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John Ruskin

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NOTES, ETC.

35. AZALEAS. (*Miss A. F. Mutrie*.¹)

There are two other works by this artist in the rooms, Nos. 304 ["Primula and Rhododendron"] and 306 ["Orchids"]. It would be well to examine them at once in succession, lest they should afterwards be passed carelessly when the mind has been interested by pictures of higher aim; for all these flower paintings are remarkable for very lovely, pure, and yet unobtrusive colour—perfectly tender, and yet luscious—(note the purple rose leaves especially), and a richness of petal texture that seems absolutely scented. The arrangement is always graceful—the backgrounds sometimes too faint. I wish this very accomplished artist would paint some banks of flowers in wild country, just as they grow, as she appears slightly in danger of falling into too artificial methods of grouping.

68. EL PASEO, the property of Her Majesty the Queen.
(*J. Phillip*.²)

¹ [Miss Annie Feray Mutrie (1826–1893) studied at the Manchester School of Design, then under the direction of George Wallis. She first exhibited at the Academy in 1851. She was younger sister of Miss M. D. Mutrie (see p. 54).]

² [John Phillip (1817–1867) went to Spain for the sake of his health in 1851, and thenceforward made a speciality of Spanish subjects. He was elected A.R.A. in 1857 and R.A. in 1859. His work had for some years attracted the favour of the Court, and he painted several ceremonial pictures by command. This picture of "The Promenade" now hangs in the King's private rooms at Windsor Castle. A characteristic example of Phillip's Spanish subjects may be seen in the Tate Gallery, No. 1534, "The Promenade."]

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The juxtaposition of these two pictures looks very like deliberate malice; but it may read an excellent lesson to the two artists. Mr. Phillip's fault is excess of decision and force; Mr. Boxall's, excess of delicacy and tenderness. Mr. Phillip's work, by the contrast, has become vulgar, and Mr. Boxall's evanescent.

Looked at separately, there is much merit in both paintings; but the truth, so painfully brought out, is still a truth with respect to both. Mr. Phillip has much to subdue, and much to refine, before he will be able to represent not merely the piquancy, but the wayward, half melancholy mystery of Spanish beauty; and Mr. Boxall has much to complete, much to *define*, before he can hope that his graceful idea of the English lady will be in anywise justly expressed. The same may be said of all his works in this exhibition. Refined in expression, though in some cases looking too stiffly straightforward, the faces he paints are still little more than shadows—the reflection of the truth in a cloudy mirror. The dresses are even less than this; in fact nothing more than a filling of the canvas with vague sweeps of the brush, issuing, when there is any momentary distinctness, in pure fallacy; as in the portrait before us, where the shadow of the chain on the neck, which, to accord with the faintness of the rest of the drawing, should have been so tender as hardly to be perceived, is nearly as black as the chain itself—and this equally on the flesh tint and on the white dress!

Mr. Boxall will never satisfy himself, nor do his real talents justice, until he is content to paint, unaffectedly, as far as he is able, things as they are. It is not time nor labour that is wanting: there are as many touches on this

¹ [Sir William Boxall (1800–1879) was elected A.R.A. in 1852 and R.A. in 1864. He was Director of the National Gallery from 1865 to 1874, and was knighted in 1871. In *Præterita* (ii. ch. vii. § 143), Ruskin describes conversations at Venice in 1845 with Boxall, “a much-regarded friend.”]

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ghostly gown as there are on one of Velasquez's portraits, head and all, which looks living enough to stalk the next moment into the middle of the room.

