The Royal Academy Exhibition

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That nearly all artists dislike and despise the Royal Academy is a matter of common knowledge. Whether with reason or without is a matter of opinion, but the existence of an immense fund of hate and contempt of the Academy is not denied. From Glasgow to Cornwall, wherever a group of artists collects, there hangs a gathering and a darkening sky of hate. True, the position of the Academy seems to be impregnable; and even if these clouds should break into storm the Academy would be as little affected as the rock of Gibraltar by squall or tempest. The Academy has succe88fully resisted a Royal Commission, and a crusade led by Mr. Holman Hunt in the columns of the *Times* did not succeed in obtaining the slightest measure of reform…. Here I might consult Blue-books and official documents, and tell the history of the Academy; but for the purpose of this article, the elementary facts in everyone's possession are all that are necessary. We know that we owe the Academy to the artistic instincts of George III. It was he who sheltered it in Somerset House, and when Somerset House was turned into public offices, the Academy was bidden to Trafalgar Square; and when circumstances again compelled the authorities to ask the Academy to move on, the Academy, posing as a public body, demanded a site, and the Academy was given one worth three hundred thousand pounds. Thereon the Academy erected its present buildings, and when they were completed the Academy declared itself on the first opportunity to be no public body at all, but a private enterprise. Then why the site, and why the Royal charter? Mr. Colman, Mr. Pears, Mr. Reckitt are not given sites worth three hundred thousand pounds. These questions have often been asked, and to them the Academy has always an excellent answer. "The site has been granted, and we have erected buildings upon it worth a hundred thousand pounds; get rid of us you can not." The position of the Academy is as impregnable as the rock of Gibraltar; it is as well advertised as the throne itself, and the income derived from the sale of the catalogues alone is enormous. Then the Academy has the handling of the Chantrey Bequest Funds, which it does not fail to turn to its own advantage by buying pictures of Academicians, which do not sell in the open market, at extravagant prices, or purchasing pictures by future Academicians, and so fostering, strengthening, and imposing on the public the standard of art which obtains in Academic circles. Such, in a few brief words, is the institution which controls and in a large measure directs the art of this country. But though I come with no project to obtain its dissolution, it seems to me interesting to consider the causes of the hatred of the Academy with which artistic England is saturated, oftentimes convulsed; and it may be well to ask if any institution, however impregnable, can continue to defy public opinion, if any sovereignty, however fortified by wealth and buttressed by prescription, can continue to ignore and outrage the opinions of its subjects?

And the hatred of artistic England for the Academy proceeds from the knowledge that the Academy is no true centre of art, but a mere commercial enterprise protected and subventioned by Government. In recent years every last shred of disguise has been cast off, and it has become patent to everyone that the Academy is conducted on as purely commercial principles as any shop in the Tottenham Court Road. For it is impossible to suppose that Mr. Orchardson

