Painters

Piero della Francesca

Piero an Intellectual:

The essentially intellectual Huxley is naturally attracted to an intellectual painter like Piero della Francesca. The picture of the Resurrection painted in fresco on the wall of a room in the town-hall of Borgo San Sepolcro by Piero, perhaps the greatest picture in the world, Huxley affirms, is a great picture, because the man who painted it was genuinely noble as well as talented. The leading quality of all Piero's work is natural, spontaneous and unpretentious grandeur. He is majestic without being at all strained or theatrical. He seems to have been inspired by what may be called the religion of Plutarch's Lives — which is a worship of what is admirable in man. Even his technically religious pictures are paens in praise of human dignity. And he is everywhere intellectual.

1. Piero della Francesca (1416-1492), Florentine painter.
2. Plutarch (46-120 A.D.), Greek author; Lives are the biographies of Greek and Roman notabilities in pairs.
Draperies:

As in most paintings, draperies play a significant part in the pictures of Piero. Draperies, we have seen earlier, often set the tone of the whole work of art, and express the artist's mood, temperament and philosophy of life. In Piero's draperies there are large unbroken surfaces, and the folds are designed to emphasize the elementary solid-geometrical structure of the figures. The impression is one of calm, of power, of intellectual objectivity and stoical detachment.\(^1\) This becomes clear if we compare Piero's draperies with those of Cosima Tura\(^2\). In Tura's draperies the surfaces are broken up, and there is a profusion of sharp angles, of jagged and flame-like forms and there emanates from them a sense of disquiet, even of anguish.

Piero and Tura:

If we compare the Virgin by Piero with the Virgin by Tura, we shall find in the first the greatness of the human spirit, its power to rise above circumstance and dominate fate. This particular mother of Christ is probably not a Christian. In Tura's Virgin we will find

\(^1\) 'Variations on El Greco': Collected Essays; Chatto & Windus, 1960; p.151.

\(^2\) Cosima Tura (1430-1498), Italian painter.
that this man was naked and at the mercy of destiny; sunk in the flux of things, overwhelmed. The world remained for him a mysterious chaos. There are no certainties in it but suffering and occasional happiness.\footnote{Music at Night; Music at Night; Penguin Books, 1955; pp.38-39.}

Piero is very little concerned with the drama of life and religion. Even his battle pictures are not dramatic compositions, though containing many dramatic incidents. All the turmoil, all the emotions of the scenes have been digested by the mind into a grave intellectual whole. Nor are the Nativity and the Baptism distinguished for any particular sympathy with the religious or emotional significance of the events portrayed. True, the Resurrection is more dramatic; but the Christ who rises before our eyes is more like a Plutarchian hero than the Christ of conventional religion. The body is perfectly developed like that of a Greek athlete; so formidably strong that the wound in its muscular flank seems somehow an irrelevance. The whole figure is expressive of physical and intellectual power.

**Piero's Passion for Solidity:**

Aesthetically, Piero's work is essentially an affair of the masses. He has a passion for solidity as
such. There is something in all his works that reminds one constantly of Egyptian sculpture. The faces of his personages look as though they were carved out of some very hard rock into which it had been impossible to engrave the hollows, the lines and wrinkles of real life. They are ideal, like the faces of Egyptian gods and princes. For example, in Piero's fresco at Arezzo, the faces of the women are all of one peculiar cast: high, rounded, smooth foreheads; necks like cylinders of polished ivory; and so on.

Piero's passion for solidity shows no less strikingly in his draperies. Wherever the subject permits, he endows his personages with curious head-dresses that remind one of those ceremonial hats or tiaras worn by the statues of Egyptian kings. Nor does he neglect the veils of his female figures. Though transparent and of lawn, they hang round the heads of his women in stiff folds, as though they were made of steel. Among clothes he has a special fondness for pleated bodices and tunics. The bulge and recession of the pleated stuff, the fluted folds, follow the curve of the body beneath.

1. 'The Best Picture': *Along the Road*; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.181-86.
Sculptor Turned Painter:

El Greco complained of Michelangelo that the man did not know how to paint, — that is, Michelangelo is primarily a sculptor and his paintings are in some sort translations of sculpture into a language which was not the painter's native tongue. Michelangelo is one of those painters who, by their excessive love of three-dimensional solidity, are led quite beyond the field of painting.

