

ART AND ITS INTEGRATION¹

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THE last thing we are ever told about anything is who made it. Naturally, for what do *makers* matter in a world of 'minders'?

The author of *The Gothic World* advances a half-hearted plea that a like technical indifference may explain medieval anonymity. He persuaded us more when in his former volume *Gothic England*² he set out to deny the allegation altogether and to rid 'le miracle occidental' itself of 'the plague of anonymity'. (Will no one rid us of the plague of notoriety?) In sober fact 'from the period 1250-1550 a vast number of names survive. It would be no exaggeration to say that the men responsible for all the major developments of art in this period are already known to us by name.'

Mr John Harvey sets himself to answer four questions: 'What, How, Where and When was Gothic Art?' He has especially enthralling things to tell us about the 'How' and not least about medieval craftsmen, *trassours* and *devysours*, their lodges and guilds, their gear and skill. Coming pat at the moment when the swinging pendulum of controversy has come to rest at a point of equilibrium, his researches should greatly help to establish once and for all a true idea of the master-builders and of the vivid world of medieval craftsmen.

For Mr Harvey the master-mason is neither, according to the extreme folk-art view, 'just one of the lads', nor, according to the opposite extreme, the irresponsible 'artist' he has been since the Renaissance.

In Gothic times *architect* meant literally chief or master mason. He did not belong to a distinct professional class, for the modern distinction between architect and builder was then unknown. 'The medieval architects had usually been trained as building craftsmen, but on becoming primarily designers, that function

1 *The Gothic World, 1100-1600; A Survey of Architecture and Art*, by John Harvey (Batsford; 30s.)

Studies of Italian Renaissance Sculpture, by W. R. Valentiner (Phaidon Press; 63s.)

The Sculptures of Michelangelo, by Ludwig Goldscheider; second edition revised (Phaidon Press; 30s.)

2 *Gothic England, A Survey of National Culture, 1300-1550* (Batsford, 1947.)

was a first charge upon their time and energy. (p. 39.) Nicholas de Biard, O.P., is quoted as saying (c. 1261): 'Note that in these great buildings there is wont to be one chief master who only ordains by word and rarely or never sets hand (to the work); and yet he takes higher pay than the rest'. (p. 27.) Great interest attaches to extant elevations reproduced *passim*; in such projects experiment was blent with discriminating imitation. But the fact that the masters 'at least to some extent left the working masons' lodge and entered the tracing-house' implies that they had once worked at the banker or that their fathers had. Now they were more than *primi inter pares*; yet there was no gulf fixed. Many were stone-carvers. How many architects are that today?

It was natural however in an hierarchical society such as that of medieval Christendom that honour should have been paid where honour was due. We need show no surprise at well-to-do master-masons, living amply, travelling widely, eating at High Table, prosperous in their lifetime and at death bequeathing house and lands.

Contrary to an opinion more current in England than on the Continent, names of workmen survive from as early as the eleventh century, not only in records and references, but also as signatures. Rogerus, whose name was found behind a statue of the Royal Porch at Chartres, must be one of the very earliest Gothic masters. But even if we got to know who was 'Gothicus I', how much better off should we be? 'How much do we know of Shakespeare?', Mr Harvey pertinently asks. What, indeed, except that he wrote the plays? Or if that is just what we do not know, the name lives as shorthand for whoever did.

If every statue at Chartres bore a signature, should we be any wiser? Without the array of names now available, we might have known that beehives do not produce art, whereas persons tend to collaborate. Has there ever been an art more personal and at the same time less idiosyncratic? Every man wrought in the only way known to him, blest in his work, thrice-blest in doing it within a culture: works thus unselfconsciously created, even by 'little masters', possessed good manners.

