
H-France Review Vol. 12 (August 2012), No. 107

Dario Gamboni, *The Brush and the Pen: Odilon Redon and Literature*. Revised and expanded edition; translated by Mary Whittall. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. xxi + 401 pp. Figures, notes, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl.) ISBN 9780226280554.

Review by Marco R. Deyasi, University of Idaho.

The artist Odilon Redon (1840-1916) is known for his fantastical and disturbing images, such as a plant with a human head for a flower (*Strange Flower* [1880] or *The Marsh Flower* [1885]) or a hot air balloon that is also an eyeball (*Like a Strange Balloon* [1882]). Despite the fact that at least one of his works is in every art history survey book, he has remained a somewhat mysterious figure, far less popular than other artists from the Symbolist movement like Paul Gauguin or Vincent Van Gogh. During his lifetime, he struggled for recognition, yet his art exemplifies the strangeness—or even weirdness—that characterizes much Symbolist art.

Dario Gamboni's *La plume et le pinceau: Odilon Redon et la littérature* (1989), based on his doctoral dissertation, has long been one of the few major scholarly treatises on Redon.[1] This new translation by Mary Whittall marks its appearance in English. Fortunately for English readers this new version is also substantially revised and expanded from the original French-language edition. As the author explains in a new preface, since the book's publication there has been important new work done on Redon by authors like Douglas Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, and Barbara Larson.[2] Gamboni revised the text to take into account the new publications which were, in fact, made possible by this same book in its earlier incarnation.

Druick and Zeger's exhibition catalog was a landmark study that sought to establish the facts of Redon's life and career. Larson's more recent volume details the discourses in science at the end of the nineteenth century and the ways that we can read Redon's art for their traces. Gamboni's book is a wide-ranging work that examines the artist's life, career, dealers and collectors, as well as his iconography (imagery), and the links between Redon's art and Symbolist literature and theory. Despite the book's subtitle, the book is about much more than the artist's relationship to literature.

Because I am not familiar with the original French edition, this review will not discuss the differences between the new translation and the earlier edition upon which it is based. The book is largely chronological, beginning with Redon's early life and concluding with his old age and reception among later modern artists. Along the way, Gamboni explores particular editions of the artist's dark lithographs (called his *noirs*), individual images, his illustrations for books, the market for his prints, and his later inclusion of color in his art.

Interestingly, this study began as an alternative to a traditional monograph, but now stands as a major work of art history at its interdisciplinary best. As Gamboni modestly explains, when he began the study he approached the executor of Redon's estate for access to the artist's papers. He was rebuffed because she wished to guard them for her own scholarship, so Gamboni re-oriented the book to explore the links between Symbolist literary circles and Redon. At the time, this must have seemed a daring step away the mainstream of art history with its relentless focus on iconography and the individual art

object. Now it reads like an exemplary work of art historical scholarship, so much has the discipline been transformed since the late 1980s.

Some portions of the book seem to bear the traces of its revision and expansion and this leads to occasional awkwardness. For instance, the chapter organization appears to follow the original edition, but the actual subjects are sometimes much broader and expansive and therefore spill over, as it were, the boundaries indicated by the chapter titles. There are occasional discussions of methodology that now come across as a bit dated. Chapter seven is the most prominent in this regard: it begins with an explanation and brief history of the iconographic method as pioneered by the great art historian, Erwin Panofsky.^[3] The text then proceeds through the classic steps of a pre-iconographic analysis, an iconographic analysis, and an iconological exploration before considering the limits of this Panofskian approach. But do not be misled by this old-fashioned beginning for a chapter; Gamboni's analysis here is subtle, perceptive, and enlightening for any twenty-first century reader. Indeed, in these days of theory it is refreshing to be reminded of the classic art historical methods, especially when so sensitively employed. Scholars from outside of the discipline of art history may find this section illuminating and a model for themselves when considering visual material.

