



MILLARD MEISS

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Rensselaer W. Lee

Princeton University

It is fitting that we, members of his family, colleagues, friends, former students should come together here today to honor Millard Meiss and to share our memories of him. It is appropriate that we meet in a splendid Gothic chapel, for Millard's admiration of the Gothic buildings on this campus played a large part in bringing him to Princeton. It was in one of these, about two-score yards from here that I taught Millard English literature over half a century ago. Gothic architecture was also the pictorial setting of much of the art that was Millard's chief concern. It was light streaming through the clerestory windows of a High Gothic church in a painting of Jan van Eyck—light which he beautifully interpreted as form and symbol—that inspired one of his most memorable writings.

"Mobile and intangible light," he wrote, "has always seemed the natural counterpart of the mind." How well this association of mind with light applies to Millard himself, to his own eager, agile intelligence and to the light-dispensing efficacy of his life as scholar and teacher. For it was to the illumination of history through art, its visual touchstone, that he marshaled his unrivaled connoisseurship, his subtle iconographic formulations, his deep grasp of the forces shaping an epoch. This is not, however, the occasion to set forth

his achievement as a scholar, already the subject of encomia, already known to you all. It is with other aspects of his life that we shall be concerned here. I would only say of his last work, the monumental *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry*, culminating in the great volume on the Limbourgs, that Millard undertook so massive a task because he regarded this painting in manuscripts not only as beautiful, not only as major art, but as the last moment of major art in Europe that had not been treated within the full context of European art as a whole.

His style of writing, however, requires a brief word. Clear, at once graceful and incisive, sensitive to aesthetic nuance, abstemious of verbal excess, it will remain a model of acute perceptive analysis and lucid historical exposition. And here one might recall that among the many honors of his life, one of the first was one that pleased him most: the Thomas B. Wanamaker prize in English composition awarded during his junior year at Princeton, augury of literary excellence to come.

If Millard will be chiefly remembered for the rich harvest of his contemplative life, we should also recall that for many years his active life ran parallel to the other in strong functioning tension. To the important national and international committees he governed he brought his subtly perceptive and receptive instincts and his architectonic wisdom. He managed them superbly with a firm, quiet persuasiveness tempered by humor and following Horace's maxim that if you know what you have to say, the exact words will follow; and

with Millard the sentences were lean and crisp and there was no superfluous word. This ability to preside and direct he displayed at an early age, for a notice in a Cincinnati newspaper, which Miggy has given me, proclaimed him at fourteen the youngest mayor in the United States. Mayor he was of the Avondale Public School City, elected after a vigorous campaign by students of the upper grades, and his first act was to appoint a Park Commissioner whose job it was to keep the school lawn in perfect condition. Well, *ex ungue leonem!* As the years revolved, a vigorous young editor-in-chief brought new intellectual life and impeccable editing to a stale *Art Bulletin*. Later Millard's talent for administration was nowhere better shown than in the arduous and complex task of organizing, in 1961, the first Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art to be held in the United States. There he was elected President of the Committee. "I met him in that capacity several times," a friend of Millard's has written me, "and it was always delightful to observe how highly respected and appreciated he was by all his colleagues from whatever country they came. He was the perfect ambassador of the United States." At the end of the Second World War he had become Chairman of the American Committee for the Restoration of Italian Monuments, and here began his urgent concern with the salvage and conservation of works of art. The most moving example of this was his response to the great Italian floods of 1966. A Florentine scholar and intimate friend of Millard's has written poignantly how swiftly he reached Florence after

the disaster despite ill health, how effective he was in planning the work of salvage, and how, when this friend expressed gratitude for all he had done, Millard replied, "Ma che dici? Firenze è la patria spirituale di tutti noi, e certo io non potrei non esser qui nel momento di una tale calamità." Concerning Florence on another cardinal side, Millard was Harvard's ultimate counselor about I Tatti "which," it has been well said, "could hardly have attained its present position except for his warm, wise, and steady sponsorship." And we may remember here that the Tuscan trecento (though not forgetting the quattrocento) to which he made the most distinguished scholarly contribution of our time, had been Millard's first, and I think remained, his greatest, love.

