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Bruce Russell

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Von Pluschow: Toward a Definition of His Canon

On the last day of the year 1889, in the presence of a great and reverent crowd, with solemn music . . . the body of Browning was laid in its resting place in Poet's Corner.

—Edward Dowden, *Robert Browning*
(London, 1904, pp. 387–388)

While there is no cause to doubt either the size or the worthiness of that assembly in Westminster Abbey, history provides at least one small cause to doubt its reverence: Among the crowd was Edmund Gosse, poet, man of letters, and onetime librarian of the House of Lords, who apparently through much of the service could not keep his eyes from wandering to a photograph of a naked Italian youth which had accompanied him to the Abbey that day hidden, perhaps, in his prayer book. The photograph had been sent to him by his friend John Addington Symonds, and it seems safe to surmise that it was the work of a German expatriate photographer, "Guglielmo" (Wilhelm von) Pluschow (Grosskurth, 1964:276).¹ Such photographs by von Pluschow and his cousin Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden as well as by their Italian imitators d'Agata and Vincenzo Galdi² were widely circulated during the fin de siècle among literary and artistic gentlemen who shared the sexual tastes of Symonds and Gosse. Today, it is the photographs of von Gloeden which have survived to overshadow those of his cousin and the others. Only a handful of images by von Pluschow³ (see Figures 1 and 2) can be identified, and he is noted only in the literature on his cousin. However, it seems probable that in the 1880s and for some years afterward von Pluschow's fame far exceeded that of von Gloeden, who did not become a professional photographer until shortly before 1890.

Although next to nothing is known of von Pluschow's life, we do know that in the 1870s he lived in Naples, where he maintained a portrait studio,⁴ and that he was visited at this time by his cousin, who had moved to Taormina, Sicily, for reasons of health. Von Gloeden, like any young artist of his day, naturally would have been intrigued by the potential of his cousin's photographic apparatus and was duly instructed

in its use. Whether von Pluschow had already begun his studies of nude youths and what von Gloeden's early photographic efforts were like is not known. Neither cousin could have anticipated the machinations of fate whereby the youthful von Gloeden, an aspiring painter of independent means, would be stripped of his wealth as a result of his stepfather's political intrigues; would be forced to support himself, his sister, and even to an extent the household of his adopted home through the sale of his photographs; or, especially, that his reputation would obscure that of his well-established professional cousin to the point where von Pluschow's photographs would be misattributed to him.

The latter confusion has several causes. For one, the commercial value resulting from recent interest in von Gloeden has led on more than one occasion to unscrupulous dealers passing off the work of one cousin as that of the other. Also, the common practice of mounting albumen prints on cards, thus obscuring the name stamp, inventory numbers, and date with which both photographers usually marked the back of an image, has been an even greater cause of confusion. A significant number of what were thought to be photographs by von Gloeden, including some which were considered his best images, are now known to be the work of his cousin.⁵ The question of attribution is not a simple one, however, as there are examples of the same image bearing contradictory signature stamps, perhaps a result of both photographers' retaining duplicate negatives from the period of their initial collaboration (Hieronimus 1979:18).⁶

Perhaps it is the very romanticism of the von Gloeden legend that accounts for his notoriety and the eclipse of his cousin. Von Gloeden's hagiographers step forward to explain all with hypotheses that crumble when confronted with the evidence of the photographers' works. In his historical romance *Les amours singulières*, Roger Peyrefitte attributes to von Gloeden the statement: "After a year of loyal competition, he [von Pluschow] admitted defeat and we agreed to divide the world between us; it was agreed that he would study the girls of Italy and would leave for me the boys of Sicily" (Peyrefitte 1949:123).

Since only one photograph containing a female model by von Pluschow is available (Figure 3) and since von Gloeden seems to have devoted much more attention to photographing girls (transvestism aside) than is often acknowledged, we need not see this assertion as anything other than a literary device used by Peyrefitte to write a character out of his story. Charles Leslie (1977), whose study is generally more reliable, dismisses von Pluschow as an excellent technician lacking in imagination and deserving his neglect, and falls back on a kind of critical Darwinism

Bruce Russell is an artist and critic living in Montreal, where he is involved in the Centre Articule, a parallel gallery. This article will form part of a larger work on homoeroticism and the male nude in nineteenth-century photography. He is also writing studies of British gay painters of the past century and of New York gay artists and writers of the interwar period.

