

REVIEWS

Writing the Pre-Raphaelites: Text, Context, Subtext edited by Michaela Giebelhausen and Tim Barringer. Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. 262 pp. + 24 b/w illus. ISBN 978-0-7546-5717-0. \$119.95; £65.00.

Past titles on Pre-Raphaelitism have included *Pre-Raphaelites Re-Viewed* (1989), *Re-Framing the Pre-Raphaelites* (1996), and *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (1999). The verb in each of these titles implicitly suggests that there is no unmediated entity that is Pre-Raphaelitism, only a group or style constructed through numerous histories, representations, and receptions. This is the explicit focus of *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites: Text, Context, Subtext*, which addresses the varying constructions of Pre-Raphaelitism. Attention to the textual formation of Pre-Raphaelitism is not entirely new – Elizabeth Prettejohn’s *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (2007) devoted three chapters to a part entitled “Stories of Pre-Raphaelitism” – but, as the editors note, “*Writing the Pre-Raphaelites* is the first collection of essays to shift the emphasis away from the artwork itself and on to the diverse strands of the written record which surrounded and shaped Pre-Raphaelite practices.” Starting from the poststructuralist-informed position that “The truth, plain and simple, cannot be written: every telling of history is a story,” the editors have compiled ten essays from familiar Pre-Raphaelite scholars, each exploring an aspect of writing the Pre-Raphaelites.

Michaela Giebelhausen and Tim Barringer argue that art history as a discipline has been slower than literary studies to approach such primary texts as William Holman Hunt’s autobiography as textual constructions. It seems significant then that the authors presented here are all art historians. The editors claim that the volume as a whole pays “close attention to the making and unmaking of reputations and value judgements” and that their interest lies “in the ways in which texts and textual strategies have affected the definition and reputation of the Pre-Raphaelites as a group, as a movement, and as individual artists.” Unlike many earlier accounts of Pre-Raphaelitism, the volume is underpinned by references to theoretical frameworks. The Introduction, for example, opens with Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas about cultural production, a relevant framework given the editors’ observation that “we have ... shifted our attention from the work of art to the networks of production, reception, and consumption.”

The editors’ Introduction, sub-titled “Pre-Raphaelite mythologies,” is a valuable essay in itself and turns its attention to one particular aspect of the