

THE POST-RAPHAELITE SOURCES OF PRE-RAPHAELITE PAINTING

Those who have studied Pre-Raphaelite painting have been for the most part literary historians and critics. For decades art historians have ignored Pre-Raphaelitism, usually on the ground that it is a mere cul-de-sac, off the great highway of modern art which travels from David to Picasso. More recently, art historians have turned their attention to the works of Hunt, Millais, Rossetti and their colleagues. But so far the work of these men has never been very strongly related to the stream of art history, and Pre-Raphaelite concerns with the art of the past have seldom been investigated. The present paper is a small step in that direction.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first recorded use of the term "Pre-Raphaelite" occurred in 1849, in the November 19th entry of W. M. Rossetti's P. R. B. Journal.¹ By 1880 contemporary critics, historians and viewers of art would refer with startling non-chalance not only to the Pre-Raphaelite "movement" but to "Pre-Raphaelitic education"² and "Pre-Raphaelitish pictures" and "dames".³ Apparently, everyone now understood what was meant by "Pre-Raphaelite"; within a rather short period of time the term had been assimilated into the language and experience of English society.

However, long before three naive and barely post-adolescent art students founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, other artists had professed admiration for and had followed the stylistic and iconographic example of the Italians who painted before Raphael. One of the French Primitifs, Maurice Quay, had dubbed himself Pré-Raphaélite as early as 1800.⁴ The German Nazarenes sought to purify their own national art through a deliberately primitive style. William Dyce, who had met the Nazarenes in Rome and who had journeyed to Italy to study fresco technique, also painted in an "early Italian" manner. Yet the styles of the English Pre-Raphaelites have little in common with the Neoclassicism of the Nazarenes, Dyce, or the followers of David.

Furthermore, of the fifty-seven literary, artistic and historical figures in the Pre-Raphaelite "List of Immortals" drawn up by Hunt and Rossetti in 1848, only seventeen are artists, and of these only two, Ghiberti and Fra Angelico, are Pre-Raphaelite in the early Italian sense of the term. Aside from Giovanni Bellini, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Pheidias and the "Early Gothic Architects", who are certainly dubious Pre-Raphaelites, all the other artists admired by Hunt and Rossetti are conspicuously post-Raphaelite, e.g. Hogarth, Flaxman, Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, and Poussin.⁵ Raphael himself was on the list, too.