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and Mr. Watts do not know that Mr. Leader's landscapes are like tea-trays, that Mr. Dicksee's figures are like bon-bon boxes, and that Mr. Herkomer's portraits are like German cigars. But apparently the R.A.s are merely concerned to follow the market, and they elect the men whose pictures sell best in the City. Citymen buy the productions of Mr. Herkomer, Mr. Dicksee, Mr. Leader, and Mr. Goodall. Little harm would be done to art if the money thus expended meant no more than filling stock-brokers' drawing-rooms with bad pictures, but the uncontrolled exercise of the stockbroker's taste in art means the election of a vast number of painters to the Academy, and election to the Academy means certain affixes, R.A. and A., and these signs are meant to direct opinion. The ordinary man goes to the Academy ; he thinks a picture very bad, looks it out in the catalogue, and finding R.A. or A. after the painter's name, concludes that he must be mistaken, and so a false standard of art is created in the public mind. But though Mr. Orchardson, Sir John Millais, Sir Frederick Leighton, and Mr. Watts have voted for the City merchants' nominees, it would be a mistake to suppose that they did not know for whom they should have voted. It is to be questioned if there be an R.A. now alive who would dare to deny that Mr. Whistler is a very great painter. It was easy to say he was not in the old days when, under the protection of Mr. Ruskin, the R.A.s went in a body and gave evidence against him. But now even Mr. Jones, R.A., would not venture to repeat the opinion he expressed about one of the most beautiful of the nocturnes. Time, it is true, has silenced the foolish mouth of the R.A., but time has not otherwise altered him; and there is as little chance to-day as there was twenty years ago of Mr. Whistler being elected an Academician. But though Mr. Whistler stands first among the misdeeds of the Academy, he does not stand alone.. No difference exists even in Academic circles as to the merits of Mr. Albert Moore's work. Many Academicians will freely acknowledge that his non-election is a very grave scandal; they will tell you that they have done everything to get him elected, and have given up the task in despair. Mr. Whistler and Mr. Albert Moore, the two greatest artists living in England, will never be elected Academicians; and artistic England is asked to acquiesce in this grave scandal, and also in many minor scandals: the election of Mr. Dicksee in place of Mr. Henry Moore, and Mr. Stanhope Forbes in place of Mr. Swan or Mr. John Sargent! No one thinks Mr. Dicksee as capable an artist as Mr. Henry Moore, and no one thinks Mr. Stanhope Forbes as great an artist as Mr. Swan, or Mr. Sargent. Then why were they elected? Because the men who represent most emphatically the taste of the City, have become so numerous of late years in the Academy that they are able to keep out anyone whose genius would throw a doubt on the commonplace ideal which they are interested in upholding. Mr. Alma Tadema would not care to confer such a mark of esteem as the affix R.A. on any painter practising an art which, when understood, would involve hatred of the copyplate antiquity which he supplies to the public. This explanation seems incredible, I admit, but no other explanation is possible, for I repeat that the Academicians do not themselves deny the genius of the men they have chosen to ignore. So we find the Academy as a body working on exactly the same lines as the individual R.A., whose one ambition is to extend his connection, please his customers, and frustrate competition; and just as the capacity of the individual R.A. declines when the incentive is money, so does. the corporate body lose its strength, and its hold on the art instincts of the nation relaxes when its aim becomes merely mercenary enterprise. If Sir John Millais, Sir Frederick Leighton, Mr. Orchardson, Mr. Hook, and Mr. Watts were to die to-morrow, their places could be filled by men who are not and never will be in the Academy; but among the Associates there is no name that does not suggest a long decline: Mr. Macbeth, Mr.

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Leader, Mr. David Murray, Mr. Stanhope Forbes, Mr. J. MacWhirter. And are the coming Associates Mr. Hacker, Mr. Shannon, Mr. Solomon, Mr. Alfred East, Mr. Bramley? Mr. Swan has been passed over so many times that his election is beginning to seem doubtful. For very shame's sake the elder Academicians may bring their influence and insist on his election; but the City merchants' nominees are very strong, and will not have him if they can help it. They may yield to Mr. Swan, but no single inch further will it be possible to get them to go. Mr. Mouat Louden, Mr. Lavery, Mr. Mark Fisher, and Mr. Peppercorn have no chance soever. Mr. Mouat Louden, one of the most talented among the younger men, one of the few young men whom a man of taste and artistic knowledge would care to commission to paint a portrait, was rejected this year. Mr. Lavery's charming portrait of Lord McLaren's daughters was still more shamefully treated; it was "skied." Mr. Mark Fisher, most certainly our greatest living landscape-painter, had his picture refused; and Mr. Reid, a man who has received medals in every capital in Europe, has had his principal picture hung just under the ceiling. On varnishing-day Mr. Reid challenged Mr. Dicksee to give a reason for this disgraceful hanging; he defied him to say that he thought the pictures underneath were better pictures; and it is as impossible for me as it was for Mr. Dicksee to deny that Mr. Reid's picture is the best picture in Room 6. Mr. Peppercorn, another well-known artist, had his picture rejected. It is now hanging in the Goupil Galleries. I do not put it forward as a masterpiece, but I do say that it deserved a place in any exhibition, and if I had a friend on the Hanging Committee I would ask him to point to the landscapes on the .Academy walls which he considers better than Mr. Peppercorn's.

