
Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism
ed. Thomas J. Tobin, SUNY Press 2005
326 pages, £40.75

Worldwide Pre-Raphaelitism is a useful tool in broadening the definitions of Pre-Raphaelitism. In his introduction, Dr. Tobin considers the traditional view of the Pre-Raphaelites as “a brief, reactionary and narrowly English movement” – and then quickly quashes this concept. He argues convincingly that the contemporary press were aware of the continental origins of Pre-Raphaelitism and the international connections the Brotherhood maintained, and yet this vision of Continental Pre-Raphaelitism has died, mostly due to the mislabelling of the group as “Young England”, “literary reactionaries whose aims were indeed markedly xenophobic and Anglocentric”.

As the definition of Pre-Raphaelitism within England broadened to encompass more artists than the original seven members, so the focus expanded to include Morris’s translations of Icelandic sagas, Burne-Jones’s fascination with Greek mythology, and of course Woolner’s emigration to Australia. Their fame began to spread, and their work was interpreted in different and surprising ways across continents:

Criticism and theory about Pre-Raphaelitism appeared in England, Wales, Scotland, Canada, Australia, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Hungary, and even Japan and Russia, most

of which described the Pre-Raphaelite movement in terms of its relation to and influence on the arts in the critics' own countries.

Pre-Raphaelite studies have examined the broadening outlook, which began to reclaim the work of associated women artists as representative of Pre-Raphaelite art, and to consider not only painting but literature, sculpture and criticism. Dr. Tobin is quick to point out that interest in the PRB is often relative to the contemporary cultural climate. It therefore makes perfect sense that in an increasingly multicultural world, where the impact of different cultures upon individuals and other cultures is of paramount importance, a world-wide approach is long overdue.

The essays which follow the introduction are equally fascinating, creating an effective "world tour" of Pre-Raphaelitism, helpfully starting with *An Inventory of the Pre-Raphaelite Mental Museum*. This is a fascinating guide to the international art that members of the PRB had seen on their various travels by 1849, and which one can therefore deduce were influences on their subsequent work. Since there seem to be more studies based on those influenced by the PRB rather than those who affected them, this was an intriguing look – partly based on conjecture and partly on records – at the inspiration behind the Brotherhood and its international roots.

Another essay examines Rossetti's relationship with Italian nationalist politics through the medium of Rossetti's poem *A Last Confession*, which mingles politics, poetry and fallen women in equal measures. It is encouraging to see literature as well as art being considered, and since politics are frequently ignored except in the case of Morris, this helps to redress the balance. Another political and cultural influence is considered in Holman Hunt's uneasy relationship with Eastern countries.

The influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on Symbolism is examined in a thought-provoking look at how French critics constructed Pre-Raphaelitism as a "cult of the beautiful", with French Symbolist artists such as Moreau and the Rose+Croix salon working directly in line with what they saw as a Pre-Raphaelite inheritance.

Other notable contributions include *A Dutch Lady of Shalott*, which looks at the work of Matthijs Maris, a Dutch near-contemporary of the PRB, and his take on the more famous Millais painting of the same title. There is also examination of the Pre-Raphaelite influence in Australia and Canada, where the poet Francis Sherman "refashioned the golden world of Camelot" by framing it in seasonal Canada, and Phillips Thompson took

the role of political and social revolutionary in poetry inspired by Morris.

The shadows of Pre-Raphaelitism can even be found in Croatian and Hungarian culture, traced through the work of Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža and inspired by Walter Crane's contact with the Hungarian art world.

Dr. Tobin says that he aimed "to create a good mix of work from scholars and enthusiastic lay persons", and the result is a readable and fascinating book which looks at Pre-Raphaelitism from an unusual angle. It is impossible to cover in sufficient detail the contents of the book, so to whet your appetite I include a list of the essays:

- *An Inventory of the Pre-Raphaelite Mental Museum, October 1849* – Beatrice Laurent
- *William Holman Hunt, Race, and Orientalism* – Francesca Vanke Altman
- *Rossetti's A Last Confession and Italian Nationalism* – C. Keirstead
- *A Dutch Lady of Shalott* – Linda Groen
- "Pre-Raphaelite Ornaments in the European Slaughterhouse": *Pre-Raphaelitism and Croatian Culture* – Tatjana Jukic
- *Symbolist Debts to Pre-Raphaelitism: A Pan-European Phenomenon* – Susan Casteras
- *William Morris's Later Writings and the Socialist Modernism of Lewis Grassie Gibbon* – Florence Boos
- *Pre-Raphaelitism's Farewell Tour: "Israfil" Goes to India* – Margaret Stetz
- *Pre-Raphaelitism in Hungary* – Eva Peteri
- *Pre-Raphaelitism in Colonial Australia* – Juliette Peers
- "Lo, here is felawschipe": *Morris, Medievalism and Christian Socialism in America* – Paul Hardwick
- "Count us but clay for them to fashion": *Pre-Raphaelite Refashionings in Canada* – David Latham
- *Keats's Poetry as a Common Thread in English and American Pre-Raphaelitism* – Sarah Wooton

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