77. COLIN.¹ (*J. C. Hook, A.*)

There is a sweet feeling in this choice of landscape subject, as in most of the other works of this painter. The execution is flimsy and imperfect, and must be much bettered before his pictures can rank as works of any importance. He has, however, a very interesting figure-subject in the middle room, of which more in its place.²

78. THE WRESTLING IN "AS YOU LIKE IT." (*D. Maclise, R.A.*³)

Very bad pictures may be divided into two principal classes—those which are weakly or passively bad, and which are to be pitied and passed by; and those which are energetically or actively bad, and which demand severe reprobation, as wilful transgressions of the laws of all good art. The picture before us is of the last class. Mr. Maclise

¹ [A figure in a landscape, called in the catalogue "Colin thou kenst, the southerne shepheard's boye" (from Spenser's "Shepherds' Calender"). Of Mr. Hook's work in later years Ruskin wrote with increasing appreciation (see pp. 102, 228). In *Modern Painters*, he said that "the designs of J. C. Hook are, perhaps, the only works of the kind in existence which deserve to be mentioned in connection with the pastorals of Wordsworth and Tennyson" (vol. v. pt. ix. ch. vi. § 23). In the Academy of 1871 he "found nothing deserving of notice otherwise [than in condemnation], except Mr. Hook's always pleasant sketches from fisher-life, and Mr. Pettie's graceful and powerful, though too slightly painted, study from Henry IV." (*Aratra Pentelici*, preface). See also *Art of England*, § 209. Mr. Hook, born in 1819, was elected A.R.A. in 1851, R.A. in 1860. He is represented in the Tate Gallery by four pictures, Nos. 1512-1514 and 1598.]

² [See p. 25.]

³ [Daniel Maclise (1806-1870) was the popular artist of his time; his vogue may be gathered alike from the acres of canvas which he was commissioned to paint, and from the appreciation of contemporaries (see, e.g., Mr. Frith's *Autobiography*, vol. i. ch. xi.). He was elected A.R.A. in 1834 and R.A. in 1840; in 1865 he declined the Presidency. Ruskin was not among his admirers; "nothing," he wrote in *Modern Painters*, "can more completely demonstrate the total ignorance of the public of all that is great or valuable in Shakespeare than their universal admiration of Maclise's 'Hamlet'" (Vol. III. p. 82 n.; see also pp. 51 n., 619 n.). Maclise is represented in the Tate Gallery by Nos. 422 and 423; in the National Portrait Gallery by a portrait of Dickens; and by three pictures in the Victoria and Albert (South Kensington) Museum. For a notice of his work in the Houses of Parliament, see below, pp. 473, 488.]

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ACADEMY NOTES, 1855

has keen sight, a steady hand, good anatomical knowledge of the human form, and good experience of the ways of the world. If he draws ill, or imagines ungracefully, it is because he is resolved to do so. He has seen enough of society to know how a Duke generally sits—how a young lady generally looks at a strange youth who interests her; and it is by vulgar choice, not vulgar ignorance, that he makes the enthroned Duke straddle like a village actor, and the young lady express her interest by a cool, unrestrained, and steady stare. It is not worth while to analyze the picture thoroughly, but let us glance at the two opponent figures—Charles and Orlando. The spectator can certainly see nothing in this “Charles” but a grim, sinister, sinewy monster, wholly devoid of all gentleness or humanity. Was Shakespeare’s Charles such an one? So far from it, that into his mouth is put the first description of the love of Rosalind and Celia—“The Duke’s daughter, her cousin, so loves her, being ever from their cradles bred together, that she would have followed her exile, or have died to stay behind her—never two ladies loved as they do.” So far from it, that he comes to Oliver especially to warn him against allowing his brother to wrestle with him. “Your brother is but young and tender; for your love, I would be loath to foil him.” Then, on Oliver’s execrable slander of Orlando, poor honest Charles is “heartily glad I came hither; if he come to-morrow, I’ll give him his payment”; this being not in cruelty, but in honest indignation at Orlando’s ascribed villainy; nevertheless, when the trial comes, although flushed with victory, and haughty in his supposed strength, there is no bitterness in his question—“Where is this young gallant?” Poor Charles is as much slandered here by the painter as Orlando was by his brother. Well, but what of Orlando himself? He folds his hands, and turns up his eyes like a lover in his last appeal to his lady’s mercy. What was the actual fact? Orlando had been but that instant called before the princesses; he had never seen them before in his life. He is a man of firm,

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calm, and gloomy character—the sadness having been induced by injustice; he has no hope, no thought of Rosalind or her love, at this moment; he has challenged the wrestler in quiet resolve to try with him the strength of his youth—little caring what comes of it. He answers the princesses with deep and grateful courtesy, but with a despairing carelessness of his fate—“If I be foiled, there is but one shamed that was never gracious; if killed, but one dead that is willing to be so. I shall do my friends no wrong, for I have none to lament me; the world no injury, for in it I have nothing.” Imagine the calmness and steady melancholy of the man who would speak thus, and then compare the sentimental grimace (as of a fashionable tenor in a favourite aria) of the Orlando in the picture.

