

E. H. Gombrich, Review of Wilhelm Wartmann, Honoré Daumier. 240 lithographs, Burlington Magazine, Vol. 89, 1947, pp.231-2 [Trapp no.1947C.1]

Honoré Daumier. 240 lithographs selected and introduced by Wilhelm Wartmann, translated by Harry C. Schnur. (Nicholson & Watson), £2 2s.

This impressive volume of reproductions, in the original size, of a cross section of Daumier's journalistic *oeuvre* forms a welcome addition to the recent spate of picture books. It makes one almost feel dizzy to realize - as the editor modestly reminds us - that only about one-seventeenth part of the master's cartoons are illustrated, quite apart from his paintings, drawings, sculptures and book illustrations. If the odds are thus heavily against finding any particular lithograph, care has been taken to represent all aspects of the master's output, the political and social satire, the friendly humour and the tragic accusation. Some will regret that the selection shows a certain bias towards the earlier period—there are about double the number of lithographs from the period before 1848 as against those from the (longer) stretch between 1848 and 1872. Though the reproductions have not, of course, the velvety surface and the fine gradations of the best originals they do not compare unfavourably with the average pages from "Charivari" such as they were sold by the Paris *bouquinistes* in recent years. There is a useful appendix with a reference to the numbering in Delteil's catalogue, the date, a translation of the captions, and a brief but adequate explanation of the more important topical allusions.

In contrast to the illustrations and the appendix the introduction is disappointing. Perhaps it is unfair to scrutinize it too closely since such introductions are mainly written to satisfy a typographic convention, but even so one wonders why, of the ten pages at the author's disposal, more than four should have been devoted to a textbook recital of the main facts of French history from 1789-1815, which is neither very relevant nor very accurate. ("Napoleon . . . in 1806 . . . reduced the Emperor of Germany to Emperor of Austria only.") Nor does the phrase "Daumier believed in the ideas of the Great Revolution. Liberty was his goddess," constitute a satisfactory analysis of the position of a great cartoonist fated to witness the upheavals and social experiments of the revolutions of 1830, 1848 and 1870. The author did not probe into the relation of Daumier's cartoons to the editorial policy of "Charivari." Deplorably little is known on that important point but since tradition has it that the artist never in his life invented a caption for his lithographs we may perhaps infer that he was not an independent political commentator or social critic. Daumier's cartoons are great not because of their ideas but because his mastery of composition and incomparable draughtsmanship—which commanded the admiration of Delacroix, Balzac, Hugo and Baudelaire—transfigured any subject he touched.

On the origin of Daumier's style the introduction is silent. We should have liked to read something of the relation of Philpott's early circle to the lithographed cartoons of "H.B." (J. Doyle) in England, and of their attitude to Gillray and Rowlandson. There is evidence that the early contributors to "Caricature" knew and adapted Goya's political prints and there must also be a close connection between Daumier's early busts and the modelled caricatures of Dantan. Even so, the art of Daumier remains an enigma. He was a genius, no doubt, whose greatness defies analysis but his historical position could be more clearly defined. Perhaps our conception of nineteenth century art is slightly out of focus. We are used to concentrate on the pioneers of modernity at the expense of the traditionalists. What wonder that we find it so hard to place an artist who was perhaps the last legitimate heir of the true "grand manner"?

