

# Book Reviews

**The Evolution of English Collecting: The Reception of Italian Art in the Tudor and Stuart Periods.** Edited by Edward Chaney. 484 pp. with 140 b. & w. ills. (Yale Center for British Art and Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art/Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2003), £40. ISBN 0-300-10224-0.

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THIS COLLECTION OF ESSAYS, the majority of which were presented at a conference held in 1998 at the Southampton Institute's History of Collecting Research Centre, is the twelfth instalment in the Paul Mellon Centre's series of occasional publications in British art, the same series that has produced two other volumes of essays devoted to the Tudor and Stuart periods: *Albion's Classicism: The Visual Arts in Britain, 1550-1660*, edited by Lucy Gent (1995), and *Patronage, Culture and Power: The Early Cecils, 1558-1612*, edited by Pauline Croft (2002). Like these earlier publications, the present volume is handsomely produced and brings together an extremely impressive selection of recent work on the visual arts in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

Conceived of both as 'a text-book and a work of academic reference, but one that might also interest the general reader' (p.vii), the volume begins with an ambitious and wide-ranging contribution from Edward Chaney on the Italianate evolution of English collecting. In this elegantly written introduction, Chaney not only surveys the trajectory of collecting and of Anglo-Italian relations in the early modern period, but also places this subject within a larger context: the history of collecting from Antiquity to the twenty-first century in Britain and America. In addition, Chaney gestures here towards the evolution of art criticism and aesthetics from the ancient Greeks onwards, as well as towards recent theoretical discourse on collecting.

The eleven essays that follow are, in the main, studies of individual collectors or networks of collectors. Several of these address the question of how Englishmen who had never been to Italy developed a taste for the Italianate. In a piece on John Lumley, 1st Baron Lumley of the second creation (?1534-1609), Kathryn Barron suggests that Lumley's knowledge of Italy was not gleaned, as traditionally has been thought, from first-hand experience. Rather, Barron persuasively argues that Lumley's perceptions of Italy were likely to have been formed at second-hand, partly through books and partly through the experiences of his father-in-law, Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel (?1511-1580), who had travelled to Milan, Padua and Venice in the 1560s. Susan Bracken, in an essay on the early Cecils and Italianate taste, speculates as to the means by which Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury (1563-1612), acquired an extensive collection of Italian paintings and

other works of art without ever venturing south of the Alps. Similar issues are addressed by Philip McEvansoneya in his excellent contribution on Italian paintings in the Buckingham collection. Like Lumley and Salisbury, George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham of the second creation (1592-1628), never travelled to Italy. However, as McEvansoneya vividly demonstrates, he would have seen Italian (and other) works of art not only in London, but also on his travels to Paris, The Hague and, most important of all, Madrid.

The significance, implicitly raised by these essays, of mediators and go-betweens is the primary focus of Robert Hill's contribution, an analysis of Sir Dudley Carleton's dual careers as art agent and ambassador to Venice and The Hague. It also informs Richard L. Williams's fascinating survey of the impact of religious upheaval on Elizabethan collecting. As Williams rightly observes, Elizabethan experiences of Italian art more often than not were filtered through a French or Netherlandish lens.

Two of the most interesting essays highlight the largely neglected role of women in the history of collecting in early modern England. Karen Hearn's contribution, on Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford (1581-1627), sheds new light on a figure traditionally discussed in terms of her literary patronage. As Hearn demonstrates, she was an important patron of painters and collector of paintings who, in the realm of connoisseurship, self-consciously sought to rival contemporaries and fellow-collectors such as Anne of Denmark (1574-1619) and Aletheia Talbot, Countess of Arundel (1584-1654). The latter's collection of paintings and other works of art at Tart Hall, London, is the focus of an essay by Elizabeth V. Chew. Long overshadowed by her husband, Thomas Howard, 2nd Earl of Arundel and Surrey (1586-1646), Aletheia Talbot here emerges as a considerable figure in her own right. As Chew reveals, Tart Hall - as distinct from Arundel House and Albury - was the countess's domain, and a space in which she strove 'to create an environment of Roman Baroque splendour that would have been unusual and innovative in pre-Restoration London' (pp.304-05).

