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Remarks on the Method of Art History: II

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when Nixon left Drumcondra for 'another Kingdom', it could have been to set up in business at Phippsbridge, in England, and that the following extract refers either to him – 32 years later – or to a near relative of the same name.

*Faulkner's Dublin Journal*.<sup>18</sup>

June 23, 1789 [also June 30 and July 7 and 14, 1789].

'To be sold by Auction, by Messers Skinner and Dyke, On Thurs. the 16th of July, at 12 o'clock, at Garraway's Coffee-house, Change-Alley, London, in 4 Lots, unless previously disposed of by private Contract.

The *Capital* and most *Compact Set of Copper-Plate Callico* Printing Works in the Kingdom, advantageously situate at Phippsbridge a Small Distance from *Mitcham* and *Morton*, 8 Miles from London, now in full Work under the Firm of *Messers Francis Nixon and Co.* The Premises consist of every proper Building erected on a singularly convenient and judicious Plan for the various Departments of the Manufactures, and carrying on the extensive Business with Ease and Dispatch, and are plentifully supplied from the River Wandel. Also a substantial Dwelling-house, Offices, Gardens, Coach-houses and Stabling, the whole Erected in the Best Manner, and in perfect Repair, held for 17 years, renewable during the Lives of two Gentlemen; subject to a ground Rent of £3-3-0 per Annum.

Lot 2. 16 Acres of rich Land adjoining, a Part Laid out in Bleaching-grounds, and held for 41 years at £41 per Annum, out of which Land Tax is allowed.

Lot 3. 12 Acres of rich Land contiguous, with a Messuage and Offices, and 3 Tenements held for 22 years at £30 per annum, out of which Land-tax is allowed.

Lot 4. 2 Acres of Freehold Land adjoining. To be viewed 10 Days preceding the Sale, by Tickets, which may be then had with printed Particulars, of Messers Skinner and Dyke, Aldergate-St., where a Plan may be seen. Particulars also at the Place of Sale, and may be viewed any Sat. prior to the 6th Day of July, after one o'clock by applying for tickets as above.'

<sup>18</sup> National Library, Dublin.

It is generally recognised that about the middle of the eighteenth century the focus of the linen and cotton printing industry in England tended to shift from Surrey and the neighbourhood of London, to the north – *i.e.*, to Manchester and the district round. A print in the Victoria and Albert Museum, with a Chinoiserie subject in red, and marked 'Collins Woolmer's 1766' has been tentatively attributed to the north.<sup>19</sup> But whether this factory was situated near London, or near Manchester, it seems fitting to conclude by drawing attention to an earlier, and hitherto little-known specimen which is in the National Museum, Dublin (Fig. 12). This example (also printed in red from engraved metal plates) depicts a pastoral scene and a ruined arch, on the base of which occurs the inscription 'Collins Woolmer's 1765'. Unfortunately, the piece is not large enough to show a repeat of the whole pattern, and there is a patch in one upper corner – but at the bottom of the fence over which a man's head appears, can just be discerned, the additional inscription 'Robert, sculp.' If this refers to the designer (as seems likely) then this piece has the additional distinction of bearing the artist's name, as well as the factory mark and date, incorporated in the pattern.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Illustrated and described in *Brief Guide to the Western Painted, Dyed, and Printed Textiles* [Victoria and Albert Museum, 1938], p. 16 and pl. ix.

<sup>20</sup> I wish to thank the appropriate authorities of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and of the National Museum, Dublin, for permission to use the photographs reproduced here.

