

E. H. Gombrich, Review of M D George, Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, vols. 9-10, Burlington Magazine, Vol. 96, 1954, pp.27 [Trapp no.1954H.1]

Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum. By Mary Dorothy George, LITT.D. vol. ix, 1811-19, vol. x, 1820-7. lvi + 811 pp. +1 pl. (British Museum). £5 15s 6d.

'Caricaturing has reached its full maturity of perfection in this country; surely a land of freedom in Caricatures, as our Patriots, as well as Ministers and other eminent men can *feelingly* testify.' With these words J. P. Malcolm concluded the earliest history of the subject ever to be written. His book came out in 1813 and so they neatly sum up the atmosphere so fully exemplified in the volumes under review. When Malcolm wrote, it was still true that a 'history of caricaturing, although even intended to be general, would naturally narrow into that of English Caricatures', though the same year produced a crop of German propaganda prints on Napoleon's downfall which were widely copied all over Europe. England's hegemony in the sphere of pictorial satire was not seriously challenged till Philipon founded the first humorous weekly, *La Caricature*, in 1830.

Nowhere else, therefore, can the early history of the whole artistic genre be studied as exhaustively as in the collection of the British Museum. It needed the patient and self-denying labours of Mrs George, however, to make this unique collection fully accessible to the student. As in her preceding volumes, she has not only carefully described and transcribed the imagery and captions for identification, but has elucidated their countless topical allusions, listed copies and variants, and supplied a series of indices which should make her work indispensable to the historian of opinion and manners. The historian of art will be particularly grateful for her introductions which once more show the prints in their political and social setting, survey the links between literary and pictorial satire and discuss the artists, their technique, their development and affiliations, and their publishers. The scholarship and acumen that has gone into the making of these unassuming accounts would (and very likely will) benefit many a more pretentious essay. Indeed, collected and fully illustrated, Mrs George's introductions would make an admirable guide to the whole neglected subject of English caricature during the period of its full flowering.

In his book, referred to above, J. P. Malcolm 'begs leave to make known his obligations to the Honourable the Trustees of the British Museum'. Any future historian of the subject will be glad to echo his words. According to the Keeper's preface to vol. x the Trustees have fixed 1832, the passing of the Reform Bill, as the limit to the catalogue which will thus come to an end with vol. xi. Perhaps an additional volume leading up to the appearance of Punch in 1841 would round off the series even more tidily but, since it would hardly contain material of great artistic interest, no one is likely to quarrel with this decision. But there is one *desideratum* that should not go unmentioned – this great enterprise cannot be considered complete before the four earliest volumes, compiled mainly by F. G. Stephens more than seventy years ago, are brought up to the high standards developed and set by Mrs George. To do them all over again would perhaps be a little extravagant. But a supplement providing indices and introductions uniform with those of the later volumes would immensely enhance the value of the whole set. Is it too much to hope that the Trustees will once more place us under an obligation by inviting Mrs George to do this final service to a field of studies in which she has no rival?