Figure 1 Von Pluschow illustration for "A Pompeian Gentleman's Home-Life" by E. Neville-Rolfe (*Scribner's*, March 1898).

whereby chance is imbued with taste, suggesting that the forgotten is best forgotten.

While even the most basic information about von Pluschow's life has yet to be researched (even the place and date of his birth are not known) and given that only a handful of images are available, thus allowing for only the most tentative comments in comparing the work of the two cousins, the fact remains that the available examples of his work attest to considerable achievement and a talent stylistically distinct from von Gloeden's that is in no way its inferior. Von Pluschow's composition is more complex, elegant, and sophisticated. Hieronimus (1979:18) has argued that von Pluschow exhibits greater attention to detail and chooses a different physical type of model than von Gloeden. Certainly, the erotic is manifested very differently in their respective work; von Gloeden employs a kind of noncentered, fleshy voluptuousness, entwining models sculpturally in a manner reminiscent of Rodin, while von Pluschow creates situations with unmistakable sexual tension far more

explicit and evocative than his cousin's romantic sensuality. Von Pluschow focuses this eroticism by means of the spatial relationships between his models and their engagement with the viewer/camera, sometimes by drawing attention to the genitalia and other homoerogenous areas. The solicitousness among the participants in the image, and that includes us, approximates a dynamic familiar to any gay man: the exhibitionism and false modesty, the flirtatiousness of cruising.

Von Pluschow's work is more firmly rooted in mid-nineteenth-century academic reconstruction of the antique and the tradition of heroic portraiture, his painterly peers being Leighton, Alma-Tadema, Feuerbach, and Flandrin,⁷ whereas von Gloeden is more involved with the romantic evocation of Arcadia, his peers being Puvis de Chavannes, Albert Moore, Hans von Marées, Böcklin, and even Eakins and Degas. The project von Gloeden shared with these artists, using the signifiers of high art and the antique to give dignity to the everyday without employing the tired rhetoric inherited from previous centuries, together with his commitment to the *plein-air* movement, ultimately set him in a more daring camp than his cousin.

If von Pluschow was more conservative, the result is that his academicism equipped him with a graphic strength and assurance often lacking in the work of von Gloeden. His mixture of elegance and raunchiness saves him from the sentimentality which is the downfall of von Gloeden at his worst. Von Pluschow's failure to experiment is perhaps the key not only to his success but the explanation of his neglect.

Notes

- 1 Grosskurth presumably derived this information from an unpublished Gosse letter to Symonds. There were at least three other occasions on which Symonds corresponded with friends concerning von Pluschow: in April 1892, he suggested that Charles Edward Saylor, poet and librarian at Cambridge, visit his "friend" von Pluschow in Rome, giving his address as 34 Via Sardegna; he also told Edward Carpenter, pioneer British gay activist, socialist, and feminist, about von Pluschow's "studies from the nude in the open air"; and he sent photographs by von Pluschow to Charles Kains-Jackson, pedophile poet and journalist/art critic. There is no evidence in the Symonds letters to support d'Arch Smith's claim (1970:18) that he sent him von Gloeden photographs. For the Symonds letters see Peters and Schueller (1969:645–646, 677, 815).
- 2 Two photos by Galdi as well as by von Pluschow are illustrated in Trevor J. Fairbrother's article "A Private Album: John Singer Sergeant's Drawings of Nude Male Model," *Arts*, vol. 56, no. 4, pp. 70–79.
- 3 A listing of von Pluschow's known published photographs is as follows:
Robert Cust, "Photographic Studies," *Photogram*, vol. iv, no. 44, pp. 130–133, 157–158, London, 1897.
Jean-Claude Lemagny. See References.
Neville-Rolfe, "A Pompeian Gentleman's Home-Life," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. xxiii, no. 3, pp. 277–290, New York, March 1898.
R. W. Schufeldt, *Studies of the Human Form for Artists*, 1908.

Figure 2 Von Pluschow illustration for "A Pompeian Gentleman's Home-Life" by E. Neville-Rolfe (Scribner's, March 1898).

Figure 3 Wilhelm von Pluschow. Postcard, ca. 1900.