Often a reactionary says, "Name the good pictures that have been rejected; where can I see them? I want to see these masterpieces," &c. The reactionary has generally the best of the argument. It is difficult to name the pictures that have been refused; they are the unknown quantity. Moreover, the pictures that are usually refused are tentative efforts, and not mature work. But this year the opponents of the .Academy are able to cite some very substantial facts in support of their position, a portrait by our most promising portrait-painter and a landscape by the best landscape-painter alive in England having been rejected. The picture of the farmyard which Mr. Fisher exhibited at the New English Art Club last autumn would not be out of place in the National Gallery. I do not say that the rejected picture is as good – I have not seen the rejected picture – but I do say that Mr. Fisher could not paint as badly as nine-tenths of the landscapes hanging in the .Academy if he tried.

The Academy is sinking steadily; never was it lower than this year; next year a few fine works may crop up, but they will be accidents, and will not affect the general tendency of the exhibitions nor the direction in which the Academy is striving to lead English art. Under the guidanceship of the Academy English art has lost all that charming naiveté and simplicity which was so long its distinguishing mark. At an Academy banquet, anything but the most general optimism would be out of place, and yet Sir Frederick Leighton could not but allude to the disintegrating influence of French art. True, in the second part of the sentence he assured his listeners that the danger was more imaginary than real, and he hoped that with wider knowledge, &c. But if no danger need be apprehended, why did Sir Frederick trouble to raise the question? And if he apprehended danger and would save us from it, why did he choose to ask his friend M. Bouguereau to exhibit at the Academy? The allusion in Sir Frederick's speech

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to French methods, and the exhibition of a picture by M. Bouguereau in the Academy, is strangely significant. For is not M. Bouguereau the chief exponent of the art which Sir Frederick ventures to suggest may prove a disintegrating influence in our art – has proven would be a more correct phrase. Let him who doubts compare the work of almost any of the elder Academicians with the work of those who practise the square brush-work of the French school. Compare, for instance, Sir Frederick's "Garden of the Hesperides" with Mr. Solomon's "Orpheus," and then you will appreciate the gulf that separates the elder Academicians from the men already chosen and marked out for future Academicians. And him whom this illustration does not convince I will ask to compare Mr. Hacker's "Annunciation" with any picture by Mr. Frith, or Mr. Faed, I will even go so far as to say with any work by Mr. Sidney Cooper, an octogenarian, now nearer his ninetieth than his eightieth year. It would have been better if Sir Frederick had told the truth boldly at the Academy banquet. He knows that a hundred years will hardly suffice to repair the mischief done by this detestable French painting, this mechanical drawing and modelling, built up systematically, and into which nothing of the artist's sensibility may enter. Sir Frederick hinted the truth, and I do not think it will displease him that I should say boldly what he was minded but did not dare to say. The high position he occupies did not allow him to go further than he did; the society of which he is president is now irreparably committed to Anglo-French art, and has, by every recent election, bound itself to uphold and impose this false and foreign art upon the nation.

Until he painted his picture of "The Mowers," Mr. Clausen was the most prominent English exponent of the Bastien-Lepage-Bouguereau method of painting (the coupling of the two names will surprise some readers, but there is little difference between the two artists; the dead man was the Bouguereau of the modern movement, that's all). Alone among English painters, Mr. Clausen seemed to inform the method with some native originality, but there remained too much Bastien-Lepage to win admiration from those who love native and original talent. But this year Mr. Clausen seems to have shaken himself free of his early training. I have witnessed too many attempts to get rid of a bad education to believe that it ever can be completely sloughed off. Mr. Clausen may be the exception. Those who feel quite sure on this point I will ask to look at Mr. Clausen's second picture, a "Girl's Head," hung in the second room. It is as dry and uninteresting a piece of Bastien-Lepageism as Mr. Clausen ever perpetrated. But the mediocrity of the second does not effect the beauty of the first, which, whether it be an accident that will not repeat itself, or the beginning of a growth of new talent in Mr. Clausen, is most certainly an excellent and charming picture, by far the most, indeed the one, desirable oil-painting in the Academy. Turning to my notes I find this description of the picture: "A small canvas containing three mowers in a flowering meadow. Two are mowing, the third, a little to the left, sharpens his scythe. The sky is deep and lowering – a sultry summer sky, a little unpleasant in colour, but true. At the end of the meadow the trees gleam. The earth is wrapped in a hot mist, the result of the heat, and through it the sun sheds a somewhat diffused and oven-like heat. No doubt there are heavy clouds overhead, for the gleam that passes over the three white shirts is transitory and uncertain. The handling is woolly and unpleasant, but handling can be overlooked when a canvas exhales a deep sensation of life. The movement of mowing – I should have said movements, for the men mow differently; one is older than the other – admirably expressed. And the principal figure, though placed in the immediate foreground, is in and not out of the

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atmosphere. The difficulty of the trousers has been overcome by generalisation; the garment has not been copied patch by patch. The distribution of light is admirable; nowhere does it escape from the frame. J.F. Millet has painted many a worse picture."

