

## REVIEWS

*Reading Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Painter as Poet* by Brian Donnelly. New York: Routledge, 2015. 178 pp. + 16 colour plates. ISBN 1472446682. \$104.95.

During the last twenty years or so the reputation of Dante Gabriel Rossetti as a major creative force in nineteenth-century culture has continued to increase. The most influential critical texts have been those that have treated him as a central figure in the context of Pre-Raphaelitism, and where he has been the single focus of critical attention his writing and his painting have been treated rather separately. Nevertheless, considerable attention has been given to his work in the context of his life, with Jerome McGann's *Rossetti Archive* and William Fredeman's edition of the *Correspondence* considerably widening our understanding of him as both man and artist. But Brian Donnelly's study adopts a rather different perspective. Drawing on the fact that Rossetti was equally at home in both visual art and poetry, Donnelly approaches the corpus exclusively through intertextuality. Choosing what might be called four nodes or centres of textual focus, he pries open some of the complex thematic relations between Rossetti's literary and visual texts and between those texts and wider issues within Victorian culture.

Donnelly opens by reading the role and presence of the Virgin Mary in a number of Rossetti's works. On the face of it, his choice of reference is rather an arresting one since it includes the painting *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and its two accompanying sonnets, as well as two other paintings, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* and *Found*, together with the poem "Found" that accompanies the latter. Donnelly builds a fine and intelligently worked account of the verbal/visual conundrum in Rossetti's work by focussing on the relationship between the time/space continuum in each of these texts. His close reading of these texts and the relations he discovers between them is compelling and convincing, and the result is a series of interpretative innovations of a remarkable kind. Particularly impressive is the way in which he teases out the double identity of the Virgin – spiritual and secular – in each of the *Girlhood* sonnets, and how he relates these to a similar doubling in Rossetti's two Marian pictures. Like many commentators on *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, Donnelly recognizes the strange, even eccentric, originality of Rossetti's version of the Annunciation, but he unfolds for us new levels of meaning by cross referencing (for example) the presence and function of the lily in each painting. In both paintings the lily appears in conjunction with an angel, but what is a symbol of innocence and purity in *The Girlhood* becomes one of impreg-