Next to pass from imagination of character to realization of detail. Mr. Maclise is supposed to draw well and realize minute features accurately. Now, the fact is, that this work has every fault usually attributed to the Pre-Raphaelites, without one of their excellences. The details are all so sharp and hard that the patterns on the dresses force the eye away from the faces, and the leaves on the boughs call to us to count them. But not only are they all drawn distinctly, they are all drawn *wrong*.

Take a single instance in a simple thing. On the part of the hem of the Duke's robe which crosses his right leg are seven circular golden ornaments, and two halves, Mr. Maclise being evidently unable to draw them as *turning* away *round* the side of the dress. Now observe, wherever there is a depression or fold in the dress, those circles ought to contract into narrow upright ovals. There *is* such a depression at the first next the half one on the left, and that circle ought to have become narrowed. Instead of which it actually widens itself! The second is right. Then the third, reaching the turn to the shade, and all those beyond it, ought to have been in narrowed perspective—but they all remain full circles! And so throughout the ornament. Imagine the errors which a draughtsman who

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could make such a childish mistake as this must commit in matters that really need refined drawing, turns of leaves, and so on!

But to pass from drawing to light and shade. Observe, the light falls from the left, on all the figures but that of the two on the extreme left. These two, for the sake of effect, are in "accidental shadow."¹ Good; but why then has Oliver, in the brown, a sharp light on the left side of his nose! and on his brown mantle? Reflected lights, says the apologist. From what? Not from the red Charles, who is five paces at least in advance of Oliver; and if from the golden dress of the courtier, how comes it that the nearer and brighter golden dress of the Duke casts *no reflected light* whatever on the yellow furs and red hose of the wrestler, infinitely more susceptible of such a reflex than the dress of Oliver?

It would be perfectly easy to analyze the whole picture in this manner; but I pass to a pleasanter subject of examination.

90. AN ARMENIAN LADY: CAIRO. (*J. F. Lewis.*²)

It is very instructive to pass immediately from Maclise's work to this. Both propose the complete rendering of details: but with Maclise all is inherently wrong; here everything is exquisitely, ineffably right. I say *ineffably*—for no words are strong enough to express the admirable skill and tenderness of pencilling and perception shown in this picture. It is one of the first that I have seen by this master in oil, and I am rejoiced to find it quite equal in precision and purity to his best work in water-colour, while it is in a safer medium. The delicacy of the drawing of the palm in the distance, of the undulating perspective of

¹ [The technical term for effects caused otherwise than by ordinary daylight: see Fairholt's *Dictionary of Terms in Art.*]

² [John Frederick Lewis (1805–1876) was elected A.R.A. in 1859 and R.A. in 1865. Two characteristic pictures by him are in the Tate Gallery, Nos. 1405 and 1638; and two drawings are reproduced in Vol. XII, pp. 362, 364. For other references to him see those passages, and the note at Vol. III, p. 120. See also below, pp. 52, 73, 94, 130, 159, 218.]

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the zigzags on the dress, and of the deep and fanciful local colouring of the vase, are all equally admirable. The face—infinately laboured—fails slightly. The flesh tint is too blue—a fault into which the master has lately fallen from trying to reach impossible delicacy.

It is only to be regretted that this costly labour should be spent on a subject devoid of interest.

