

worried about the heightened rhetoric used in support of the allied cause. All this was happening at a time when the Free Churches were clearly on the wrong side of the peak of their membership and when the Free Church Movement as such was being questioned in an increasingly ecumenical age. While Catterall's analysis of the interaction between the Free Churches and the emerging Labor Party is properly complete, there is much here more generally stated on the way the Free Churches addressed society in the interwar years.

This reviewer's only regret is that Catterall uses dated denominational histories rather than the most recent and period-relevant work on Congregationalists and Baptists such as the studies by Alan Argent and Ian Randall.

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STEPHEN CHEEKE. *Transfiguration: The Religion of Art in Nineteenth-Century Literature before Aestheticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. 288. \$95.00 (cloth).
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In *Transfiguration: The Religion of Art in Nineteenth-Century Literature before Aestheticism*, Stephen Cheeke explores how Victorian writers and artists complicated the relationship between religion and art, analyzing how they anticipated but also nuanced the more recognized narrative of a secularized religion of art in late-nineteenth-century aestheticism. Building on the work already conducted in his study *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (2008), Cheeke continues an interdisciplinary course of scholarship that includes Hilary Fraser's seminal *Beauty and Belief: Aesthetics and Religion in Victorian Literature* (1986), Pierre Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1992), and Rachel Teukolsky's *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (2009). Cheeke focuses his new book more specifically on how religious concerns resonated closely with those of aesthetics. Such concerns include the possibility of belief, the danger of idolatrous imagination, the risks and raptures of conversion, the problem of evil, and the promise of transfiguration as the raising of mimetic naturalism to see the ordinary anew.

Cheeke's first chapter continues the holistic discussion of the introduction, not yet delving into the close readings of canonical Victorian artists and writers that organize his subsequent chapters. He begins by tracing how "the museum age" formed itself around the alternately rapturous and unsettled feelings raised by Napoleon's confiscation of classical and Renaissance artworks from Italy (31). As Protestant British viewers encountered Catholic art displaced from its original religious settings into a secular space, some were troubled by the works' loss of "sacred aura" (33), while others felt the need still to respond with an "eye of faith" (38). Cheeke outlines how such ambivalence set the stage for the permutations of what would become the mantra of aestheticism, art for art's sake, which by the end of the century assumed the status of a new moral way of life. He outlines different narratives about the relationship between religion and art in the nineteenth century: interwoven substitutive metonymy, separate paralleled allegory, outright usurpation, and restatement as transformation, alienation, or intensification (39–45).

Cheeke centers most of the chapters on Renaissance works of art that proved provocative and controversial touchstones for Victorian art critics. In chapter 2 he considers Raphael's *The Transfiguration* (c. 1519–20), one of the most commented-about artworks in the nineteenth century. Cheeke focuses on how the Pre-Raphaelites and John Ruskin criticized the painting's aesthetic form as being "too explicit" and "artificial" (75); they

sustained the assumptions that art has a role in faith, that it operates through the phenomenon of “seeing-to-believe,” and that it can transform the disfigured ordinary into the transfigured divine, even as they challenged how effectively Raphael’s painting fulfils these roles (78). Similar analysis continues in chapter 3, with concern about the slippery edge between apotheosis and corruption exposed in how Robert Browning’s painter poems engage Raphael’s legacy.

Cheeke focuses the next section focuses more exclusively on the art criticism of John Ruskin. In chapter 4 he moves from Raphael to the Renaissance artist Fra Lippo Lippi. Cheeke recounts the struggle between Browning and Ruskin over Lippi’s capacity to paint such marvelous work despite—or because of—his being immorally entranced with fleshly materiality (130). One of Ruskin’s most famous claims, that “All great art is Praise,” entails an embracing of the world that stands in tension with his criticism of the Renaissance’s love of beauty for beauty’s sake (119–20). This danger of praise turning to idolatry, Cheeke suggests, haunts the Victorian imagination (133). In chapter 5, the artwork in question is Paolo Veronese’s *The Presentation of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon* (c. 1580), a painting that led to Ruskin’s un-conversion from Evangelicalism, which he famously called his “Queen of Sheba crash” (136). Here, the main religious trope explored is conversion as an epiphanic encounter that is also paradoxically the result of accumulated experience. Cheeke argues that the dualistic structure of Ruskin’s thought repeats this conversion model: Ruskin habitually organized ideas in patterns of turning between true/false, light/dark, good/evil, wealth/“illth,” rise/fall, all of which center in the work of art itself as the moral index of this turning (154). Ruskin’s anxiety over the fine line between faith and betrayal pervades his inextricable linkage of art and religion.

The last section concerns Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Walter Pater. For Rossetti in particular, literary critics have tended to elide the pervasive religious structure of his work, projecting onto him a wholly secularized religion of art. The charge of inauthenticity in religious belief, begun even by Rossetti’s contemporaries, has been perpetuated; Cheeke takes issue with Jerome McGann’s interpretations in particular. In chapter 6 he discusses both Rossetti’s paintings and his sonnets about Renaissance art to defamiliarize this secular narrative and show that for Rossetti, aesthetic experience was most powerful when it retained the “spiritual agencies” of mystical religion (173). In chapter 7, while also engaging lesser-known works of Pater, Cheeke focuses mainly on comparing *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* with *Marius the Epicurean*. While Pater claimed to see artworks as “embodied states of ethical consciousness,” promoting a wholesale “religion of the visible” (197), he was unable to resolve the tension between the ideal of aesthetic indifference and the evil of ethical indifference to suffering. For Pater, Cheeke argues, the problem of evil confronted by traditional religion remains unassimilated in the religion of art.

Cheeke concludes his afterword by summarizing the relationship between religion and art in the middle nineteenth century as balanced between the possibility of transfigurative praise, allowing a continued connection with belief, and the danger of idolatrous betrayal, where art, in reaching for the “language of religion,” cannot wholly transform religion after its own image, betraying not only religion but also itself (218). Cheeke’s historical research and insightful readings provide a better understanding of the complex relation between art and religion in the nineteenth century. His work will appeal to literary critics, religious historians, and art historians, and it will make a valuable addition to academic library collections.

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