

REVIEWS

Late Victorian Orientalism: Representations of the East in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Art and Culture from the Pre-Raphaelites to John La Farge, edited by Eleonora Sasso. London: Anthem Press, 2020. 240 pp. ISBN: 9781785273278. £80.00; \$125.00.

As Eleonora Sasso notes in the introduction to this fascinating collection of essays, late Victorian artists and writers were often saturated in notions of the “East.” The publisher John Murray supplied an almost endless supply of travel narratives, just as waves of Persian, Japanese, Chinese, and Arab influences affected painting and design. Among Victorian intellectuals and artists, these influences sometimes manifested themselves in very odd personal behaviour: “Ford Madox Brown installed a Turkish bath at home, which he used on a daily basis; D.G. Rossetti kept a Japanese salamander among the animals and birds in the exotic menagerie at his house in Cheyne Walk; Sir Richard Burton used to wear a green Oriental turban to indicate his Arab connection.” The essays in this collection take Victorian Orientalism more seriously, and they range across the arts, from nonfiction narrative to poetry to fiction, from archaeology to painting and the domestic arts. They are interdisciplinary in the best sense of the word, both from essay to essay and within essays themselves.

Florence Boos’s “Empires and Scapegoats: The Pre-Raphaelites in the Near East” takes apart the web of Near Eastern fascination in and around the PRB. William Homan Hunt was mesmerized by the area, travelled extensively in it, and depicted its landscapes and people often in his paintings. Boos detects the tension between his Anglicanism and attraction “to the ideal of an ‘enlightened’ imperialism of John Bull with his fascination with other cultures in all their sensory, artistic, linguistic and ethnic complexity.” Dante Rossetti, no great traveller himself, used the published works and elegant drawings of Austen Henry Layard, who excavated Nineveh and shipped it to the British Museum, as sources for his poem “The Burden of Nineveh.” William Morris competed for the Newdigate Prize with his poem on the construction of The Dome of the Rock, though he had turned against Britain’s imperial project. Sasso in her contribution notes the lure of aspects of the *Arabian Nights* in Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne. They “elaborate their own Oriental aesthetics by projecting such conceptual metaphors as ‘East is crime’ and ‘East is magic.’” The young Rossetti illustrated the *Nights* with fifteen drawings: his first attempt at combining literature and the visual art. For Rossetti, the “East” provides “an alternative world of beauty wherein the material and