

## REVIEWS

*In the Olden Time: Victorians and the British Past* by Andrew Sanders. Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. New Haven: Yale UP, 2013. 344 pp., 80 colour, 15 b/w illus. ISBN 978-0-300-19042-7. \$75.00.

The task of explaining how the Victorians shaped their version of British history requires a temporally sophisticated approach, and Andrew Sanders is able to execute this difficult manoeuvre in his new book *In the Olden Time*, a formidable contribution to a growing body of scholarship concerned with how Victorians viewed the past. Those with an interest in historiography as well as Victorian historical genre painting, architecture, literature, and cultural history will find this volume particularly valuable.

Sanders's primary objective is a compelling one: to explore how Victorian literature and the writing of history were expressed through the visual arts. In particular, he examines how the representation of artists (which he defines broadly as painters, writers, poets, architects, and musicians) from the past functioned as a means of mediating and constructing history during the Victorian period. The artist, he argues, is a seminal figure because he represents the spirit of an age in a way that other historical figures cannot. For Victorians, the representation of artists from history was a means of negotiating perceptions about the past in a less specific mode than historical paintings of kings, queens, and battles. Artists represented a link to history that cultivated nationalism, reinventing the past in the image of the present.

Sanders begins with an exploration of Victorian perceptions of Elizabethan England and continues his study chronologically using the succession of British kings and queens throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as historical markers that signify shifting views of the past in Victorian consciousness. He concludes his analysis with the Regency and Queen Victoria's ascent to the throne. The chronological and geographical scope of *In the Olden Time* has received relatively little attention in existing historiographic studies of Victorian art and literature. Previous studies have been concerned predominantly with the Pre-Raphaelite view of foreign history, particularly that of Medieval and Renaissance Italy. Efforts such as J.B. Bullen's *The Myth of the Renaissance* (1994) or Hilary Fraser's *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (1992), and more recently the essays collected in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Renaissance* (2005) would all adhere to this general trend. An important exception, however, is Roy Strong's *And When Did You Last See Your Father? The Victorian Painter and British History* (1978) – a book to which Sanders owes a great debt. Strong's