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The Meaning of Pictures
Roger Fry on the Radio

In the fall of 1929, Roger Fry held at BBC Radio a series of talks entitled *The Meaning of Pictures*. Aired weekly, in the evening, Fry's six radio broadcasts would accompany listeners through a more comprehensive understanding of some significant works of art. Specially selected as "case studies" by Fry, they were used to test the theoretical principles of his formalist doctrine.

It had been almost twenty years since Fry, the father of modern painting in England, as his dear friend Virginia Woolf defined him, had organized the much discussed Post-Impressionist Exhibitions in London. Nobody knows if the BBC's unwary listeners would have recognised in the warm and reassuring voice of Fry, the critic who was called a revolutionary, ready to undermine the establishment of the British art institutions of the early twentieth century.

On the radio Fry appeared to listeners like a teacher on the first day of school to his students. He clarifies his intentions, explains the educational aims of his course and warns against the pitfalls and difficulties that will appear. The six talks on the meaning of painting are, as already noted by Denys Sutton, a *summa* of Fry's last formalist thoughts on the subject, necessarily summarised and simplified in order to make it more accessible to an audience that was quite ignorant of philosophical and aesthetic doctrines on art.

With *The Meaning of Pictures*, Fry presented, as Sutton writes, "the complex ideas in his own comprehensive manner" and "the fact that the medium forced him to sharpen his arguments and relate them to specific examples gives them added cogency" (85-86). Fry's effort was very remarkable, especially considering

that, in the late Twenties, he tried to revise the very foundations of his "difficult and uncertain science," as the title of a recent study on the formalist aesthetics of Fry reminds us (Rubin). Ultimately, he succeeded in finding a glimmer of theoretical and methodological consistency in a much-needed reformulation of the relationship between form and content, with a view to their possible synthesis, although Fry continued to have doubts and reservations.

As noted by Deane W. Curtin in an insightful article that traces the thread of formalism from Kant to Greenberg, passing inevitably through Fry, "Fry found it necessary to moderate his formalism even further by allowing that very few artists, Giorgione and Rembrandt, for instance, had attained 'a complete fusion' of form and content." We can only admire, Curtin continues, "a man so tenaciously honest to his experience." As a critic he "always considered his theoretical writings tentative, empirical generalizations from his sensibility" (322).

To help Fry in his challenge, both the text read on the radio and the photographic reproductions of the works analysed in the talks were published in the magazine *The Listener*, a guide to BBC radio broadcasts.[1] In order to be even more effective in his intent, the reproductions of the works that would be discussed throughout the series were published in *The Listener* simultaneously with the broadcasts. In this way listeners could follow the radio lesson each week, having already before them the black and white photographs of the works that were explained. This was essential for Fry, given the constant references to the "forms" of the paintings that his listeners-spectators must necessarily always have on hand, to be able to follow and understand Fry's explanation.

In front of the microphone, Fry tries to establish an equal relationship with his audience. He is motivated by a desire to share his own experience of art with that of any other "common" spectator. Fry was well aware of the fact that the rigidity of a formalist doctrine that was dogmatically firm on positions of abstract theoreticism would not have been able to find favour with a broader and diverse audience. As already understood by Clive Bell, this

[1] On the history of the BBC Radio and its impact on British culture among the two wars, see Avery.

new public asked nothing more than having in its hands a practical and quick art history guide to bring comfortably to museums and galleries. "Let everyone make himself an amateur"—ruled Bell in his famous and successful *Art* of 1914—"and lose the notion that art is something that lives in the museums understood by the learned alone. By practicing an art it is possible that people will acquire sensibility" (291). Behind the apparent willingness to make art an enjoyable pastime for everyone, where increasingly more people could participate, Bell remained tied to his "'professional' journalistic approach to art." This was the reason why Fry reproached him for writing his articles only "for a 'fashionable' audience" (Stephenson 36), "with such an assurance that the world of snobs listen to him eagerly" (Fry, *Letters* 519-20).

On the other hand Fry, remaining halfway between the art historian and the *amateur*, hoped to stem the risk of making art as the object of desire of plutocrats without taste, interested in it exclusively "for its value as an indication of social status" ("Art and Socialism" 45).

