

For if bello is the Italian's favorite adjective, there is another that runs it very close in popularity: moderno. The Italians only ecstatically say bello; but moderno they really mean. And it appears to be impossible for a thing to possess both these qualities, in Italy at any rate, at the same time. Italy, the brand-new country that has only existed since 1870, is still too busy developing her material resources to be practically concerned with the reconciliation of bello (as the old Italians understood bello) with moderno. There are still too many waterfalls to be harnessed, too many power-stations and factories to be built, for the Italians to do much but talk about the bello. The people with the oldest and most splendid civilization in Europe are now in some ways younger than the Americans of a generation ago. They have grown into a kind of second boyhood when nothing matters but engines and motor cars. The vitality, intelligence, and energy of which in the past so much went into the creation of those works of art which, with the hotels, now constitute the necessary plant of the tourist industry, are still there; but they seem to have been deflected into other channels. But perhaps when the country has been made sufficiently moderno, its people will find the leisure to think of a new bellezza.

It is interesting, meanwhile, to see what does pass for artistically beautiful among the modernities. Signor Ojett. has complained that Italian bad taste is worse than the bad taste of other countries because it is less consistent and systematic. It is a bad taste of shreds and patches. But it seems to me that all contemporary manifestations of the bello in Italy, however different the conventions in terms of which they are executed, have always one thing in common: they are all fundamentally baroque. The model may be Bernini or Mestrovic, the convention may be one of extreme realism or geometrical simplification; it does not matter. In every work one sees that same baroque violence which defeats its own object, the emotionalism which does not move, the straining after effect which achieves nothing, the gesticulating sublime which is ridiculous. Bello in the twentieth century is a throaty music, is pages of d'Annunzio's clotted and feverish verbiage. Bello-cum-moderno manifests itself in the Victor Emanuel monument in Rome (not half bad, after all, if you leave the statues out, in the theatrical seventeenth-century manner); in the Centro della Città in Florence; in projects for war memorials conceived in the most powerful Munich style. By some strange and malignant fate the Italians, whose bello was once so sober and intellectual in its moving passion, seem to have got permanently bogged among the facile emotionalisms and violences of the seventeenth century. Palestrina was once a representative Italian artist; today it is Puccini.

There is no reason to suppose that the Italian character has fundamentally changed in recent cen-

turies. The qualities which, in baroque art, reveal themselves as violence and emotionalism, were always there, but kept down, but tempered and severely moulded by the intellect. The most moving works of art are always those in which passion is confined within a severe formal scheme. The artists of the seventeenth century hoped, by throwing off formal restraint, by exploiting technical resources to their utmost limit, to make their works more moving and passionate. They achieved the exact opposite; and, compared with the works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, theirs are uninteresting and even, positively, unexciting. The bello of today, being still further from the great tradition, is still less interesting.

Why the great tradition, the remains of which persisted, after all, till the end of the eighteenth century, should so miserably have perished in Italy, even as it did in our comparatively benighted England, is a great mystery. Mysterious, too, is the modern Italian tendency to prefer the worst foreign conventions to their own best. The Italian craftsman has all the skill he ever possessed; but if you ask a house-painter to decorate your house for you, his first instinct will be to cover your walls with all the horrible decorative shapes invented in Munich or Vienna during the last five-and-twenty years. But in this the Italian is not unique. The Chinese, it is said, are now ashamed of their ancient art, and prefer a colored supplement by Mr. Barribal to the finest work of painters ignorant of chiaroscuro and the laws of perspective. That we needs must love the highest when we see it is not, alas! invariably true. When a great tradition fails and grows tired through lack of great men to continue and develop it, when there are only second-rate artists repeating competently what has been done before, then a new and strikingly bad style—the important thing is that it should be striking—will come as a revelation, and we rush, in a delirious Gadarene descent, headlong towards the lowest. It is unlikely that Art Nouveau would have had much success in Rome during the lifetimes of Raphael and Michelangelo. And, conversely, bello-moderno will begin to mean something different from baroque emotionalism as soon as a few more artists of genius make their appearance upon the Italian scene.

ALDOUS HUXLEY.

### Poems

When poems ripen into form,  
Let them be harvested by a storm;  
Let a great gale blow them down.  
You will not find them late or soon  
In orchards where such fruit should be,  
But globes of amber out of the sea  
Flung by the spinning black typhoon:  
Apples of uncertainty,  
An island pomegranate laced with brown,  
A nectarine like a cloven moon.

GRACE HAZARD CONKLING.

## The Sargent Exhibition

EVERYBODY has known for years now what have been the characteristics of Sargent's painting. The energy and fruitfulness of his great gifts have sent his work in every direction. So that there can easily be said of the extensive exhibition that the Painters and Sculptors Gallery presents at the Grand Central the usual things. Sargent, to a degree that no one else has attained, has caught the restless quality of modern life, you see it in the postures of his sitters and especially in their eyes and mouths—though I must add that, in this event, modern life must mean Sargent's own generation; to my mind his people have very little of the quality of these later years. Sargent's brushwork, too, shines and glitters from his canvasses; there is something amazing in the ease and plenty and swing of his brush. It is his brush mainly that gives whatever style there is to his pictures, the animation and dexterity and cool power of Sargent's brush as he arrives at his picture.