Each man, it is true, strove to outdo his fellows, but vying with them to make the same thing, only better—not trying to make a totally different kind of thing. Even the most daring innovators—Vauban's 'sublime madman' who threw into air the

lantern of Coutances, Pierre de Montreuil, to whose new art of luminosity we owe *la Sainte-Chapelle* and the 'glass-house' church, Jean Vast the Younger, who, 'seized by a strange frenzy to complete the greatest of all buildings' (Beauvais), cherished 'the last as it was the wildest faith in the upward surging powers of Gothic Art' (p. 101), and strove only to carry further, higher, this same thing, this leaping, soaring Gothic flame.

Before 1100 there had been no occurrence of the pointed arch in the West, nor can we speak of a positive Gothic art earlier than 1150; 'yet by that year the first fruits were visible in several distinct areas covering nearly three thousand miles in length, from Durham in the north-west to Jerusalem in the south-east.' Before the close of the century an unknown but certainly English master at Wells had produced the first design in the world to rank as pure Gothic. (p. 74.) The next hundred years covered Royal France with cathedrals from Sens (begun 1140) to Beauvais (1211-1290). By the fourteenth century 'the boundaries of Gothic civilisation were now those of the Roman Church: Scandinavia, . . . the Baltic, . . . the Adriatic and Dalmatian seaboard . . . and far-off Iceland were all included'. (p. 54.)

Mr Harvey is at his happiest in the evocative handling of the impact of events on culture. 'The last and most romantic mission which carried the French Cathedrals across Europe was that of Maître Mathieu d'Arras, called from Avignon in 1344 to design the new cathedral of Prague for the Emperor Charles IV, son of the blind King of Bohemia, who died at Crécy in 1346. . . . The building of Prague was the end of the story begun at Sens two centuries before. . . . While a French master was setting out foundations in Bohemia, the Bohemian King was dying on the field of Crécy; and with him not only the hopes of France, but of the international High Gothic of the French Royal Domain.' (pp. 70-71.)

The French churches had always been moving towards a 'unity of articulated structure and contained space, now about to be realised in the Later Gothic concerned chiefly with two things: space and pattern'. This, the pattern produced by linear combinations, was . . . typically English (pp. 81-82), hence of the North, enamoured of verticality and light. Spatial treatment on the other hand was characteristic of the South, where it wooed the dark. Functionally the demand for space sprang from the

Mendicant Orders' need of preaching room; aesthetically from the trend towards interior unity. From the Friars' churches 'Spatial Gothic' spread to diocesan architecture, and from Poitiers Cathedral, which may be considered the first of the Gothic hall-churches, was carried through the Angevin Empire to England, where however it never became of primary importance. Simultaneously the single-unit design was being developed there in the direction of the 'glass-house church', later to culminate in the glories of King's College Cambridge . . . and King Henry VII's Chapel at Westminster. (pp. 84-85.)

'Large expanses of stained glass are in fact a leading characteristic of *Sondergotik* as of French and Flemish Flamboyant and of English Perpendicular.' (p. 88.) Only, whereas the High Gothic of *l'Ile-de-France* had been European, the Late Gothic splits up into national cultures. Of these the most clearly defined are *Perpendicular* in Great Britain and *Sondergotik* in the Teutonic and Baltic world.

It is unfortunate, though perhaps inevitable in illustrating so large a field, that at this point choice should give way to catholicity in reproduction. We could spare some Flamboyant towers and all the second-rate Gothic from the New World to see Prague and Milan cheek by jowl as we have been shown Cologne and Rheims (with Beauvais just overleaf), or for full-page views of other key developments as striking as those of Northern Gothic (Malmö) and Southern Gothic (Batalha). [plates 16-17.] Mr Harvey has brilliantly vindicated the claim of English Perpendicular from 1350-1550 to the status of a complete style, a national culture. May we hope that he may yet convince us in a more leisurely study of the 'New Art' that 'from Alsace in the west to the Carpathians, and from Trent in the south up to Linköping in Sweden, German masters were supreme in the later Gothic age?' (p. 91.)