Except this picture, which is admirable, there is nothing in the Academy which furnishes the critic with a theme for critical analysis, nothing from which the critic can deduce general laws and principles. Here and there, in the corner, small pictures may be discovered which it would not be disagreeable to possess; but the barren aspect of the Academy is more than ever surprising. Out of the vast array of portraits and subject-pictures painted in various styles and illustrating every degree of ignorance, stupidity, and false education, one thing really comes home to the careful observer, and that is, the steady obliteration of all English feeling and mode of thought. The younger men practise an art purged of all nationality. England lingers in the elder painters, and though the representation is often hopelessly inadequate, the English pictures are pleasanter than the mechanical art which has spread from Paris all over Europe, blotting out in its progress all artistic expression of racial instincts and mental characteristics. Nothing, for instance, can be more primitive, infantile in execution, than Mr. Leslie's "Rose Queen." But it seems to me superficial criticism to pull it to pieces, for after all it suggests a pleasant scene, a stairway full of girls in white muslin; and who does not like pretty girls dressed in white muslin? And Mr. Leslie spares us the boredom of odious and sterile French pedantry.

Now Mr. Waterhouse's picture of "Circe Poisoning the Sea," hanging on the opposite wall, demands a more respectful consideration. It is an excellent example of square brush-work. The drawing is planned out geometrically, the modelling is built up mechanically. The brush, filled with thick paint, works like a trowel. In the hands of the Dutch and Flemish artists the brush was in direct communication with the brain, and moved slowly or rapidly, changing from the broadest and most emphatic stroke to the most delicate and fluent touch according to the nature of the work. But here all is square and heavy. Look at that arm, those shoulders, and tell me, if you can, that they are not wanting in just that sensibility of touch without which there is no life.

But can we credit Mr. Dicksee with any artistic intention in the picture he calls "Leila," hanging in the next room? I think not. Mr. Dicksee probably thought that having painted what the critics would call "somewhat sad subjects" last year, that it would be well if he painted something distinctly gay this year. A girl in a harem struck him as a subject that would please every one,especially if he gave her a pretty face, a pretty dress, and posed her in a graceful attitude. A nice bright crimson was just the colour for the dress, the feet he might leave bare, and it would be well to draw them from the plaster cast – a pair of pretty feet would be sure to find favour with the populace. It is impo88ible to believe that Mr. Dicksee was moved by any deeper thought or impression when he painted this picture. The execution is not quite so childlike and bland as Mr. Leslie's; it is heavier and more stodgy. One is a cane chair from the Tottenham Court Road, the other is a drawing-room chair from the Tottenham Court Road. In neither does any trace of French influence appear, and both painters are City-elected Academicians. A sudden thought. …Leader, Fildes, David Murray, Peter Graham, Herkomer…. Then it is not the City that favours the French school, but the Academy itself! And this shows how widely tastes may differ, yet remain equally sundered from good taste. I believe the north and the south poles

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are equi-distant from the equator. Looking at Sir Frederick Leighton's picture, entitled "At the Fountain," I am forced to admit that, regarded as mere execution, it is quite as intolerably bad as Mr. Dicksee's "Leila." And yet it is not so bad a picture, because Sir Frederick's mind is a higher and better-educated mind than Mr. Dicksee's; and therefore, however his hand may fail him, there remains a certain habit of thought which always, even when worn and frayed, preserves something of its original aristocracy. "The Sea giving up its Dead" seems to me to be pompous, empty, and as ugly in execution as in conception. In the next room – Room 3 – Mr. Watts exhibits a very incoherent work, entitled "She shall be called Woman." The picture shows the genius of this great painter, not on the threshold of decline, of decrepitude, but a long way down the gloomy pathway. Were it not for the fact that Mr. Watts exhibits two pictures, as beautiful as any he ever painted, in the New Gallery, I should deem it unpardonable to write one word of disparagement or censure. But as "Hic Transit" proves Mr. Watts to be in possession of all his powers, I may be permitted to wonder at the strange divagations of his genius.

