interest, addressed also to the pure intelligence, on the other: – this is the way of most spectators, and of many critics, who have never caught sight all the time of that true pictorial quality which lies between, unique pledge, as it is, of the possession of the pictorial gift, that inventive or creative handling of pure line and colour, which, as almost always in Dutch painting, as often also in the works of Titian or Veronese, is quite independent of anything definitely poetical in the subject it accompanies. It is the *drawing* – the design projected from the peculiar pictorial temperament or constitution, in which, while it may possibly be ignorant of true anatomical proportions, all things whatever, all poetry, all ideas however abstract or obscure, float up as visible scene or image: it is the *colouring* – that weaving of light, as of just perceptible gold threads, through the dress, the flesh, the atmosphere, in Titian's *Lace-girl*, that staining of the whole fabric of the thing with a new, delightful physical quality. This *drawing*, then – the arabesque traced in the air by Tintoret's flying figures, by Titian's forest branches; this colouring – the magic conditions of light and hue in the atmosphere of Titian's *Lace-girl*, or Rubens's *Descent from the Cross*: – these essential pictorial qualities must first of all delight the sense, delight it as directly and sensuously as a fragment of Venetian glass; and through this delight alone become the vehicle of whatever poetry or science may lie beyond them in the intention of the composer. In its primary aspect, a great picture has no more definite message for us than an accidental play of sunlight and shadow for a few moments on the wall or floor: is itself, in truth, a space of such fallen light, caught as the colours are in an Eastern carpet, but refined upon, and dealt with more subtly and exquisitely than by nature itself. And this primary and essential condition fulfilled, we may trace the coming of poetry into painting, by fine gradations upwards; from Japanese fan-painting, for instance, where we get, first, only abstract colour; then, just a little interfused sense of the poetry of flowers; then, sometimes, perfect flower-painting; and so, onwards, until in Titian we have, as his poetry in the *Ariadne*, so actually a touch of true childlike humour in the diminutive, quaint figure with its silk gown, which ascends the temple stairs, in his picture of the *Presentation of the Virgin*, at Venice.

But although each art has thus its own specific order of impressions, and an untranslatable charm, while a just apprehension of the ultimate differences of the arts is the beginning of aesthetic criticism; yet it is noticeable that, in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art, by what German critics term an *Anders-streben* [striving to be other] – a partial alienation from its own limitations, through which the arts are able, not indeed to supply the place of each other, but reciprocally to lend each other new forces.

Thus some of the most delightful music seems to be always approaching to figure, to pictorial definition. Architecture, again, though it has its own laws – laws esoteric enough, as the true architect knows only too well – yet sometimes aims at fulfilling the conditions of a picture, as in the *Arena* chapel; or of sculpture, as in the flawless unity of Giotto's tower at Florence; and often finds a true poetry, as in those strangely twisted staircases of the *châteaux* of the country of the Loire, as if it were intended that among their odd turnings the actors in a theatrical mode of life might pass each other unseen; there being a poetry also of memory and of the mere effect of time, by which architecture often profits greatly. Thus, again, sculpture aspires out of the hard limitation of pure form towards colour, or its equivalent; poetry also, in many ways,

finding guidance from the other arts, the analogy between a Greek tragedy and a work of Greek sculpture, between a sonnet and a relief, of French poetry generally with the art of engraving, being more than mere figures of speech; and all the arts in common aspiring towards the principle of music; music being the typical, or ideally consummate art, the object of the great *Anders-streben* of all art, of all that is artistic, or partakes of artistic qualities.

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music. For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it. That the mere matter of a poem, for instance, its subject, namely, its given incidents or situation – that the mere matter of a picture, the actual circumstances of an event, the actual topography of a landscape – should be nothing without the form, the spirit, of the handling, that this form, this mode of handling, should become an end in itself, should penetrate every part of the matter: this is what all art constantly strives after, and achieves in different degrees.

* * *

Art, then, is thus always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material; the ideal examples of poetry and painting being those in which the constituent elements of the composition are so welded together, that the material or subject no longer strikes the intellect only; nor the form, the eye c
matter, in their union or identity, present one single effec
that complex faculty for which every thought and feeling i
analogue or symbol.

