interfere with the general harmony of his picture; because, if the table on which she is standing were indicated, the movement of outstretched arm would be incomprehensible. The hand, too, is somewhat uncertain,

undetermined, and a gesture is meaningless that the hand does not determine and complete. I do not speak of the fingers of the right hand, which are non-existent; after a dozen attempts to paint the gloved hand, only an approximate result was obtained. Look at the ear, and say that the painter's nerves did not give way once or twice. And the likeness is vague and shadowy; she is only fairly representative of her class. We see fairly well that she is a lady *du grand monde*, who is, however, not without knowledge of *les environs du monde*. But she is hardly English—she might be a French woman or an American. She is a sort of hybrid. Miss Rose Corder and "the lady in the fur jacket" are equally cosmopolitan; so, too, is Miss Alexander. Only once has Mr. Whistler expressed race, and that was in his portrait of his mother. Then these three ladies—Miss Corder, Lady Archibald Campbell, and "the lady in the fur jacket"—wear the same complexion: a pale yellow complexion, burnt and dried. With this conventional tint he obtains unison and a totality of effect; but he obtains this result at the expense of truth. Hals and Velasquez obtained the same result, without, however, resorting to such meretricious methods.

The portrait of the mother is, as every one knows, in the Luxemburg; but the engraving reminds us of the honour which France has done, but which we failed to do, to the great painter of the nineteenth century; and after much hesitation and arguing with myself I feel sure that on the whole this picture is the painter's greatest work in portraiture. We forget relations, friends, perhaps even our parents; but that picture we never forget; it is for ever with

us, in sickness and in health; and in moments of extreme despair, when life seems hopeless, the strange magic of that picture springs into consciousness, and we wonder by what strange 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 grey wall, on the black silhouette sitting so tranquilly, on the large feet on a foot-stool, on the hands crossed, on the long black dress that fills the picture with such solemn harmony. Then mark the transition from grey to white, and how *le ton local* is carried through the entire picture, from the highest light to the deepest shadow. Note the tenderness of that white cap, the white lace cuffs, the certainty, the choice, and think of anything if you can, even in the best Japanese work, more beautiful, more delicate, subtle, illusive, certain in its handicraft; and if the lace cuffs are marvellous, the delicate hands of a beautiful old age lying in a small lace handkerchief are little short of miraculous. They are not drawn out in anatomical diagram, but appear and disappear, seen here on the black dress, lost there in the small white handkerchief. And when we study the faint, subtle outline of the mother's face, we seem to feel that there the painter has told the story of his soul more fully than elsewhere. That soul, strangely alive to all that is delicate and illusive in Nature, found perhaps its fullest expression in that grave old Puritan lady looking through the quiet refinement of her grey room, sitting in solemn profile in all the quiet habit of her long life.

Compared with later work, the execution is "tighter", if I may be permitted an expression which will be understood in

studios; we are very far indeed from the admirable looseness of handling which is the charm of the portrait of Miss Rose Corder. There every object is born unconsciously beneath the passing of the brush. If not less certain, the touch in the portrait of the mother is less prompt; but the painter's vision is more sincere and more intense. And to those who object to the artificiality of the arrangement, I reply that if the old lady is sitting in a room artificially arranged, Lady Archibald Campbell may be said to be walking through incomprehensible space. But what really decides me to place this portrait above the others is the fact that while painting his mother's portrait he was unquestionably absorbed in his model; and absorption in the model is perhaps the first quality in portrait-painting.

Still, for my own personal pleasure, to satisfy the innermost cravings of my own soul, I would choose to live with the portrait of Miss Alexander. Truly, this picture seems to me the most beautiful in the world. I know very well that it has not the profound beauty of the Infantes by Velasquez in the Louvre; but for pure magic of inspiration, is it not more delightful? Just as Shelley's "Sensitive Plant" thrills the innermost sense like no other poem in the language, the portrait of Miss Alexander enchants with the harmony of colour, with the melody of composition.