The place of honour has been given to the President's "Garden of the Hesperides." The merit of the picture is in the arabesque, which is charming and original. The maidens are not dancing, but sitting round their tree. On the right there is an olive, in the middle the usual strawberry-cream damsel, and on the left a purple drapery. The brown water in the foreground balances the white sky most happily, and the faces of the women recall our best recollections of Sir Frederick's work. Considered as a piece of decoration, the picture would be as good as anything he has done, were it not that owing to a faulty lighting the knees of the strawberry-cream damsel come right out of the picture. In this room there is also Mr. Orchardson's picture of "Napoleon dictating the account of his Campaigns." I gather from my notes the trace of the disappointment that this picture caused me: "Two small figures in a large canvas. The secretary sits on the right at a small table. He looks up, his face turned towards Napoleon, who stands on the left in the middle of the picture, looking down, studying the maps with which the floor is strewn. A great simplicity in the surroundings, and all the points of character insisted on, with the view of awakening the spectator's curiosity. From first to last a vicious desire to narrate an anecdote. It is strange that a man of Mr. Orchardson's talent should participate so fully in the supreme vice of modern art which believes a picture to be the same thing as a scene in a play. The whole picture conceived and executed in that pale yellow tint which seems to be the habitual colour of Mr. Orchardson's mind." When I turned from this picture my eye was caught by a picture by Mr. Marcus Stone. I should not be surprised to learn one day that this R.A. has invented a method of painting by machinery. For one set of years, it is true, the rejected lover goes out on the right; for another set of years he goes out on the left; but he always wears the same costume, and stands looking back in the same attitude. In the lovers themselves and in the garden I have never been able to discover any change in Mr. Stone's palette – neither change nor modification – and that is a pity; for it is not more expressive than a cheap wall-paper. Mr. Stone is another City-elected Academician, and in him there is not to be found a trace of French influence any more than in Mr. Dicksee or Mr. Leslie. Room 4 is remarkable for Stanhope Forbes's picture of "Forging the Anchor." Mr. Stanhope Forbes is the last elected Academician, and the most prominent exponent of the art of Bastien-Lepage. Perhaps the most instructive article that could be written on the Academy would be one in which the writer would confine his examination to this and Mr. Clausen's picture of "Mowers,"

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comparing and contrasting the two pictures at every point, showing where they diverge, and tracing their artistic history back to its ultimate source. But to do this thoroughly would be to write the history of the artistic movement in France and England for the last thirty years; and I must limit myself to pointing out that Mr. Clausen has gone back to first principles, whereas Mr. Stanhope Forbes still continues at the point where Bastien-Lepage began to curtail, deform, and degrade the original inspiration. Mr. Clausen, I said, overcame the difficulty of the trousers by generalisation. Mr. Stanhope Forbes copies the trousers seam by seam, patch by patch; and the ugliness of the garment bores you in the picture, exactly as it would in nature. And the same criticism applies equally well to the faces, the hands, the leather aprons, the loose iron, the hammers, the pincers, the smoked walls. I should not be surprised to learn that Mr. Stanhope Forbes had had a forge built up in his studio, and had copied it all as it stood. The artist may treat the basest and lowest subjects on the face of the earth, but an element of mystery, of *cachotterie*, must enter into all art. The Dutch found this essential element in the atmosphere, and if Mr. Stanhope Forbes had thought more about what the forge would yield in transforming lights and shades, he might have painted a picture. Even then it would be necessary to change the execution – that plodding mechanical square brushwork which he learnt in France. He must undo his education from first to last; the brush must cease to build up, it must write. In a word, he must, if he wishes to be a painter, sensitise his execution.

