



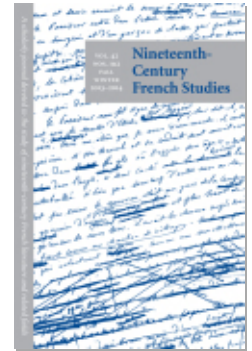
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**<em xmlns:m="http://www.w3.org/1998/Math/MathML" xmlns:mml="http://www.w3.org/1999/xlink">Fellow Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in Nineteenth-Century French Painting  
by Bridget Alsdorf (review)**

Anne Leonard

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over ten pages have been added in a subsection called “Translating Poe.” Here, Gamboni demonstrates how several drawings by Redon can be more explicitly connected to specific stories by Poe. Such welcome in-depth analysis of Redon’s works can also be found in other sections of the book, especially the one on *The Face of Mystery*. Even more minor additions offer the reader fascinating insights.

One example of this careful attention to detail is Gamboni’s recognition of an unconscious “slip” or “pun” that recurs frequently in Redon’s early manuscripts. The word “pénombre,” meaning “twilight or darkness” is replaced with “peine ombre” which would mean “sorrow shadow.” This slip reveals Redon’s painful associations with the oppressive shadows that frequently appear in his early drawings. This idea also relates to the artist’s early predilection for black. Gamboni’s careful reading further reveals that when these manuscripts appeared in an edition by Claire Moran, “this highly significant misspelling is unfortunately corrected without mention.”

Gamboni’s enhanced translation adds considerably to our knowledge of Redon’s interaction with the literary sphere. This includes not only Redon’s own art criticism, but also his interactions with, and sometimes manipulations of, other critics. Indeed, Gamboni’s thorough exploration of late nineteenth-century art criticism examines the various forms that were produced, from journal articles to criticism within novels and the “literary transposition” of works of visual art. He adeptly demonstrates the ways Redon’s “change of direction” towards the end of his career led to conscious attempts to distance himself from the very literary associations he had actively sought out as a means to gain recognition earlier.

Gamboni discusses dialogues between the brush and pen in both textual sources and illustrations such as Grandville’s *Un Autre Monde*—which was included in the original edition. These passages are simply delightful, as are the added discussions of works such as James Ensor’s *Dangerous Cooks* and Jasper Johns’s *The Critic Speaks* which help to demonstrate the ways in which these dialogues between word and image have continued relevance for developments in later modernism.

**Alsdorf, Bridget. *Fellow Men: Fantin-Latour and the Problem of the Group in Nineteenth-Century French Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. Pp. 368. 42 color illus. 122 halftones. ISBN: 978-0691153674**

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Bridget Alsdorf has written a fluent, carefully considered book about a genre of painting that Henri Fantin-Latour (1836–1904) made his own: group portraits of artists. Rarely studied in terms of their compositional dynamics, these works have been more often valued for their individual portrayals of Baudelaire, Whistler, Manet, Rimbaud and other period luminaries. With his group portraits, Alsdorf argues, Fantin sought to produce an image of the artistic avant-garde that would convey unity, credibility

and (dare one say) respectability. Alsdorf notes that the community enshrined within them was sometimes more imaginary than real, and that these assemblages often masked a host of conflicts and divisions. In her reading, Fantin's group portraiture carries an inherent tension between individual ambitions and the collective identity required to put the avant-garde on a solid public footing.

Staying admirably close to the paintings and the preparatory drawings for each, Alsdorf exposes many of the contradictions that linger around Fantin-Latour's oeuvre, often signaling these in crisply aphoristic terms. For example, of Fantin's *Homage to Delacroix* (1864)—his first major group portrait and the focus of Chapter One—she remarks, “There is an element of self-congratulation in every homage” (30). She also points out that Fantin's “commitment to group portraiture coincided with a slow but steady withdrawal” from exactly those social and artistic circles that yielded his notable sitters (33). In all, Alsdorf gives us a more avant-garde Fantin than we have come to expect: closer to Courbet, more contemporary in his outlook, a “man on the make” rather than a retiring maker of *hommages*.

