

Art should be independent of all clap-trap —
should stand alone and appeal to the artistic sense
of eye or ear without confounding this with emotions
entirely foreign to it *as devotion pity*
love patriotism and the like its value

having little to do with how well it represents
something else something other than itself
but everything to do with its technical
felicities, the craftsmanship with which true
genius creates its own reality. Thus spake

the stock cartoon artist *à la bohème*
when not done up sartorially in top hat
frock coat monocle square-tipped patent
leather pumps white shirt and long cane
flourished it was said menacingly on occasion

ex-pat Irish-American in St Petersburg
Paris London during the thickest Victorian fog
sometimes passing himself off as of Russian birth
(*I shall be born when and where I want* he answered
when confronted with the plain fact that he first saw light

in a state of the art Massachusetts mill town) —
inspiration to generations of Wildean spirits
perfecting *the gentle art of making enemies*
seeing at once that whatever the grey and black
and peacock blue arrangements what sells art is

the artist's persona performance image will;
whose pyrrhic victory in court against the libel
enounced by the reigning elder left him bankrupt
whistling in the dark said elder's stone lamps
first brought to light in order to save modern art

from industrialized palates; that elder *who*
had long said the capital-A Artist addresses
any particular scene in any medium
by recalling thousands of such previous scenes
commingling them with those now passing through him

a Morris dance of traditional properties
(*Well-meaning* said the sage of Tigullia *but a goose*
to think return to the stagecoach the answer to foul locomotives

when clean quiet electric trains are already running);
who giving up aesthetics in the ascetic sense,

his main value in the public's heart, to preach instead
his last forty years nothing but economic
morality and the present recession thereof,
alienated his audience at the height of his fame;
but *who* nonetheless hit the nail on the head concerning

the dismal science and dirty politics of art —
ugliness and injustice unidentical twins
injustice the first born of that misbegot pair
all money an acknowledgment of debt
scarcity a by-product of monopoly

imagination and the passionate element values
that must be figured into every calculation
the body politic weakened if men spend their lives
manufacturing trivialities *wealth*
the possession of the valuable by the valiant

capital capital proper only when producing
something useful something other than itself
consumption the end aim of all production
to use everything and to use it nobly
usefulness value in the hands of the valiant

distribution the physics of wealth — *not wealth*
absolute but discriminate, not everything
to every man but the right thing to the right man
not equality in the leveling sense
but the obvious superiority of some

the basic idea of *organic form* producing
in his thinking the familiar notion
of the paternal state a rigid class-structure
guided by principles of intrinsic value insisting
that democracy must be rejected;

the root of war the capitalists' will risen to the top
of a covetous culture, unjust wars supported
if not by pillaging the enemy then by loans
from private parties to be repaid by taxing the public,
the *proper* function of businessmen neither self-interest

nor making themselves rich, gaining the power of riches
(the power of keeping your neighbor poor the tradesman servile
the artist in poverty) but to provide for the nation,
teach it righteousness — *what is vanity*
what substance — the difference between *grapes and grape-shot*;

who (*one of those rare men* said Tolstoy *who think*
with their hearts) conceived culture to be an organism
so even as cultural degradation depraves the arts
— slurred lines always a sign of vice the moral
history of nations there in the construct of their buildings —

changes for the better in art might prompt broader improvements;
who, fined a farthing for saying in print that the coxcomb
in asking two hundred guineas for his black and gold imposture
was *throwing a pot of paint in the public's face* (recalling
how he himself was first provoked into becoming a critic

when the spattered paint image was thrown at Turner)
arguing in his own defense his right to speak
his mind, especially on morality in art
the character of the art indicative of the artist,
especially in the written-letter format where

opinion is to be not only expected but welcomed,
especially when the opinions expressed are right as his
he pointed out were, and though admittedly
his impulsive style might seem scurrilous,
forceful expression is native to caricature

the proper voice to draw attention to dark truths —
resigned his chair at Oxford in a fit of protest at the fine,
took it up again then resigned it again to protest
vivisection on campus; *who* said he saw as he walked
to the British Museum people's faces *more corrupt*

daily the great majority already gone rancid
more so he thought or so he told himself
than the one he saw when he cared to look in his shaving mirror;
who, having tried to hold everything
in his mind, in his declining years had to let go —

no summing up, only chance remarks
casual thoughts memories letting time in,
his last twenty-five suffering mental breakdowns

(attacks of madness as they were called at the time)
spending the last ten in intense silence.