Book Reviews Comptes rendus

Rena Goffen, ed. *Titian's "Venus of Urbino."* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

This volume is the eighth to appear in a new series issued by Cambridge University Press called "Masterpieces of Western Painting." It collects essays from different scholars on one well-known work of art, and is clearly designed to address the needs of teachers as well as to engage the interest of an extra-academic audience. The format recalls the one-work-one-book series formerly produced by Reclam in Germany, matched in English by John Fleming's and Hugh Honour's "Art in Context" series (Allen Lane / Penguin), an idea revived in recent times by Klaus Herding's *Kunststück* series (Fischer Verlag). The difference between all of these and the present series is that in those books the one work is matched by one author. The multi-author nature of this book recalls most closely the "Norton Critical Studies in Art History," with the difference that those volumes have a generally larger focus on complexes and monumental works.

This volume is especially opportune, coming at a time when issues of sexuality and gender are at the centre of some of the most innovative work done in the field and are frequently raised in student papers. Students sent to this volume will find some thought-provoking essays and an excellent bibliography to work from. Goffen has made the sensible decision to include, as bookends to the four essays that concentrate on the painting directly, two by Carlo Ginzburg and T.J. Clark that serve to set the volume into a larger view of the social context and historical reception. Ginzburg's essay, "Titian, Ovid, and Sixteenth-Century Codes for Erotic Illustration," first appeared 20 years ago, and is well known. Arguing for the importance of vernacular texts in the transmission of mythological traditions, the essay stands as an important, even if preliminary, critique of Panofsky's "high culture" readings of Titian's art — one which leads in a different and more fruitful direction than

Charles Hope's anti-Panofskyan reading of Titian. Unfortunately, the essay is here presented in excerpted form, with important passages and relevant illustrations missing, making Ginzburg's postscript (written in 1989, in its first English translation) virtually unintelligible. One must return to the complete text in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. J. and A. Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1989). The selection from Clark, an excerpt from the chapter on Manet's *Olympia* in *The Painting of Modern Life*, is also too brief, leaving the reader hanging at the point where Clark points out the *lack* of relation between Manet's *Olympia* and Titian's *Venus*, a point that does not make sense without Clark's account of the crisis in the tradition of the nude that *Olympia* exposes.

David Rosand's essay, drawn largely on several of his earlier well-known pieces, studies the work as the result of a process of autonomization from the *cassone* tradition. Rosand's "generic" approach is a valuable line of inquiry in the case of a painting strictly without a category, and allows him to situate the painting within a fluid "scale of values" continually defined and redefined by pictorial production. A high point of the essay is his analysis of the way Titian's later works, above all the Naples *Danaë*, comment upon and define the earlier *Venus*. It is a pity that in articulating the range thereby defined Rosand sticks so closely to the three-tier system outlined by Panofsky in the introduction to *Studies in Iconology*. Of all of Panofsky's working concepts, this schema is by far the least useful. As portions of Rosand's own essay show, much of the interest and methodological utility of the concept of genre derives from the fact that it obliterates the separation between Panofsky's first two levels, and therefore opens the way to a more historicized hermeneutics of pictorial reading.

Rona Goffen's essay, also a revision of earlier pieces, offers some very powerful evidence for understanding Titian's painting as a marriage picture. She shows that the very presence of the twin *cassoni* in the background alludes to a matrimonial situation, and thus effectively complicates any attempt to read the picture as a simple image of a cocotte on a couch. Not that Goffen wishes to deny the work's overt sexuality. She shows, instead, the extent to which sexuality was a part of the sixteenth-century preoccupation with fertility and generation in marriage, and thereby informed traditions of matrimonial images. The social-historical contribution is the best part of Goffen's essay. Less compelling is the reading of the painting offered at the end, which is surprisingly rigid in its formalism. The closing celebration of the nude's assertiveness and "power to choose" sounds, finally, too much like the self-help rhetoric of the nineties and not enough like what we know about the sexual politics of the sixteenth century.

Daniel Arasse's essay makes many proposals, but the main point is to focus attention on the fact that the background vignette of the two chambermaids at the *cassoni* is put in an indefinable relation to the rest of the scene, thus placing the *Venus* in an unlocatable "in between," which in turn destabilizes and multiplies the

viewer's relation to the figure. This idea, like several others presented here, is ingenious but needs to be more fully worked out. In the place of this critical elaboration we get half-baked applications of Michael Fried's concepts of "absorption" and "theatricality" and of Freud's concept of dream wish-fulfillment.

Mary Pardo's essay is a good example of the brand of pictorial reading she has made her own, in which meditation on the conditions of painting becomes a means of entry into the painting's thematics. Her focus here is textiles and the way the setting of Titian's "velvet-contoured nude . . . reiterates, over and over, its origin as an expanse of colored fabric" (p. 121). Pardo's suggestion that the metaphoric associations surrounding Alberti's proposal to use a woven veil (*velo*, *taglio*) in pictorial construction actually informed Venetian Cinquecento experiments in canvas painting is, in the end, not convincing. This does not mean, however, that in developing these associations Pardo does not provide a useful mesh of ideas through which to look at Titian. I only wish she had spent more of the essay doing so.

The authors of this volume are less interested in finding a meaning "located" in the picture than in understanding how a reshaping of image traditions generates a new engagement with social contexts and viewer responses. This is truly a movement beyond standard iconographic readings, and reveals Charles Hope's apparently anti-Panofskyan stance to be in fact little more than the reverse of the traditional iconographic coin (if it is not to be explained by reference to an erudite program, then it means *nothing*). If those alternatives tend to lead away from the painting, the essays presented here continually draw us back to it. This makes it particularly regrettable that the volume lacks a good, large color photograph of the painting. A small color photo appears on the back cover, too small to allow the reader to share the many subtle observations encountered throughout the volume. The series editor might take a pointer from the Fischer Verlag *Kunststück* series, where even in the paperback format a high-quality color foldout is included at the back, and can be pulled out alongside the book as one reads.

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Les Images ou tableaux de platte-peinture de Philostrate. Traduction et commentaire de Blaise de Vigenère (1578). Présenté et annoté par Françoise Graziani. 2 vol., 70 planches en noir et blanc. Paris, Champion, 1995. Pp. 1 057.

Voilà un projet de grand ahan, compliqué et bien énigmatique mais qui valait sûrement la peine d'être entrepris et livré. Philostrate fut un lemnien sophiste grec à qui sont attribués des documents extrêmement curieux, liés à la culture artistique antique. Il s'agit d'un recueil de 65 "tableaux" qui se donnent pour la description commentée d'une galerie de peinture visitée lors d'un voyage à Naples, au troisième