

REVIEWS

Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet by Jan Marsh. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999. xiii, 592 pp. 47 illus. ISBN 0 297 81703 5. £25.00.

This is the first full-scale biography of Dante Gabriel Rossetti since Oswald Doughty's *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Victorian Romantic* (1949) and Rosalie Glynn Grylls's *Portrait of Rossetti* (1964). Marsh considers Rossetti's life, his art, and his literary production in detail, with extensive research in original sources. To get a full picture of Rossetti and his work it should be read with a book of Rossetti's paintings in colour – as it reproduces only black and white photographs of Rossetti, his family, and contemporaries – and also with a collection of Rossetti's poems for the complete texts, as many of the poems appear in excerpts only.

What this book does best is to situate Rossetti in the social and economic climate of his times, not surprisingly as Marsh has researched and written extensively on the Pre-Raphaelite milieu. She also adds valuable comparisons of his paintings with those of other contemporary artists, such as Leighton and F.M. Brown. The book also uses some new sources, such as those for the Working Men's College, where Rossetti taught art for several years.

One of the highlights of this book is the fine account of Rossetti's contributions to Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. founded in 1861, though I would disagree with Marsh on the importance of Rossetti's role in founding the company with Morris, Burne-Jones, Brown, and others, especially as Rossetti proposed having a bottega like Giotto's to put out all sorts of art goods.

Marsh's detailing of Rossetti's growing reputation as a painter and a listing of his works throughout his career are also very well done. It would have been interesting to give more material on some of his later patrons and Rossetti's relations to them, but most of this material has already been covered in Dianne S. Macleod's *Art and the Victorian Middle Class* (1996). Marsh's treatment in Chapter 20 of Rossetti's 1870 *Poems* is very well done; especially helpful is the inclusion of reviews by Swinburne, Marston, Morris, and Skelton. Chapter 22, "Catastrophe," and Chapter 23, "Recovery," cover in detail Rossetti's nervous breakdown. Although this material is known to Pre-Raphaelite scholars, it has not been published in such detail with letters and source material.

In dealing with the extensive material on Rossetti, both published and unpublished, there is a great deal of room for different interpretations and emphasis. Marsh is known for new interpretations as well as exhaustive research and the discovery of new sources. There is nothing startling in her interpretation of Rossetti material, but what may come as a surprise is her portrait of Rossetti as a hard-working Victorian painter and poet desiring success and acknowledgment from his contemporaries. This departs from the more popular view of DGR as a free-living and free-loving bohemian current in the 1960s and '70s which reformed Rossetti in