Strangely original, a rare and unique thing, is this picture, yet we know whence it came, and may easily appreciate the influences that brought it into being. Exquisite and happy combination of the art of an entire nation and the genius of one man-the soul of Japan incarnate in the body of the immortal Spaniard. It was Japan that counselled the strange

grace of the silhouette, and it was that country, too, that inspired in a dim, far-off way those subtly sweet and magical passages from grey to green, from green again to changing evanescent grey. But a higher intelligence massed and impelled those chords of green and grey than ever manifested itself in Japanese fan or screen; the means are simpler, the effect is greater, and by the side of this picture the best Japanese work seems only facile superficial improvisation. In the picture itself there is really little of Japan. The painter merely understood all that Japan might teach. He went to the very root, appropriating only the innermost essence of its art. We Westerns had thought it sufficient to copy Nature, but the Japanese knew it was better to observe Nature. The whole art of Japan is selection, and Japan taught Mr. Whistler, or impressed upon Mr. Whistler, the imperative necessity of selection. No Western artist of the present or of past time—no, not Velasquez himself—ever selected from the model so tenderly as Mr. Whistler; 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. Sir John Millais' art is the opposite; there we find no selection; the model is copied—and sometimes only with sufficient technical skill.

But this picture is throughout a selection from the model; nowhere has anything been copied brutally, yet the reality of the girl is not sacrificed.

The picture represents a girl of ten or eleven. She is dressed according to the fashion of twenty years ago—a starched muslin frock, a small overskirt pale brown, white



stockings, square-toed black shoes. She stands, her left foot advanced, holding in her left hand a grey felt hat adorned with a long plume reaching nearly to the ground. The wall behind her is grey with a black wainscot. On the left, far back in the picture, on a low stool, some grey-green drapery strikes the highest note of colour in the picture. On the right, in the foreground, some tall daisies come into the picture, and two butterflies flutter over the girl's blonde head. This picture seems to exist principally in the seeing! I mean that the execution is so strangely simple that the thought, "If I could only see the model like that, I think I could do it myself", comes spontaneously into the mind. And this spontaneous thought is excellent criticism, for three-parts of Mr. Whistler's art lies in the seeing; no one ever saw Nature so artistically. Notice on the left the sharp line of the white frock cutting against the black wainscoting. Were that line taken away, how much would the picture lose! Look at the leg that is advanced, and tell me if you can detect the modelling. There is modelling, I know, but there are no vulgar roundnesses. Apparently, only a flat tint; but there is on the bone a light, hardly discernible; and this light is sufficient. And the leg that is turned away, the thick, chubby ankle of the child, how admirable in drawing; and that touch of darker colour, how it tells the exact form of the bone! To indicate is the final accomplishment of the painter's art, and I know no indication like that ankle bone. And now passing from the feet to the face, notice, I beg of you to notice—it is one of the points in the picture—that jaw bone. The face is seen in three-quarter, and to focus the interest in the face the painter has slightly insisted on the line of the jaw bone,

which, taken in conjunction with the line of the hair, brings into prominence the oval of the face. In Nature that charming oval only appeared at moments. The painter seized one of those moments, and called it into our consciousness as a musician with certain finger will choose to give prominence to a certain note in a chord.

There must have been a day in Mr. Whistler's life when the artists of Japan convinced him once and for ever of the primary importance of selection. In Velasquez, too, there is selection, and very often it is in the same direction as Mr. Whistler's, but the selection is never, I think, so much insisted upon; and sometimes in Velasquez there is, as in the portrait of the Admiral in the National Gallery, hardly any selection—I mean, of course, conscious selection. Velasquez sometimes brutally accepted Nature for what she was worth; this Mr. Whistler never does. But it was Velasquez that gave consistency and strength to what in Mr. Whistler might have run into an art of trivial but exquisite decoration. Velasquez, too, had a voice in the composition of the palette generally, so sober, so grave. The palette of Velasquez is the opposite of the palette of Rubens; the fantasy of Rubens' palette created the art of Watteau, Turner, Gainsborough; it obtained throughout the eighteenth century in England and in France. Chardin was the one exception. Alone amid the eighteenth century painters he chose the palette of Velasquez in preference to that of Rubens, and in the nineteenth century Whistler too has chosen it. It was Velasquez who taught Mr. Whistler that flowing, limpid execution. In the painting of that blonde hair there is something more than a souvenir of the blonde hair

of the Infante in the *salle carrée* in the Louvre. There is also something of Velasquez in the black notes of the shoes. Those blacks—are they not perfectly observed? How light and dry the colour is! How heavy and shiny it would have become in other hands! Notice, too, that in the frock nowhere is there a single touch of pure white, and yet it is all white—a rich, luminous white that makes every other white in the gallery seem either chalky or dirty. What an enchantment and a delight the handling is! How flowing, how supple, infinitely and beautifully sure, the music of perfect accomplishment! In the portrait of the mother the execution seems slower, hardly so spontaneous. For this, no doubt, the subject is accountable. But this little girl is the very finest flower, and the culminating point of Mr. Whistler's art. The eye travels over the canvas seeking a fault. In vain; nothing has been omitted that might have been included, nothing has been included that might have been omitted. There is much in Velasquez that is stronger, but nothing in this world ever seemed to me so perfect as this picture.