It is the art of music which most completely realizes tl
identification of matter and form. In its consummate mo
from the means, the form from the matter, the subject fro
in and completely saturate each other; and to it, there
perfect moments, all the arts may be supposed constantly
then, rather than in poetry, is to be found the true type
Therefore, although each art has its incommunicable ele
of impressions, its unique mode of reaching the 'imagina
be represented as continually struggling after the law
condition which music alone completely realizes; and
aesthetic criticism, dealing with the products of art, n
degree in which each of those products approaches, in thi

3 James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) Cross-examination in the Trial of Ruskin for Libel

An American by birth, Whistler was in Paris in the later 1850s and 1860s. He was a member of a circle of artists that included Manet, Legros and Fantin-Latour, and his *Symphony in White No. 1,* was among the paintings shown in the Salon des Refusés in 1863. But from 1859 till 1892 he made London his principal base, becoming a leading figure in the English aesthetic movement. In 1877 John Ruskin responded to the exhibition

of his *Nocturne in Black and Gold* at the Grosvenor Galleries with a condemnation which Whistler considered damaging to his livelihood. The ensuing libel case attracted considerable publicity. It has been seen with hindsight as a *cause célèbre* in the battle between competing standards and principles of judgement: on the one hand the conviction that art should be grounded in the natural world and that it should be edifying; on the other the view that the value of art lies in the autonomy of its formal and decorative effects. Ruskin did not take the stand, being reported too ill to attend the court. Whistler won the case but was awarded token damages of one farthing. The payment of his costs ruined him financially, at least for the time being. He published his own account of the trial in his book *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* in 1893. The following report was originally published in the *Daily News*, London, 26 November 1878. The *Nocturne in Black and Gold* is now in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Yesterday morning the trial of an action for libel in which Mr James Abbott McNeill Whistler, an artist, seeks to recover damages against Mr John Ruskin, the well-known author and art critic, was commenced in the Exchequer Chamber, before Baron Huddleston and a special jury. The case excited great interest, and the court was crowded throughout the entire day; even the passages to the court being filled.

Mr Serjeant Parry, in stating the case to the jury, said the plaintiff had followed the profession of an artist for many years both in this and other countries. Mr Ruskin, the defendant, was a gentleman well known to all of them, and he held perhaps the highest position in Europe or in America as an art critic. Some of his works, he thought he was not wrong in saying, were destined to immortality, and it was the more surprising, therefore, that a gentleman holding such a position could traduce another in a way which would lead that other to come into a court of law to ask for damages. He thought the jury, after hearing the case, would come to the conclusion that a great injustice had been done. [...]

Mr Ruskin edited a publication called *Fors Clavigera*, which had a large circulation amongst artists and art patrons. In the July number of 1877 there appeared a criticism of many matters besides art, but on the subject of art he first criticized in general terms what he called the modern school, speaking in complimentary terms of Sir Coutts Lindsay, and referring to Mr Burne-Jones as an artist, after which came the paragraph which was the defamatory matter complained of, and which ran as follows: – 'Lastly, the mannerisms and errors of these pictures (meaning some pictures by Mr Burne-Jones), whatever may be their extent, are never affected or indolent. The work is natural to the painter, however strange to us; and it is wrought with utmost conscience of care, however far, to his own or our desire, the result may seem to be incomplete. Scarcely so much can be said for any other pictures of the modern schools; their eccentricities are almost always in some degree forced; and their imperfections gratuitously, if not impertinently, indulged. For Mr Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay ought not to have admitted works into the gallery in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen and heard much of cockney impudence before now, but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask 200 guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face.' Mr Ruskin pleaded that the alleged libel was privileged as being a fair and bona fide criticism upon a painting which the plaintiff had exposed to public view. He submitted that the terms in which

Mr Ruskin had spoken of the plaintiff were unfair and ungentlemanly, and that they were calculated to, and had done him considerable injury, and it would be for the jury to say what damages the plaintiff was entitled to.

