

THEODOR VON HOLST  
AND DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

Max Browne

In his first brief letter of introduction to Ford Madox Brown, Dante Rossetti refers to “an engraving after that great painter Von Holst [together with a Brown illustration as] the sole pictorial adornment of my room” (*Correspondence* 1:58; March 1848). As the years passed, “that great painter” fell so far out of fashion that when I prepared the first Theodor von Holst exhibition and catalogue in 1994 William Fredeman wrote to congratulate me for answering at long last Rossetti’s call for an account of his favourite modern artist at the time of the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Fredeman was pleased to incorporate the exhibition information into the first two volumes of his monumental *Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. The well-known but mystifying “great painter” reference to Holst was now explained (Brown, *Romantic Art*; and *Correspondence* 1:59n2), and Fredeman’s planned footnote on Holst’s friend, the notorious Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, was catapulted into a separate appendix (2:523-27).

Holst and Wainewright were both disciples of Henry Fuseli at the Royal Academy of Arts and admirers of William Blake. Rossetti was fascinated by all four of these Romantic predecessors and he included them in his contributions to Alexander Gilchrist’s *Life of William Blake* (1863). In his “Supplementary Chapter” for Gilchrist on Blake’s influence, Rossetti devoted a page to Holst, praising his talent, acknowledging his role as a link to the Pre-Raphaelite circle, and criticizing his choice of exhibited subjects. Rossetti undoubtedly learned from and modified his own early career-strategy based on this last aspect of his one-time hero, and he lamented the obscurity that Holst’s work had already fallen into by 1862 (qtd in Gilchrist 1:379-80).

With such a meagre quantity of known works by Holst it is no surprise