- 4 For a discussion of this complex problem see the Appendix and Table in Hieronimus (1979:18, 21).
- 5 Perhaps as many as a quarter of the images reproduced in Lemagny (1975) are probably the work of von Pluschow, not von Gloeden (see Hieronimus, op. cit.), specifically plates 15, 17, 23, 25, 31, 33, 35, 41, 43, 45, 79, 83, 91, 95, and 103. In addition to these reattributions I would add Lemagny, pages 37 and 93—the former because of the resemblance of the drapery, location, and background to plate 13 in Peters (1969); the latter because the setting, a painted Roman interior, suggests the works published here—as well as a number of others that don't seem to fit what is beginning to emerge as von Gloeden's distinctive style.
- 6 Gleeson White (1898) states that the work of both photographers could be ordered from J. Littauer, 2 Odeon Platz, Munich.
- 7 The coolness of Flandrin's work remains more akin to von Pluschow's style despite von Gloeden's documented association with the French classicist. He photographically approximated Flandrin's study in the Louvre, *Jeune homme nu assis au bord de la mer*, giving it the more anecdotal title *Cain* when he produced it as a photogravure in 1926.

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Von Gloeden: A Reappraisal

Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden, photographer, for many years resident of Taormina, born on September 16, 1856, at the Castle Volkshagen near Wismar, Prussian noble—winner of photographic awards (Cairo 1897, Rome 1889, Milan 1911), friend of royalty, millionaires, artists, writers, and peasants: it is strange that such a man has achieved greater fame in the past decade than at any time during his long and distinguished career. The explanation is perhaps twofold: the emergence of a reborn worldwide homosexual movement, eager to rediscover its forebears, which rejoiced in the baron's portraits of his lovers, the youths of his adopted Sicily; and the phenomenal explosion of interest in photography, its history, and the achievements of its practitioners.

Indeed, one of the surest as well as the most dubious compliments our age can pay, being "made into a movie," has twice been conferred upon von Gloeden. In Bertolucci's 1900, Uncle Octavio indulges his taste for young men by arranging them in Gloedenesque tableaux on rocks overlooking the sea and photographing them with a view camera. The French film *Race d'Ep!* (Hocquengham and Soukatz, 1979), an often lighthearted review of the past century of the gay movement, offers a more direct portrayal in the guise of a stereotypical German shutterbug tourist lurking in bushes so as to capture the spontaneous erotic rambles of the golden boys of the south, who always seem to strike poses reminiscent of the baron's work. Given the oversimplification and distortion that cinematizing a historic person inevitably implies, what do these characterizations of von Gloeden nonetheless imply about contemporary conceptions of who he was and what he did? The character is semicomical, a jaded, voyeuristic dilettante involved in an exploitative relation to the innocent "natural" sexuality of his models (victims?). This image dates back to the earliest posthumous writings about von Gloeden, for example, that of Roger Peyrefitte (1949). If we proceed to consider the more recent writing (four monographs/catalogs have appeared since 1975, as well as numerous articles and brief discussions in more general texts), we find, for instance, that Estelle Jussim (1981), in her study of the New England pictorialist photographer F. Holland Day, contrasts what she considers his ability to disguise the vulgarity of his models and make great art of them with the "blatant homoeroticism" of von Gloeden's work, in which "flagrant ephebes . . . catered to pederastic taste."

While it is true that von Gloeden's work is often explicitly erotic and was clearly produced to be shared with men who shared his sexual interests, suggesting that this is what accounts for the stylistic difference in the two men's work is a failure to understand the reasoned aesthetic project of von Gloeden and to deni-

grate the erotic component of Day's. Perhaps a more serious appraisal of von Gloeden's work is that of Roland Barthes (1978), which nevertheless mixes real insight with hermeneutic subjectivity. Barthes accuses the baron of "overloading . . . the code of antiquity . . . and mixing up signs without thinking about it. . . . It seems he takes without any irony the most worn-out legends for cash value. *Il est surtout Kitsch.*" All this seems to add up to what is in fact the general response to von Gloeden: he was a silly old man who took sentimental naughty pictures; an amateur exploitative, voyeuristic pornographer whose work is "soft-core" and amusing if one has the right kind of humor.