Mr Whistler was then called, and he said – I am an artist and was born in St Petersburg. My father was the engineer of the St Petersburg and Moscow Railway. After leaving Russia I went to America, and was educated at West Point. I came back to England in 1865, or 1866. I resided in Paris for two or three years, and studied with M. Glare [Gleyre]. After leaving Paris I came to London, and settled here. While I have been in London I have continually exhibited at the Academy. The last picture I sent to the Academy was a portrait of my mother. The first picture that I exhibited in England, called 'At the Piano,' I sold to Mr Phillips, R. A. Since then I have exhibited 'La Mère Gerard,' 'Wapping,' 'Alone with the Tide,' 'Taking down Scaffolding at Old Westminster Bridge,' 'Ships in the Ice on the Thames,' 'The Little White Girl,' and many others. I have also exhibited in Paris. These pictures were painted by me, as an artist, for sale. Subsequently to this I exhibited pictures in the Dudley Gallery. I have been in the habit of etching. A number of my etchings were exhibited at the Hague, and I received a gold medal for them, which was the first intimation I had that they were there. There is a collection of my etchings in the British Museum. It is not complete. There is also a collection at Windsor Castle, in her Majesty's library. I exhibited eight pictures in the summer of 1877 at the Grosvenor Gallery. No pictures are exhibited there but on invitation. I was invited by Sir Coutts Lindsay to exhibit. The first was a 'Nocturne in Black and Gold,' the second a 'Nocturne in Blue and Silver,' the third a 'Nocturne in Blue and Gold,' the fourth a 'Nocturne in Blue and Silver,' the fifth 'An Arrangement in Black' (Irving, as Philip the Second), the sixth 'A Harmony in Amber and Black,' the seventh 'An Arrangement in Brown.' And, in addition to these, there was a portrait of Mr Carlyle. That portrait was painted from sittings which Mr Carlyle gave me. It has since been engraved, and the artist's proofs, or the mass of them, were all subscribed for. All the Nocturnes but one were sold before they went to the Grosvenor Gallery. One of them was sold to the Hon. Percy Wyndham for 200 guineas, the one in blue and gold. One I sent to Mr Graham in lieu of a former commission, the amount of which was 150 guineas. A third one, blue and silver, I presented to Mrs Leyland. The one that was for sale was in black and gold. I know the publication called *Fors Clavigera*. I believe it has an extensive sale.

Since the publication of this criticism have you sold a nocturne? – Not by any means at the same price as before. [...]

What is your definition of a Nocturne? – I have, perhaps, meant rather to indicate an artistic interest alone in the work, divesting the picture from any outside sort of interest which might have been otherwise attached to it. It is an arrangement of line, form, and colour first; and I make use of any incident of it which shall bring about a symmetrical result. Among my works are some night pieces; and I have chosen the word Nocturne because it generalizes and simplifies the whole set of them.

Cross-examined by the Attorney-General – I have sent pictures to the Academy which have not been received. I believe that is the experience of all artists. I did not send any of those which were exhibited in the Grosvenor Gallery. The nocturne in black and gold is a night piece, and represents the fireworks at Cremorne.

Not a view of Cremorne? – If it were called a view of Cremorne, it would certainly bring about nothing but disappointment on the part of the beholders. (Laughter) It is an artistic arrangement. It was marked 200 guineas. [...]

I suppose you are willing to admit that your pictures exhibit some eccentricities; you have been told that over and over again? – Yes; very often. (Laughter.)

You send them to the Gallery to invite the admiration of the public? – That would be such vast absurdity on my part that I don't think I could. (Laughter.)

Did it take you much time to paint the 'Nocturne in Black and Gold,' how soon did you knock it off? (Laughter.) – I knocked it off possibly in a couple of days – one day to do the work, and another to finish it.

And that was the labour for which you asked 200 guineas? – No; it was for the knowledge gained through a lifetime. (Applause.)

Mr Baron Huddleston said that if this manifestation of feeling were repeated, he would have to clear the court.

Cross-examination resumed – You don't approve of criticism? – I should not disapprove in any way of technical criticism by a man whose life is passed in the practice of the science which he criticizes; but for the opinion of a man whose life is not so passed I would have as little opinion as you would have if he expressed an opinion on law.

You expect to be criticized? – Yes, certainly; and I do not expect to be affected by it until it comes to be a case of this kind. [...]

The picture called the 'Nocturne in Blue and Silver' was then produced in court.

Cross-examination resumed – That is Mr Graham's picture, and is the 'Nocturne in Blue and Silver.' It represents Battersea Bridge by moonlight.

Baron Huddleston – Is this part of the picture at the top old Battersea Bridge? (Laughter.)

Witness – Your lordship is too close at present to the picture to perceive the effect which I intended to produce at a distance. The spectator is supposed to be looking down the river towards London.

The prevailing colour is blue? – Yes.

Are those figures on the top of the bridge intended for people? – They are just what you like.