As I walk through those rooms of Sargent's paintings at the Grand Central I feel this brush as a form of power and as a kind of wit too. I feel the vivacity of his people and of the portraits of them, though it appears to be a vivacity strangely without center, winking, like that wine of Keats', at the brim; these people slide out of their canvasses toward me—the composition for that matter does not hold most of them very tightly into the frame—and sometimes their eyes arrest me; and yet I feel that they have little to say that I want to hear. I realize more than ever as I look at them that Sargent could not be called a great draughtsman. He draws in the Javanese girl an extraordinary rhythm and final rest upon the feet. In the Lord Ribblesdale of the National Gallery he draws with great aristocracy and finality of line; the drawing in the Carmencita lifts and spins. But that Sargent does not on the whole draw with distinction is an old observation among his critics. And he has not great design. There is not very often in his composition that quality of line that quiets the intrusive period or generation in which the painting happened, and that establishes on the canvas a lasting abstraction of moving pattern or pure visual poetry free of the thing painted. In his color there is flow and ease, striking nuance and dexterity, and sometimes glare. But Sargent's color, as has been said often enough, and as anyone ought to see after five minutes at the Grand Central, has no great depth; his color lacks profundity and passion. It appeals to the affable emotions of the eye; it has a social ease and facility and a kind of inexhaustible ability and universal adequacy. But color as the revelation by light of the world in which we live; color as a flight, a richness, an evasion and escape from the surface of living; color as an approach, through the greatness or delicacy of tone, to the range of music; color as a poignancy, a force, an originality, a shock, from an artist's own depths; Sargent has not.

I walk through these rooms of painting, the water-colors too in the corridor, and see all over again that Sargent is an astonishing painter. How he glances over the world and what a mistake it is to think of him only as a painter of portraits! I think how well two or three of those canvasses will look when a century of time and dust and light have done their work. I am all admiration, and I am a little tired. People around me are praising with animation; I feel indifferent, and begin to think of vistas, music and poetry, and to think—unfairly—of painting that

is purer. Sargent's is pure painting, more or less; in so far as concerns its seeming indifference to the meaning or implication or poetry or sentiment of his subject matter, it may be pure painting. But the purity must go a great deal farther, farther into great design, line, color. And this can ultimately derive, however remotely, only from great content. I get a kind of nomadic, divine discontent as I look at these lively yards on yards of paint.

Presently I settle on a picture that seems to promise an illustration of what for me the trouble is with these paintings. On a smallish canvas Sargent has made a painting of a scene somewhere, the Tyrol perhaps. At the back rise mountains, with a stretch of middle ground, and then on a little level and in the foreground a graveyard with its array of crosses and slight memorials upon the graves. I look at this picture. It has the same aplomb, the same indifference, the same adequacy and brushwork, the same cosmopolitan and sophisticated bounce, the same energy, as any other picture to be seen nearby, as the walk in front of the villa, the little dog's head, the lady rising out of her satin bodice. Very well then, Sargent has a right to remain unmoved by this scene. From the picture I can guess what was there when the painter took up his brush and his vivacious palette: the towering mountains of the world above those graves of men, with their crosses and shells and slanting stakes and wreaths put there by the living; the high land, the sky, the dead, the remembrance. I should think that perhaps in any event for any artist some noble flowing line would above all things appear in the mountains and might be caught and given an accent and permanence of its own. Or some pitiful frailty in the crosses and wreaths. Or there would be in the light upon that scene some wistful elegiac hint, something lightly done, if you wish, like Meleager's cry "I beseech thee, Earth, that nurtur'st all, gently to clasp her, O Mother, to thy breast." Or something of Plato's poem of him who was in his life the morning star of the living, and now in death the evening star of the dead. I think of Damascius' epigram,

Zosime, who was once a slave in body alone, for her body too is now free.

Or there might be bitter comments on this scene, infinite moods, Gothic, macabre, brutal, dryly literal. But Sargent's is scarcely a mood at all. Very well then, we may ask of him to set down the very reality of that air and light and high swinging land and that plot of graves. He may leave out sentiment if he can catch the scene exactly, better than the camera. We shall get our own mood, whatever it is, out of such representation. But not this bright brush and empty sketching!

Painting is painting, is its own defence; that point arises but is not new. Obviously painting is painting and no other art. I am not asking that this picture of Sargent's have a meaning or a story or a theme. I am not asking the suggestion of sad associations or of any literary values introduced into the art of painting. I am asking only this: that in painting terms—the purer the better so far as I am concerned—in line, color, design, Sargent give us the sign of some quality of life aroused in him by that scene, and not go, as they say in the Bhagavad-Gita, like a spoon through the soup without perceiving the savor. Sargent may give us as much representation, as much mere likeness, or as little as he chooses, an inspired photograph or a single line, a copy or a pattern; what I am asking is