Although the majority of the contributors focus on early English collections of paintings, this volume is by no means exclusively concerned with painting. Jane Roberts, for example, considers the Leonardo drawings acquired by Thomas Howard, while Charles Avery examines the activities of John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough (1650-1722), as a collector of sculpture. Christopher Baker and Anne Brookes are both concerned with early print collections, the former focusing on the collection of Henry Aldrich (1648-1710), the latter on those of Richard Symonds (1617-?92) and Thomas Isham (1657-81). Both Baker and Brookes, in their respective appendixes, make available

previously unpublished documents important to the history of print collecting: an inventory of the Aldrich collection, c.1710, and an inventory of Isham's prints compiled in 1677-78. (McEvansoneya's essay also includes an appendix which, although based on printed rather than manuscript sources, nonetheless provides a useful table comparing the contents of aristocratic English picture collections from the late sixteenth century through to the late seventeenth.)

One of the many strands binding together the essays in this volume is a thoughtful consideration of the validity of applying the term 'collecting' to early modern England. Williams, for example, probes the question of precisely when 'pictures and sculpture began to be collected not as mere room decorations but as "works of art"' for themselves (p.159), ultimately concluding that 'the appreciation of these objects as works of "fine art" seems to have filtered into England, but only perhaps among the minority of Elizabethan collectors' (p.179). In a similar vein, McEvansoneya, discussing Buckingham's acquisition of pictures and early seventeenth-century collecting more generally, ponders 'the location of the cut-off point between the mere assemblage of art and the intellectualized collection' (p.316).

This is an important volume which deserves the wide readership to which it aspires. Its essays have been carefully and extensively researched, and are accompanied by copious notes that will be of immense use to the student and scholar alike.

**Puritan Iconoclasm during the English Civil War.** By Julie Spraggon. 318 pp. with 5 b. & w. ills. (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2003), £45/\$75. ISBN 0-85115-895-1.

Reviewed by SIMON WATNEY

WRITING IN 1631, the antiquary John Weever contrasted a traditional English reverence for church monuments and sites of Christian burial to the attitudes of contemporary iconoclasts: 'swearing and protesting that all these are remains of Antichrist, papistical and damnable'. Looking back to Royal Proclamations from the time of Queen Elizabeth, he wryly observed that they 'took small effect, for [...] about this time, there sprung up a contagious brood of Schismatics; who, if they might have had their wills, would not only have robbed our churches of all their ornaments and riches, but also have laid them level with the ground, choosing rather to exercise their devotions, and publish their erroneous doctrines, in some empty barn, in the woods, or common fields, than in these churches, which they held to be polluted with the abominations of the whore of Babylon.'

Little could Weever have imagined that within a decade parliament itself would

have been largely taken over by sectarian Puritans and be playing a major role in inciting new waves of official vandalism. As Julie Spraggon explains in her introduction to this book: 'The peculiar circumstances of the time [. . .] meant that a minority of godly parliamentarians were in a position to effect political and religious change' (p.xi). Furthermore: 'What differentiated this bout of officially sponsored iconoclasm from those which had gone before was that it was played out within the Protestant church itself, rather than as a part of the struggle between the old Catholic faith and the new reformed one' (p.xiii).

As her bibliography reveals, Spraggon has consulted a wealth of contemporary sources, from state papers and parliamentary records to cathedral archives and churchwardens' accounts. Such primary research is invaluable, given the dense fog that hangs over the whole subject. Through the accidents of time, and the unofficial action of many iconoclasts, church records from this period are notoriously incomplete, and there can thus be no final reliable documentary evidence concerning the precise scale and nature of destruction. All the more reason therefore to pay attention to surviving documentation, as Spraggon's work admirably demonstrates, although she seems much more willing to accept Puritan accounts than Royalist records, which are typically dismissed as 'blatant propaganda'. Also, she most helpfully provides several appendixes providing the texts of the main iconoclastic parliamentary legislation and ordinances of 1641, 1643 and 1644, as well as orders concerning Royal Arms, and the Earl of Manchester's two commissions to the arch-iconoclast William Dowsing.