That is a barge beneath? – Yes. I am very much flattered at your seeing that. The thing is intended simply as a representation of moonlight. My whole scheme was only to bring about a certain harmony of colour.

How long did it take you to paint that picture? – I completed the work of that in one day after having arranged the idea in my mind....

Re-examined by Mr Serjeant Parry – I have also painted the portrait of Mr Carlyle, and a picture of a young lady, which have not been exhibited in the Grosvenor Gallery. [...] There is another picture which was at the Grosvenor called 'A Variation in Flesh Colour and Green.' There is another representing the sea-side and sand, called 'Harmony in Blue and Yellow.' The 'Nocturne in Black and Gold' was the one to which Mr Ruskin alluded. This subject of the arrangement of colours had been a life study to my mind. The pictures are painted off generally from my own thought and mind. Sketching on paper is very rare with me.

Do you conscientiously form your idea, and then conscientiously work it out? – Certainly.

And these pictures are published by you for the purpose of a livelihood? – Yes.

Your manual labour is rapid? – Certainly.

At this stage of the proceedings the court adjourned for luncheon, and for the purpose of enabling the jury to see the pictures in the Westminster Palace Hotel.

The jury having returned into court, the 'Nocturne in Black and Gold' was produced.

By the Attorney-General – This is Cremorne?

(Laughter.) – It is a 'Nocturne in Black and Gold.'

How long did it take you to paint that? – One whole day and part of another. That is a finished picture. The black monogram in the frame was placed in its position so as not to put the balance of colour out.

You have made the study of art your study of a lifetime. What is the peculiar beauty of that picture? – It would be impossible for me to explain to you, I am afraid, although I dare say I could to a sympathetic ear.

Do you not think that anybody looking at that picture might fairly come to the conclusion that it had no peculiar beauty? – I have strong evidence that Mr Ruskin did come to that conclusion.

Do you think it fair that Mr Ruskin should come to that conclusion? – What might be fair to Mr Ruskin I can't answer. No artist of culture would come to that conclusion.

You offer that picture to the public as one of particular beauty as a work of art, and which is fairly worth 200 guineas? – I offer it as a work which I have conscientiously executed, and which I think worth the money. I would hold my reputation upon this as I would upon any of my other works.

Re-examined by Mr Serjeant Parry – That picture was painted not as offering the portrait of a particular place, but as an artistic impression which had been carried away.

* * *

Mr Albert Moore, called and examined by Mr Petheran, stated – I am an artist. I have seen most of the picture galleries in Europe. I have studied in Rome, and have followed my profession in London for 15 years. I have had my pictures in the Academy and in the Grosvenor Gallery. I have known Mr Whistler for 14 years. I have seen the pictures which have been produced here to-day. The two pictures produced, in common with all Mr Whistler's works, have a large aim not often followed. People abroad charge us with finishing our pictures too much. In the qualities aimed at I say he has succeeded, and no living painter, I believe, could succeed in the same way in the same qualities. I consider them to be beautiful works of art. There is one extraordinary thing about them, and that is, that he has painted the air, especially in the 'Battersea Bridge' scene. The picture in black and gold I look upon as simply marvellous.

Would you call it a work of art? – Certainly, most consummate art.

Is 200 guineas a reasonable price? – I should say that as prices go it is not an unreasonable price. If I were rich I would buy them myself. The picture of Mr Carlyle is good as a portrait and excellent as a picture.

Is the picture with the fireworks an exquisite work of art? – There is a decided beauty in the painting of it.

Is there any eccentricity in these pictures? – I should call it originality.

4 James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) 'The Ten O'Clock Lecture'

Whistler's lecture takes its name from the time in the evening at which it was first delivered in St James' Hall, Piccadilly, London, on 20 February 1885. He gave the same lecture twice more, in Cambridge on 24 March and in Oxford on 30 April. It was recognized at the time as a forceful statement of avant-garde views – as it was no doubt Whistler's intention it should be. Nevertheless its arguments were derived from what was by then a long tradition of belief in the independence and self-sufficiency of aesthetic values and judgements. Variations on that belief had been articulated at intervals throughout the century, though they had rarely gone unopposed for long (see, for instance, IA18). For the majority of his English audience, one of Whistler's provocative assertions is likely to have been seen as particularly outrageous: his claim that the production of art was unaffected by the moral conduct of individuals or societies. The association of aestheticism with independence from moral judgement was widely taken as a sign of decadence in the aesthetic movement as a whole. For many younger artists in England, however, Whistler's example was crucial in re-establishing the priority of technical effects over moral concerns. The lecture was first published as *Mr Whistler's 'Ten O'Clock'*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1885. It was translated into French by the poet Stéphane Mallarmé in 1888. This complete text of the lecture is taken from the second English edition of 1888, pp. 7–29.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great hesitation and much misgiving that I appear before you, in the character of The Preacher.