94. THE RIVER'S BANK. (*T. Creswick, R.A.*¹)

This, like most other of the landscapes hung on the line, is one of those works so characteristic of the English school, and so little creditable to them, in which everything is carelessly or ill painted—because it is in a landscape. Nothing is really *done*. The cows have imperfect horns and hides; the girl has an imperfect face and imperfect hands; the trees have imperfect leaves; the sky imperfect clouds; the water imperfect waves. The colour, of a heavy yellow with dim green, is worse than imperfect; for colour must either be right—that is, infinitely beautiful; or wrong—that is, *less* than beautiful. All tame and dead colour is *false* colour.

120. BEATRICE. (*C. L. Eastlake, P.R.A.*²)

An imitation of the Venetians, on the supposition that the essence of Venetian painting consisted in method:

¹ [Thomas Creswick (1811–1869) was elected A.R.A. in 1842 and R.A. in 1851. At a period earlier than the present criticism, Ruskin instanced Creswick as a typical “modern painter” not of the first class, in the faithfulness of his study from nature, in contrast to the conventional untruthfulness in old masters such as Poussin. Creswick’s is “the work of a man who has sought earnestly for truth: and who, with one thought or memory of nature in his heart, could look at the two landscapes, and receive Poussin’s with ordinary patience? . . . Creswick has sweet feeling, and tries for the real green too, but, from want of science in his shadows, ends in green paint instead of green light” (*Modern Painters*, vol. i., Vol. III. pp. 591–592, 604). Pictures by Creswick may be seen at the Tate Gallery and the Victoria and Albert Museum.]

² [Sir Charles Lock Eastlake (1793–1865) was elected A.R.A. in 1827, R.A. in 1830, and P.R.A. in 1850. He was Keeper of the National Gallery from 1843 to 1847, and Director from 1855 till his death. Ruskin reviewed his “Materials for a History of Oil Painting” (1848) in the *Quarterly* (see Vol. XII. pp. 251–302, and see also Vol. III. p. 670. Pictures by Eastlake may be seen at the Tate Gallery and the Victoria and Albert (South Kensington) Museum.)

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issuing, as trusts in Method instead of Fact always must issue—in mere negation. Sir Charles Eastlake has power of rendering expression, if he would watch it in human beings—and power of drawing form, if he would look at the form to be drawn. But when, because Giorgione and Titian draw broadly, and sometimes make their colours look broken, he supposes that all he has to do is to get a broken breadth, he ends, as all imitators must end, in a rich inheritance of the errors of his original, without its virtues. Titian and Giorgione have a slight tendency to flatness; but Giorgione's *G Flat* has accompaniments, Sir Charles's *C Flat* stands alone.

The real source of the error may be sufficiently seen in the distance; Titian paints his distances in pure colour—but at least indicates what is grass and what is stone. The distant ground, here, with its white spot for a castle, is a mere space of dim brownish-green paint, which can by no possibility stand for grass, or moss, or any other natural thing. It seems to me, however, that there are some points in the execution of the picture, considered as an example of certain textures, which are instructive. The whole is careful, and the draperies well cast. But who is the lady? Dante's Beatrice, or Benedict's? She can hardly be either: her face indicates little piety, and less wit.

121. FLITTING SHADOWS. (*H. Jutsum*.¹)

Not particularly remarkable, but good as an instance of tolerably clear and firm drawing. The clouds and ferns are both exceedingly well articulated.

136. "COME, REST IN THIS BOSOM," ETC. (*A. Egg*, *A.*²)

Mr. Egg has considerable power of expression, and though this subject of prison sentiment is both painful, useless, and hackneyed, he appears to have something like

¹ [Henry Jutsum (1816-1869), a pupil of James Stark, first exhibited at the Academy, 1836; member of the New Water-Colour Society, 1843.]