But whether, pen in hand when he was never happier, Millard spent long hours of the day composing, or served as wise and firm advocate in the agora of his profession, his life, sustained and strengthened by Miggy's unfailing support and devotion, stands out as *something luminous and whole*. He was, as I saw him, a man of deep reserve and restraint with austere high standards of conduct and performance, just as he had an unerring sense of quality in art as in life. He was not a competitive spirit. Being joyously absorbed in his work and secure in the mastery of it, he was, as Matthew Arnold wrote of Shakespeare "self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honored, self-secure." He had a priestlike dedication to the scholar's life on which the ordinary claims of pleasure did not intrude. His writing, of extraordinary density and richness, reflects a lifetime of

perfectionist investigation. Descartes once wrote "To make everywhere such complete countings and such all embracing surveys that I might be confident of having omitted nothing." So Millard; and of course, much more. And he had a high sense of professional obligation to the scholarly community. He was an interested and generous friend and critic to whom old or young scholars could go for profitable, spirited discussion of work in hand, or for lucid direction and encouragement. For many young scholars he charted the course of their beginning as well as later work and he was their advocate as the scholar-trustees of the future. As late as May of this year he wrote a letter to the Secretary of the International Committee for the History of Art that has been called a testament. In this he recorded his vote that international congresses should not be restricted to the inner circle of mature art historians, but remain, as they had always been, open to all, so that old and young scholars could come to know each other and engage in discussion fruitful to both.

But if Millard's life and accomplishment aroused highest respect, another side endeared him to his friends. He was a gentle, tolerant, humorous man and he enjoyed the human comedy. A discreet and mellow wit marked his conversation, and witty were the titles he sometimes gave his articles; for instance, "'Highlands' in the Lowlands," or his marvelous response to Longhi who had objected to Millard's attribution of the Frick *Flagellation* to Duccio in a note entitled "Prima Cimabue, poi Duccio," to which Millard's title in answer was "Scusi, ma sempre Duccio." And Millard

cherished the good things of life. When he and Miggy were invited by Baron Rothschild to his place in the country, he sipped the Château Lafite Rothschild proffered him with quiet rapture. He was once heard to remark that he chose the subject of his doctoral thesis because it would take him to those parts of Italy where grew the finest figs.

Much withdrawn during the last years of his life, he worked long hours in adverse health to finish his final volumes, an inspiring example of intellectual stamina, steadfast purpose and stoic fortitude. Little more than a year before he died, knowing his illness to be grave, he visited Florence, Siena and Venice and greeted his Italian friends. Then in a major effort he delivered two lectures on the *Très Riches Heures* at the Collège de France. As he knew at the time, the journey and the lectures were valedictory. A year later, he died in his study, with only his closest family present, and surrounded by his books. He had finished all his major work.

Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus
Tam cari capitis?

What measure or limit can there be to our regret for the loss of so dear a life?

Millard's death deprived us of a beloved friend and the world of a great scholar. But in equal measure his life enriched our lives and the world of learning, and this is cause for rejoicing.

Angelica Zander Rudenstine

Guggenheim Museum

I have been asked to say a few words about Millard the man, not the art historian, a difficult task only because the two were in so many essential ways inseparable. The work will endure as a monument to the man, long after all who knew and loved Millard are gone. But for those who shared in the rich experience of his friendship, the work will be forever entwined with the greatness of the person.

I came to know Millard only in the last seven years of his life. I had recently begun research for a catalogue of the paintings in the Guggenheim Museum, and we both sat reading in the Visiting Scholars' room of Marquand Library. Typically, it was Millard who took the initiative and with characteristic modesty introduced himself. He asked many questions about my project, about the kind of catalogue I hoped to produce, and about the problems I expected to encounter. I felt then—as on so many later occasions—how easily and reassuringly he reached across to others; how natural it seemed for him to seek contact with and give so generously of himself to new, often much younger, friends, even when their fields and immediate interests were different from his own.

The impressions of Millard which I gained in that first encounter were only strengthened by subsequent

meetings when his rich complexity, as well as his deep simplicity, made themselves felt more and more. His receptiveness and his openness of spirit came with a certain reticence; but the diffidence was in turn combined with a formidable commitment to everything that engaged his interest. Behind the marvelously gentle and restrained manner one always felt the presence of those immense reserves of intellectual intensity and rigor. His patient, probing, sometimes perplexed attitudes, his occasionally quizzical and even sceptical responses were enriched by humor, by a sharp (though always charitable) wit, by his feeling for the gaiety of life and its occasions.

I saw Millard for the last time this spring. My catalogue of the Guggenheim collection was ready to go to press. Millard, though extremely fragile, and unable to rise from his couch, insisted on looking through the proposed layout. He talked thoughtfully and animatedly about its logic, about technical details of design and printing, as well as about some pressing publication problems that still remained unresolved. He made our last meeting, though so deeply overshadowed by his illness, somehow as vital and as natural as our first. At a time when he was so painfully aware of the ebbing of his own life, he had room in his expansive heart to think mainly of others, to ask of *their* plans and hopes for the future.