As rightly pointed out by Frances Spalding, "when writing articles and reviews, which were addressed (even those for *The Burlington Magazine*) as much to the lay reader as to the specialist, Fry chose to pursue, for the most part, an appreciative rather than a historical line of enquiry" (490). Despite the complexity of some passages, which even Fry himself acknowledges several times, Fry tries to make sense with words of what is "perceived" by the vision of painting and his BBC talks are a clear example of the attempt to make his own discourse on art more accessible, formulated, first of all, from a level of visual perception and aesthetic appreciation.

The titles of the six radio lectures are all extremely significant: "Telling a Story," "Visible Melodies," "The Relations of Volume and Space," "Symphony of Line and Colour," "Rhythm and Harmony," "Truth and Nature in Art." Through the lectures, we can trace an explanatory circularity which develops from the first episode throughout the course of the series ending in the last lecture, when Fry calls into question some of the most burning issues of formalism, addressed at the beginning and left open until then. This does not mean that Fry is able to fully solve the "di-

lemma" of his formalism during these radio broadcasts (Lang). He makes it clear at the end of his last talk:

> Whatever value such principles or theories as I have suggested may have, lies not so much in their truth, for we are still at the very beginning of aesthetics, as in their power to stimulate latent sensibilities, in the assistance they may be to you in the art of being a spectator: for in that transmission from one spirit to another, which is the essence of art, the spectator is as essential as the artist (Fry, "Truth and Nature in Art" 618).

First of all, we should ask ourselves about the title of the series. Is it possible to find the meaning of painting only in the forms that make up the visual elements of a picture? Instinctively, we would be tempted to answer "no." It is on this "no," generated by an "instinctive reaction," that Fry builds his own reflection. He hopes that even the most distracted common spectator can take over those necessary tools of analysis for understanding a picture, and activate them in the presence of a work of art. No matter if it is a masterpiece or a work of secondary importance. It is relative and does not affect the evaluation of the formal force that the work is able to express. According to Fry, the formulation of an aesthetic judgment on a work of art must be preceded by the formal analysis. Instead, it is often ignored. This is the gap that Fry attempted to fill since the time of "An Essay in Aesthetics" (1909), which was reprinted in 1920, in the famous collection *Vision and Design* and always considered the founding text of his formalist theories. This is why Giotto's medieval painting, for example, will seem even rude and rough, to those who are not able to capture the so-called "emotional elements of design" (rhythm of the line, mass, space, light and shade, colour), if compared to that of an acclaimed painter of Victorian realism such as Luke Fildes.

We will focus on the singular comparison between these two artists that was developed in the first wireless lecture by Fry, "Telling a Story."

From the beginning, Fry recalls his assertions published in the "Essay in Aesthetics." After twenty years, his faith in the imaginative faculties of the artist's vision remains firm and unchanged. According to Fry, the "recognition of purpose" of the artist is "an

essential part of the proper aesthetic judgment" ("An Essay in Aesthetics" 20). The task of the artist is not the mere imitation of natural beauty, but the expression of the imaginative life that "is distinguished by the greater clearness of its perception, and the greater purity and freedom of its emotion" (16). The spectator should be able to perceive an "aesthetic feeling" aroused by the "order," the "variety" and the "unity" by which the artist has reformulated his or her own vision of objective reality, filtered through "the perceptive and the emotional aspects of the experience" (12). These qualities (order, variety, unity) are the ones that the spectator should look for in a work of art, because they are the only ones which can put him or her sympathetically in relation to the spirit that animated the artist as creator of a work of art, arousing the same imaginative emotions. "When these emotions are aroused—Fry writes—in a way that satisfies fully the needs of the imaginative life we approve and delight in the sensations through which we enjoy that heightened experience, because they possess purposeful order and variety in relation to those emotions" (20).

For this reason, the represented subject becomes marginal. In itself the figurative narration of a theme cannot awaken within us aesthetic emotion. In confirmation of his thesis, Fry cites both in "An Essay in Aesthetics" and in "Telling a Story" a quote by Rodin: "A woman, a mountain, a horse—they are all the same thing; they are made on the same principles." However, if in "An Essay in Aesthetics" citing Rodin functioned to explain to the reader that the "disinterested vision of the imaginative life" could produce similar emotional effects regardless of the subject painted (23), in "Telling a Story" Fry surrendered less easily to such transcendental observations that the listener probably would not have caught. Fry would not have been able to capture the listener's attention on the radio talking about a vague idea of aesthetic emotion. Rather than emotional effects of painting, Fry finds here the visual elements through which the spectator can enter "into intimate communion with the most sensitive, the most profound, the most passionately contemplative spirits of mankind" ("Telling a Story" 394), the true artists. What the great artists do is to search in the objects they look at "some pattern or

