

Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting by Elizabeth Prettejohn. New Haven: Yale UP (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art), 2007. 343 pp. + 40 colour plates, 85 b/w illus. ISBN 978-0-300-13549-7. \$65.00; £35.00.

Art historians will be aware that on the subject of Aestheticism there are many more studies of literature than of art. Elizabeth Prettejohn's *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* seeks to address this lack. It aims to "reconfigure the debate" of Aestheticism by focussing on painting, taking as its problematic "a set of art practices that are linked by nothing except a common agreement that no theory can ever be devised to link them." "Art for art's sake" might be seen as the theory that links these practices; Prettejohn, however, suggests the motto is not a theory but only "a statement of the problem." She is well qualified to undertake such a project; past ventures, including books on Pre-Raphaelitism and on beauty in art, represent her extensive knowledge of both modern art and aesthetics. Given her familiarity with philosophy and aesthetics, she is more than able to deal with the demands of a study of this scale and ambition. Her co-edited collection of 1999, *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity* (with Tim Barringer), was a "revisionist" project which sought to challenge the Modernist derision of academic painters such as Leighton. In *Art for Art's Sake*, Prettejohn gives full scope to this reclamation of Victorian painters, arguing in each case why the artists she examines have as much claim to modernity as French artists of the same period.

The book, a considerable undertaking at 343 pages, contains a chapter each on Algernon Swinburne, Simeon Solomon, Albert Moore, Leighton, James McNeill Whistler, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and Walter Pater. Additionally, an introductory chapter, "Two Early Aesthetic Pictures," examines John Everett Millais's *Autumn Leaves* (1855-56) and Rossetti's *The Blue Closet* (1856-57). This chapter deftly sets up debates surrounding Aestheticism in the 1860s. The close focus on two paintings might at first frustrate the reader's desire for a more obviously contextual chapter with which to begin the book, but only initially, for Prettejohn uses the two paintings to stage a discussion of the first usages of "art for art's sake" and the nature of art criticism in the 1860s. She is very clear about her strategy, suggesting that she wishes to discuss individual paintings and *then* locate them within a history of aestheticism, rather than write that history and furnish it with visual examples. Such self-narration of her methodology is welcome; the reader is at once made to engage not only with the material presented but with a particular way of writing art history. Some sections in this first chapter are easier to read than