

NOTES AND REVIEWS

THE ART-JOURNAL, 1850-1880: Antiquarians, the Medieval Revival, and the Reception of Pre-Raphaelism.

The Art-Journal, which provides an invaluable index to Victorian taste, well documents an ever-increasing artistic interest in the middle ages between 1850 and 1880. Even the most cursory glance through the pages of this influential art periodical reveals the great extent to which antiquarians directly influenced artistic subject and renderings. What is most surprising about The Art-Journal's contribution to medievalism in art and design is that for a long time its editorial policy was staunchly opposed to such a movement. The Art-Journal, in other words, seems to have contributed to the medieval revival almost in spite of itself.

Its early opposition to any movement it considered archaistic appears in its review of the 1849 Royal Academy Exhibition. The Art-Journal reviewer commented about Oliphant's "The Holy Family," which he took to be "an imitation of the Giotteschi," that "we cannot see any good purpose in reference to a period so remote."¹ The Art-Journal, it appears, opposed artistic revivalism because of the social and political overtones it associated with such glancing back at the past. R. N. Wornum began his "Modern Moves in Art" (1850), which juxtaposes Gothic architecture and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, by firmly nailing his colors to the mast: "Progress be our motto" (12.269), he asserts, before going on to wonder at the "remarkable . . . recurrence to an old and imperfect style of design in painting" (12.270). Wornum called the Pre-Raphaelites the "Young England School" (12.271), mistaking the would-be reformers for followers of Disraeli. The writer argued that this school "breathes in the spirit of its works the miserable asceticism of the darkest monastic ages; and exhibits in their execution quite the extremest littleness of style that ever disfigured the works of any of the early middle-age masters" (12.271). According to Wornum, the main flaw in the young men's conception of art was this wasteful archaism: "disregarding the fruits of the earnest and skillful labour of ages, it goes back to the puerile achievement of the infants of Art" (12.271).

Two articles which appeared the following year continue this approach, censuring Pre-Raphaelite and other revivalism for threatening the progress of the arts. For example, in a short biographical study of Adrian van Ostade an anonymous author claimed that "we live in an age when attempts are being made, both with pen and pencil, to carry Art back to its primitive state of semi-barbarism, and to hold this up as the standard of perfection, and the only pure condition of Art"