

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Magnificent Dreams: Burne-Jones and the Late Victorians* by Frances Spalding

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painting's presence in the Whistler circle, provides fascinating food for thought for the student of British art in the later nineteenth century. Butlin and Joll bring together the raw material needed for a survey of Turner's reputation throughout the nineteenth century, and it is to be hoped that their achievement will inspire further studies.

The final section of the catalogue is devoted to sixteen paintings 'formerly attributed to Turner' but sensibly not accepted by the compilers. Among these are a number in public collections, including the Huntington's *Edinburgh and Calton Hill from St Anthony's Chapel* (No.554) and the two small Margate pictures at Cardiff (Nos. 555 and 557), both of which have been associated with a Mrs Booth/John Pound provenance. Butlin and Joll do, however, accept a number of paintings with that provenance, some of which seem questionable to the present reviewer, including two more at Cardiff, *Morning after the Wreck* (No.478) and *A Sailing Boat off Deal* (No.484). The catalogue entries for these indicate the problems that their dating have raised, which come as no surprise as they appear to be little better than pastiches in oil of some of Turner's later water-colours of marine subjects. Another marine probably from this source, the Walker Art Gallery's *Margate Harbour* (No.475) seems equally weak; certainly when seen at the 1974/5 Turner Exhibition at the Royal Academy all the three last-mentioned paintings (Nos. 323, 324 and 497 respectively) looked out of place. Two other problematic paintings accepted by Joll but doubted by Butlin (in my opinion correctly) also seem to be based, in general terms, on water-colour prototypes. These are No.40, *A Storm in the Mountains*, and No.41, *Tummel Bridge, Perthshire*. Another much more impressive canvas accepted, though tentatively, by Joll but doubted by Butlin (with whom I am again in agreement) is the Mellon Collection's version (No.442) of the Walker Art Gallery's *Schloss Rosenau* (No.392), exhibited at the R.A. in 1841. Now shown with the important group of Turner paintings at the Yale Center, this appears altogether too lacking in depth to merit an attribution to Turner, as it also did when seen in similar company in the Lecture Room at the Royal Academy's Bicentenary Exhibition in 1968.

Recent restoration has proved that another doubtful canvas, accepted by both Butlin and Joll as a work of c.1799-1800, is not by Turner. This is the Leicester Museum and Art Gallery's *Cilgerran Castle* (No.37), for which an attribution to William Havell, an artist much influenced by Turner and associated with other representations of the same subject, seems to be feasible. There are certainly a few more paintings included in this catalogue about which reservations might be expressed, but there is no doubt at all that Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll have compiled an

invaluable and largely unassailable corpus of Turner's oil paintings which will provide the basis for further research on the artist for years to come.

Many passages in their catalogue indicate the need for continuing work, especially in matters of dating and provenance. Thus Martin Butlin is very guarded in attributing the *Roman* and *Small Italian Sketches* (Nos.302-327) to Turner's 1828 visit to Italy. On the other hand, despite recent alternative suggestions, he accepts the long-standing date of c.1807 for the *Small Thames Sketches* painted on mahogany veneer (Nos.177-194), and makes no reference to the worrying suggestion made by Conal Shields in the Catalogue of the 1973 *Landscape in Britain* Exhibition that Turner may have used a mechanical aid (W. H. Wollaston's *camera lucida*) in some of these compositions. In the final section of some thirty late 'Miscellaneous' unexhibited paintings (Nos.501-32), the majority in the Turner Bequest, the latest date proposed is c.1845, while most are dated to c.1835-40. It has recently become clear that there are quite a number of large water-colours which may be dated after 1845, and which in their pale colouring and rather nervous washes can certainly be compared with some of these late oil studies; it would now seem plausible to suggest a date as late as c.1850 for some of them. However, on present evidence such re-dating can be no more than guesswork, something which Butlin and Joll have largely avoided. It will be in this area of Turner's late work that their successors can be most fruitfully employed.

LUKE HERRMANN

Félicien Rops - L'œuvre graphique complète. By Jean-François Bory. 20 pp. + 644 pl. (Paris, Arthur Hubschmid), 1977.

Rops died in 1898 and since then the flow of publications dealing with his life and work has never quite stopped. Unfortunately none of the books published during the past fifty years - since Maurice Exteens's *L'œuvre gravé et lithographié de Félicien Rops* (1928) - do justice to an artist whose talents were praised by Baudelaire, Verhaeren, J.-K. Huysmans and Richard Muther. Most of them contain mainly plates selected for their pornographic appeal (although those in Charles Brisson's *Pornocrates: an introduction to the Life and Work of Félicien Rops* convey a certain impression of the artist's many-sidedness) and texts entirely based on those of Rop's contemporaries (although J.-P. Babut du Marès in his *Félicien Rops* publishes a number of unknown letters).

