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Introduction

Recent studies of Holman Hunt, Burne-Jones, William Morris and Swinburne, as well as exhibitions like the 1973 Royal Academy retrospective of Rossetti or the comprehensive 1984 Pre-Raphaelite survey held at the Tate, confirm a constant but also expanding interest in the Pre-Raphaelites. One explanation for this development may be associated with the post-modern need to reclaim content and sincerity in art; another may be the normal vacillation of taste. It was timely, therefore, for *JPRAS* to offer a Special Session re-assessing the current scholarly and critical approaches to Pre-Raphaelitism at the 1987 Modern Language Association Convention in San Francisco. The papers that follow were presented at that meeting.

At the end of his 1984 essay "The Pre-Raphaelites and their Critics," Quentin Bell celebrated the absence of "a genuine critical assessment of the movement": "This seems to me absolutely right and proper," he continued, because "such a blanket criticism is now impossible; the more we know the less we are able to form a judgment of this kind."¹ The essays by the four participants in San Francisco contradict Bell's argument that the heterogeneous nature of Pre-Raphaelitism has made a general re-evaluation impossible. Collectively, the essays denote the strenuous effort underway to challenge Bell's assertion, while demonstrating the success of such an enterprise. And yet, in the course of this activity to examine the nature and contribution of the Pre-Raphaelites, critics are at the same time investigating the critical methods that can best elucidate the Pre-Raphaelite project. As Ruskin warned in his 1851 letter to *The Times*, the fate of Pre-Raphaelitism "may in

no small degree depend upon the character of the criticism which their works have to sustain."²

In his encyclopedic survey of Pre-Raphaelite scholarship over the last twenty years, W. E. Fredeman shows the continued if somewhat uneven interest in the movement. Of greatest importance, perhaps, is the recovery and publication of various manuscript sources including letters, diaries, and journals. Current projects to edit the letters of D. G. Rossetti, Burne-Jones, William Bell Scott and Christina Rossetti anticipate an abundance of rich materials for future Pre-Raphaelite scholars. Critical developments in the study of Pre-Raphaelitism include a greater effort to place the movement in the broader context of nineteenth century art, an effort distinguished by the many exhibitions of Pre-Raphaelite art held worldwide between 1965-1985. In the last two decades, the appearance of four anthologies of Pre-Raphaelite writing, plus two collections of critical essays and three special double numbers of *Victorian Poetry* devoted to the Pre-Raphaelites have also contributed to the increased and sustained scholarship of the movement. Leslie Parris's *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, published in conjunction with the 1984 Tate exhibition, epitomizes twenty years of intensified critical interest confirmed by the extraordinary rise in value of Pre-Raphaelite art at auction. Fredeman concludes that the plethora of useful exhibition catalogues accompanying the various shows corroborates the trajectory of Pre-Raphaelite scholarship.

In "Reassessing the Pre-Raphaelites: The Case of 'Faustine,'" David Riede provides an example of a new critical method applied to a