



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ÆSTHETIC CANT.

AN exceedingly clever novel, "*The Martyrdom of Madeline*," by Robert Buchanan, contains some rich satire and considerable philosophy. When the book first appeared, in London, some two years ago, it created a great stir. Sham æstheticism was at its height just then, and this book was plainly a slap in its face. The critics, and particularly the art critics of a certain order, attacked the book most venomously, and notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Buchanan disclaimed any intention of photographing individuals or of caricaturing the representatives of æstheticism,—asserting that it was only the cant of æstheticism that he wished to satirize, they took occasion to defend certain personages whose characters they felt might be recognized in Mr. Buchanan's book. Several of these characters are so typical of the classes they represent that they may be recognized in almost any city where what has been wrongly termed æstheticism has been strongly prevalent. We give herewith an extract from the book, and ask if *Blanco Serena* and his disciples cannot be found in New York as well as in London?

Mr. Blanco Serena, the prophet of a new school of painting, the object of which was more closely to reconcile and blend the kindred arts of painting, poetry and music, occupied a large detached house in South Kensington, whither his worshippers flocked every Sunday, as to the shrine of some patron saint. The walls were embellished with designs from his own pencil, or those of his own friends; the furniture was his own invention in form as well as color; the ceilings were cerulean, like the heavens, and like the heavens were studded with golden stars; so that when the rapt creature looked up in contemplation or in inspiration, his vision was rewarded by celestial glimpses. There were no carpets on the floors, but here and there costly rugs were strewn. The house formed a quadrangle, in the centre of which was an open court with a playing fountain, and by the fountain, in fine weather, the prophet and the faithful would lie upon tiger and lion skins, smoking pipes and calumets of strange device.

Serena himself was a middle-aged man, with a high, bald forehead, long, apostolic beard and large, brown, dreamy eyes. He was a good soul, with the kindest disposition, and the affectations of his profession did not extend to his personal character. The fault lay more in his stars than himself that he had become an eccentric painter. He began merrily, in Bohemian fashion, with a clay pipe in his mouth, painting real landscapes from nature and human beings from the life, and producing compositions noteworthy for fine color and honest effect. But he discovered early, as many another prophet has discovered, that sincerity did not pay. In an angry moment, one day, disgusted with a picture he had just completed, he took up his brush and deliberately reversed all the color of his composition. Where water was blue, he made it vermilion; where boughs were green and golden, he made them purple and cerulean; a white human figure standing by water became an Ethiop through excess of shadow; and finally, out of sheer deviltry, he covered the daffodil sky with layers of pea-green cloud. He had just completed his work, and was scowling at it grimly, when there entered Ponto, the new art critic from Camford. No sooner did Ponto see the mutilated picture than he clasped his hands and raised his eyes rapturously to heaven. "At last!" he cried, and wrung Serena by the hand. "Only paint like this, and your fame is sure." The "Megatherium" of the following Sunday contained an article by Ponto, entitled "Mr. Blanco Serena's new painting—a Reverie in Vermilion and Pea-Green," in which article it was clearly demonstrated, not merely that the painting was one of the masterpieces of the world, but that the painter was the first "modern man" who had dared "to give prominence on canvas to evanescent cosmic moods." From that day forth the epithets cosmic, august, titanic, supersensuous,

sublime and other adjectives of equal meaning were the especial property of Serena and his imitators; for that imitators came soon goes perhaps without saying, seeing that imitation is so easy. "Reveries" on canvas became the rage; to be non-natural was the fashion. Artists who had once in their innocence strained every nerve to study great models and to copy nature, now tortured ingenuity to represent "evanescent cosmic moods"—out of color, out of drawing, and out of all harmony with anything else but the diseased inventions of bad painters and the bad critics who urged them on.

Serena, as we have said, was a good fellow, and took his success sensibly. Only to one man in the world did he secretly confess the facts of the case. "I know I am a humbug," he said to Forster, "and that those who praise me are humbugs. I know that I paint worse than I did at twenty, and that when I die, and my school dies with me, posterity will find me out. This is why, now and then, I follow the true lights of my soul, and paint a true picture, just to keep my work from utterly perishing in Limbo, just to enable some poor soul in the far future to say, 'After all, Blanco Serena might, had he chosen, have escaped from being the æsthetic prig of his period.' But what I am the scribblers and the public have made me. If another man painted a bony woman in yellow gauze, with red hair and pale-green eyes, and impossible arms and legs, he would be found out directly; but only let me paint such a figure and call it 'Persephone musing by the waters of Lethe,' or 'Memory kneeling by the grave of Hope,' or 'Fading away; a sonata in Sunset tints,' and I am sure at least of Ponto's praise and the public's approval. Well, of all humbugs Art humbug is the worst; though, after all, worse saints have been canonized than Blanco Serena."

