

*The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel: Narrative Challenges to Visual Gendered Boundaries* by Sophia Andres. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2005. xxvii, 208 pp. + 16 colour plates. ISBN 0-8142-0974-2. \$89.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-8142-5129-3. \$29.95 (paper). ISBN 0-8142-9049-3. \$9.95 (CD).

Pre-Raphaelite painting's intersection with Victorian poetry, in particular the ekphrastic translation between words and images, has been the subject of much recent scholarship. Sophia Andres's interdisciplinary study, emphasizing four Victorian novelists – Wilkie Collins, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy – and their references to Pre-Raphaelite paintings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Edward Burne-Jones, builds upon that work to examine the role of Pre-Raphaelite art in Victorian novels. Arguing that the novelists' use of Pre-Raphaelite paintings reveals the period's evolving construction of gender in visual and narrative forms, Andres pairs these novelists and artists in order to explore the “narrative reconfigurations of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, understood and appreciated by Victorian readers in ways lost to us.” This is no easy task. Defining Pre-Raphaelite art itself is complicated by the diverse and often contradictory stages of the movement, and certainly by the extensive influence of many of the artists, while the frequent references to Pre-Raphaelite paintings in novels of the period signal the popularity of the art but not necessarily its cultural meaning. Andres goes beyond the common (and often commonplace) recognition that the Victorian world was deeply visual to argue that the Victorians were forging a deliberate connection between aesthetics and morality through their representations of gender, and that the role of Pre-Raphaelite art, and these writers' narrative revisions of it, was to challenge and indeed revise those gendered connections.

In a thoughtful, well-researched overview of critical receptions of Pre-Raphaelite art from the Victorian period to the present, Andres emphasizes the painters' aesthetic revolution, the success of which, ironically, is demonstrated by Victorian reviewers' scathing and horrified responses to the paintings. She explores the reasons for that critical distress in a nuanced discussion of the ways in which gender, aesthetics, and morality are tied together in evaluations of art: as one reviewer claimed, “the most beautiful soul must have the most beautiful body.” Not only do the paintings fail to suit Victorian aesthetic, and therefore moral, ideals, they challenge prevailing and evolving concepts of realism as well. As Andres points out, later Pre-Raphaelites like Edward Burne-Jones were reviled for an aestheticism that failed to recreate the intense realism of the early Pre-Raphaelites like Holman Hunt – for which they, of course, had initially been condemned. John Ruskin's impassioned defence of Pre-Raphaelitism's emphasis on “truth to nature” in 1851 highlights the moral and aesthetic questions involved (whose truth? what nature?), which were