

REVIEWS

Pre-Raphaelitism: Poetry and Painting by Lindsay Smith. Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House Publishers, 2013. xiv, 138 pp. + 5 colour illus. ISBN 978-0-7463-0805-9 paperback. £14.99.

It might seem surprising that Northcote's *Writers and their Work* series had not yet devoted a volume to the Pre-Raphaelites, especially when considering its ample section on the nineteenth century. Lindsay Smith's study has come to bridge this gap by offering a complex reassessment of Pre-Raphaelitism, mainly conducted from the perspective of its innovative verbal-visual inter-art aesthetic and its most representative and charismatic figure, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Convinced that the interdisciplinary project shared by the two generations of Pre-Raphaelite writers and painters has seldom been placed at the centre of serious research, apart from very few exceptions such as Lionel Stevenson and more recently Elizabeth Helsinger, Smith proposes to contribute to a still largely uninvestigated field. And although some reservations may arise about her claims regarding the scarcity of inter-art criticism on the Brotherhood (some titles from her "*Select Bibliography*" would suffice to confute the opinion), little doubt exists as to the value and novelty of Smith's analysis.

Divided into seven tightly argued chapters, *Pre-Raphaelitism: Poetry and Painting* also offers dense paratextual material. It opens with a timeline that covers the time span from 1842 – when Ruskin first commissioned watercolours from Turner – to 1878 – the year of the Ruskin-Whistler trial and the onset of Ruskin's mental illness. These three decades correspond to the formation and consolidation of the Pre-Raphaelite verbal-visual aesthetic, in which, as explained in the Introduction, eighteenth-century ideas on the sister arts were developed in new directions. From the start, the Pre-Raphaelites did not simply establish similarities between visual and verbal, nor did they manifest – as is often supposed – a preference for the former medium over the latter. Instead, they pursued a creative rather than theoretical coexistence between the two and considered both their physical and metaphysical qualities. In addition to providing insightful anticipations of its contents, the introduction accounts for the book's non-linear chronology, stretching from Ruskin's early influence on the brethren to Rossetti's publication of *Poems* in 1870, though often moving back and forth to reveal the continuity between different moments of Pre-Raphaelitism.

The nature of Ruskin's mentorship is possibly the first traditional notion Smith revises in a work containing several new ideas. She holds that Ruskin's