The portrait of Carlyle has been painted about an arabesque similar, I might almost say identical, to that of the portrait of the mother. But as is usually the case, the attempt to repeat a success has resulted a failure. Mr. Whistler has sought to vary the arabesque in the direction of greater naturalness. He has broken the severity of the line, which the lace handkerchief and the hands scarcely stayed in the first picture, by placing the philosopher's hat upon his knees, he has attenuated the symmetry of the picture-frames on the walls, and has omitted the black curtain

which drops through the earlier picture. And all these alterations seemed to me like so many leaks through which the eternal something of the first design has run out. A pattern like that of the egg and dart cannot be disturbed, and Columbus himself cannot rediscover America. And, turning from the arabesque to the painting, we notice at once that the balance of colour, held with such exquisite grace by the curtain on one side and the dress on the other, is absent in the later work; and if we examine the colours separately we cannot fail to apprehend the fact that the blacks in the later are not nearly so beautiful as those in the earlier picture. The blacks of the philosopher's coat and rug are neither as rich, not as rare, nor as deep as the blacks of the mother's gown. Never have the vital differences and the beauty of this colour been brought out as in that gown and that curtain, never even in Hals, who excels all other painters in this use of black. Mr. Whistler's failure with the first colour, when we compare the two pictures, is exceeded by his failure with the second colour. We miss the beauty of those extraordinary and exquisite high notes—the cap and cuffs; and the place of the rich, palpitating greys, so tremulous in the background of the earlier picture, is taken by an insignificant grey that hardly seems necessary or helpful to the coat and rug, and is only just raised out of the commonplace by the dim yellow of two picture-frames. It must be admitted, however, that the yellow is perfectly successful; it may be almost said to be what is most attractive in the picture. The greys in chin, beard, and hair must, however, be admitted to be beautiful, although they

are not so full of charm as the greys in the portrait of Miss Alexander.

But if Mr. Whistler had only failed in these matters, he might have still produced a masterpiece. But there is a graver criticism to be urged against the picture. A portrait is an exact reflection of the painter's state of soul at the moment of sitting down to paint. We read in the picture what he really desired; for what he really desired is in the picture, and his hesitations tell us what he only desired feebly. Every passing distraction, every weariness, every loss of interest in the model, all is written upon the canvas. Above all, he tells us most plainly what he thought about his model—whether he was moved by love or contempt; whether his moods were critical or reverential. And what the canvas under consideration tells most plainly is that Mr. Whistler never forgot his own personality in that of the ancient philosopher. He came into the room as chirpy and anecdotal as usual, in no way discountenanced or put about by the presence of his venerable and illustrious sitter. He had heard that the Chelsea sage wrote histories which were no doubt very learned, but he felt no particular interest in the matter. Of reverence, respect, or intimate knowledge of Carlyle there is no trace on the canvas; and looked at from this side the picture may be said to be the most American of all Mr. Whistler's works. "I am quite as big a man as you", to put it bluntly, was Mr. Whistler's attitude of mind while painting Carlyle. I do not contest the truth of the opinion. I merely submit that that is not the frame of mind in which great portraiture is done.

The drawing is large, ample, and vigorous, beautifully understood, but not very profound or intimate: the picture seems to have been accomplished easily, and in excellent health and spirits. The painting is in Mr. Whistler's later and most characteristic manner. For many years—for certainly twenty years—his manner has hardly varied at all. He uses his colour very thin, so thinly that it often hardly amounts to more than a glaze, and painting is laid over painting, like skin upon skin. Regarded merely as brushwork, the face of the sage could hardly be surpassed; the modelling is that beautiful flat modelling, of which none except Mr. Whistler possesses the secrets. What the painter saw he rendered with incomparable skill. The vision of the rugged pensiveness of the old philosophers is as beautiful and as shallow as a page of De Quincey. We are carried away in a flow of exquisite eloquence, but the painter has not told us one significant fact about his model, his nationality, his temperament, his rank, his manner of life. We learn in a general way that he was a thinker; but it would have been impossible to draw the head at all and conceal so salient a characteristic. Mr. Whistler's portrait reveals certain general observations of life; but has he given one single touch intimately characteristic of his model?