F. ANTAL

## Remarks on the Method of Art History: I I

Why is it, we may ask, that a tendency still remains among some art historians to put a brake upon efforts to broaden art history by a study of social history? It is their own historical position which compels them to do so. As regards England, since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries an admirable tradition of art theory, art criticism, and connoisseurship has flourished here. Art history, on the other hand, as a university discipline, obliged to stand on its own feet, work out its own field of research and its own method is of very recent growth. The new science necessarily originated in previous art criticism; at first, towards the end of the nineteenth century, in its more impressionist form, art criticism was largely concerned to describe the fleeting reactions of a sensitive beholder before a work of art, while later, in the early twentieth century, an attempt was made to modify this extreme subjectivism by a more controlled, more constructed, but still unhistorical approach. The historical point of view naturally came into the new discipline where it was the most urgently needed, the most obviously lacking and where a transition

from the previous stage of art criticism could be most easily effected: in the construction of the historical development on a formal basis. So the space allotted to history within art history was relatively small, as it had been in the Wölfflin school. But, while in the Wölfflin school the theory of art for art's sake could only be sensed as a distant though necessary phenomenon, here art history, because of its later origin in an esoteric art criticism, was still closely and directly bound up with it. It is almost a hundred years since Ruskin, than whom none could have been more averse to the art for art's sake attitude, considered art as expressive of the society which produced it (though naturally, in his case, mainly of the ethical life of society) and was stimulated in consequence by his study of art to a thorough study of the social structure and social economy.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to Ruskin not only many writers during his later life-time and after him, but even

<sup>28</sup> In his Ruskin lecture, *Ruskin's Politics*, London [1921], BERNARD SHAW drew attention to this evolution remarking, incidentally, that this marked his own development too.

some art historians of our own day have still been apt to believe, fundamentally, that art is a world by itself which has, and should have, as little contact as possible with the tangible world. Since they cannot be consistently historical, these latter still adhere to the supposition that the art for art's sake point of view is unchangeable. They cannot imagine that art history is a piece of history<sup>29</sup> and that the art historian's task is primarily not to approve or to disapprove of a given work of art from his own point of view, but to try to understand and explain it in the light of its own historical premises; and that there is no contradiction between a picture as a work of art and as a document of its time, since the two are complementary. Nor can they appreciate that familiarity with outlook and taste aids us in comprehending, not only the complete style of a picture, but ultimately, even its quality: partly because the quality of a given picture, in its special nuance, can only be seriously judged if compared with other pictures of the same style and even more so because knowledge historically-grounded is the only sure means of neutralising our subjective judgment on the quality of works of art of the past, even on the significance of individual styles, which otherwise is too exclusively conditioned by our penchant for one tendency or another in contemporary art akin to them.<sup>30</sup>

In recent years, as is well known, historical scholarship in England has tended to emphasise the economic and social aspects. Yet, for instance, though Tawney's book we have mentioned is one of the most widely-read, art historians of the older persuasion appear to be unacquainted with the fruitful achievements of modern historical research which is to be found, so to speak, on their doorsteps.<sup>31</sup> It is distasteful to them to find, embedded in art-historical literature, facts and terms, commonplaces in every historical book, with which they are unfamiliar and the art-historical implications and consequences of which they fail to grasp.<sup>32</sup> Living in their ivory tower, they think that to adduce the results of social or ecclesiastical history must degrade an art history

which should, at least theoretically, be reserved to masterpieces and in which the diversity of styles is explained by the diversity of styles. The sensitiveness and esoteric nature of their spiritual ancestors has by now become a search for precious, if possible, unusual words. We can feel no surprise, therefore, under such conditions, if the non-art historian, in particular the social historian, for example E. Halévy, in the short chapter on art in his *History of the English People in 1815* (English translation, London 1924) can make striking, new art-historical observations which, in many ways, are more interesting and revealing than those of some art historians on the same period.