Millard's brilliantly shining eyes, penetrating, yet so warmly kind, always so deeply focused, remain an unforgettable embodiment of what he was. They gave eloquent expression to his mind, as well as to his pro-

found humanity and grace. One remembers Shakespeare's lines:

His life was gentle, and the elements
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, "This was a man."

Arthur J. Patek, Jr.

Cambridge, Massachusetts

I had the privilege of being a friend of Millard Meiss and his physician for some years. We first met during our college days when Millard came to Cambridge to visit my roommate Red Rauh, also a wonderful person. There was a congenial, really devoted group of fellows from Cincinnati who remained friends from early boyhood through their adult lives. Among them was Eddie Mack who was very close to both Red and Millard. Although I was somewhat on the periphery, having come from Wisconsin, I felt that I almost belonged.

After graduation from Princeton, Millard came to Harvard, but transferred after a short time to the Institute of Fine Arts in New York. We saw little of each other until I moved to New York ten years later. One of my fond recollections of Millard at this time was his role as farmer. He and Miggy had a charming place in Connecticut where they spent weekends and vaca-

tions. He was an avid gardener, and as always became expert in whatever he undertook.

I recall the vegetable garden planned with such pleasing proportions and walks, and ringed with flowers. I made a drawing of this and emulated it later, and I made note of his schedule for spraying apple trees. He was interested in the adjacent woods and became knowledgeable about forestry and the natural cycle of trees. He was devoted to his tractor which symbolized for him, I suspect, the rugged farmer. I recall one time when his mower ran over a border of allysum by mistake. Millard discovered later that the allysum flourished from the insult, and this delighted him.

I had engaged in academic medicine for about fifteen years and then decided to go into part-time practice as well. Millard called soon after I hung out my shingle, which of course was flattering. In this role I was to know him better, and to know him better was to appreciate a very special man. He was most sensitive and perceptive. His humor was quiet and gentle—it was never mean. He often laughed at himself over some absurdity, or what he might consider an absurdity. There was no pretension, and I never thought of him in terms of his achievements, but rather as a rare fellow with a vibrant nature.

The office visits were strictly professional. Some time previously, I had been physician to a famous pianist. One day I discussed something pertaining to music or possibly the piano. There was a frightened look, as I recall, and I was not asked to see him again. So per-

haps intuitively I realized that it was better not to discuss frescoes or Giotto's work with Millard, at least not in the office.

Millard continued to be my patient until he left New York for Cambridge. There was one medical problem that I might recall because it may have exerted very telling effect on his life. In the 1930s, quite some time before I knew him professionally, a shadow was discovered on a chest x-ray which was interpreted as malignant. The prognosis was grim. The x-ray shadow was watched anxiously for years until finally it was recognized to be benign. But year after year this chest x-ray was lived with. I think that this made life all the more precious to Millard. Every moment was important. There was so little time and so much to be done.

This interpretation may be fantasy, but I believe there is some validity to it, and that the burning interest in his work was sparked by this early experience.

But more than his professional accomplishments, he loved people and people loved him. I can only say that I am most grateful for having known him.

John Pope-Hennessy

British Museum

I first encountered Millard Meiss at Oxford in 1933. I became acquainted with him in the way that art historians generally become acquainted with one another, through the medium of the written word, in this case two articles in the *Art Bulletin*. I still remember the impression that they made, of carefully cogitated and extremely subtle style analysis, combined with perspicacious but uninsistent iconographical research. I already apprehended vaguely what I believe more firmly now, that art history is a subjective discipline, and that what is known as method is a projection of personal standards and individual character. And when I eventually met Millard—in 1945 I think—the first impression was that his human personality corresponded exactly with the personality implicit in his written work. The scholar and the man were really one, and the qualities they shared were the qualities that made him so great an art historian.

In art history there is a premium on abstinence. The subject requires great cleverness, but cleverness that never lapses into exhibitionism; it requires imagination, but imagination under rational control; it requires a capacity to formulate, which differs from other forms of writing in that it is invalidated if the writer gives way to the seduction of writing for writing's sake.

In all those respects Millard Meiss was a paragon. He could have astonished, but refrained from doing so. He could have allowed a powerful imagination to draw him beyond the permissible limits of the evidence. He could have disturbed the careful balance between formulation and the thought that it expressed. But he did none of those things. And the first of the attributes for which he was so greatly admired by European scholars as well as by scholars in this country was intellectual integrity.