Breughel

Huxley is suspicious of artistic theory. The number of ways in which good pictures can be painted, he writes, is quite incalculable. Every good painter invents a new way of painting. The questions a critic must ask himself are whether a man is a competent painter, has anything to say, is genuine; not whether he conforms with some favourite theory of the critic himself. At present,

1. Buonarotti Michelangelo (1475-1564), Florentine painter.
2. 'Variations on El Greco': Themes and Variations; Chatto & Windus, 1954; p.176.
3. 'Rimini and Alberti': Along the Road; Chatto & Windus, 1948; p.164.
4. Peter Breughel (c.1525-69), Flemish painter. His sons, 'Hell' Breughel and 'Velvet' Breughel, also were painters. It is, however, the Elder Breughel - Peter Breughel - who is a great artist.
Huxley, it is fashionable to believe in fora; the subject is regarded as unimportant.

The Prejudice against Breughel:

One victim of such theoretical prejudice has been the elder Breughel. He is highly competent aesthetically; he has plenty to say; his mind is curious, interesting and powerful; and he has no false pretensions, is entirely honest. And yet, if he has never enjoyed the high reputation due to him, it is because his work has never quite squared with any of the critical theories in vogue since his time.

Breughel is a subtle colourist, a sure and powerful draughtsman, and possesses great powers of composition. If Giotto's dalliance with sacred history be forgiven him, Huxley asks, why may not Breughel be excused for being an anthropologist and a social philosopher? and answers that Giotto is forgiven because, having ceased to believe in Catholic Christianity, we can concentrate only on his formal qualities; Breughel, on the other hand, is unforgivable, because he made comments on humanity from which we cannot escape.

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1. Giotto (c. 1266-1337), Florentine painter.
Breughel's Art:

Even in the past, when there was no theoretical objection to the mingling of literature and painting, Breughel was considered low, gross, a mere comedian, and as such unworthy of serious consideration. But his later pictures, painted when he had really mastered the secrets of his art, Huxley points out, are not comic at all. They are studies of peasant life, allegories, religious pictures of the most strangely reflective cast, exquisitely poetical landscapes. There is enough of his mature work to expose the fatuity of the classical verdict and show him for what he really was: the first landscape painter of his century, the acutest student of manners, and the wonderfully skilful expounder or suggester of a view of life.

Snow Scenes:

Snow scenes lent themselves particularly well to Breughel's style. Breughel does in all his compositions what the snow does in nature: all the objects in his pictures are paper-thin silhouettes arranged, plane on plane, like the theatrical scenery in the depth of the stage. Consequently, is Huxley's curious comment, in the painting of snow scenes, where nature starts by imitating his habitual method, he achieves an almost
disquieting degree of fundamental realism. Breughel painted too transparently and too flatly to be the perfect interpreter of autumnal landscapes. Still his *Autumn Day* has a most exquisite beauty.

Breughel's Anthropology:

Breughel's anthropology is as delightful as his nature poetry. A Fleming himself, he was perfectly qualified to be the natural historian of the Flemish folk. He exhibits them mostly in those moments of gaiety with which they temper the laborious monotony of their daily lives: eating enormously, drinking, uncouthly dancing. The *Wedding Feast* and the *Peasants' Dance* are superb examples of this anthropological type of painting; two other curious pictures, the *Battle between Carnival and Lent* and the *Children's Games*, illustrate in a systematic and encyclopaedic manner all children's games, all the amusements of Carnival. In the same way, he represents, in his *Tower of Babel*, all the processes of building. These pictures are handbooks of their respective subjects.

There are allegorical pictures, too. His illustrations to proverbs and parables belong to the same class. They show him to have been a man profoundly convinced of the reality of evil and of the horrors which this mortal life holds in store for suffering humanity.
The world is a horrible place; the gaiety is only for a moment.

**Christ Carrying the Cross**;

Huxley has a particularly acute comment on Breughel's picture of *Christ Carrying the Cross*. While all other masters have painted such dreadful scenes from within, so to speak, outwards — Christ being for them the centre, the divine hero of the tragedy — Breughel starts from the outside and works inwards, representing the scene as it would have appeared to any casual spectator. Breughel resolutely remains a human onlooker; what he shows is a crowd of people walking briskly in holiday joyfulness up the slopes of a hill. On the top of the hill are two crosses; and round them stands a ring of people, who have come out with their picnic baskets to look on at the free entertainment. Seen thus, impassively, from the outside, the tragedy does not purge or uplift; it appalls and makes desperate; or it may even inspire a kind of gruesome mirth.

