

want to resort, as I did, to pencilling in their own.

In spite of its diffuseness, *William Morris and the Middle Ages* must have been an engrossing exhibit to view; this catalog,

Katherine Solender. *Dreadful Fire! Burning of the houses of Parliament*. Bloomington, The Cleveland Museum of Art in cooperation with the Indiana University Press, 1984. Pp. 80. 4 color and 51 black and white plates. \$7.95

The illumination that seared the London skies on the night of October 16, 1834 announced a national disaster to a horrified public. The Palace at Westminster, a complex of buildings on the bank of the Thames that served as the seat of the Houses of Parliament, was consumed by flames. Throngs of curiosity seekers surrounded the site of the conflagration, watching the spectacle of destruction from a safe distance. Artists who joined the crowd were struck by the visual drama of leaping flames against the dark, autumnal sky. Among them was J.M.W. Turner. Turner's observations of the fiery devastation may be seen in a number of works: two sketchbooks, a watercolor, a vignette and two oil paintings, both entitled *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament* in the respective collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Dreadful Fire!, written by Katherine Solender, chronicles the history of this group of works. Her study was prepared in conjunction with an exhibition commemorating the 150th anniversary of the "dreadful fire" which originated in 1834 at Cleveland and then traveled to Philadelphia. Both the exhibition and *Dreadful Fire!*, which served as an exhibition catalogue, offer far more than a simple overview of works by Turner on a single theme. They explore the contextual setting of an idea and trace the development

therefore, should hold considerable interest for Victorian scholars—and considerable frustration.

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of that idea from the source of inspiration through the art-historical influence of the finished works.

The breadth and organization of Solender's study reveals that her intention went beyond the desire to present just an accompanying text to an exhibition. What she attempted and achieved was an analysis of artistic inspiration and historical context. Solender divides her material into three sections: "J.M.W. Turner: Life and Art," *Dreadful Fire!*, and "Turner and the Burning of the Houses of Parliament." Each section, though related to the others, is a distinct entity, and could be individually read, as a separate essay. The first is a general assessment of Turner's career, with special emphasis on his preference for the spectacular subject. Although Solender provides no new insights into Turner's oeuvre, her telescoped study of Turner's career is lucid and intelligent. "Dreadful Fire!" presents the contextual material. In a cogent essay, Solender provides a history of the Palace of Westminster, from its foundation as a residence for Canute the Great to the evening of its destruction, when a careless bonfire set by workmen led to the almost total destruction of the nation's symbol of representative government. Through contemporary reports and engravings, Solender recreates the night of the disaster, presenting a fine balance of reportage, anecdote and analysis. The final section traces the birth of an idea, discussing the progress of Turner's observations on the night of October 16, 1834 from sketch to the finished paintings, which were exhibited at the British Institution and the Royal Academy of Arts in the following year. Solender's sampling of opinions by contemporary critics