One of the most fascinating recurring themes of the book involves the widespread Puritan practice of burning vestments, prayer books and all forms of religious art, at public events which were evidently carefully stage-managed as a form of devout politico-theological theatre. We may learn much about Puritanism from what it found offensive and shocking, and we would do well to attend to contemporary descriptions of 'scandalous pictures' and other 'popish trash' in order to understand its underlying psychology and the social significance of the public spectacles of destruction it regularly occasioned. Closely related emotions of hatred and fear are found in equal measures in such rites of destruction, expressing a violent hostility to the national past while embodying a strongly self-dramatising self-righteousness, as manifested in these stark demonstrations of personal zeal and purity. Such acts of public sacrilege and desecration, from the destruction of paintings and stained-glass windows to the mock-baptism of animals and above all the trial and judicial murder of Charles I, should be considered as improving rituals of Puritan piety, reflecting a simplistic underlying Messianic fundamentalism, albeit with varying degrees of potential popular appeal.

Far too often iconoclasm has been regarded as if it were merely a rather distasteful side issue in seventeenth-century English history, and it is a great virtue of this book that it makes plain both the leading role of parliament in such matters and the close relations between iconoclastic legislation and other areas of Puritan concern, such as the observation of the Sabbath, the abolition of supposedly 'superstitious' festivals such as Christmas and May Day, the closing of theatres, and strict new laws concerning blasphemy and personal sexual morality. As Spraggon rightly concludes: 'Iconoclasm, whether moderate or extreme, was in a sense part of the Puritan temperament. It was just one physical manifestation of the urge to cleanse, to purge all things ungodly – both from the church and from society at large' (p.255).

If there is a problem here, it is one of tone. For example, on p.72 she writes casually of the 'cleansing' of the chapel at Somerset House as if this were indeed some kind of desirable sanitary improvement. Similarly her description of the removal in 1645 of Torrigiano's altar from Westminster Abbey, with its 'obviously offensive features', makes the desecration sound almost acceptable (p.91). Unfortunately there are many other such examples scattered throughout the book. Sometimes they reflect deeper problems.

The founders of the Elizabethan Settlement, followed by men such as Richard Hooker and Bishop Lancelot Andrewes had insisted on a distinction between legitimate religious images and 'idols', which was famously reiterated by Archbishop Laud at his trial, and was of course fervently denied by his Puritan opponents. Yet far too often Laud is regarded in these pages as if he were a crusading radical innovator, rather than a mainstream Anglican within the Elizabethan tradition, fighting what many would see as a rearguard action to defend his church against those bent upon its total destruction, a goal which, it should not be forgotten, they indeed temporarily achieved. In this way the fanaticism of his critics is ameliorated, and he is misleadingly presented as an extremist, who is then personally blamed, rather than his Schismatic enemies, for bringing disaster upon himself and his church.

For this reason many readers will question Spraggon's repeated descriptions of Laudian and Arminian 'zeal', as if the defence of the established Anglican hierarchy and its liturgy were somehow commensurate with the policies and actions of iconoclasts such as the Baptist Samuel Hering who, in 1653, argued to Parliament that the interiors of all churches should be painted a uniform black, 'to putt men in minde of that blacknesse and darknesse that is within them' (p.55).

The author frequently refers to 'the Laudians' as if they were some kind of strange sect, rather than the broad mass of anti-Presbyterian Anglicans, and seemingly has

no idea that anyone reading her text might regard Laud as a saint and martyr: he may have been a very difficult and at times tactless man, but surely no other English spiritual leader at a time of comparable national catastrophe has ever had more reason to be cantankerous. Nor is one much encouraged by Spraggon's flat observations that 'cathedrals were especially important to Laudians who considered them to be "mother churches" and places of special holiness' (p.177), or that 'not all cathedrals were alike in the extent to which they contained or were adorned with monuments of idolatry' (p.193). Indeed, she often writes with what appears to be surprisingly little comprehension of the sanctity of the sacraments which lies at the heart of Anglican belief and worship, and as if she could not imagine that any reasonable person could possibly care very deeply about defending such things.