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2. Domenico Theotocopuli (1545-1614), Greek painter. He settled at Toledo in Spain, where he was universally called El Greco, i.e. 'the Greek.'
El Greco was mainly a religious painter, a teller of stories from the Gospels and the legends of the saints. But he told them in his own peculiar manner, which, in its turn, tells another, fascinating and enigmatic, story. His intention was neither to imitate nature nor to tell a story with dramatic verisimilitude. Like the Post-Impressionists three centuries later, El Greco used natural objects as the raw material for creating, by a process of calculated distortion, "his own world of pictorial forms in pictorial space under pictorial illumination." Within this private universe he situated his religious subject-matter and used it to express what he wanted to say about life.

What El Greco wanted to say can only be inferred; but Huxley himself sees in the rapt faces, in the hands clasped or lifted heavenwards, in the elongated anatomy of his figures, an upward aspiration, a constant preoccupation with mystical religion. His aim seems to be to assert the soul's capacity to come to ecstatic union with the divine Spirit; and this idea of union is stressed more and more as the painter advances in years. The frontier between earth and heaven grows fainter and finally disappears. In the latest version of Christ's Baptism the forms and colours flow continuously from the
bottom of the picture to the top: the two realms are totally fused. And yet, for all their extraordinary beauty, El Greco's paintings are strangely oppressive and disquieting. Consciously, Huxley feels, El Greco was telling two stories — a story from the Gospels or the legends of the saints, and a story about mystical union with the divine; but, unconsciously, he told yet another story; and all that is disquieting in El Greco pertains to his third story and is conveyed by his highly individual manner of treating space and forms.

The Two Influences:

El Greco chose to combine Byzantium and Venice in the strangest possible way. In Byzantine art, there is no third dimension, no perspective; and precisely because there is no perspective, the figures seem to exist in a celestial universe of indefinite extension. In Venetian art, El Greco saw a third dimension. His own pictures are neither flat nor fully three-dimensional. "He is the painter of movement in a narrow room, of agitation in prison;" and the effect of confinement is enhanced by the almost complete absence from his paintings

1. Ancient name of Constantinople.
of a landscape background. So far as El Greco is concerned, the world of non-human nature is practically nonexistent.¹

El Greco's Agoraphobia:

Critics have tried to explain El Greco's pictorial agoraphobia in terms of his early, Cretan education. There is no space in his pictures, they assure us, because the typical art of that Byzantium which was El Greco's spiritual home was the mosaic, which is innocent of depth. This is a specious explanation, says Huxley. The Byzantine mosaic was not invariably without depth. El Greco's world, too, is no Flatland; there is depth in it — just a little depth. It is precisely this that makes it seem such a disquieting world. His people — solid and three-dimensional, and made to be the inhabitants of a spacious universe — are shut up in a nearly spaceless world. They are in prison and as if in the process of being assimilated to their visceral surroundings.²

No less disquieting than the narrowness of El Greco's universe is the quality of the forms with which he fills it. Everything is organic, but organic on a low

level, organic to a point well below the limit of life's perfection. It is protoplasm in the raw or dismembered organs. Under his brush the human body, when it is naked, becomes a thing of ectoplasm — beautifully appropriate in its pictorial context, but uncanny in the context of real life. "His very draperies become pure abstractions, having the form of something indeterminately physiological."

Within his own Byzantine-Venetian tradition, El Greco combined representation with abstraction in a manner which we are accustomed to regard as characteristically modern. While his intention was to express, in visual terms, man's capacity for union with the divine, the artistic means he employed were not equal to that intention. The existence of a spiritual reality transcendent and yet immanent has been rendered in visual symbols — but not symbols of the kind employed by El Greco. The agitation of the quasi-visceral forms in an overcrowded and almost spaceless world cannot express man's union with the Spirit.

It seems strange that El Greco, who received his first training from Byzantine masters, should not have realized the symbolical value of the human figure in repose, but should have preferred to represent, or imply, an agitation wholly incompatible with the spiritual life.
No less strange is the fact that a disciple of Titian\(^1\) should have ignored landscape and failed to perceive that, in the aged master's religious pictures, the only hint of spirituality was to be found in the Alpine scenery of their backgrounds.\(^2\)

El Greco as a metaphysician belongs to no known school. The most one can say, by way of classification, is that, like most great artists of the Baroque, he believed in the validity of ecstasy, of 'numinous' experiences out of which the reason fashions the attributes of God. But he seems to be talking all the time about the physiological root of ecstasy, not the spiritual flower. The primary physiological fact of religious experience is for him also the final fact. He remains consistently on the plane of that visceral consciousness with which our ancestors (as their language proves) did so much of their feeling and thinking. El Greco lived at a time when even the loftiest experiences were admitted to be physiological. St. Teresa of Ávila knew God in terms of an exquisite pain in her heart, her side, her bowels; but while she found it natural to pass from the realm of