If timidity be at all allied to the virtue modesty, and can find favour in your eyes, I pray you, for the sake of that virtue, accord me your utmost indulgence.

I would plead for my want of habit, did it not seem preposterous, judging from precedent, that aught save the most efficient effrontery could be ever expected in connection with my subject – for I will not conceal from you that I mean to talk about Art. Yes, Art – that has of late become, as far as much discussion and writing can make it, a sort of common topic for the tea-table.

Art is upon the Town! – to be chucked under the chin by the passing gallant – to be enticed within the gates of the householder – to be coaxed into company, as a proof of culture and refinement.

If familiarity can breed contempt, certainly Art – or what is currently taken for it – has been brought to its lowest stage of intimacy.

The people have been harassed with Art in every guise, and vexed with many methods as to its endurance. They have been told how they shall love Art, and live with it. Their homes have been invaded, their walls covered with paper, their very dress taken to task – until, roused at last, bewildered and filled with the doubts and discomforts of senseless suggestion, they resent such intrusion, and cast forth the false prophets, who have brought the very name of the beautiful into disrepute, and derision upon themselves.

Alas! ladies and gentlemen, Art has been maligned. She has naught in common with such practices. She is a goddess of dainty thought – reticent of habit, abjuring all obtrusiveness, purposing in no way to better others.

She is, withal, selfishly occupied with her own perfection only – having no desire to teach – seeking and finding the beautiful in all conditions and in all times, as did her high priest Rembrandt, when he saw picturesque grandeur and noble dignity in the Jews' quarter of Amsterdam, and lamented not that its inhabitants were not Greeks.

As did Tintoret and Paul Veronese, among the Venetians, while not halting to change the brocaded silks for the classic draperies of Athens.

As did, at the Court of Philip, Velasquez, whose Infantas, clad in inaesthetic hoops, are, as works of Art, of the same quality as the Elgin marbles.

No reformers were these great men – no improvers of the ways of others! Their productions alone were their occupation, and, filled with the poetry of their science, they required not to alter their surroundings – for, as the laws of their Art were revealed to them, they saw, in the development of their work, that real beauty which, to them, was as much a matter of certainty and triumph as is to the astronomer the verification of the result, foreseen with the light given to him alone. In all this, their world was completely severed from that of their fellow-creatures with whom sentiment is mistaken for poetry; and for whom there is no perfect work that shall not be explained by the benefit conferred upon themselves.

Humanity takes the place of Art, and God's creations are excused by their usefulness. Beauty is confounded with virtue, and, before a work of Art, it is asked: 'What good shall it do?'

Hence it is that nobility of action, in this life, is hopelessly linked with the merit of the work that portrays it, and thus the people have acquired the habit of looking, as who should say, not *at* a picture, but *through* it, at some human fact, that shall, or shall not, from a social point of view, better their mental or moral state. So we have come to hear of the painting that elevates, and of the duty of the painter – of the picture that is full of thought, and of the panel that merely decorates.

A favourite faith, dear to those who teach, is that certain periods were especially artistic, and that nations, readily named, were notably lovers of Art.

So we are told that the Greeks were, as a people, worshippers of the beautiful, and that in the fifteenth century Art was engrained in the multitude.

That the great masters lived in common understanding with their patrons – that the early Italians were artists – all – and that the demand for the lovely thing produced it.

That we, of to-day, in gross contrast to this Arcadian purity, call for the ungainly, and obtain the ugly.

That, could we but change our habits and climate – were we willing to wander in groves – could we be roasted out of broadcloth – were we to do without haste, and journey without speed, we should again *require* the spoon of Queen Anne, and pick at our peas with the fork of two prongs.

And so, for the flock, little hamlets grow near Hammersmith, and the steam horse is scorned.

Useless! quite hopeless and false is the effort! – built upon fable, and all because 'a wise man has uttered a vain thing and filled his belly with the East wind.'