

E. H. Gombrich, Review of Mary Dorothy George, Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires. Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum. Vol. VI, 1, Burlington Magazine, Vol. 76, 1940, pp.32 [Trapp no. not recorded]

Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires. Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum. Vol. VI, 1784-1792. By Mary Dorothy George. xxxviii + 1,082 pp. , £2 12s. 6d.

This is an even bulkier volume than its forerunner (1,120 pages) although it covers a still shorter period, in fact only nine years. But these were " crisis-years," years rich in events that fired the imagination. There was the rise of Pitt, his dramatic rivalry with Fox, the French Revolution, the trial of Warren Hastings—ideal material for the satirists who were quick to record every fluctuation of public opinion. It is the period of the rise of the two great protagonists of English caricature, Gillray and Rowlandson, whose intensely personal style eclipses the considerable achievements of many minor talents.

The author has again devoted all possible care to each of the 1923 items. There is hardly a naughty allusion or obscure reference she has not succeeded in elucidating. Her "inside knowledge " of people and events might well have amazed a contemporary. Problems of attributions—so intricate in a field where artists could have good reasons to conceal their manner, and where they sometimes only worked out what others prescribed to them—are treated with circumspection and caution.

Each volume from Mrs. George's pen makes it increasingly evident that her catalogue—unlike the four earlier sections—is destined to be far more than a useful inventory of an individual collection. Not unlike Mr. Hind's *Catalogue of Early Italian Engravings*, it tends to develop into an invaluable stocktaking of almost the entire output of a given period. This is the more welcome because the fame of individual caricaturists has helped little so far to make the history of caricature a field for serious research. In England caricature was from the outset stigmatized as vulgar. The kind of taste which it was supposed to cater for is best indicated by the fact, that the exhibition of prints at Fores' contained, as an additional attraction, casts of the head and hand of Count Struenzee taken after his execution. In 1793 a model of the guillotine was introduced as a sensational bait. Small wonder that a paper like the *Morning Post* could not refrain from regret when an artist "condescended " to what it calls "the common order of caricaturists." Up to our day books dealing with caricature and graphic satire have rarely freed themselves entirely from the kind of atmosphere which these additions to Fores' show suggest. But time and again this approach has proved inadequate to answer any of the questions which the history of caricature raises. These ephemeral and often coarse productions fully deserve the meticulous care which the author has bestowed on them. Even the few among them which really lack all artistic verve and spirit are valuable as documents of propaganda. A retrospective Dr. Gallup would find plenty of vital indications if he consulted Mrs. George's introduction and the extremely useful "Index of selected subjects." It is true that the problem of how far that puzzling and powerful being called " public opinion " was consciously moulded by politicians, and how far it moulded their politics, cannot be solved from this material alone. But it gives cause for reflection to read that, in this volume as in its predecessor the problems of poverty are scarcely touched upon.

The author's interest is obviously focussed on these historical questions. Although she rightly calls the period covered "the beginning of the great age of English caricature "she refrains from giving reasons for this rather sudden rise in quantity and above all in quality. Perhaps one could adduce factors other than merely political or sociological ones to account for this development. The three main ingredients

of English satire were at last perfectly blended : the century-old tradition of popular broadsides with their technique of emblematic allusions and metaphorical representations, so brilliantly handled by Gillray; the Hogarthian satire (to which Rowlandson owed so much) that utilised the achievements of Dutch *genre* for its moralising depiction of human physiognomy and all too human behaviour, last but not least the most brilliant among these gentle arts of making enemies, portrait caricature as it had been developed by the *virtuosi* of the Italian Baroque, which was now penetrating into all spheres of comic art. The amalgamation of these three main currents had begun earlier but it was only now they united in one mighty stream. It is indeed a matter for congratulation that an expert of Mrs. George's rank has taken upon herself the laborious task of mapping out its course. Her work will probably be more used than quoted but after all this is more satisfactory than the other way round.