Is all this fair or accurate? If not, why? And what did von Gloeden think *he* was doing, and did he succeed? In proceeding with these considerations, it is perhaps useful to separate the issues: (1) a moral one—did von Gloeden take sexual, financial, and cultural advantage of his Sicilian neighbors? (2) was he a photographer primarily motivated by sexual and financial considerations? and (3) do we read his images in a fundamentally different way from his peers?

Exploiter, Tourist, Voyeur?

When Wilhelm von Gloeden first visited Sicily in the late 1870s, he was a consumptive young Prussian noble of independent means, a painter trained in the academic traditions of his homeland in search of an agreeable haven for his threatened lungs. The Taormina he settled in was rarely visited by northern tourists; soon it would be "discovered." A medieval town, it bore abundant evidence of its Greek, Roman, and Moorish periods. In the words of Charles Leslie, von Gloeden's biographer, it

hung between the sky and the sea with breathtaking panoramas of the rugged coast of Messina, the luminous transparent blue of the Mediterranean and the looming majesty of snow-capped Mount Aetna in the distance. Around and through the terraces, the little piazzas with their views of the seas and the mountains, the narrow climbing streets and the crumbling walls of the old villas were tumbling cascades of bougainvillea, fountains of grape vines, green floods of fragrant orange, lemon, and citron and fig. The tall spires of cypress and fronded palms rose upwards and brilliant geraniums were everywhere, like so much splashed paint. [Leslie 1977]

The population subsisted as it had for centuries on a mixture of fishing, agriculture, and artisan production. By the time of his death, in 1931, and indeed even by 1900, this small, picturesque town had become a tourists' haven and, as is always the case when "underdeveloped" traditional societies are inundated by affluent visitors, the impact of badly needed currency had to balance against the social cost. Northern Europeans had been making the Grand

Tours for centuries, and in von Gloeden's time rail and steam expanded the limits of readily accessible vacation possibilities to include Greece, Egypt, Palestine, and Sicily. Some indication of the impact of this expansion can be gleaned from the works of E. M. Forster dealing with the Italian context; *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *Albergo Empedocle*, and *The Story of a Panic*. The contradiction between the idealized vision of classic glory and the contemplation of picturesque ruins, on the one hand, and the heat, fleas, and indifference to northern conceptions of class, comfort, and hygiene by natives who bore but little resemblance to their ancient marble prototypes, on the other, proved too much for all but the most determined travelers. The ensuing consternation, however, was insignificant compared to the disruption of traditional values and social organization that was left behind at the end of the various "seasons." Like that of its neighbors', Taormina's fate was sealed by the development of transportation, and while von Gloeden's presence no doubt attracted some visitors as his work became known, he cannot be held responsible for the change in the community's economic base. Is his moral culpability, then, to be found in examining more specifically his relations with the citizens of his adopted town?

The biographers Leslie and Peyrefitte tell us that von Gloeden quickly made friends with all but a few of the residents. In 1887 his stepfather, Baron von Hammerstein, published the secret proceedings of a meeting of the kaiser's Cabinet, of which he was a member, in the liberal newspaper he published. The reaction was instantaneous: the property of the entire family was seized by the Crown. Von Hammerstein fled to Greece, where imperial influence resulted in his arrest and imprisonment for ten years. Von Gloeden and his step-sister Sophie, who lived with him, were left penniless. Their neighbors, tradesmen and working people, began leaving food on their doorstep during the night as soon as their plight was known. Eventually, friends in Germany subscribed a small pension, but after these events von Gloeden resorted to selling prints and postcards to supplement his income. In addition to scenic views, largely ignored today, it was his "artistic" photographs that quickly won a large audience. Careful accounts were kept, and a royalty was paid to the models involved for each print sold. Von Gloeden was remembered as being ever-willing to help out ex-models or their families with capital for business projects; several were set up as photographers. He also provided generous dowries for local girls from poor families, hardly the portrait painted in *Race d'Ep!*

There remains the question of sex itself and the sexual power his position implied. If his biographers are to be believed, it seems that he simply fit into networks of intergenerational homosexual promiscuity al-

ready established in the community. In a sense, the selling of photographs which have their basis in this system of sexual exchange, and even the payment of the models, makes something else of the situation. But any insinuation of voyeurism, exploitation, or even prostitution seems to be countered by the esteem and affection expressed by his neighbors, even years after his death.