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1. Tiziano Vecellio Titian (1477-1579), Venetian painter.
physiology into that of the spirit, El Greco obstinately insisted on remaining swallowed, in the belly of the whale.¹

Union with the Divine:

While El Greco's universe seems curiously oppressive and disquieting, when considered as an isolated artistic system it appears perfectly unified, beautiful. El Greco's conscious purpose was to affirm man's capacity for union with the divine; unconsciously, however, and by his choice of forms and his peculiar treatment of space, he proclaimed the triumph of the organic, and the incapacity of spirit to transfigure matter. But at the same time, the order he creates out of the visceral forms and cramped spaces seems to reaffirm the possibility of man's union with Spirit. Here, then, says Huxley, is a happy marriage of incompatibles, a perfect fusion of contradictions²:

Rubens³

Rubens's Passion for Fat and Muscle:

Rubens delighted in depicting skin, fat and muscle. That is how he has given us a wonderful picture,

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1. 'Meditation on El Greco': Music at Night; Penguin Books pp.46-49.
3. Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Flemish painter.
The Sabine Rape. Commenting on the picture in Those Barren Leaves, Huxley observes that only Rubens knew that Sabine women looked like and how they ought to be raped. How large and blonde they were! What glossy satin dresses they had on, what pearls! And their Roman ravishers were tanned, as brown as Indians. Their muscles bulged; their eyes, their polished armour flashed. From the backs of their prancing horses they fairly dived into the foaming sea of female flesh that splashed and widely undulated around them. Rubens, however, had a sentiment for human greatness as well as for human rumps.

Rubens's Christ:

Even when Rubens came to depict Christ, he represented him as quite a muscular person, so different from the traditional Jesus with a predominantly ectomorphic physique and cerebrotonic temperament, slender, small-boned, unemphatically muscled.

Rubens, unlike Goya, possessed the power of filling the entire canvas with figures or details of land-

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2. 'Breughel': Along the Road; Chatto & Windus, 1948; P.139.
scape, and upon that plenum imposing a clear and yet exquisitely subtle three-dimensional order.¹

Georges de Latour ²

Georges de Latour was recognized as a great artist in his own lifetime. But with the deliberate cultivation of a new art, aristocratic in subject-matter and classical in style, his reputation suffered a total eclipse, until he was rediscovered and his work was included when the Louvre ³ organized an exhibition of 'The Painters of Reality.'

Latour a Visionary Artist:

Latour is one of those extroverted visionaries whose art faithfully reflects certain aspects of the outer world, but reflects them in a state of transfigurement, so that every particular becomes a manifestation of the Absolute. Most of his compositions are of figures

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2. Georges de Latour (1593-1652), French painter. He refined on the violent lighting effects of Caravaggio in a very personal way.
3. The Louvre Palace, group of buildings on the right bank of the Seine at Paris; originally the hunting-seat of the early French kings. It contains one of the finest art collections in Europe.
seen by the light of a single candle. But Latour was not interested in theatrical effects. There is nothing dramatic, tragic or grotesque in his pictures. The single candle is used, in every case, to stress the intense but unexcited, impersonal thereeness of things. By the exhibition of common things in an uncommon light, the living mystery and inexplicable marvel of mere existence is made manifest. There is very little religiosity in his paintings; it is impossible to decide whether his 'Nativity' is the nativity, or merely a nativity; or whether the old man asleep under the eyes of a young girl, just an old man or St. Peter in prison visited by the delivering angel. But though Latour's art is wholly without religiosity, it remains profoundly religious, in the sense that it reveals, with unexampled intensity, the divine omnipresence.  

Vermeer

A Painter of Still Life:

Vermeer had a treble gift — the vision that perceives the Dharma-Body; the talent to render as much

1. Heaven and Hell; Chatto & Windus, 1956; pp.79-80.
of that vision as the human capacity will permit; and the prudence to confine himself to the more manageable aspects of reality; for though Vermeer represented human beings, he was always a painter of still life. While Cézanne expected his female sitters to look like apples, Vermeer never asked them to sit like apples; and yet he is undoubtedly the greatest painter of human still lives.\footnote{Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), French painter called the "Father of Post-Impressionism".}