Concerning the numerous portraits by Mr. Fildes and Mr. Herkomer scattered through these rooms I shall have little to say. Mr. Fildes graduated on the *Graphic* newspaper. He gave up his black and white work for oil-painting without, however, acquiring, or even attempting to acquire, any of the qualities which the new medium necessitated. Drawing, tone and composition are evidently considered by him only so far as they help him to tell the story he is minded to tell. As the journalist who is sent by a daily paper to write a report of a boat-race or a wedding, understands the effect and the construction of a phrase, so far Mr. Fildes understands colour and line. Mr. Orchardson stoops, it is true, to the anecdote, but he brings into the telling the same refinement of style as Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Pater do when they write for the newspapers and reviews. I should be puzzled to say which I dislike most, a portrait by Mr. Fildes or a portrait by Mr. Herkomer. Mr. Fildes is to me the type and epitome of Holloway. Mr. Herkomer reminds me of the Tyrolean carvers who come over here in vans. I do not know if he uses photography, but the mechanical manner in which the characteristics of the sitter are seized, suggest photography. But are Mr. Herkomer and Mr. Fildes taken together as bad as Mr. Alma Tadema's portrait of an archdeacon? This portrait sent me to the catalogue in frantic haste. I wanted to know who on earth could have done it. Elizabeth Nurse should be grateful to Mr. Tadema, for by force of contrast her nice little picture is transformed for the time being into a little masterpiece. Mr. Leader and Mr. David Murray are the two Academicians who paint landscapes. They practise their art in different ways. Mr. Leader's ideal seems to be between the chromo and the photograph, and that hybrid he continues to produce with unwavering success. Mr. Murray's speciality defies description. In the New Gallery he is represented by a Murray-Constable, and in the Academy by a Murray-Corot and a Murray-Rousseau. Sometimes he perpetrates a pure Murray, and this raises a curious question: Which is preferable – Mr. Murray when he aspires towards the heights of genius of the masters, or Mr. Murray when he drudges in the lowly path of his own natural talent?

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The old masters habitually used heavy shadows; it is, therefore, incumbent on "the moderns" to dispense with all shadow, with all depth of tone; and for some years pictures have been growing steadily whiter and whiter; they have now reached the consistency of faintly-tinted sheets of Japanese paper; no object has any weight, everything floats in their pictures like feathers. Mr. Solomon and Mr. Hacker have not realised that the first of all necessities in a picture is *une atmosphère de tableau*, and I would point out to them that a tree bears away the whole landscape in a picture of Corot, and that in a portrait by Manet a hand outweighs the entire figure. Mr. Solomon's and Mr. Hacker's pictures are identical; the faults of one are the faults of the other. Mr. Solomon calls his picture "Orpheus," so I suppose he bas a story to tell, and has some dramatic effect in view. But in this "Orpheus" I perceive no dramatic significance whatever. I see a tall figure drawn with out any perception of the beauty of form, without any passion for form, without any profound or curious appreciation of form; an uninteresting outline I see, methodically filled up with a monotonous flesh tint. I find no distance that goes back, no foreground that comes forward, nor any contrast of light and shade. I look in vain for any two parts that hold together.

Mr. Hacker has taken "The Annunciation" for theme. Rossetti's treatment of this theme hangs in the National Gallery. It will be interesting and instructive to compare the two pictures, for the intention of both painters was dramatic significance. We will look first at the Rossetti.

It is a small picture, about three feet by two, and is destitute of all technical accomplishment, or even habit. It is painted in white and blue, and the streak of red in the foreground, the red of a screen on which is embroidered the lily – emblem of purity – adds to the chill and coldness. Drawn up upon her white bed the Virgin crouches, silent with expectation, listening to the mystic dream that has come upon her in the dim hush of dawn. The large blue eyes gleam with some strange joy that is quickening in her. The mouth and chin tell no tale, but the eyes are deep pools of light, and mirror the soul that is on fire within. The red hair falls about her, a symbol of the soul. In the drawn-up knees, faintly outlined beneath the white sheet, the painter hints at her body's beauty. One arm is cast forward, the hand not clenched but stricken. Behind her a blue curtain hangs straight from iron rods set on either side of the bed. Above the curtain a lamp is burning dimly, blighted by the pallor of the dawn. A dead, faint sky – the faint ashen sky which precedes the first rose tint; the circular window is filled with it, and the paling blue of the sky's colour contrasts with the deep blue of the bed's curtain, on which the Virgin's red hair is painted. The angel stands by the side of the white bed – I should say floats, his fair feet hanging out of a few pale flames. White raiment clothes him, falling in long folds, leaving the arms and feet bare; in the right hand he holds a lily all in blossom; the left hand is extended in rigid gesture of warning. Brown-gold hair grows thick about the angel's neck; the shadowed profile is outlined against the hard, sad sky; the expression of the face is deep and sphinx-like; he has come, it is clear, from vast realms of light, where uncertainty and doubt are unknown. The Dove passes by him towards the Virgin. Look upon her again, crouching in her white bed, her knees drawn to her bosom, her deep blue eyes – her dawn-tinted eyes – filled with ache, dream, and expectation. The shadows of dawn are on wall and floor – strange, blue shadows! – the Virgin's shadow lies on the wall, the angel's shadow falls across the coverlet.