Dilettante and Amateur?

Perhaps because of his family and privilege, it is often suggested that von Gloeden was a dilettante, an amateur photographer who was forced to sell his naive efforts because of circumstance. While it is quite possible that, like Day, he might never have sold his prints if it had not been for the von Hammerstein affair, I feel that he was a serious artist who brought to photography a preoccupation with some of the most significant aesthetic issues that concerned his generation.

The reaction against classicism had unleashed a wide range of responses, especially the rejection of its conceptions of subject, composition, and technique. All this would have been known to any art student of the period, and especially one like von Gloeden who could afford travel, the annual albums illustrating the various salons, and other publications and whose class privilege provided access to "advanced" circles.

According to Klaus Kertess (1980):

it all started with Manet. His *Dead Christ with Angels* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) portrays Christ about to be entombed . . . for the last time. Two angels, as unremarkable for the blandness of their grief as for the birdlike naturalism of their wings, just barely prevent Christ's body from sliding out of the picture into the viewer's space. His face is veiled by shadow; the light is focused on his drape encircled crotch. Christ is sliding into the plane—deadpan and demythologized. Christ with a small "c", Art with a capital "A".

While it is the trajectory of Manet's displacement, its consequence, which in retrospect distinguishes it, in its own time it was part of an interrogative context that crossed borders and included a wide range of work. *Dead Christ with Angels* (Figure 1) is but one example of a project shared by a generation of artists as disparate as Bouguereau, Millais, Hans von Marées, Puvis de Chavannes, and August Böcklin to "deconstruct the hierarchies of genres by which different kinds of paintings had been classified for centuries. The distinction between sublime (historical and religious painting) and the familiar (landscape, still life, scenes of everyday life) were effectively abolished" (Rosen and Zerner 1982:21–26). Artists were desperately trying to achieve

liberation from rhetorical figures of speech conceived pictorially . . . the whole repertory of poses and gestures that Renaissance artists derived from classical statuary and reliefs and invented in new forms. For the most part when classical formulas turn up in Realist painting they appear as quotations or parody (most notably in Manet). In general, however, the traditional ideologizing pose is absent, the force of the painting often depends on a sense of this absence. The great achievement of the Realist school in painting, however, was the acceptance of trivial banal material and the refusal to ennoble it, idealize it or even make it picturesque. [ibid.]

On the other hand, for a naturalist like Bouguereau, or for Feuerbach or Böcklin in their lighter moods, the object was, in fact, to ennoble and idealize the banal by the use of the hieratic mode in presenting the picturesque. Others, like von Marées and Puvis de Chavannes, sought to undermine both the idealization of the ancient world by putting it to work and to dignify labor by classicizing it. All these artists were born between 1824 and 1837 and had reached maturity by the time von Gloeden was a student. Their concerns would have been his, and his work reflects his sympathies.

It is strange, then, to read Barthes's suggestion that von Gloeden's work was arrived at "*without thinking about it*" (emphasis in original), an accident arising from his nonconformity, "a force more than art." What Barthes calls the mixing of sign systems in von Gloeden seems to be precisely his heavily informed synthesis of the very issues just discussed. Barthes sees rather

the contradiction between all this literary scenery of the Greek vision of antiquity and these black bodies of country gigolos. These little Greek gods (already contradicted by their darkness) have dirty peasants' hands, badly cured (sic) fingernails, worn-out and dirty feet; their foreskins are swollen and well in evidence; no longer stylized; that is pointed and smaller. They are uncircumcized, this is all one sees . . . [Barthes 1978]

Apart from the rather obvious point that it is rather difficult to stylize foreskins in photography and that the Greeks painted (white) marble to resemble real (tanned) flesh, even putting aside the racism of his anxiety concerning an Arcady "peopled with African bodies," what is most maddening is Barthes's blindness to his own insights and the resulting confusion. He points out that "the Baron's photographs are at the same time sublime and anatomic. The sublime softness of legend enters in collision with the realism of photography, for what is a photograph thus conceived, none other than an image where all is seen; a collection of details without hierarchy, without order, the great classical principle" (ibid.). Barthes's description is just as apt for *Dead Christ with Angels*. This is no mere coincidence. Von Gloeden draws to-

gether two projects much current at the time: the rejection of the classical formulas of the beaux-arts tradition and an attempt to reempower the memory of ancient Mediterranean society. The resemblance, for example, of Thomas Eakins's Arcadian photographs to von Gloeden's attests that this project was current not just among the circle of photographers working in Italy that included von Pluschow, von Gloeden, Galdi, and d'Agata.

