

Both authors report the various acts of vandalism suffered by the sculptures of Rodin and Gilbert (the most disgraceful being Queen Mary's gilding of Gilbert's superb epergne, a tablepiece made of silver, bronze, ivory and crystal, which all but ruined the carefully contrived effects of contrasting metals), but from what Sarah Walden writes, it seems to be the restorers who commit the really irreversible acts of vandalism. *The Ravished Image*<sup>7</sup> is a catalogue of such disasters, ranging from the 17th-century Frenchman who suggested that the best treatment for dirty paintings was "to take warm urine, or simply piss on the painting" to the more sophisticated, some would say more deadly, steps taken by our own National Gallery in recent years.

The scars left by the 1962 controversy over their cleaning of *Bacchus and Ariadne* have left their mark on more than Titian's canvas. The anger expressed by Ernst Gombrich at the time over the view taken by Helmut Ruhemann, a consultant restorer to the Gallery, during a critical period in the picture-cleaning controversy, that Titian's oil glazes were not soluble, not at risk, is still simmering away in his Foreword to this book. And it may even have been that particularly bitter confrontation which led Sarah Walden, herself a restorer, to write it: her spirited account of the whole episode is strongly anti-Ruhemann. But more insidious damage results from the ways in which contemporary prejudices influence the restorer's work without his even being aware of it. The prejudices she identifies as affecting the restorers of today are "broadly those of advertising: impact, rawness and readability", hidden persuaders which

beckon paintings "imperceptibly a few years nearer to our own ideals", closer to the clean precision of a Mondrian square.

Those Mondrian squares have themselves fallen victims to the desire to keep modern painting spanking new through the brash application of fresh coats of paint over the delicate brushwork of the original surface. Modern paintings suffer just as much as the old. Walden writes eloquently of the terrible damage inflicted on the Cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque:

"Their surfaces are now often sodden and monotonous looking: the spikey provocative interplay of texture—part of the very essence of cubism—has gone. The contrasts between velvety black recessions, gravelly advancing lights or sudden patches of powdery blue have gone too, deadened by a combination of wax impregnation from behind, and varnishing in front."

One lesson *The Ravished Image* can teach everyone who looks at paintings is how pathetically trusting we are when we walk round museums and art galleries. Labels may identify the artist, the title of his work and its date, but they do not identify the damage. Curators and dealers are not keen to alert the public to the fact that whole areas of a work have been repainted, or that cleaning has removed layers of precious glazes, or that the canvas has been relined and the impasto flattened in the process, or that unstable pigments have completely altered the balance of the original colours, or that the surface is now covered with a synthetic resin. . . . The onus is well and truly on the spectator to find these things out for himself. In the light of this, one has to ask the editors of *The New Art History* if connoisseurship really is such a dirty word after all.

<sup>7</sup> *The Ravished Image*. By SARAH WALDEN. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £12.95.

## The Wife Speaks

Now that I'm dead, he writes  
All day in his study downstairs  
About me and my pony, my dress,  
My brown hair, and those sweet old airs  
That I played him when we first met.  
He shares all our private affairs.

He peers through a mist at my youth,  
He turns at my distant call,  
I must ride for him by the sea,  
I must visit his house at nightfall.  
How he loves me as ghost, how he thrills  
To my shade where it fades from the wall.

That shrivelled and shivering man  
With his red-rimmed eyes and white hair  
Who built us this cold dark house,  
Loves me if I'll wander out there.  
But he won't ask me in, he dislikes  
My warm breath near the poems we share.

*Ruth Silcock*

## Books Encountered

**A Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Girl.** Edited by JOHN QUINN. Methuen, £8.95.

Charming, unpretentious reminiscences, revised from RTE radio interviews with Maeve Binchy, Clare Boylan, Polly Devlin, Jennifer Johnston, Molly Keane, Mary Lavin, Joan Lingard, Dervla Murphy, and Edna O'Brien, plus excerpts. The Church, the Troubles, the family, and release through words.

**Graham Greene.** By A. A. DeVITIS. Twayne Publishers/Macmillan, £16.95.

Revised edition of Professor De Vitis's 1964 study, since which Greene has published nearly a score of new works, and critics have written almost as many substantial analyses, enumerated in a bibliography with comments, and partly surveyed in a useful short chapter on "Literary Opinions". DeVitis's own is high.

**Empiricism, Explanation and Rationality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of the Social Sciences.** By LEN DOYAL and ROGER HARRIS. Routledge & Kegan Paul, £20.

Didactic in the best sense, and designed for intelligent but unlearned undergraduates, this explores empiricism, confronting Popper and Kuhn; distinguishes between the methodologies of the natural and the social sciences; and refutes relativism. Chapter bibliographies flesh out and update the argument.

**Setting the Mould: The United States and Britain 1945-1950.** By ROBIN EDMONDS. Clarendon Press, Oxford, £25.

Scholarly recap. by a former British diplomatist, based on newly opened US and UK archives, of the so-called (by the UK) "special relationship"—rhetoric on which increased as its content declined. Tragic paradox: the British spurned European integration for fear of losing the USA, which was urging them into it. *Verb. sap.* 1987.