Whether the author's appraisal of these later cultures be as acceptable is open to doubt. To call English Perpendicular 'an ordered style unsurpassed in any age and time' is hyperbole. The integration of Sherborne Abbey and the star-vaulting of the Norwich nave and choir are truer and greater measures of Perpendicular achievement than is King Henry VII's chapel. Nor should the glory of St Michael's spire at Coventry blind us to the carvings, of what perhaps we might call the Huntley and

Palmer school, which cover the walls built by 'the royal saint'.

'The introduction of the spatial hall-church into Germany was one of the most fateful moments for the production of the later Gothic architecture. At the same time another influence tending in the same general direction was entering Germany from France at Strasbourg. . . . Breadth, and light and verticality are all present.' (p. 89.)

'Norman architecture had dealt in mass; the early Gothic in line; now at last came space defined by line. To the three material dimensions has been added another: aesthetic space.' (G.E. p.25.) This then, beauty of space, is the pearl for which the 'New Art' gave all it had—shaft, capital, triforium, crossing. The emphasis no longer falls on the construction, lapped without by an ocean, within by a middle sea, of air, but on the space it contains. This has become, so to speak, the *pièce de résistance*, and the structure but a mould. Moulds, too, no less than sweets, can be, should be, works of art; but the difference in approach is undeniable—a shifting of emphasis from absolute to relative. As a result we have broader planning and greater suavity of line: 'there is an immediate impression of space and light, coupled with a grand sense of repose'. (p. 33.) No longer *things*, you observe, but *effects*. Making is no more an end to itself (*finis operis*) and a gift to God (*finis operantis*), but a means of expression, to 'the conscious evocation by the architect of an emotional response from the observer'.

Is not this the first crack in the Gothic edifice? Whereas 'the builders of the thirteenth century were the pure in heart', the men who built these works 'mid doubt and depression' thought 'to find God through their own exertions'. The parallels, not only in the other arts, but also in philosophy and mysticism, are obvious. Is not this the very crisis the author of *Gothic England* diagnosed in music—the gulf between the willed response of Beethoven and the glad acceptance of Mozart? Is not this the fundamental difference which runs between partsong and plainsong, between *leitmotiv* and canon, and in general between Romantic and Classical art; between individualistic pietism and sacramental religion?

Is it not precisely here that we can put our finger on the divergence between what Mr Harvey calls Integrative and Disintegrative art—the watershed of which he places, between two overlapping periods 1150-1550 and 1450-1950, at 1450:

Here again everything hinges on absolute as against relative values.

To tell us exactly what is the Gothic Thing, more is needed than chronicling of data and sifting of sources—a wider history of philosophy and a deeper philosophy of history. But Mr Harvey has scant use for philosophy. Though paying lip-service to the Thomist aesthetic as elaborated by M. Maritain, he makes no use of distinctions which would have saved him from opposing art to reason.

As for religion, while he defines the Gothic Thing as the culture obtaining in Christendom of the Western Rite, he justly refuses to identify it with Christianity. In the effort to avoid this, he distinguishes between the religion and the culture of Christendom and concludes that, (although Gothic Art is primarily the expression of religious feeling and faith, . . . its basic religion is in no exclusive sense Christian). Instead, he sees in it the opening of a struggle between the two basic cultures on which Western Christianity itself was based: the Mediterranean or Classic and the Northern Gothic paganisms. 'No hard-and-fast line between the religious and the secular' strikes him as 'the outstanding feature of Gothic Art, the basis of its internal unity. (p. 57.) He does not see the synthesis of nature and grace, of secular and religious as another form or fount of the Gothic balance, another aspect of its 'flexibility', of its 'multiplicity of viewpoint'.

But, the profane being ever the raw material of the sacred, it was not necessary to turn Gothic into an ethnic culture based on a secular religion, syncretising Christian iconography with the imitation of nature (regarded by Mr Harvey as pagan). Culture represents the impact of an ethic, or of its underlying metaphysic, on the *imagination*. Hence collective assent to the dictates of the mythopoeic faculty admits dissidents, being due among the majority (with the possible exception of the technique of each man's own 'mystery') rather to instinct than to reflection. How many cultural formulas are not in fact due to spent mythopoeic impetus! Maybe in the case in point, the author would not reject such an interpretation. But that is not to say that the impetus never was Christian.