Barthes's description of von Gloeden's models always reminds me that Ganymede must have stunk of his father's hunting dogs as he was carried off to Olympus. He was no doubt covered with dust, and much more than just his foreskin must have been swollen soon after his arrival. And yet countless cameo brooches were carved throughout the nineteenth century which depict a classically veiled woman discreetly offering a wine cup to an eagle. This image owes its origins to a convention of eighteenth-century portraiture whereby Ganymede is appropriated to the gender of Leda, Europa, Io, and Danae. Not just a simple equivalent of an operatic *pants-role*, this metamorphosis effectively tidied up what must have been a particularly unpleasant myth. Thomas S. W. Lewis (1982-1983:58-59) contrasts the versions of the legend in a series of classical dictionaries from Dr. Lemprière's frank if disapproving *Bibliotheca Classica* of 1788 to the more circumspect *Classical Dictionary*, by Charles Anthon, of 1842. As the spirit of the Enlightenment gave way to moral purity, one suspects that the classical tradition must have presented considerable problems for puritanically inclined parents intent on the aesthetic edification of their children. A stroll through any major gallery would have led from depictions of rape and abduction to patricide and unnatural vice. Nudity must have been relatively inconsequential, although Thomas Eakins noted during his years in Paris that "English ladies" simply did not enter the sculpture galleries of the Louvre. The sentimentalization and bowdlerization of classical subjects by the most rigid of the academicians must have been some consolation, but even years of covering youthful eyes before certain red-figure vases and explaining away Titian, the Pollaiuolo brothers, Piero di Cosimo, Michelangelo, and the rest as the products of a rawer age would hardly have tempered the shock of encountering the work of an artist like Arnold Böcklin. Once again shepherds smelled of dung and drunken satyrs hid in bushes waiting to ravish one's daughters. *The Isle of the Dead* (1880; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) presents none of the consolations of a Christian death. Equally disturbing, but for far more ambiguous reasons, must have been Anselm Feuerbach's strangely haunting *Medea* paintings or the *Nana* portraits. The reaction to a similar British work, the *Bacchus* (1868; Birmingham, England, City Museum and

◀ **Figure 1** Edouard Manet. *The Dead Christ with Angels*, 1864. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer (1929). The H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

Figure 2 Hippolyte Flandrin. *Jeune homme assis nu au bord de la mer*, 1837. Louvre, Paris.

Art Gallery), of Simeon Solomon is documented in the comments of sympathetic contemporaries such as Swinburne (1908) and Walter Pater (1901). For these artists, the classics were not an inventory of stock pretty subjects, or an occasion for careful archaeological reconstruction, or the pursuit of conventionalized ideal pure form. Rather, for them, as for Pater, Freud, and Nietzsche, they were as red embers hidden below a layer of dull ash—the childhood, the unconscious memory of our civilization.

From the perspective of Marie Antoinette's dairy at the Petit Trianon, it is almost unthinkable that later generations would turn to Prometheus, Sisyphus, Electra, Oedipus, and the sphinx to express their most profound fears. After Sèvres milk buckets, the world needed to be reminded of the dirty feet, the peasant hands, and even the swollen foreskins of the inhabitants of the Golden Age.

Von Gloeden must also have known of Hans von Marées, who, like Puvis de Chavannes, regarded the making over of a vision of Arcady as a conscious project to dignify everyday life. If Courbet, in continuity from Caravaggio, sought to dignify labor through its realistic portrayal, von Marées and Puvis de Chavannes in their own manner sought to demystify the ancients, after Piero de Cosimo, by making them toil and spin. In all probability, von Gloeden would have visited at the nearby German Marine Biological Institute in Naples that von Marées had decorated with frescoes in 1873. Which of all the other possible influences might have reached von Gloeden remains speculative. We can say with certainty, however, that for him as for numerous other homosexuals of his class and education, the classics and the world they document offered not only a legitimization of their sexuality but also a vision of the possibility of a new age as different from the present as that of Pericles.