To the studio of Blanco, a few days after Madeline's visit, came Ponto, the Art critic, bringing with him a thin, middle-aged Frenchman, with a coarse mouth and a sinister expression of countenance. The painter, with deft and careless hand, was adding a few touches to the picture of Ophelia.

"Serena," cried Ponto, "let me introduce you to M. Auguste de Gavrolles, from Paris—the friend and pupil of the supreme and impeccable Gautier. He is a poet, an ardent worshipper of your genius, and in all matters of art completely sane and cosmic."

Serena smiled and held out his hand, which the Frenchman took rapturously and raised it to his lips.

"Ah, Monsieur," he exclaimed, this is the proudest moment of my life!"

Ponto threw himself into a chair, and looked around him with a smile of feline insipidity.

"What is that you have there, my dear Serena?" he asked, blinking at the picture. "Ah, I see, another superbly musical meditation in the minor key of flake white!"

"It is a portrait," said Serena quietly.

"An ideal portrait—quite so. How wonderfully in that floating drapery you have conveyed the serene insouciance of trances of languor crescendoing into aberration of supersensual dream!"

"It is neither more nor less than a careful likeness of the original," returned Serena modestly. "In the arrangement of the colors I wish to convey—"

"The spirituality of a superb and life-consuming dream, fired with the arid flame of incipient passion—ethereal, almost epicene—conscious of throbbing vistas of a sexual retrospection and chromatic wastes of fruitless future fantasy, interposed with forlorn gulfs of irremediable darkness and despair. Added to this, and seen in the pose of the limp hand and the melancholy texture of the flesh tints is the Lethean consciousness of a drowned and devastated ideal, unlightened by one star of promise and irredeemed by one flower of celestial truth. Am I right? Do I take your meaning?"

"Just so," said Serena drily, and turned to look at the Frenchman.

* * * *

Ponto looked over Serena's shoulder as he worked, with admiring eyes.

"You must know Gavrolles better," he observed; "I like him; we all like him. He is a man of ideas." Gavrolles placed his hand upon his heart and bowed.

"I have learned of my master, the immortal Theophile, to worship what is beautiful, to adore what is superb."

"In France, at the present moment," continued Ponto patronizingly, "Gavrolles represents the school of super-sensuous personal yearning. In his last book of poems, 'Parfums de la Chair,' and particularly in that superb fragment, 'Cameo Satanique,' he has applied the connecting link between the celestial appetite of Gautier and the divine nausea of Baudelaire. Till Gavrolles came, the calendar of imperial passion was incomplete. What Smith, Jones and Keats are to our august poetry, that is he to the poetry of modern France."

"Ah, Monsieur, forbear!" cried the Frenchman. "You overwhelm me with shame. Such praise—before the master!"

"I will go further," cried Ponto recklessly, "and I will fearlessly assert that in the golden roll of the fearless and fecund Parisian Parnasus, there is no more affluent name than that of my friend Gavrolles. His 'Chant Aromatique' to the Venus of Dahomey would alone entitle him to a place in that Pantheon where the names of Victor Hugo and Achille de Gauville shine effulgent, while his masterly management of the Sestina, in his great address to myself, is only to be compared with the Titanic sculpture of Michael Angelo, or the colossal imagery of Potts."

Serena smiled gloomily. He was familiar with that sort of praise, as addressed to himself, but with all his cynicism, he scarcely approved of its lavish application to an obscure Frenchman. The fact was that the whole speech formed part and parcel of a eulogistic article, in Ponto's best manner, then in type for the "Megatherium," a widely circulated literary journal in which nepotism and malignity formed equal parts.

"By the way," observed Serena, still quietly at work, "I see that MacAlpine has been falling foul of our friend Potts in the North British."

MacAlpine was a cantakerous critic hailing from beyond the Border, and with a Highland disregard of consequences in the expression of his literary opinions. Ponto turned livid.