The whole point of view of art historians, of whatever country or training, who have not yet even absorbed the achievements of Riegl, Dvořák, and Warburg (let alone tried to go beyond them) is conditioned by their historical place: they cling to older conceptions, thereby lagging behind at least some quarter of a century. And, in the same way are conditioned their step-by-step retreat and the concessions they are willing to make – not too many and not too soon – to the new spirit. Their resistance is all the stronger, their will to give ground, all the less, the greater the consistency and novelty they encounter. They themselves frequently publish weak pictures by fifth-rate masters, provided the period is remote enough: for these are attributions to, say, the Master of the Goodenough Deposition, and thus are justified from the point of view of connoisseurship.<sup>33</sup> Even the abundant literature on popular and semi-popular art is not, I believe, particularly frowned upon so long as this art is kept well apart from the general stylistic development or, at any rate, can be considered diverting and charming, reminiscent of Henri Rousseau. Discussion of the subject-matter seems permissible as long as it is restricted to an iconography in which the explanation of the choice of subject is kept as aloof as possible from living history. Literature on the working conditions of artists is not, I think, objected to, provided it remains detached and conclusions which could be drawn from it are not incorporated into literature dealing with great artists but are limited to isolated and casual reference. The innumerable allusions in art-historical literature to the social and political background usually pass unchallenged as long as the connection between it and art is left, on the whole, comfortably vague.<sup>34</sup> In the case of some artists of more recent centuries, however, practising secular art, the connection is so obvious that constant reference to it in literature has bred familiarity: in the case, for instance, of Hogarth, David or Géricault. Thus, a step further which reaches the precise association of style and outlook, a step so small that it is scarcely noticeable, passes without comment.<sup>35</sup> But when

<sup>33</sup> To avoid any misunderstanding: nothing would be more puerile than to deny the obvious importance of attributions. What will soon be gone with the wind is that over-accentuation, which tends to confine art history to attributions almost for attributions' sake.

<sup>34</sup> C. GUTKIND'S *Cosimo de' Medici*, Oxford [1938], is a typical case where a well-meaning author has felt the need to adduce far more economic and social history than had previously been done, but has not yet arrived at the stage of drawing any conclusions from them or of connecting them with anything. A large part of the book deals in almost too great detail with the economic conditions in Florence and with Cosimo's business interests, while, in the chapter 'Cosimo in private life', his philosophy of life (and, of course, also his liking for art and learning) remains entirely detached, so that we acquire no all-round picture of Cosimo's person and outlook.

<sup>35</sup> Articles I wrote on those three artists and to which no exception was taken were in the same vein as my book on Florentine painting, mentioned below.

<sup>29</sup> I purposely employ the expression 'piece of history' because Saxl (himself a product of the school of Vienna) used it in conversation with me.

<sup>30</sup> Interest in Baroque and Mannerist art, which originated, as we have mentioned, within the Viennese school of art history, was a consequence of the growing historical thoroughness of this school's own researches, while at the same time reflecting contemporary art tendencies. The analysis of Baroque art began with Riegl in the last years of the nineteenth century, that of Mannerism with Dvořák in the years preceding World War I. Though recognition of the qualities of the latter style, of course, coincided with the taste for contemporary expressionist art, as time goes on and with the growth of our knowledge of the spiritual and social background of Mannerism, we shall obtain an increasingly objective idea of this style.

<sup>31</sup> Nor, to take an example nearer to art history, do they appear to be conversant with the writings of the outstanding prehistoric archaeologist, V. Gordon Childe, which extend not only to oriental but even to classical antiquity and which establish the closest possible relations between social structure, religion, mental outlook, and art.

<sup>32</sup> The connection between religious and economic thought, as Tawney has demonstrated, can no longer be disputed to-day. Yet, it is apparently only the historian who is allowed to be aware of this, not the art historian, and, if the pure formalists had it their own way, art history would be destined to carry on in a water-tight compartment cut off from the other historical disciplines. This is even true of terminology. In the 1937 preface to his book, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, originally published in 1926, Tawney wrote: 'When this book first appeared, it was possible for a friendly reviewer, writing in a serious journal, to deprecate in all gravity the employment of the term "Capitalism" in an historical work, as a political catch-word, betraying a sinister intention on the part of the misguided author. An innocent solecism of the kind would not, it is probable, occur so readily to-day'. It can, however, occur even in 1948 from the same innocence, when it is a question not of historians but of art historians, who, as regards certain current terms, are fettered by a primitive word fetishism.