**Hogarth**\footnote{William Hogarth (1697-1764), English painter.}

To judge from Hogarth’s gruesome picture of children tormenting their dogs, cats and birds, neither the common law nor popular morality took cognizance of cruelty to animals.\footnote{\textit{The Poors of Perception}; Chatto & Windus, 1957; pp.29-30.}

**Contemporary Life in Hogarth’s Art**: Hogarth’s work most faithfully reflects the nature of the hell English prisons were in his time. This is not the Hogarth of harmoniously coloured paintings, but of the engravings, of the hard insensitive line which

\begin{itemize}
  \item 1. Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), French painter called the "Father of Post-Impressionism".
  \item 3. William Hogarth (1697-1764), English painter.
\end{itemize}
delineated the senseless evil and chaotic misery, as well within the Fleet and Newgate and Bedlam as outside, in those other prisons, those other asylums, the dram-shops of Gin Alley, the brothels and gaming-rooms of Convent Garden, the suburban playgrounds where children torment their dogs and birds with scarcely imaginable refinements of cruelty and obscenity.1

Piranesi 2

Piranesi and Hogarth:

Piranesi's Prisons have continued to seem completely modern, not merely in their formal aspects, but also as expressions of obscure psychological truths. That which Piranesi expressed is not subject to historical change. He is not, like Hogarth, recording the facts of contemporary social life. His concern is with the states of the soul—states that are largely independent of external circumstances.

The metaphysical prisons (whose seat is within the mind, whose walls are made of nightmare and incomprehension, whose chains are anxiety and their racks a sense

1. 'Variations on The Prisons': Themes and Variations; Chatto & Windus, 1954, p.195.
2. Giambattista Piranesi (1720-1778), Italian etcher.
of personal and even generic guilt) delineated by Piranesi were well known to our ancestors — but as moral imperfections, not as what they are — systems of disease or some temperamental peculiarity.

The most disquietingly obvious feature of these dungeons is their perfect pointlessness. Their staircases lead nowhere, the vaults support nothing but their own weight and enclose vast spaces that are never truly rooms. Below them, on the floor, stand great machines incapable of doing anything in particular, and from the arches overhead hang ropes that carry nothing except a sickening suggestion of torture. Piranesi contrives to give the impression that this colossal pointlessness is co-extensive with the universe. Engaged in no recognizable activity, paying no attention to one another, a few small faceless figures haunt the shadows. Their insignificant presence merely emphasizes the fact that there is nobody at home.

The Prisons Resemble Abstract Art:

Considered from a purely technical point of view, The Prisons are remarkable as being the nearest eighteenth-century approach to a purely abstract art. The raw material of Piranesi's designs consists of architectural forms; but, because The Prisons are images of confusion,
because their essence is pointlessness, the combinations of architectural forms never add up to an architectural drawing. In other words, Piranesi uses architectural forms to produce a series of beautifully intricate designs which resemble the abstractions of the Cubists in being composed of geometrical elements, but which have enough subject-matter to express the obscure and terrible states of spiritual confusion.

Of natural forms Piranesi makes here hardly any use. There is not a leaf or blade of grass in the whole series, not a bird or an animal. Here and there, irrelevantly alive in the stony abstractions, stand a few human figures, darkly cloaked, featureless and impassive.¹

Goya ²

In Goya Huxley sees a progress from light-hearted eighteenth-century art to something quite timeless both in technique and spirit. His pictures are the most powerful commentaries on human crime and madness, made in terms of "an artistic convention uniquely fitted to express precisely that extraordinary mingling of hatred and

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² Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828), Spanish painter.
compassion, despair and sardonic humour, realism and fantasy." "I show you sorrow", said the Buddha, "and the ending of sorrow". Goya knows only sorrow, but not the ending of sorrow.

**Goya's Religious Paintings**:

Some of his religious paintings, like the frescoes in the cupola of La Florida, are frankly and avowedly secular. But others are serious essays in religious painting. In the best of these, *Agony in the Garden*, Christ, with outstretched arms, raises towards the comforting angel a face whose expression is identical with that of the poor creatures whom we see in many of his etchings and paintings, kneeling or standing before the barrels of a French firing squad. There is no trace of that loving confidence of men who live continually in the presence of God; nor of that 'holy indifference', the mental equanimity which belongs to those whose attention is firmly fixed upon a transcendental reality. Naturally; for Goya the transcendental reality did not exist. The only reality he knew was that of the world around him; and the longer he lived, the more frightful did that world seem to his rational self.