rhythm, some principle of harmony" (394), trying to find those secret relations to connect one to the other in a precise formal principle, invisible to the eye of the majority. It is only the artist's vision which is able to grasp these "special meanings" and provide others with the means for sharing that visual experience. Fry evokes arguments already used in "The Artist's Vision," an article published in the *Athenaeum* in 1919 and republished in *Vision and Design*. The artist plays an intermediary role in society. The artist raises the spirit of the spectator to a higher dimension where the sensitivity and faculty of perception of the ordinary man can be heightened and stimulated by the study of art. In the radio lecture of 1929, Fry explains that this communion between the artist and the spectator through the medium of the picture may happen because "the artist is as it were a transmitting station; we are the receivers when we look at his pictures. But the receivers must be attuned. The study of art is really the tuning of our own special receiving set, so that it can respond in turn to all the great transmitters of past and present times" ("Telling a Story" 394). One of the greatest transmitters of past times was definitely Giotto, an artist provided with the highest level of what Fry called "the creative vision:"

> It demands the most complete detachment from any of the meanings and implications of appearances. Almost any turn of the kaleidoscope of nature may set up in the artist this detached and impassioned vision, and, as he contemplates the particular field of vision, the (aesthetically) chaotic and accidental conjuction of forms and colours begins to crystallise into a harmony; and as this harmony becomes clear to the artist, his actual vision becomes distorted by the emphasis of the rhythm which has been set up within him. Certain relations of directions of line become for him full of meaning; he apprehends them no longer casually or merely curiously, but passionately, and these lines begin to be so stressed and stand out so clearly from the rest that he sees them far more distinctly than he did at first. Similarly colours, which in nature have almost always a certain vagueness and elusiveness, become so definite and clear to him, owing to their now necessary relation to other colours, that if he chooses to paint his vision he can state them positively and definitely. In such a creative vision the objects as such tend to disappear, to lose their separate unities, and to take their places as so many bits in the whole mosaic of vision. ("The Artist's Vision" 33-34)

We preferred to quote Fry's words which, in this passage of "The Artist's Vision," well summarize what he tried to explain throughout his radio series.

In demonstrating his ideas, Fry compares *Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene* by Giotto (Scrovegni Chapel, Padua) with a painting titled *The Doctor* by Luke Fildes, particularly well-known to the British public since its first exhibition in 1891. The analysis of these two paintings is the testing ground on which Fry tries to find a meeting point between form and content.

In 1901, Fry had dedicated a well structured essay to Giotto. When it was republished in *Vision and Design*, it was accompanied by a footnote in which Fry admitted to have changed his opinion from twenty years earlier. Above all, when in the article it was implied "not only that the dramatic idea may have inspired the artist to the creation of his form, but that the value of the form for us is bound up without recognition of the dramatic idea" (87). The end of the note, as rightly emphasized by Christopher Reed, represents "the apogee of Fry's formalism" (Reed 319). Fry concludes by saying that "it now seems to me possible by a more searching analysis of our experience in front of a work of art to disentangle our reaction to pure form from our reaction to its implied associated ideas" ("Giotto" 87).

In 1929, explaining the meaning of *Noli Me Tangere* by Giotto, Fry restores the narrative value of the image to its formal value, because the dramatic idea of the scene is expressed by a well-balanced combination of form and content that only the creative vision of an artist such as Giotto was able to accomplish. The same cannot be said for *The Doctor* by Fildes. The picture depicts the night vigil of a conscientious doctor called to treat an unfortunate sick child, probably in his last moments of life, cared by his disheartened parents. According to Fry, the painting of Fildes tells us everything about the event, maybe too much. There are a thousand of details that choke the clear narration of the story that ends up being reduced to a mere unnecessarily detailed description. Fry thinks that Fildes has lost the sight of what his task should be as a painter, sharing with the audience the pain of the parents, stressing forcibly the pietism of the scene, even in an annoying way. Fry does not exclude that the drama of the

subject can somehow affect our overall view of the painting, but it should never avoid the formal primary analysis that the painted subject requires. In practice, Fildes failed because his work is unbalanced in favour of the content. It is the feeling of pain that dominates and is conveyed to the spectator who is led to feel a similar sense of anguish and despair. It is the same feeling experienced by the doctor who could not do anything to save the child's life.