Chapter one discusses the artist's early life and succeeds in untangling the mythology that has accrued around it thanks to Redon's later revisionism and what Gamboni identifies as anachronistic interpretations. The author does not simply describe historical events despite fragmentary evidence; he also seeks to explain them and their larger significance. Chapter two seeks to reconstruct Redon's early ideas and the ideas that influenced him, despite the paucity of documentation. Chapter three examines Redon's early career, especially its limitations due to his late start as an artist and how those limitations shaped both his opportunities to exhibit and the form of his later career. Chapter four is about the support that Redon received from writers affiliated with the Symbolist movement, with substantial detail about the artist's relationship to various writers and how he--and they--developed his public image.

Chapter five explores Redon's illustrations for stories by Edgar Allen Poe, who was a significant influence on Symbolist writers. Gamboni also examines Redon's work in the context of lithographic illustrations more generally, the artist's enthusiasm for Poe, the idiosyncratic imagery that he developed to communicate it, and the reception of his illustrations among writers. Chapter six reprints an essay by J. K. Huysmans, one of Redon's significant supporters, published as the preface to the portfolio, *Homage to Goya* (1885). An exegesis of the essay follows. Chapter seven, as noted above, begins with an iconographic analysis of *Face of Mystery* (1885) before becoming a rigorous analysis of a selection of Redon's lithographs and their meanings for the artist and his circle. The final portion of the chapter deals with the possible influence of occultism on the artist's imagery and occultist theories of artistic creativity as they influenced Symbolist artists and writers. Chapter eight details Redon's poor reception in the Parisian art market and his successful efforts to build a market for his art in Belgium.

Chapter nine deals with the artist's later career and seeks to explain his turn towards color images (mainly in pastel) after many years of producing monochromatic lithographs. His imagery changed as well, becoming less disturbing. Gamboni suggests that this change in production was caused by the artist's desire to make unique original artworks rather than the multiples inherent in printmaking. An artist can charge more for a unique original and, by this time, Redon had a market of fervent collectors willing to pay the higher prices. Chapter ten examines Redon's late writings, their reception in his circle, and the artist's own conception of his work and career. Chapter eleven discusses the artist's reception as a writer after his death, especially how art historians have treated him as a theorist (or not) from the early twentieth century to the present. This chapter also explores the history of the discourse of artists as writers and artists relationships with other members of the art world like critics.

The illustrations, all in black and white, are plentiful and well-reproduced. There is an extensive index of names and subjects. However, researchers may be disappointed to learn that there is no bibliography or list of works cited. Full citations are only given in the endnotes.

Gamboni has succeeded in writing a compelling, sensitive, and enlightening study of an artist whose work is mysterious and difficult to interpret and whose late writings have given scholars a misleading impression of his intellectual development. Perhaps the most important contribution of this study is its careful consideration of the discontinuities, fissures, and transformations in Redon's ideas and artistic practice over his lifetime. Rather than apply a simple frame around the artist's imagery, Gamboni has sought to tease out the contradictions in Redon's ideas and explain how he developed both an artistic practice and a career with the help of many others in the Symbolist milieu. The author considers art works, critics and their essays, autobiographical texts, illustrated books, personal correspondence, the art market, as well as the scholarly literature in his efforts to create a highly contextual study of an artist. In this way, his methodology could provide a model for art historians and for others. This important volume will immediately become a standard reference on the artist and should be read by all scholars and graduate students interested in Odilon Redon or in Symbolist art more generally.

NOTES

[1] Dario Gamboni, *La plume et le pinceau: Odilon Redon et la littérature* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1989).

[2] Douglas Druick, Peter Kort Zegers, et al, *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams, 1840-1916*. Catalog of exhibition held at: the Art Institute of Chicago, 2 July-18 September 1994; Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 20 October 1994-15 January 1995; Royal Academy of Arts, London, 16 February-21 May 1995 (Chicago, Ill.: Art Institute of Chicago; Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum; London: Royal Academy of Arts; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994); Barbara Larson, *The Dark Side of Nature: Science, Society, and the Fantastic in the work of Odilon Redon* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

[3] Panofsky's classic explanation of his method is found in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1955), especially in the opening essay, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," pp. 1-25.

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