I have mentioned European scholars as a whole, and one may question whether any art historian from this country ever earned so high a measure of recognition from Italy—where he inspired admiring and respectful trust, and where his personal standing was fundamental for the successful work of CRIA eight years ago; from France—where he is universally conceded to have made one of the greatest and what will surely prove one of the most enduring contributions to the study of French painting and manuscript illumination; and from Great Britain—where, thanks to the resources of a common language, the delicacy and precision of his thought processes and their corollary, his literary style, have been held, for thirty years, in the very highest regard. And at the time he died it would have been conceded universally, first that he had made a major contribution in all those areas to which he applied himself, that by treating the development of trecento painting as history he had transformed it from a conceptual, rather arid discipline to a study that was more real and viable; that he possessed a unique combination

of sensibility and mental rigor, which made his writings on major Renaissance artists, and especially Piero della Francesca and Masaccio, more probing and more profound than any other publications on these artists in the same period of years; that in his volumes on French painting he had added a new dimension to connoisseurship. But it should have been felt still more strongly that his whole nature, his solicitude for people and for works of art, his generosity and modesty and confidence transcended national barriers, and had won him, in a quite extraordinary degree, not just the respect but the affection of all his colleagues, regardless of the disciplines they studied or the backgrounds from which they sprang. He added to knowledge, but more importantly he changed the climate from which knowledge springs.

Cesare Gnudi

Bologna, Italy

As a great friend of Millard Meiss I am privileged to be here at this moment to express on behalf of Italy our admiration, gratitude and love for him who loved Italy; for him who knew us so well in our artists, our poets, and through the warmth of friendships. To Italy he gave of himself unhesitatingly in moments of crisis, bringing as well the generous support of his own country. What could be more appropriate than for Italy to

speak here with the voice of Dante, the divine poet to whom Millard dedicated "lungo studio e lungo amore"? The passage I have chosen is from the second canto of the *Purgatorio*. The canto of Casella of music and friendship. A group of souls has just disembarked on the Island of Purgatory. One of them approaches Dante who recognizes his friend, the musician Casella. Dante asks him to sing as he used to in life. He sings a famous *canzone* by Dante himself, and to the hearers it brings release from care, inward recollection and self-forgetfulness.

Io vidi una di lor trarresi avante
per abbracciarmi, con sì grande affetto,
che mosse me a fare il simigliante.

.

Soavemente disse ch'io posasse:
allor conobbi chi era, e pregai
che, per parlarmi, un poco s'arrestasse.

Rispuosemi: "Così com'io t'amai
nel mortal corpo, così t'amo sciolta:
però m'arresto; ma tu perchè vai?"

.

E io: "Se nuova legge non ti toglie
memoria o uso a l'amoroso canto
che mi solea quietar tutte mie voglie,
di ciò ti piaccia consolare alquanto
l'anima mia, che, con la mia persona
venendo qui, è affannata tanto!"

'Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona'
cominciò elli allor sì dolcemente,
che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi sona.

Lo mio maestro e io e quella gente
ch'eran con lui parevan sì contenti,
come a nessun toccasse altro la mente.

Howard Davis

Columbia University

Millard spent the first twenty years of his career on the Columbia faculty. This past May he came back to Columbia to receive an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. Pursued by honors, as we all know he was, Millard cherished this one, which brought his career full circle. Since he was also pleased by the citation, Miggy and I felt that it would be fitting to read it on this occasion. It is, of course, addressed to him:

Teacher, writer, conservator of our artistic heritage, you have been a guiding light of art history, first at Columbia and then throughout the world, a model for generations of students and colleagues.

With a rare sense for the precise expressive quality of works of art, you have, in your own words, "regarded iconography as responsive to form and as symbolic of deeper intrinsic meanings." The art you have most closely studied runs

the full range of the great age of the Renaissance and spans the Alps. The artists whose works you have illumined—Giotto, Van Eyck, Piero, Bellini—suggest your own spiritual qualities.

In a busy life as a scholar you have found time for leadership in the revitalization of our key scholarly journal and in the preservation of works of art threatened by flood and by human neglect.

No one more appropriately reminds us of Columbia's motto, *in lumine tuo videbimus lumen*.

That Commencement day was the last day Millard felt so fully and truly alive, Miggy has told me; indeed he was radiantly so. For him it was clearly a joyous occasion. For those of us who were privileged to be there and share it with him, it is a memory we will cherish always.