Giotto painted in a completely different way. We recognize immediately in his figures, says Fry, human beings even if "they lack all those minute convincing details which make us say 'How true!' to any stroke of The Doctor" ("Telling a Story" 397). It is sufficient to look at the reclined backward heads of the sleeping soldiers in front of the tomb of Christ to realise the effort made by Giotto in an attempt to render the idea of the relaxation of their bodies, while sleeping after the exhausting vigil. It is clear that Giotto did not succeed in a realistic way, but the effect remains extraordinary because he is able to express an idea and to communicate his message to us. In his own way, he is telling us a story. According to Fry, unlike Fildes, who could rely on a rather generic title in the hope that it was sufficient to evoke in the spectator a rough idea of the told event, Giotto knew that the majority of the people, who would see his frescoes, knew the Evangelical texts and the story of the Magdalene in front of the tomb. Contrary to Fildes, this awareness allowed him to avoid falling into the detailed illustration of every single moment of the story. The narrative realism of Fildes' Victorian academic painting raises in Fry a certain feeling of "nausea and disgust," because his representation is somehow distorted, especially in the description of the doctor and the parents of the child: "For all the mass of details which are correctly described for us there is something false about the whole thing: the dice are loaded: these people are too noble, they would not be like that unless we were looking on. They are keeping a noble pose. They ought to show traces of other feelings. In the doctor, in particular, there might be something of a purely professional scientific tension; he could not be, should not be, so purely, so nobly pitiful" (398). *The Doctor* is a clear example of "sentimental art" as defined by Fry. An

art whose sole purpose is to awaken our emotional partecipation in the story, moved by a fictitious sense of respect for the moral value of what is shown.[2] This does not happen with Giotto who, with the simple draftmanship of a child, is able to clean up the scene of the superfluous elements to give us back a story that finds its centre in the "dramatic tension" between Christ and Mary Magdalene:

> Giotto tells his story without any accessory details; he fixed his attention entirely on the broad outlines of the essential features and the relative positions of the figures. The stage is almost entirely bare, everything is focused on the actors. Even their dress is of an extreme simplicity, mere vague wrappings which seem to reveal the action of the limbs in large simple visible shapes. We are dealing only with the fundamental psychological facts of the story, the great oppositions and contrasts of the situation, and we see that such a bleak, abstract treatment, shows us the fundamental drama with incredible force. ("Telling a Story" 399)

In front of Giotto's work, rather than wondering how much the artist was able to make his painting realistic and truthful, we notice how he made "vivid to our imagination just what was most significant, more sublime in the dramatic moment" (399). Hence, the circle closes around what might be called the imaginative contemplation that, as Fry tries to explain, is the only approach that could allow the spectator "to tune into" the story represented by the artist. Fry turns implicitly on what had been a crucial turning point of his "Essay in Aesthetics," as complex as Bell's tormented identification of the significant form, that is the distinction between imaginative life and actual life. Once again Fry seems convinced that an individual can hope to enjoy art "imaginatively" only in the imaginative life, putting aside desires and vanities that animate his spirit in his actual, personal life. It is in this strict separation that the ambiguity of Fry's formalism is played until the end. We are interested in the telling of a story, the content of a painting, as long as it does not become the anecdotal narrative of detail. Filtered by the artist's imaginative vision, it

[2] Bell had already expressed a similar negative judgment about *The Doctor* in *Art*, see Bell 19-20.

transcends into the imaginative dimension, from which we stay away because we cannot identify with its characters (in this case, Christ and Mary Magdalene), because they have nothing to do with our normal instinctive feelings experienced in actual life: "In the imaginative life no such action is necessary, and, therefore, the whole consciousness may be focused upon the perceptive and the emotional aspects of the experience. In this way we get, in the imaginative life, a different set of values, and a different kind of perception" ("An Essay in Aesthetics" 12).

It is in the distance of a careful contemplation of the forms of painting that its true meaning can be revealed. "Telling a Story" actually becomes the story of a formal contemplation of a painting rather than the story of a real event. The thread that distinguishes "truly aesthetic and merely anecdotal narrative" on which Fry insists in his radio lecture, as highlighted by Reed (320), is so thin that it is really difficult to fully grasp it without careful thought.