**Goya and his Times**:

Realistically or in fantastic allegories, Goya
recorded not only the agonies of his people during the French invasion, but their follies and crimes towards one another. The creatures who haunt Goya's later works are inexpressibly horrible. Huxley's account of them is nearly as vivid as Goya's. "And above the lower depths where they obscenely pullulate is a world of bad priests and lustful friars, of fascinating women whose love is a 'dream of lies and inconstancy', of fatuous nobles and, at the top of the social pyramid, a royal family of half-wits, sadists, Messallinas¹ and perjurers."

Commenting on Goya's brilliant records of the bull ring, Huxley expresses the view that such etchings, being documentary, do not lend themselves to bold execution or dramatic effect. On the other hand, Goya's series of etchings — the Disasters of the War — shows us the abyss of bestiality and diabolism and suffering which opens up in times of war. Huxley re-etches the scenes for us. "Goya's record of disaster", he writes, "has a number of recurrent themes. There are those shadowy archways, for example, more sinister than those oven of Piranesi's Prisons², where women are violated,

¹. Valeria Messallina, consort of the Roman Emperor, Claudius; notorious for her sexual excesses; executed in A.D. 48.
². Vide pp.315-17.
captives squat in a hopeless stupor, corpses lie rotting, emaciated children starve to death. Then there are the vague street corners at which the famine-stricken hold out their hands; but the whiskered French hussars and carabiniers look on without pity, and even the rich Spaniards pass by indifferently, as though they were 'of another lineage'. Of still more occurrence in the series are the crests of those naked hillocks on which lie the dead, like so much garbage. Or else, in dramatic silhouette against the sky above those same hilltops, we see the hideous butchery of Spanish men and women, and the no less hideous vengeance meted out by infuriated Spaniards upon their tormentors. Often the hillock sprouts a single tree, always low, sometimes maimed by gunfire. Upon its branches are impaled, like the beetles and caterpillars in a butcher bird's larder, whole naked torsos, sometimes decapitated, sometimes without arms, or else a pair of amputated legs, or a severed head — warnings, set there by the conquerors, of the fate awaiting those who dare oppose the Emperor. At other times the tree is used as a gallows — a less efficient gallows indeed, than that majestic oak which, in Callot's

Le Misères et les Malheurs de la Guerre, is fruited with more than a score of swinging corpses, but good enough for a couple of executions en passant. In one of Goya's most hair-raising plates, the tree is too stumpy to permit of a man's hanging clear of the ground. But the rope is fixed, none the less, and to tighten the noose around their victim's neck, two French Soldiers tug at the legs, while with his foot a third man thrusts with all his strength against the shoulders.¹

Goya and Callot:

Goya's etchings of Disastres de la Guerra invite comparison with those of Callot, who depicts the sufferings of the people of France during the Thirty Years' War. Huxley sets off the peculiar genius of Goya by comparing his work with that of the French painter of war.

Like Goya's etchings Callot's Misères et Malheurs are pieces of a first-hand reporting, says Huxley. Each series is the portrait of a war taken from life; but while Goya is an artist of passionate temperament with an unrivalled gift for the pictorial expression of his indignations and his pities, Callot is an illustrator with

¹ 'Variations on Goya': Collected Essays; Chatto & Windus, 1960; pp.159-63.
a gift for complete emotional detachment; and there are qualities in the art of Callot which invite one to pore over his etchings with a fascinated and bewildered, a half amused and half horrified admiration. However, to infer from Callot's aesthetic neutrality that Callot himself was emotionally neutral to the scenes he represented would be unjustifiable. The imperturbability is only in style; and style is by no means always or completely the man.  

Goya's Satire:

In the series of etchings entitled Caprichos and Disparates, Goya passes from tragedy to satire and from historical fact to allegory and pictorial metaphor and pure fantasy. Much of the satire of the Caprichos is merely Goya's sharper version of the standard eighteenth-century humour; but in certain etchings a more disquieting note is struck: the humour often undergoes a sea-change into something darker and queerer—the unplumbed depths of original sin and original stupidity. In the Disparates the satire is on the whole less direct, the allegories are more general and more mysterious.

The satire, it would seem, is directed not against any particular social evil, but against unregenerate human nature as such.