Then, if not Christian, what was this 'culture of the High Middle Ages roughly coinciding with the period of Angevin ascendancy and with the Christendom of the Latin Rite'? Those

are its 'When' and its 'Whereabouts'. But what *was* it? Mr Harvey replies: 'a natural and almost inevitable expression of a certain inward spirit, an unresolved tension caused by the firing of an eastern spark within the northern soul'. . . 'the impact upon the adventurous Norman (and Northern) mind of Eastern symbols and knowledge'. (pp. 130, 54.) Foremost among these symbols he puts 'the pointed arch . . . symbolical before it is structural. What did the pointed arch symbolise?' (pp. vi-vii; 57.) He does not tell us. Engagingly he describes, yet never defines the Gothic Thing. Not content with 'perfect functionalism and structural fitness', Gothic design aims at something more; it seeks 'exactness in imagery', infinite variety, endless experiment, 'upwardness'. 'Ability to soar is the keynote of the Gothic achievement.' (p. 2.) Exchanging dead weight for thrust, balance, climax, it is wholly 'alive'. Moreover, in virtue of its 'unity of articulated structure' it is in the highest degree classic. But as the impulse of that spiritual unity which haunted all Gothic dreams, Mr Harvey has nothing to suggest beyond a vague *mystique* of Creation, divine and human; 'Geometry as the science all reasonable men live by'; God as Architect of the Universe.

In the introduction to *Gothic England* the emergence of the human artist is identified with the rise of civilisation itself. Man, 'the freest creature . . . on this terrestrial sphere', is distinguished from the brutes not by reason but by art. It should be remembered however that this freedom of the artist is his freedom as craftsman, as maker: he is not therefore made free as man and citizen. Even Plantagenet craftsmen were liable to impressment—a much milder constraint, it is true, than the enforced labour which raised the Pyramids. Nevertheless the author is right in his claim that 'art in its widest sense is the truest index of human values' and in his contention that, while the minimal levels of human existence are being raised, maximal levels of cultural humanity should not be lowered.

'All cultures are fundamentally religious; that is, they live and die with the beliefs and social practices of the community to which they are attached.' (p. 57.) The old ethnic religions are the most propitious to culture, taboo more conducive to communal well-being than law, and the rule of the priest-king preferable to that of a philosopher. In a ruler taste matters more than virtue: 'the older world under its emperors, kings and tribal chiefs, even

under bad ones, was better placed than we'. The greatest periods in art will then be found, *ceteris paribus*, where there is a strong government by an individual of exquisite taste. From all this it is difficult to avoid the implication that the value of religion is relative and that the aim of life is culture.

One of the reasons why Mr Harvey doubts the Christian inspiration of Gothic culture is that while it was accepted by the commercial centre, Flanders, it was rejected by the religious centre, Rome. (p. 56.)

Gothic in Italy, it is true, never reached the status of a complete culture. Rather it was a *décor*, which found its most notable setting outside the Peninsula, in Papal Avignon. In Italy itself it is easier to come across Gothic towns than Gothic churches: shrines—such as S. Francesco at Assisi, Orvieto Cathedral and, until the war, the Campo Santo at Pisa—breathing Gothic air, are few indeed. Yet the Gothic afflatus inspired two supreme Italian geniuses, Dante and Giotto. Moreover, Gothic as a *style* exerted a widespread influence over painting, sculpture and the minor arts. So long-lived was this that at Siena, which knew not Raphael's *cinquecento* style, with Beccafumi and Sodoma late Gothic and mannerist art flowed together uninterruptedly. Even in 'classical' *quattrocento* Florence Ghiberti kept his linear Gothic manner until his death in mid-century. Two generations later we see Michelangelo wrestling with 'the heavy draperies characteristic of the late Gothic style from which he and his contemporaries evolved'. The statuettes of draped figures for the Piccolomini tomb in Siena, whose authenticity Dr Valentiner conscientiously establishes from the documents, connect the *Pietà* in St Peter's (1498-1500) with the *Madonna* at Bruges (1504-5). This, he ingeniously argues, was itself carved to occupy the lofty central niche.