² [Augustus Egg (1816-1863) was elected A.R.A. in 1848 and R.A. in 1860. He is represented in the Tate Gallery by two pictures, Nos. 444 and 1385. "He was,"

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serious purpose in his work. But he will never be a great painter until he has a greater respect for plain truth. There is in this picture one of the most wonderful fallacies that ever painter ventured. Observe the shadows of the bars of the window. They fall with intense sharpness on the wall at the back of the bed. Now, to get there, the sun must have come *in* at the window; it did not get through the keyhole. And as it came in at the window, it must have cast the first portions of those shadows *from the ends of the bars themselves*. But, actually, at the bars there are no shadows at all! It is dim daylight, shadowless, at the window itself. Hot sunshine, ten feet within the prison! The state of mind in which a painter could firmly carry out such a fallacy is wholly adverse to all real progress.

It is better to walk at once into the next room, in order to examine the more important work by this artist, "The Life and Death of Buckingham," No. 349. The story is worth telling, and there is vigorous painting in both pictures; but the figures which surround Buckingham in his riot are not of the class which could have entertained a man either of wit or breeding. Vice, unhappily, is not always repulsive at first sight, and the Tempter has not usually his bargain quite so cheap as he would have had of the Duke on such terms. The head of the dying Buckingham is forcible, but quite unfinished.

141. THE MITHERLESS BAIRN. (*T. Faed.*¹)

The story is well told, and the figure of the orphan child very affecting. But the painting is throughout the most commonplace Wilkieism—white spots everywhere. I expected far higher things from this painter, whose work eight years ago was more modest and powerful than it is now.

says Holman Hunt (to whom in his early days Egg gave encouragement and assistance), "a pictorial dramatist of true power; a keen reader and renderer of human expression to the very realm of poetic inspiration, if not of imaginative interpretation."—*Contemporary Review*, April 1886.]

¹ [Thomas Faed (1826–1900) was elected A.R.A. in 1859, and R.A. in 1864. Characteristic examples of his art are in the Tate Gallery, Nos. 1525–1527.]

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A fair example of Stanfield; but I never understand, in the accepted types of marine painting, why there is no distinction between the Foam and the Water. In the sea there is either yeasty foam or smooth surface; but in all marine paintings the waves are merely touched upon with little oblong strokes of white, which express neither water nor spray. Observe those in this picture at the boat's bow.

149. LEAR RECOVERING HIS REASON AT THE SIGHT OF CORDELIA. (*J. R. Herbert, R.A.*²)

As No. 78 [p. 9] furnished us with an instance of the class of picture which is Actively bad, we have here an equally important instance of the Passively bad; which, had it been in a less prominent place, might kindly have been passed without notice; but, since it is thus recommended to the public by its position, it must needs be examined.

In the whole compass of Shakespeare's conceptions, the two women whom he has gifted with the deepest souls are Cordelia and Virgilia.³ All his other women can speak what is in them. These two cannot. The "Nothing, my lord," of Cordelia, and the "gracious silence" of Virgilia, are the everlasting seals set by the Master of the human heart upon the most sacred writing of its folded and golden leaves.

¹ [William Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867) was elected A.R.A. in 1832 and R.A. in 1835. Ruskin always ranked him among the best marine painters of England: see Vol. III. pp. 226, 534, Vol. XIII. p. 31, and for other references, General Index. Stanfield's work may be studied in several examples at the Tate Gallery and Victoria and Albert Museum.]

² [John Rogers Herbert (1810-1890), who did some damage to his reputation in the later years of his life by exhibiting works of singular weakness, was elected A.R.A. in 1841 and R.A. in 1846. For the decoration of the Houses of Parliament he was commissioned to paint, in fresco, "King Lear disinheriting Cordelia" (now hopelessly decayed) in the Upper Waiting Hall, and also nine subjects illustrative of Human Justice for the Peers' Robing Room. Of these the "Moses" is generally considered the best, and it is also the best preserved. A picture by Herbert, "Sir Thomas More and his Daughter" (1844), is in the National collection, now lent to Chester.]

³ [Compare *Sesame and Lilies*, § 56. For Cordelia's "Nothing, my lord," see *King Lear*, i. 1; and for Virgilia's "gracious silence," *Coriolanus*, ii. 1; the latter passage is cited, and commented upon, in *Modern Painters*, vol. ii. (Vol. IV. p. 227), and in *Fiction, Fair and Foul*, § 65.]