

REVIEWS

Poetry in Pre-Raphaelite Paintings: Transcending Boundaries edited by Sophia Andres and Brian Donnelly. New York: Peter Lang, 2018. 181 pp. + 9 colour plates. ISBN 978-1-4331-4078-5. \$92.95.

In an important scholarly study that applied new critical theory to Pre-Raphaelite writing, *Victorian Poets and Romantic Dreams: Intertextuality and Ideology* (1990), Antony H. Harrison took issue with Jerome McGann's view of the impulse behind Dante Rossetti's poetry. He wanted to go further than McGann in understanding the aesthetic complexity of the "best poems": "The frequent reader of these texts finds them not only ornate and beautiful but also rich and deep in their allusiveness to other texts and to the entire literary enterprise. He finds them simultaneously sincere and parodic; derivative yet original; fraught with ineffable philosophic weight yet somehow hollow; ambiguous; ironic – and finally, elusive" (Harrison 94). Further, Harrison commences his analysis of "The Blessed Damozel" by making yet another, if shorter, list of features which "strike us as curious" about this work: that it is "hyperconscious, oddly derivative, even self-mocking" (95).

The quotational hyper-consciousness that Harrison moots might well be regarded as the origin of that peculiar quality of Rossetti's works in both painting and poetry. Indeed, it might be another way of describing Rossetti's impulse for the making of art. The processes by which Rossetti's imagination escapes into the work of art or helps it find a form were fed by childhood encounters with language(s), poetry, translation, works of visual and literary art, and early exposure to arcane political and religious allegories, to rhetorical and poetic devices, to forms of address, variously scholarly and populist. What could be richer, more suggestive, or more complex than that? In many ways, this suggestiveness and complexity haunt the continued study of Pre-Raphaelitism – not just Rossettianism – and lie behind our contemporary attempts to understand its cultural contexts, potency, and endurance.

The essays in *Poetry in Pre-Raphaelite Paintings* address the challenges to traditional interpretations of art and its production in mid- and late-nineteenth-century Britain. The book is organized into loosely themed sections of two or three chapters each; it is introduced with a useful overview co-written by the editors and concluded by one of them, Sophia Andres. One suspects the approaches and indeed the themes each of the essayists tackles might appear too diverse to help address the subject. The first section – "Windows and Bowers: Sexuality and Creativity" – has Elizabeth Siddal as