But if the portrait of Carlyle, when looked at from a certain side, must be admitted to be not wholly satisfactory, what shall be said of the portrait of Lady Meux? The dress is a luminous and harmonious piece of colouring, the material has its weight and its texture and its character of fold; but of the face it is difficult to say more than that it keeps its place in the picture. Very often the faces in Mr. Whistler's portraits

are the least interesting part of the picture; his sitter's face does not seem to interest him more than the cuffs, the carpet, the butterfly, which hovers about the screen. After this admission, it will seem to many that it is waste of time to consider further Mr. Whistler's claim to portraiture. This is not so. Mr. Whistler is a great portrait painter, though he cannot take measurements or follow an outline like Holbein.

Like most great painters, he has known how to introduce harmonious variation into his style by taking from others just as much of their sense of beauty as his own nature might successfully assimilate. I have spoken of his assimilation and combination of the art of Velasquez, and the entire art of Japan, but a still more striking instance of the power of assimilation, which, strange as it may seem, only the most original natures possess, is to hand in the early but extremely beautiful picture, *La femme en blanc*. In the Chelsea period of his life Mr. Whistler saw a great deal of that singular man, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Intensely Italian, though he had never seen Italy; and though writing no language but ours, still writing it with a strange hybrid grace, bringing into it the rich and voluptuous colour and fragrance of the south, expressing in picture and poem nothing but an uneasy haunting sense of Italy—opulence of women, not of the south, nor yet of the north, Italian celebration, mystic altar linen, and pomp of gold vestment and legendary pane. Of such hauntings Rossetti's life and art were made.

His hold on poetic form was surer than his hold on pictorial form, wherein his art is hardly more than poetic reminiscence of Italian missal and window pane. Yet even as



a painter his attractiveness cannot be denied, nor yet the influence he has exercised on English art. Though he took nothing from his contemporaries, all took from him, poets and painters alike. Not even Mr. Whistler could refrain, and in *La femme en blanc* he took from Rossetti his manner of feeling and seeing. The type of woman is the same—beauty of dreaming eyes and abundant hair. And in this picture we find a poetic interest, a moral sense, if I may so phrase it, nowhere else to be detected, though you search Mr. Whistler's work from end to end. The woman stands idly dreaming by her mirror. She is what is her image in the glass, an appearance that has come, and that will go leaving no more trace than her reflection on the glass when she herself has moved away. She sees in her dream the world like passing shadows thrown on an illuminated cloth. She thinks of her soft, white, and opulent beauty which fills her white dress; her chin is lifted, and above her face shines the golden tumult of her hair.

The picture is one of the most perfect that Mr. Whistler has painted; it is as perfect as the mother or Miss Alexander, and though it has not the beautiful, flowing, supple execution of the "symphony in white", I prefer it for sake of its sheer perfection. It is more perfect than the symphony in white, though there is nothing in it quite so extraordinary as the loving gaiety of the young girl's face. The execution of that face is as flowing, as spontaneous, and as bright as the most beautiful day of May. The white drapery clings like haze about the edge of the woods, and the flesh tints are pearly and evanescent as dew, and soft as the colour of a flowering mead. But the kneeling figure is

not so perfect, and that is why I reluctantly give my preference to the woman by the mirror. Turning again to this picture, I would fain call attention to the azalias, which, in irresponsible decorative fashion, come into the right-hand corner. The delicate flowers show bright and clear on the black-leaded fire-grate; and it is in the painting of such detail that Mr. Whistler exceeds all painters. For purity of colour and the beauty of pattern, these flowers are surely as beautiful as anything that man's hand has ever accomplished.

Mr. Whistler has never tried to be original. He has never attempted to reproduce on canvas the discordant and discrepant extravagancies of Nature as M. Besnard and Mr. John Sargent have done. His style has always been marked by such extreme reserve that the critical must have sometimes inclined to reproach him with want of daring, and ask themselves where was the innovator in this calculated reduction of tones, in these formal harmonies, in this constant synthesis, sought with far more disregard for superfluous detail than Hals, for instance, had ever dared to show. The still more critical, while admitting the beauty and the grace of this art, must have often asked themselves what, after all, has this painter invented, what new subject-matter has he introduced into art?