The volume here under review has one merit: it reproduces over 600 of the more than 1,200 prints listed by Exteens,

including those Exteens preferred not to illustrate. In every other respect this book is of little value. Most of the plates, which are very arbitrarily arranged, are of poor quality; some (for instance Pls.43, 44) are so grey that details and inscriptions remain imperceptible. Apart from the editor's brief introduction, the text consists once more of J.-K. Huysmans's famous chapter from *Certains*. There is very little factual information and no bibliography. Illustrations and frontispieces (Pls.40-47: Barbey d'Aurévilly; Pl.63: Sâr Péladan; Pl.90: Gérard de Nerval; Pl.110: De Coster) appear unaccompanied by authors' names. Dates are sometimes given, but missing in the cases of *Les Diaboliques*, where they could easily have been established, or *La Dalécarlienne* which is dated on the plate.

The perfunctoriness of this production is particularly regrettable as this book is one of a series of handsome volumes on the work of great print-makers which was initiated in Munich by the publishing firm of Rogner & Bernhard (whose name does not appear on *L'œuvre graphique complète de Félicien Rops*) and supplied with French texts by the French distributor in Paris.

EDITH HOFFMANN

Magnificent Dreams: Burne-Jones and the Late Victorians. By Frances Spalding. 80pp. — 68 ill. (27 in col.). (Phaidon), £5.95.

At first glance this slim volume appears to be yet another picture book cashing in on the current vogue for Victorian and Symbolist painting; however, the text belies this and the opening sentences pitch the reader straight into what is a serious and erudite study of late Victorian classicism, formed, in Mrs Spalding's definition, out of the 'union of the sensuous with the historical'. The book starts with the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery on May Day 1877, and after a brief outline of the Grosvenor's aims and failings concentrates on its principal artists, Burne-Jones and G. F. Watts. The dream-world of Burne-Jones, Rossetti and the painters they inspired provide the core of Mrs Spalding's thesis; it was a world inspired by the writings of Chaucer and William Morris, especially *The Earthly Paradise*, which displayed a 'wealth of imagery and delight in decorative accessories'. Several pictures are studied and analysed - Burne-Jones's *The Beguiling of Merlin, Perseus and the Graiae* and the *Briar Rose* series; Watt's *Love and Death* and *Time Death and Judgement* and Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel*. Mrs Spalding is at her most assured when dealing with these works as well as with the paintings and imagery of John William Waterhouse - an exhibition of whose work,

incidentally, is to be held at Sheffield and Wolverhampton (14th October 1978 – 13th January 1979) but becomes less confident when she tries to incorporate the more blatantly bourgeois creations of Edwin Long, Poynter and Alma Tadema into the same category.

Despite fervent interest in the period, it is still difficult for us satisfactorily to analyse Victorian aspirations; on the one hand there was an intense and often desperate search for a divine being, and on the other an acceptance and glorification of worldly things and of the newly created wealth, which made them accessible. Between these two there were, naturally, many strata and variants. Idealism and worldliness were closely paralleled by the two main strands of Victorian painting; from the Italy of Raphael, Botticelli and Titian was derived a language of devout aspiration, whilst the *mondaine* traditions of Northern narrative painting fused to create titillating pictures for the new patricians. To try and combine the two is to confuse by oversimplification. However, Mrs Spalding is undoubtedly right in her conclusion; both traditions depended to a considerable degree on an unswerving belief in themselves, and once that confidence was undermined they faltered and were lost. Byam Shaw, Herbert Draper and Reginald Frampton never had the same conviction as Burne-Jones, partly, as she suggests, because they had been overtaken by *pleinairisme*, Impressionism, etc, but more seriously because they had lost their integrity and their dreams were hollow charades. Joseph Southall, the Birmingham Group and Maxwell Armfield, who are not mentioned in the book, were more truly the heirs to Burne-Jones; they were not undermined by the existence of bodies such as the New English Art Club, they were part of them. As Mrs Spalding says, 'late Victorian art generally assumed an educated, literary audience', and this book makes a valid and useful contribution to the study of late nineteenth-century taste.

PEYTON SKIPWITH

Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions

London

The life of Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845–86) illustrates perfectly Kenneth Clark's dictum that lives dedicated to beauty have a way of ending badly. The small exhibition at the **Victoria & Albert Museum** (until 17th December; admission costs £1) is confined to the studies, invariably in water-colour or gouache, for the palaces and castles that he built and for stage sets that are often indistinguishable from building operations conceived in largely theatrical terms. No expense was spared and no detail was too insignificant for Ludwig's neurotic but enamoured

attention; the exhibits at the V & A, on loan from Munich, cover everything from panoramas of Neuschwanstein and Herrenchiemsee (built to rival Versailles) to details of ornament, carriages (Fig.48), candle-sticks, vases and a 'peacock throne' that even George IV might have thought excessive.