Other essays in this author's *Studies of Italian Renaissance Sculpture* lend support to Mr Harvey's claim that Gothic art was still vital on the eve of its eclipse. The last phase, even in Italy, is here described as 'late Gothic-baroque', expressive of pre-Reformation restlessness. In it we see in the later Donatello and early Michelangelo a return to medieval religious feeling amid a materialist and sceptical age. The *Pietà* shows that Michelangelo was 'acquainted with the passionate style of late Gothic-baroque in Germany', whence his motif had passed into Italian art. (*S.I.R.S.*, p. 37.) Hence a contemporary critic's scoff:

caprici (sic) *luterani*. Contemporary art north of the Alps from Claus Sluter to Veit Stoss, from Jan van Eyck to Grünewald is exuberantly, fantastically Gothic. Interesting parallels suggest themselves between Konrad Witz and Uccello, Hans Multscher and Castagno. In short, 'it was but a step from the medieval art in its final phase . . . to baroque art of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries: the baroque style, especially in the North, developed directly from late Gothic-baroque without much interference from the Italian Renaissance'. (p. 22.) Whereas nineteenth-century sympathy for rationalist humanism had tended to prolong its rôle from St Francis of Assisi to the eighteenth century, today a more sober reevaluation sees it rather as a parenthesis, brilliant but local—a clique of genius with a first-rate publicity agent in Vasari.

An important essay on *Donatello and The Medieval Front Plane Relief* insists on the autonomy of successive cultures and the danger of judging the past by progressive technical achievement. It is noteworthy that, in their old age, both Donatello and Rembrandt reverted to medieval standards. Other essays reveal intimate knowledge of the Florentine workshops. There we may meet the gentle Ghiberti, 'single-minded' Donatello, Cellini,— 'not the genius people like to think him'—and admire the generous friendship between Verrocchio and his so much more gifted pupil Leonardo.³

All the research in *The Sculptures of Michelangelo* is due to 'the eye of the author and the eye of the camera'. The result is a sense of style and space unparalleled in reproduction. The details are integral parts, not, as so often, fragments. Unusual points of approach throw into new light the pose of *la Notte* (plate 102-4) and the head of *Giuliano* (p. 88). Amazingly sensitive claw-tooling, akin to the cross-hatching of the ink drawings, and as pleasing to modern taste as his use of abrasives is repellent, lends interest to the *Brutus* (plates 182-3) which Justi found 'trite and insignifi-

³ So scholarly a book should not lack a general index. In that to the illustrations the sculptor Agostino di Duccio is confused with Duccio the great Siennese painter. Still less should so sumptuous a volume harbour solecisms such as *cire perdu* (for *perdue*), *controposto* (*passim* for *controposto*) and *stucci* (for *stucchi*). *Tolentino* is known to hagiographers, though not as the name of a saint. *Catastro* and *catastrale* are unknown to lexicographers, English or Italian, though the Italian forms *catasto*, *-ale*, would fit the context. But why not *property tax*? It takes a bold writer to tackle the syntax of two languages at once, undeterred by a hybrid plural such as *Pietás* or by unresolvable discords like *were* . . . *retardataire* [sic]. The illustrations, chosen to comment on the text, are intrinsically beautiful.