Goya's technical competence, Huxley shows, improved as he grew older — from restraint to freedom, from timidity to impressive boldness. From this point of view the most striking fact about almost all Goya's work is that they are composed in terms of one or more clearly delimited masses standing out from the background — often, indeed, silhouetted against the sky; but when he attempts what may be called an 'all-over' composition, the essay is rarely successful. Fortunately, in his etchings, Goya is very seldom tempted to talk in any but his own style.¹

Constable ²

When Blake, one day, complimented Constable on the mystical quality of one of his sketches, the latter protested that it was only drawing. But the fact remains

2. John Constable (1776-1857), English painter. Turner and Constable are the two greatest English landscape painters.
that the best of Constable's landscapes are powerful and convincing renderings of the spiritual reality in which all things have their being. Indeed, they are much more adequate as symbols of spiritual life than the majority of works in which Blake consciously tried to express his spiritualist philosophy. Much less gifted as painter than as poet, and brought up in a deplorable artistic tradition, Blake rarely produced a picture that 'comes off' to the extent of expressing what he says to perfectly in his lyrics and in isolated passages of the Prophetic Books. Constable, on the other hand, is a great Nature mystic without his being aware of it.\textsuperscript{1}

\textbf{B.R. Haydon} \textsuperscript{2}

\begin{quote}
Haydon was not cut out for Painting:

Haydon was endowed with a sharp and comprehensive intelligence; an excellent judgment (except where his own productions were concerned); a daemonic vitality; the proverbial 'infinite capacity for taking pains'; a mystical sense of inspiration, and a boundless belief in his own
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\textsuperscript{1} 'Form and Spirit in Art': Collected Essays; Chatto & Windus, 1960; pp.155-56.
\textsuperscript{2} Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846), English historical painter and writer, friend of Keats.
\end{flushleft}
powers. His special gifts were literary and discursive. He might also have made a good politician, a first-rate soldier, even a tolerably efficient man of science. The one gift which Nature had quite obviously denied him was the gift of expressing himself in form and colour! His lines are hard, heavy, uncertain and utterly insensitive. He fumbles painfully and blunderingly after likeness to nature, and when he cannot achieve realism falls back on the cheapest art-student tricks. The paintings are entirely without composition. They abound in bad drawing and disproportions. The colour is crude and inharmonious.

Haydon on Portrait-Painting:

Towards the end of his life Haydon, though still ambitious to paint huge historical figures, painted portraits in the meanwhile. But he hated portrait-painting. He could never paint for painting's sake. He was only interested in the literature of painting; he needed a subject to stimulate his imagination. Haydon was a very bad portrait-painter. His comment on portrait painting, however, is worth noting: "Portraiture is always independent of art and has little or nothing to do with it. It is one of the staple manufactures of the British Empire. Wherever the British settle, wherever they colonize, they carry, and will ever carry, trial by jury, horse-racing and portrait-painting."
Haydon's Historical Pictures:

Kore congenial were his fancy pictures of Napoleon musing — musing not merely on St. Helena¹, but at Fontainbleau², in his bedroom, on the ocean, at Marengo³, in Egypt before the pyramids. Haydon also painted a picture of the Duke of Wellington⁴ musing on the field of Waterloo⁵; but the piece was much less successful. Perhaps it was felt that the picture lacked versimilitude. French tyrants might muse; but not an English general.⁶

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1. St. Helena, British island and crown colony in the South Atlantic Ocean. Its chief fame arises from the years of exile and confinement which Napoleon passed there from 1815 till his death in 1821.
2. Fontainbleau, town in France, thirty-five miles South of Paris, surrounded by a magnificent forest. Here Napoleon signed his abdication in 1814.
3. Marengo, suburb of Alessandria, Italy; scene of Napoleon's victory over Austria in 1800.
4. Arthur Wellesley, first Duke of Wellington (1769-1852), British soldier and statesman; defeated Napoleon's army at Waterloo in 1815.
5. Waterloo, Belgian village, near Brussels; scene of the decisive victory of Wellington and Blucher over Napoleon in 1815.
6. 'B.R. Haydon': The Olive Tree; Chatto & Windus, 1947; pp. 240-41; 253-54; & 260.
A Negative Visionary:

Géricault, says Huxley, was a negative visionary; for his almost obsessive fidelity to nature was a fidelity to a nature magically transfigured for the worse. His masterpiece, the "Raft of the Medusa", was painted "from dissolution and decay — from bits of cadavers supplied by medical students, from the emaciated torso and jaundiced face of a friend who was suffering from a disease of the liver. Even the waves on which the raft is floating, even the overarching sky are corpse-coloured." "The Derby", it is obvious, is being run in hell, "against a background fairly blazing with darkness visible." "The Horse startled by Lightning" is the revelation of the sinister and even infernal otherness that hides in familiar things.