The first objections to Fry's discussion begin here. First of all, it can be said that Fry shows overconfidence in the fact that the scene of *Noli Me Tangere* is immediately recognized by all. If this is not the case, what would any observer who, in the time of Giotto as well as today, does not know the story of the Gospel of John, be able to understand? Would it be sufficient for the comprehension of the story to reduce it into a few figures, with a time overlap of various moments of storytelling synthesized in only one scene by Giotto's imaginative eye? There is another observation. The contemplative distance mentioned by Fry can be more easily maintained before a religious subject, as in this case, which none of us would ever think to identify with. It is all too obvious that no one can think of living the Christological drama in his actual life. It is much easier for us to share the grief of two parents who are losing their child and the suffering of a doctor who fails his medical care. In the story painted by Fildes, there are people who take on a role closer to our actual real dimension (parents, doctor), while none of us can imagine himself in the role of the risen Christ or the holy women. Therefore, we can deduce that in "Telling a Story" Fry succeeds only in part to reconcile the demands of form with content. First of all, it can be said that

he succeeds when some *a priori* unavoidable elements for the spectator's understanding remain incontrovertible. The story should already be known by the viewer who, therefore, does not need many descriptive details. The story should represent an imaginary, biblical, mythological or fantasy theme, in which it is impossible for spectators to recognize themselves. With these assumptions, the distinction between imaginative life and actual life stands still. It immediately sways when just one accessory element is added, an apparently unnecessary detail, that may be able to trigger in the viewer's mind a game of references and free associations from his real life. In the case of a scene such as that of the painting of Fildes the risk is very high. Who of us, when looking at a picture, puts aside completely what he has read, studied, thought, or simply made up to that point? Above all, would we ever be able, as Fry wanted to teach us, to judge a picture, taking into account only its forms? These are doubts and uncertainties that enrich the critical thinking of Fry with renewed vitality still today. If on one side it might seem fair to share the idea that formalism is "a dead end" against which Fry fought throughout his career (Elam 36), on the other, we feel we should once more take up the challenge that "Roger, first King of Bloomsbury" left us as a legacy.[3]

To better understand the difference between the "softened" formalism of Fry, in 1929, and the more severe one of a few years before, it is useful to remember what Fry wrote in 1920 in "Retrospect," conclusive essay of *Vision and Design* and an accurate clarification of his aesthetic theories in that time. The analysis that Fry proposes of Raphael's *Transfiguration* is particularly useful for our reflection. A complex and structured story, as the one painted by Raphael, will immediately produce in the mind of the Christian spectator "an immense complex of feelings interpenetrating and mutually affecting one another" and "all this merely by the content of the picture, its subject, the dramatic story it tells" ("Retrospect"196). This spectator, although not endowed with "any particular sensibility to form" (196), continues Fry, already knowing the gospel story, will be amazed to see that those

[3] Fry is sarcastically defined in this manner, in 1931, in one of the many caricatures that Max Beerbohm dedicated to him, see Harvey.

who should have been "unsophisticated peasants and fisherfolk" become on the canvas of Raphael figures with noble and theatrical poses who impassively attend both the exorcism of a boy, who occupies the lower part of the work, and the Transfiguration of Christ. Like Fildes, also Raphael puts in place a process of falsification of reality. The interest of the Christian spectator in the work is moved only by the countless "associated ideas" that follow one another in his mind in an attempt to answer a single question: does this representation correspond with what I already know?

In 1920, Fry is intransigent. Only the spectator who is "a person highly endowed with the special sensibility to form, who feels the intervals and forms of relations" ("Retrospect" 196-197), can aspire to "pure contemplation of the spatial relations of plastic volumes," thus getting "this extremely elusive aesthetic quality which is the one constant quality of all works of art, and which seems independent of all the prepossessions and associations which the spectator brings with him from his past life". To achieve such a similar experience of art, the content becomes almost without importance. Fry imagines his ideal spectator "either completely ignorant of, or indifferent to, the Gospel story". A spectator "so entirely preoccupied with the purely formal meaning of a work of art," says Fry, "is extremely rare" (197). However, despite the theoretical intransigence in which Fry seems to want to persist until the end, "Retrospect" leaves unresolved the *ultimatum* imposed by Fry's formalist aesthetics that, if further and vainly argued, would lead the critic "in the depth of mysticism" (199), as he recognized.

Fry knows that he needs to be necessarily more direct on the radio and the problems of formalism are implicitly addressed through practical examples argued in the clearest possible way. As noted by Frances Spalding, "had he been more obsessed with philosophical precision he would never have reached such a wide audience. His aim was not to impress but to make accessible" (491).