The Modern Eye

There remains the biggest obstacle to the accessibility of von Gloeden's work, the reason so many of his images seem to be kitsch or sentimental: the contradiction between the *vérité* of the camera and the beaux-arts content of the images. We learn from family albums, photo-journalism, and the Polaroid that a photograph is an artifact which documents real time, and therefore our minds reject a photograph of the subject of a poem by Theocritus, just as they would a newsreel of the battle of Hastings. A representational painting poses no such conceptual problem. A viewer of the painting *Jeune homme assis nu au bord de la mer* by Flandrin (Figure 2) would probably not immediately concern him/herself with such questions as where the artist stood in relation to the model while sketching or whether an image was composed from a variety of figure, landscape, and perspective sketches. Instead, we accept the image as, in a sense, a fiction composed for our pleasure and edification by someone trained with specific mimetic skills. But these are precisely the questions posed by viewers of the von Gloeden photogravure *Cain*, based itself on the Flandrin painting. The eye registers the improbability of the vantage point of the camera and proceeds to solve the problem, noting that the image is collaged from three photographs—boy, rock, and landscape—and is considerably touched up. We make no demand that the execution of a representational painting chronologically correspond to its content; our century has even allowed historical representation through illustration to remain in a limited sense a legitimate prerogative of the artist as image maker. But a photograph of a picnic in a park in Buffalo in the summer of 1926 is just that or it is not. To an extent, the work of von Gloeden or Julia Margaret Cameron seems to become kitsch because

of the subsequent development, definition, and function of both painting and photography. That von Gloeden and Cameron attempted in good faith to explore in a new medium what were the concerns of art being explored by their painter peers is only a problem retrospectively for us. The confusion results from that aspect of kitsch whereby signs of high culture find themselves appropriated into more diffuse circuits of production, in which the class *origins* of the signs in question are paramount to the appropriators and become in fact their primary "meaning." No longer articulated within a discourse of distinction and power as pertaining to the ruling class with whom they are originally identified, these signs become one-dimensional, "empty," and flattened, their credibility undermined. The transferring of the signifiers of beaux-arts painting (draped figure, studio props) to what we perceive as a popular medium, photography, creates a shift that seems the equivalent of the appropriation by the bourgeoisie of signs of aristocratic discourse or even of more contemporary operations that characterize "mass culture," but again, this is so only retrospectively and to the modern eye.

The Pictorialists, perhaps unfairly, seem exempt from this confusion and elicit a different and simpler response. While we might subscribe to the conventional wisdom that their project was untruthful to the very nature of the camera and its historic destiny, their very rejection of its *vérité* and "function," of sharp focus and spontaneity for chiaroscuro and "art," set their production apart as a subspecies of graphic arts, which, after all, was their intent. Their textured quality as pieces of paper inscribed with impressionist or symbolist images allow them to be visually equated with the lithographs and etchings of Whistler, Shannon, and Zorn, which they resemble.

Wilhelm von Gloeden was left to work out his own synthesis of these various currents. His success in doing so is another issue, one I take up in the accompanying comparison with von Pluschow, but to dismiss the result without trying to assess it in its own terms is unfair and foolish. It is unfair to judge von Gloeden's work by the standards of the soft-focus pictorialism of the generation that succeeded him, as does Estelle Jussim. In fact, one may be reasonably sure that F. Holland Day, whom she prefers to von Gloeden, would have thought so as well. After all, he chose a photograph of von Gloeden's to illustrate an article he wrote in *Camera Notes* (Day 1897:27-28), and concerning "the correct approach to photography as applied to the human figure" (Day 1897:27-28). Asserting, as does Roland Barthes, that von Gloeden's work attacks the purity of received classical harmony by the intrusion of discordants is to pay it the great compliment of success in its own terms.

Despite much attention, Wilhelm von Gloeden has yet to win the appreciation or even the evaluation he deserves. The literature is still sketchy, and there has been only one previous attempt to situate his work in its contemporary context (Schiff 1979). Other problems, such as organizing and defining the *oeuvre*, have barely begun to be confronted. In time, the significance of this seemingly enigmatic figure will hopefully be understood and appreciated.

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Wilhelm von Pluschow

Wilhelm von Gloeden

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