Not only from his pictures, but from the accounts left of him, it is evident that Géricault habitually saw the world about him as a succession of visionary apocalypses. There is, in his canvas, hardly any sign of an outline drawing of the whole composition, or gradual building up of a harmony of tones and colours. Each

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particular revelation was fully rendered as it was seen and artistically realized; but by a miracle of genius, every successive apocalypse was made to fit, prophetically, into a harmonious composition which existed in the artist's imagination.  

Seurat  

Seurat reminds us of Constable. "They see poetry in what I do," complained that great master of landscape. "No; I apply my method and that is all there is to it." But the method was applied by a painter who combined the most exquisite sensibility with intellectual powers of the first order. Consequently, what Seurat supposed to be merely pointillisme was in fact inspiration — a vision of the world in which material reality is the symbol and, one might say, the incarnation of an all-embracing spiritual reality. The famous method was the means whereby he told this Taoistic and Wordsworthian story; pointillisme; as he used it, permitted him to

1. Heaven and Hell; Chatto & Windus, 1956; pp.85-86.
2. Georges Seurat (1859-1891), French painter.
3. Pointillisme is a method of painting in juxtaposed spots of pure colour, which, seen from a proper distance, blend into a natural atmospheric effect.
render empty space as no other painter has ever done, and to impose, through colour, an unprecedented degree of unity upon his composition. In Seurat's paintings the near and the far are separate and yet are one. The emptiness which is the symbol of infinity is of the same substance as the finite forms it contains. The transient participates in the eternal; samsara and nirvana are one and the same. Such is the poetry with which, in spite of himself, Seurat filled those wonderful landscapes of Honfleur and Gravelines and the Seine. 1

Lautrec 2

Lautrec's interest in painting began in his childhood, when he loved to watch oxen, dogs, poultry, falcons, and above all horses. What he saw he remembered in all its detail. Later, as a mature artist, he seldom used models and preferred to rely on his memory.

Movement of Life in Lautrec's Art:

The very doodlings which he made in his Latin dictionary while his tutor's back was turned, are the

1. 'Form and Spirit in Art': Collected Essays; Chatto & Windus, 1960; p.156.

work of a mature artist. His first master's opinion that
Lautrec's drawing was simply atrocious is only partly
justified; for though Lautrec made a great effort to copy
the model exactly, in spite of himself he exaggerated
certain typical details, sometimes the general character,
so that he distorted without trying to or even wanting to.
Lautrec seems to have been, unconsciously, a faithful
exponent of Hsieh Ho's First Principle, which prescribes
that a painting should possess the movement of life —
itself a manifestation of the rhythm of the Spirit. Even
as a boy, as yet completely ignorant of the masters under
whose influence his mature style was to be formed, Lautrec
was making manifest the vitalizing spirit in the movements
of life. The horse, thanks to the internal combustion
engine, is now an almost extinct animal and in a few years
will be seen only in zoos. Along with Degas Lautrec was
almost the last of the great portrayers of horses.

Lautrec also portrayed "the drunks and tarts,
the lecherous gentlemen in top hats, the sensation-hunting

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1. Hsieh Ho, Chinese painter and critic who flourished
towards the end of the 5th century, A.D. (dates not
known). He formulated six canons of painting, which
have been the basis for art criticism in the Far
East for centuries.

2. Edgar Hilaire Germain Degas (1834-1917), French
painter.
ladies in feather boas, the stable boys, the lesbians, the bearded surgeons performing operations with horrifying disregard of the first principles of asepsis." He portrayed them simply as curiosities, passing no moral judgment, but simply rendering their intrinsic oddity. It was in this spirit of the curiosity hunter that he visited the theatre (plays as such did not interest him) to watch the way the actors grimaced and gesticulated, the curious effects produced by the lights from above and beneath, the garish costumes and so forth.

*Lautrec's Art not Sexy*

In Lautrec's drawings of women there is no effort to stress the femininity of his model, and our current obsession with the bosom is conspicuously absent. There is never anything sexy about Lautrec's art; but there is also never anything deliberately, sarcastically, anti-feminist in it. Degas, for instance, took pleasure in posing his models in the most unalluring postures. A lady once asked him why he chose to make all his women look so ugly. "Madame", replied the painter, "because women generally are ugly." Unlike Degas, Lautrec never set out to prove that women were ugly; nor to prove them attractive either. He just looked at them, as he had looked from
his earliest childhood at oxen, horses, falcons, dogs; then, from memory and with appropriate distortions, rendered their life-movement, now graceful, now grotesque, and the underlying rhythm of the mysterious spirit that manifests itself within that movement.¹