Ludwig von Burkel, the King's Court Secretary for many years, once remarked that there were two souls within the breast of his employer – 'the soul of a tyrant and the soul of a child' – and the palaces combine acute megalomania with a degree of fantasy infantile in its comprehensive escapism. The effect is ultimately neither beautiful nor exciting but simply depressing. As Simon Jervis writes in an interesting essay in the catalogue (again supported, like the Fabergé affair, by **Debrett's Peerage Ltd.**, which is evidently fascinated by the taste of doomed monarchies), Ludwig's activities were by no means original nor, in his own lifetime, unique. Where he differed from Beckford or Ferdinand de Rothschild, builder of Waddesdon, was in the sheer scale of his extravagance and in his disinterest in original works of art from the past. He was unfortunate in living in a bad period. All his reconstructions suffer from the same kind of oppressive Victorian over-elaboration; an airless vulgarity permeates everything, like dry-rot. It is like being trapped, for ever, in a pompous production of *Swan Lake*; one longs for the curtain to go up on life.

Things might have been better had Ludwig had a sense of humour and encouraged it in his designers; even his most Rococo inventions are earnest and heavy. For a taste of the real Rococo one has only to go to **Agnew's**, where over sixty of the 137 drawings by Fragonard for *Orlando Furioso* are on view until 15th December. All the studies were of course catalogued by Mongan, Hofer and Sez nec in 1945; the catalogue of the exhibition includes useful information on the relationship between the drawings and Ariosto's text, emphasising what one might not have suspected from a cursory glance at these spirited but slight sketches, that they follow the narrative very closely. The drawings are, perhaps, *too* slight, the forms empty, the response to drama conventional, but they are certainly characteristic of Fragonard's airy visual thinking. The maid servant in Fig.47 seems almost like a quotation from the comparably placed girl in the National Gallery's new painting.

Much more interesting – potentially at least, since the originals were not yet available at the time of going to press and had to be judged on the basis of good photographs – are the drawings and water-colours of Gerhardt Wilhelm von Reutern (1794–1865) at **Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox** (24th November–22nd December), introduced and well catalogued by their sponsor, Stephanie Maison. Von Reutern's life was picturesque. He came from an

aristocratic German family but joined the Russian Army in 1811. He was badly wounded at the Battle of Leipzig two years later and his right arm had to be amputated (buried in a miniature coffin near Leipzig, it was eventually disinterred and re-buried with the rest of his body in Frankfurt). Von Reutern then became an artist; was a friend of Goethe who referred to him as 'the beautiful Russian'; travelled a great deal; and took instruction in portrait drawing from Ludwig Emil Grimm, brother of the writers. He settled in Frankfurt in 1844, having become Court Painter to the Russian Imperial Court seven years earlier; and much of his work, including Biblical paintings, is still in Russia.

Von Reutern's drawings (Figs.50, 57 & 58) are impressive: clarity of vision, Nazarene inspired, is strengthened by a Romantic intensity to give his studies, whether they be of a woman with clasped hands (Advertisements, p.CLXIII), a street in Hanau (Fig.57) or of a blacksmith named Johannes Daum (Fig.58), a memorable authenticity. Although a drawing such as the *Johannes Daum* may have its origins in the Nazarene revival of Düreresque draughtsmanship, there is nothing in the least antiquarian about it. What we see in Von Reutern's work is an unaffected but acute feeling for character and place; neither pretentious nor cold-blooded, his art reveals a dignified modesty of intent and effect that is exceptionally sympathetic.

To coincide with the joint-publication (with **Studio Vista**) of Christopher Gilbert's important new monograph on Chippendale, **Christie's** are showing a small loan exhibition of twelve documented pieces of Chippendale furniture at their King Street premises from the 10th–16th November. The exhibits include the newly restored marquetry pier-table from the circular dressing room at Harewood House, a mahogany card table – one of a pair made for Dumfries House – and a pair of newly identified candle-stands from Brocket Hall (Fig.44).

David Carritt has had the extremely attractive idea of mounting a small exhibition of twenty-five paintings and drawings by Seurat, in memory of Ben Nicolson. The show can be seen in the Duke Street gallery from 15th November until 15th December; and proceeds from the sale of the catalogue (selection and text by John Richardson) will go to the N.A.–C.F. Nicolson Fund. Ben was always extremely fond of Seurat's work and his own early drawing (Fig.52) is in the present exhibition, lent by Richard Wollheim, who contributes an exceptionally acute memoir of Ben to the catalogue. Other works promised include the haunting study for *La Baignade* (Fig.51), *La Luzerne, Saint-Denis* (Edinburgh), two of the small oil studies formerly belonging to Lady Aberconway and last, but by no means least, the small version of *Les Poseuses*.