It was with the night that Mr. Whistler set his seal and sign-manual upon art; above all others he is surely the interpreter of the night. Until he came the night of the painter was as ugly and insignificant as any pitch barrel; it was he who first transferred to canvas the blue transparent darkness which folds the world from sunset to sunrise. The

purple hollow, and all the illusive distances of the gas-lit river, are Mr. Whistler's own. It was not the uninhabited night of lonely plain and desolate tarn that he chose to interpret, but the difficult populous city night—the night of tall bridges and vast water rained through with lights red and grey, the shores lined with the lamps of the watching city. Mr. Whistler's night is the vast blue and golden caravanry, where the jaded and the hungry and the heavy-hearted lay down their burdens, and the contemplative freed from the deceptive reality of the day understand humbly and pathetically the casualness of our habitation, and the limitless reality of a plan, the intention of which we shall never know. Mr. Whistler's nights are the blue transparent darknesses which are half of the world's life. Sometimes he foregoes even the aid of earthly light, and his picture is but luminous blue shadow, delicately graduated, as in the nocturne in M. Duret's collection—purple above and below, a shadow in the middle of the picture—a little less and there would be nothing.

There is the celebrated nocturne in the shape of a T—one pier of the bridge and part of the arch, the mystery of the barge, and the figure guiding the barge in the current, the strange luminosity of the fleeting river! lines of lights, vague purple and illusive distance, and all is so obviously beautiful that one pauses to consider how there could have been stupidity enough to deny it. Of less dramatic significance, but of equal esthetic value, is the nocturne known as "the Cremorne lights". Here the night is strangely pale; one of those summer nights when a slight veil of darkness is drawn for an hour or more across the heavens. Another of quite

extraordinary beauty, even in a series of extraordinarily beautiful things, is "Night on the Sea". The waves curl white in the darkness, and figures are seen as in dreams; lights burn low, ships rock in the offing, and beyond them, lost in the night, a vague sense of illimitable sea.

Out of the night Mr. Whistler has gathered beauty as august as Phidias took from Greek youths. Nocturne II is the picture which Professor Ruskin declared to be equivalent to flinging a pot of paint in the face of the public. But that black night, filling the garden even to the sky's obliteration, is not black paint but darkness. The whirl of the St. Catherine wheel in the midst of this darkness amounts to a miracle, and the exquisite drawing of the shower of falling fire would arouse envy in Rembrandt, and prompt imitation. The line of the watching crowd is only just indicated, and yet the garden is crowded. There is another nocturne in which rockets are rising and falling, and the drawing of these two showers of fire is so perfect, that when you turn quickly towards the picture, the sparks really do ascend and descend.

More than any other painter, Mr. Whistler's influence has made itself felt on English art. More than any other man, Mr. Whistler has helped to purge art of the vice of subject and belief that the mission of the artist is to copy nature. Mr. Whistler's method is more learned, more co-ordinate than that of any other painter of our time; all is preconceived from the first touch to the last, nor has there ever been much change in the method, the painting has grown looser, but the method was always the same; to have seen him paint at once is to have seen him paint at every moment of

his life. Never did a man seem more admirably destined to found a school which should worthily carry on the tradition inherited from the old masters and represented only by him. All the younger generation has accepted him as master, and that my generation has not profited more than it has, leads me to think, however elegant, refined, emotional, educated it may be, and anxious to achieve, that it is lacking in creative force, that it is, in a word, slightly too slight.

## **CHAVANNES, MILLET, AND MANET.**

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Of the great painters born before 1840 only two now are living, Puvis de Chavannes and Degas. It is true to say of Chavannes that he is the only man alive to whom a beautiful building might be given for decoration without fear that its beauty would be disgraced. He is the one man alive who can cover twenty feet of wall or vaulted roof with decoration that will neither deform the grandeur nor jar the greyness of the masonry. Mural decoration in his eyes is not merely a picture let into a wall, nor is it necessarily mural decoration even if it be painted on the wall itself: it is mural decoration if it form part of the wall, if it be, if I may so express myself, a variant of the stonework. No other painter ever kept this end so strictly before his eyes. For this end Chavannes reduced his palette almost to a monochrome, for