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Here, at least, there is drama, and the highest form of drama – spiritual drama; here, at least, there is story, and the highest form of story, symbol, and suggestion. Rossetti has revealed the essence of this intensely human story – a story that, whenever we look below the surface, which is mediaeval and religious, we recognise as a story of to-day, of yesterday, of all time. A girl thralled by the mystery of Conception awakes at morn in palpitations, seeing visions. Mr. Hacker's telling of the legend is to Rossetti's what a story in the *London Journal* is to a story by Balzac. The Virgin has apparently wandered outside the town. She is dressed in a long white garment not at all explicit: is it a night-dress, or a piece of conventional drapery? On the right there is a long, silly tree, which looks as if it had been evolved out of a ball of green wool with knitting-needles, and above her floats an angel attired in a wisp of blue gauze. Rossetti, we know, was, in the strict sense of the word, hardly a painter at all, but he had something to say; and we can bear in painting, as we can in literature, with faulty expression, if there is something behind it. What is most intolerable in art is scholastic rhodomontade. And what else is Mr. Hacker's execution? In every transmission the method seems to degenerate, and in this picture it seems to have touched bottom. It has become loose, all its original crispness is lost, and, complicated with *la peinture claire*, it seems incapable of expressing anything whatsoever. There is no variety of tone in that white sheet, there is nobody inside it, and the angel is as insincere and frivolous as any sketch in a young lady's album. The building at the back seems to have been painted with the scrapings of a dirty palette, and the sky in the left-hand corner comes out of the picture. I have only to add that the picture has been purchased out of the Chantrey Bequest Fund, and the purchase is considered to be equivalent to a formal declaration that Mr. Hacker will be elected an Associate of the Royal Academy at the next election.

Mr. Hacker's -election to the Academy – I speak of this election as a foregone conclusion – following as it does the election of Mr. Stanhope Forbes, makes it plain that the intention of the Academy is to support to the full extent of its great power a method of painting which is foreign and unnatural to English art, which, in the opinion of a large body of artists – and it is valuable to know that their opinion is shared by the best and most original of the French artists – is disintegrating and destroying our English artistic tradition. Mr. Hacker's election and the three elections that will follow it, those of Mr. Shannon, Mr. Alfred East, and Mr. Bromley, will be equivalent to an official declaration that those who desire to be English Academicians must adopt the French methods. Independent of the national disaster that these elections will inflict on art, they will be moreover flagrant acts of injustice. For I repeat, among the forty Academicians there is not one who considers these future Academicians to be comparable to Mr. Whistler, Mr. Albert Moore, Mr. Swan, or Mr. Sargent. No one holds such an opinion, and yet there is no doubt which way the elections in the Academy will go. The explanation of this incredible anomaly I have given; the explanation is not a noble one, but that is not a matter for which I can be held responsible; suffice it to say, that my explanation is the only possible explanation. The Academy is a private commercial enterprise, and conducts its business on the lines which it considers the most advantageous; its commercialism has become flagrant and undeniable. If this is so – how the facts can otherwise be explained I cannot see – it is to be regretted that the Academy got its beautiful site for nothing. But regrets are vain. The only thing to do now is to see that the Academy is no longer allowed to sail under false colours. This article

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may awaken in the Academy a sense that it is not well to persist in open and flagrant defiance of public opinion, or it may serve to render the Academicians even more stiff-necked than before. In either case it will have accomplished its purpose. GEORGE MOORE.

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