it is no longer a question of secular art of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries but, let us say, of religious art of remoter times as was, for instance, the case in my book on Florentine painting of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, then there still appears an objection on the part of some art historians to the discussion of differences in religious sentiment and consequently in religious art, as associated with various social groups; they would prefer to keep Fra Angelico and Botticelli in the dream-world ambient where the pre-Raphaelites put them. Although lately it has become fashionable to introduce a few historical facts, these may only enter the art-historical picture when confined to hackneyed political history, in a diluted form, which gives as little indication as possible of the existing structure of society and does not disturb the romantic twilight of the atmosphere. The last redoubt which will be held as long as possible is, of course, the most deep-rooted nineteenth-century belief, inherited from Romanticism, of the incalculable nature of genius in art. It is, however, characteristic of the strength of the new trend that L. Münz, the best connoisseur of

Rembrandt in our day, should have brought out, in 1931, a popular, annotated edition of Riegl's famous essay of 1902, on the Dutch Portrait Group; here, without detracting in any way from his grandeur, Rembrandt is treated as a link in a long chain and subjected to an analysis so exact and so instructive as to horrify every supporter of the genius theory.<sup>36</sup>

Methods of art history, just as pictures, can be dated. This is by no means a depreciation of pictures or methods – just a banal historical statement. But the time will naturally come when the exclusive formalists will generally be recognised as in the rear of art history, as to-day are the antiquarians and anecdotalists.

<sup>36</sup> I would like to recall here Münz's opinion that a closer understanding of Rembrandt's works is gained by the realisation that they are charged with meaning and emotion than by those 'happily now obsolete, æsthetic approaches from which Rembrandt's work was seen either as realism empty of all emotional content or as a magic of light and shade so exalted, so unique and intangible, that all attempts to search for a meaning became irrelevant' ('Rembrandt's "Synagogue" and some Problems of Nomenclature', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, iii, 1939–40).

F. J. B. WATSON

## The Nazari—A Forgotten Family of Venetian Portrait Painters

THE Nazari were a family of portrait painters of considerable importance in Venice during the eighteenth century. Bartolomeo, the head of the family, was born of poor parents at Ciusone, near Bergamo, on May 10, 1699.<sup>1</sup> The protection of Count Ferdinand Thurn and Taxis secured his admission at the age of seventeen into Angelo Trevisani's studio at Venice. His training was completed by a short visit to Rome in 1723, where he studied under Trevisani's brother, Francesco, and under Benedetto Luti. He was back in Venice by 1724, and his name first appears in the *Fraglia dei Pittori*<sup>2</sup> in 1726. He continued to work there for the rest of his life save for occasional visits abroad to carry out commissions which his success at home had brought him. In 1744 he was summoned to Frankfurt, where he painted portraits of the Emperor Charles VII, his Empress, and members of the

Imperial court as well as a few religious works. At the foundation of the Venetian Academy in 1756 he was elected a member, his name appearing second on the list of ordinary members elected after the three officers of the society had been chosen.<sup>3</sup> His death occurred in Milan on August 24, 1758 during the return journey from Genoa, where he had gone to paint an official portrait of the Doge.

Whilst still living he received a biographical notice in Orlandi's *Abecedario Pittorico* longer than that accorded to almost all his contemporaries, and his name is mentioned more frequently than that of any living Venetian painter except Tiepolo and Piazzetta in Pietro Gradenigo's *Notatori*. Yet when Zannetti published *Della Pittura Veneziana* in 1773 he confessed himself unable to mention a single work by Nazari in public possession.<sup>4</sup> This was certainly due in part to the fact that his works were largely portraits in the hands of the sitters or their families, but also because, like so many Venetian painters of his day, his works found a readier and more profitable sale amongst foreigners (especially the English)

<sup>1</sup> Most of the biographical information about Nazari is taken from F. M. TASSI'S *Vite dei Pittori, Scultori e Architetti Bergameschi*, Bergamo [1793], Tomo II, pp. 82–93. Tassi was a close personal friend of B. Nazari's and much of the information he used was obtained direct from the painter himself. Some of their correspondence was published in BOTTARI-TICOZZI: *Raccolta di Lettere . . .*, Milan [1822], iv, pp. 105, 109–130; v, p. 398.

<sup>2</sup> G. LORENZETTI: *Venezia e il suo Estuario*, Venice [1926], p. 859.

<sup>3</sup> G. FOGOLARI: *L'Arte* [1913], p. 246.

<sup>4</sup> p. 400 note.