For much the same reason I would question the author's description of Members of Parliament who were opposed to such excesses, including Falkland, Culpepper and Hyde, as 'conservatives' (p.75). On the contrary, they were simply devout Anglicans, responding as best they could to an escalating attack on the very idea of churches as holy places, and what amounted to a complete politicisation of religion and religious images. The scale of popular resistance to such measures is reflected in the large number of windows and other moveable fittings and furnishings evidently removed from churches and protected for the duration of the Interregnum, doubtless often at real personal risk, by parishioners all over the country, and which happily survive in some profusion.

Spraggon's evidence concerning the local protection of stained-glass windows would have been strengthened by the documented example of Messing in Essex, where most of the early seventeenth-century furnishings were saved, together with the marvellous surviving east window by Abraham van Linge of 1640. This was preserved by being hidden at the time of the siege of nearby Colchester in 1646, together with other parish treasures, in the ancient parish chest in a vault under the church. It is a key work of art of the period, and richly suggestive of Laudian piety, in its very material, so abhorred by the Puritans, as much as its iconography of the ancient charitable Acts of Mercy, now however enacted in front of red-brick buildings with elegant strapwork decoration, and delightful scenes of north European everyday life. They are at the same time still touchingly close to the spirit of the surviving late medieval Seven Sacraments fonts and windows of East Anglia which suffered so grievously from Puritan iconoclasm in this same decade. Here we are still, just, in touch with something of the sensibility of late medieval piety.

It is all very well to conclude that at 'the root of Puritan iconoclasm was the fear and hatred of idolatry' (p.255), but its meaning

is unclear. No English Christians have ever imputed such awesome magical powers to images as did seventeenth-century Puritans. The author's apparent lack of any keen sense of sacrilege sometimes gets the better of her other judgments, as in her revealingly understated assessment of the frankly repulsive Colonel William Springett, whom she almost endearingly describes as 'an earnest young man who took his religious beliefs seriously' (p.117). Yet according to his wife, his serious beliefs led him, among other things, to 'a great zeal against superstition, encouraging his soldiers and requiring them to break down idolatrous pictures and crosses, and going into steeple houses [churches] [he] would take the surplices and distribute them to big bellied women. When he was upon the service of searching popish houses, whatever crucifixes, beads, and such like trumpery, he found, if they were never so rich, he destroyed them, and reserved not one of them for its comeliness or costly workmanship, nor saved anything for his own use' (p.116). The remarkable story of his taking his sword to a painting of the Crucifixion inside a Protestant colleague's private house is one of the more telling anecdotes concerning Puritan psychology with which the book abounds. His noble monument in Ringmer parish church, East Sussex, not discussed here, is one of a series of contemporary shrines to Puritan martyrs which amply deserve separate assessment elsewhere.

Spraggon eloquently concludes that 'Iconoclasm was the godly weapon against idolatry, and for many Puritans it was no less than a duty. Approved by God, as biblical examples testified, iconoclasm was a positive rather than a negative act, creative rather than destructive – churches were "beautified", for instance, by the removal of dark idolatrous glass allowing the light to flood in. Clearing away the symbols was an essential first step in the building of a godly future' (p.255). This is doubtless in some sense true, and important, but it runs the risk of being misunderstood, especially if it tempts anyone to place the work of the iconoclasts on the same level as that of creative artists and craftsmen. Puritan taste certainly made things happen, but the new light pouring into so many churches was an accidental consequence of their actions, rather than their primary goal.

Moreover, if churches had become dark, this was because Puritanism had already long since destroyed the consoling sources of illumination provided by the old faith. Stripped of their fittings and furnishings, churches no longer emphasised the sanctity of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and had become mere sounding-boxes for the endlessly bigoted sermonising of the Elect. Nor should we assume that the light that flooded in through the new clear glass windows onto lately whitewashed walls and purged screens and reredoses was any less symbolic than the Bible stories and the lives of the saints which it replaced. What it symbolised is another matter.