cant', no less than to the profile of *The Victor* (plate 123.) Plate 77—the *Hands of Christ, holding bamboo, sponge and rope*—from *The Risen Christ* at S. Maria sopra Minerva, gives what is rare in this sculptor—contrast of texture. Yet this resides no longer in the medium, as in medieval carving, but in the subject, and is thus reduced to the contrast between the smooth and the wrought, as in the effigies of the Medici, or between the tight and the protuberant as in the *Pietà*. The contrast between rough and smooth being fortuitous (owing to the sculptor's intention of smoothing every part), there remains the single contrast between the taut and the bulgy; this accounts for a certain monotony which was noted even by his contemporaries. The finest plate of all (plate 127) reveals the *Apollo's* unique qualities as a work *de ronde bosse*. This and the Hermitage *Crouching Boy*, here claimed as an original, even if finished by Tribolo, anticipates all sculpture until yesterday and beyond, including Rodin and Kolbe, Despiiau and Dobson. Every now and then comes an artist who not only consumes the past as did Giotto and Bach, but who seems to have gambled away the future as well: such were Beethoven and Michelangelo.

If the hallmark of classicism be the subordination of parts to the whole, how much more classic was the art of the Middle Ages than Michelangelo's, in which the part is almost always greater than the whole! How perfectly in place are the royal figures on their porch at Chartres, the angels round their pillar at Strasbourg, *Ekklesia* and *Synagoge* and even the asymmetrical *Blasengel* at Bamberg! What a contrast between the galaxy of founders in their airy West Choir at Naumburg and those other portraits, no less ideal, *The Thinker* and *The Hero* on their jejune ledges in that depressing sacristy!

And lest it be objected that between the summer of the Middle Ages and the 'classical' blight there is a lapse of two centuries, let us remember how exuberant Gothic art still was in the North: Veit Stoss's *Englischer Grüss* at Nuremberg is contemporary with the Medici tombs; so is Bernt Notke, who, with his great St George at Stockholm, passed from the full flood of late Gothic into the rising tide of Baroque.

Hitherto men had built or carved in the only way conceivable to them; now for the first time it was possible to choose, to create in this style or that—to go Gothic with Ghiberti or 'classic' with Brunellesco. And lo! we are at once confronted with the albatross

type of artist: '*ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher*'. Collaboration, which had been the strength of the workshop tradition, spells disaster when the conception is confined to one mind and its appreciation to an *élite*. We have passed instantaneously from an integrated culture to intellectual anarchy, from a society of artisans, strong in an inherited tradition knowing in what and in whom they believed, to the fluctuations of an unpredictable protestantism of taste.

OBITER

ETIENNE GILSON, in a letter to the Editor of *Esprit*, gives a full—and most people will say, a final—answer to the critics who have accused him of 'abandoning' France for America. He is, he explains, 'a hardened recidivist in this matter of flight to America', for academic commitments there have led him to make twenty-two journeys to America in twenty-six years. His decision to devote three whole years to the Medieval Institute of Toronto, after a career of forty-three years of teaching in France, is a personal one, but 'France is present wherever a Frenchman continues his work . . . and the most obscure French professor abroad is incomparably more important for France than twenty academicians from all the Parisian academies whatsoever'.

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THE FURROW devotes its April issue to the question of Preaching. The Editor rightly insists that 'nowhere is the need for adaptation so great as here, where there is ever the temptation to canonise the style and forms of yesterday'. The number opens significantly with 'A Layman's view of Preaching', and Fr Drinkwater's analysis of the discipline and dignity of words is itself a model of their use.

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PERMANENT AND TEMPORARY CHURCHES, Dual Purpose Church Halls, Church Furniture and Arrangement, Maintenance Problems, Stained Glass of Today, the Parish Church Organ—such are a few of the subjects dealt with by experts in the eleventh Report of the Central Council for the Care of Churches, entitled *The Problem of England's Historic Churches* (Mowbray; 6s.). Although written mainly for members of the Church of England, this Report deserves careful study by any Catholic bishop, priest or layman who is responsible for, or interested in, the care and furnishing of churches. The excellent photographs add to the value of this book, especially those of altars. The survey of books devoted to church building and furnishing published between 1947 and 1950 is another valuable feature of this Report.