

Kenneth Bendiner, *An Introduction to Victorian Painting*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, 90 black-and-white illus., 8 colour plates., \$49.00 (cloth)

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niste », qui a ensuite curieusement glissé dans les slogans de Kodak pour être perpétué par des critiques contemporains, glosant sur l'image mais n'en créant pas eux-mêmes.

Car une image qui répond aux critères propres à la photographie est une création dès avant que le bouton ou la poire ne soient pressés : l'élément premier est en effet la « vision photographique » qui est d'abord une vue synthétique du sujet et de l'interprétation qu'on en veut donner. En cela, elle procède comme l'esquisse (avec laquelle on la comparait au XIX^e siècle) par une vue d'ensemble, tenant compte des masses et des lignes générales. Cette perception, souvent fugace, qui se caractérisera par le choix de l'objectif et du point de vue, est le premier élément du « discours » de la photographie. Où l'analogie avec l'esquisse s'arrête, c'est au résultat final dans lequel la photographie révélera (plus ou moins selon les techniques de tirage adoptées, mais toujours plus que l'esquisse) des détails qui n'avaient souvent pas été remarqués au moment de la prise de vue. La multiplicité des techniques de tirage et la richesse des possibilités d'interprétation sont d'autres éléments du pluralisme des discours de la photographie qui doivent être analysés dans leur contexte d'intention (scientifique, documentaire, sociologique, esthétique...), au risque de perdre leur vitalité, leur raison d'être. Mais le premier élément de la « vision photographique » restera toujours indépendant de ce contexte, et c'est cette perception spécifique qu'on voit se préciser au travers du livre et dont les exemples sont nombreux dans la période de l'entre-deux-guerres.

En somme, si les auteurs ont eu de la difficulté à analyser de façon satisfaisante la notion d'amateur comme critère sur lequel baser le choix des photographies, le corpus présenté illustre assez bien les qualités d'exploration, d'innovation, qui sont caractéristiques de l'amateur complet du XIX^e siècle et de celui qui, au XX^e, poursuit la même quête indépendante. L'ouvrage a nettement été conçu comme une première approche factuelle qui devrait servir de base à de plus amples études. Il faut noter l'heureuse idée de donner dans les marges de courts textes d'information technique très pertinents. Les références bibliographiques et archivistiques sont abondantes et témoignent d'un sérieux travail de documentation; les biographies en appendice complètent le texte, mais on s'étonne de n'y pas trouver certains noms, ou tout au moins la raison de leur absence (Joly de Lotbinière, A. M. Ross, H. J. Cundall, MacNamara et une demi-douzaine d'autres).

Les erreurs de forme sont rares. Une seule vaut d'être signalée; il s'agit probablement d'une erreur de lecture de manuscrit qui aura échappé aux correcteurs: quand Joly de Lotbinière développe ses daguerréotypes, sa boîte de mercure est chauffée par une lampe à esprit de vin et non « esprit de vue » (p. 4)!

Les quelques critiques de fond que l'on a pu faire sont, en fin de compte, un signe supplémentaire de l'intérêt que présente ce bel ouvrage, intérêt qui réside dans les réflexions qu'il peut susciter, aussi bien que dans la source très riche qui servira de base, espérons-le, à bien des travaux futurs.

Une dernière note: le titre de l'édition française est « Le cœur au métier ». Il aurait fallu dire « le cœur à l'ouvrage », expression plus courante qui éviterait une ambiguïté assez amusante et peut-être significative, car

on parle en général de « métier » pour un professionnel.

ARIANE ISLER-DE JONGH
Victoria

KENNETH BENDINER *An Introduction to Victorian Painting*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, 90 black-and-white illus., 8 colour plates., \$49.00 (cloth).

Kenneth Bendiner states that his book was "conceived in the belief that an intimate familiarity with a few works of art can reveal the character and issues of Victorian painting with greater depth, meaning and pleasure than a schematic overview of the subject." The author proves his case by devoting his seven chapters to seven paintings, each chosen from a different decade of Victoria's reign. Each painting is examined in microscopic detail; the artist's life and character, current political thought and religious activity, social issues, other contemporary artists and their influence—all are pondered and discussed within the framework of the individual painting. This is a fascinating exercise and enriches the reader's understanding and knowledge of this perplexing and diverse period.

The author is at pains to point out that the chosen works are not "the finest, most innovative, or most influential . . . of the era. Instead they were selected for their capacity to illuminate significant facets of Nineteenth Century British art." Thus the paintings discussed in the book represent the typically varied subject matter of the age: religious and historical paintings; portraiture, both human and animal; landscape; genre painting; and the literary subjects so loved by the Victorians. From a starting point of seven paintings, the reader is drawn into lively discussion on subjects as varied as Anthropomorphism, the Evangelical Movement, a Victorian view of Judaism, the Newlyn School, Pre-Raphaelitism, even nineteenth-century research into glacial movements. By the end of the book one has a surer feeling for the spirit of the Victorian Age.

When presenting the difficult subject of Victorian painting, one of the problems is to understand what caused the apparent breakdown in an accepted style: how paintings of the hitherto seemingly unreconcilable schools of Medievalism, Classicism, and Realism were produced simultaneously. The era of the Industrial Revolution gave birth to confusion in values, morals, and also art. Painters were at sea and did not know what was expected of them; this was a totally new situation. Professor Bendiner grasps this nettle firmly and discusses it with authority.