This book is of great importance for at least two reasons. First, it lucidly sets out a neglected aspect of English history which has particular significance for art historians. The Puritan regime may have crumbled after little more than a decade, but its intellectual inheritance tenaciously lives on, and is perhaps most glaringly apparent in the widely accepted and revealing fantasy that English culture is somehow primarily verbal rather than visual, as if any human culture or society could ever fail to be both. Among other things, it helps us understand why the history of English art is to this day so woefully neglected in England. Secondly, it reinforces the wider lesson that all known societies seem vulnerable to such periodic orgies of self-destructive vandalism, and reminds us, if reminders we need, of the constant dangers posed today by those who enthusiastically attack all forms of art as 'elitist' or 'superstitious', from the Taliban to the tabloids. The iconoclasm of our seventeenth-century ancestors was not simply a finite historical event in the distant past, but remains in many respects an active potential force in the present which we ignore at our peril, not least, sadly, inside the Church of England.

<sup>1</sup> J. Weever: *Ancient Funeral Monuments*, London 1631, pp.38 and 54.

**Irish Paintings in the National Gallery of Ireland.** Vol.I. By Nicola Figgis and Brendan Rooley. 496 pp. incl. 254 col. pls. + 36 b. & w. ills. (National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, 2001), €69.83. ISBN 090-316-270-9.

Reviewed by MARTIN BUTLIN

THIS CATALOGUE COVERS paintings by Irish artists up to the mid-nineteenth century. The preface explains that the intention was to limit the catalogue to artists born before 1770, but while Martin Archer Shee (1769–1850) is included, John Mulvany (1766–1838) is excluded as working 'in a more Victorian idiom'. Similarly, the definition of Irishness is slightly vague: included are artists with their origins in England or the Low Countries who worked for a considerable period in Ireland, such as Gaspar Smitz and William Ashford, but Stephen Slaughter and Francis Wheatley, who only worked in Ireland for a short period 'and who can be associated either equally or more immediately with other schools', are excluded. Luckily, in view of the quality of their works, Thomas Frye and Robert Fagan are included. The former was born in Ireland but all his known works, although they include portraits of Irish sitters, seem to have been done outside the country. Fagan is present almost solely on the basis of having been described, while resident in Rome (like so many other artists in this catalogue), as 'an Irish Catholic'.

Given these limits, this is the fullest of any museum catalogue known to this reviewer, surpassing even those recently published by the National Gallery in London. Medium, size (alas in centimetres only, despite the fact that the artists involved would have thought in feet and inches), inscriptions including those on later labels, condition, provenance, exhibitions, former attributions, literature, details of original frames, and versions are given in tabulated form. The entries themselves are extremely thorough, identifying landscapes and sitters, for whom full biographical accounts are given, and even extend to stylistic and formal analysis and to assessments of quality. These last can be quite refreshing as they are not exclusively positive but include such admissions as that Charles Stoppelaar's *Portrait of a gentleman* 'is ultimately rather dull'. Minor artists are treated in as much detail as major ones. Full biographies are given, often spilling over into the entries on individual pictures. Only in the case of James Maubert does lack of information restrict the biographical note to a mere half column. Considerable use is made of quotations from contemporary sources, an example being Robert Carver's remark that he would do better to adopt a fine-sounding foreign name such as 'Signor Somebody'.

Some might think that the fullness of the entries is altogether too much, particularly in the case of less competent works by minor artists, but the catalogue as a whole serves as a survey of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century painting in Ireland, supplementing the standard works by Walter G. Strickland and Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin (these two last act as tutelary deities and, like other sources, are fully acknowledged in notes that, conveniently, appear in the margins of the text). The only limiting factor is the absence from the collection of certain characteristic works such as subject pictures by Henry Tresham and topographical landscapes by William van der Hagen. The catalogue also gives a marvellous insight into the life and times of the period, including the revolutionary troubles of the 1790s and the theatrical activities in Smock Alley which are revealed in all their complexity. All that is missing is an account of the formation of the collection.

The quality of the colour reproductions is exceptional, but the sixty-four comparative illustrations seem somewhat randomly selected. Does one really need to be reminded of Reynolds's *Three ladies adorning a term of Hymen*, and why omit the finished version of Barry's *Iachimo emerging from the chest in Imogen's chamber* or the oil-sketch for Nathaniel Hone's *Conjuror*, though the importance of the sketch is clear from the text?

It would be presumptuous to question the scholarship and accuracy of this catalogue and its many new attributions, but one or two questions should be raised. A last-minute suggestion by Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, reported in a note