"MacAlpine," he exclaims, "bears to the immortal Potts the relation that a leper does to the Paian Apollo. It is well known that MacAlpine has been guilty of murder, bigamy, rapine, incest and larceny, but all these are nothing compared to his fiendish and futile statement that Potts is not the most stupendous, wonderful, awe-inspiring, celestial and cosmic creature existing on this planet. MacAlpine, it is notorious, left his grandmother to starve in the workhouse, and kicked his little brother to death, but these crimes are venial by the side of his hateful and hellish assertion that your divine and spirit-compelling picture of 'Psyche watching the sleep of Eros' is out of proportion."

Serena sighed, then smiled.

"Do you know, my dear Ponto, I sometimes think that a little hostile criticism is refreshing. I really find it so, when it comes in my way."

Ponto shuddered.

"The only true attitude of criticism is that of worship," he exclaimed.

"The man who, in contemplating your consummate masterpiece, could be conscious of any feeling save of the surging forces of cosmic yearning, flowering into the form of perfect idealization, and shining with the reflected light of coruscating eternities of sterile pain—such a man, I say, is capable of any social crime, and incapable of any æsthetic perception."

"Pardon me," returned Serena. "What you say is doubtless very flattering, but if criticism is pure worship, how do you account for your own attacks on the literary productions of the enemies of the æsthetic school?"

"All modern schools but one are execrable," returned Ponto, with a grinding of the teeth and a waving of the hand. "It is enough for us to pronounce that they are not—Art! In approaching them we do not criticise—we simply obliterate; we crush, as we crush a reptile or an unclean thing. The man who denies absolute perfection to Potts, or universal mastery to Blanco Serena, at once proclaims, not merely his incompetence to speak on any artistic subject whatever, but by inference his moral degradation as a human being. We wave him from our vision—we wipe him out. He is a loathsome Philistine, an outcast, physically and intellectually abominable. Such a man once said, in my hearing, that 'Mademoiselle de Maupin' was not the purest, wholesomest, most supremely sane and salutary book produced since the Divine Comedy, and that, on the whole, he preferred Wordsworth to Gautier as a moral

teacher. My whole soul revolted. I shrank from that man with a shudder, and I am convinced that the wretch is ethically lost and intellectually paralytic."

This is only an extract referring to the peculiar artistic tendencies of a year or two ago; later on there is a discussion of the peculiar ideas of literature and especially of journalism which obtain among certain classes and which have already borne considerable fruit in New York. The book can give an excellent reason for its existence, and, besides, the matter is artistically presented.

SANFORD R. GIFFORD.

WE have been requested to publish these beautiful lines written shortly after the death of Sanford R. Gifford, and originally published in the New York *Tribune* of November 14, 1880. Those who knew and loved the artist and who cling to all their memories of him, will be glad to preserve this tribute to his genius and charming personality. Those who did not know him may still appreciate the beauty of the lines, which we reproduce with pleasure.

GIFFORD.

I.

THE CLOSED STUDIO.

This was a magician's cell:
Beauty's self obeyed his spell!
When the air was gloom without,
Grace and Color played about
Yonder easel. Many a sprite,
Golden-winged with heaven's light,
Let the upper skies go drear,
Spreading his rare plumage here.

Skyward now,—alas the day!—
See the truant Ariels play!
Cloud and air with light they fill,
Wandering at idle will,
Nor (with half their tasks undone)
Stay to mourn the master gone.
Only in this hollow room,
Now, the stillness and the gloom.

II.

OF WINTER NIGHTS.

When the long nights return, and find us met
Where he was wont to meet us, and the flame
On the deep hearth-stone gladdens as of old,
And there is cheer, as ever in that place,
How shall our utmost nearing close the gap
Known, but till then scarce measured? Or what light
Of cheer for us, his gracious presence gone,
His speech delayed, till none shall fail to miss
That halting voice, yet sure; speaking, it seemed,
The one apt word? For well the painter knew
Art's alchemy and law; her nobleness
Was in his soul, her wisdom in his speech,
And loyalty was housed in that true heart,
Gentle yet strong, and yielding not one whit
Of right or purpose. Now, not more afar
The light of last year's Yule fire from the smile
Of Gifford, nor more irreclaimable
Its vapor mingled with the wintry air.

EDMUND C. STEDMAN.