

PRE-RAPHAELITISM: AN INTRODUCTION

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Scarlet Hunters brings together a collection of essays that presents the first extended study of the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism in Canada. The intention is not to trace indisputable influences but rather to showcase a variety of Canadians who pursued their work in the spirit of the Pre-Raphaelite tradition. As a movement begun in 1848 by three British artists who pursued the paradoxical practice of presenting a literary subject in a naturalistic setting with a decorative style, Pre-Raphaelitism is the term now used to denote the Victorian aesthetic movement that led to the socialism of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts guilds and to the decadence of Oscar Wilde and the Rhymers' Club. In Canada, its sphere extends from Anna Jameson's art criticism in the 1840s to Margaret Atwood's fiction in the 1990s. Anna Jameson was an early resident of Upper Canada and an art critic whose *Memoirs of Early Italian Painters, and the Progress of Painting in Italy* (1845) introduced the taste for the medieval style of the early Renaissance art that preceded Raphael. Jameson's influence was acknowledged by Holman Hunt and exhibited in the shift of interest in the second volume of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1846). Margaret Atwood has scattered Pre-Raphaelite references throughout her fiction and poetry, but nowhere so much as in her 1996 novel, *Alias Grace*, in which she exploits constructions of popular Pre-Raphaelite images of women as a context for her story about a maid imprisoned for murder in Victorian Canada. These constructions range from William Morris's image of Queen Guenevere's self-defence at the court of Camelot (Atwood, vii) to Christina Rossetti's images of self-negating women who belie the patriarchal convention of the immortalized beloved (Atwood, 182).

The essays discuss a variety of Pre-Raphaelite elements in Canadian art and architecture, poetry and politics, printing and bookbinding, and culture and scholarship. D.M.R. Bentley, Karen Herbert, and Karen Kitagawa focus on Canadian poetry. D.M.R. Bentley identifies William Morris as a wizard to our Northern poets. He examines the effect of two different sides of Morris on two