

## REVIEWS

*Ruskin's Artists: Studies in the Victorian Visual Economy* edited by Robert Hewison. Aldershot, Hants/Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 2000. 252 pp.+ 34 b/w illus. ISBN 0-75460-0028-9. \$84.95.

*Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites* edited by Robert Hewison, Ian Warrell, and Stephen Wildman. London: Tate Gallery, 2000. 288 pp. + 260 colour illus. ISBN 1-85437-303-X. \$60.00.

The centennial in 2001 of Ruskin's death inspired a number of publications and an exhibition at the Tate. In these two books edited by Robert Hewison, Ruskin's own critical views shaped both the organization of the exhibition and the essay topics. Each book emphasizes the interrelation of Ruskin's life and work. While traditional and Marxist criticism privileged the biographical as a source of interpretation, the discursive nature of biography – deceptively transparent and objective, while being self-fashioning, rhetorical, solipsistic, and aggrandizing – has made it suspect and problematic as an interpretive tool.

In *Ruskin's Artists* the collusion of biography and critical analysis is treated differently from essay to essay. While most remain tied to the archive, several essays offer rich interpretations and fruitful speculation, employing imagination as Ruskin wished it applied – beyond the merely accurate, or in this case, archival. Robert Hewison, Slade Professor of Art at Oxford, 1999-2000 (Ruskin was the first to hold this post), introduces the anthology with an essay on the collecting of Ruskin and Ruskin's father. He argues that Ruskin's wide-ranging interests covered the entire Victorian visual economy, across high and low cultures, living and dead artists, drawing, art education, and architecture. The Ruskins' collecting activities both bound and separated them, as Ruskin's taste and free-wheeling buying departed from his father's cautiousness, generating a psychological drama between father and son, replayed in Ruskin's difficult friendships with artists, a topic taken up in several other essays.

Clare Wildsmith compares Ruskin to early nineteenth-century periodical critics on the topic of Turner's art: John Eagles (conservative *Blackwood's*), George Darley (liberal *Athenaeum*), William Hazlitt (radical press), and William Thackeray (*Fraser's* mixed readership). Thackeray appreciated Turner, and many of his comments and topics probably influenced Ruskin. All four feared that art could not sustain its new role as a civilizing force against commerce and public taste. Wildsmith is adept at delineating how they anticipated Ruskin, as well as showing their differences. She nicely posits a framework outside the strictly biographical. Citing Terry Eagleton, she shapes her essay through the awareness that art talk was embedded in other topics: society, politics, economics.