Alsdorf audaciously devotes an entire chapter to the destroyed *The Toast! Homage to Truth* (1865), of which just three portrait fragments remain. Copious preparatory studies, which Alsdorf exploits fully for clues to Fantin's thinking, document the artist's tortuous journey toward the final version of a work that, in the end, neither he nor the critics could bear. Fantin's quixotic attempt to integrate a nude allegorical figure into a bourgeois group portrait would go unrepeatable. Still, Alsdorf argues that the mid-1860s, in the wake of the 1863 Salon des Refusés, represent the moment of greatest energy around the avant-garde ideal: a triumphal moment whose loss Fantin would implicitly mourn in the group portraits to follow.

Composing an ensemble of artistic peers and friends on canvas turned out to be a fiendishly unpredictable business, a fact that comes to the fore in Fantin's *A Studio in the Batignolles* (1870). Centered on the figure of Manet at the easel, this painting won Fantin his first major public success, even in the absence of three men who refused to pose. Fantin's difficulty in managing capricious sitters and smoothing over their interpersonal feuds underscores Alsdorf's argument concerning the studio as an inherently fraught space, in which an artist's twin needs—for solitude and sociability—were always coming into conflict. Yet a social gathering in a dining room could be no less fraught, as Alsdorf shows in her riveting discussion of *Corner of a Table* (1872). Produced hard on the heels of the Paris Commune, crackling with political radicalism as well as the “deviant” implications of Rimbaud's and Verlaine's relationship, the painting had the power to shock on multiple grounds. In the familiar critical refrain, *Corner of a Table* was faulted for resembling a “collection of portraits” more than a coherent group. Alsdorf convincingly parries this critique by suggesting that the disconnection among the figures amounts to an aesthetic choice, not clumsiness on the part of Fantin, to reveal fundamental divisions among the men gathered around the table.

Alsdorf seems to reserve a special scorn for *Around the Piano* (1885), which, as the last of Fantin's five major group portraits, should logically occupy the final slot in her five-chapter structure. Instead, Alsdorf excludes the painting from analysis except for a few dismissive sentences in the Conclusion—a decision all the more startling in that she devotes all of Chapter Two to a destroyed work—and fills Chapter Five with a discussion of examples by Renoir and Degas. Here, her focus necessarily broadens from artistic brotherhoods to the more general topic of “relational tension” in widely assorted multi-figure compositions: family groups, office co-workers, friends on holiday and so on. While these fascinating byways pull somewhat afield from Fantin's specific genre challenges, they eventually lead back to the more closely-related group portraits by Maurice Denis and Félix Vallotton, c. 1900. Yet one wonders if, in the group of Wagnerian listeners that Fantin portrayed in 1885 (and to which he fervently belonged), he had not found exactly the sort of artistic brotherhood that had eluded him among his fellow painters and writers. Perhaps tellingly, in *Around the Piano* there is no human gap needing to be filled, as in the other major group portraits, with a signature Fantin still life.

**Lindsay, Suzanne Glover. *Funerary Arts and Tomb Cult: Living with the Dead in France, 1750–1870*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2012. Pp. 254. ISBN: 978-1-4094-2261-7**

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What do monuments for the dead reveal about the living? And to what extent are these structures, which attempt to immortalize fallen heroes and departed loved ones, inextricably linked to the social and political climate of a specific time and place? These questions are at the heart of Suzanne Glover Lindsay's *Funerary Arts and Tomb Cult*. Lindsay argues that modern effigy tomb sculpture “asserts that the individual existed (because he died), with an identifiable place in historical time;” her study explores how this monarchical—and, by the eighteenth century, out-dated and under-represented—form of funerary art was revitalized and transformed to embrace modern views of death and commemoration in nineteenth-century France (128). In demonstrating how the social, religious and civic concerns that shaped the metropolis were frequently replicated within the policies governing the necropolis, this study situates effigies within a broader context in order to explore how a modern, urban people went about, as the subtitle cleverly states, living with the dead in France.

In spite of a somewhat narrow focus on a particular type of sculpture—the recumbent effigy (*gisant*) that reproduces the corpse of the deceased—Lindsay's text nevertheless embraces an interdisciplinary approach, with a particular emphasis on how funerary sculpture regularly intersected with issues of architecture (notably the buildings that housed funerary monuments) and landscape (in the form of outdoor, garden-like cemeteries). Looking at burial and commemorative practices during a