During the other five episodes of the series, that ended with the last broadcast on October 30, 1929, Piero della Francesca and Botticelli, Michelangelo and Raphael, Rubens and Velázquez all appeared, to name only a few. Analysing their works, Fry tried to carry on what he set out from the beginning: to provide the

listener-spectator with analytical tools to approach the detached contemplation of the painting, always keeping in mind some key points, that is "likeness to nature is not essential to a work of art, but that what is essential is always the harmonic disposition of all the parts in a single whole" ("Symphony of Line and Colour" 536) and that "is not what the artist says, but the way he says it that is the chief consideration in art" ("The Relations of Volume and Space" 499).

Is this a return to the theory of a complete indifference to the subject? Not completely. If considered in relation to actual life, the reunion of form and content remains inevitably precarious, because it is unbalanced in favour of the latter that immediately knows which strings to move in the spirit of the observer to arouse feelings that, according to Fry, have nothing to do with the aesthetic contemplation of a work of art. If transferred to the imaginative life dimension, however, the form-content dichotomy ends "in a single whole" where it is irrelevant knowing or not knowing the content of the story, because our imaginative faculty should immediately be able to transcend it and to analyze it through purely formal patterns. This is why, as argued by Fry, the represented subject itself is not important. What is relevant is the way it becomes part of the story. It is not quite true either, that the contents should necessarily be a fantastic and unreal theme, as assumed previously. For sure, we are not inclined to have, for example, the same emotional participation and empathy that Fildes wants us at all costs to feel with *The Doctor* when looking at the Parisians who flock to the banks of the Grande-Jatte in the famous work of Seurat, or before *The Card Players* by Cézanne, or in front of the ladies who are drinking tea in a painting by Matisse called *The Garden*. Even though they are scenes of real life, as is the one of Fildes, that all of us could experience. These examples were not chosen by chance. Seurat, Cézanne, Matisse were the great French artists whom Fry always looked at with admiration in the hope that what he baptized Post-Impressionism could save the fate of British art from the pedantry and the late Victorian academicism against which he fought in the early 1910s. As expressed by Fry, everything lies in the way an artist chooses to treat a theme. In the essay that he dedicated to Matisse in 1930,

Fry wrote about *The Garden* that "a familiar scene of everyday life takes on an air of almost monumental grandeur without any sense of rhetorical falsification. The shock of the word rhetorical in relation to Matisse proves, by the by, the fundamental simplicity and sincerity of his attitude to life" (*Matisse* 50).

If it is difficult to apply the formalist method to a work such as the one of Fildes, it is precisely because Fry's formalism demands "simplicity and sincerity" while *The Doctor* is a beautiful lie.

In conclusion, what is the meaning of painting, according to Fry? We could answer by saying that, ultimately, Fry recognized the undeniable interrelationship between form and content which reveals itself to the observers in an ever changing way. It all depends on the observer and the perceptual sensitivity that can be more or less stimulated by the aforementioned interrelationship. The critic is an intermediary who, through his work, tries to facilitate communication, or as written by Fry, the communion between artist and spectator through the medium of the work of art.

"One reason why Fry insisted on promoting form was because he knew it to be the fact in art that offers, potentially, the most democratic appeal" (Spalding 490). For example, even those who knew very little about Giotto, could hope to enter into communion with his mind, to see in the way he saw, to grasp his sensitivity for the "pure" form of things. To be initiated into this communion, it was sufficient to turn on the radio, following the talks of Roger Fry and "listening" to the painting through his words. To learn "the art of being a spectator," we should be able to put ourselves on the same wavelength of the artist's voice and listen to what he has to say. This is the sense of communion between artist and spectator which Fry talks about. A communion that is primarily a communication between human beings because, as Virginia Woolf wrote in her *Common Reader* essay "Montaigne": "Communication is health; communication is truth; communication is happiness. To share is our duty; to go down boldly and bring to light those hidden thoughts which are the most diseased; to conceal nothing; to pretend nothing; if we are ignorant to say so; if we love our friends to let them know it" (64-65).

Roger Fry, the art historian of Bloomsbury, taught us that looking at a picture is a little bit like spending time in a conversa-

tion with a new friend who is telling us a story. Every time we desire to listen to a new story by a new picture, all we can do is, as Woolf suggests, "to drop the book and take the next omnibus to the National Gallery, there to gratify the desire for seeing that has been so miraculously stimulated" (*Roger Fry* 228).

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