**The Master Eccentric: The Journals of Rayner Heppenstall 1969-1982.** Edited by JONATHAN GOODMAN. Allison & Busby, £14.95.

Not a match for that title, borrowed from C. P. Snow, but a genial Mr Growser mixing public and private concerns, fascinated by crime, tempted by suicide, much attached to France, sometimes called the first *nouveau romancier*, and a gadfly on the British literary scene. The editing's too unbiographical.

**The New Enlightenment: The Rebirth of Liberalism.** By DAVID GRAHAM and PETER CLARKE. Macmillan, £6.95.

Published with Channel Four Television, the book of the six-part series bearing the same name. Graham the producer and Clarke the economist argue rather breathlessly the merits of the free market, but are stronger on criticism of welfare and aid dependency than on their low-tax utopia.

**Who Owns London?** By SHIRLEY GREEN. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £10.95.

Fascinating, meticulously researched, pedestrianly written part-answer to its title's question, surveying in turn the Crown Estate, the Church Commissioners, the aristocracy, the City, the Charities, the property companies, the local authorities, the Government, the institutions, etc. Only lack: a pull-out map.

**Local Government and Urban Politics.** By WILLIAM HAMPTON. Longman, £7.95.

Shrewd, even-handed analysis of the crisis caused by shrunken industry in old big cities, growth in smaller towns, and increased ideology, Left and Right, making a once-dull subject vital. Professor Hampton chides the Right for lack of planning, the Left for blaming everything on the Right, and both for myopia.

**Cahiers du Cinéma. Volume 2.** Edited by JIM HILLIER. Routledge & Kegan Paul, £18.95.

Thirty-nine pieces from more than 100 issues (January 1960

to December 1968), covering "New Wave, New Cinema, Re-evaluating Hollywood". Authors include Rohmer, Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rivette, and Barthes, in discussion or interview, plus regular *Cahiers* critics, like Walter Mitty inscrutable to the last.

**The Market for Glory: Fleet Street Ownership in the 20th Century.** By SIMON JENKINS. Faber, £9.95.

Authoritative insider's account of Fleet Street and Wapping takeovers, including memories of old Spanish customs, thumbnail sketches of key figures, a defence of private ownership despite its drawbacks, and admission that readers remain conservative, but no real answer to why proprietors accept the hassle.

**The End of the Street.** By LINDA MELVERN. Methuen, £9.95.

Detailed history of News International's move to Wapping and the 20th century, by a former member of the *Sunday Times* "Insight" group. Although less analytical than Simon Jenkins (above), it describes some *new* Spanish customs (not the latest violence), and is frank about both sides.

**The Royal Court Theatre 1965-1972.** By PHILIP ROBERTS. Routledge & Kegan Paul, £18.95.

Scholarly but expansive and trudging chronicle of the Sloane Square playhouse during William Gaskill's years as its Artistic Director. Since its climax is Howard Brenton's *Magnificence*, some may feel George Devine's tenure as Gaskill's predecessor more rewarding for study.

**The Complete Alice & The Hunting of the Snark.** By LEWIS CARROLL. Illustrated by RALPH STEADMAN. Cape, £15.

At last—the gonzo Dodgson? In these nightmare pictures, filled with birdcage-like reeds, hair, and railings, the iconography's that of newspaper cartoons, sci-fi, and *The Yellow Submarine*. Alice becomes a podgy proletarian androgyne; only the White Rabbit has much charm. I prefer Tenniel or Peake.

**Beatrix Potter: Artist, Storyteller and Countrywoman.** By JUDY TAYLOR. Warne, £12.95.

Reworking of the well-known story by a children's books editor with access to the publisher's files, revealing fraud and near-bankruptcy as well as many new Beatrix Potter letters. The illustrations are delightful, the prose less so, but the price moderate. A fresh letter collection is on the way.

**Wrestling with a Pencil: The Life of a Freelance Artist.** By NORMAN THELWELL. Methuen, £12.50.

Crisp, benign, well-illustrated autobiography by the creator of fierce imps on pot-bellied ponies, frenzied mutts on doomed but accurately drawn yachts, and comic industrial catastrophes clearly the work of a country-lover. His serious sketches are lively: his paintings have Rowland Hilder charm but seem static.

**Scenes from Institutional Life and Other Writings.** By JOHN VAIZEY. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £12.95.

Slight but memorable appendages embellish the late Lord Vaizey's poignant account of childhood in hospital, which still reads freshly after nearly 30 years, and will surely last. Hugh Thomas, Frank Field, and T. E. B. Howarth add tributes to a talented, formidable, witty, and thoughtful man.

**Virginia Woolf and the Real World.** By ALEX ZWERDLING. University of California Press, \$24.95, £21.25.

A relief from the Bloomsbury fan club: penetrating, learned, wide-ranging appreciation of Virginia Woolf in her social and political context, documenting what muscle and thought there was in her allegedly gossamer work—although *A Room of One's Own* has always proved how much more she was made of.

R.M.