Bendiner is completely absorbing on the subject of the Oxford Movement and its ensuing influence on contemporary painting. This chapter is superb and should be enforced reading for any student, as it conjures up so entirely the religious fervour and diversity of the time. I am not sure that I am convinced by Bendiner's assertion that "the Mariolatry of the Oxford Movement is distinctly denied" (p. 71) in the painting of *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*. Christ was quite definitely annoyed to be discovered by his parents: "How is it that ye

sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business." I have always taken Christ's physical aloofness from his Mother in this painting to be purely one of impatience.

Although the chapter devoted to Whistler is interesting for the background it provides to his work, I found the analysis of the portrait of the painter's mother disappointing. Whistler never made any secret of the fact that the subject matter was of secondary importance to him, and therefore his work should be viewed with that consideration in mind. His paramount preoccupation was with the translation of the subject into colour and form. He regarded a portrait as he would have a still-life, an arrangement, as his titles so aptly convey. The fact that this particular painting is one of the world's most popular is interesting in itself. In spite of Whistler's posturings, a certain emotion occasionally escapes; I find this portrait a most sensitive one. Bernard Sickert remarked that it is "the only one [portrait] that has a compelling individuality, except perhaps the Carlyle whose weary hopeless face looks out with a sad intensity." He goes on to say, "a human being was to Whistler just like an old barge or a falling rocket, the stimulus to certain ideas as to colour and form aroused by the contemplation of its aspect." More could have been said about Whistler's interest in Japan and Aestheticism, and of his profound influence on the Scottish painters of the Glasgow School: Lavery, Guthrie, and E. A. Walton.

The literary style of the book is a little diffuse and indigestible, but that is a minor quibble. Professor Bendiner has amassed a wonderful selection of illustrations to accompany his main work in each chapter. It is a pity that more could not have been in colour as the vivid nature of Victorian art is often lost in monochrome illustrations. The colour plates are of a superb quality rarely seen this side of the Atlantic. He has compiled an invaluable bibliography though the absence of William Gaunt's classic trilogy is strange. The notes, however, are full of useful sources and references.

In the end, the importance of this work is this: Kenneth Bendiner traces the renewed interest in Victorian painting which endured a long period of virtual ignominy.

SARAH GROTRAIN
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GARY WIHL *Ruskin and the Rhetoric of Infallibility*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1985, 234 pp., illus., \$24.50 (cloth).

In this thought-provoking analysis of the shifting grounds on which Ruskin purported to be building his defence of Turner in *Modern Painters* and of his interpretation of the Greek imagination in *Aratra Pentelici*, Professor Wihl encounters numerous inconsistencies in Ruskin's positions and frequent contradictions between his theory and practice as a critic. It is thus not surprising that while he considers Ruskin "the most important epistemological critic in English," many of Wihl's own statements cast doubt upon that claim. Among other Ruskinian sins catalogued here are his "inability to sepa-

rate human distortion from true perception or conceptualization" and his facility for "confusing linguistic structures with actual substance." In Wihl's judgment, Ruskin's "failure derives from his continual inability to master his own brilliant rhetorical inventiveness," for he "idolatrously interposed metaphor before all that he perceived." If Wihl justly describes its most important epistemological critic, English criticism must be in a bad way indeed.

However, just as in reading Ruskin one is wise to ignore his broad generalizations and concentrate on what he has to say under narrower focus of eye or argument, so the reader who pays close attention to Wihl's analysis of specific attempts by Ruskin to define or explicate "truthfulness" in art will be richly rewarded. Wihl's penetrating study of the quasi-Lockean formulations of *Modern Painters I* demonstrates that, far from failing to understand Locke (as is sometimes supposed), Ruskin apprehended the crux of Locke's epistemology: "the perpetual disposition of mankind to suppose that they see what they know." Despite this insight, Wihl argues, Ruskin's treatment of individual paintings often confuses perception with imaginative conception. While constant shifting back and forth between signs and tropes gives Ruskin's prose great suggestiveness, it is dangerous to read his metaphors as if they denoted descriptive truths.

In discussing *Modern Painters II*, Wihl's main concern is to show how Ruskin's pontifical tone conceals various epistemological cruxes in a work filled with uncertainties of theory. Ruskin had many theories of proportion, for example; but Wihl singles out the notion of proportion as "metaphorical structure, one which intensifies cognition" as a decisive advance in epistemology. He then shows that Ruskin often, nonetheless—as in his ranking of beauty in animals according to degree of vitality and gentleness expressed by the eye—fell prey to "a confusion of linguistic metaphor with either substance or appearance." While he was aware of the danger of "substituting himself in the place of the signifier," Ruskin consistently ignored the disruption such substitution created in his own texts.

Ruskin's treatment of allegorical landscape in *Modern Painters III-V* is largely vitiated, in Wihl's opinion, by his interpretation of allegory as an assertion of "fact in a nonbelievable form" rather than as a trope. Heedless of the danger of reading allegory as if it were empirically based assertion, Ruskin often made serious mistakes in generalizing about the Greek and medieval mind.

This leads Wihl into the most interesting section of the book, a discussion of "Idolatry in Ruskin and Proust." Wihl's is the first concerted attempt in English criticism to come to terms with Proust's complex reaction to what he considered Ruskin's dishonest substitution of morally significant but empirically valueless religious images for his "sincere" love of physical beauty. While Wihl himself uses the term to cover a bewildering range of meanings, his definition of idolatry as "belief in the literal existence of . . . allegorical figures" is applied with interesting results to Ruskin's later writings, in which he turned increasingly to forms of art, such as Byzantine mosaics or Greek coins, which "emphasize the importance of cognition over sensation." In *Aratra Pentelici*, for example, Ruskin fell into idolatry in his treatment of